

Floods, landslides kill at least 11 in India's Jammu region

AFP, Srinagar

Floods and landslides triggered by record-breaking rain killed at least 11 people, including four children, in India's Jammu and Kashmir, officials said Saturday.

An intense monsoon rainstorm in the Indian administered territory since Tuesday has caused widespread chaos, with raging water smashing into bridges and swamping homes.

A local disaster official told AFP that Ramban and Reasi districts were hit by heavy rainfall and landslides on Friday night, killing 11 people.

One child aged five was trapped in the debris and still missing, he added.

On Wednesday, a landslide slammed the pilgrimage route to the Hindu shrine of Vaishno Devi in Jammu, killing 41 people.

India's Meteorological Department said the torrential rain had smashed records at two locations in the region.

Jammu and Udhampur recorded their highest 24-hour rainfall on Wednesday, with 296 millimetres (11.6 inches) in Jammu, nine percent higher than the 1973 record, and 629.4 mm (24.8 inches) in Udhampur — a staggering 84 percent surge over the 2019 mark.

Floods and landslides are common during the June-September monsoon season, but experts say climate change, coupled with poorly planned development, is increasing their frequency, severity and impact.

Climate experts from the Himalayan-focused International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development warn that a spate of disasters illustrates the dangers when extreme rain combines with mountain slopes weakened by melting permafrost, as well as building developments in flood-prone valleys.

Powerful torrents driven by intense rain smashed into Chisoti village in Indian-administered Kashmir on August 14, killing at least 65 people and leaving another 33 missing.



Palestinians mourn over the bodies of family members killed in an Israeli strike at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

THAI POLITICAL CRISIS Rival camps jostle to fill void after PM's ouster

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's political rivals jockeyed for power yesterday after a court sacked the prime minister, with two camps declaring they were ready to form the next government but with no indication when that might happen.

The Constitutional Court's dismissal of Paetongtarn Shinawatra on Friday for an ethics violation triggered a burst of dealmaking. Her ruling alliance put on a united front, while a party that quit her coalition sought to rally support to fill the vacuum.

Paetongtarn, 39, was the sixth premier from or backed by the billionaire Shinawatra family to be ousted by the military or judiciary in a tumultuous two-decade battle for power and patronage

among Thailand's rival elites.

With an array of competing interests, histories of betrayal and big war chests among the political groups, more shifts in allegiance could create deadlock at a time of public unease and prolonged malaise in Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy.

The once dominant Pheu Thai party, founded by Paetongtarn's father Thaksin Shinawatra, has a mountain to climb to shore up a coalition that has haemorrhaged public support, opening the door to its former alliance partner Bhumjaithai to woo other parties and seek defections.

Bhumjaithai's leader, Anutin Charnvirakul, stole the spotlight from Paetongtarn on Friday, as a phalanx of media livestreamed his every move as he shuttled between parties offering pledges

that included calling an election within four months.

The process to elect a prime minister could be protracted, as the constitution provides no deadline. There was no indication on Saturday of when parliament would hold a vote.

Flanked by several factions that once backed the coalition, Anutin told a press conference late on Friday he already had the votes in the bag.

"We are here to work for the people, we have enough votes of support," he said.

Emerging as a kingmaker is the opposition People's Party, the largest force in parliament and a reincarnation of the party that won the 2023 election on an anti-establishment platform but was blocked from power by lawmakers allied with the royalist military.

Want to free Ducsu from political interference

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He argued that political parties intend to regulate students' fate and keep the university bound within their political settlements. "The mass uprising has now given us the chance to raise these issues. Just as the state needs reform, Dhaka University also needs reform. I want to work to that end as an elected representative of students."

Reflecting on his own experience, Shameem said the reality of DU was far from the dream he once imagined. "In classrooms, students often struggle to stay awake. The library is rich, but finding the right books is difficult."

He said the administrative system is stuck in the past, despite global technological progress. "Even now, students pay fees manually at banks."

According to him, appointments of teachers and officials are based more on political loyalty than merit, while no government has ever addressed students' fundamental needs. "Accommodation, food quality, canteen conditions, and educational standards are routinely ignored," he said.

Shameem also highlighted the struggle of students who have a glorious past in leading democratic movements. "Many have to sleep on terraces, in gono rooms, or on rooftops, suffering from bedbugs. Yet no new halls are being built, nor is there any initiative to reclaim university land for students."

Pointing to the crises over accommodation, education, food, and safety, he said the root problem was a lack of accountability. "The administration is not accountable to students. Teachers have their syndicates, and officials have theirs. Reform is essential to ensure accountability. Even if all changes cannot be achieved in one year, we can set an example. We will bring the Ducsu elections into the university calendar, and will not allow any Senate meeting without elected student representatives."

Explaining why he chose to run independently, Shameem said every student has leadership potential. "I considered joining a panel, but realised I would not be able to fully carry out my ideas if I stayed within one."

If elected, he plans to establish a website and media cell where students can file complaints, alongside forming hall-based sub-committees to create an effective student network.

"Look at Oxford and Cambridge, students there contest elections based on quality. If students here believe in my capability and connect with my vision, I believe they will vote for me," he said.

Dropouts up after 14 years

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The grade-wise breakdown shows that students typically begin with high enrolment and low attrition in class-1. But the system begins to falter from class-2, with dropout rates rising steadily and peaking at 7.6 percent in class-4.

"These are the areas where interventions are needed," the report pointed out.

Bangladesh has made notable progress in reducing primary school dropouts since 2010, when nearly four in 10 students failed to complete the education cycle.

Various government measures such as distribution of free textbooks, expansion of stipend coverage and mid-day meals resulted in a sharp decrease in dropout rate over the years.

An analysis of the trend shows that by 2020, the rate fell to 17.02 percent from 39.8 percent in 2010. It further came down to 13.15 percent in 2023, marking significant improvement.

REASONS BEHIND SUDDEN RISE
Inflationary pressure and a rise in living costs in 2024 might have eroded the real value of student stipends, prompting many families to prioritise survival over schooling, said the report.

Seasonal migration, household shocks, and climate-related hardships

There will be a judicial probe

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Doctors said Nur suffered a head injury, jaw and nose fractures, and minor internal bleeding. His face and eyes remain swollen with blood accumulation.

The former Ducsu VP was brought to the emergency ward around 11:20pm Friday and later shifted to the ICU, said Dr Mostak Ahmed, a resident surgeon at DMCH.

A medical board comprising specialists from neurosurgery, ENT, ophthalmology, and casualty departments has been formed.

"We do not think he needs surgery at the moment, but he is still not out of danger," Dr Mostak said.

The attack on Nur set off widespread condemnation and protests throughout the country.

Gono Odhikar Parishad activists yesterday rallied in the capital's Bijoy Nagar, placing three demands: banning the Jatiya Party within 48 hours, forming a committee immediately to investigate the attack, and the resignation of the home affairs adviser.

"We want justice," said General Secretary Rashed Khan.

In Rajshahi, a section of Rajshahi University students blocked the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway for nearly an hour from 11:30am, joined by around 50 students from different departments. The rally was addressed by Fahim Reza, former coordinator of Students Against Discrimination, and Al Shahriar Shuvo, general secretary of the Student Rights Council.

In Chattogram, protesters blocked Soloshohor Gate No. 2 from noon to

further intensified this pressure, particularly among disadvantaged communities, it noted.

Boys are more vulnerable to dropping out than girls, largely due to early entry into the labour market or informal apprenticeship.

Experts warn that the recent reversal in student retention risks undermining Bangladesh's hard-won progress towards universal education and the Sustainable Development Goals.

They recommend introducing inflation-adjusted stipends and targeted interventions to prevent further dropouts.

"Though the government recently raised the stipend amount, it failed to keep pace with rising inflation that has sharply driven up the cost of living," said Rasheda K Choudhury, a noted educationist.

Besides, prices of education materials such as exercise books, pens, and pencils have gone up, she told The Daily Star.

"In such circumstances, families are forced to decide whether they can afford to keep their children in school. Many withdraw their daughters from school to help with household chores, while boys are often pushed into income-generating work," she added.

Rasheda, also the executive director

of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), called for raising the stipend amount and investing more to keep students in school and ensure quality education.

"The government must explore ways to invest in both retention of students and learning outcomes," she said.

When contacted, Abu Noor Md Shamsuzzaman, director general of the DPE, said that to prevent further dropouts, the government is initiating some measures, including the revival of the school feeding programme that was suspended in 2022.

The programme will resume next month in around 23,000 primary schools across 165 poverty-stricken upazilas. Each student will receive two food items selected from a list of biscuits, eggs, milk, buns, and bananas five days per week, he said.

"We hope this will help meet the nutritional needs of children from marginalised families, increase school attendance and reduce dropout rates."

Asked whether the stipend amount would be raised, Shamsuzzaman said they don't have any such plan right now as it will require a huge budget.

"However, the scholarship for 82,500 students selected through the Primary Scholarship Examination is likely to be increased," he added.

I'm running to resist

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set a precedent in the ongoing journey toward a truly democratic Bangladesh."

"Everyone in our panel are student who are currently enrolled. Therefore, they understand the issues of the campus very well. Students have always found me standing by their side in every movement. That's why I think they will recognise the faces of resistance."

If elected, Onoy said, he'll get only one year to work, which he considers to be insufficient, citing the numerous crises that students face.

"But I want to assure students that I'll prioritise their basic rights: accommodation, food, healthcare, and conducive academic environment."

"At the same time, to preserve democratic practices at Dhaka University, I'll remain committed to ensuring that Ducsu elections are held every year. Alongside, we will ensure maximum allocation for education and research to transform Dhaka University into a hub of research and knowledge. If not elected, I will continue efforts so that those who are elected implement these agendas."

Speaking about the overall electoral atmosphere, he said, "Since Ducsu elections are being held after a long time, we had hopes of restoring healthy

student politics on campus. But the overall picture is not as festive as we expected. We've seen that although some candidates violated the electoral code of conduct, no action was taken against them. There is a lack of a level playing field."

Meanwhile, the administration's restrictive policies toward female students have raised concerns about the intent behind such measures, he said adding that the administration has been overall negligent in ensuring equal opportunities for all candidates.

"I'm contesting the election to resist this anti-state and anti-liberation forces," remarked Onoy, who is also secretary for education and research of the central committee of Bangladesh Chhatra Union.

"We do not want the vile politics of Chhatra Shibir in Dhaka University. Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir was formed in 1977 by the then leaders of Islami Chhatra Sangha. Their anti-liberation agenda of 1971 is still what they want to implement, and we have seen examples of that in various ways at different times."

"If Shibir participates in this election, we know students will defeat these identified anti-state forces on election day."

Yunus to meet BNP, Jamaat

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at 6:00pm, all at the chief adviser's official residence, State Guest House Jamuna, Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said at a briefing yesterday.

Shafiqul also said, "We are firmly stating that the election will be held in the first half of February. There is no force that can prevent this. No conspiracy will be able to stop it."

In response to a question whether the environment is conducive to election, he said, "You should collect statistics from the Police Headquarters. Compare the current law and order situation with last year's statistics and see whether the situation has deteriorated."

"We have already instructed the police to provide regular reports. We believe the environment is satisfactory for the polls."

Yunus, in his address to the nation on August 5, said the next general election would be held in February before Ramadan next year. The month of fasting in the Islamic calendar will begin on Feb 17 or 18, subject to sighting of the moon.

The Election Commission on Thursday announced its work plan for the 13th national polls, aiming to complete major preparations by the end of November and announce the schedule in the first half of December.

Tarique pledges

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to protect languages, culture and social values, include qualified representatives in the party structure, form cultural research institutions, give status to the Tribal Welfare Association as a trust, create opportunities for foreign technical education and training, and provide loan facilities to women entrepreneurs.

Speaking as a special guest at the conference, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "After the long reign of oppression by the monstrous fascist government,

we got the opportunity to build a new Bangladesh through a mass uprising. In this new Bangladesh, equal rights of all citizens will be established. My leader and our madam always say the word 'minority' cannot be used; we are all Bangladeshis, our rights are equal."

Mirza Fakhrul further said, "However, we believe that the 31 points formulated under the leadership of Tarique Rahman are the key to the future politics of Bangladesh. This includes the idea of Rainbow Bangladesh. We want to build a true Rainbow State by including small ethnic groups."