

FLOODS IN NORTHEAST Worst-hit 4 lakh need rehabilitation



MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Rehabilitation of around four lakh people, who were worst hit by the floods and lost their homes, is the biggest challenge in the government's recovery efforts.

Other major challenges include repairing roads and bridges damaged in the floods and stepping up relief efforts, government officials and experts said.

Md Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief, told The Daily Star yesterday that in their initial assessment in Sylhet and Sunamganj, they found 21.5 lakh people were affected by the floods that have ravaged the region since mid-June.

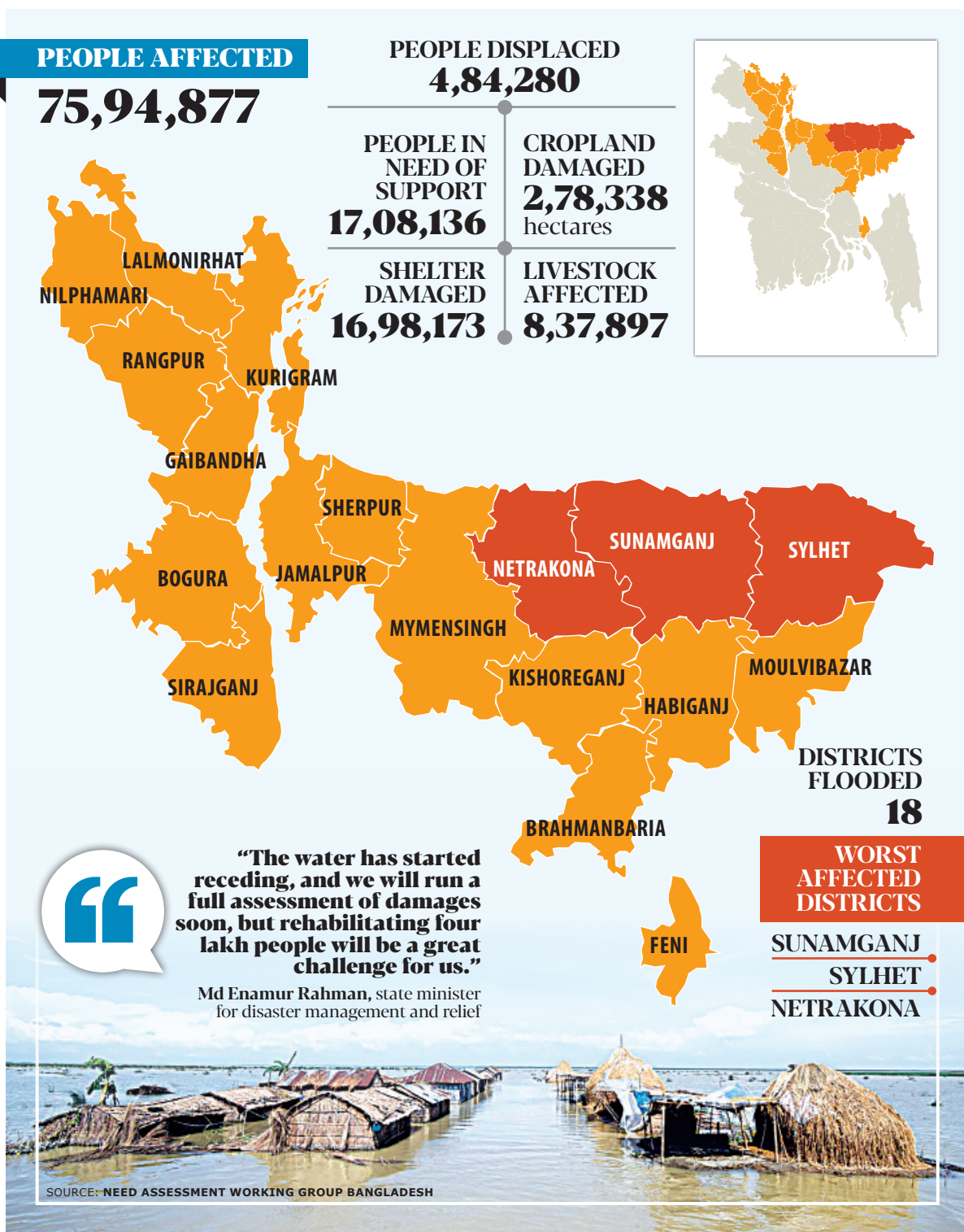
Around 20 percent of the victims were from poor or ultra-poor households and their homes and possessions were washed away by the flood.

"The water has started receding, and we will run a full assessment of damages soon, but rehabilitating the four lakh people will be a great challenge for us," the state minister said.

Enamur further said the ongoing relief activities will continue till normalcy returns in the region.

While a full assessment has not yet been done, experts and officials fear the damage could be huge, and said the assessment should be done as soon as possible to start rehabilitation.

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Waterborne diseases on the rise

DWOHA CHOWDHURY and MINTU DESHWARA

The yard and kitchen of Aparna Rani Das's house in Gagra village, on the edge of Hakaluki haor in Moulvibazar's Barlekha upazila, is submerged in knee-deep water since June 17.

Not considering the floodwater a threat, she continued her daily chores while wading through it without covering her legs.

Soon, she developed skin disease between her toes due to prolonged exposure to filthy floodwater.

Her neighbour Ananta Das also developed rashes on his legs for the same reason.

"Floodwater is everywhere and it's filthy, with a bad odour. I develop a rash whenever I walk through it," Ananta said.

Both Aparna and Ananta said no doctor or medical team has visited the village during the flood, and they have not taken any medication for the skin disease.

There has also been outbreaks of diarrhoea in all flood-affected areas in Sylhet division, and children are worst affected by the waterborne disease.

Dr Rajib Chakraborty, upazila health and family planning officer of Chhatak in Sunamganj, said, "As the flood prolongs, people are coming to hospitals with many waterborne diseases like diarrhoea and skin diseases, mostly fungal infections. Among diarrhoea patients, around 40 percent are children."

According to the civil surgeon offices, a total of 2,488 people contracted several waterborne diseases in Sylhet district till yesterday afternoon since the floods began over two weeks ago. The number is 1,411 in Moulvibazar and 1,780 in Habiganj.

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HOLEY ARTISAN ATTACK The victims remembered with love

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Every year on July 1, Dutch national Mack visits the place where the Holey Artisan café once stood. He lost his two Italian friends in the horrific carnage that took place there six years ago.

Mack still cannot get over the incident.

"It was a very sad moment for the Bangladeshis because this is not the real Bangladesh," Mack told reporters on the then premises of the café, which has since changed location, yesterday morning after paying tribute to the victims.

The brutal militant attack claimed 22 lives, including nine Italians, seven Japanese, three Bangladeshis and an Indian.

Foreign envoys of several countries also paid homage to the victims at the Gulshan café yesterday.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ito Naoki said, "Seven Japanese nationals, who were working for the metro rail line-1 project, were killed in the attack six years back. We will never forget them. Japan has important bilateral and friendly ties with Bangladesh. The work on the rail line-1 project will begin in September. It is very important for us to continue and finish the work."

US Ambassador Peter D Haas said, "I would like to give credit to Bangladesh for taking steps to prevent terrorism

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Govt moves to cool rice prices

Allows 95 companies to import more than four lakh tonnes of rice



The Department of Agricultural Extension estimates that the total yield in the Boro season would be 2.09 crore tonnes this year.

SOHEL PARVEZ

Ninety-five food companies have got the permission to import a total of 4,09,000 tonnes of rice as the government tries to lower the prices of staple grain by increasing supply.

The firms were asked to bring in the rice by August 11, according to a food ministry notice issued on Thursday.

The companies will have to let the district food offices know how much rice they will import, how much they will sell and how much they will store.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) earlier cut the duty on rice imported between June 22 and October 31 to 25.75 percent from 62.5 percent.

The NBR attached a condition that importers have permission from the food ministry for every shipment.

Traders will have to sell the rice in the same bag in which the rice would be imported, said the food ministry.

Of the 95 companies, 10 got permission to import a total of 1,70,000 tonnes, two got permission to import 25,000 tonnes each, three got permission to import 20,000 tonnes each, the rest got permission to import different amounts.

A ministry official said 111 firms applied for the permission. "We have a similar number of applications that we will examine. We will also review whether the firms followed the restrictions if they had been given permission last year."

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