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Meandering tragedy

1 million rendered homeless over 3 decades as the mighty Brahmaputra-Jamuna widens

REAZ AHMAD and SURANJITH DEABNATH

Around one million people have been rendered homeless due to river erosion in the country over the last three decades as the mighty Brahmaputra-Jamuna continues to widen due to decrease in its depth for heavy rush of sediments from the upstream and poor erosion management in the downstream.

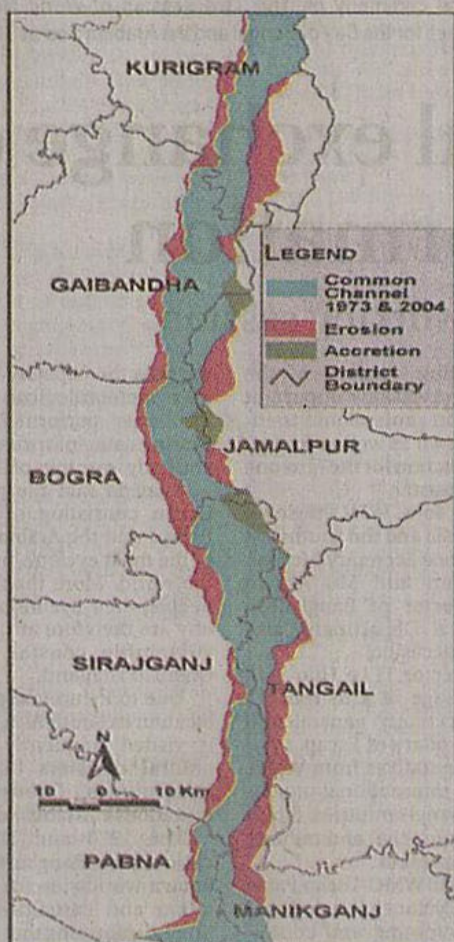
Official statistics show that the Brahmaputra-Jamuna, a major river system in Bangladesh, has widened to 11.8 km now from 8.3 km in the early '70s, eroding about 87,790 hectares of land. The Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS), an independent analysis wing of the water resources ministry, in a recent study said the widening process of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna still continues owing to long-term effects of the 1950 Assam (India) earthquake of 8.6 magnitude on the Richter scale.

Experts said nearly 800 square kilometres of valuable floodplains have been lost due to erosion along the Brahmaputra-Jamuna's total length of 240 km in Bangladesh.

"Around 10 lakh people have become homeless and infrastructures destroyed due to riverbank erosion in the Brahmaputra-Jamuna," said Knut Oberhagemann, team leader of the Jamuna-Meghna River Erosion Mitigation Project (JMREMP), while talking to The Daily Star.

The rate of erosion becomes high and the flow of water strongly hits the river banks when huge quantities of sediment are mixed with water, experts noted.

"Assam earthquake delivered approximately 45 billion cubic metres of sediment to the



Brahmaputra-Jamuna river and its tributaries in the Assam valley, raising the riverbed by three metres," said CEGIS Morphologist Maminul Haque Sarker. He conducted a research titled 'Prediction for Bank Erosion and Morphological Changes of the Jamuna and Padma Rivers 2005'.

Around 60 to 70-square km land is being devoured by the Brahmaputra-Jamuna, leaving 60,000 to 75,000 people landless every year, said a research report of Water Resources Engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

"Depth of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna continues to decrease and its width increases. At present, from 100 to 500 metres of land is being eroded from both banks of the river due to lack of river training," said Professor M Monowar Hossain, who conducted the research identifying three causes of expanding width of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna.

Hundreds of small shoals have emerged changing the course of the river as it carries a huge quantity of sediment from the upstream, Monowar told The Daily Star.

"The mighty Brahmaputra deposits large quantities of fertile alluvial soil as it flows for 1,800 miles (2,900 km) from its source in the Himalayas. Sand, stone, mud and varieties of trees merge with water as the river passes through Tibet in China and Arunachal and Assam states of India," he said.

The river also gets widened as it has less slope and carries most of the sediment at bottom level in the water, he added.

According to the CEGIS study, the Brahmaputra-Jamuna had eroded 87,790

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Cabinet okays tele-tapping

Punishment clause added to law

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved Bangladesh Telecommunications (Amendment) Act 2006, providing for control on the use of mobile phone as a measure to break crime networks.

A meeting of the cabinet held in the conference room of the Prime Minister's Office with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair, gave the approval for amending the law with the phone-control provision.

In the wake of violent crimes across the country, particularly serial bombings by Islamist militants, the government has taken the move to check such syndicated criminal acts.

The president recently promulgated an ordinance with a provision for tapping phones to check "the misuse of mobile phone for committing criminal act".

On December 11, 2005, the president promulgated the Ordinance with immediate effect, amending the Bangladesh Telecommunications (Amendment) Act 2001. The amendment

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

SIDDHIRGANJ POWER PROJECT

Bid to dismantle running plant to set up new ones

Govt bows to donor pressure to get funds

SHARIER KHAN

Under pressure from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the cash-strapped government is set to dismantle a functional 50 megawatt power plant to install in its place two 120 megawatt 'peaking' power units at Siddhirganj power projectsite.

The government's power experts had initially resisted this move on the ground that the 88.5-acre project site has adequate free space for setting up several new power units.

But such arguments have been brushed aside and the government has floated a tender for dismantling the existing plant and install new ones there, sources said.

"This is because the government has no option but to accept the ADB conditions to get funds for the new project," explained a power ministry source.

The ADB will provide \$77 million loan for this project. It justifies its conditions arguing that the 50 MW plant is 35 years old, which needs to be discarded very soon. By dismantling the plant and selling out its old equipment, the total project cost for the new plants can be reduced by several million dollars, it says.

But according to the Power Development Board (PDB) and the newly formed Electric Generation Company Ltd (EGCB), the old plant still generates 30 MW power. Considering the level of load shedding in the country, it will be unwise to dismantle the plant right away. The new plant will take two years to install even if all factors are positive.

The EGCB, formed according to an ADB condition to unbundle the country's state-controlled power generation system, is currently evaluating two bids for this new

power project.

Chinese company Harbin and Indian Bhel in their bids have offered to dismantle and procure the old plant, and install the new units. The two bidders have offered prices ranging between \$90 million and \$110 million. "But we cannot exactly pinpoint the price right away as there are many aspects of their bids that are being evaluated by our consultant," said an EGCB source.

"We expect to sign the ADB loan agreement in April. By that time we should be able to pick and sign agreement with our lowest bidder. It will take another 17 months to install the plant," said another EGCB official.

Meanwhile, the World Bank (WB) has also agreed to finance setting up a 120 MW unit at Siddhirganj.

Sources said following the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Fuel crisis continues to cripple N-dists

Govt points at smuggling, decides to watch filling stations along borders

STAR REPORT

The ongoing fuel crisis continues to make life miserable particularly in the northern region as the authorities are still unable to supply petrol and octane.

The government however started releasing diesel on a limited scale in a bid to resolve farmers' problems in irrigating their lands for boro cultivation.

Petrol and octane were not released from the fuel depot at Kazirhat in Pabna, which was

opened 25-kilometre downstream of Baghabari on Sunday as there were not enough safety measures in place for releasing such highly inflammable fuel.

Apparently blaming smuggling of fuel the main reason for the crisis, the government yesterday also decided to monitor the filling stations along the bordering areas, which get more supply of oil than necessary.

The home ministry, which claimed to have sealed off 13 points

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

ARREST OF BARKATULLAH'S BROTHER Shyamoli traders feel relieved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A number of businessmen and traders in the capital's Shyamoli area heaved a sigh of relief after the arrest of Motiur Rahman Pintu, younger brother of a BNP leader Barkatullah Bulu, on Sunday night.

Pintu is the alleged leader of a gang, which has been allegedly extorting illegal tolls from the local businessmen.

Mohammadpur police arrested Pintu from Adabar area after another alleged gang member, arrested on charge of shooting at a private car showroom on Ring

Road on January 26, named Pintu as the leader of the gang.

A gang opened fire on the car showroom, Top Corporation, and vandalised four cars after the owner of the showroom had refused to pay the gang a toll of Tk 10 lakh.

Local people alleged that commerce ministry adviser, Barkatullah Bulu, also president of Jatiyatabadi

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

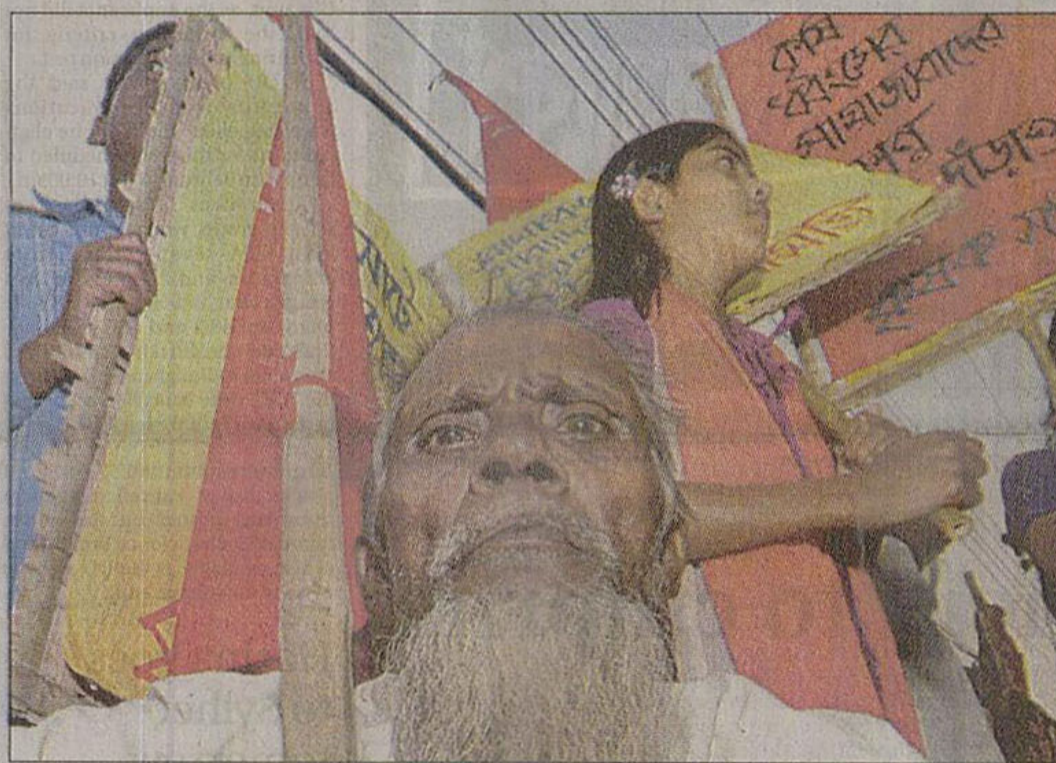


PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Krishak Samity stages a demonstration at Muktangan in the city yesterday, demanding trial of the Kansat killings in Chapainawabganj and cessation of irregularities and corruption in rural power cooperatives.

ACC to file 45 graft cases in a week

Chairman says he'd resign if he fails to make body effective

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission will file charge sheets in 45 corruption cases within a week, ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan said yesterday amid criticism that the commission is not functioning effectively.

"I would resign if I fail to make the commission effective and curb corruption," he told newsmen after a meeting of the ACC members and consultants with the finance minister, the Asian Development Bank and high government officials.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman however observed the commission is not working and has not been effective at all. He said the commission could not help fight corruption as

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Dollar price for LC reaches record high

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As dollar crisis deepened primarily for rising expenditure for petroleum import, greenback prices yesterday soared to a record high of Tk 69.25 in case of opening letters of credit (LC). The rate was Tk 69 on Sunday.

However, prices in the inter-bank foreign exchange market did not rise even though the supply was inadequate yesterday. Transaction in the inter-bank forex market amounted to \$4 lakh only yesterday at a rate of Tk 66.60.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Ramna blast accused recruited as police SI

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An accused in the Ramna Batmul bomb blast case has been recruited as a sub-inspector (SI) of police and is scheduled to be sworn in next month.

Mizanur Rahman Swadhin, an alleged militant and accused in the blast case, is receiving the six-month training at Sardah Police Academy in Rajshahi.

He is likely to get posting after the ceremonial march past of police training completion scheduled to be held on February 22.

He was arrested at a mosque's

mess owned by Abdus Sabur at Matuail in Demra, Dhaka on April 14, 2001 in connection with the case.

Swadhin, son of Abdul Hamid of Bhetchki village in Mathbaria upazila, Pirojpur, was a student of geography department at Suhrawardi College in Dhaka and an adherent of the college unit Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal.

A team of Detective Branch of police had visited his house along with him following allegations that his cousin Jasim was killed while hurling bombs at Ramna.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Blaze your way to glory in the ICC Under 19 World Cup Tournament



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