

Aila-hit families in distress

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
KHULNA

Nov. 21 : The Aila affected people of Koyra upazila in Khulna district, in the absence of rehabilitation, are leading sub-human life fighting against sun and rain under the open sky.

They are suffering from pangs of hunger and diseases and want of safe drinking water. The water from the tidal surge during the cyclonic storm Aila caused the river to fill to the brim on May 25 this year.

The affected upazilas and pourasabhas are Koyra, Dacope, Paikgachha, Bataghata, Dumnuria, Rupsha, Digholia, Terokhada, Phulhala and Chahna pourasabha.

Khulna District Relief and Rehabilitation office sources said 37,544 families of six unions out of seven under Koyra upazila were badly affected in the devastating cyclone Aila.

The badly affected unions are

South Bethkashi, North Bethkashi, Koyra sadar, Moharajpur, Moheshwarpur and Bagail.

The homeless people have taken shelter on the cross-dam built by Water Development Board (WDB). The members of the families are leading sub-human life in absence of relief goods.

They are suffering for want of food. The homeless families do not know when they would return to their houses. Besides, the cross-dam, cyclone centres, schools, madrasas, motor garages beside the road, NGO offices and the sales centres of shrimp have become the shelters for the homeless people.

The marooned people are running after the volunteers of NGOs in deep frustration, who have undertaken initiatives to distribute relief goods. But they are being deprived of relief goods in the face of a few people who are taking advantage of having relief goods more than one time.

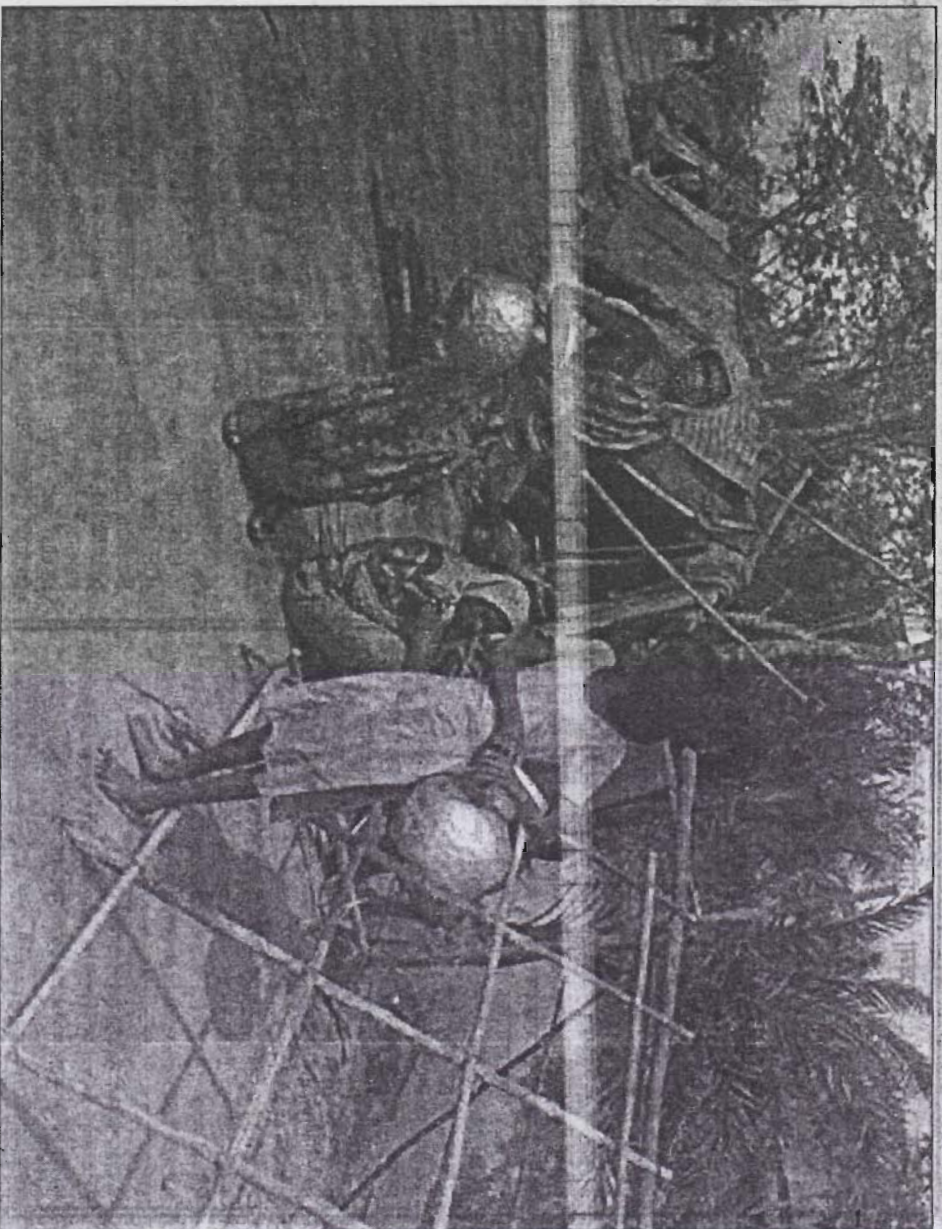
Koyra upazila Chairman Md. Mohsin Reza said, relief goods provided earlier were too inadequate and it did not reach even 50 per cent of the victims.

He said, the beneficiaries who have directly received these relief goods, they could make shelter home and would be possible to transfer by them in their permanent shelter centre after the rainy season in their own arrangement.

But the rehabilitation and reconstruction process is meagre and too slow, he added.

With the passing of time, water-borne diseases are spreading in the areas affected. Poisoning in saline water, crisis of safe water and the disruption of the sanitary system have created the situation of spreading waterborne diseases.

There is a crisis of pure drinking water with the diarrhoea patients suffering much. People have to drink canal and pond water.



A view of the shanties built by Aila-affected families in Koyra upazila of Khulna district.—Independent photo

Aila victims sink deeper

Woes of waterlogged victims compounded as they slip out of spotlight; thousands still live on embankments, aid flow stopped

WASIM BIN HABIB, back from Satkhira, with ABU AHMED

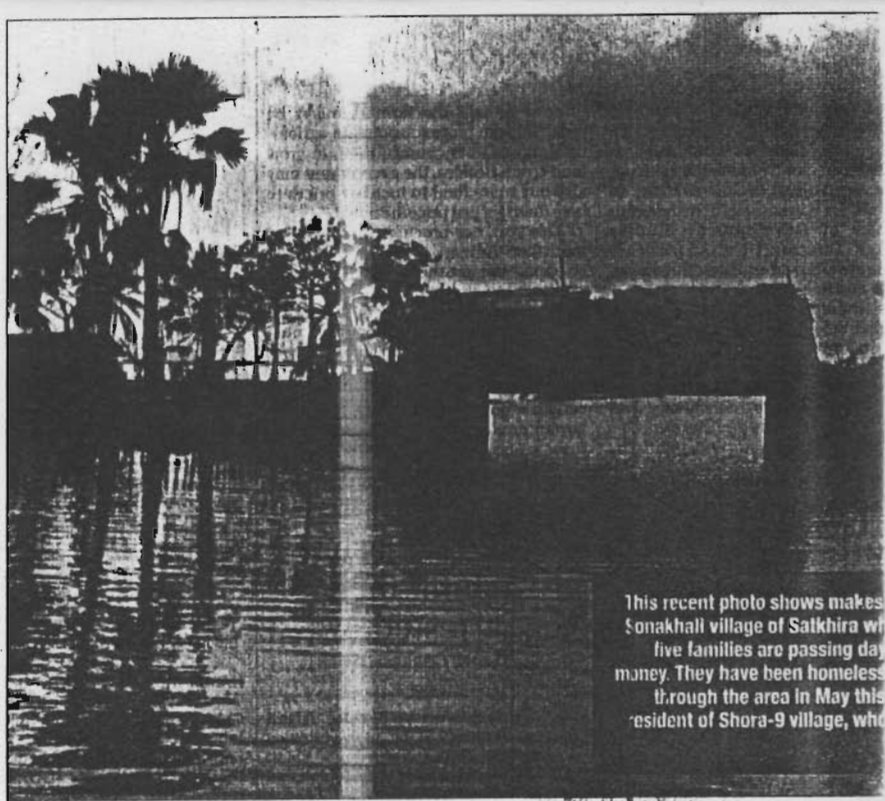
Lutfar Gazi doesn't even try to recall that disastrous day when cyclone Aila ripped through the area he lives and wrecked havoc on his life in May this year. Since then he is too busy struggling to cope with the plight with little time to look back to his past.

Staring blank at the Kohadak river that left him homeless, he tries to figure out in vain how to maintain his family with no source of income and no one for his rescue.

He was a resident of Shora-9 under Gabura union in Shyamnagar upazila, which was one of the worst cyclone-hit areas in Satkhira. In the last four months he knocked door to door to make a living for his six-member family. But eventually he returned to his family with the 'solution' of starvation every now and then.

In a worn-out, makeshift shack on the embankment, Lutfar now spends most of his time thinking of a living but only sees a bleak future ahead.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



This recent photo shows makes Sonakhali village of Satkhira where five families are passing day money. They have been homeless through the area in May this resident of Shora-9 village, who

Aila victims sink deeper

FROM PAGE 1

"I cannot bear anymore. Perhaps death in the storm was a better option than living in this hell," he lets out a deep sigh.

"No home, no income, no food, no water -- how can a human being live here? You will not realise how it feels when your children are crying for food and you have nothing to feed them," he says as he speaks to The Daily Star correspondent visiting the Aila-hit areas.

"Everyone has forgotten us. My little children do not want to live in this small hut anymore but they have nowhere to go, nothing to do.

"Living in this hut during the day is like living in an oven. And when it rains miseries go unbound... perhaps we will die here helplessly," Lutfar adds.

Lutfar is not alone. Several thousands of the Aila victims of different unions of Shyamnagar and Ashashuni upazilas are leading miserable lives in makeshift huts on roads and embankments.

Cyclone Aila struck a deadly blow on the country's southwest coast on May 25, killing about a hundred and washing away several thousand houses and other property.

Though many of the victims have returned to what was left of their homes, people of the worst-affected Gabura, Padmapukur unions in Shyamnagar and Pratapnagar in Ashashuni are still living in a dismal condition.

They have no proper shelter, no food, and no safe drinking water or sanitation facilities.

A significant number of people have migrated to safer places failing to bear the hardships. According to the deputy commissioner (DC) of Satkhira, around 10,000 people have shifted elsewhere.

The government initially

the survivors' woes.

During a recent visit to different villages of Gabura and Padmapukur unions, it was found most of areas are still submerged by river waters.

The villagers say they could not return to their damaged or destroyed houses to rebuild everything due to lack of resources and help. Besides, things get worse during high tides and heavy rain as their living places are flooded through the breaches on the embankment.

The damaged embankment has now become home to thousands as water still gushes in the villages through the breaches during high tides.

"How can we return to our houses as those are still under knee-to-waist-deep water?" asks Mojibur Sana of Dumuria village.

The problem of safe drinking water is acute in the areas. The victims say though the government and some non-government organisations installed a number of tubewells, but those are not adequate at all.

"The situation remains unchanged; it is rather deteriorating day by day as all the villages are still under water," says Shaiful Azam Lenin, chairman of Gabura union.

"Around 25,000 out of 38,000 people in my union are leading inhuman lives on the embankment," he informs, adding there is no government assistance for over a month.

The dam repairing work from which the victims used to get some food assistance has also stopped.

The sufferings of these people already leading a miserable life turn worse

during rains.

"The fear of rain and storm always haunts us. Whenever it rains we clutch at the roof of the hut and pray to Allah so that the wind may not sweep it away. But rainwater enters our huts anyway making the floors muddy and unliveable," comments Wazid Kumar Mridha of Jhapa village in Padmapukur.

"The situation is terrible," sums up Amzad Hossain, chairman of Padmapukur union. He says over half of 32,000 people of his union are living on the embankment with no food or shelter.

The villagers say huge quantity of relief came soon after the cyclone, but the distribution has stopped for over a month. Besides, the "food for work" programme to repair the damaged embankment has also stopped for over a month, they complain.

Many victims allege they did not get the rice they were supposed to get despite working under the "food for work" programmes to repair the dams. Moreover, they allege they did not receive the money allocated by the government for rebuilding their houses.

DC of Satkhira Mohammad Abdus Samad told The Daily Star: "We have distributed rice before the Eid and during the Durga Puja."

He said they would soon provide food assistance, medical support and sanitation to around 9,500 displaced families in the district and continue it till December.

The government has already given house-rebuilding money to the survivors who took refuge on the embankments and would distribute it again soon, he added.

