



About 20 thousand inhabitants of 14 villages, under Protapnagar union in Satkhira's Assasuni upazila, had left their homes after tidal waters of Cyclone Amphan inundated their villages in May last year. They came back home seven or eight months later when the water receded. But no sooner had they settled in, Cyclone Yaas swept through the region in May this year, submerging their homes in saline water one again. This time the villagers did not leave their homes. They have been using makeshift rafts or boats to collect potable water and to conduct other day-to-day activities. But monsoon has already arrived and it is making matters worse for them. The villagers hope that the authorities will mend the damaged embankments to relieve them from sufferings. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

AFTERMATH OF CYCLONE YAAS

20 thousand people in 14 villages still waterlogged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Last time they left home was after Cyclone Amphan struck the coastal districts on May 20 last year.

After staying at flood shelters or someone else's house, they returned home only several months before another cyclonic storm, Yaas, ravaged the region on May 26 this year.

It has been almost two months since then, but about 20 thousand inhabitants of Assasuni upazila in Satkhira are still marooned by saline water.

Monsoon has arrived by this time and the sufferings they have been facing are unimaginable.

Nearly 20 thousand people in 14 villages under Protapnagar union have been suffering the most as the cyclone caused damage to embankments of the Kholpetua and Kapotakha rivers in Protapnagar, Kurikawmia, Dighalarait, Harishkhali and Bonnotola areas.

Although the authorities repaired the damage in most areas, saline water is still inundating Protapnagar union through the unrepaired breaches in Harishkhali and Bonnotola areas.

During a recent visit to the area, about 60 kilometres away from Satkhira town, the villages were found to be submerged in knee to waist-deep saline water. The villagers were seen using makeshift rafts or boats for day-to-day activities.

The villagers said they had been travelling to faraway places for potable water and many of them have been contracting various waterborne diseases.

"Our houses have been under water for around two months. We don't have any earnings, as there's no work. Having even one meal a day has been extremely difficult," said Romesa Khatun of Dighalarait village.

Ohidul Islam, a resident of Sreepur village, said, "It isn't possible to live here. Many have already moved out to their relative's houses in nearby areas."

"I had a shrimp enclosure on around 20 bighas of land. It was flooded by Cyclone Amphan last year. Later I got a loan and restarted my business. But Yaas has damaged it again," said Mahmood Hasan, from the same area.

All the villagers, especially women, children

and the elderly are facing immense sufferings as their toilets are submerged.

Nasima Khatun, a resident of Protapnagar village, said, "We are facing a lot of challenge to save our livestock. With our house submerged, we don't even have enough space for ourselves. How can we accommodate the livestock?"

Contacted, Protapnagar Union Parishad Chairman Zakir Hossain said, "People in this area have been enduring endless sufferings. Whenever a natural disaster hits this region, our people become waterlogged. We want the government to take effective steps to end our sufferings."

Assasuni Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nazmul Islam Khan said the embankments were damaged at 14 points and most of those have already been repaired.

The waterlogging in Protapnagar union is being caused through four breaches, which are yet to be plugged.

Contacted, Rashedur Islam, executive engineer of Water Development Board in Satkhira, said they already took steps in this regard and the remaining breaches in the embankments would be repaired shortly.

MOBILE KITCHEN MARKET

100 rickshaw van pullers get jobs

Programme aimed at keeping people at home

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, Bagerhat

A mobile kitchen market has been launched in Bagerhat town's Swadhinata Udyan yesterday to cater to the people stuck at home during the lockdown.

Over 100 rickshaw van pullers who have lost income due to the lockdown turned their vehicles into mobile stores.

The programme was inaugurated on yesterday morning in front of the town's Swadhinata Udyan at the initiative of Bagerhat-2 MP Sheikh Tanmo.

UNO of Bagerhat sadar Mohammad Moshabberul Islam said, "We have seen people out of homes to buy daily essentials ... The mobile market that

has been launched will play a role in stopping some people from coming out for daily essentials. We can tell people that vegetables and essentials are available close to your homes. The lockdown also created a kind of employment for the unemployed rickshaw van pullers."

Bagerhat Sadar Upazila Parishad Chairman Sardar Nasir Uddin said the mobile market would be introduced in every upazila of the district in phases. Through this, people will get their daily necessities at home.

Rickshaw van pullers Bakul, Selim, and Mafuj said they stopped going out for work during the lockdown and their families fell into hardship. Now they have a way to earn their bread.



Crucial RHD project runs

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sign deals with contractors and consultants once the "lockdown" is lifted. Then they will start the physical work," Mamun told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

He said they were working on the project by attaching the highest priority to it.

Responding to a question, the PD said they would seek an extension of the deadline, if needed.

The 28 axle load control centres, where weight of goods-laden vehicles would be measured, will be set up at the entrances to all major highways from sea and land ports and major terminals to ensure that no overloaded vehicle is operated on highways.

According to the RHD, there are 22,428km national and regional highways and district roads under the department across the country.

Its own survey published last month shows over 3,000km surveyed roads -- 16.26 percent -- are in "poor, bad or very bad" condition.

The RHD would require around Tk 15,606 crore to repair the damaged roads in the current fiscal year, according to the Maintenance and Rehabilitation Needs Report 2021-22.

As per the report, RHD has to reconstruct 1287.13km road fully and 1493.88km road partially in the current fiscal year. The department has to carry out periodic maintenance of 11,970km road.

The length of roads, which would require full and partial reconstruction this fiscal year, is much higher than the outgoing year, shows document.

The Highway Development and Maintenance (HDM) Circle of RHD, which prepared the report, said a rise in demand for partial reconstruction work indicates that strength of roads has reduced or traffic load has increased.

"Therefore, axle loads on those roads should be controlled urgently," the report recommended.

In its previous year's report, the HDM circle had recommended reconstructing 695km road fully and 722.65km partially.

The circle said Tk 2,081 crore would be required in the current fiscal year for partial reconstruction, up from 1851.79 crore in the last fiscal year.

Experts also find overloading of trucks as one of the major reasons for quick damages to roads.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque, also a professor of civil engineering at Buet, said the government was allowing overloaded trucks that were destroying roads long before the service life. He termed it a "suicidal decision" by the government.

He said a two-axle truck is supposed to carry 16 tonnes of goods, but the government is permitting it to carry 22 tonnes. Similarly, larger trucks are

carrying heavier loads against the approved load capacity set by their manufacturers.

Only two axle load control centres are now being operated in the country. They are operational on the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway, officials said.

WHY THE PROJECT?

The authorities for the first-time had imposed fines for overloading in August, 2016.

But on the very day, transport owners and workers damaged weighbridges in Manikganj and Chattogram, forcing the government to increase the maximum weight limit of goods-laden vehicles later.

In September 2019, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the project to set up 28 axle load control centres at 21 points across the country.

After completion of the tendering process, the RHD sent three proposals to the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase for appointing contractors and consultants. The committee approved those last month, said an RHD official who is aware of the project.

But the project authorities could not award the work to the contractors and consultants due to an embargo on issuance of work order.

The finance ministry in April had asked all ministries, except health and agriculture, not to issue work order for any physical works till June as austerity measures amid pandemic.

COMPLICATIONS OVER LAND ACQUISITION The main component of the project is acquiring land at a cost of around Tk 800 crore. The RHD has to procure private land for most of the centres, RHD sources said.

The RHD has so far completed land acquisition for three axle load control centres. Besides, seven others will be installed on its own land. Acquisition of land for several centres are under process.

But the authorities are facing complications regarding acquiring land in four districts.

In Cumilla, a local lawmaker is opposing the move for acquiring land at the selected site. In Nilphamari, the project authorities could not acquire land at the selected site as a preliminary decision was made to build an economic zone there.

In Kurigram, all stakeholders, including a local lawmaker, have been demanding change of the selected site for the centre.

In Chattogram, the project authorities selected a site on its own land along Bandar Connectivity Road for a centre, but illegal occupants of the land are opposing the initiative.

Project Director Mamun said they were working to overcome all these complications.

Tokyo Olympics venues

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the pandemic last year and has been hit by massive budget overruns.

Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa said organisers had agreed to hold the Games without spectators in Tokyo, and to decide according to the local situation for venues outside of the capital.

Medical experts have said for weeks that

having no spectators would be the least risky option, amid widespread public fears that an influx of thousands of athletes and officials will fuel a fresh wave of infections, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, the Southeast Asian Games, which were due to take place in Vietnam this year, have been postponed because of the pandemic and will most likely be held in 2022, a member of the organising council said yesterday.

World's tallest sandcastle built

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Guinness World Records.

A total of 4,860 tonnes of sand make up the intricately decorated structure which is reminiscent of a pyramid.

Its creator, Dutchman Wilfred Stijger, who was assisted by 30 of the world's best sand sculptors, wanted the castle to represent the power of the novel coronavirus over the world since the beginning of the pandemic.

Kissinger's Pakistan visit

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a memorandum, prepared for President Richard Nixon on July 9, 1971, Kissinger wrote, "In my conversation with President Yahya ... we discussed possible approaches to the present problem, including the possibility of appointing new civil authority in East Pakistan to coordinate an energetic program for the return of refugees. I urged this and he said he would consider it and would discuss it further with me in our next talk."

In his memoirs, Kissinger summarised his conversation with Yahya as follows: "I had several conversations with President Yahya and Foreign Secretary Sultan Khan. I urged them to put forward a comprehensive proposal to encourage refugees to return home and to deny India a pretext for going to war. I urged Yahya and his associates to go a step further in the internationalization of relief by admitting the United Nations to supervise its distribution. And I recommended the early appointment of a civilian governor for East Pakistan. Yahya promised to consider these suggestions. But fundamentally he was oblivious to his perils and unprepared to face necessities. He and his colleagues did not feel that India was planning war; if so, they were convinced that they would win. When I asked as tactfully as I could about the Indian advantage in numbers and equipment, Yahya and his colleagues answered with bravado about the historic superiority of Moslem fighters." (White House Years, p. 861)

In his meeting with Sultan Khan, Kissinger emphasised the importance of attempting to defuse the issue over the next few months. One way to do this, Kissinger suggested, might be to try to separate as much as possible, at least in international eyes, the refugee issue from the issue of rebuilding the political structure of East Pakistan. If this were to be tried, it would seem important for Pakistan to put together a collection of major steps in one package designed to have important impact both on the refugees and on the world community and perhaps to internationalise the effort.

On July 9, 1971, Kissinger had lunch with Gen Abdul Hamid Khan, chief of staff of the Pakistani army. Kissinger was said to have discussed with the general the curtailment of United States' military aid to Pakistan after war erupted in East Pakistan in March.

NO POLITICAL COOPERATION WITH PINDI

No political leader in East Pakistan was prepared to share responsibility at the political level with the military rulers of West Pakistan. This was disclosed by Khawaja Mohammed Safdar, secretary general of the West Punjab unit of Council Muslim League, who returned to Lahore after a tour of East Pakistan. He added, "It was the unanimous opinion of the leaders of the Muslim League, the Pakistan Democratic Party and other political parties that they were prepared to assist the government only in economic rehabilitation of East Pakistan."

BANGLADESH GOVT APPOINTS CAMP OFFICERS The Government of Bangladesh appointed camp assistants for different refugee camps in West Bengal to look after the refugee families. The zonal administrator of north western zone of the Bangladesh government was the appointing authority. The salaries of the camp officers were met by the Bangladesh government.

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ACC begins Evaly probe

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Quoting Bangladesh Bank probe report, the ministry in its letter said that the central bank found asset of evaly.com amounting to Tk 91.69 crore as of March 14.

Of the amount, the current asset was Tk 65.17 crore and the total liability was Tk 407.18 crore.

The total liability of Evaly to customers was Tk 213.94 crore on that date. To merchants, the liability was Tk 189.85 crore.

In view of the money taken from customers and products taken from merchants, the company was supposed to have at least Tk 403.80 crore as a current asset, said the letter.

It also said evaly.com will only be able to deliver products or make refunds to 16.14 per cent of the customers with the current assets.

"It is not possible for the company to settle the debts of the remaining customers and merchants," the ministry wrote, adding that no trace of Tk 338.62 crore taken from the customers and merchants as payment and products could be found.

In this case, it appears that there is a possibility of embezzling or illegally transferring Tk 338.62, which was received from customers as payment and from merchants in the form of products, said the letter.

Robbers throw baby

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on Wednesday when the family members were asleep.

The four woke her up and demanded the keys of the almira. As she was taking time, they allegedly threw her baby girl out of the window into a pond adjacent to the house.

Later the four gagged the woman and took turns to rape her before decamping with cash and one tola gold, as per the complaint.

After the cops were alerted, a team from Bholu Sadar Police Station rushed to the spot and fished out the body of the baby from the pond.

Enayet Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station, said, "Four robbers barged into the house and violated the woman. The medical examination of the woman has confirmed rape."

A case of rape has been registered on a complaint filed by the house owner.

"The baby's body has been sent to the local hospital morgue for autopsy," the OC said.

"Efforts are also on to identify the perpetrators of the heinous crime," he added.

BANGLADESH'S RAPE EPIDEMIC Sexual assaults on women continue unabated in Bangladesh, despite the

government introducing death penalty for rapes last year.

A police headquarters report, released recently, said that 26,695 rape cases were filed across the country in the past five years.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) data shows that 1,018 children were raped last year alone, but only 683 police cases had been filed. Also, 116 survivors were six years old or below.

Overall, 1,627 rape cases were reported last year and 53 of the women were killed by the perpetrators while 14 took their own lives, as per the data.

However, ASK's data is just the tip of the iceberg, according to aid agencies, who report that most women are too afraid to report rape.

In October 2020, the country was rocked by protests after a woman was allegedly attacked and raped in Noakhali.

In November last year, Bangladesh introduced capital punishment for rape, following days of protests against sexual violence against women in several cities across the country.

But human rights organisations say the move will not solve the country's rape crisis, as the survivors of the heinous crime are often stigmatised in the society.

No overall improvement

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A journalist investigating an Awami League-linked prostitution ring disappeared for 53 days and was arrested when found near the Indian border.

The report said while the government continued to give strong support to religious freedom, religious minorities, including Ahmadiyya Muslims and Hindus, reported that they had been targeted by extremists who used section 28(2) of the DSA (harming religious sentiment) to file cases against them.

"There were attacks on 67 minority places of worship, including temples, monasteries and statues," it said.

Hindus reported incidents of land grabbing, particularly following demonstrations against France in November.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Mro

indigenous people demonstrated in November against plans to construct a five-star hotel that threatened to displace them from their ancestral lands.

Violence against women remained a major problem, the UK report said.

Local human rights groups reported that 1,627 women had been raped. Human rights activists blamed the absence of effective law enforcement, exacerbated by Covid-19, for the increase in cases of rape.

In October, in response to high profile cases and large-scale demonstrations against sexual violence, the government approved an amendment allowing for the death penalty in rape cases.

The UK government commended the fact Bangladesh continued to host around 860,000 Rohingya refugees in its Cox's Bazar and rescuing several boatloads of refugees from the Bay of Bengal.