

## 18 Months After the Cyclone Amphan The Tears of Coastal People Have Not Yet Dried Up

Rafiqul Islam Montu



'I used to have everything. But now I'm left with nothing. Our extended family owned a great amount of land and property. Natural disasters have been claiming our lives regularly. The cyclone of 1988 wreaked havoc on the area. Then came a slew of other cyclones'.

Suja Uddin Gazi, 72, uttered his sentiments. For the last one and a half years, his family has been living on the riverbank. Six members of his family live in a cramped room with a leaf fence and a thatched shed, despite the fact that a year back, he and his family resided in a lovely big house with plenty of space. The family used to meet their daily needs by growing crops on their own farm. Suja Uddin's house was swept away by Cyclone Amphan, and his family has been living by the riverside

since the night of the cyclone on 20 May 2020.

Sreepur village is located in the Pratapnagar union of the Asashuni Upazila of the Satkhira district located on Bangladesh's southwest coast. The embankment was broken on the night of the cyclone due to high tidal pressure, allowing water to infiltrate beyond the riverbank. On that night of the cyclone, Suja Uddin Gazi and the rest of the villagers took refuge beside the riverbank. For the past 18 months, they have been in dire straits in every aspect, and their lives are at stake. Many people have fled the neighbourhood searching for work and a better life. The worst-affected areas are Koyra Upazila of Khulna District and Asashuni and Shyamnagar Upazilas of Satkhira

District. Different villages in these Upazilas have experienced a severe crisis due to cyclones.

### **Crying Never Stopped**

Cyclone Amphan has displaced many people along Bangladesh's southwest coast. Many of them have departed the area, along with their families. I've met a lot of these displaced families. I conducted interviews with some of them.

Tripti Das, a resident of Rishipara in the Pratapnagar Union under Satkhira District, had her house, but presently underwater due to cyclone for almost ten months. She and her family eventually had to leave her neighbourhood. Her recent residence is at Dighraj village, Dakop Upazila of Khulna District. Cyclone Amphan has also changed people's lives. Faruk Hossain, a local farmer, is now working as a van driver in Khulna city. The village market's prominent vendors are now selling things inside the villages like hawkers. Nur Hossain, a shrimp farmer, is now a boatman. Even before the cyclone Amphan hit, Mafuar Rahman had everything. Now, he resides on someone else's property.



The cyclone has affected Asashuni Upazila alongwith four other Upazilas on Bangladesh's west coast. Shyamnagar

Upazila in Satkhira District and Koyra, Dakop and Paikgachha Upazilas in Khulna District were also severely hit by Cyclone Amphan. I spoke to several villagers of those areas, and each of them has passed a challenging life year since Cyclone Amphan hit. Approximately one million people in these five Upazilas were affected in various ways. According to local union council sources, more than three lac individuals have not returned to their houses yet. Many of the families who were impacted due to cyclones have relocated.

Hopefully, when the floodwater will be receding, some people will be able to return home. However, a significant portion will never be able to return home as they have changed their professions. More than 2,000 people evacuated the area after Cyclone Aila in 2009 according to Shamsur Rahman,



chairman of Dakkhin Bedkashi Union Parishad in Koyra Upazila. Even after six months of cyclone Amphan, many people have left their houses. A considerable percentage of them will never return.

### **Adopting New Profession**

Natural calamities, such as cyclone Amphan, have prompted many people in the southwest to shift their careers. A

villager who used to be a farmer is now a city van driver or day labourer. Many people are striving to make a living by boating or joining the fishing industry. The once-large fishermen have now shrunk to the size of small fishers. Natural calamities are destroying people's lives in this area. People are running here-and-there for their livelihood. Some are borrowing money from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), while others are borrowing from moneylenders. As a result, their lives are becoming increasingly complex.

Nur Islam, 45, of Kurikahunia village in Pratapnagar union of Asashuni Upazila, used to be a shrimp farmer but now

shrimp farm. It will no longer be possible for him to cultivate shrimp.

In the same village, Mafuar Rahman, 35, also used to be a shrimp farmer. On three bighas of land, he started farming. Presently water is being reduced, but the ground is still flooded. Cyclone Amphan has flooded his home as well. No farmer in the Pratapnagar Union has been able to get ready for shrimp farming this year.

### **A Brutal Struggle for Survival**

How do people manage to get through this year after so many crises? This was the question I had been asking to many Cyclone Amphan impacted people. Many people stated that they had sold



makes a living by boating. Collecting three meals a day for family members has become difficult for him. The last resource is to sell the cows and return the lease money to the landowner of the

the property in response to my query. Almost everyone has taken loans from various sources, Most of the families now have higher debt burdens. People don't have money to fight against any

new natural disaster. It is impossible for them to build new dwellings every year. Almost all the families are in a state of emergency. Even people can't afford to spend money to repair their accommodations and to buy other necessities, Natural disasters are raising the 'hidden climate costs' for their family.

The NGO Uttaran had a study on Upazila's impacted residents and confirmed their coping mechanisms. There are seven different techniques they are adopting. Reduced daily meals, borrowing and begging, reduced medical expenses, asset sales, displacement, child labour, and relief assistance are among them. Their survey revealed this picture after the cyclone Amphan hit in May 2020.

A study done in December of the same year revealed a different picture, In the poll, the response rate was 100%. According to the study, in May, 74% of the people in the affected area had reduced their food intake; 45% of people were borrowing and begging; however, the rate had risen to 67% by December. In May, 83% of respondents said they planned to cut medical costs, However, by December, the percentage had risen to 98%, In May, 39% of respondents claimed they had sold assets, but by December 2020, that number had risen to 73%, 22% of people were displaced in May, reduced to 17% in December. In

May, the percentage of children working was 59%, reduced to 54% in December. In May, 94% of people used relief to pay for their families, reduced to 79% in December.

### **Demand for Strong Embankment**

What caused such a conundrum in this area following Cyclone Amphan? In response to this issue, the chairman of the Koirā Sadar Union Parishad, Humayun Kabir, stated that the unplanned and poorly constructed embankment is the main root of the crisis in the area. This embankment, which was constructed in the 1960s, has gradually deteriorated. Previous cyclones that wreaked havoc on this shaky embankment also put the residents of this area in jeopardy. The residents of this region have been demanding a strong embankment for the last few years.

'Construct a strong embankment for us. Please work in this sector for our survival. Allow us to live and make a home for our family. Otherwise, we will have to move to another place.' Said Sukumar Chandra Baulia, 65, of Hajatkhali village in Koyra Upazila.

***Writer: Rafiqul Islam Montu is a Coastal Journalist.***