



The embankment on the Jamuna lies vulnerable to erosion at Gorilabari village in Kalihati upazila of Tangail as unscrupulous traders continue sand lifting from the river near the east end of the Bangabandhu Bridge.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Sand lifting puts villages along Jamuna under threat

No step taken to protect two villages near Bangabandhu Bridge

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Residents of Gorilabari and Beltia villages in Kalihati upazila of Tangail are passing days amid fear that river erosion may hit the area in upcoming rainy season as sand lifting continues near the Bangabandhu Bridge on the Jamuna river.

The villages under Gohaliabari union are about 1.5 kilometres south to the eastern side of the bridge.

Around 4,000 people live in more than 500 homesteads in the two villages, according to Gohaliabari Union Parishad.

In August last year, recession of the water level in the Jamuna resulted in erosion that damaged a 200-metre embankment. Some 50 houses in Gorilabari village went under water then.

Bangladesh Bridge Authority constructed the river bank protection embankment at the confluence of the Jamuna and the New Dhaleswari in 2003 to protect its land and nearby localities.

According to villagers, the disaster occurred due to continuous sand lifting by unscrupulous traders. The authorities dumped geo-bags but

failed to prevent the erosion that left at least 20 families homeless.

Although law prohibits sand lifting within six-kilometre radius of a bridge, a syndicate of influential traders having political connections continued lifting sand near the bridge with powerful dredgers, the villagers said.

When this correspondent visited Gorilabari village last week, the villagers expressed grave concern that during the upcoming monsoon, they might once again face river erosion.

If the erosion hits, a school and a madrasa situated on the bank of the Jamuna will also go under water, they said, urging the authorities to take steps against illegal sand lifting.

They strongly demanded immediate construction of an embankment for the protection of the village.

"We have been living in fear because no steps have been taken since the calamity last year," said Rahima Khatun, 45, a resident of the village.

Sand lifters carry out the illegal activities at night. Lax monitoring by the authorities encouraged them to do so, alleged the villagers.

They said they dared not protest because the

traders have strong political connections.

Despite being notified of the demands and concerns of the villagers, the authorities said they might not go for construction of a new embankment before the start of monsoon.

Ahsanul Kabir Pavel, assistant engineer and in-charge at Bangabandhu Bridge site office in Tangail, said, "On several occasions, sand lifters were detained and handed over to police."

"Tender has been floated for construction of a 460-metre embankment. But the construction will start after monsoon is over," he said adding, "We have enough geo-bags in stock to protect the villagers in case erosion occurs."

Md Alamgir, sub-divisional engineer at Bangladesh Water Development Board in Tangail, said the Board has already prepared the design of the embankment but the work will start next season.

"The authorities should start dumping geo bags immediately because monsoon is knocking at the door and erosion might hit the villages anytime," Nazrul Islam Talukder, a member of Gohaliabari Union Parishad, said.

Indigenous people in Sylhet losing land as grabbers remain scot-free

Speakers tell Moulvibazar discussion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

In the face of land grabbing and injustice, indigenous people in Sylhet division are increasingly leaving their ancestral homes, speakers at a discussion in Kulaura upazila said yesterday.

They said the government should recognise different minority communities as indigenous people and establish their economic, social and land rights to stop such migration.

Moulvibazar Bar Association Executive Member Subimol Lyngdokiri addressed the programme as special guest with Protush Asakra, president of Kuboraj Inters Punjee Development Organisation, in the chair.

Subimol said people from different indigenous communities are always deprived of mainstream development and the trend should change for betterment of the plain land indigenous people.

In the context of land rights issue, plain land indigenous people are facing more trouble than that of the hilly indigenous people, he said, adding that indigenous people in Sylhet division are increasingly migrating to other places due to rampant land grabbing and injustice.

He also stressed the need for undertaking effective steps to make the indigenous people competent in all aspects, especially literacy and social empowerment, so that they can ensure their welfare.

While attending the programme as the chief guest, Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Abul Layes said the government is running various projects for development of the indigenous communities.

Indigenous Peoples' Development Services (IPDS) organised the projects, funded by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and UKaid, he said.

Among others, Kulaura Upazila Agriculture Officer Jaglul Haider, Upazila Livestock Officer Dr Hedayet Ullah and Junior Programme Officer of Caritas, Sylhet region, Prokash Chandra Sarker, spoke as special guests while Orijen Khonglah read out the keynote.

The speakers also emphasised the need for an intensive effort to bring the indigenous people in the mainstream of the society and urged for necessary steps to protect them from repression and oppression by their surroundings.



Local administration demolished 25 illegal structures during a drive yesterday as part of their initiative to free Rahmatpur canal in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN



Waste from Raja Paper Mill being dumped into Ishamoti Gajari canal in Gobindaganj upazila of Gaibandha.

PHOTO: STAR

Paper mill damaging canal, environment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Raja Paper Mill, a newsprint and cardboard factory on Rangpur-Bogura highway in Chapriganj area of Gobindaganj upazila, is causing severe pollution to Ishamoti Gajari canal.

The pollution is posing threat not only to human health, but also to aquatic animals in the canal, affecting overall environment in surrounding areas.

The canal, originating from the Karotoa river, is the primary source of irrigation for agricultural lands in the area. It is also the source of fish for locals. Jute growers also depend on it for processing raw jute.

Raja Paper Mill has been dumping chemical waste into the canal since it went into operation three years ago, said locals.

A thick layer of waste and debris, accumulated throughout the years, now covers the canal and emits foul odour, making lives miserable at houses and schools within around a three-kilometre radius of the canal, they also said.

The pollution has rendered the canal's water unsuitable for irrigation and it destroyed the entire ecosystem of the canal

including aquatic animals such as fish, they alleged.

Nur-e-Diba Shanti, headteacher of Chapriganj Model Government Primary School, said the stench from the canal is so overpowering that conducting classes becomes difficult and some students often suffer from nausea and breathing problems.

Contacted, Gobindaganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ramkrishna Barmon said they were taking steps so the factory authorities install an effluent treatment plant to conserve the environment.

Raja Paper Mill's manager, Nurul Islam, claimed that they have already set up an effluent treatment plant, but an undetected leak in it was spilling waste into the canal for the last few months.

A Chinese expert has detected the cause of the spill and the situation is normal now, he further claimed.

On Monday, Monower Hossain Chowdhury, lawmaker from Gaibandha-4, and Abdul Latif Proddhan, chairman of Gobindaganj Upazila Parishad, paid a visit to the factory and asked its authorities to stop the environmental pollution.

Unani practitioner fined

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A mobile court yesterday fined a unani medicine practitioner Tk 30 thousand in Manikganj town for prescribing allopathic medicines.

The convict is Mohammad Shamim Hossain.

The court, led by Executive Magistrate Sheikh Mohammad Alaul Islam, raided Siddikia Diagnostic Center in the town's Wireless Gate area around 4:00pm and found Shamim prescribing allopathic medicines to patients.

The court later fined him Tk 30,000 and issued him a warning.

Assistant Director of National Consumer Rights Protection Directorate Asaduzzaman fined the authorities of Siddikia Diagnostic Center Tk 15 thousand for keeping expired medicines, Alaul said.

Boy drowns in pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A boy drowned in a pond at Naiyarbari village in Kotalipara upazila of Gopalganj yesterday.

The victim was Chandan Ghorami, 12, son of Sonjit Ghorami of Naiyarbari village.

"While playing beside our house on the bank of a pond, Chandan fell into the water around 1:00pm. Later family members found him floating there," Sonjit Ghorami said.

He was rushed to Kotalipara Upazila Health Complex where an on-duty doctor declared him dead, he said.

EMBEZZLEMENT

Union social worker jailed for four years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A Faridpur court yesterday sentenced a former union social worker to four years' imprisonment in a case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) over misappropriation of Tk 78,870.

Mujibur Rahman, public prosecutor (PP) of ACC in Faridpur, said, "The convict is Mollah Farid Iqbal, 56, former union social worker of Paikkand and Suktail unions under Sadar upazila in Gopalganj."

On charge of embezzlement by the convict, present before the court, Judge Md Motiur Rahman of Special Judge's Court in Faridpur handed him two years' jail term and a fine of Tk 78,870. In default of paying the fine, the convict will have to serve three additional months in jail.

On charge of corruption, the judge gave Mollah Farid another two years of jail term and a fine of Tk 2,000. A default in payment of the fine will result in an additional jail term of one month more, the PP said.

According to the case statement, while working as a union social worker in Paikkand and Suktail unions, Mollah Farid Iqbal collected Tk 1,76,070 in loan payments from different borrowers. But he misappropriated Tk 78,870 of the collection by depositing Tk 97,200 in his office accounts.

Later, Rafiqul Islam, then upazila social services officer, requested the ACC office in Faridpur to investigate into the matter. After investigation, Harun-ar-Roshid, then ACC inspector, filed the case with Gopalganj Sadar Police Station on December 7, 2003, against Mollah Farid.



The approach road of the bridge on Indurkani-Bagolerhat road adjacent to Pattasi Bazar in Indurkani upazila of Pirojpur started subsiding on Monday and finally got separated from the bridge yesterday, hampering road communication with the upazila headquarters.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN