



A good number of dredgers engaged in sand lifting at Bahirchar of the Padma river in Pabna Sadar upazila. Inset, a closer view of mindless sand extraction in the area.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, PABNA

PADMA, JAMUNA IN PABNA

Mindless sand lifting wreaks havoc

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR Topu, Pabna

Illegal sand lifting from the major rivers in the district, especially the Padma and the Jamuna, has continued for years, although the district administration officially stopped leasing the sand fields in 2010 following an injunction by the court.

With the growing demand of sand due to the increase in development works during the last few years, influential people got involved in massive sand extraction at different points of the two mighty rivers, stakeholders said.

The unplanned sand lifting, involving business worth hundreds of crore of taka every year, causes frequent erosion in the riverbank areas, said locals.

"We had cultivable land covering a five-bigha area on the bank of the Padma, but the river has devoured three bighas of it during the last five

years. Mindless sand lifting from the river is causing the menace," said college student Hosain Ali, also a farmer of Bahirchar village in Pabna's Chartarapur union.

Hundreds of villagers in the riverbank areas face similar problems due to the indiscriminate sand lifting in last few years.

During a visit a couple of days ago, this correspondent learnt that around 200 dredgers operating in a three-kilometre area of the river at Bahirchar, Kolchari, Hugladangi, Shukchar, Aria Gohailbari, Dighi Gohailbari, Char Sujanagar and Vadudangi in the border areas of Pabna Sadar and Sujanagar upazilas extract three to five lakh CFT of sand daily.

The perpetrators of the callous act are least bothered by protests from locals.

"Chairman of Varara union parishad (UP) Abu Sayeed, chairman of Chartarapur UP Rabiul Haque

Tutul and dozens of Awami League (AL) leaders in Pabna Sadar and Sujanagar upazilas are involved in the illegal sand business in the Padma over the last four years but the local administration hardly takes action," Hosain Ali said.

Contacted, Varara UP chairman Abu Sayeed claimed that he is not involved in extracting sand from the river.

"Demand of sand has rapidly increased in last few years due to several development works, especially the construction of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and Padma Bridge. And so, the sand traders are extracting sand from the river for supplying to development project sites," Abu Sayeed said.

"As there is no official step to lease the sand fields, the traders are extracting sand in this way. Many influential people including ruling party leaders might be involved in it

outside my area," he said.

Many public representatives in the river areas, mostly local AL men, are directly or indirectly involved with the sand lifting from rivers while a section of political bigwigs and corrupt officials are backing them, said several affected people.

Talking with the journalists, Rabiul Haque Tutul, chairman of Chartarapur UP, said sand traders backed by local administration are running their illegal business in the area.

The Daily Star correspondent made an inspection in the 60-km area of the Padma from Sara Ghat in Ishwardi upazila to Najirganj point of Sujanagar upazila in Pabna during the last few weeks and found frequent sand lifting at several points.

Hundreds of dredgers are engaged in the act.

Illegal sand lifting is also rampant at different places of the Jamuna river in Pabna's Bera upazila.

Visiting Nagarbari, Panchakola and Mohonganj on the Jamuna, this correspondent found that scores of small boats have been turned into dredgers by setting shallow power pumps for extracting sand from the river.

"There are seven officially approved sand fields in Padma and Jamuna rivers in Pabna. The district administration stopped leasing the sand fields due to an injunction by the court in 2010. But the illegal sand traders continued extracting sand from different places with dredgers," said an official of the district administration, seeking anonymity.

Encroaches extract approximately 20 to 25 lakh CFT sand from different points of the major rivers in the district and it brings around Tk 2 crore daily, he said.

Talking with The Daily Star, Pabna Deputy Commissioner Kabir Mahamud said the district

administration launched many drives in last few years and fined the sand lifters, damaged dredgers but the illegal act could not be stopped.

"We promptly conduct drive if there is any specific information. Recently the district administration seized a huge quantity of illegal sand and sold it for Tk 1.1 crore through an auction," he said.

"Sand lifting is necessary to maintain navigability of the river. Dredging up to five-foot circumference in a certain area is acceptable but the sand lifters hardly follow the rule. Continuous sand lifting with dredgers at a place creates big holes, which leads to massive erosion in the river bank areas," said Md Johurul Haque, executive engineer of Water Development Board, Pabna.

The sand fields must be brought under a proper management system, he said.



Locals form a human chain at Baharapur village in Thakurgaon's Haripur upazila yesterday, demanding punishment of the Border Guard Bangladesh members, who opened fire on innocent villagers on February 12, 2019 that left three people dead and 18 others injured.

PHOTO: STAR

Teacher shortage hampers pryd in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Acute teacher shortage has been hampering academic activities at government primary schools in Gaibandha for a long time.

According to district primary education office, there are 1,463 government primary schools in the district, where 6,884 assistant teachers have been rendering services. A total of 941 posts of assistant teachers and 190 posts of head teachers have been lying vacant there for long time.

The schools those suffer from acute shortage of teacher are situated either in remote areas or char lands. So, teachers who are posted to char lands do not want to stay in the remote area due to lack of smooth communication.

In Gaibandha, four out of seven upazilas are in remote char lands along Teesta and Jamuna river basin having 139 government primary schools. In some areas, it needs a daylong boat trip to reach the schools.

Abdus Sattar, headmaster of Kalurpara Government Primary

School in Fulchhari upazila, said primary teachers usually do not want to work at the schools in char lands due to communication problem. So, the teachers who are posted to the remote area do not want to stay there for long time.

Most of the children in the char area remained deprived of quality education due to acute shortage of teachers, said Sattar.

On a visit, this correspondent found a gloomy picture prevailed at some primary schools like Tekani Government Primary School in Kishorgari union of Palashbari upazila, where a single teacher conducted total academic activities. The school has 30 students.

Apart from this, only two teachers are seen teaching around 100 students at Anduya Government Primary School in the same union. Earlier, four teachers were posted here. Of them, one teacher left for a training programme and another was deputed to other school.

Meanwhile, the number of teachers is increasing in the schools

situated adjacent to the district and upazila headquarters for smooth communication and other facilities.

According to the standard of primary education, a school should have at least five teachers. The teacher-student ratio will be 1:40, which is almost ignored in most of the primary schools.

Fulchhari Upazila Education Officer Kafiluddin Sarker said during the last flood, five school houses were eroded by the surging water of the Jamuna river.

He further said those schools have been shifted to some other places temporarily. The schools are marked by a thin presence of students due to communication problem.

Hossain Ali, district primary education officer in Gaibandha, said academic activities of primary school students are being hampered due to shortage of teachers.

The government has already taken initiative to recruit primary school teachers that will help to replace the vacant posts of assistant teachers and head teachers, said the education officer.

Man gets life term for killing wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Kishoreganj court yesterday sentenced a man to life term imprisonment for killing his wife in Pakundia upazila in 2017.

The convict, Samir Uddin, 57, is son of late Izzat Ali of Syedgaon Pashchimpara village.

Third Additional District and Sessions Judge Propid Kumar Roy also fined him Tk 20,000. In default he is to suffer two years more in jail, Court Inspector Chowdhury Mizanuzzaman said.

According to the case statement, Samir's wife Marzina Akter, 35, mother of three children, returned home from Lebanon in July, 2017.

Soon after returning home, Marzina had altercations with her husband over financial issues and went to her father's house.

On July 14, Samir went to his in-laws' house and locked in a quarrel with Marzina again.

At one stage, he stabbed Marzina with a knife and fled the scene, leaving her injured.

Family members rescued injured Marzina and took her to Pakundia Upazila Health Complex, where the doctors declared her dead.

Being informed, police recovered the body and sent it to Kishoreganj General Hospital for autopsy.

They also detained Samir soon after the murder.

The following day, deceased's father lodged a murder case with Pakundia Police Station against Samir.

After investigation, Sub-Inspector Humayun Kabir, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge-sheet against Samir on December 24 of the same year.

Illegal kiln demolished after 27 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The Department of Environment (DoE) during their drives over the last couple of days in three upazilas of Moulvibazar demolished and fined six illegal brick kilns.

The kilns include Kazi Khandakar Bricks that had been operating illegally in the middle of Murali village, in close proximity of Rajnagar upazila town.

Headlined "Brick kiln skulks in village for 27 years!", The Daily Star on January 7 ran a report against the brick kiln's unlawful activities over decades.

Yesterday in Juri upazila, a mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Israt Jahan Panna, also director of the DoE in Sylhet, demolished BAB and MCO brick fields. A team from Border Guard Bangladesh accompanied the DoE officials during the drive.

The court also fined Tk 20 lakh to each owner of the two kilns for operating the illegal kilns in residential areas and causing damage to a vast tract of paddy fields in the area, said Badrul Huda, assistant director of DoE in Moulvibazar.

On Tuesday, the same mobile court demolished three illegal brick kilns, including Kazi Khandakar Bricks, in Rajnagar upazila and Khan Bricks in Kulaura upazila.

The other two brick kilns demolished in Rajnagar upazila were FRB and SKB.

Among those, SKB was fined Tk 20 lakh for burning wood and not having an environment-friendly oven, said Badrul, adding that the owners of the other kilns were asked to appear for a hearing, he added.



A DoE excavator destroys unbaked bricks at Khan Bricks in Kulaura upazila on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR