



Severe erosion by the Surma at Kandigaon village in Sylhet Sadar upazila due to unabated illegal extraction of sand from the riverbed by privately owned dredgers (inset).

PHOTO: STAR

# Looting of sand from Surma causes massive erosion

## Illegal dredging by private operators sparks protests

**IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet**

Illegal extraction of soil and sand from the Surma riverbed by using dredgers at several points in Sylhet Sadar and Golapganj upazilas has accentuated erosion along the banks in the last few weeks.

The continued erosion due to unplanned dredging may cause serious flooding and massive landslides any time as the river embankment has been affected at several points.

The Surma embankment at Shingpur now faces damage caused by erosion, local people said.

Some influential people, allegedly backed by a section of ruling party men, have engaged these dredgers, they alleged.

This has caused a serious commotion among villagers, who held several protest rallies and urged the administration to stop the illegal dredging.

Several protest rallies were held in the villages in the last two weeks, but to no effect, they told this correspondent during a visit to the area on Thursday and the day before.

The dredging stops during demonstrations, but it resumes days later as the administration does not

take any step, the villagers alleged. Several hundred people from Jangail, Herakhola, Jugirgaon, Dhanpur, Govindapur, Hausha, Chandpur and Pashchim Ghopal attended a protest meeting held at Kandigaon village in the Sadar upazila on Thursday. A number of local political leaders and village elders addressed the rally.

They said at least eight villages in Kandigaon and Mogalgaon unions are facing erosion due to random extraction of sand from the riverbed. They alleged that some private dredging firms are making a brisk business of earth-filling work and selling soil and earth.

They threatened to go for tougher agitation if immediate steps are not taken to stop the illegal dredging.

Haji Abdul Jabbar of Jogirgaon village chaired the rally. Later, a memorandum was submitted to the Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet. Such protest rallies were also held at Shingpur and Turukbhag villages on Wednesday, the local people said.

This correspondent saw three dredgers in operation in the Surma at Kholapur village.

At least 15 small dredgers owned by some private companies are in

the illegal operation in the river in the two upazilas, villagers said.

They said the extracted soil and sand is deposited on the riverbank and then sold. At places, long pipes are used for earth-filling work.

They said the illegal work is going on for about a month now in the Surma in Golapganj upazila.

A number of elderly people at Shingpur and Mollagaon said severe erosion takes place in the area almost every year, and the indiscriminate dredging will create a havoc.

The Water Development (WDB) has to spend huge amounts of money almost every year to protect the embankment there.

Last year, floods left a trail of devastation in the area as the embankment was damaged, inundating villages in five unions. The villages were under water for several weeks. The Sylhet-Jokiganj road, which is just near the Surma embankment, was under water for days, snapping road links from the divisional headquarters to the five upazilas for weeks.

The unplanned extraction of sand or soil from the riverbed by using dredgers is adding to the trouble in the area this year, the victims alleged with great discontent.

## Kaptai plant's power output lowest

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati**

Electricity generation by Kaptai hydroelectric plant has come down to 60 MW (megawatt) a day as water level of the lake at the dam point has fallen due to a drought-like-situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

"The generation on Friday was only 60 MW, the lowest since the plant went into operation", plant manager Shafiqul Islam said yesterday.

"We recorded the water level (of the lake at the dam point) at 74.25 MSL (Mean Sea level) yesterday. At least 84.16 MSL is needed to operate the two generation units at their optimum", he said.

Three generation units are now operational but they are operating only two units. Even the two units can not operate at their optimum because of the low level of water, he said.

One unit is idle for want of water for the last three months, he said.

The plant has five generation units, two of those are inoperative because of mechanical fault, he said.

## Shishu Sadan ransacked in Rajshahi

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi**

A government Safe Home (Shishu Sadan) at Baya was attacked and ransacked by local people yesterday protesting what they said beating up a former student of Home.

The attackers also laid a seize to the Home but withdrew when police came.

Kawsar, a former resident of the Home had gone there to request the authorities to take back five students -- Dulal, Belal, Helal, Alam and Masud-- expelled from the Home for allegedly humiliating one of its female teachers, Laizu Razzak.

But its Assistant Director refused and called in Ansar members

This angered Kawsar, who started shouting and ransacking furniture and other things, police and officials at the Home said.

This drew locals who joined Kawsar.

Police arrested Kawsar. A case has been filed against him, police said.

## Students block highway at Palashbari

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha**

About 2000 students and teachers of different schools and colleges in Palashbari upazila yesterday barricaded the Dhaka-Dinajpur highway for an hour demanding trial of the murder of school student Plabon.

Several hundred vehicles remained stranded on the road on both sides of the upazila headquarters due to the barricade.

Rezbul Huq Plabon, a student of SM Pilot High School at Palashbari, was killed during a clash between activists of Jammata-Islami and BNP on June 14.

Earlier yesterday, a protest meeting was held at upazila headquarters demanding trial of the killers. It was addressed by, among others, Prof Golam Mostafa, Abu Taleb, Monowarul Islam, Md Faruk. They demanded trial of the killing and arrest of the persons responsible.

# Tornado batters 2 Patuakhali villages:17 hurt

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal**

At least 17 people were injured as a tornado battered two villages in Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali district in the early hours of yesterday.

The foray that lasted about a minute tore down houses, uprooted trees and damaged crops in Char Chapali and Anantapara villages in Dhulasar, according to Kalapara Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abdul Barek.

Some cattleheads were killed, mainly due to collapse of cowsheds at dead of night.

The injured people were taken to Kalapara Upazila Health Complex. Many people rendered homeless by the tornado have taken shelter at educational institution.

Local administration sent a team to the tornado-affected area to ascertain the damage. They were yet to return to the upazila headquarters till filing of the report yesterday afternoon, official sources said when contacted over phone. Officials at Kalapara weather office said, they could not make any weather forecast as the radar is out of order for long.

GAS GOES TO BOGRA THIS MONTH

# Customers shy away for 'high' charges

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra**

Gas will be supplied to Bogra this month but prospective customers are shying away because of what they call high tariff and connection charge.

A domestic connection will cost more than Tk 12000, many of them said while talking to this correspondent. It will be costlier depending on the distance of the house from the pipeline, they said.

The charges and tariff are as in Dhaka, which is not affordable to residents of a district town, they said.

A customer will have to pay a fixed charge of Tk 3050 as connection fee, a minimum of Tk 3000 to contractor and Tk 12,00 (equivalent to three months' gas bill) as deposit money and the cost of laying pipe up to his house from the pipeline.

The monthly tariff will be Tk 400 for a single burner, according to

sources at the Bogra Town Gas Supply Project.

This is not fair for residents of a district town, many prospective customers said.

The charge for industrial connection is so much that only a handful will afford, some owners of small industries said.

Officials at the Bogra Town Gas Supply Project said they did not receive a single application for industrial connection.

Over 2000 domestic connection forms have been distributed through agents but only 538 applications were received so far, they said.

Prime Minister Begum Khalada Zia may inaugurate the gas connection this month, official sources said earlier.

Bogra town and its suburbs came under gas supply network at a cost of Tk 171 crore. Supply of gas to Bogra was one of the election

pledges of ruling BNP.

The authorities will pay for only three metre pipe free of cost. The rest will be charged from customers at Tk 296 per metre. Moreover there will be road cutting charge payable to the municipal authorities.

Industrialist Amzad Hossain Tajma, Managing Director of Tajma Ceramic Industry, said he needs gas to reopen his closed factory.

He said he will have to spend at least Tk 21 lakh for this.

Some other industrialists said their factories now run on furnace oil. They want to convert those to gas-based ones, this will involve a huge expenditure.

Local BNP leader and former public prosecutor (PP) Advocate Mozammel Haque said he has abandoned plan for having gas connection at his house for the time being due to high cost. He said he needs about Tk 15,000 for this.

# Rising Teesta floods two Nilphamari upazilas

## Thousands marooned, crops damaged

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari**

At least 10,000 people have become marooned in Teesta shoals and low-lying areas in Jaldhaka and Dimla upazilas as the river started swelling on Friday though there was no heavy rain in the district in the last few days.

The river is swelling as India opened all the gates of Gojaldoba barrage in the upstream to release the "excess water" from heavy rainfall in its territories, Water Development Board (WDB) officials said yesterday.

India did not exchange any information on release of Teesta waters with Bangladesh officials at Dalia, they said.

According to WDB control room in Rangpur, the water level of Teesta

was 52.15 metres at Teesta Barrage point Friday evening. The danger mark at the barrage point is 52.25 metres, they said.

With the rise of Teesta, its tributaries on Nilphamari including Charal Kanta, Deunai, Buri Teesta, Buri Khora, Jamuneswari and Panga have also swelled, inundating newly transplanted Amon and vegetable fields.

The heavy current of water has made an embankment point of Teesta vulnerable at Bhavan Chur and Gopal Jhar points in Jaldhaka upazila, the WDB officials said.

If the embankment is damaged, more areas in Jaldhaka and Dimla upazilas will go under water. The marooned people are in Purba Kharibari, Char Khari Bari, Kisanot Chhatnai, Doholpara, Baishpukur, Bahsanir Char, Fakrater Char, Jharsingerswar and Vendabari

villages in Dimla upazila and Bahavan Chur and Gopaljhar in Jaldhaka upazila.

Most of the houses in these areas have gone under two to four feet water. The people there are suffering for food, fodder and drinking water.

About 200 families have shifted to safer places in nearby schools and madrasas, administration officials said.

WDB officials at Dalia said they are monitoring the Teesta. WDB Executive Engineer Atiqur Rahman told newsmen yesterday that the situation is still under control.

Dimla Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mezbahuri Haque after a visit to the flood affected areas said all possible steps would be taken to help the affected people.



PHOTO: STAR

An inundated house in Jharsingerswar village in Nilphamari following rise in the water level of Teesta that flooded two upzilas of the district.

8x3

5x3