



PHOTO: STAR

Primarily due to man-made erosion caused by the wake of passing launches, hundreds of residents from Asoa Amrajhuri village and adjacent area along with the bank of Pirojpur's Sandhya River have become homeless. Many more households are at risk.

Man-made erosion gobbles riverside village

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

By age 75 most people aren't looking to start a new life. Sattar Mollah of Pirojpur's Asoa Amrajhuri village in Kawkhali upazila isn't any different. Indeed a poignant symbol that he had no choice but to move is the half clay oven still visible on this family's ancestral land. The culprit is the greedy Sandhya River which, through erosion, has claimed the property. According to locals, Sattar has transferred the site of his house several times previously in response to the Sandhya's waves. But this time was different. He's had to leave the land altogether as there isn't enough left to build a new house on. Sattar now resides at a government shelter for landless people in nearby Gandharbo village. Like him, over 50 of Asoa Amrajhuri's families have lost landholdings to the

Sandhya over the past decade. While for many Bangladeshi rivers it's the strong currents of the monsoon months that bring about the most treacherous erosion, in the case of the Sandhya the rate of erosion peaks in winter and spring. That's because the Sandhya's erosion is primarily man-made. It's the sizeable waves created by river vessels, including the Dhaka-bound launches navigating the Sandhya that cause the greatest devastation. The waves are largest when nature's water flow is less. Some days later and afternoon finds Sarwar Majhi shifting his house away from the riverbank after three large cracks arrived to inhabit the floor of the house. The river has taken most of his land too and there's little room left on which to build another. "I don't know how long

I'll be able to stay here," he says, adding that when the river completes its takeover he will have to leave the village for having nowhere to stay. His neighbour Jakir Hossain has moved his house over five times during the last decade. "I already lost 1 bigha," he says, "I'm really anxious about my house since the houses in front of mine have already gone." Locals report that serious erosion affects a one kilometre stretch of the Sandhya, starting from the Gabkhan Channel and that the situation has been serious for around 15 years. They lament that no major government initiative has been taken to save their village. "Sometimes an official visited the area," says Majnu Howlader, 60, "They observe the erosion and leave. Yet we have seen no work to save the village." Locals estimate around

half a kilometre of village land has fallen into the river, including houses, mosques, graveyards, cowsheds and crop land. Many solvent villagers have become day labourers as a result. Currently 14 households are in a precarious position. The Bangladesh Water Development Board is the authority responsible for protecting riverside land. Their executive engineer in Pirojpur, Sayeed Ahmed, says that 23 land protection proposals have been sent to Dhaka under the Bangladesh Riverbed Preservation Project, with proposals including Asoa Amrajhuri. "We will be able to start work once proposals are approved," he says. But will it be soon enough for Aheda Begum, 45, who waits with worry in the kitchen of her now riverside home? If measures are not taken soon, her fate will mirror the usual story, the fate of so many of her neighbours.



PHOTO: STAR

Manab Kalyan Parishad organises a cycle procession in Thakurgaon town yesterday marking International Women's Day.

Murder of school kid sparks protest in B'baria

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Teachers and students formed a human chain in Kosba upazila town under Brahmanbaria district for an hour yesterday afternoon, demanding capital punishment of the culprits who abducted and killed a Class I student in the upazila on Saturday. The victim is Khadija Moni, a student of Imam Cadet School in the upazila town, and daughter of Al-Amin. Speaking at the human chain, teachers and students of different schools said they will arrange a tougher agitation programme if police

fail to arrest the killers. Upazila chairman Anisul Haque Bhuiyan said murdering of children must stop, and demanded capital punishment of the killers. Police recovered the decapitated body of the girl from the roof of her uncle Masuk Miah's house at around 7.30pm on Tuesday. Khadija Moni was picked up from in front of her house on Saturday morning, police said. The abductors demanded Tk 1.5 lakh ransom from her family over mobile phone. They threatened that if the money was not sent immediately they would kill the girl, said Md

Mohiuddin, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kosba Police Station. Victim's mother Runa Akther said she filed a general diary in Kosba Police Station on Saturday afternoon against Masuk Miah, Khairul Islam, Kibria Ahmed and Tamim Ahmed. After filing of the case, police arrested the four. During interrogation, they admitted to killing Moni. On the basis of their statements, police recovered the body from the roof of Masuk's house, the OC said. Masuk was produced in the court of Additional District Judge Shafiqul Islam. He confessed to killing Moni for ransom under Section 164.

The arrestee is Rabiul Islam, 35, son of late Alim Uddin of the village. Police said they later raided his house and seized a foreign-made pistol and three bullets from his cowshed on information given by him. Contacted, Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Dupchanchia Police Station, said Rabiul is an accused in at least 14 cases for sabotage, arson and vandalism.

THAKURGAON Illegal sand lifting poses threat to bridge

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

A local Awami League leader is extracting sand as landfill from the Senua River around 50 metres from an important bridge on Thakurgaon-Patiadangi road at Barunagaon village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila. Following out of the river bed at the site poses a threat to the concrete pillars of the nearby bailey bridge that serves as a link between the district headquarters and about fifteen villages, say experts and locals. It also poses a threat to a high-voltage electric pole that is 10 metres from the sand lifting site, they added. During a visit on Sunday morning, this correspondent saw several workers extracting sand with a diesel-run dredger near the important bridge. The sand is being brought through plastic pipes to raise the level of low land about 300 metres away. "The dredging machine has been hired at a rate of Tk 1.20 for lifting one square foot of sand. We have been extracting sand for the last six days and another two weeks will be needed to fill the land," says Ratan Sarcar, 32, a worker engaged in the sand lifting. Mokbul Hossain, 45, of Barunagaon village told this correspondent that the age-old bridge is already in a bad condition. It shakes even when a motorbike plies it. Warning signboards saying 'risky bridge' have been installed on both sides of the bridge. Ram Chandra Barman, 42, of the village says the river is normally 2-3 feet deep, but sand lifting has created a deep hole at one

point in the river. Such ditches have become death traps for people, especially children, who bathe there. Two or three children drown in ditches created by sand lifting in the Senua and Tangon rivers every year. Bablur Rahman, a local Awami League leader and former councillor of Thakurgaon municipality is responsible. He told this correspondent that he is extracting sand from his land for landfill purposes. Bablur says the place from where sand is being

lifted is his ancestral land as per land documents, and that he took permission from the Water Development Board (WDB) and the district administration to undertake the work. Shariful Islam, executive engineer of Thakurgaon WDB, told this correspondent that nobody took permission to lift sand from the Senua River. Shariful says they do not allow extraction of sand within 100-metres from a bridge or embankment. "We will look into the matter and then decide what to do," he said. Shahanur Rahman,

executive engineer of the LGED, said sand lifting within 100 metres of a bridge adversely affects the concrete pillars, although the damage may not be visible immediately. Contacted, Nazmul Habib Reza, revenue deputy collector (RDC) told this correspondent that the district administration is yet to provide permission to extract sand from the river, though Bablur has submitted an application in this regard. The RDC said they will decide what to do after talking with the deputy commissioner.



PHOTO: STAR

Mindless sand lifting from the Senua River at Barunagaon village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila threatens the nearby bridge on Thakurgaon-Patiadangi road.

Schoolboy killed as electric pole falls on him

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A 10-year-old boy was killed when an electric pole fell on him at Bhagabanpur village in Palashbari upazila of the district yesterday. The deceased, Talha Mia, son of Abu Tayeb of the village, was a student of Class IV of Rangpur Kindergarten KC School and used to live with his parents in Rangpur town. Witnesses said Talha along with his mother came to visit his village home on Tuesday. The accident took place when an electric pole of Palli Bidyut Samity, which was being unloaded by some labourers, fell on Talha while he was walking along the road with her mother to board on a rickshaw-van at noon. The boy died instantly. Officer-in-Charge Firoj Kabir of Palashbari Police Station said on information police went to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Padma devours part of Daulatdia ferry terminal

ZAHANGIR SHAH, back from Daulatdia of Rajbari

Daulatdia ferry ghat is now under serious threat posed by river erosion. Ghat (landing spot) No 2 was closed from Sunday after erosion of at least 50 feet around it, said Abdus Sobhan, manager (Marine) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) Aricha ferry sector. There are four ghats on each side of the Padma River, but at least five ghats on each side are needed to keep ferry service normal, he added. Daulatdia ferry ghat in Goalunda upazila of Rajbari district will go into the Padma River if the authorities concerned do not take necessary steps immediately to check river erosion, he said. This correspondent visited Daulatdia ferry ghat on Monday afternoon and saw that a large part of Ghat No 2 had gone into the river.

Shah Alam, sub-assistant engineer of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), said Ghat No 2 and Ghat No 3 are six hundred feet apart, and the gap should be filled to check erosion. Md Ashraf Hossain, additional deputy magistrate of Rajbari district and convener of district crisis management cell, said the issue of Daulatdia ferry ghat was discussed at a meeting held at the deputy commissioner's office on February 14. Representatives from BIWTA, BIWTC, Roads and Highways Department (RHD), Water Development Board (WDB) and upazila administration took part in the meeting, he said, adding that he had requested Md Sultan Ahmed, a port officer of BIWTA, to take immediate steps to protect Ghat No. 2 from erosion. But the port officer did not take any

initiative in that regard, he said, adding that Ghat No. 2 has been damaged and Ghat No. 3 is now under threat. Md Sultan Ahmed said they are trying to protect the other ghats from erosion. The two departments gave a proposal to the district administration to make an approach road and a new ghat to avoid disruption of ferry service. Pankaj Ghosh, upazila nirbahi officer of Goalunda, said land acquisition for the approach road will take time, but steps must be taken to make another ghat and approach road urgently. Otherwise, it would be very difficult to keep ferry service normal. Md Nurul Islam, chairman of Goalunda Upazila Parishad, urged the authorities to take necessary steps to keep the ghat usable as it is the gateway to 17 south and south-western districts.



PHOTO: STAR

Pontoon No 2 of Daulatdia ferry terminal in Manikganj district has remained closed since Sunday due to serious erosion by the Padma River. The photo was taken on Monday.