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FLASH FLOOD IN SYLHET

6.43 lakh people stranded in eight upazilas

Many facing shortage of drinking water, food

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

At least 6.43 lakh people have been marooned in Sylhet's eight upazilas as flash floods hit the district early Thursday, according to the local administration.

Vast swathes of low-lying areas in Gowainghat, Companiganj, Jaintiapur, Kanaighat, Zakiganj, Beanibazar, Golapganj, and Sadar upazilas went under water owing to incessant rains and a gush of water from upstream areas in neighbouring Indian Meghalaya State since Wednesday night.

As a result, homes, schools, vegetable fields, fish enclosures, and key roads were submerged in 48 unions under these eight upazilas.

The flood-affected people are suffering from shortage of food and drinking water.

"Water entered my home so quickly that I could barely save any of my belongings. Paddy stored in the house got wet, and my fish worth Tk 7 lakh in three ponds were washed away," Moklisur Rahman, a resident of Nayagram Uttar area in Gowainghat upazila, told this newspaper last morning as he was drying his crop on a road.



Sabina Akhter's house, located in the same village next to a haor, was swept away by strong currents when the flash floods hit first.

"We had to take shelter at a neighbour's house. We'll now have to take out a loan to rebuild the house, but we aren't sure how we would repay the loan," she said.

Malika Begum of Forfora village in Jaintiapur upazila said her family along with eight other families took refuge at a shelter early Thursday.

"There were 15 families last night. Seven of them left as the floodwater in their localities receded. But we are still not being able to return home as the situation has not improved in our village," she said.

With the Sari Gowain river flowing below danger level, the floodwaters were slowly receding yesterday in five upazilas that were first hit by the flash floods — Gowainghat, Companiganj, Jaintiapur, Kanaighat, Zakiganj.

As of 6:00pm yesterday, the river was flowing 24cm below the danger mark at Gowainghat point and 34cm below the danger mark at Sarighat point, where the river flowed 33cm above the danger mark around the same time on Thursday.

In the last 24 hours till 6:00pm yesterday, 15mm rainfall was recorded in Kanaighat upazila and 19mm in Sylhet Sadar upazila.

Meanwhile, 193mm of rainfall was recorded in Cherrapunji, Meghalaya in the last 24 hours till 9:00am yesterday.

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This bridge on the Louhajang river in Kachudanga area of Tangail town was built three years ago, but there is no approach road to it. Bamboo walkways built by locals offer a precarious crossing for pedestrians.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Unrest likely if Rohingyas not sent back to Myanmar

Says home boss

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Unrest may occur in Cox's Bazar if the Rohingyas are not repatriated soon, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said yesterday.

"A hub of international terrorists may be created here. There may be an influx of arms. Many things can happen. And we already see some signs of them," he told journalists while visiting a Rohingya camp in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar in the morning.

The minister said some people who are fighting inside Myanmar can be seen in Rohingya camps.

"The biggest fear is that drugs have been coming in from Myanmar for a long time although our country does not produce any drugs. Some people in the camps here have got involved in drugs," said Asaduzzaman.

He said the government is trying to identify those

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Israel offers new Gaza ceasefire plan

Says Biden, urges Hamas to accept it; aid not reaching Gaza population, says UN

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden yesterday said Israel had proposed a Gaza ceasefire in exchange for the release of hostages, and called on Hamas to agree to the new offer, saying it was the best way to end the conflict.

"It's time for this war to end and for the day after to begin," said Biden, who is under election-year pressure to stop the Gaza conflict, now in its eighth month.

Talks mediated by Egypt, Qatar and others to arrange a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas have repeatedly stalled, with both sides blaming the other for the lack of progress.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli prime minister's office or from Hamas on Biden's remarks.

The new proposal Biden laid out yesterday is made up of three phases;

the first would be a ceasefire lasting for six weeks.

During this time, Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza and hostages, including the elderly and women, would be exchanged for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Palestinian civilians would return to Gaza, including northern Gaza, and 600 trucks would bring humanitarian aid into Gaza each day, Biden said.

In the second phase, Hamas and Israel would negotiate terms of a permanent end to hostilities. "The ceasefire will still continue as long as negotiations continue," the president said.

The third phase would include a major reconstruction plan for Gaza.

The proposal has been relayed to Hamas by Qatar, Biden said.

He called on those in Israel who were pushing for "indefinite" war to

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- » Israel says combat operations in part of north Gaza over
- » 60 more Palestinians killed
- » Humanitarian situation dire in Gaza: Blinken

57 constituencies go to polls today

Modi, Omar Abdullah among key candidates in the last phase

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

An estimated 10.06 crore Indians are expected to cast their votes today in the last phase of voting in 57 constituencies spread across eight states and two union territories.

A total of 904 candidates, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, are in the fray in the seventh and final phase of voting which began on April 19.

Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is seeking a third term from the ancient city of Varanasi in eastern Uttar Pradesh, and his nearest challenger is Ajay Rai of Congress.

In a video message to Varanasi voters on the last day of campaigning on Thursday, Modi urged them to turn up at polling booths in record numbers.

Among other key candidates in the seventh phase are: senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad in Patna Sahib constituency in Bihar, Omar Abdullah of Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in Baramulla and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee in Diamond Harbour.

Nine Lok Sabha constituencies in Kolkata, its nearby suburbs, and the Sunderbans are going to the polls in the last phase of elections in West Bengal. Votes will be counted on June 4.

In Punjab, there will be battles for 13 seats between the state's ruling Aam Aadmi Party and Congress despite the fact that the two parties had forged an alliance for taking on BJP for the seven seats in Delhi.

Once again, the focus in the last phase will be on the voter turnout. The turnout in the first six phases of polling was 66.14 percent, 66.71, 65.68, 69.16, 62.2 and

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AZIZ AHMED

Decision on probing graft allegations soon: ACC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission will soon decide whether it will launch an investigation into the corruption allegations against former army chief Aziz Ahmed.

In a meeting on Thursday, the ACC reviewed the petition filed by a Supreme Court lawyer and asked its Scrutiny Committee to look into the allegations against Aziz.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, ACC Chairman Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah said the Scrutiny Committee was instructed to verify whether the allegations against General (ret'd) Aziz fall within the jurisdiction of the commission as per

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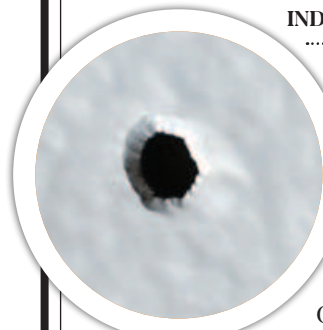


Smoke billows following Israeli bombardment as displaced Palestinians move in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Mysterious pit on Mars could be key to colonising the Red Planet

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK



A newly discovered hole on Mars likely connected to underground caves could be key to colonising the Red Planet, astronomers say.

An image of the pit, which is a few metres across, was captured by Nasa's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter.

"Pits may reflect geologically recent tectonic or volcanic activity. Any associated caves could be targets for future robotic exploration," researchers at the University of Arizona who analysed the images said in a blog post.

Mars has vast networks of lava tubes similar to those found on Earth which could host life forms, sheltering them from dust storms and the harsh planetary conditions caused by the lack of an effective magnetic shield and a thick atmosphere like Earth's.

Scientists suggest such cave networks, formed from the collapse of ancient lava tubes, could be potential shelters for future astronauts.

The newly discovered pit is near a dormant volcano in the Arsia Mons region, a volcanic plain thousands of kilometres across. This region is elevated relative to the rest of Mars by about 10km on average.