



PHOTO: STAR

Several hundred people collecting coal from Someswari riverbed (L) and heaps of the mineral on the bank.

Unplanned coal collection from riverbed threatens ecology

JAHANGIR ALAM, *Netrakona*

It is nature's gift to the poor, but they are unaware of the environmental and ecological damage they are doing. Hundreds of poor families earn a living by collecting coal illegally from Someswari river bed in Durgapur upazila, carried by water from the upstream across the border.

The coal rolling down along with sand in the rainy season lie hidden under in the river bed. People, mainly women and children, collect those by digging the riverbed, affecting the environment and the ecology.

The mineral is collected from the riverbed from Bijoypur to Birishiri, stretching about 10 kilometres. Women and children collect it from morning to sunset.

Baromary, Buranga, Dashed, Ghagra, Balikandi, Thakurbari-Kandi, Majiail, Jianagar, Mujibnagar, Dhanstra, Farongpara, Debthail, Shibgonj, Bhulipara and Bijoypur of Durgapur upazila areas are the main spots from where the coal is collected.

Normally, one person can collect one to one and half maunds, which earn him Tk 60 to 70 a day. This way, 25 to 30 tons of coal are collected everyday.

Local administration sources said there is neither any restriction not any tax for the coal collection. But some local coal traders talking to this correspondent said they have to give Tk 100 per ton as toll to ruling party activists. They sell one maund of coal at Tk 100 to 110, mainly to local brick fields.

They are also exploited because they can not carry the mineral to other places due to bad communication system. Coal traders from outside also do not come to the area due to for this, they said.

Amena Begum, 35, of Majiail village said she has been collect-

ing coal for five years. She said she does not get a fair price of her labour as she has to accept whatever offered by local traders. She can collect one to one and a half maunds daily.

Rehena Khatun, 16, an unmarried girl from Shibgonj village, is engaged in coal collection for about six years. "It is a hard work but we do not get a fair price", she said. She earns Tk 70 to 100 daily.

Coal trader Amir Hossen said he is compelled to sell coal bought from collectors to local brick fields as he can neither carry those to other areas nor

from outside due to bad communication.

"We could pay them (collectors) better if we could sell those at higher prices", said another trader Ali Akbar.

Local environmentalists said indiscriminate and unplanned collection of coal from the river bed will ultimately change its course which will increase floods and erosion. Fishes are also depleting as their sanctuaries are being destroyed. The government should either stop it or allow planned collection, they said.

School teacher held for 'link' with Dr Galib's committee

A CORRESPONDENT, *Comilla*

Police have arrested a school teacher, an alleged member of Ahle Hadis, an Islamist organisation led by Rajshahi University teacher Dr. Asadulla Galib, for "suspicious activities".

Arrested Md. Nurul Islam, Assistant Teacher of a government primary school at Kakiarcher in Burichang upazila, was arrested on Tuesday and produced him in court on the same day. The court placed him on remand for three days, which expired yesterday.

Police said they interrogated him but declined to disclose details. Asked whether a fresh remand will be sought, police sources said the decision will be taken in the evening (on Friday).

When contacted, Nurul Islam's family however denied the allegation that he was involved in any suspicious activity.

Grenade recovered in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

A powerful grenade was found by some people at Ramchandrapur village in Mostafapur union in Parbaripur upazila in Dinajpur district recently.

According to villagers and police, Manik Chowdhury, son of late Hafezuddin Chowdhury, found the grenade near a pond while he was fishing there.

On information, police took the grenade to Parbatipur thana.

Later bomb experts from Rangpur cantonment led by Maj. Anwarul Islam Mondol and Capt MH Hafizul defused the grenade in presence of district administration officials.

A label was found on the grenade, which read: 36 MHE. Police quoting the bomb experts said it was a powerful grenade.

MAY 15 PATUAKHALI LAUNCH TRAGEDY

3-man body begins investigation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

A three-member probe body headed by additional district magistrate (ADM) Monjur Alam Bhuiyan on Friday began investigation into the cause of launch mishap occurred in the Buragourango in Galachipa upazila on May 15.

Patuakhali deputy commissioner (DC) formed the probe body on Tuesday.

As many as 82 bodies were recovered. Of them 39 were floating and 43 were found inside the vessel.

However, the death toll was 65, according to a record of the upazila administration and police.

The launch having a capacity of 80 passengers sailed for Char Montaz UP chairman Matiur Rahman have urged the Bangladesh Inland Transport Authorities (BIWTA) through the Galachipa upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) to introduce a new sea-truck service on Patuakhali-Char Kazal route for the greater interest of people.

Meanwhile, no launch is plying on the route since the accident took place on Sunday. Five launches used to ply on the route. The launches were the modes of communication for about one and a half lakh people of six unions of Char Kazal, Char Biswas, Char Montaz, Chhoto Baishdia, Bara Baishdia and Rangabali in Galachipa upazila. The launches established links with the upazila headquarters and other parts of the country.

Following stoppage of launch services, the people of the unions have been facing a great difficulty. Risking their lives, people of the shoal areas are now coming to the upazila headquarters by small wooden boats for emergency work.

Char Kazal Union Parishad (UP) chairman Ali Ahmed and Char Montaz UP chairman Matiur Rahman have urged the Bangladesh Inland Transport Authorities (BIWTA) through the Galachipa upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) to introduce a new sea-truck service on Patuakhali-Char Kazal route for the greater interest of people.

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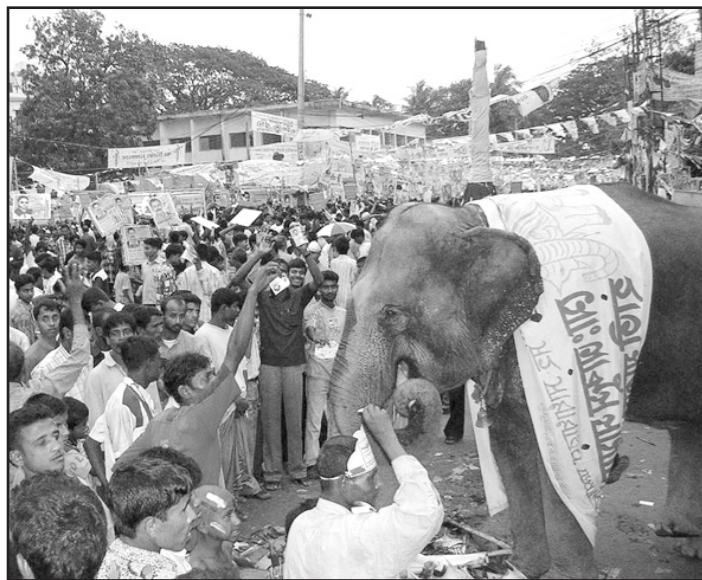


PHOTO: STAR

Bemused people gather around an elephant brought by a candidate in Bogra town yesterday for campaign in the transport workers' union election.

Polls with fanfare

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogra*

Election of Bogra Motor Shramik Union, the second largest transport worker's organization in the country, was held yesterday amid great fanfare. Pooling was held peacefully on Bogra Zila School premises.

The Muzammil Haque Lulu, Editor of local daily The Karotoa, who was in charge of conducting the elections, said 52 booths were opened for 10,293 voters.

He also told newsmen that the budget for the election was Tk three lakh.

Three candidates including former president of the union Abdul Mannan Mitu ran in the race for the post of president.

Abdul Latif, Mostafizur Rahman Badsha and Syed Kabir Ahmmed Mitu were candidates for the post of general secretary.

A total of 109 candidates contested for 16 posts.

Some transport workers' leaders claimed that over Tk three crore was spent for election campaign by the 109 candidates.

Polling started at 8 am and continue till 5 pm with out any break.

Colorful poster were pasted on wall in the town and banners hung on roads. At least 1000 vehicles were engaged for the election campaign, sources said.

Result of the election will be declared on Sunday, sources said.

Intellectuals 'instigate' PCJSS : PBCP

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rangamati*

Rangamati district unit leaders of Parbatya Bangalee Chhatra Parishad (PBCP), a platform of Bangalee students in Chittagong Hill Tracts, at a rally here yesterday threatened to declare "unwanted" in CHT some eminent intellectuals of the country for what they called "instigating PCJSS leaders in turning this region a problematic area again".

They named Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, its presidium member Ponkoj Bhattacharya and Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahmana and said they patronise interests of indigenous people ignoring that of Bangalees living in the hills. Their patronisation often instigate the hill indigenous leaders, they alleged.

The rally was held at Bonorupa in the town to protest comments made by Pankaj Bhattacharya at the PCP rally held in front of Shilpakala Academy in the morning. The PBCP rally was preceded by a procession in the town.

PBCP leaders claimed that his speech at the inaugural session of PCP council will "instigate PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jono Sanghaty Samity) leaders to go back to arms struggle to press the government to implement the CHT Accord".

The PBCP leaders in their speeches also claimed that some dailies published from Dhaka at times make propaganda in favour of indigenous people, ignoring the interest of Bangalees in the hills.

Presided over by PBCP Rangamati district unit president Sabbir Ahmed, the rally was addressed by, among others, its vice-president Saiful Islam, general secretary Md Solaiman, organising secretary Md Mahim Uddin.

Later in the evening, the PBCP issued a press release which also made similar comments about the intellectuals.

SANTU LARMA TELLS PCP COUNCIL Launch tougher agitation to implement accord

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rangamati*

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) chief Jyotirindriya Bodhipriya Lama alias Santu Larma asked members of its student front Pahari Chha Parishad to launch tougher agitation for implementation of the CHT peace accord.

He was addressing the inaugural function of the two-day annual council of PCP here yesterday.

He called up the students belonging to indigenous communities to spread his message to the hill people.

"Convey my message to the Jumma people in every corner of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to prepare for tougher agitation to realise full implementation of the accord", he said.

Santu Larma, also chairman of CHT Regional Council, urged the indigenous students to create awareness among different tribesmen about their rights.

Held on the Shilpakala Academy premises, the inaugural session was presided over by PCP President Uzzal Chakma and addressed by, among others,

Gono Forum Presidium member



Santu Larma

Ponkaj Bhattacharya.

PCJSS leaders Advocate Shakriman Chakma and KS Mong Marma, president of pro-PCJSS Bangalee Platform Yusuf Alam, Parbatya Chattagram Mohila Samity President Modhobilata Chakma, Hill Women Federation President Choitali Tripura, former PCP leaders Brozokishore Tripura and Mong She Wei and PCP secretary Binotamoy Dhamai also spoke on the occasion.

Others speakers at the council alleged that the government is intentionally delaying full implementation of the peace accord.

Attack on Hindu families: 10 hurt in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Ten people including a woman belonging to Hindu community were injured in an attack by hoodlums over land dispute allegedly led by a ruling party leader and a Union Parishad (UP) chairman at village Baokhola Malo Para in Tala upazila on Tuesday, according to victims and eyewitnesses.

Two houses were ransacked and torched during the attack.

Quoting local people police said, about 30 to 35 hoodlums allegedly led by local BNP leader and Islamkati UP chairman Lokman

Hossain equipped with lethal weapons attacked the house of Amal Adhikari. They

looted cash, ornaments and other valuables worth about Tk 50,000 from there. Then they attacked his brother Parimal Adhikari's house and looted goods worth about Tk 27,000 from there. Before leaving the houses they torched the houses, locals said.

Of the injured Amal, Parimal, Joydev and Radharani were admitted to Tala hospital in a critical condition, according to an on-duty doctor of the hospital.

Eyewitnesses said, the attackers fell down trees like Mehgini, Segun and trees of other valuable species and looted timber worth Tk 2 lakh. Following the attack, panic gripped the Malo community (fisherman).

Parimal told this correspondent a case was filed with Tala Police Station accusing 35 people, but they could not include the name of the UP chairman as an accused person due to police refusal to do so.

According to Amal and Parimal, they had a dispute with their rival Balai Das over 58 decimals of land.

Local people said, chairman Lokman Hossain purchased 25 decimals of the disputed land from Balai making a registered deed in name of his wife Anowara khatun on

May 14. The chairman led the attack to occupy the land.

When contacted, Tala PS Officer-in-charge (OC) Shah Mashiur Rahman said police

arrested two accused persons namely Babulal Das and Bishnupada Das of the same village and recovered some of the looted goods from their houses.



PHOTO: STAR

A human chain was formed in Rajshahi city yesterday demanding trial of rape and murder of school student Mili.