

## FLOOD, EROSION IN SIRAJGANJ

## Academic activities in jeopardy

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Sirajganj

Jannati Khatun, a fifth-grader from Mehernagar village in Sirajganj's Belkuchi upazila, lost her home and school to the Jamuna, forcing her and her family to seek refuge in a roadside shed and making it difficult for her to continue education.

Continuous river erosion and flooding have left a lot of students like Jannati helpless.

"I have to cross half a kilometre of submerged road to get to my school, which is very tough. So, I don't go to school every day," said Jannati.

Although Mehernagar Government Primary School, where she studies, was devoured by the Jamuna on August 25, school activities resumed first beneath the open sky and then under a tin shed, but most students remain absent.

The flood that began in the last week of August inundated Mehernagar, and when the water receded, river devoured many structures in the area, including houses and schools.

"Only 25 to 30 students are attending classes. Most have moved to different areas due to the recent flood," said Shahidul Islam, headmaster of Mehernagar Primary School.

Earlier, Khidrochapri Government Primary School in Belkuchi upazila met a similar fate in July. Although makeshift classrooms were established to continue school activities, many students never returned.

"We have 142 students officially, but only 35-40 percent are attending classes," said Farid Ahmed, the school's acting headteacher.

Students complained that there were no restrooms or water facilities in the new makeshift school. All classes from first to fifth grades are held simultaneously in the same classroom. All of these issues are impeding their academic performance.

Farid Ahmed shared their plans for rehabilitation while talking to the Daily Star, saying, "We have acquired some lands from villagers. Whenever we can manage some funding, we will build a new tin shed

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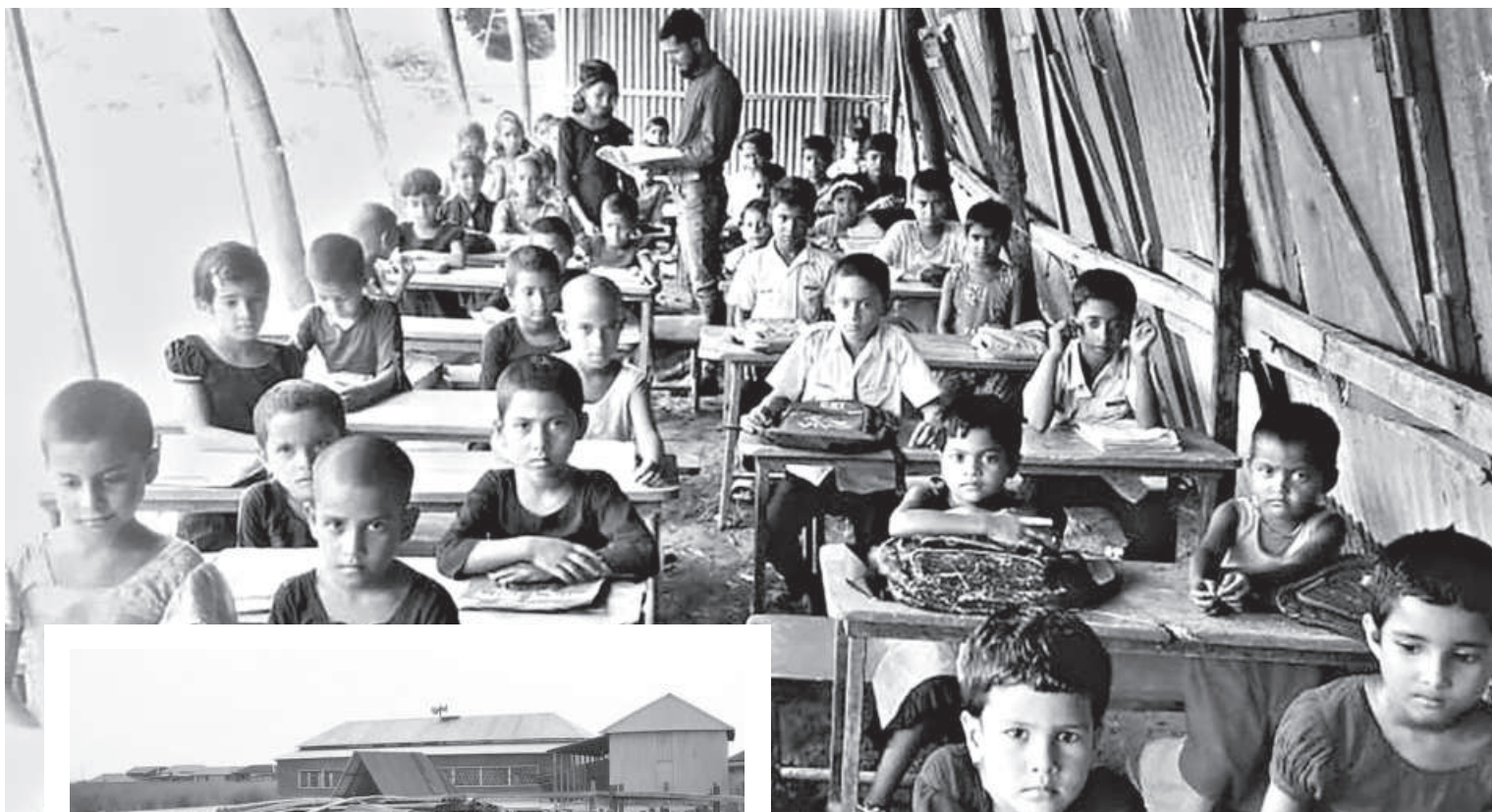


PHOTO: STAR

With the recent flood and river erosion wreaking havoc in Sirajganj, the academic activities of students are now uncertain. While many have dropped out of school and relocated, some were seen attending classes in makeshift sheds as many schools remained submerged.

## 'We must protect girls from early marriage'

Speakers tell event marking National Girl Child Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Early marriage limits chances of empowerment and development for girls, speakers said at a programme yesterday.

The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, and National Girl Child Advocacy Forum, jointly organised the programme marking National Girl Child Day.

"Despite continued prevention efforts, early marriage remains common in our society and the pandemic has worsened the situation," said Fazilatunnesa Indira, state minister for Women and Children Affairs.

Stressing how marriage is seen as the solution to all problems in rural areas, Nazma Mobarek, secretary of the ministry, said, "The actual problem begins after adolescent girls are married off. Their mental and physical health is completely ignored while their shot at becoming independent is compromised."

Nasima Akter Jolly, editor of advocacy forum, emphasised the need to focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent girls, since their parents are not aware of health problems related to early marriage.

Shahin Akter Dolly, vice president of the forum, said, "To empower women, sexual harassment and gender-based violence should be mitigated. We need to strengthen our law and judiciary system to protect our adolescent girls and ensure their fundamental rights."

Tanzir Liton, director general of Shishu Academy, and Farida Parveen, director at the Directorate of Women Affairs, also spoke at the event.

The discussion was followed by an awards ceremony for an art competition arranged earlier as part of the event. Around 956 children participated in the competition.

The 15 winners were awarded crests and certificates for their artworks. The event concluded with a cultural programme.

## BARISHAL MARINE FIRE STATIONS

# Understaffed and ill-equipped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

The marine fire service stations in Barishal division have to respond to incidents of drowning and accidents on waterways often as the region has an abundance of rivers, canals and ponds.

However, they do not have adequate capacity to deal with numerous accidents taking place on the water, due to a lack of sufficient manpower, trained divers, and necessary equipment.

While there are two marine fire service stations at Barishal and Patuakhali districts, the districts of Pirojpur, Bhola, Barguna and Jhalakathi have none.

Belal Uddin, assistant director of Barishal Divisional Office of Fire Service and Civil Defense, said, "We need more divers, who can also operate firefighting vessels and boats."

Of the seven divers available, three are employed in the office of deputy director of Barishal Divisional Fire Service Station, three in Barishal Marine Fire Station and one remains on standby.

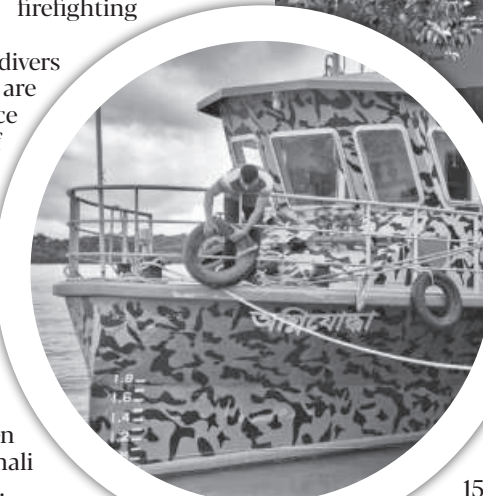
However, one of the three divers posted at Barishal Marine Fire Service Station has been posted to Patuakhali station on deputation.

As such, whenever there is a call for rescue operation, they are not able to respond immediately, said officials.

Only 36 of the 42 upazilas in the division have land fire service stations. Of these, only three stations are under "A" category, while 23 under "B" and 10 under "C" categories.

None of the two marine fire service stations in Patuakhali and Barishal districts falls under the "B" category.

Construction of stations is underway in Muladi upazila of Barishal district and Taltali upazila of Barguna. However, there are no plans to build fire service stations in Agailjhara



under Barishal and Rangabali under Patuakhali.

While the marine stations in other divisions have a manpower of 40, the Barishal station has only 15, said officials.

According to the Center for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh, Barishal division witnesses the highest number of drownings in the country. An average of nine children died of drowning every day in the division, said a 2016 survey.

Some divers, wishing anonymity, said the number of drowning increases during monsoon. They get three to four calls a day but fail to respond due to manpower shortage.

At least a team of four is required to deal with each accident, they said. One diver needs to be kept on standby, in case the primary diver is in danger underwater. However,

often only one person has to carry out rescue operations.

Since December 2021, around 60 people died and 15 others were injured in three severe accidents on waterways in Barishal and Jhalakathi.

The ship Agnijoddha, attached to the Barishal marine station, was asked to conduct rescue operations for the aforementioned accidents but failed to arrive on time.

Diver Enamul Haque said after they started for conducting rescue operation during the incident of MV Ovjian-10 in Jhalakathi last year, their launch stopped working on the way, which compelled them to reach the location by alternative means.

"A firefighting launch requires a crew of at least five to operate. Along with Agnijoddha, I also have to operate another ship -- Agnighatak. Additionally, there is only one diver who runs three speedboats of the marine fire station. For last two years, we have no other diver who can operate the firefighting vessel," he added.

## VISA CURBS ON MEDIA

## US envoy's remark 'disappointing'

Say eminent citizens in a joint statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of eminent citizens yesterday expressed "disappointment" over US Ambassador Peter Haas' recent remark on the possibility of imposing visa sanction on media in Bangladesh.

"We are deeply disappointed at a recent statement issued by US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mr. Peter D Haas where the envoy announced that media persons would fall under the recently imposed visa sanction," they said in a joint statement.

"Announcement of applying visa restriction on media clearly stands in stark contrast to earlier statements pressed by Haas involving the status of freedom of press in Bangladesh, given that media acts as the fourth pillar of a state," said the statement.

"In our country, the media took up an instrumental role in creating awareness against

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radical forces, militants, terrorist outfits, and entities like Jamaat-e-Islami, which consists of war criminals and seeks to eliminate progressive and secular forces including religious and ethnic minorities while establishing a Taliban-style rule in Bangladesh."

"However, we have witnessed Haas' statement on imposing sanction on media has been glorified by radical outfits and anti-liberation quarters that publicly decries western values, deems free thinkers as enemies of Islam and vouches for impunity for war criminals who committed genocide and crimes against humanity in 1971," it added.

The statement was signed by some 190 eminent citizens including Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad general secretary advocate Rana Dasgupta, Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee president Shahriar Kabir, educationist Prof Dr Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, eminent historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon, noted cultural activists Nasiruddin Yusuf and Ramendu Majumder.

On September 24, Haas said in an exclusive interview with a private television channel that media in Bangladesh may also come under the purview of the US visa policy.

## UNO assaulted by 'AL men' in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Gazipur's Kaliganj UNO Azizur Rahman and some Ansar members have been assaulted allegedly by a group of Awami League activists yesterday afternoon for not allowing them to park vehicles on the upazila parishad premises.

The UNO and an Ansar member were injured in the incident, said Faizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kaliganj Police Station. Witnesses said around 10-12 followers of Moktarpur Union AL President Alamgir Hossain, also the Moktarpur UP chairman, carried out the attack in his presence.

They said the upazila AL arranged a memorial meeting at Kaliganj RRN Pilot Government High School ground on the occasion of the 39th martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Moiz Uddin Ahmed.

Around 1:00pm, UP Chairman Alamgir along with his several hundred followers on battery-run auto-rickshaws and motorcyclecentered the upazila parishad premises and started chanting slogans. At that time, another function of Shilpakala Academy was underway at the upazila

parishad auditorium on the occasion of National Girl Child Day.

Ansar members informed them about the programme, but they did not stop chanting slogans, said the witnesses.

As AL men were asked to park their vehicles outside the upazila parishad premises, they became angry with some Ansar men.

At one stage, the UNO reached the scene and also asked the chairman to park the vehicles outside.

Talking to reporters, UNO Azizur said he urged the chairman and his supporters not to park auto-rickshaws and motorcycles on the upazila parishad premises, but the chairman became furious.

"At that time, the leaders and activists who were accompanying him [chairman] attacked me and some other government officials at the instigation of the UP chairman," added the UNO.

The OC further said legal action will be taken if anyone files a complaint in this connection.

Despite several attempts, The Daily Star could not reach the UP chairman over the phone for comments.



A lorry almost topples while two other pick-up vans and a motorbike struggles to maintain balance on the Kachua Bazar section of Tangail's Sakhipur-Sagardighi road, which has been in a dilapidated state for months. The large potholes make commute risky while regular waterlogging exacerbates the locals' sufferings. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR