

## BANGLADESH NATURAL DISASTER OF A DIFFERENT KIND: COLD SPELL IN BANGLADESH

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Being a Bangladeshi, it is never a pleasant experience to talk about the periodic natural disasters, mainly floods and cyclones that ravage the country every now and then. To increase the sufferings of the poor disaster vulnerable people of the country, recently there has been a new addition to the list of regular natural disasters of Bangladesh named *Cold Spell*, thanks to the global climate change. The impact of *Cold Spell* is as notorious as other regular natural calamities of Bangladesh as far as the death toll is in concern. The recent *Cold Spell* that appeared on the 7th January in Bangladesh has already taken sixteen lives, out of which is 9 children and made most of the population of the northern Bangladesh to suffer with pneumonia, cold diarrhoea, cough, fever, asthma and other cold-related diseases.

During a *Cold Spell*, gusty extreme cold wind coupled with heavy fog covers the whole area of Bangladesh. Historically the average winter temperature in Bangladesh is within 15 to 20 degree Celsius. However, in recent *Cold Spells* this average temperature has dropped to as low as 4 degree Celsius, a new record for the country. The most affected area during this calamity is the northern part of the Bangladesh which is closer to the Himalayas. Northern Bangladesh is the most poverty stricken area of the country where people have year round income poverty and seasonal food poverty during the time of agricultural lean seasons. The recent catastrophe of *Cold Spell* has magnified their sufferings to a severe extent, shortage of warm clothing and shelter has caused them even their lives.

The sufferings of poor people of northern Bangladesh reached to an untold terrible stage especially for those who live in the remote island areas of river Tista, which is locally known as *Char*. Some places in the northern part had not seen the sun for the last 3 to 4 days due to the extreme fog and clouds. Most places of the char areas in the river basins remained covered with fog, reducing the visibility till noon almost every day. In such situations, poor cannot join their regular work because of the unfavorable weather condition as well as due to sickness. As a result, they lose a significant share of their regular income which further reduces their ability to take proper action against the shock.

Also the daily transportation of food items from all parts of the country has been dangerously interrupted. Basic road and water transportation has been delayed for an indefinite time, causing major physical communication to an almost complete halt. Needless to say, such physical communication chaos has triggered the price of common household commodities to a seasonal extreme, causing the sufferings of the poor even more severe. People who took desperate attempt to hit the road ignoring such bad driving conditions have already paid the price with road accidents if not heavy traffic congestions in the highways.

The main reason for such calamity is the constant and consistent blow of chilly wind from the northwest blowing at a speed of 10-15 kms per hour which made the weather further cooler during the typical winter season. As there is no rain, pollen count in the air is relatively high in this season making the air full of dust and causing respiratory problem and allergic infections along with asthma, pneumonia, chronic bronchitis, respiratory problem, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Hospitals, especially those in the northern part of the country, are experiencing massive admission of patients suffering from cold related illnesses for the last few days. Reports received from different sources mentioned seriously sufferings of thousands and millions people living in the sandy char areas in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Bogra and Sirajganj districts on the Brahmaputra basin.

As a concerned national of Bangladesh, I feel very sympathetic to those people who are suffering enormously from this *Cold Spell*. I heard there are some very limited charitable activities has taken place so far in helping out those people. I take this opportunity of writing about such natural disaster in *Ajiken World Trend* to raise concerns among the development partners and government departments and in general Japanese nationals who feel sympathetic about it.