

PHOTO: STAR

Stone crushing plants capture much of the Shitalakkhya river near the Kanchpur bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. The plant owners took the riverbank on 99-year lease, but encroached on the riverbed at will, choking the natural flow of the river.

Riverbank lease chokes up Shitalakkhya

PINAKI ROY

Influential people, including lawmakers, have been taking the Shitalakkhya bank on a 99-year lease from the government and filling up the river to put up their businesses changing the river's course at will.

A ruling BNP lawmaker has long been running stone processing plants along the riverbank under the Kanchpur bridge and another industrialist legislator has put up a raft of industries in the Shitalakkhya by taking lands on permanent settlement.

"I got the land from the land ministry under a permanent settlement in 1987 to establish my stone processing industry. The government allocated me one acre and 95

decimals," said Giasuddin Ahmed, a lawmaker for Narayanganj. He said he also took permission from the Board of Investment too.

He told The Daily Star that a ruling BNP lawmaker got 16 acres of land on the riverbank under the settlement.

The course of the Shitalakkhya has narrowed down and changed under the Kanchpur bridge as the encroachers have filled up more than 100 feet to make a jetty to unload stones from Sylhet.

The entire riverbank is a hive of stone crushing activity and local residents allege much of the activity cause harm to the river.

"The government can allow the change in natural water body if it does not hamper public interest. The government can do it on its own

too for the sake of public interest, but before doing so it has to issue a statement," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, director (programme) of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association.

Lawmaker Giasuddin has been operating the biggest plant, Kassaf Stone Processing Plant, for 20 years.

Besides running his industry, he lends his stone crushing machines to other plant owners who have encroached more than one kilometre of the Shitalakkhya riverbank there.

As many as 30 stone processing plants have thrived on the riverbank under the Kanchpur bridge. The owners of the plants buy stones from Sylhet and crush them into small pieces for sale to the construc-

tion industry.

Lawmaker Giasuddin told The Daily Star that not only him but also others got the riverbank from the government on the 99-year lease.

The owners operate 26 stone-processing machines what make thunderous sound throughout the day, causing both noise and air pollution.

Five of the 26 machines are run by Giasuddin, his employees said requesting anonymity.

Besides Kassaf, Harun and Brothers, Shafiq, Soudia, Nurul Amin, Alam Enterprise stone processing plants also operate there.

"Generally nobody can allocate river banks to establish industry. But

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Nab attackers or face all-out movement: Oikyamancha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Oikyamancha will go for an out-government movement if the BNP-led coalition fails to solve the August 21 grenade blasts that killed 19 people and injured over 200 at an Awami League (AL) rally.

At the 10th convening committee meeting, Oikyamancha decided that it will launch the campaign for ouster of the government singly or in conjunction with those who stand opposed to terrorism, corruption and communalism, said the meeting sources.

Members participated in the meeting observed as the four-party alliance government has 'totally failed to rule the country', a change of power must take place. They, however, stated unequivocally that it will have to be in a democratic and constitutional way.

Presided over by Oikyamancha President Dr Kamal Hossain, the meeting was attended by

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GRENADE ATTACK Nizami hints at anti-Islam plot

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami yesterday said the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally was part of a 'sinister conspiracy' against Islam and the sovereignty and democracy of Bangladesh.

The 'well-known enemies of Islam' are manipulating some organisations to carry out the subversive acts to damage Islam's image and the rising Islamic movement, he told a crowded press conference at the ruling coalition partner's Moghbazar headquarters.

Nizami said, "People of Bangladesh can't help being worried at the way some Indian newspapers -- The Statesman, The Hindustan Times, The Hindu -- made open instigation, directly accusing Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Jamaat-e-Islami [for the attack]. The Statesman even called for [Indian government's] direct

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Indiscriminate sand extraction to repeat Basila-like erosion

Locals at Kamrangirchar and Kholamora fear

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Indiscriminate and unplanned extraction of millions of tonnes of sand from the riverbed of the Buriganga near Kamrangirchar and Kholamora is raising fears of a change in the river channel, turbulence in its water flow and erosion of the banks.

Residents of the areas said small locally made dredgers -- known as volgates -- are extracting tonnes of sand from the riverbed day and night. They might face a similar devastation as at nearby Basila recently, they apprehend.

"Hundreds of volgates are extracting sand from the riverbed and loading it in large barges for sale to the construction sector of the capital," said Golam Murtaza of Kamrangirchar.

Locals at Kholamora also made similar allegations. The practice continues often with the authorisation by the Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), they said.

"Indiscriminate extraction of sand from riverbed may not only change the channel of a river but also cause turbulence in water flow and erosion of its banks," a dredging

expert of the BIWTA said. In the wake of the Basila erosion in which the Buriganga devoured 27 houses between August 13 and 28, a cabinet committee discussed the matter and decided that the mineral resources ministry would no longer authorise anyone to extract sand from riverbed.

A law enacted in 1992 however allows them to permit extraction of sand from riverbed.

A BIWTA official said the cabinet committee decision on August 21 is yet to be announced officially.

BIWTA dredging experts pointed out that authorisation by the min

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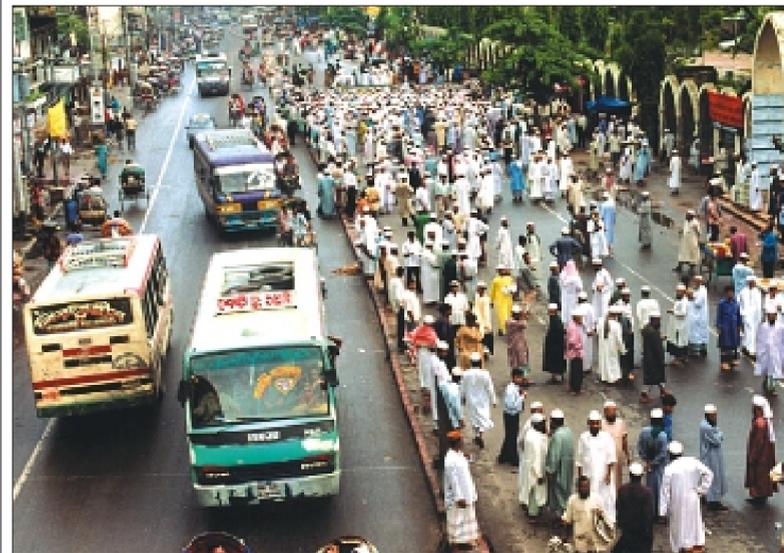


PHOTO: STAR

Islamic Shashantantra Andolon, an Islamist organisation, holds a rally blocking traffic on the road in front of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in Dhaka after Friday prayers yesterday.

BAY OIL SPILLAGE Probe report today, faulty vessel liable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A two-member committee formed by Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) to probe the oil spillage from the state-owned oil tanker MT Banglar Sourav and fish epidemic in the bay is likely to submit its report today.

The CPA probe body found the oil tanker of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) as carrying some 990.3 tonnes of crude oil and blamed a faulty valve in the supply line for the oil leakage that caused severe bay-pollution on August 27.

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JCD barricades highway

JU CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) yesterday blockaded the Dhaka-Aricha highway for three hours to protest a lawmaker's assault on JCD president of Jahangirnagar University (JU).

Activists loyal to the JCD president took position and put blockades on the highway in front of Dairy Farm gate at around 4:30pm. Salahuddin Babu, BNP lawmaker from Savar, reportedly slapped Parvez Mallik, JU JCD president, following an altercation over a football match in Savar half an hour

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Prayer Timing		
September 4		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-30	5-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-23	6-26
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Move to streamline pvt universities Changes in '98 act soon

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The Private University Act, 1998 is going to be amended providing for stringent measures to force the private universities to go by rules and streamline their operation.

The education ministry took the initiative to amend the act amidst widespread allegations of declining quality of education, financial mismanagement and recruitment of teachers lacking required qualification at the private universities.

"The University Grants Commission (UGC) has finalised a draft of the Private University Act, 2004 after necessary changes in the Private University Act, 1998," UGC Chairman Prof M Asaduzzaman told The Daily Star.

The law ministry has vetted the draft that will now be placed before the cabinet for its approval, he said. "If it gets cabinet nod, it will be

placed before parliament for passage approval."

Not a single private university meets the required criteria including own campus, required faculty members and library and laboratory facilities, experts said.

There are now 52 private universities in the country and another has received approval of the UGC, the higher education watchdog. The latest one -- Atish Dipankar University -- will teach computer and information and communications technology-related subjects with a special focus on Buddhist studies.

The UGC has now suspended approval of private universities. It has received eight proposals seeking approval for establishing private universities.

The UGC chairman pointed out that the Private University Act 1992

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JCD LEADER KILLING IN SYLHET 2 Shibir activists remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, arrested in connection with the killing of a JCD leader at Sylhet Government Veterinary College on Tuesday night, were placed on a five-day remand on Thursday.

Kotwali police produced the Shibir activists, Zahed and Mofiz, in a court here Thursday afternoon, seeking a 10-day remand. The court granted five days' remand for the

two. The JCD activists on Thursday announced a three-day agitation programme from yesterday protesting the killing of their leader Rafiqul Hasan Sohag and gave a 15-day ultimatum to nab the killers.

Rafiqul Hasan Sohag, organising secretary of Sylhet Government Veterinary College unit of the JCD, was chopped to death by the armed cadres of Islami Chhatra Shibir on

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