

Madhumati erosion escalates

Locals blame unregulated sand extraction for worsening crisis

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, *Bagerhat*

Thousands of people living in Kashipur, Makrail, Ramchandrapur, and Naokhola villages along the bank of the Madhumati in Narail's Lohagara upazila are having sleepless nights as the river's erosion has turned severe recently.

Numerous homes, schools, mosques, and cropland have already been devoured by the river, while many more structures and vast stretches of agricultural land are at risk of erosion.

Locals and affected families alleged that indiscriminate sand extraction from the river has compromised the integrity of the riverbank embankments, exacerbating erosion in the area.

Shamsunnahar, 65, a widow living in Kashipur village, said several dredgers have been extracting sand and stockpiling it behind her homestead.

"Due to this, water began seeping through and caused the land underneath my homestead to collapse. Eventually, my only shelter went into the river's womb," she said.

Visiting the affected areas recently, this correspondent observed that although the Madhumati has a low water level and gentle current, erosion was visibly active along the riverbank.

Sandbags placed by the Bangladesh Water Development Board in previous years had either sunk or

shifted, rendering the embankments ineffective. As a result, fresh erosion has begun in several places, putting numerous structures at risk -- including the Makrail Government Primary School, three other educational institutions, several mosques, and local roads built under the Ashrayan Project.

Locals said while the WDB had somewhat managed to check erosion in past years by reinforcing embankments with sandbags, the extraction of sand by dredgers in both leased and non-leased areas recently led to widespread damage.

"I lost my home twice to Madhumati's erosion earlier, and rebuilt it later, only to find it at risk yet again," said Margina Begum, an elderly resident of Makrail village.

Fazlul Mridha of the same village said the river devoured several acres of his family's land, while his brother had to dismantle his home and relocate after sand extraction from the river caused the nearby embankment to collapse.

Abhijit Kumar Saha, executive engineer of the WDB in Narail, said following complaints from residents, local authorities recently halted sand extraction from unauthorised areas and suspended leases of several sand quarries.

"Measures are underway to repair the damaged embankments," he added.



A visitor offers a bottle of water to a monkey at a mini zoo in Barishal. As temperatures continue to rise, staying hydrated is essential for both humans and animals. The photo was taken near Durga Sagar in the Madhabpasha area of Babuganj upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Offering hope

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"I'll donate personally," he said. "At our next board meeting, we will discuss further contributions. This is a great initiative for people who cannot afford costly treatment. Supporting this project is an opportunity to make a real difference."

BANCAT's General Secretary Mahzabin Ferdous said the organisation follows up with patients for up to three years after treatment.

She also highlighted another programme, "Alok Katha", where quilts are stitched and sold to raise funds for patients while ensuring fair wages for the workers.

BANCAT's Executive Director Najmus Ahmed Albab, a cancer survivor himself, said, "I received the best treatment in the world, but many of our people can't afford that. They deserve the same care. That's why I took up this cause as my life's mission."

'Tal-pakha' artisans

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Wholesale traders collect fans from Joynagar and distribute them across Faridpur, Rajbari, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Magura, Khulna, Gopalganj and Barishal.

"Joynagar's fans are well-made and durable. They can last four to five years," said Prabir Mitra, a wholesaler from Kaderdi. "That's why they're still in demand across the

country."

Rafiqul Alam, chairman of Satoir Union Parishad, said there are plans to plant palm trees in the area to address the raw material shortage.

Boalmari UNO Tanvir Hasan Chowdhury said a proposal has been sent to bring the artisans under a small and cottage industries project, offering training and low-interest loans.

Inequality in education must

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that, despite forming numerous commissions, the interim government has yet to establish an education commission.

"I cannot explain the reason behind this. At one point, they even formed a committee to review the curriculum, but after facing criticism, they backtracked, and nothing came of it. This remains a matter of deep regret."

He added, "If there is one area where inequality is most deeply rooted in Bangladesh, it is education. The system itself creates this inequality. Some receive quality education, while others receive none."

Those who are financially well-off send their children to one type of school, while those without means are left with no option but to enrol them in under-resourced village schools, he said.

He further said that if we cannot eliminate inequality in education, then those who speak of fighting

inequality are missing the very foundation of that struggle.

"Educational inequality must be eradicated by ensuring there is no gender discrimination, and that underprivileged communities, such as indigenous groups and children from remote char areas, are not left behind," he added.

Explaining the reasons behind students' opposition to the quota system, Debapriya said private sector investment has remained stagnant for the past decade and a half.

As a result, new jobs are not being created in the private sector. At the same time, due to poor quality education, many graduates are not considered suitable for the few available roles, he said.

"Yes, foreigners are coming and taking our jobs. But employers often argue that they cannot find qualified local candidates," he added.

Debapriya questioned

how jobs could be created when, on one hand, the quality of education remains low, and on the other, there is a lack of investment.

"Right now, only the government is creating jobs. That's why we must understand how this structural failure has contributed to democratic unrest. It must be taken seriously, not dismissed," he said.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of SHUJAN, said if students remain committed, a prosperous Bangladesh can be built.

Siddique Zobair, senior secretary of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, renowned magician Jewel Aich, noted actor Khairul Alam Sabuj, and Grameenphone's Chief Corporate Affairs Officer Tanveer Mohammad also spoke at the event.

At the two-day award ceremony, a total of 2,563 students from 31 schools in Dhaka received awards across various categories yesterday.

Another arrested

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Against Discrimination (SAD), and accusing 25-30 unnamed persons.

According to the case statement, Jahidul and some friends were having snacks around 3:00pm near the university after an exam. They were laughing and joking when two female students of another private university and some others were seen nearby.

Three individuals approached Jahidul and

'Good mosquitoes' may turn

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releasing only infected males, which produce unviable eggs when mating with wild females, reducing mosquito populations.

The Replacement Strategy releases both males and females, allowing infected females to pass the bacteria to offspring, gradually replacing virus-spreading mosquitoes, according to the study.

International trials have shown remarkable success. In Australia's northern

Queensland, dengue incidence dropped by 96 percent following releases. Similar results -- up to 95 percent mosquito population control -- have been recorded in Indonesia, Brazil, Colombia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the US.

In the latest study, researchers used a heat-tolerant strain of Wolbachia known as wAlBb, crossbreeding it with local Aedes mosquitoes over several generations to create wAlB2-Dhaka. Lab tests showed it reduced dengue virus transmission by 92.7 percent. Further analysis showed no significant decline in fertility, hatch rate, or survival, suggesting it could survive in Dhaka's conditions.

"This is not genetic modification," said Dr Mohammad Shafiqul Alam of icddr,b. "These are mosquitoes carrying a natural bacterium proven safe in multiple countries. It may provide a biological defence against dengue and related diseases."

Lead author Hasan Mohammad Al-Amin said the findings pave the way for field trials in Bangladesh. "The lab results are promising, but large-scale use will require careful testing and planning," he said.

icddr,b has signed a Material Transfer Agreement with QIMRB to use Wolbachia-infected mosquitoes in Bangladesh for non-commercial purposes. Dr Tahmeed Ahmed, executive director of icddr,b, said his

organisation stands ready to support government-led field trials and aims to integrate this method with vaccine development efforts.

ENTOMOLOGISTS

SKEPTICAL

Despite the enthusiasm, local entomologists remain skeptical about the method's effectiveness in densely populated urban settings.

"This concept may work on islands or contained environments, but not in chaotic, crowded cities like Dhaka," said GM Saifur Rahman, entomologist and mosquito specialist. "Lab-reared mosquitoes are often weaker and may not survive long. Also, wild males may outcompete the infected ones, reducing mating success."

He warned that environmental stressors, such as extreme heat and urban pollution, could reduce the survival and spread of the modified mosquitoes. "Most Aedes mosquitoes breed in hidden indoor spaces like basements, where the released ones may never reach."

Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University echoed this concern, saying that unlike trial locations such as Indonesia and Australia, Dhaka lacks natural barriers to control mosquito dispersal.

He said the Wolbachia method should only be seen as one component of an integrated mosquito management strategy. "It's promising, but not a silver bullet for Bangladesh's dengue crisis," he said.

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