

# River erosion threatens to wipe away more Basila houses

Buriganga changes its course because of massive encroachment

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Renu Begum could do nothing but to watch it happen. Now, only strong currents roll where her home was two days ago.

River erosion by a diverted Buriganga channel left the housewife homeless, cutting a swath of destruction and devouring 11 houses, including a four-storey building, at Basila in Mohammadpur.

Renu, sitting outside her house with her only child on the evening of August 16, sobbed: "It was a sudden jerk and the house tilted towards the

river. I saw all gone ... all my belongings."

"My husband works in a trawler. He does not have much money," she said adding they built the three-room house on loan only six months ago. "How will we pay back the loan," Renu said.

"We could only save our lives," said Haji Yusuf, owner of a one-storey building swallowed by the river on August 13. "Our family of 15 had lived in the house for the last 25 years and now there is nothing but an abyss 40 feet deep in water," he said. "I feel pangs at the sight of river waters."

Up to 20,000 people live in Basila and about 7,000 of them live close to the riverbank, now exposed to the threat of erosion, as the Buriganga changed its course because of massive encroachment.

Locals said the river has never eroded in the area before. "We have been living in Basila for generations but have never seen anything like that," said Faruk Sarder, a local resident.

"Three brick kilns in the middle forced the river to change its course and hit directly the unprotected foreshore," another local resident said.

The village became more vulnerable when owners of brick kilns built a dam to protect their own installations as traders started scooping up sand from the riverbed threatening the shores.

"Brick kiln owners can save their business as they are moneyed men. We suffer as we are poor," said a resident alleging involvement of influential people, including local Ward Commissioner Abu Sayeed Bepari, in sand extraction.

But the commissioner denied the allegation and said: "I have nothing to do with that. I tried to stop building the dyke down the river to save Basila. People blame me simply because I am the local commissioner."

The frightened people are passing sleepless nights. "We are living in the open, as parts of land may go into the river anytime," Haji Yusuf said. "Men, women and children are

ill on a later, "he said.



The brick kilns emerged illegally on the khas land at Basila and owners built a dyke to protect the kilns from Buriganga over flowing, which caused erosion and suffering to 15,000 residents of the area.

Some villagers moved to safety. "Some neighbours went to their relatives' houses in other areas," said Alimullah Miah. "Things are worse for the people who have no money," he said.

Asked, residents said the build-

ings along the riverbank are always strong built. "That house was built on 50 feet deep piling but was washed away," said a resident pointing to the four-storey building of Shamim Ahmed.

Contacted, Monira Khatun,

project director of the Detailed Area Plan of Rajuk, said Basila is under Rajuk. Abdul Latif Helali, authorised officer of zone No. 1 of Rajuk that includes Basila, said he has never received any request for a house plan in Basila.

The Rajuk chief town planner told Star City that a few people came to ask for permission to build houses in Basila. "But Rajuk cannot permit them as the area is a flood-flow zone," he said, adding nothing could be done unless the detailed area plan is prepared.

"Once the plan is prepared, we would be able to identify which area is suitable for construction and we can demolish the unauthorised structures," he said.



The certainty of non-erosive nature of the river made residents of Basila build permanent structures that went down to Buriganga because of man-made erosion.

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## Basila snapped from circular waterway

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The erosion of Buriganga at Basila threatens a gangway of a landing station by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) built as part of the Circular Waterway Project. This has snapped Basila from the waterway.

"The erosion is the result of an illegal dyke built by some brick kiln owners on the western side of the Buriganga. The dyke was built during the dry season this year to protect the kilns from flood," said Abul Kashem, project director (PD) of Dhaka Circular Waterway Project imple-

mented by the BIWTA.

The dyke turned the flow of the Buriganga from the western side to eastern threatening the terminal. Water level on the eastern side has increased from 30 feet to 60 feet because of the dyke, putting the pontoon under threat.

"We have set up another temporary jetty to protect the gangway at Basila," said the PD.

He also said the BIWTA is unable to remove the brick kilns since they are under the deputy commissioner's jurisdiction.

"There are at least five brick kilns in that area built on state land," said another BIWTA official.



Trawlers used to dredge sand illegally have anchored beside Rayerbazar Martyr Monuments shielding from the rage of Basila residents.

**A dyke turned the flow of the Buriganga from the western side to eastern threatening the terminal. Water level on the eastern side has increased from 30 feet to 60 feet because of the dyke, putting the pontoon under threat**



BIWTA is moving the gangway from the pontoon at Basila minor landing station built for Dhaka circular waterway navigation as it turned unstable due to rise in water level of the Buriganga.

## Schools put off exams for floods

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

Public schools in Old Dhaka had to indefinitely postpone the second term examinations and new dates are yet to be announced, as most schools were used as shelters for flood victims.

Apart from incomplete syllabi, most schools sustained huge damage and developed unhealthy environment left behind by the affected people of adjoining areas.

"Students may be exposed to disease as halls and classrooms are extremely dirty," said a teacher of Lalbagh 2 Government Primary School.

Almost all schools in Sadarghat, Lalbagh and adjoining areas, opened their premises to shelter flood victims in Keraniganj and Kamrangirchar, and the premises served as shelters for over a month.

As soon as the floodwaters started receding, most families left the shelters for their homes and

schools resumed sessions on August 14.

But teachers are facing difficulties conducting classes in unhygienic conditions.

Along with human waste and garbage cleaning from the premises, walls and window grilles in Giyasuddin Govt. Primary School, Lalbagh 1 Govt. Primary School need mending.

Even though, school authorities had the classrooms cleaned with bleaching powder and disinfectant, students still complain of the unbearable stench in toilets and larger classrooms.

Victims are also blamed for overuse of electricity and water the schools provided.

"We are estimating an electricity bill of around Tk. 10,000 to Tk 12,000 for the last month," said Khosru Alam, headmaster of Lalbagh Primary School.

Because of high consumption electric and water supplies in most schools have already been disconnected.

