



Illegal landing stations operate just beside President Zillur Rahman Railway Bridge, Shaheed Habildar Abdul Halim Railway Bridge and Syed Nazrul Islam Highway Bridge over the Meghna river at Ashuganj.

PHOTO: MASUKHRIDOV



# Illegal stations, sand trade threat to 3 Meghna bridges

The important structures include two rail bridges and a road bridge at Ashuganj

MASUK HRIDOV, Brahmanbaria

Some local influential people are running at least 10 illegal landing stations just beside two rail bridges and a highway bridge over the Meghna at Ashuganj in the district while a syndicate of illegal sand traders have set pipelines by cutting roads in the area.

The act poses serious threat to the three important state-owned structures -- President Zillur Rahman Railway Bridge, Shaheed Habildar Abdul Halim Railway Bridge and Syed Nazrul Islam Highway Bridge, but the authorities concerned, managed with 'monthly benefits', are yet to take any noticeable steps, alleged locals.

"Some ruling party leaders have built seven bamboo structures as landing stations beside the pillars of the bridges. Handsome amounts of

money is daily exchanged for loading and unloading of barges and trawlers at the illegal stations," said an official of Ashuganj port, on condition of anonymity.

"Upazila parishad Chairman Hanif Munshi, also joint convener of Ashuganj upazila Awami League, runs four of the stations, also occupying lands of river protection embankment.

"Anchoring and movement of goods-laden boats beside pillars of the three bridges pose threat of serious damage anytime," the official said.

Visiting the area on Saturday and Sunday, this correspondent found seven bamboo-made structures built adjacent to the three bridges for using as landing stations while thick iron pipes have been set by cutting river protection embankment and roads for



supplying sand to different villages.

Only a little away, three other landing stations have been built.

"Thick pipes for carrying sand,

upazila," said Nur Ali, an inhabitant of Alamnagar village.

Such pipes have also been taken by cutting the road in front of the office of the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO).

Contacted, Hanif Munshi claimed that he is not involved with any unauthorised landing stations or illegal sand business although some of his relatives are engaged in the trade.

Asked what action he has taken as the upazila parishad chairman, he said it is the responsibility of the administration.

Ibrahim Mollah, president of Ashuganj Ferryghat Paribahan Thikadar Samity, said Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is in charge of monitoring the river area but they are remaining silent about the illegal landing

stations, which are some 50 metres from the local BIWTA office.

Rumel Munshi, general secretary of the association, said the upazila administration and BIWTA know very well who the illegal occupiers are and so, they are expected to take action in this regard.

Md Asaduzzaman, assistant director of BIWTA, refuted the allegation of taking any 'monthly benefits' from anyone and said, "We have collected names of some illegal station builders and a general diary has been filed with Ashuganj Police Station. Case will also be filed soon against the perpetrators."

Contacted, Ashuganj UNO Nazimul Haider said, "I am not aware about the matter. I will conduct an inquiry and take action if there is any illegal occupation."

## Canal blocked for fish cultivation

Local UP chairman and some influential persons allegedly set up bamboo enclosures in Vuter Khal for pisciculture



A group of local influential persons in Barishal's Mehendiganj upazila set up illegal bamboo enclosures in the canal for fish cultivation.

PHOTO: STAR

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

To cultivate fish in Vuter Khal (canal), a group of local influential people have set up illegal bamboo enclosures halting natural flow of the canal in Barishal's Mehendiganj upazila.

Originated from the Maskata river, the three-km-long canal connects the Tetulia river in nearby Alimabad and Chargopalpur unions of the upazila, said locals.

Thousands of fishermen and farmers depend on the canal for their

livelihood.

Blocking of the canal for fish farming will hamper irrigation for Boro cultivation, said growers.

Gopalpur union parishad (UP) chairman and some local influential persons have been involved in the illegal act, alleged villagers.

Refuting the allegation, Gopalpur UP chairman Shamsul Alam Bari said some villagers put bamboo fences and tree branches across the canal to save thousands of people from river erosion during the rainy season.

He further added such arrangement will not halt the natural water flow of the canal.

Shuvankar Chakrabarty, secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), Barishal unit, said it is totally illegal to hamper natural water flow of the canal.

He also urged the authorities concerned to free the canal immediately.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Pijush Chandra Dey said he has not heard about the incident but trying to get information on the matter.

## Jubo League man held for tree looting

Roadside tree felling rampant in Mahendranagar of Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The roads in Mahendranagar union of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila are gradually becoming barren, thanks to rampant tree looting allegedly by ruling party men.

Locals on Monday caught red-handed Badsha Miah, president of Mahendranagar union Jubo League, youth wing of Awami League, when he and his cohorts were felling trees beside Kashipur-Lalmonirhat road and handed him over to police.

Badsha, son of Akbar Mandol at Gobai village of Mahendranagar union, was produced before the court and the court sent him to jail the same day, said Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station OC Mahfuz Alam.

Police lodged a case against Badsha Miah on charge of felling roadside trees, he added.

"Villagers made a strong protest when Badsha and his four or five men were felling roadside trees at the village. At one stage locals caught him while his cohorts managed to flee. Informed, police came to the spot



Police seize logs of illegally felled trees beside Kashipur-Lalmonirhat road at Gobai village in Mahendranagar union of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila on Monday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

and arrested Badsha and seized eight felled trees," said Ashraf Ali, 55, a local at Kashipur village.

Badsha and his men were involved in felling roadside trees for long, he said.

"Felling of roadside trees by ruling party men has become a common

scene here. Often we dare not protest in fear of harassment," said Mansur Ali, 48, at the same village.

"Only a few years ago, the roads in Mahendranagar union were adorned with various types of trees but now most of them look barren due to continued tree looting," he said.



Two men warm themselves up around burning wastes. The prevailing dense fog, coupled with the chill, has made regular life difficult for all. The photo was taken from Thakurgaon municipality area on Monday night.

PHOTO: STAR