City

# Bhasan Char and Yaas No injury, no damage

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLIA from Bhasan Char

Even after fears of widespread inundation and extensive damage, Bhasan Char housing and cyclone shelters stood up well against cyclone Yaas, which made its landfall yesterday

While the small island off Bangladesh's coast with the Bay of Bengal was not in the cyclone's direct path, residents did experience strong winds and tidal surges about two feet higher than normal.

Officials said this experience provided them with a good opportunity to plan for extreme events in the future and contribute to the overall preparedness of the Rohingya refugees.

Officials at Bhasan Char reported that there hasn't been a single incident of damage or injury. "This is the first cyclone in the island after Rohingyas were relocated here. So, it is also a first for the Rohingyas. But we had prepared [for such natural disasters] to the best of our capabilities."

Commodore Rashed Sattar, project director of Ashrayan-3 project, popularly known as the Bhasan Char project, told The Daily Star that this cyclone will help them prepare better for future natural disasters.

"The refugees and we are now confident after already facing one

Syed Hossain, a refugee on the island, said, "We were fearing the outcome of natural disasters. But now, there is no fear.

Due to cyclone Yaas, heavy rainfall and winds started from Wednesday night in the island. Life at the Rohingya shelters were normal as people were roaming on the island and fishing at the canals.

"The embankment at Bhasan char is nine feet higher than the water level. So, not a single drop of water entered the island," Commodore Rashed said, adding that there was no casualty, no accident and no damage.

He said even if the cyclone was closer to the island while passing, Bhasan char would not be affected. "In any case, if water entered the island, there are a number of natural canals, lakes, and 120 ponds to accommodate the water. To discharge the water, there are 17 switch gates and 21 water pumps.

"During high tide, water came close to the embankment but that was for only two hours, after which the water started receding."

The Bangladesh government spent

around Tk 3,100 crore in developing the island, building infrastructures and putting in place a protection system against extreme climate events under the project delegated to Bangladesh Navy. About two hours by boat from

Noakhali district town, Bhasan Char is slightly south west of Sandwip in the Bay of Bengal, close to the mouth of the Meghna river.

Since the beginning of the project, the UN and other international aid encies nave been refuctant to give a thumbs up to the project, citing risks of tidal surges and cyclones. Project officials said the embankment had been constructed after studying history

and data of the last 176 years. Each shelter was constructed 14 meter above ground-level and can

withstand winds flowing 260 km/hrs. Contacted, International Relations Professor Imtiaz Ahmed said Bangladesh is globally known for tackling cyclones and natural disasters and so when the government has taken up the project, they thought it out well before.

There were several assessments from the government side. And this cyclone management in the Bhasan Char has now proved that the government took the right decision. Now, the UN and other organisations should pressurise Myanmar to take Rohingyas back and support the

### UN to honour 8 fallen Bangladeshi peacekeepers

**U**nв, Dhaka

The UN will honour eight fallen peacekeepers from Bangladesh to mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers today.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said their service and sacrifices will never be forgotten, according to a press release from the UN Information Centre in Dhaka.

Guterres will preside over a ceremony at which the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal will be awarded posthumously to 129 military, police and civilian peacekeepers, including the eight from Bangladesh. They lost their lives serving under the UN flag last year and in the first month of this year, the release said.

The fallen Bangladeshi peacekeepers are Abdul Md Halim who served with MINUSMA, LCpl Md Abdulla Al Mamun and Sgt Mohammad Ibrahim, who served with United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic; Sgt Md Mobarak Hussain, LCl Md Saiful ISLAM, Md Saiful Imam Bhuiyan and Sgt Md Ziaur Rahman who were deployed with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Washerman Nurul AMIN of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

Bangladesh is the largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping.







PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN/ RAJIB RATHAN/ DIPANKAR ROY

An unusually high tide, caused by cyclone Yaas, flows inland breaching an embankment that protected neighbourhoods in Khalgora area of Rangabali, Patuakhali. Top right, residents of a fishing village in Anandapara, Chattogram, look at the ruins of their fishing equipment after the afternoon tide flooded the area. Bottom right, villagers try to keep the water out as the Shakbaria river swells in Kacharibari area of Koyra, Khulna.

# 4 children drown in storm surges In Barguna's Betagi upazila, a threewater, said Abdus Salam, chairman of

In Barishal district's Bakerganj upazila, two children in separate villages drowned in tidal water.

Both victims -- Sumaiyya and Aajoya -- were three years old, said Abul Kalam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Bakerganj Police Station.

Sumaiyya was the daughter of Hafizur Rahman of Dhalmara village and Aajoya the daughter of Ali Azahar of Runshi Posuyee village, the OC

Both died in almost similar fashion they left their homes and slipped into the tidal water, the police official

In Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila, an eight-year-old boy drowned while playing in flood water.

The deceased is Siam Hossain, son of Faruk Hossain of Pingri village in the upazila. Siam had gone out to swim in an

inundated field in the morning, said Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Rajapur Police Station.

When the eight-year-old did not return, family members searched for him and found him in an unconscious state in a flooded field next to their house, the OC said, quoting family members.

When he was taken to Rajapur upazila health complex, the duty doctor declared Siam dead

year-old boy drowned after falling from his mother's lap when they were going to a cyclone centre.

The victim, Imamul Hasan, was son of Swapan Mia of Sarishamuri village under Betagi upazila. The incident took place around 11:00am yesterday at South Kalikabari

area, said Suhrid Salehin, Betagi's upazila nirbahi officer (UNO). In Bhola, a rickshaw-puller named Abu Taher (55) died on Tuesday night

when a tree fell on him in Char Sakina village under Lalmohan upazila. At least 30 chars out of 40 in Bhola were flooded and some areas were submerged in five to six feet of water, said Abdur Rashid, deputy director

Program (CPP). In the district's remote Monpura upazila, at least 5,000 people were evacuated and brought to a shelter, said Monpura Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mohammad Shamim Mia.

of the district's Cyclone Preparedness

The road along Hazirhat to north and south Sakuchia, adjacent to the Monpura embankment, has been damaged, the UNO said.

Another remote coastal island, Char Kukrimukri, was also inundated. Around 1,500 people were taken to cyclone centres in Dhalchar union

of Charfashion upazila as the union

the union parishad. Besides, cracks developed on a

300-metre embankment at the old Hijla point, said Prashanta Kumar Roy, Barishal district's relief and rehabilitation officer.

Different points on Kazir Char road of Barishal's Muladi upazila were completely destroyed while different portions of the embankment of Nalua union in Bakerganj upazila were also damaged, said Prashanta.

Besides, areas of Palashpur, Chakarua, Sagardi, Gernadi, Muladi, Hizla and Mehendiganj were also flooded, he said.

Water level of different rivers in Barishal increased by 10 to 137 centimetres above the danger level yesterday during the tidal surge, according to a Water Development Board (WDB) official.

Meanwhile, at least 175 villages were flooded in Patuakhali due to the tidal surge. Several hundred houses and many arable lands were inundated.

Cracks developed at different points of the 41-kilometre embankment, according to a WDB official.

Over 2,600 ponds and 600 fish enclosures were submerged causing a loss of around Tk 50 crore, said officials of the fisheries department.

In Pirojpur, some fifty villages

flooded, causing inundation of many houses, farmlands and fish enclosures. Road communications remained

located alongside different rivers got

suspended for over four hours at the Pirojpur-Hulerhat road as a portion of the road had been submerged. In Satkhira, over a thousand

families were marooned after cracks developed at 49 points of WDB's embankment. Communication in many areas remained suspended and many shrimp enclosures were washed In Khulna, around 7,500 people of

four villages in Koyra upazila suffered from waterlogging as tidal water entered the villages following breaches of portions of the embankment.

Over a hundred houses collapsed and around 500 shrimp enclosures were washed away, according to local administration and locals.

In Cox's Bazar, the sea beach was asked to hoist cautionary signal number three as the sea water may rise up to six feet than normal time. Besides, a portion of the jetty's pontoon in Saint Martin's Island was broken.

In Pabna and Sirajganj, water level increased in the Jamuna river, which may flood low-lying areas.

[Our correspondents respective districts contributed to the

Advisory Committee on Covid-19, which has recommended reopening the educational institutions once the infection rate drops below 5 percent. Yesterday, the infection rate was

9.11 percent.

At the virtual briefing, the minister said, "We want to reopen schools as early as possible. The [Covid] situation has improved but the risk of infection has gone up due to increased public movement.

"A student can be infected at school or on way to school and spread it to the elderly family members... We

have to keep this in mind." If the situation improves, the government will reopen educational

institutions on June 13, she said. "Preparations have been made to ensure hygiene at schools and colleges. A good number of teachers and staffers have already been vaccinated. But the reopening of universities depends on vaccination of students."

She said the government has a plan to inoculate 1.3 lakh university students. They have to take two shots of Covid vaccine each, and this will take some time.

REOPENING PLANS

The education ministry plans to hold in-person classes for the SSC and HSC examinees of 2021 and 2022 six days a week, said Dipu Moni.

The syllabuses of SSC and HSC have been shortened. The SSC students will have to attend classes for 60 days and the HSC students for 84 days.

Schools not opening soon

\*After that, there will be a two-week demonstrations in the city's Shaheb the second week of March.

\*Contacted Re-Nazir

\*Contact gap. And then the examinations will be held."

Students of class six to nine will have to go to school once a week. The number of classes will be increased in keeping with the improvement in Covid situation, said the minister.

Zakir Hossen said they plan to

reopen schools on June 13. Students of class five will attend classes six days a week whereas students of class one to four will go to school once a week, he added. **AGGRIEVED STUDENTS** 

Educational activities of around four crore students have been affected by the Covid-induced closure since March 17 last year. It led to cancellation of exams and left the academic calendars in disarray. School students were promoted to the next grade this year without any examinations.

The government has broadcasting educational programmes on state-run TV channels for primary and secondary school students. Many schools, colleges and universities have been offering online classes. But many students, especially those in rural areas, were left out because of the digital divide.

The long closure has also made students restless.

Yesterday, students under the banner of "General Students of Dhaka University" at a press conference at the TSC urged the government to reopen the university immediately.

Rajshahi, students

Bazar area, demanding immediate all educational reopening of institutions. Many guardians have resented

paying full tuition fees for online "My daughter who is in class one

has no interest in online classes, yet I've been paying full tuition fees for her," said Md Akramuzzaman, a banker, in the capital. WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education, said the latest announcement will give some comfort to the guardians and students who have become impatient.

"The government has to find a solution to ease the growing restlessness.

"The digital divide has resulted in learning loss as many students in rural areas are deprived of education... It will be a bigger challenge for the government to address.

Besides, many children had to leave school and engage in hazardous work following job loss of their parents due to the pandemic, she observed. The long closure has resulted in a

rise in the number of dropouts and also child marriage, Rasheda pointed The Directorate General of Health

Services (DGHS) data shows that the infection rate dropped below 5 percent between January 09 and held March 08. But it started rising since

Contacted, Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the DGHS, said, the infection rate varies from place to place.

"If you go through the data, you will see the infection rate in some areas is over 5 percent while it's 1 or 2 percent in some other places. The government could reopen schools in the areas with low infection rate by taking proper health safety measures

"This will create a level playing field for the children in both villages and towns.

Talking to this newspaper, DGHS Director General Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam said the governmentin December last vear made a list of university students for raccination.

"But the initiative stumbled after the Serum Institute of India halted the supply of vaccine doses.

He said they will launch a vaccination programme for university students after getting Chinese vaccines. The doses will be administered to the students aged 20 and above.

The government moved to buy vaccines from China and Russia after India halted vaccine export in March. India's Serum delivered 7 million of the 30 million shots that Bangladesh bought from it.

Bangladesh will buy 1.5 crore Sinopharm vaccine doses from China, and the first consignment is likely to arrive next month.

### Daily new cases, deaths drop slightly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of new Covid cases and deaths from the deadly virus slightly dropped yesterday.

Seventeen more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

In the previous day, the death toll

With yesterday's deaths, the total number of deaths reached 12,458 and death rate was 1.57 percent.

Around 1,497 new positive cases were recorded in the meantime, bringing the total number of people infected to 7,93,693, added the release.

On the previous day, 1,675 people tested positive for the viral infection --highest since May 7, when 1,682 cases were confirmed.

Yesterday, the positivity rate was 9.11 percent, while the total positivity rate was 13.52 percent.

Around 16,434 samples were tested across the country in those 24 hours. At least 1,056 Covid-19 patients recovered during the period.

The total number of recoveries rose to 7,33,866 and the recovery rate stood at 92.46 percent.

Among the 17 deceased, 10 were men and seven women. One of them was aged between 31 and 40, one between 41 and 50, four were within 51-60 and 11 were above 60 years, added the DGHS release.

## 2 killed as Yaas

Cyclone Yaas was packing gusts of up to 140 kph (87 mph) as it made landfall around 0900 HRS IST (Indian Standard Time)," or 0330 GMT, the Indian Meteorological Department said.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said that the seaside town of Digha had been "swamped" by waves up to four metres (13 feet) high. She said two people had been killed,

including one dragged into the sea by the waves in Digha and another crushed when his house collapsed. "I have never seen such a storm ever in my life," said Purnendu Jana, a Digha

resident. "The water may cross the main road for the first time.' Local hotel owner Shiuli Das said: "Many of us are here, all of us are really scared."

Nearly 20,000 mud houses and emporary shelters were either destroyed or damaged and more than a dozen river islands were flooded with a number of

embankments breached, Mamata said. The busiest regional airport, in the city of Kolkata, had been shut until

Wednesday evening. In Odisha there was also extensive damage with hundreds of trees uprooted although there was minimal damage to power infrastructure, relief official Pradeep Kumar Jena said.

The cyclone was expected to weaken gradually into a deep depression around midnight. The wind speed at the centre of the cyclone at 9:00 PM was 75 to 85 km per hour with gusts of 95 km per hour.

Although considerably, the cyclone is predicted to bring heavy rains and authorities have advised fishermen not to venture out to sea. Jharkhand, which lays on the way of the storm, was also put on high alert. Officials yesterday began to evacuate people from low-lying areas in vulnerable districts like East and West Singhbhum.

Almost 5,000 disaster workers were deployed in India with tree and wire cutters, emergency communications, nflatable boats and medical aid, the National Disaster Response Force said.

Officials fear the emergency will further complicate efforts to halt a surge in coronavirus cases that has now killed 310,000 people.

Masks were distributed in emergency shelters but West Bengal state minister Bankim Chandra Hazra told AFP that maintaining social distancing would be "a big challenge". This cyclone spells double trouble

for millions of people in India as there is no respite from Covid-19," said Udaya Regmi from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Some vaccination centres in threatened districts, as well as Kolkata, suspended operations and a special effort had been launched to ensure the supply of oxygen and medicines to hospitals, officials said.

# Airlines make it harder for them

"Due to complexities in hotel booking, many migrant workers might fail to go to Saudi Arabia in time. In that case, visas of many migrant workers might expire," Fakhrul Islam, former finance secretary, Baira and president of Recruiting Agency Welfare Organization of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

Tipu Sultan, president, Recruiting Agency Oikya Parishad, said the present situation required that the expatriates' welfare ministry come forward and help the remittance-earning workers with the hotel bookings.

thousand Saudi-bound Several Bangladeshi migrant workers have been facing untold sufferings due to the new travel advisory of Saudi Arabia that requires medical insurance against Covid-19 infections and hotel reservations for seven days of institutional quarantine.

The Saudi authorities said violators shall be deported and banned from entering the Middle East country indefinitely.

After the issuance of the fresh travel advisory that came into effect on May 20, the Saudi Arabian Airlines assisted the Saudi-bound workers in booking hotels until May 24. On May 25, the airlines authorities

hung a notice at different points of their

office premises, informing that Saudi-

bound migrant workers will have to complete the hotel booking process on their own using specific apps In its notice, Saudia asked all Saudibound Bangladeshi workers to book hotels for quarantine a minimum of 72 hours before their flight's departure

https://holidaysbysaudia.com. For hotel booking confirmation, Saudi-bound passengers were also asked

through the Saudia Holidays website

to contact their respective employer/ Kaphil/company/travel agency, or visit the website. "Without booking through Saudia

Holidays website, no hotel confirmation will be accepted," the notice also reads. According to the notice, there is no need for quarantine package for

non-residents and first-time visitors who have completed 14 days since receiving all doses of vaccination. They must provide a certificate or proof in accordance with the requirements set by the ministry of health. Residence/Íqama holders

completed their vaccinations in the KSA will also not need quarantine packages, added the directives. In an interview with The Daily

Star on Tuesday, Country Manager of Saudia in Bangladesh, Tarik A Alowaidi, however, assured that if any Bangladeshi passenger misses flight or

needs to change flight date on different grounds, Saudia will issue fresh ticket and will accommodate them in other flights without any charge.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior official of Saudia yesterday said they had provided service temporarily to the Bangladeshi workers regarding hotel booking as it was new to the passengers.

"But we cannot provide this service for an indefinite period as we lack necessary number of staffers to do this. Besides, it is also not our job," he said, vishing anonymity.

Talking to this correspondent in front of the Saudia's office, Mahbub Alam, a Saudi-bound worker, said he was at a loss since the airlines was no longer providing him with the service he needed. "I have bought my return ticket from a travel agent in Saudi Arabia. I find it hard now to contact the travel agent for completing my hotel booking," he said.

Besides, he said, despite repeated attempts, he failed to contact his Kaphil employing company.
"Under this situation, I just feel

helpless," he also said. Ânother Saudi-bound worker said he was not educated enough and did not

have the know-how for hotel booking. Saudi-bound expatriate workers need to spend around Tk 65,000 to Tk 70,000 for staying at the hotel for

Following the fresh travel advisory, Biman Bangladesh Airlines on May 20 suspended all its fights to Saudi Arabia for nine days until May 29, saying they need time to make arrangements to comply with the fresh travel advisory.

Saudi Arabia is the largest expatriate income market for Bangladesh. At least 26 lakh expatriates are working in different sectors in that country.