

Afaz
We used to have six seasons

Interview dramatised by Ursula Rani Sarma

At the time of the cyclone we were actually collecting honey in the Indian region of Sundarbans, in the forest. This is far from the Bangladeshi border, maybe six or seven kilometres. We had noticed that the sea was rising, that the air was moving more quickly than it should. We were travelling in two boats that morning. As we collected honey we could see a tiger was tracking us. The weather was getting worse and I was worried the tiger may attack my team so I told everyone to get back into the boats. Up ahead we saw another boat with Indian people inside, they had a radio. They told us there was a danger signal being broadcast for the previous 48 hours. They brought us to their shelter and we stayed there overnight. The next day we set off for home.

We had to wait for nightfall to cross the border as the Indian Border Security Force were on patrol. By the time we reached the Bangladeshi border the dawn was breaking. We couldn't believe our eyes. The water was everywhere, it had consumed everything. The place was unrecognisable. When we were about two or three kilometres from home we saw the dead body of a child floating past us. Even then some of my team didn't want to accept what had happened. They said perhaps the child had accidentally slipped into the water somehow but I knew. When we finally reached our homes, they had been broken into pieces. There was nothing left.

The water level had risen and the whole forest was flooded with water. Incredibly, my family managed to remain in our house for the entire thing. Everyone else was on the embankment where they were given tents to live in. A few of us decided to stay at home. We knew everything was being eroded but there was a better water source where we were and at least we could collect it. After some time, the government sent us some aid and they tried to rebuild the dam. That was a terrible time for us, we suffered a lot.

We used to have six seasons; spring, summer, the rainy season, autumn, pre-winter and winter. Now we only have three; the rainy season, winter and summer. Even then most of the time it is like the summer and this heat is what is causing the cyclones. We know they will continue to come more often now. The climate has totally been changed because of greenhouse gases and it is demolishing poor countries like ours. These wealthy countries who have industrial factories, who pump out smoke from cars, they are damaging the poorer countries who have no power to defend themselves. It makes no sense; these people cause the problems and then send us aid. Why not try to prevent the problem in the first place?

The embankment needs to be properly repaired, reinforced, we need new areas of forestation. The roads of this area are not good, the boundary dams are not

satisfactory, it can collapse anytime. A foreign organisation has promised to do this but even they are working closely with the government and then nothing happens. If the embankment cannot be fixed then we are all in danger. We will have to move and we have no place to go.

This is our home, we shouldn't have to leave it...