



Homes in Khagail area of Sylhet's Companiganj upazila submerged as the region grapples with floods caused by continuous rains and the swelling of rivers. *Right top:* Two families yesterday set up a tent on a highway for shelter in Companiganj upazila's Borni area, after their homes went under water. *Right bottom:* Flood victims waiting in line for relief, distributed by the Red Crescent, at the Companiganj Thana Sadar High School shelter.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH NASIR

1.6m marooned

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flooded, directly affecting over 8.25 lakh people, said Deputy Commissioner Sheikh Russel Hasan.

While poor people are the most vulnerable, the comparatively well-off farmers also lost their stored grain to the flood.

In Sunamganj, homes of 5.6 lakh people have been flooded as the Surma flowed 145cm above the danger mark in Chhatak, 43cm in Sunamganj town and 21cm in Derai.

Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Rashed Iqbal Chowdhury said new areas were flooded yesterday.

Officials in Moulvibazar said nearly half of the district was flooded, affecting 1.93 lakh people.

Urme Binte Salam, deputy commissioner of Moulvibazar, said, "As more rainfall is in the forecast, we are preparing for an even more devastating flood."

In Habiganj, homes of thousands of people have been flooded and more villages are at risk as rivers have been swelling since Wednesday night.

The floods are caused as the Surma, Kushiya, Manu, Dhalai, Kalni, and Gowain rivers have swelled, said Bangladesh Water Development Board officials.

In Sylhet, the Surma was flowing 94cm above the danger level at Kanaighat and 36cm in Sylhet city; the Kushiya was 56cm above in Zakiganj, and 99cm in Fenchuganj; and the Gowain was flowing 5cm above in Gowainghat.

In Moulvibazar, the Juri river was flowing 199cm above the danger level in Juri; the Dhalai was 23cm above in the town; and the Kushiya 20cm in Sherpur.

In Habiganj, the Khowai River in Chunarughat's Balla was flowing 131cm over of the danger level with 75cm in Habiganj's town and 21cm in Sayestaganj. The Kushiya was also flowing 21cm above the danger level in Baniachang's Markuli with Kalni-Kushiya 31cm in Ajmiriganj.

Officials say the rivers are swelling due to torrential rains in Meghalaya, which is upstream from Sylhet. The Indian Met office yesterday morning said it rained 111.4mm in Meghalaya's Mawsynram and 109.8mm in Cherrapunji in just 24 hours.

Besides, Sunamganj town saw 100mm rainfall, Habiganj 115mm, Sylhet city 94mm, and Moulvibazar's Sherpur 75mm.

The Met office in Bangladesh forecasts heavy and very heavy rains in Sylhet division, starting from today.

Officials said many areas were at risk of landslides.

US forces destroy eight Houthi drones in Yemen

AFP, Washington

American forces destroyed eight drones belonging to the Houthi rebels in Yemen over the past 24 hours, the US military said later on Tuesday.

The Houthis have been targeting vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since November 2023 in attacks they say are in solidarity with Palestinians during the ongoing Israel offensive in the Gaza Strip.

The United States and Britain have carried out strikes in Yemen aimed at degrading the Iran-backed rebels' ability to carry out the attacks, while there is also an international military effort to intercept drones and missiles fired at ships.

Defence, Teesta project, port likely to be on agenda

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The two countries will feature prominently during the delegation-level meeting between Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

The Bangladesh premier is scheduled to reach New Delhi in the afternoon tomorrow. On June 22, she will hold the delegation-level meeting centring on a new phase in the bilateral relationship, a diplomat told The Daily Star yesterday.

The two countries are finalising several agreements and memorandums of understanding that may be signed during Hasina's tour of India.

TEESTA PROJECT

The issue of funding for the "Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project" will feature prominently in the talks, according to diplomatic sources in Dhaka and New Delhi.

The agreement was finalised in 2011, but could not be inked due to opposition from West Bengal.

The Economic Relations Division sought a \$983.27 million loan from China to implement the Teesta project, which includes river dredging, setting up reservoirs and building townships along the river.

On October 13, 2022, then-Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming said his country was serious about implementing the project, but also had a sense of reluctance due to sensitive issues surrounding it.

During a visit to Dhaka on May 9, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan

Kwatra told Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud that India was interested in financing the Teesta project.

On June 13, Hasina told the parliament that the government was considering a proposal for a detailed feasibility study for the Teesta project as China's evaluation pointed out that there was a lack of detailed proposals on land development and water navigation.

"Our government needs to know whether India would sign the Teesta water sharing agreement because the river restoration and management project would depend on this," said Faiz Ahmad, a former ambassador of Bangladesh to China.

India and China also can fund different components of the project, said Ahmad, also a former chair of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

A diplomat in New Delhi said the two prime ministers will also discuss the renewal of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty that was signed in 1996. The treaty is set to expire in 2026.

MONGLA PORT

India is keen to manage the Mongla river port, which is crucial for better connectivity between Kolkata and India's north-eastern states, said a diplomatic source in New Delhi.

According to a report in India's The Economic Times, India has shown interest in managing Mongla port as it aligns with the country's broader strategy to counter China's expanding influence in the region.

Air pollution caused most deaths in 2021

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The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's Global Burden of Disease project in partnership with Unicef.

India tops the list with 169,000 deaths in children under 5, followed by Nigeria (114,000), Pakistan (68,000) and Ethiopia (31,000).

"In the last 20 years, we have talked a lot about air pollution but when it comes to action, we rarely see any action -- even the interventions that we saw are very insignificant," said Abdus Salam, one of the reviewers of the study.

The study focuses on the danger of both indoor and outdoor pollution and the vulnerability of children due to indoor air pollution in Bangladesh, said Salam, a professor of chemistry at Dhaka University.

As much as 36 percent of preterm births in Bangladesh in 2021 were linked to exposure to air pollution.

Air pollution impacts children's health in many ways -- from pregnancy through early childhood -- through impacts on newborns including preterm birth, as well as through lower respiratory infections and asthma in children, said Pallavi Pant, head of global health at HEI.

The study found South Asia to be the most polluted region in the world in terms of air: about 18 percent of the total deaths in the region are linked to air pollution.

Bangladesh also featured in the top 20 countries with the highest outdoor PM2.5 exposures.

More than 92 percent of the country's population live in areas that exceed the least stringent interim target for PM2.5 (35 µg/m3) from the World Health Organisation, the report said.

Exposure to household air

pollution caused by the use of solid fuels for cooking is also linked to the development of cataracts, a debilitating disease that affects many across South Asia, Pant told The Daily Star.

Across South Asia, residential solid fuel use continues to be an important contributor to outdoor PM2.5, together with energy, industry, agriculture and transportation sectors.

"It is promising to see progress including reductions in PM2.5 levels and exposure to household air pollution over the last few years. However, exposures to various pollutants remain high in much of South Asia, and the data brings into focus the need for sustained and science-based local and regional action to improve air quality," said Pant, who oversaw the report's release.

While there is a silver lining with the stabilisation and even reduction of annual average PM2.5 levels of air pollutants at the national level, another threat looms large: ozone pollution, according to the report.

For the first time, this year's report includes exposure levels and related health effects of nitrogen dioxide (NO2), including the impact of NO2 exposures on the development of childhood asthma.

Since 2000, deaths linked to exposure to ozone have more than doubled, with 15,000 deaths in 2021 compared with 6,200 deaths in 2000.

Traffic exhaust is a major source of NO2, which means densely populated urban areas, particularly in high-income countries, often see the highest levels of NO2 exposure and health impacts.

It should not be an issue if Bangladesh gives the port handling work to India, Ahmad said.

"Japan is already working on Matarbari deep sea port, and China can manage the Payra Port in Patuakhali. But we need to be careful so that we don't upset anyone by satisfying another," he added.

India is also keen to develop an alternative network of railway routes through Bangladesh to connect its northeast with the rest of the country. This would reduce India's reliance on the existing route through Siliguri, according to a report by The Times of India.

"Detailed negotiation on such projects is needed to know whether Indian trains will run on Bangladesh's territory and whether Bangladesh's trains can use India's territories," Ahmad said.

According to sources, India may in principle approve the supply of electricity from Bhutan to Bangladesh using its power grid.

India is also likely to push for defence equipment sales to Bangladesh under the \$500 million line of credit.

Bangladesh will seek smooth supply of essentials like wheat, sugar and onions from India.

The two leaders may also announce the launch of formal negotiations for a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA), said Bangladesh foreign ministry sources.

The issue of border killings will also be on the agenda.

4 arrested

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was undergoing treatment at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Among the named accused are Sayed Sarzeel Ahmed Tipu, member of Bogura Zilla Parishad and also the secretary of ward-1 Awami League and Md Mehedi Hasan Himu, former publicity affairs secretary of Swechhasebak Dal and also a councillor of Bogura municipality's ward-1.

Sarzeel is the younger brother of arrestee Kabir Ahmed Mithu.

Kabir was arrested by Rab-12 while the three others were picked up by police, said Bogura Sadar Police Station Inspector Shahinuzzaman, also the investigation officer of the case.

AL leader Mintu assured plotter of blood money

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transaction regarding the murder, says the report.

Babu also confessed that he and Amanullah met in person to discuss the same matter and one of them provided the other with photos of the crime scene.

Babu was supposed to collect a part of the assailants' payment from Mintu and pay Amanullah, it adds.

Arrested on June 12, Mintu was later placed on an eight-day remand. Lawmaker Azim went to Kolkata on May 12. Nine days later, India and Bangladesh police said he was murdered at a Kolkata flat.

Of the accused, Amanullah, Tanvir Bhuiyan, Celesty Rahman and Kazi Kamal Ahmed Babu made confessional statements.

West Bengal CID arrested two suspects named Siam Hossain and Jihad Howlader.



Landslides kill 9 in Ukhiya

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in a landslide at camp- 8; two in camp- 9; four members of family in camp-10; and one in camp-14.

The four of a family who died in camp-10 were identified as Abu Meher, 25, Shahana, 22, Abul Kalam, 50 and Selima Khatun, 45. The two in camp-9 were Mohammad Hossain, 50, and Anwara Begum, 18.

The RRRC could not confirm the names of the other victims.

Mohammad Samsuddouza said

the locals who died in landslides are of camps eight and 14.

Locals said a Bangladeshi child, Abdul Karim, 12, was killed in the landslide at camp-8. They said he was a sixth grader at Thayangkhalai High School in Ukhiya.

Cox's Bazar has been witnessing heavy rainfall since yesterday.

Abdul Hannan, Met officer at Cox's Bazar, said his office recorded 63mm rainfall in 24 hours till 12:00pm yesterday.



The wreckage left behind by a landslide in Ukhiya camp of Cox's Bazar yesterday morning.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Hajj death toll surges past 900

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That figure brought the total reported dead so far to 922, according to an AFP tally of figures released by various countries.

Mabrouka bint Salem Shushana of Tunisia, in her early 70s, has been missing since the climax of the pilgrimage on Saturday at Mount Arafat, her husband Mohammed told AFP yesterday.

Because she was unregistered and did not have an official hajj permit, she was unable to access air-conditioned facilities that allow pilgrims to cool down, he said.

"She's an old lady. She was tired. She was feeling so hot, and she had no place to sleep," he said. "I looked for her in all the hospitals. Until now I don't have a clue."

Facebook and other social media networks have been flooded with pictures of the missing and requests for information.

Those searching for news include family and friends of Ghada Mahmoud

Ahmed Dawood, an Egyptian pilgrim unaccounted for since Saturday.

"I received a call from her daughter in Egypt begging me to put any post on Facebook that can help track her or find her," said one family friend based in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to Egypt, fatalities have also been confirmed by Jordan, Indonesia, Iran, Senegal, Tunisia and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, though in many cases authorities have not specified the cause.

A second Arab diplomat told AFP yesterday that Jordanian officials were looking for 20 missing pilgrims, though 80 others who were initially reported missing were located in hospitals.

An Asian diplomat told AFP there were "around 68 dead" from India and that others were missing.

"Some (died) because of natural causes and we had many old-age pilgrims. And some are due to the weather conditions, that's what we assume," he said.

Russia, N Korea sign

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After talks, Putin drove Kim around in a luxury Russian limousine. They then switched places and Kim drove Putin. Later, they watched a concert together.

Putin accused the United States, South Korea and Japan of raising tensions on the Korean peninsula and said North Korea had a right to strengthen its own defences.

Kim said the pact would expand cooperation in politics, economy and defence, calling it "strictly peace-loving and defensive" in nature.

"Our two countries' relations have been elevated to the new higher level of an alliance," Kim said.

At the start of their summit, Kim expressed "unconditional support" for "all of Russia's policies", including "a full support and firm alliance" for Putin's war with Ukraine.

Putin said Moscow was fighting the hegemonic, imperialist policy

of the United States and its allies, Russian media reported.

"We highly appreciate your consistent and unwavering support for Russian policy, including in the Ukrainian direction," Putin said.

The countries' partnership was an "engine for accelerating the building of a new multi-polar world", North Korea's state news agency KCNA said.

Russia has used its warming ties with North Korea to needle Washington, while heavily sanctioned North Korea has won political backing and promises of economic support and trade from Moscow.

The United States and its allies say they fear Russia could provide aid for North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes, which are banned by UN Security Council resolutions, and have accused Pyongyang of providing ballistic missiles and artillery shells that Russia has used in its war in Ukraine.