



A flooded vegetable field at Char Sanikdiar village in Pabna Sadar upazila. Inset, people waded through a flooded road at Char Anupnagar in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

# Flood wreaks havoc on early winter crops in Pabna

Fresh areas inundated in Rajshahi, C'nawabganj as rain-fed Padma swells

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Fresh areas of Rajshahi, Pabna and Chapainawabganj went under water yesterday as the mighty Padma continued to swell.

The flooding caused massive damage to early winter crops in Pabna, reports our correspondent.

Fresh areas of Pabna Sadar, Ishwardi and Sujannagar upazilas went under water in last two days, said officials of the Water Development Board (WDB).

"The Padma is flowing 7 centimetres above the danger level at Pakshey Hardinge Bridge point as the water level has risen by five centimetres in last 24 hours. The rise may continue next two or three days," Md Mosharraf Hossain, assistant director of Pabna WDB, told The Daily Star.

However, no massive flood is expected as the water level in the Jamuna remains normal, he added.

Md Azahar Ali, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Pabna, said the ongoing floods caused serious damage to early winter crops.

"Over 12 thousand hectares of land beside the Padma have been brought under cultivation of early winter vegetables and pulses but the crops on 1730 hectares have already gone under water.

"Approximately 27,500 tonnes of early winter crops worth Tk 7 crore have been damaged, affecting 6,000 farmers in six upazilas of the district. If the water level continues to rise for two or three more days, the damage will be immense," the official said.

Md Abdullah, a flood affected farmer of Char Sanikdiar village, said, "The sudden flood damaged bean on my five bighas of land. Now I am living on an embankment as the floodwater also entered my house."

Md Sirajul Islam, the district's relief and rehabilitation officer, said they are making lists of flood-affected people for conducting relief work.

Our Rajshahi Staff Correspondent reports: The WDB yesterday identified at least six points of Rajshahi City Protection Embankment as risky due to strong current of the swelling Padma.

Five hundred geo sandbags have been

dumped at the risky points of T-groyen, Police Lines, Rautha, Alaipur, Tangon and Kuthipara areas while some 2000 sandbags are kept ready at Police Lines point to deal with any unwanted situation, said WDB Executive Engineer Shahidul Alam.

"The water level rose by 10 centimetres in 24 hours till 6:00am today [Wednesday]. However, it is still below the danger mark," he said.

Water from the Padma inundated vast low-lying areas, mostly in different chars of Rajshahi, affecting some 4000 families, said district administration officials.

Some 350 families at Char Khanpur are now marooned, said Kohinur Begum, member of Haripur union parishad.

Paba Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Shahadat Hossain yesterday visited Char Khanpur and distributed relief materials among the affected people.

Our Chapainawabganj Correspondent adds: Onrush of water from the upstream triggered floods in the low-lying areas of ten unions under Shibganj and Sadar upazilas in Chapainawabganj, leaving ten thousand families marooned.

The affected unions are Alatali, Char Bagdanga, Narayanpur, Debinagar and Shahjahanpur of Sadar upazila and Monakasha, Ghorapakhia, Panka, Durlupur and Ujirpur of Shibganj upazila, said Hasanuzzaman Fouzdar, district relief and rehabilitation officer.

People are badly suffering as a large number of dwellings went under water, said Kamrul Hasan, chairman of Alatali union parishad.

Many people have taken shelter in safer places with their cattle, said Kamaluddin Huda, chairman of Narayanpur union parishad.

The Padma was flowing 30 centimetres below the danger level at Pankha point of Shibganj upazila in Chapainawabganj yesterday morning.

Its water level rose by 11 centimetres in 24 hours till yesterday morning, said Atikur Rahman, sub-divisional engineer of Chapainawabganj WDB.

The water level of the Mahananda also saw a similar rise, he said, adding that it was flowing 21 centimetres below the danger mark.

## Girl gang-raped

Victim's family passing days in panic as 2 accused yet to be held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A college girl was raped allegedly by two local goons in Mahendranagar area of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila on Sunday night.

The accused are Mazidul Islam, 39, and Rana Miah, 24, of Mahendranagar village in the upazila.

The victim and her family members are passing their days in panic as the two are yet to be held.

Mahfuz Alam, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station, said the accused picked up the HSC first year student from a rickshaw in the area when she was returning home from a relative's house around 8:00pm on Sunday.

The two then took her to nearby Medha Bikas Residential Model School and raped her, said the victim.

Later, locals rescued the victim in unconscious state from the spot and sent her to Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital.

Dr Manjur Morshed Dolon of the hospital said the girl has been gang-raped according to the medical test.

Principal of Medha Bokash Residential Model School Govinda Chandra Roy demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the rapists.

The culprits went into hiding soon after the incident, said the OC.

They were raiding different areas to arrest the accused, said the police official.

## BBS activities hampered

Patuakhali office runs with only two staffers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Departmental activities of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in Patuakhali have been greatly hampered due to acute shortage of manpower.

Sources at Patuakhali BBS office said the district office has been running with only two staffers while 11 out of 13 posts are lying vacant for long. As the post of deputy director (DD) has been lying vacant for about two years, a senior upazila statistic officer is serving in the post as an acting officer.

Twenty-one out of 35 posts in seven upazila offices have been lying vacant for long. Of the 21 posts, four in Dasmina and Kalapara each, and three in Sadar, Dumki, Baula and Galachipa each and two in Mirzaganj have been lying vacant.

Especially the post of upazila statistics officer in five out of seven upazilas remain vacant for long.

They have to do various works like conduction of population census but those works have been badly hampered due to lack of manpower, said, Md Masud, survey inspector and also the acting upazila statistics officer in Dumki.

Md Atikur Rahman, acting DD of Patuakhali BBS, said they informed the higher authorities about the shortage of manpower several times but to no effect yet.

Contacted, Md Qader Mia, director (admin) of BBS, said they are trying their best to fill up the vacant posts. He hopes that the problem will be resolved soon.

## No hurdle big enough

Schoolgirl swims across two canals every day to get to school 2.5km away

RABIUL HASAN, Chapainawabganj

When children of her age usually look for any excuse to skip school if there is a little rain or the neighbourhood street is swamped with rainwater, seventh grader Taslima Khatun swims across not one, but two canals to get to her school every day.

This has been her routine for the past three weeks as the two shallow canals -- one about 200 feet wide and the other about 300 feet -- swelled up after the Mahananda river recently flooded low-lying areas of Char Anupnagar union in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila.

Born to an impoverished family of eight siblings, this 14-year-old resident of Natunpara village in the upazila, where school dropouts and child marriages are rife, knows it all too well that education is her only tool available to overcome the odds.

This is why Taslima never complains of the five kilometres distance she has to walk, and lately swim, to and from her school each day.

These days, when she gets out of the house for school, she brings along her school uniform and puts her school books and stationery along with the uniform in an aluminium cooking pot. When she reaches a canal, she floats the pot and swims behind it until she reaches the bank of the canal. She crosses the second canal the same way before reaching her school.

Taslima then goes inside a room in the school and puts on the uniform.

After the school is over, she puts the wet clothes back on and starts her arduous journey back home.

Mahtabuddin, the headteacher of her school, Anupnagar Girls' High School, said Taslima never misses a day of class, even after the canals swelled up.

It is difficult for anyone to cross two canals two times daily and he was overwhelmed to learn that the two overflowing canals on way to the school could not stop a young girl like Taslima from attending school.

Three other girls -- Sultana Khatun and Parul Begum of seventh grade and Runa Laila of eighth grade -- of the school from nearby villages have also been crossing the canals now and then to attend school since the area was flooded, but no one could beat Taslima's attendance record, the teacher added.

Asked why attending school this way is so important to her, Taslima said after her father passed away, her elder brother, a mason, went abroad to provide for the family. But the money he sends home is not enough.

Due to poverty, none of her siblings except a younger brother, who is in third grade, has ever gone to school and her three sisters were married off at early age, she said, adding, "We are very poor. I want to continue my studies to educate myself so I can get a job after finishing my education."

One of her sisters, Nasima Khatun, said their mother and all siblings also want to see Taslima carries on with her studies as a means to succeed in life.



RANGAMATI GOVERNMENT COLLEGE

## Students 12,000, dormitory none

ANVIL CHAKMA, Rangamati

Rangamati Government College (RGC), once regarded as one of the acclaimed educational institutions in the district, has been struggling to live up to expectations for at least two decades now.

Enrolment of students has soared to around 12,000 -- in higher secondary, undergraduate (honours and pass course) and masters courses -- at the college that was upgraded to a university college in 1989.

Till date, besides higher secondary courses, RGC offers 13 courses for students in undergraduate and masters levels.

Although more courses are being offered now, the institution seems to be failing to cope with the rising number of students from surrounding areas and districts.

Boasting a 24-acre campus in Rangamati town, RGC once had student dormitories on the campus. But for the past twenty years, its male dormitory has been lying in a dilapidated state after it was abandoned following recurring political confrontations. The female one has also remained shut down for years due to similar reasons.

Most students of the college are from remote hilly areas of the district where daily commute is risky and expensive. But without any dormitories operational on the college campus, more than 10,000 of the students, mostly from impoverished families, are being compelled to live outside the campus at expensive rented accommodations. Rehana Akhter, an intermediate student of science group, said, "Girls are living without security outside the campus. The authorities should provide security to the students by opening the hostels again."

Sonarita Chakma, another student in humanities group from a remote area, said, "I don't have any relative in Rangamati town where I can stay. Though it's very expensive, I am having to stay at a mess with classmates."

Shortage of teachers is another setback the RGC is facing. Although honours courses were introduced a long time ago, there are no professor positions in the institution yet.

Out of the 14 associate professor positions, four lie vacant while eight out of its 29 lecturer



The dilapidated men's dormitory building left in an abandoned state on the campus of Rangamati Government College in the district town. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

positions remain unfilled.

"After getting admitted, I realised that the number of teachers is not enough for all our classes. I don't know how I will do in exams," said Zinat Sultana, a higher secondary science group student from Rangunia in Chattogram.

Anjali Tangchangya, a second-year business studies student in higher secondary, said the teacher shortage at the college left them with no option but to spend excessive money on tutors for private lessons.

For students commuting daily, RGC does not have adequate transport services either. Currently, the college authorities have been trying to transport around 2,000 such students with only five to six buses hired from third parties.

Being unable to board the overcrowded buses provided by the college, most of the commuting students are using local transport services.

Many students cannot afford to pay so much

money every day on bus fare, said Khokon Chakma, an honours fourth-year student of history department.

Admitting the teacher shortage at RGC, its principal Muhammad Moin Uddin said, "We already requested the education ministry to fill the vacant teaching posts and they assured us to fill the posts as soon as possible." Regarding campus housing for students, he said, "We also informed the ministry of the need to repair [the women's dorm] and build a new hostel [for men]. Education Engineering Department (EED) have already done a land survey for the construction of the new hostel."

Asked about how he plans to address the inadequate transport services for students, he said they hope the issue would be resolved once the Prime Minister's Office responds to their written request of procuring new buses for the college.