

Nilphamari-Rangpur road threatened by Charalkata erosion

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

River erosion has taken a serious turn in Kishoreganj upazila in this ongoing flooding season.

The Nilphamari-Rangpur Road via Kishoreganj, Poracoat village and Khokarbazar in Putimari union, all are threatened by erosion of the Charalkata. The erosion has intensified following recession of floodwaters from the area.

The Charalkata is the largest river in the district after the Teesta. Originally, the river was flowing through Kachukata village in Sadar upazila. All on a sudden, it changed its course about 15 years ago and started pro-

ceeding towards human habitat. The river entered Poracoat village. It took a devastating form in the last 10 years. The river devoured at random houses, cultivatable land, trees, bamboo clusters whatever came before it.

During a visit to the area, Motiar Rahman, an elderly man, at Poracoat village said to this correspondent that the Charalkata had devoured his 150 decimals of agricultural land in the last couple of years. Now his house stands on five decimals of land. He said he is very worried now because of intensification of erosion area after recession of floodwater. If the erosion accelerates, he will have to shift his house to elsewhere, he said.

Amena Begum, another villager whose house is only two feet off the river said she cannot sleep at night. 'None wants to abandon her dear house', she said adding, there is none to pay heed to her woes.

Rabeya Begum, wife of Mazammel told this correspondent about 15 years ago 300 families with 1,500 of their members used to live at the village. But now only 35 families live here. She feared the rest others might have to shift to elsewhere if erosion continues at the present pace.

The erosion victims are now living on others' lands at other villages. Previously, most of them were well-to-do families, but now they became

pauper after the erosion.

Locals informed the village is part of Nilphamari-3 constituency (Jaldhaka and a portion of Kishoreganj upazila). Jamaat leader Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury was the elected lawmaker in this constituency. During his visit to the village last year, he gave a false promise to local people that a dam would be constructed to check erosion in the area. But the lawmaker did not turn up at the village, alleged locals. Mizanur Rahman is now in jail for his alleged misappropriation of government relief (corrugated iron sheet).

This correspondent saw that after devouring a vast tract of the land and lot of houses at Poracoat village, the Charalkata is now out to devour the nearby Khokarbazar, a rural market.

The river about to touch the Nilphamari-Rangpur Road. Everyday hundreds of trucks, buses, minibuses, pickups, and other vehicles ply through the road. Last year the Roads and Highway Department (RHD) repaired part of the road which damaged by erosion. As the erosion continues, the road is now being threatened.

Putimari Union Parishad (UP) chairman Shahidul Islam said he met the local BWDB officials several times for protection of the village, the bazar and the vital road from erosion, but to no effect.

On contact, Nilphamari BWDB executive engineer Abdur Razzak said he is well-aware about the situation.

He suggested re-excavation of about half-a-kilometre riverbed and construction of a cross dam might control the erosion. 'I have already sent a project proposal (PP) to the higher authorities in this regard', he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Rural people at a site of erosion by the Charalkata which threatens the nearby Nilphamari-Rangpur road.

A govt primary school indeed!

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Here is a story of a government primary school where classes are held only for six months a year due to dilapidated condition of the class rooms.

Kongchairi Para Primary School was established in 1967 while it was nationalised in 1973, District Primary Education Office (DPEO) sources said.

However, none took any initiative to rebuild the school even after 40 years of its establishment.

Over 200 children of five villages belonging to three indigenous communities read in the school. The communities are Chakma, Marma and Tripura. But the school children are being deprived of quality education.

Local people call it a school of the winter season.

Fearing collapse, the school remains closed in the rainy season because the classrooms are open and the roof of the school broke down long ago.

Both the teachers and students do not attend their classes in the rainy season. All feel insecure to go to school at that season.

During a visit to the school, this correspondent saw the dilapidated structure of the school where the children were studying at risk. The classrooms lack doors and windows while the school atmosphere is not at all congenial to education.

The correspondent saw four teachers in the school. The headmistress is Kohinur Begum while the assistant teachers are Kahalasai Marma, Mathin Marma and Mrashangue Marma. Although they

showed negligence in their duties, but they never failed to draw their salaries every month.

'If we see any cloud or sign of storm, at once we leave our school', said Herohita Chakma, a student of Class Five. He said most of the teachers did not come to school regularly. Local people including guardians have claimed that no government official ever visited the school.

On contact, the headmistress said she had written to the higher

authorities on several occasions narrating the plight of the school children but the authorities concerned did not pay heed to her appeal.

Mongshi Prue Marma, president of the school managing committee said the higher authorities do not pay heed to their appeal because they belong to poor indigenous communities.

'We need a school building for establishment of our children in

society through proper education,' he said.

When asked for comments, DPEO Shakhwat Hossain declined to give his comments although he admitted the reality.

On contact, Khagrachhari Hill District Council (KHDC) chairman Monindra Lal Tripura said they have taken a plan for construction of a pucca building. The work will start after the month of September, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Kongchairi Para Government Primary School teachers and students at an assembly in front of their dilapidated school. The school was not repaired for long since its nationalisation in 1973.

Random sand lifting behind erosion

JAHANGIR ALAM, Netrakona

Indiscriminate sand lifting from river beds in different parts of Durgapur upazila has resulted in massive erosion by the Sumeshowary, sources in the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) here said.

Erosion has already affected 20 villages in the upazila. Over 2000 families have become homeless while about 10,000 hectares of cultivable land have gone into the gorge of the river due to erosion in last three years.

The worst affected villages are Ranikong, Shibganj, Dakumara, Gaokandia and Birishiri.

Villagers of Shibganj and Dakumara lodged several complaints with the administration demanding immediate stoppage of sand lifting but to no effect. They alleged that whenever they protested, unscrupulous sand lifters stopped sand lifting for a few days. They again restarted sand lifting after a few days, villagers said.

Dakumara villagers said sand lifters threatened the protesters of filing extortion cases against them. They also blamed the local administration for not taking necessary action against the sand lifters. This has resulted in rise in sand lifting, villagers said.

Jakir Hossain, a villager at

Shibganj said an organised gang of sand lifters is engaged in the criminal act. They lift sand without taking permission from the administration or the BWDB authorities. But the authorities concerned do not take any action against them, he added.

A villager at Birishiri said, on condition of anonymity, that the administration staffers take bribe from sand lifters.

Another villager, Abdur Rahim at Gaokandia village alleged that there is none to stop sand lifters from doing the bad practice. 'Whenever we protest, they leave the area but they come back again after a few days,' he said.

When contacted, Mohammad

Alauddin, executive engineer of Netrakona BWDB said indiscriminate sand lifting is behind erosion by the Sumeshowary. If indiscriminate sand lifting continues then erosion will be intensified, he said.

A project proposal of Tk 24 crore was submitted to the higher authorities of the BWDB to build the Sumeshowary River Erosion Protection Dam. But all efforts will end in failure if sand lifting is not stopped, the BWDB engineer said.

In reply to a query, the engineer said the BWDB authorities did not give permission to anybody for lifting sand from the Sumeshowary.

Two bombs recovered in Jhenidah

A CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Joint forces yesterday recovered two bombs from Jhenidah municipality graveyard.

Acting on a tip-off, joint forces raided the graveyard and recovered the bombs wrapped by red tape.

Iqbal Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Jhenidah sadar police station said, criminals might have kept the bombs.

Rangamati zoo attracts people

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

A mini zoo here has become a recreation centre for people in the hill town. Everyday, a large number of people along with their kids visit the zoo.

The Hill District Council (RHDC) built the mini-zoo-cum botanical garden on 33 acres of government land in the old hatchery area in the hill town about one year ago.

RHDC spent Tk 30 lakh for by planting different kinds of saplings and constructing the mini-zoo-cum botanical garden under a project titled 'Development of Botanical Garden'. More funds will be spent to finish the remaining work of the zoo, the RHDC authorities said. The RHDC authorities planted 29,000 saplings including mehgani, amolaki, olive, mango and jackfruit, RHDC sources said.

At present, there are four species of wildlife in the zoo. These are: male deer, four maya deer, two monkeys (gangkullya bandar) and a jungle cock.

Although the recreation facilities are limited, yet a large number of visitors flock the zoo everyday. Sometimes, during government holidays, the numbers of visitors rose sharply, zoo authorities said.

'Wildlife is very limited in our zoo but a large number of visitors throng here everyday,' said Kamashya Chakma, caretakers of the zoo.

More animal sheds including shed for birds will be constructed very soon to rear different species of forest birds to make the zoo more attractive, said Ananda Chakma, an official of the RHDC.

At present, around Tk 5,000 are being spent to feed the animals in the zoo, he said. On an average, Tk 120 is needed to feed an animal daily. The RHDC authorities also dug three fish ponds in the surroundings, he added.

Surya Chakma, Monwara Begum and many other visitors said the zoo has become a centre for people's recreation.

Two Myanmar nationals held in Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) with the help of local people arrested two Myanmar nationals from Baro Maudok area in Thanchi upazila on Saturday morning.

They were identified as Kew Ching and May U Gya. BDR handed over them to Thanchi police in the evening.

Sources said, they were active members of Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), a militant group of Myanmar and staying in the area for long.

CI sheets recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and police in a joint drive yesterday recovered 24 pieces of corrugated iron (CI) sheets meant for relief from a madrasa superintendent's house in Shyamnagar upazila.

Acting on a tip-off, police and BDR jointly conducted the drive to the house of Maulana Abdul Aziz, superintendent of Gabura Nizamia Dakhil Madrasa and recovered 24 pieces of CI sheets. Police also arrested him during the drive.

On contact, Police Superintendent (SP) Abdullahel Baki confirmed the incident.

Outlaw held in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Police arrested an activist of the outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (BCP) from Puratan Satkhira village in Sadar upazila on Saturday night.

The arrestee is Abdul Halim, 35, son of Ruhul Amin Gazi of Majhhiara village in Tala upazila. Police also arrested his wife and two sons.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided the house of one Saiful Islam at Puratan Satkhira village and arrested them. Halim was wanted in several cases including Kabir Sana murder case, police said. He went on hiding after killing Kabir Sana in Kaliganj upazila.

On Contact, Police Superintendent (SP) Mirza Abdullahel Baki confirmed the report.



PHOTO: STAR

Some poor fishermen holding a fishing net at Majhipara village in Kurigram. DFID helped make the net meant for alleviating poverty.

A net brings hope to Kurigram fishermen

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, back from Kurigram

A fishing net has brought hope to 32 families of fishermen at Majhipara village in Kurigram.

About 30 women led by Leububala, wife of Amal Das, made the 1,500 long fishing net with the financial aid of the Department for International Development (DFID). Working relentlessly for one month, the rural women finished its work in November last year.

An amount of one and a half lakh taka was spent for the net, 'Tonir Ber,' which was officially handed over to them on July 8 this year.

The expectation was the net would provide square meal to the fishermen family members thrice daily. Thirty-two women own the net while the fishermen of Majhipara village only will catch fish by it.

Amal Das believes that from now on no member of the 32 families will have to starve for days together. He and his family members may not be

able to take a square meal thrice daily but they will not have to buy rice and pulse taking loan from the money-lenders at high interest rate during Monga (famine-like situation) period every year.

'The net will definitely bring something for them from the Brahmaputra riverbed', the fishermen families believe so because now they possess a fishing net.

Although it is a rule that net owners will automatically be owners of water body too, but it is not true for fishermen at Majhipara, a locality adjacent to Chilmari Bandar, most part of which was vanished by river erosion. This is because local influentials deprived the fishermen taking possession of water bodies by force.

Char Livelihood Project (CLPP) Kurigram district infrastructure manager Hosne Ara told this correspondent each woman received Tk 80 for 8-hour work daily.

Although it is a successful poverty alleviation project but the

government has no plan to emulate it, informed Chilmari Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Abdur Rouf. Although he admitted that the project had benefited many people, but he said the project may not succeed at the nearby villages because the nature of food and job crisis varies from village to village in Chilmari upazila. The fishing net will help alleviate poverty of 32 fishermen families at Majhipara village but it does not mean the net project will help combat Monga at erosion prone Putimari-Kajaldanga and other villages, the UNO said.

Hosne Ara further informed the DFID has no future plan for the time being because this project was a pilot project which could not be extended to other villages.

Like Hosne Ara, local chairman Md Abdul Jalil too believes the net will provide three-time square meal to 150 members of the 32 families.

Tk 3 cr timber damaging in Moulvibazar



PHOTO: STAR

Valuable timber being damaged under the open sky at Rajkandi Forest Range office in Moulvibazar.

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

Timber worth Tk 3 crore are being damaged at various range offices of the Forest Department due to lengthy procedure in inviting tender to sell those.

A source in the Forest Department said the situation arose following introduction of sealed tender system instead of open auction system by the Ministry of Forest and Environment to sell timber. The timber are now kept in the open sky.

The Forest Department source said timber merchants have lost interest in participation in the bid due to lengthy procedure. Small merchants have no chance to participate in the bid due to their financial constraint.

In open auction system, all interested persons could participate and purchase timber according to their needs.

Forest officials said the Ministry of Forest and Environment, in a letter issued on October 10, 2005, asked them to sell timber through sealed tender. On receipt of the letter of the ministry, they had invited tender in 47 groups on October 17, 2006, but quotations were submitted for only 38 groups, of furniture, 60 thousand 411 pieces of

they said. They also called second tender on November 20 for 16 groups, but quotations were submitted for only two groups, the said further.

In this way, the third tender was called for 14 groups on January 16 this year but they received quotations for only three groups. The next tender was called for 12 groups on April 19 this year, but they received quotations for only three groups.

Forest officials said the number of submitted quotations was not only poor, but they could not approve the submitted quotations due to different faults.

In this circumstance, they were compelled to call re-tender. The lengthy procedure for approval of any quotation is also another reason for which bidders lost interest in participating the bid.

However, value of timber and timber made furniture kept in stacks at different forest range offices will be about Tk 3 crore.

According to the office of the Forest Department in Srirongal, 48 thousand 586 cubic feet of round timber, 4 thousand 731 feet of long timber slices, 367.50 cubic feet of fuel wood, 1,408 pieces of different items of furniture, 60 thousand 411 pieces of

bamboo and 280 bundles of hemp (Shon grass) are being kept under the open sky at the forest range offices at Juri-1, Juri-2, Kulaura and Rajkandi.

Because of rains, most of the items are being damaged. If the forest goods are not sold immediately, value of the goods might come down by 50 percent, sources said.

Meanwhile, scarcity of timber is prevailing in the markets though the district is rich in forest resources. As a result, prices of timber soared abnormally. Construction work is being hampered seriously due to scarcity of timber in markets. Labourers involved in wood work are also reportedly becoming jobless following scarcity of timber.

Sylhet Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Abul Bashar said to this correspondent over phone not only in Moulvibazar but the same situation prevails in 12 forest range offices of Sylhet region. He said interested buyers have no idea about tender. They (buyers) feel comfortable in open auction system.

On contact, the DFO too said that timbers kept in stacks at different forest range offices are being destroyed. He said he is trying to make the process easy.