

The Daily Star

Sunday, May 31, 2009

Atulia air heavy with death stench

Wasim Bin Habib, from Satkhira

Dead cattle, fish, poultry and other animals floating in the water bodies in Atulia under Shyamnagar upazila bear witness to the destruction Aila caused. The living are in plight whereas the dead are lucky.

The air of Atulia is heavy with the cries of the marooned and stench of decomposed livestock. The road from Gumantoli Chuna Bridge to Noabeki Bazar reeks of death.

The need to pull out the decaying livestock from water is immense but no one sees the point as no high land was spared to bury them.

The river Kholpetua has flooded the entire union of Atulia; one of the worst Aila hit areas with tidal surge that wrecked the southwestern coastal belts of the country on May 25. As far as the eyes lead only water is visible as almost every village is reeling under knee to waist deep water.

Thousands of people of the area are still living on roads as not a single homestead was spared by the storm surge.

Almost all of the houses in these villages including Biralaxmi, Baduria, Uttar Atulia, Hawolbhangī, Chotokupor, Borokupor have been washed away.

Almost every yard is now a pile of waste. Villagers are gathering whatever they can recover while many of them have abandoned the place.

The devastated and destitute families took refuge on the road, where some lost their valuables, most importantly, their precious cattle. Cattle means so much to these poor people of the country's southwestern part.

Scarcity of safe drinking water is now haunting the villagers.

With her daughter-in-law, octogenarian Gulaman Bibi of Biralaxmi village was seen in a long queue on the road for water. With a faint voice she said, "I do not want anything, just give me some water."

Housewife Farida Khatun of Uttar Atulia was standing with her three-year-old daughter as she heard drinking water was on its way.

"My child has been suffering from diarrhoea since last night and is now dehydrated," she said adding, "I need fresh water and saline to save her."

"We do not have any pond left as most of them we used for drinking water have turned salty in the tidal surge," she said adding that they cannot even cook since there is no high ground to place stoves or any fuel to light it up.

Masiron Bibi said, "I have lost everything. I have no house, clothes or medicine. We can go without food for few hours but no way we can survive without water."

Many villagers, especially children, have got skin diseases because of the dirty and contaminated water used for bathing and other purposes.

Tube wells could not be installed here due to salinity and iron in the water, said Rabiul Islam, another resident of the village. So most of the villagers used to purify pond water for drinking, but these ponds have been inundated, he added.

Wading through waist-deep water, Jahidul came to collect water from the lone remaining tube well at Uttar Atulia village. "There is no tube well in three kilometres and the water from it is too inadequate," he said adding that that tube well also went under water during the high tide.

Bimol Mallick of Baduria said he has to fetch water by boat, as his house is three kilometres away from Uttar Atulia.

Cooking with this salty water gives food an unpleasant taste and colour. Joyna Akhter said, "My children do not want to eat food cooked with the water as rice tastes salty and smells terrible."

The locals are now resigned to the nightmare they are living through. They have no option but to crowd along the banks hoping for relief.

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