

DYKE COLLAPSES IN KALAPARA

Saline water damages crops on hundreds of acres

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Different crops including watermelon, teel, mustard, maize, chilli, ground nut, and dal on several hundred acres of land at Devpur village in Kalapara upazila under the district got damaged due to salinity following collapse of an embankment on the Ramnabad River on Monday.

The incident affected around 500 farmers who were preparing to harvest the crops within a short time.

Tidal water from the Ramnabad River regularly enters the farmlands during the high tide since a 400-metre portion of the embankment collapsed under the pressure of the tidal surge influenced by the new moon, said Rustom Ali, 40, a farmer of the village.

"We cultivated different kinds of crops on our land and expected bumper yield but the disaster a little before harvest has left us frustrated," he said.

"My mung bean on six bighas of land and chilli on

three acres of land got damaged by saline water that entered through the damaged portion of the embankment. Crops of over 500 acres of land in the area have been totally damaged due to the same reason, said Rois Uddin, 70, of the same area.

Md Jakir Hosain, 35, another farmer of the area, said he cultivated watermelon and dal on three acres of land but all the crops were totally damaged as saline water entered the field after the embankment collapse.

Cultivation of aman paddy in the area is also under threat if the embankment is not repaired soon, farmers said.

Abul Khayer, executive engineer of Water Development Board's Kalapara Circle, said, "We can build an alternative ring embankment to protect the farmlands from the saline water if locals agree to give their land free of cost. We have already informed the higher authorities of the matter for necessary steps."



PHOTO: STAR

Breach on this protection embankment at Bedpur in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district flooded hundreds of acres of farmlands with saline water, damaging different crops shortly before their harvest.

Living with graves: Loved ones buried inside houses

M. JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL with ANDREW EAGLE

About 350 years ago some 20 families from Barguna district were made landless by various calamities. They resettled in Jalepara, in Amua union in Jhalakathi's Kathalia upazila, on an uninhabited quarter-square-kilometre island between the Bishkhali and Amua rivers. Jalepara's population has since grown to include around 300 families and while the land yet manages to tightly accommodate the living there's simply no ground for the dead.

"I buried my father under the bed where we sleep," says local Saleha Begum.

"We've been living on graves or with graves for a long time because there is

no graveyard," says Khotojan Begum, an elderly woman.

All the local families have deceased relatives buried either inside or right beside their houses. "My mother is buried next to our bedroom," says neighbour Md. Abul Hossen Sarker. "My father is buried in our kitchen, which is a great tragedy since my wife has to cook there every day and she has to sit on the grave to do so."

In total Sarker's house includes four graves, including one under the toilet. In the past the situation was so dire, he explains, that at times corpses were given to the river. "But we really can't do that," he says, "It's not right."

According to Amua union chairman Akter

Hossen Nijam, the problem stems from geography. "Their household land is surrounded by rivers," he says, "and with ten times as many people to house as there once were, there's no land for the deceased."

Poverty also creates the problem, says Sarker, as most Jalepara families rely on river fishing to sustain them and it's not a livelihood that leaves much profit for additional land purchase.

Yet, according to one local fisherman, the community did go as far as depositing money to buy cemetery land. "But the land owners won't sell to us because they think it's not prestigious to sell the land to us," he says.

The community has raised their concerns about

lack of a cemetery to local and upazila authorities on many occasions, locals say, without any result.

Amua's chairman Nijam says meanwhile, that the situation troubles him too, and that he has contacted higher authorities to ask for an allotment of public land. He says he's yet to receive a response.

"I am informed of the problem," says Jhalakathi's deputy commissioner Mizanul Haque Choudhury, "I hope to allot a piece of land for a graveyard as soon as possible. Two plots have been selected, one of which will be their graveyard once official procedures are complete." It's quite upsetting, he adds, to think that some in the community don't have any land on which to bury their dead.



PHOTO: STAR

In Jelepara of Jhalakathi's Kathalia upazila, many houses include graves inside and beside as those people have very little space to live and hardly any space for arranging separate graves. Hence, Abul Hossen Sarker's wife cooks food while sitting on his father's grave and adjacent to his mother's grave.

Housewife rescued 3 days into abduction

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police rescued a housewife of Parbatipur upazila in district on Wednesday, three days after her abduction.

The husband of 21-year-old housewife said his wife was abducted on April 3 when she was going to Parbatipur upazila town from Barapukuria 250MW Coal Fired Power Plant in the upazila.

The abductors then demanded Tk 3 lakh ransom from him over mobile phone.

He informed Parbatipur police about the matter, said victim's husband who works at the power plant.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided Tulapushkuruni village in Chouddagram upazila of Comilla district and rescued the housewife.

However, the abductors managed to flee the scene, sensing the presence of the law enforcers, said Mahmudul Alam, officer-in-charge of Parbatipur Police Station.

In Khansama upazila, a Class IX student of Tangua Adarsha High School in the upazila, who was abducted on March 19, is yet to be rescued.

A gang in a microbus abducted the girl when she was returning home from her school, said police.

The victim's brother later filed an abduction case with Khansama Police Station.

Police are raiding different areas to rescue the girl, OC Krishna Chandra Sarker said, adding that they already arrested one, suspecting his involvement in the incident.

One killed, 15 hurt over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A housewife was killed and 15 others injured in a clash between two rival groups over land dispute at Motiganj village under Srimangal upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Sabana Begum, 33, wife of Joynal Miah, 45.

Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Srimangal Police Station, said there was a longstanding dispute between Sabana Begum and her stepbrother Muzzamel Haque, 45, over the possession of a piece of land at the village.

As a sequel to that, supporters of Joynal Miah and Muzzamel locked in a clash in the morning, leaving 16 people from both sides injured.

Five of the injured, including Sabana, were admitted to Srimangal Upazila Health Complex in a critical condition while the rest given first aid at the hospital. Shabana succumbed to her injuries in the afternoon.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. Muzzamel had gone into hiding.

Five robbers arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police arrested five alleged members of a robber gang in Sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

They also seized a cattle-laden pick-up from their possession.

The arrestees are Abdul Khalek, 30, Mohammad Abdul Barek, 30, and Lavlu Miah, 27, of Gopalpur village, and Ripon Miah, 31, of Rupshi village, and Abul Kashem of Putiajani village in Delduar upazila.

Informed that a gang was passing through the district town with a looted cattle-laden pick-up the law enforcers raided the area and arrested the five, said Nazmul Haque Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Tangail Model Police Station.

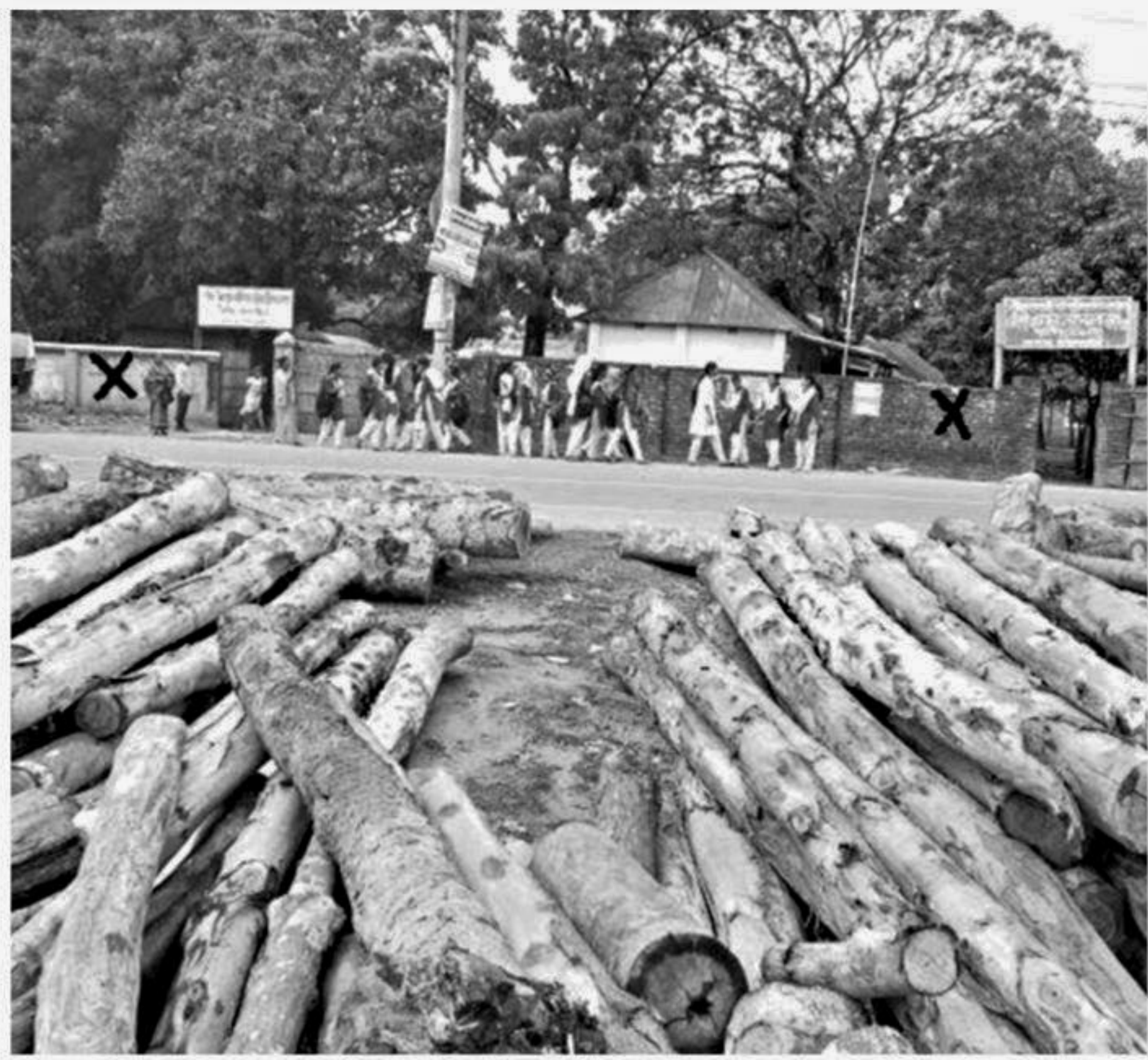


PHOTO: STAR

Defying rules, saw mills have been set up very close to two educational institutions -- Shaheed Zia Girls' High School and Business Management College at Gasbari in Nilphamari municipality.

NILPHAMARI

All 206 sawmills operating without license

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

All the 206 sawmills in the district are operating without any valid license issued by forest department, thanks to the lax monitoring of the authorities concerned.

"I did not get license for my mills as I faced no difficulty to operate those although forest department sent letters, asking me to do so," said Rustom Ali, owner of two sawmills at Halir Bazar, a busy market in Khoksabari union of Sadar upazila.

"I managed to get a license for my sawmill in 2002. But I never renewed it although it is mandatory to do it every year," said Lablu Islam, owner of Bhai-Bhai Sawmill at Gasbari in Nilphamari municipality.

Rules do not allow setting up of sawmills within 200 metres of any educational institution but a large number of sawmills are operating in violation of the rule,

sources in forest department said.

At Gasbari, three sawmills are operating beside Nilphamari-Domar road within 100 metres of two educational institutions -- Shahid Zia Girls' High School and Business Management College.

There is strict ban on setting up of sawmill within 10 kilometres of international border and any recognised forest but a large number of sawmills are operating within two to three kilometres of such places in Chilahati, Gomnati, Purbo Satnai, Tepakharibari and many other villages in Domar and Dimla upazilas.

Contacted, Monsur Ali, ranger in Nilphamari office of forest department, said only 13 of the 65 sawmills operating in Sadar upazila got valid licenses a few years ago.

Even those 13 did not renew the licenses for last couple of years, he said.

Monayem Hossen, in

charge officer of Jaldhaka, Kishoreganj and Saidpur upazila forest offices, said, "There are 82 sawmills in the three upazilas and none has valid license although my office sent notice to the owners repeatedly.

"The license fee for a sawmill is only Tk 2000. Its Vat fee is Tk 300 while the yearly renewal fee is Tk 500. Despite fixing such small amounts as fees, the sawmill owners hardly respond to our calls," he said.

Sahidur Rahman, in-charge of Domar forest range, said, "None of the 59 sawmills in Domar and Dimla upazilas has license. We've submitted their list to higher authority for action."

"Only nine of the sawmill owners applied for license and investigation is on to find their eligibility. The law for awarding jail for operating any sawmill without license is hardly enforced as many of the offenders are blessed by politically influential people," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Heavy vehicles including passenger buses ply this risky bridge across the Mathabhanga River on Damurhuda-Dewly road in Chuadanga district, thanks to the negligence of the authorities concerned.

Bridge turns risky due to lack of renovation

AMANUR AMAN, back from Chuadanga

A large number of buses, trucks and other vehicles regularly use a risky bridge across the Mathabhanga River on Damurhuda-Dewly road as it serves as the lone direct road communication with Chuadanga district headquarters for about seven lakh people of Damurhuda and Alamdanga upazilas.

The road is also connected with 20 rural roads, facilitating locals to transport their agricultural

produces to Chuadanga town.

The bridge was built in 1989 but it has turned risky due to lack of renovation, said sources of LGED office in Damurhuda upazila.

Cracks have developed on the floor of the bridge while parts of the railing on both sides have broken.

The bridge shakes dangerously when a bus crosses it, said Atiul Islam, driver of a passenger bus.

Shariful Alam Milton, chairman of Damurhuda

union parishad, said he raised the issue in the upazila parishad's monthly meeting on several occasions.

Ilias Hossain, Damurhuda upazila engineer of LGED, said, "The bridge got damaged due to movement of vehicles carrying more than stipulated weight for long. Earlier we sent a letter to the communications ministry for replacing the dilapidated bridge with a new one but we have not received no response yet."