30,000 Families Live in Fear Amidst River Erosion and Embankment Failures

Md. Sanaullah Riyad, Barguna:: Mostafa Musalli, a man in his seventies, once belonged to a prosperous family. He lived on his own homestead in Kalikabari, Betagi, with his wife and children, owning approximately five bighas of land. Two years ago, his homestead was swallowed by the Bishkhali River. He subsequently sought shelter on government-owned (khas) land near the Kalikabari launch ghat—but that home, too, was claimed by the river many months ago.

Currently, the elderly man is living temporarily in the home of another family member. Having lost everything, he is now consumed by anxiety about what the future holds.

Like Mostafa, 50 percent of the households in the Kalikabari area of □□Sarishamuri, Betagi, have been lost to river erosion. Over the past year alone, more than a hundred families have seen their homes vanish into the river.

The Barguna and Bishkhali rivers pose a severe threat to the region. Approximately 30,000 families living near the embankments are gripped by the fear of losing their homes and land.

According to the Barguna office of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), there are about 805 embankments in the district. Of these, 503 are vulnerable to river currents and high tides. The breakdown by upazila is as follows: 26 embankments (covering 949 km) in Barguna Sadar, 18 (559 km) in Patharghata, 11 (166 km) in Betagi, 5 in Amtali, 3 (500 km) in Taltali, and 7 (329 km) in Bamna.

In the Kalikabari area of □□Betagi, the river has even

consumed the local primary school. Approximately 100 meters of the flood-control embankment in the Artraghata and Kalmegha areas have collapsed into the Bishkhali River.

According to local residents, the water levels in the rivers and canals have begun to recede, but the strong currents have caused significant damage to the embankment.

In 2007, the devastating Cyclone Sidr destroyed sections of the embankment along the Baleshwar River in Patharghata. Since then, two new, more durable structures have been built in the area.

Local resident Alamgir Hossain shared his concerns, noting that river erosion has left many people destitute. He emphasized the urgent need for a robust embankment to protect their lives and livelihoods.

Md. Raju Mia, a resident of Kalmegha in Patharghata, reported that his home and one acre of land have already been swallowed by the Bishkhali River. “I am currently living on the remaining 40 decimals of land,” he said, “but there is no telling when the Bishkhali River might consume that as well.”

According to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), constructing a durable, block-reinforced embankment would require 90 crore BDT.

The total estimated cost for constructing the block-reinforced embankment is approximately 6,000 crore BDT, with an additional 100 crore BDT earmarked for emergency requirements.

Md. Abdullah Hannan Prodhan, an executive engineer at the BWDB’s Barguna office, stated, “Discussions are underway regarding immediate protective measures for the erosion-affected areas.”