

JMB leader says he was Shibir man

Confession before Patuakhali Magistrate court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

JMB (Jamia'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh) suicide bomber and its regional chief in Patuakhali-Barguna, Masum Billah, in his statement before a Magistrate court here said he was involved with Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of ruling coalition partner Jaamat-e-Islami.

In his statement given on Thursday under Section 164, Masum also confessed to his involvement in the August 17 bomb blasts at seven points in Barguna town.

He also disclosed 'important information' about JMB network and activities in Patuakhali-Barguna region, court sources and police said.

Masum surrendered to Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) on February 12 in Patuakhali following detention of his parents. He is the son of Abdul Karim Mollah of Padma village in Pathorghata upazila in Barguna.



Masum Billah

He is the youngest of six brothers and sisters.

Rab handed him over to Barguna Sadar police. Detective Branch police took him on three days' remand. Masum was produced before the court on Thursday on expiry of the remand.

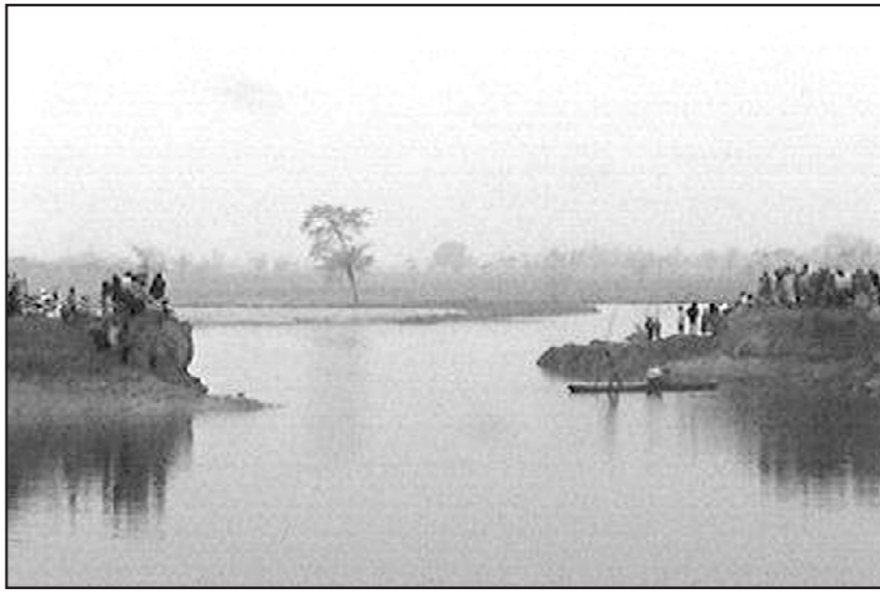
He passed SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examination from Pathorghata KS High School in 2003 and HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) in 2005 from Pathorghata College.

Masum said before the court that he joined JMB in 2001 when he was a student of class nine and was an activist of Chhatra Shibir.

Earlier, Barguna police had arrested Masum and 32 others from a mosque at Bayalpur village in June 2004. All were released on bail.

After release he organised several training camps in different places in Patuakhali and Barguna districts, he told the court.

Earlier, another arrested JMB activist -- Al-Amin alias Abdullah-- who was the 'second in command' of the militant outfit in the region, in his confession had said that he was also a Shibir leader. Al-Amin was arrested on December 5 from Kathal Tali village in Mirzagonj upazila in Patuakhali.



The breach in Teesta Irrigation Project canal embankment in Golna village (Left) and earth filling by Water Development Board to repair the damage.

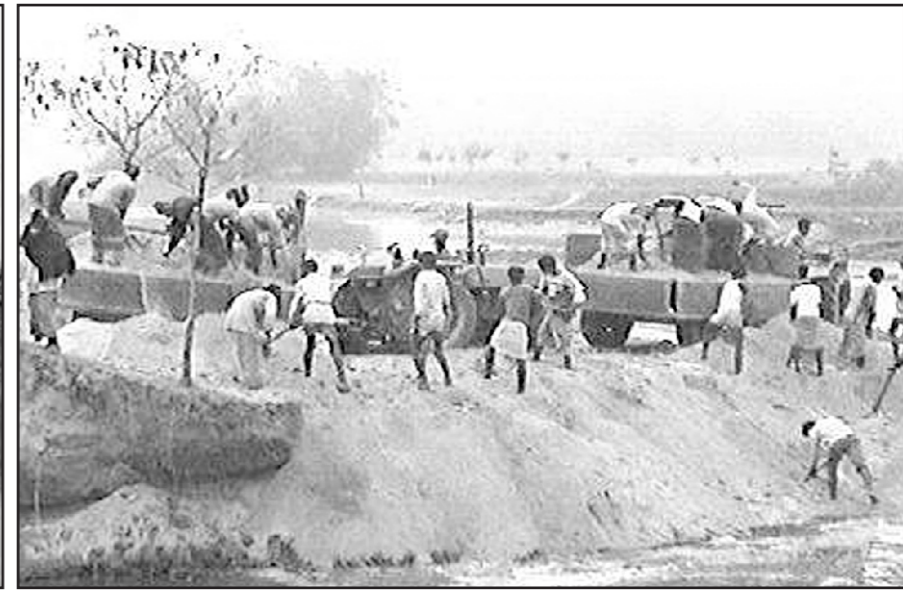


PHOTO: STAR

CHT eco-system faces disaster

Unplanned land management, Jhum cultivation and erosion of hills make Kaptai dam vulnerable

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

The entire Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region may face an ecological disaster if the unplanned land management, Jhum cultivation and destruction of forests and erosion of the topsoil are not stopped, experts said at an international workshop here.

The moderate earthquake in July 2003 and its aftershocks that shook the CHT accentuated the possibility of a disaster and have made the giant Kaptai dam vulnerable, they said.

They suggested introduction of pro-environment methods of land use and creation of alternatives to Jhum cultivation for ethnic communities to stop the erosion and keep the hills unaffected. They urged the government to initiate steps right now to protect the eco-system. Experts from home and abroad presented nine papers at the workshop.

The two-day workshop on 'Chittagong Hill Tracts: Improved Natural Resource Management', held at the BPC auditorium in the town, was organised jointly by the Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) and Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) in association with the ISRIC World Soil Information of the Netherlands and Lleida University of Spain.

"The earthquake and aftershocks have made major damages to fringe lands, particularly those close to the banks of Kamaphuly and weakened the half-century-old dam (Kaptai dam)", Prof. Dr M Shahidul Islam of the

department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Chittagong University told the two-day workshop that concluded here on Thursday.

"The dam has been built on a river that combines flows of five major rivers in the region. If it (dam) is affected, there will be a major disaster and the eco-system in the whole region will be affected".

He said depletion of forests, severe erosion due to Jhum cultivation, unplanned land management and teak plantation and scarcity of surface water sources are gradually affecting the topsoil and silting the Kaptai lake and rivers.

Dr Abdul Gafur of Soil Resources Development Industries has said Jhum cultivation seriously affects soil vegetation and nutrients of the topsoil, and this is non-recoverable.

Sanjeeb K Buchar of ICIMOD, Nepal, in his presentation detailed how the mountainous people of Nepal have been brought under environment-friendly livelihood supports through proper, sustainable and pro-environment management of land and water to keep the hills unaffected.

"I do not claim that soil erosion (in Nepal) has been reduced to zero, but it has come down significantly after pro-environment methods of land use and alternatives for hill people was introduced", Sanjeeb said.

Similar options may be created for the people of CHT as this region is also a part of the Himalayan belt.

At the concluding session, Deputy

Minister for CHT Affairs Moniswapon Dewan said the region can be turned into an attractive tourist spot, which could be one of many alternatives to lessen pressure on unplanned land use.

Rangamati Hill District Council Chairman Dr Maniklal Dewan said, "We have plenty of resources on the surface and beneath the ground here and these must be properly utilised".

TEESTA IRRIGATION PROJECT

Breach repair to take 2 more days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The breach in the Teesta Irrigation Project canal was yet to be repaired yesterday.

The Water Development Board (EDB) is repairing the 100 feet breach at Golna village in Jaldhaka upazila, which may take more two days, officials said. It was scheduled to be completed yesterday.

Following the breach, IRRI-Boro fields in six villages in Jaldhaka and Dimla upazilas have been inundated.

On the other hand, about one lakh hectares of cropland in Rangpur, Dinajpur and Nilphamari are being deprived of irrigation as the authorities have closed all gates of the main irrigation canal in the upstream of the Teesta barrage

to prevent water flow from the Teesta river to the main canal. The canal breached at about 8:30 pm on Wednesday.

WDB Executive Engineer in Dalia, Atiqur Rahman, told this correspondent that the canal breached its embankment as some miscreants tried to lay pipes to steal water from the canal for irrigation.

But some local people claimed that the breach was due to use of sand instead of soil in building the embankment.

WDB Chief Engineer for Rangpur region, Abul Kalam, visited the spot Wednesday night.

The WDB authorities have filed a case against four persons in Golna village accusing them of sabotage.



PHOTO: STAR

People in Barisal city staged a sit-in and held a rally on the bank of Bibir Pukur on Thursday to protest a move by the authorities to fill up the pond.

10x3

JUDGES KILLING CASE

Argument begins tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The cross-examination of 45 witnesses in a case lodged in connection with the killing of two judges in Jhalakati on November 14 last year was completed on Thursday.

The argument of the case will begin at Barisal Speedy Trial Tribunal tomorrow.

Among the witnesses, Shohrab Hossain, Investigation Officer (IO) of the case presented evidences of explosive items, clothes, leaflets and Islamic books recovered from the spot and rented house of assassin Mamun.

Tribunal judge M A Matin recorded the explosive items and samples of evidences of the case lodged under Explosive Act. He ordered preservation of other items for future trial of the murder case.

While giving witness, Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka Safiq Anwar said the assassin, Mamun gave a 15-page confessional statement under Section 164. The accused was under treatment at Dhaka Pongu Hospital during a period from November 17 to 24 last year when he gave the statement, he said.

Badsha Mia, one of the injured victims also narrated a description of the incident.

Other witnesses were mainly staff of hospitals in Barisal and Jhalakati, ambulance driver and relatives of injured Badsha.

Accused Sultan claimed himself innocent and refused to produce any witness before the court.

Tight security measures were taken in the court building during the trial.

12x3

4x2