

# 'UP chairman's illegal sand lifting' blamed for recurring Jamuna erosion

25 houses in Gorilabari village near Bangabandhu bridge lost only two months apart; 10 more might add to the count soon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Inhabitants of Gorilabari village in Kalihati upazila are experiencing a second wave of erosion of the Jamuna only two months apart.

The affected area is only several hundred metres south of the Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge's guide embankment and about a kilometre away from the bridge itself.

The recent erosion over the last three days has destroyed at least five dwellings and it is threatening another 10 structures along the river bank.

On October 8 and 9 this year, at least 20 houses and a part of a local road were lost to the river in the same area.

In 2018, around 50 dwellings and an embankment built by the Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) were also destroyed in erosion of the Jamuna at Gorilabari village.

The rise in the intensity and frequency of the river's erosion is due to rampant lifting of sand, from the river next to the village, by a syndicate led by Hazrat Ali Talukder, chairman of Gohaliabari Union Parishad, alleged the affected villagers.

They said although they staged a number of protests against the illegal sand lifting by Hazrat Ali and his accomplices, no action was taken against them as they have "blessings of powerful politicians".

Adding to their sufferings, Hazrat Ali and a few of his followers stopped the BBA from building a new embankment to protect the village from further erosion, claimed the villagers.

Ahsanul Kabir Pavel, executive engineer (river direction) of BBA site office in Tangail, said the BBA could not start construction work of a 450-metre-long new embankment from Gorilabari Pathar Ghat due to objection raised by several villagers under the leadership of UP Chairman Hazrat Ali.

The BBA decided to build the embankment at a cost of Tk 33 crore after the villagers petitioned the BBA for a solution to the erosion problem in the area.



A part of the Jamuna river bank in Gorilabari village of Tangail's Kalihati upazila where at least five houses were destroyed by the river's erosion over the last three days and 10 more are under the risk of being destroyed. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Work order for the project has already been issued to joint venture firms Rana Builders and Shahid and Brothers, Ahsanul said, adding that after 100 metres of fresh area went in the river in the last few days, they started dumping Geotextile bags in the affected areas as a means to check further erosion.

Contacted, BBA Superintendent Engineer Tofazzal Hossain said acting on a petition made by around 250 villagers, they

undertook the new embankment project in Gorilabari village, although the area does not fall under the jurisdiction of the BBA.

A few of the villagers might have raised objection to the work for their petty interests, but the BBA was making all necessary preparations for the construction of the embankment as they were hopeful of completing the work through reaching an amicable resolution, he also said.

When reached for his comment over the allegations raised against him, Gohaliabari UP Chairman Hazrat Ali said he is no longer involved in sand lifting.

Admitting that he and several other villagers initially raised objection to the construction of the new embankment in Gorilabari village as it would be built on their land, Hazrat Ali said he did not have any reservation against it any more.

## Power plant

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under a month before it was fined.

Jahirul Islam, senior officer and in-charge of logistic unit of Abul Khair Steel and Power Ltd, asked the DoE to allow it to increase the power generation limit.

Jahirul declined to comment on the matter when this correspondent approached him.

Imrul Kader Bhuiyan, senior administration officer of the group, told The Daily Star over phone that they obtained the permission for 23MW in 2010.

For producing 97MW, they took permission from Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company and Power Development Board, he claimed.

Imrul said while they were obtaining permission from various government bodies, the plant went on increased production.

He denied that their power plant was polluting the air even though the DoE lab tests contradict his claims.

Director Muazzem Hossain of the DoE Chattogram (region) told The Daily Star that they fined the plant for violating conditions on which the clearance was issued.

"We are keeping an eye on them. If there is any recurrence of violation, tougher action will be taken against them," he added.

Prof Sikandar Khan, president of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, Chattogram chapter, alleged that big companies were least bothered about protecting the environment.

"They have money. Now money has taken over everything. So, they don't care about laws. This has to be stopped at any cost. DoE must take stricter punitive measures against those who violate environmental laws," he said.

DoE Director Muazzem said a team of DoE would inspect the plant following its letter seeking clearance for increased power generation. "If the requirements for running a 97MW plant is met, we will issue a clearance."

## Landslide win

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681 votes.

Prof Z M Parvez Sazzad was elected joint secretary and Prof Muhammad Abdul Moyeen treasurer.

All of the 10 membership posts of the executive committee were won by Blue panel teachers Prof Aftab Ali Shaikh, Prof Nisar Hosain, Prof Zinat Huda, Prof Ziaur Rahman, Prof K M Saiful Islam Khan, Prof Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed, Prof Mohammad Amzad Ali, Prof Soumitra Shekhar, Prof Shibli Rubayat Ul Islam and Prof Zakia Parveen.

A total of 1,434 of 2,011 teachers cast their vote at DU Teachers' Club.

## S Muazzem Ali passes away

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secretary and immediate-past high commissioner to India left behind his wife, two sons and a host of relatives and well-wishers.

He will be buried tomorrow after the arrival of his sons from abroad, Fawzia told The Daily Star.

His first namaz-e-janaza would be held at 10:30am on Wednesday at the Padma State Guest House.

His second janaza would be held on the same day after Zohr prayers at the Gulshan Azad Mosque, after which his body would be buried at the Banani graveyard.

His quikhani will be held on Friday after Asr prayers at the Gulshan Azad Mosque.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited CMH to see the body of Muazzem Ali around 2:00pm yesterday. There, she expressed her condolences and spoke to his family members, including his wife, said the PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim, reports UNB.

President Abdul Hamid, Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen, State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam, Chief of Army Staff General Aziz Ahmed, PM's Principal Secretary Md Nojibur Rahman and PMO's Senior Secretary Sajjadul Hassan, among others, were present there, reports UNB.

They also conveyed their sympathies to his bereaved family members and prayed for the eternal peace of his departed soul.

In a condolence message, the president said Muazzem Ali's death is an irreparable loss to the country. "The nation will remember him for long with due respect."

Hasina recalled Muazzem's outstanding contributions on the diplomatic front during the 1971 Liberation War.

Dr Momen said Muazzem Ali performed his duties skilfully as a diplomat. The two were family friends.

Shahriar said Muazzem Ali returned to work after his retirement at the call of the PM and completed his assignment just 10 days ago.

"We'll never forget his contributions to building opinions in favour of Bangladesh during the Liberation War during his stay in the US," he said. Indian External Affairs Minister Dr J Jaishankar also expressed deep shock at the death of Muazzem Ali.

"Deeply shocked to learn of the passing away of former High Commissioner Syed Muazzem Ali," Jaishankar tweeted yesterday.

He said Muazzem was a good friend and a strong partner for so many of them. "Our thoughts are with Tuhfa and [his] family."

Muazzem left New Delhi on December 19 after the successful completion of his five-year long tenure (from September 2014 to December 2019) as the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India.

The High Commission of Bangladesh in New Delhi will open a condolence book from December 31 2019 to January 2, 2020. The timings to sign the condolence book are 11:00am to 1:00pm and 3:00pm to 5:00pm.

Born on October 29, 1944, in Sylhet, Muazzem joined the Pakistan Foreign Service in 1968 and retired from work in December 2001. While serving in the Pakistan Embassy in Washington DC in 1971, he declared his allegiance to the government of Bangladesh.

As a founding member of the Bangladesh mission in Washington DC, Muazzem was busy lobbying for political support for Bangladesh's independence movement.

After the independence, he was directly involved in getting US's recognition of Bangladesh as well as the US, World Bank and UN participation in the massive reconstruction efforts in a war-torn Bangladesh (1971-1975).

He also served in the Bangladesh embassies in Warsaw (1975-1978), and New Delhi (1986-1988) and in the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York (1982-1986).

He was Consul General in Jeddah during the Gulf War, and later served as Bangladesh ambassador to Bhutan, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkmenistan, France and Portugal.

In Paris, he was also Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to Unesco. In that capacity, he tabled a draft resolution on behalf of Bangladesh for the proclamation of February 21 as the International Mother Language Day.

He spearheaded the lobbying efforts and its unanimous adoption by the Unesco General Conference in 1999.

As foreign secretary, Muazzem worked for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the South Asian region and beyond.

Since Bangladesh was the chairman of the LDC group at that time, he coordinated the move that led to duty- and quota-free access of LDC exports to the EU at the Third UN LDC Conference.

He also worked for the emergence of Bangladesh as the largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping.

Specialising in multilateral diplomacy, he has represented and led Bangladesh delegations to various Senior Officials', Ministerial, and Summit-level meetings of the UN, UNESCO, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Commonwealth, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Group of 77, and World Bank's Development Forum (earlier known as Consortium) meetings.

Muazzem Ali came from a distinguished literary family of the Greater Bengal. His father, late Syed Mustafa Ali, and uncle late Syed

Murtaza Ali, served in the Assam Civil Service prior to 1947, and also wrote several books and articles.

His youngest uncle late Syed Mujtaba Ali is a distinguished writer of Bengali literature. His eldest brother Late SM Ali (Syed Mohammad Ali), founder-editor of the leading Bangladeshi English newspaper The Daily Star, was one of the most well-known Bangladeshi journalists in the international arena.

His father-in-law late Chowdhury Imamuzzaman served in the Assam Engineering Service prior to 1947. Muazzem's wife Tuhfa Zaman Ali obtained her MA from Dhaka University and MPhil from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

## 25 fighters

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described the attacks against the Hezbollah brigades -- which hit three locations in Iraq and two in neighbouring Syria -- as "successful", and did not rule out further military action against Iran-backed militias.

Bahrain, a key US ally in the region, welcomed the strikes.

The operation was retaliation for a series of rocket attacks since late October against US interests in Iraq, including a barrage of more than 30 fired on Friday against an Iraqi base in Kirkuk, which killed a US civilian contractor.

US-Iran tensions have soared since Washington pulled out of a multilateral nuclear agreement with Tehran last year and imposed crippling sanctions.

Iraqi leaders fear their country could become a battleground between Tehran and Washington, in a context where they are also grappling with huge street protests against corruption and Iran's enormous political influence.

The demonstrations forced prime minister Abel Abdel Mahdi to resign last month, although he remains in a caretaker role. The protest movement, along with President Barham Saleh, have rejected Iran's favoured successor.

US sources say that pro-Iran armed factions now pose a greater threat than the Islamic State, a jihadist group whose rise saw the US freshly deploy troops on Iraqi soil.

But significant elements of the Iraqi political class view the 5,200 US troops in the country as a "threat", with Sunday night's strikes reviving calls for them to leave the country.

**PRO-IRAN FACTIONS ANGRY** Abdel Mahdi's military spokesman decried "a violation of Iraqi sovereignty", while the Hezbollah brigades are demanding the "withdrawal of the American enemy".

Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah -- which is separate from the targeted faction -- called the attacks a "flagrant violation of Iraq's sovereignty and security" and noted that Hashed had been a key player in the battle against IS.

## 2,260 collect

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officer for Dhaka North City Corporation polls, has urged the candidates not to bring out any procession or stage any showdown during filing nominations.

He said a candidate could not take more than five people along with him to the RO's office for submitting nominations. "If anyone violates the rule, we will fine him and take legal actions."

Meanwhile, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam resigned yesterday to contest the upcoming polls as the Awami League's mayoral candidate.

His resignation letter was sent to the Local Government Division, and the government accepted it, said a circular of the division.

According to the RO's office for Dhaka South City Corporation polls, eight mayoral hopefuls, 1,347 general councillor aspirants and 190 woman councillor hopefuls collected nomination forms till 5:00pm yesterday against one, 75, and 25 posts respectively.

Among others, AL nominee Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, BNP candidate Ishraque Hossain, Jatiya Party candidate Mohammad Saifuddin, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh nominee Abdur Rahman have collected nomination forms for the post of DSCC mayor.

DNCC RO office sources said 10 mayoral aspirants, 828 general councillor hopefuls and 177 women councillor aspirants have collected nomination forms till 5:00pm yesterday against one, 54, and 18 posts respectively.

Among others, AL candidate Atiqul, BNP nominee Tabitha Awal, Jatiya Party candidate GM Kamrul Islam, Communist Party of Bangladesh candidate Sajedul Huq Rubel, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh nominee Sheikh Md Fazle Bari Masud collected nomination forms for the post of DNCC mayor.

The ROs will scrutinise nomination papers on January 2. The last day for withdrawal of candidature is January 9.

According to statistics of the Election Commission, the two corporations have over 54.02 lakh voters -- 30.35 lakh in DNCC and 23.67 lakh in DSCC.

### NO TRANSFER WITHOUT PERMISSION

The EC yesterday wrote to the Cabinet Division not to transfer the officials involved in electoral activities without its permission during the Dhaka city polls.

The commission also urged the authorities not to transfer anyone until 15 days after the publication of the polls results.

EC Senior Secretary Md Alamgir in the letter said returning and assistant returning officers have already been appointed to conduct the elections.

A divisional commissioner has also been appointed to deal with candidates' appeals against decisions of ROs over cancellation of candidature or any other issues, the letter said.

### KHOKON ACCEPTS AL DECISION

DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon yesterday said he accepted the decision of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina regarding his candidacy.

"I have accepted the decision happily," he told journalists at the Nagar Bhaban after failing to win party's ticket.

He said his leader (PM Hasina) has taken the decision considering whatever is better for him.

Asked about helping the AL candidate during the polls campaign, the mayor said he would decide after discussing the matter with the PM.

## Discomforts within

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Mohammed Abu Kawsar, of his duties on October 23 and asked General Secretary Pankaj Devnath, not to take part in any activity centring its council, held on November 16.

Also in September, Hasina removed Chhatra League president and general secretary Rezwanaul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and Golam Rabbani from their positions following "commission" controversies, among others. The two were later sacked from the organisation.

These developments came at a time when the "reputation for corruption" increased in all the tiers of the party. Unchallenged, a section of party leaders was quite "successful" in annoying mostly the common people -- from villages to small towns to big cities.

The anti-graft drives revealed the extent of power abuse by them.

After winning the 11th national polls, the prime minister formed the cabinet leaving out a number of top and veteran leaders of her party and allies.

Her new cabinet excluded senior AL leaders like Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, AMA Muihi, Matia Chowdhury, Mohammed Nasim, Khandker Mosharrar Hossain, Engineer Mosharrar Hossain and Nurul Islam Nahid and Workers Party chief Rashed Khan Menon, JSD chief Hasanul Haq Inu and JP (Manju) chief Anwar Hossain Manju.

**'INFILTRATORS'** It was possibly the most uttered word by its leaders.

The central committee made a list of its 5,000 members who "infiltrated into AL from opposition parties". There is yet no decision on their fate.

The party also could not very well manage rebel candidates in upazila polls beginning in March. Later, it identified around 30 AL lawmakers, three to four ministers, and over three hundred grassroots leaders who backed the dissidents.

With the emergence of the rebel candidates, the infighting in units once again came to spotlight.

The AL Central Working Committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, at a meeting on July 12 decided to expel rebel candidates and serve show-cause notices on the leaders who supported them.

Many of the 126 AL rebel candidates who are now upazila chairmen hold the posts of president, general secretary and organising secretary at upazila- and district-level AL units, but the party didn't take any organisational actions against them.

In 21st triennial national council, Hasina was elected party president for the ninth consecutive time and Obaidul Quader general secretary for second term.

It made the AL supreme even more powerful, but the party's democratic decision-making mechanism and internal governance became weak. Everyone, from grassroots to central, look to her for every single decision.

It is mentionable that the anti-

corruption drive shook the front organisations of AL, but it could hardly affect the committee formation of the party itself.

The AL also dropped nine ministers from its central executive committee in efforts to separate the party from the government.

"We are trying to separate the party from the government. And our main task next year will be making the party stronger," said Hanif, joint general secretary of the AL.

Party activities until November were centred only on press conferences and special days' events.

Some enthusiasm was noticed in the grassroots when the high command asked all district units to hold their councils before the party's national council.

Top leaders were also busy highlighting the government successes in different forums in and outside the country.

Economic growth has accelerated under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government that has bolstered her support in business community and also in the international arena.

However, the failure to check unusually high onion prices since India's imposing a ban on its export in September was deeply embarrassing for the government.

This apart, five of the 10 fast-track mega projects have finally gotten some momentum last year after initial delay, bringing hope for a positive change in economy and people's livelihood.

## Guam Rail back

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island was liberated by US forces in 1944, brown tree snakes appeared -- it is thought they hitched a ride there as stowaways on an American cargo ship.

For the predatory snakes, which grow up to eight feet in length, Guam was a food-filled paradise. As they feasted on the island's defenceless native animals, their population exploded, reaching peak density of 20 plus snakes per acre of jungle.

The voracious serpents wiped 10 out of 12 native forest birds off the island.

The killing of birds triggered a "domino effect" says Suzanne Medina, a wildlife biologist with the Guam department of agriculture, who has worked to save the Guam Rail for 21 years.

Without birds to spread tree seeds, the forests thinned out. The problem didn't stop there -- the snakes also slithered from trees to electrical lines, causing frequent power outages.

Only a handful of Guam rails avoided being eaten by snakes. In 1981, conservationists captured 21 individuals -- all that they could find. They brought them into captivity and the bird was declared extinct in the wild.

Eight years after the surviving rails were captured, conservationists started releasing captive-bred birds into the wild.