

Monsoon triggers landslide threat

The risk of landslides looms large for thousands living on foothills in Sylhet, Cox's Bazar and Chattogram amid the ongoing monsoon rain. Unabated hill razing has heightened the danger. Experts have warned that the situation resembles a ticking time bomb and anything can happen at any time if people living on foothills are not evacuated immediately.

6,558 families live illegally on Ctg hills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least 6,558 families are still living on 26 hills in various parts of Chattogram city, violating the law and endangering the hills, according to the Hill Management Committee of Chattogram.

The committee revealed the data at its 28th meeting at the Circuit House in the port city yesterday.

At the meeting, Tofayel Islam, convener of the committee and divisional commissioner of Chattogram, asked the authorities concerned, including Power Development Board, to disconnect utility services within the next 15 days.

Over 20,000 people currently reside on these hills, which are being subjected to indiscriminate hill razing, said Abul Basar Mohammad Fakhruzzaman, deputy



DEATHS IN ROHINGYA CAMP Safety fences not repaired in two years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Unmaintained safety fences led to loss of lives from landslides in Rohingya camps on Wednesday, said Refugee, Relief, and Repatriation Commissioner Mohammad Mizanur Rahman yesterday.

Due to a fund crisis, the agencies concerned did not repair the safety fences and sandbags in place to protect the camps from landslides for two years, he added.

Ten people -- including eight Rohingyas -- were killed in Camp 1 West, Camp 8, Camp 9, and Camp 14 in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar due to the landslides caused by torrential rain on Wednesday.



commissioner of Chattogram.

According to documents revealed in the meeting, most of the families live on seven hills owned by Bangladesh Railway.

When asked, Stujan Chowdhury, estate officer (east) of BR, claimed that they have removed over 1,700 illegal structures from these hills in the past two years, but no action has been able to deter grabbers, as people just return to the hills following evacuation drives.

Fakhruzzaman claimed that they evacuated grabbers from three state-owned hills recently. "We fenced these hills to protect them from grabbers," he added.

At the meeting, participants demanded that the administration make life imprisonment the sentence for hill-cutting.

CAMPAIGN ONGOING TO EVACUATE HILL RESIDENTS TO SAFETY

Meanwhile, the Chattogram district administration has started a publicity campaign in different hills to raise awareness among people about hillslides during the monsoon. A total of six teams, led by executive magistrates, have been campaigning through loudspeakers and asking people living on risky hill slopes to evacuate their homes and come to the shelter centres.

Campaigns were conducted in the hills near Akbar Shah Jheel areas, Bijaynagar Hill, Shantinagar Hill, Tankir Pahar, Paharika, Ambagan, Debarpar, and Railway Hill areas in the city.

Tanvir al-Nasif, additional deputy commissioner (land acquisition) of Chattogram District Administration, said according to the forecast, heavy showers will continue for the next two to three days, so we have taken preparations to evacuate the people living on risky hill slopes.

The schools, colleges, and madrasa buildings are ready to be used as shelter centres in the respective areas.

Yusuf Hasan, executive magistrate of AC Land (Chandgaon circle), said the district administration has allocated dry food for the people taking shelter there.

Dwelling in death trap

Thousands living in landslide fear in Moulvibazar, Habiganj

MINITU DESHWARA

Suleman Ali, a resident of Dahpara village in Juri upazila, Moulvibazar, lives in fear after parts of his house were damaged by a recent landslide from a nearby hill.

"We are living in constant fear amid the looming threat of landslides. The persistent rainfall and flooding are exacerbating the situation further. We are desperately seeking a way out of this situation," he said.

Jashim Uddin, 35, from Saheb Tila village in Rajnagar upazila, echoed Suleman's concerns. Like them, thousands of residents in the hilly areas of Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts fear landslides amid the inclement weather.

The Met office issued a landslide warning for the hilly areas of Chattogram and Sylhet.

Rafiq Uddin, chairman of North

Shahbazpur Union Parishad in Barlekha upazila, advised people to avoid foothill areas for safety.

On June 18, a hillock collapsed on Nirala Punjee road in Sreemangal upazila, Moulvibazar, following

Low-lying areas are submerged, and continuous downpours worsen the flood situation and raise the threat of landslides."

He called for strict enforcement of laws and effective local authority



a daylong downpour and onrush of hilly torrents, halting vehicular movement. Earlier, three of a family died in a landslide in Majortila Chamelibag of Sylhet on June 10.

Besides, a female tea worker named Gita Kahar, 30, died and three others were injured in a landslide in Kamalganj on May 31.

Tofazzal Sohel, coordinator of Habiganj Sankhubdo Andolon, said hilly soil, saturated with rainwater, is turning into loose mud, increasing the risk of sudden collapses.

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's Sylhet chapter, said, "This is the fourth round of flooding in Sylhet within 20 days.

vigilance to curb hill razing.

Shah Shaheda Akhter, coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association in Sylhet, echoed him.

Badrul Huda, assistant director of the Department of Environment in Sylhet, said, "Over 30 percent of Sylhet's hills have been razed in the last two and a half decades. Due to recent heavy showers and indiscriminate hill cutting, landslides may occur at any time."

Najratun Naem, UNO of Barlekha upazila, said the administration has been alerting residents living on foothills to move to safety as incessant rain increases the likelihood of landslides.



A total of 233 makeshift shelters were completely damaged while 702 shelters were partly damaged in those incidents. More than 1,300 Rohingyas were evacuated, while a total of 1,500 people are at risk of landslides, said Mizanur Rahman.

The RRRRC feared that more such incidents would happen in the future if protection measures are not repaired regularly.

A total of 543 landslides occurred in the camp on Wednesday due to the heavy rain, according to the RRRRC office.

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Most of the Rohingyas living under landslide risk were sent back to their houses since there was no rain yesterday, according to some of them. "We have no place to relocate the 1,500 Rohingyas living under threat, providing them new shelters. They will be transferred to safer places when the risk of landslides rises," said Mizanur Rahman.

AL gears up for grand 75th founding anniv

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League has planned a series of events, including rallies, processions, discussions, and food distribution across the country in the lead up to its 75th founding anniversary on June 23.

Special programmes like seminars, art exhibitions, discussions, and documentary screenings are also planned. Cultural programmes at Rabindra Sarobar, a boat race, and a cycle rally at Hatirjheel are also scheduled.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Green World".

Various banners, festoons, placards, and arches will be displayed across Dhaka. To save power, the party will not illuminate streets or infrastructure.

The anniversary celebrations will kick off today with a procession that will start from the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh and end at Dhanmondi 32.

On June 23, Prime Minister and party President Sheikh Hasina will officially inaugurate the anniversary programme in front of Bangabandhu Bhaban after returning from New Delhi on June 22.

A discussion meeting and cultural

event will be held at Suhrawardy Udyan on the same day, with Hasina addressing as the chief guest.

A boat-shaped stage has been constructed at Suhrawardy Udyan for the event.

Later, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy will organise a light and sound show, followed by a cultural programme at the Rose Garden.

Political parties from neighbouring countries, development partners, and supporters of the Liberation War have been invited to the event, according to the Awami League sources.

The AL has also invited the BNP and other opposition parties to the celebrations.

Besides, a nationwide tree plantation campaign, "Sabuj Dharithri", will also be inaugurated on June 23.

AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nashim said, "This year's celebration will highlight aspects of Awami League's long history, tradition, movement, birth of Bangladesh, independence, Liberation War, and struggle."



Vendors sit idle in front of closed shops at AGB colony in Motijheel. With the capital still not returning to its usual state due to many leaving the city on Eid vacation, shops and markets are seeing fewer customers. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN