

Unparalleled brutality

Fahad's killers must be punished

We are numb with shock at the brutal killing of a second-year Buet (Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology) student, Abrar Fahad, at the hands of Chhatra League members who had called him ostensibly for “questioning” regarding his possible involvement with Chhatra Shibir. This painful incident shows the nadir of depravity the Chhatra League has reached in their lawlessness and couldn’t care-less attitude. The autopsy report of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital has clearly stated that Abrar experienced internal bleeding and excessive pain due to being beaten with cricket stumps and bamboo sticks. Where is the accountability of the BCL?

It is surprising that in a respectable institution like Buet, the student wing of the ruling party would set up a room that was reportedly known among the students as a “torture room”, and the Buet administration did nothing about it. And it is equally hard to believe that a Facebook post would trigger such a violent reaction among the BCL, as would result in the death of a young person. It seems that to these depraved BCL members, human lives are of no value at all.

Only a few BCL members of Buet may have been involved in the killing of Fahad, but can those who have failed to control the wayward BCL members of the public universities in spite of repeated caution from the media, and the Buet administration who is responsible to enforce discipline in the campus but turned a blind eye to the repressive behaviour of the BCL, absolve themselves of their culpability in Fahad’s death?

Comments of a responsible minister that one cannot just beat someone to death for having a different opinion should have been directed towards his own party apparatchiks and thrust in their minds and not the public, least of all to the parents to whom it sounds glib and hollow and lacking in empathy. We hope, as the said minister has assured, the law would be allowed to take its own course. A university campus should be the safest place for a student—not a place controlled by thugs and murderers. What we witnessed in Buet has not only tainted the name of the university, it has also sullied the achievements of the AL.

Refugee influx raises local poverty levels

Prolonged stay poses multiple challenges

ACCORDING to World Bank’s “Bangladesh Poverty Assessment Report” released on October 7, the influx of the Rohingya population in Cox’s Bazar has raised local poverty level by approximately 52 percent, while the average daily wage in the area has dropped by about 24 percent between August 2017 and May 2018. However, we are informed that as this is a localised phenomenon, the national poverty level will remain unaffected.

Some 650,000 Rohingyas arrived in the two upazilas of Teknaf and Ukhiya over a three-month period and basically doubled the population of these two upazilas, impacting poverty there, and caused an increase in prices of commodities. As the area is predominantly agricultural, workers in the host community are dependent on daily work. Hence, as more and more members of the Rohingyas get involved economically, the nosedive in wages was bound to happen. Local employers are taking advantage of the refugee crisis and hiring workers at lower wages. The livelihoods of the Rohingyas are similar to that of ours, and before the crisis that gripped Rakhine State, they were primarily involved in agriculture.

The fact remains that the presence of such a massive foreign population has stretched local patience to a limit. The same limited natural resources are now being depleted at alarming rates, and tensions are beginning to surface. Unless the issue is resolved soon, problems tied to the refugee crisis will not be limited to Cox’s Bazar but start expanding outwards. While Bangladesh is faced with a complicated challenge, Myanmar isn’t being pressurised enough to take back its nationals. It has employed delaying tactics to evade its responsibility.

Abrar’s murder has opened Chhatra League’s Pandora’s box



IT is a common belief that only meritorious, above-average students can get into a university like Buet. It’s no joke when amongst thousands of applicants, only a handful are selected. Abrar Fahad, a second-year student of the university, was, according to his family and associates, one of those promising students who would probably have done remarkable things had his life not been so brutally cut short. Shockingly, his assailants, too, are all Buet students—supposed to be part of the elite group of the smartest and the brightest as this institution’s student body is considered. Less shocking is the fact that all those so far arrested are leaders and activists of the Buet unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL). So why is this not surprising?

You don’t even have to be an ordinary student of a public university to know how things work in these campuses. For decades, the public universities and colleges have allowed a strange culture to flourish in the residential halls. Depending on the party in power, members of the student units of the ruling party, aptly called “cadres”, will always have “control” over the residential halls. “Control” does not merely mean getting the best room for themselves and their lackeys, it also means maintaining a reign of terror so that regular students are always “kept in line” regarding who they must pay allegiance to. Thus there is a shadow administration within the university administration consisting of the student cadres who will control everything—from who will get the contract for constructing dormitories to who can stay in them.

With 10 years of Awami League rule, it is only part of this unwritten law that Chhatra League would rule the university campuses. The gruesome death of Abrar, a bright student of electrical and electronic engineering, is a reminder of the level of lawlessness that years of overindulgence of Chhatra League by their parent body have resulted in. Dhaka Medical College Hospital autopsy reports have confirmed that Abrar died of internal bleeding and

excessive pain caused by merciless beating with blunt objects like cricket stumps and bamboo sticks. Can you imagine how his parents felt when they learnt of how much pain their son had to endure before he lost his fight with death? A son they were so proud of, for always being a meritorious student, a quiet young man everyone liked. A son who had come home during a break along with his younger brother, and who had decided to

reason to be killed? According to news reports, after returning from his village home, Abrar was called to Room 2011 by third-year Chhatra League members for “interrogation” under the pretext that he might be a “Shibir activist”. So why would merely being a Shibir member (which Abrar was not) come with a death sentence? Why did they think they had the right to mercilessly beat a young man until he was dead—just for expressing

killing, captured on video, of Biswajeet Das by Chhatra League members in 2012 who had “mistook” him for a Shibir member? Can we ignore the allegations of Chhatra League cadres swooping on students during the anti-quota and road safety movements? Are we supposed to pretend that these things did not happen?

Abrar’s murder inside a room (known as the torture room) of a residential hall of the most prestigious educational institute of the country, is bringing a wave of protests from students, teachers, the ordinary people of this country. It has revealed the failure of university authorities in public universities to ensure the safety and security of the majority of its students. It has made it obvious that the university authorities have looked the other way while student cadres have taken over the dormitories, turned rooms into unofficial “interrogation and torture” cells and basically created an environment of terror and powerlessness among the ordinary students. But most of all, it has made it obvious that these goons have a sense of infallibility because of the indulgence bestowed upon them by their parent organisation. Call it indulgence, call it fostering or call it political expediency, it is about time the Awami League abandoned all that and curbed the unbridled power enjoyed by its student body and held those involved in criminality accountable under law.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader has stated: “You can’t just beat someone to death for having a different opinion. Whoever is the criminal, the law will take its own course.” We would really like to believe in the sincerity of these words. As citizens of this country, we expect that every single individual involved in Abrar’s murder, not just be arrested but be given exemplary punishment for the ruthless, cold blooded slaughter of this bright young man. But just meting out punishment to Abrar’s killers is not enough. In the spirit of the corruption drive against errant Jubo League leaders, the government should now focus on freeing the campuses of thugs and killers who believe they have unlimited protection from their parent party. We refuse to live in constant fear that our children may be murdered inside the campus for speaking their mind—the whole point of the university experience.

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Abrar Fahad

SOURCE: FACEBOOK

go back to his university a few days earlier than planned to get a head start on his studies. A son who talked on the phone with his mother a few times while on the bus back to Dhaka and who let her know that he had “reached safely”.

How ironic that he thought he was safe. How could he have possibly known that an innocuous Facebook post regarding his concerns about his country’s welfare would provoke the wrath of Chhatra League members to assault him so ruthlessly? His post was critical about Bangladesh’s recent agreement with India that would allow India to withdraw water from Feni River. He also stated three historical examples in which Bangladesh failed to make any headway with its neighbour regarding use of port, water sharing and export of energy resources. When was expressing one’s views on bilateral agreements enough

views they did not like? Most importantly, why did they think they could get away with such a coldblooded murder that many of the victim’s fellow students were very much aware of?

Such questions bring us back to square one: the culture of thuggery in the name of student politics that has prevailed for years on end. It is no use saying that these are just “a few bad apples” giving the entire organisation a bad name. Please. Do not insult our intelligence anymore. The excesses of Chhatra League members have been all over the news for many years now. According to Prothom Alo, from 2009 to 2014, 39 members of BCL have been killed due to infighting between factions. Within this timeframe, 15 other men from other organisations have been killed at the hands of Chhatra League men.

But even without these grisly statistics, can we ever forget the horrifying, gory

Publish or Perish

Some things to know about research publications



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recent years, this pressure to publish has been mounting not just to sustain and further one’s academic career, but also for universities to secure their “desired spot” in lists of university ranking.

Academic administrators also consider the number (and quality) of publications as one of the main criteria in recruiting faculty members. In its true sense, academic research publications should warrant creating, advancing, and disseminating knowledge that ought to help solve real-life problems in their respective fields. Unfortunately, the increasing demand for publications has raised many concerns such as plagiarism, duplicate publications, salami slicing, gift authors, and other unethical/dubious research practices.

Plagiarism is perhaps the most common and widely known issue when it comes to unethical practices in academia and in the publication world. While the definition of plagiarism may vary across different levels and forms, it simply refers to “presenting someone else’s work or ideas as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement” (Oxford University). In duplicate publications, authors attempt to publish almost the same material in different outlets, changing the title and keywords and often with different co-authors, impeding the detection of plagiarism. Unlike duplicate publication, salami slicing involves splitting a large study into “slices” in order to generate more publications from the same data set. If the slices of a segmented study share the same hypotheses, samples and methods, it is not an acceptable practice. In some cases, however, splitting a large study into multiple publications might be very meaningful where splitting must be done with full transparency, disclosing precisely how each segment of the study is related to other segments.

Another typical malpractice is phrased as “gift authorship”. According to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), gift authors are the “people who are listed as authors but who did not make a significant contribution to the

research”. COPE also defines another type of gift author as a colleague whose name is included in your publication based on a mutual understanding that s/he will do the same for you, regardless of your contribution to his/her research. This is usually (mal)practiced to increase the number of publications.

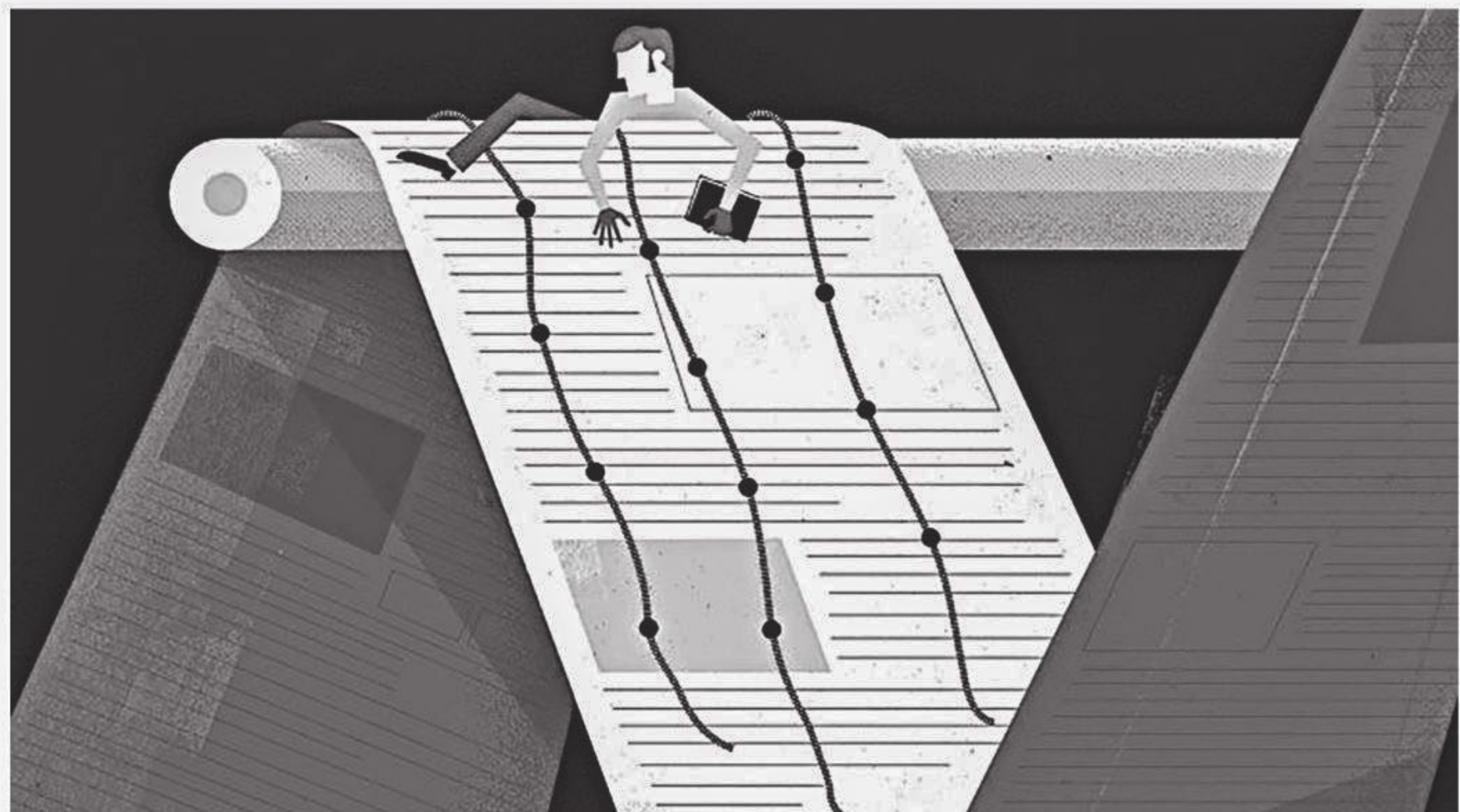
These unethical/dubious practices in academic research have been fuelled by mushrooming of “predatory” journals and publishers. The phrase “predatory journal” or “predatory publisher” was coined by Jeffrey Beall, an American librarian. Jeffrey Beall has created a list, now widely known as “Beall’s list”, of unscrupulous open access publishers

iteration before publication. The quality of peer-reviewed journals can be assessed using different set criteria such as indexing, impact factor, journal ranking, publisher and editorial board members.

Indexing is considered as one indicator of journal quality. Once a journal is indexed by a database, it is immediately made available to all users of that database. Among several abstracting and indexing services available today, Scopus (owned by Elsevier) is one of the most recognised and the largest abstract and citation database of scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings. Another highly recognised indexing is ISI (Institute for Scientific Information)

any authenticity. In order to have an authentic impact factor, a journal must be indexed in Web of Science (owned by Clarivate Analytics) that publishes journals’ impact factor in its Journal Citation Reports (JCR).

There are also different authentic journal rankings such as Scimago, ABDC and ABS ranking. Scimago ranks journals into four quartiles (Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4) based on impact factor in specific fields. ABDC (Australian Business Deans Council) categorises journals into four grades of quality (A*, A, B, and C) broadly within business disciplines, and ABS (Association of Business Schools) ranks business journals into five



SOURCE: PINTEREST

who were publishing articles with little or no real peer review. As of September 12, 2019, there are a total of 1,451 potential predatory journals and 1,276 predatory publishers listed in Beall’s list. This list is updated regularly where the number continues to inflate. Many universities do not allow their faculty members to get their research papers published in any predatory journals, or at least such publications are not counted in key performance index (KPI). One important question is, how should we gauge the quality of a journal?

Academic journals are meant to be peer-reviewed. Peer reviewed journals (also known as “refereed journals”) include only articles that have gone through a systematic review process of feedback and

which has been taken over by Clarivate Analytics. Indexed journals are generally considered to be of higher scientific quality as compared to non-indexed journals. However, mere indexing does not warrant the quality of peer-reviewed academic journals.

The impact factor is commonly used as an indicator of the relative importance of a journal in a specific field. The impact factor of a journal is calculated based on how frequently articles that were published in that journal during the preceding two years (e.g., 2016 and 2017), were cited by articles published in one particular year (e.g., 2018). One needs to be cautious in finding the genuine impact factor, because some journals self-declare their impact factors which do not have

categories (4*, 4, 3, 2, and 1). Different criteria are used to rank journals including global acceptance of the journal, journal citation metrics, expert peer review and relevance to the discipline.

Publishing a research paper is one of the apparatuses of augmenting academic credentials, progressing one’s career, and of course, advancing scientific knowledge. At the same time, we should not forget that mere publishing does not warrant academic testimonial; rather it may cripple academic credentials and contaminate scientific knowledge if the work lacks integrity.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Wrath of the Jamuna river

Last year, in The Daily Star’s “Letters To The Editor” section, I addressed my concern over the ongoing erosion caused by the mighty Jamuna, and how it left the inhabitants of the riverbank displaced and homeless. Even though a year has passed since then, it seems that no effective measures have been taken by the authorities to tackle this perilous situation. People residing closest to the river are highly at risk and continue to remain helpless.

Over the years, multiple educational institutions, public property, arable land and homestead have been lost to the river, leaving nearby residents and others in miserable conditions. Unfortunately, the erosion is not limited to the rainy season only, but continues to destroy long after monsoon has passed.

Despite the extensive news coverage regarding the worsening conditions, it seems that those who can do something about it are turning a blind eye to it. I cannot help but wonder, how many more people need to suffer for the matter to be dealt with urgently?

As a resident of the Jamuna riverbank, I would like to urge the authorities to address this dire situation, in order to protect people’s livelihoods before the waves devour all that remains.

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