



With floodwaters receding gradually in Shahjadpur upazila of Sirajganj, many families like the one in the photo, left, start returning homes only to find signs of devastation left by the mighty Jamuna. Brick chips are what is left of a road in Potazia union, top right. People stand on a homestead that survived the flood, but is now threatened by the Jamuna in the same upazila, bottom right. The photos were taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

# Post-flood rehabilitation a far cry

Crops on 14,000 hectares of land completely damaged, 8 primary schools lost to Jamuna erosion, over 110 tonnes of fish and 1.27 crore fish fry washed away

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Sirajganj

The flood waters of Pachil village in Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila have started to recede. But that does not matter to Ahd Ali. The furious Jamuna has devoured his home, even the land on which his humble abode stood.

For over a month, Ahd, along with his family of five, and other flood victims, have taken shelter on a nearby field. They all have to pay a small sum of rent to occupy that space as well.

"The water started gushing in by the first week of July. There was no scope to stay back. Now, everything has been washed away. There is no land to rebuild my home and no money to start afresh either," he said.

Anji Khatun, of nearby Dadaspanchi village, returned from the shelter to see that her home has been damaged. She had no choice but to borrow Tk 20,000 at a high rate of interest from a local money lender to repair her home.

"My daughters and I took shelter in the flood protection embankment for three weeks. Nobody is coming forward to help us, not even the government."

Anji was lucky that she found someone to borrow money from. But Maleka Begum of Potajia Nishipara village in the same upazila, not so much. No one is willing to lend money to her.

Tying up some bamboo sticks with rope, she has repaired her home. The wind or rain can blow away the repairs at any time, she said, as she continues to live perilously.

"My husband is a poor day labourer. He had no work in the last one month. We have no place to live, no food to eat even."

All the victims said they lost everything in the last three weeks, but they did not get any help for rehabilitation.

Md Chand Ali of Potajia village said, "During the flood, we were given seven to eight kilograms of rice as relief material." It was enough to last a week for a family of five. "We are in dire need of assistance to rebuild our homes."

Over 3,079 families of 408 villages in five upazilas of Sirajganj were displaced by the recent flood. A total of 15,434 people have been hit hard, while 313,997 people were partially affected, according to Sirajganj Relief and Rehabilitation Office.

A total of 6,505 houses were entirely damaged, while 44,013 were partially damaged.

"We have reported these figures to the ministry of relief and rehabilitation. They have allotted 1,570 bundles of corrugated iron sheets to rehabilitate the flood victims. The allotment is likely to reach Sirajganj soon," Sirajganj Deputy Commissioner (DC) Dr Faruk Ahmed told the Daily Star recently.

Not just home, roads, culverts, croplands, ponds and many educational institutions have been battered by the flood. Officials concerned at the district administration have pinned losses at Tk 200 crore this year. Total actual losses cannot be ascertained yet, as many areas are still under water.

"Although the water level was dropped

below the danger level now, flooding has not left yet. There are many areas in Belkuchi, Kazipur, Chowhali and Shahzadpur that are still water logged," said Md Rafikul Islam, Sirajganj divisional engineer of Water Development Board.

The flood water is likely to remain till the end of September, which will add to the misery of the people in these areas, he added.

A total of 21,000 hectares of croplands were inundated and crops on 14,000 hectares

of the district to assist the victim farmers after the water recedes," he said.

Meanwhile, the district has lost eight primary schools to river erosion. There is no existence left of those institutions, said Md. Eusuf Reza, Sirajganj primary education officer. At the same time, 162 primary schools were partially damaged, he added.

"We could not calculate the total loss yet, but we are estimating it at around Tk 1.85 crore." All academic activities are stalled since July. "We hope to resume studies after we complete the repair works after Eid," he added.

Sirajganj District Educational Officer Md Shafiulla said 65 high schools and colleges have also been damaged. He expects repair work to start soon.

Fish cultivation took a hit in Chalanbeel areas of Sirajganj. A total of 116.75 hectares of fishing areas were affected, washing away 110.73 tonnes of fish and 1.27 crore fish fry worth Tk 4.17 crore, said Md Shahed Ali, Sirajganj district fishery officer.

"We are expecting rehabilitation funds for the worst-hit fish farmers." The flood has destroyed 134 acres of hybrid grass fields. The loss can be estimated at Tk 75 lakh, said Akhteruzaman Vuia, district livestock officer.

The flood claimed the lives of 4 cows and 3,885 chicken. Although the flood did not hurt the animals directly, the cattle farmers face massive losses for fodder crisis.

Besides, a total of 55.34 kilometres of roads were totally damaged, while 180 km partially,

said Md Mizanur Rahman, executive engineer of Sirajganj LGED. Twenty-nine culverts were also damaged.

Several roads are still inundated, so the actual loss is still unknown, he said.

Sirajganj is one of the biggest handloom and power loom producing areas in the country.

Samen Ali of Saydabad Modhhyapara in Sirajganj Sadar upazila said, "I set up a handloom factory by borrowing money from a local NGO a couple of years ago. But the recent flood destroyed my factory, taking away the lone source of income for my family."

"I don't know how I will repay the loan instalments now."

Like him, most weavers in five upazilas are facing a crisis. Total damage to the sector is yet to be determined.

As the flood water recedes, Jamuna river is devouring houses and crop lands at several points of Sirajganj Sadar, Chowhali, Shahzadpur, Kazipur and Belkuchi upazila, said Sirajganj divisional WDB engineer Rafikul Islam. This is casual river erosion, he added.

"According to the characteristics of Jamuna, the river banks erode both then the water level rises and drops. We have nothing to do at this moment. At the end of the flood, we can take steps to save damage for the next time."

Sirajganj district administration has compiled a flood loss report from different departments. But the fund allotment for rehabilitation is yet to be allotted.

"We will start rehabilitation work after getting the funds," DC Dr Faruk said.



were completely damaged, said Md Habibul Haque, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Sirajganj. He assumes the damage to agriculture to be worth Tk 134 crore.

"The agriculture sector has suffered the most due to the flood. We have submitted the flood loss report to the ministry, seeking rehabilitation funds."

"We are currently taking preparations for 30-acre seed beds and 56 floating seed beds in

## RANGABALI-DHAKA LAUNCH SERVICES

### Passengers being ripped off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Launch service operators have been accused of overcharging passengers departing Patuakhali's Rangabali upazila for Dhaka after Eid.

On way back to their workplaces in the capital after spending their Eid holidays with near and dear ones, the passengers also complained of misconduct by staff members of the launch operators.

They said the launch operators have not only been ripping them off, but their staffers have been verbally abusive to any passenger who raised objection to the exorbitant fare.

Even fare for the special launch services -- authorised by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) to ease the Eid rush -- has been higher than the usual rate, the passengers alleged.

Launch is the only mode of transport for around 1.50 lakh inhabitants of five unions in Rangabali, an isolated upazila by the Bay of Bengal. A double-decker launch -- Zahid-3 and Prince of Rassel-5 -- ferries them on alternating

days to and from Dhaka throughout the rest of the year.

The special service to Dhaka started a week prior to the Eid holidays on an additional double-decker launch daily and it is scheduled to end a week after the holiday.

Passengers said all launches were charging Tk 1,500 to Tk 1,800 for a single cabin against a regular fare of Tk 900 to Tk 1,000, while fare for a double cabin jumped to Tk 3,400 to Tk 4,000 from Tk 1,700 to Tk 2,000.

Mizanur Rahman, a passenger who booked a double cabin to go to Dhaka from Koralia under Rangabali, said he had to pay Tk 3,400 for it, while the fare is usually between Tk 1,700 and Tk 2,000.

The launch staff behaved badly when he questioned about the steep price, he alleged.

Khawja Sadiqur Rahman, deputy director of BIWTA and Patuakhali river port official, said they would investigate the allegations of overcharging and take action against the companies concerned.



A man raises the fence of a fish enclosure at Sundarbhona village in Bagerhat Sadar upazila on Saturday in a bid to prevent moving out of cultivated fish amid the rise of water level due to hours-long torrential rain on Friday night and Saturday morning. PHOTO: STAR

## Flash flood triggered by rain damages fish enclosures, crops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Heavy downpour from Friday midnight to Saturday noon flooded low-lying areas of three municipalities and nine upazilas of Bagerhat and caused damage to fish enclosures and different crops including vegetables.

The coastal district saw an average of 55-millimetre rainfall in the 12 hours, which can be considered as this year's highest in the area, said officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension.

A number of roads, vast crop fields and many fish enclosures in Bagerhat Sadar, Mongla, Rampal, Sharankhola, Morrelganj and Kachua upazilas have been badly damaged.

Farmers are worried as the water level rises during high tides.

Bagerhat Sadar Upazila Fisheries Officer ASM Russell said fish from at least 250 enclosures have been washed away due to the flooding caused by continuous rain. Thousands of fishermen will suffer huge losses if there is further downpour, he added.

Nakib Ohid, chairman of Badal Union Parishad in Kachua upazila, said at least 2500 crop farmers and several owners of shrimp enclosures in the union face serious losses due to the flooding.

"People's movement is badly disturbed as roads are under knee-deep water in our area. Many shrimp enclosures are flooded," said Musfikul Islam of Karapara village

in Bagerhat Sadar union.

"The excessive rain caused rotting of the roots of some vegetables. However, the damage would not be that much if there is no further rain," said Rustom Sheikh, a vegetable grower of Kachua.

Talukder Abdul Baki, panel mayor of Bagerhat municipality, said survey work has started as a project is going to be implemented to reduce waterlogging in the municipality.

Aftab Uddin Ahmed, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Bagerhat, said, "The heavy rain resulted in the flooding that caused damage to betel plantations and vegetable fields. However, the losses will be minimum if water recedes quickly."

## B'BARIA GOVT COLLEGE

### English dept ex-students' reunion held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

It was a special occasion for the former students of 2004-'05 batch of the English department of Brahmanbaria Government College (BGC) who joined their first ever reunion in the district town yesterday.

"Department of English BGC 2004-'05", a newly formed Facebook group of the former students of the batch, arranged the daylong programme titled 'friends forever' at the hall room of Crown Bangla & Chinese Restaurant in Mohadeb Patti area of the district town.

Fifty former students participated there with spouses and children.

They passed the day gossiping, reminiscing and enjoying cultural programmes.

"It was a day of nostalgia as old memories came flooding back. Gathering of this kind will help build bridge with the alma mater," said Sanjoy Kumar Deb, the main organiser of the get together.

The participants stimulated their past memories through presentations with a projector.

"The main purpose of the event was to create a bond among the former students so that they can cooperate from their respective field," said Meer Arif, now serving as an English teacher of Stamford School and College, Dhaka.

Adel Khama, a graduate from the batch, said they will arrange a picnic next winter and undertake welfare work for the underprivileged people



Managing Director and CEO of Samorita Hospital Ltd, Dhaka, also founder of Nurun Nahar Moni Charity and Eye Hospital in Feni Dr ABM Haroon, middle, hands over a key of an ambulance to representatives of Sohay, a voluntary organisation, at a programme on Wednesday. PHOTO: COURTESY