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Month after floods, two lakh homeless

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Tamluk, July 20: More than a month after the floods in East Midnapore, some two lakh people are homeless and over 350 schools shut because they are serving as relief camps.

"Hundreds of villages are still under water," said district relief officer Srikrishna Maity. Unless the water recedes, the government won't be able to assess the damage and fix compensation.

If the water has receded in some villages, the houses are unfit to live in.

The authorities of many of the 321 primary and 45 secondary schools had requested the refugees to move out but it evoked little response.

About 84 schools are closed because they have been severely damaged by the floods, said district inspector of schools Dilip Ghatak.

The floods had affected 15 blocks in mid-June. Five of them — in Bhagabanpur, Patashpur and Chandipur — are still waterlogged.

Ghatak said there are 800 primary and 150 secondary schools in the five blocks.

When the floods came, the ground floor of the three-stor-



An East Midnapore school still under water. Picture by Jahangir Badsa

ey Bhagabanpur High School went under water.

The floodwaters receded a fortnight ago, but over 1,000 people have made the school building their home.

"All the classrooms have been occupied. We requested the villagers to shift to some other relief camp a week ago. But only around a third of the 1,500 refugees heeded our request. Some of the classrooms have been turned into cattle sheds," said headmaster Ashok Das Mahapatra.

"We don't know when we will be able to start our classes.

About 1,800 students are suffering at the onset of the academic year," he added.

Most of the flood victims, however, have nowhere to go to. Lutafar Rahman, 65, a hawker of aluminium utensils from Durgapur village in Bhagabanpur block I, has been staying in a school with his wife Rabeya, 55, their two sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren since June 20.

"My two-storey mud-walled house has collapsed and the village is still under knee-deep water. Where will I go with my family, if I am asked to move out of the school building?" asked Lutafar.

Sheikh Rabiul's house in Uttar Beudia village is also swamped. Rabiul, 41, who sells wigs, said repairing the house was impossible unless the water receded.

The students are worried. "This year is very vital for me as I will appear for Madhyamik next year. We have our selection tests and a lot to catch up on," said Abhijit Patram, a Class X student of Palpara Boys' High School.

Sheikh Sahidul's school has resumed but he cannot attend classes because all his books were destroyed.

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