

Impoverished Chilmari found mineral rich

FRONT PAGE 1
kyanite, magnetite, rutile and zircon. As the AEC lab can only separate seven kinds of minerals from sediments, Carbon Mining is now sending about one hundred samples to a sophisticated laboratory in Perth, Australia for confirmation and further analysis.

Carbon Mining Plc's Chairman Wahid Salam says that after the tests in Perth, his company would formally announce the findings. The test results would be available in August.

"If the results are positive, we will

conduct a feasibility study within early next year. If it is feasible, we would then propose how to mine this resource," Salam pointed out.

Ex director general of GSB who detected the minerals here for the first time in 1979 Khurshid Alam believes that further tests in Perth, Australia would reveal the presence of several other mineralsincluding apatite, anatisé, brookite and kecitárite.

The 68-year old veteran geologist who joined Carbon Mining two years back believes that the unusually thick sediment layer of

Brahmaputra might even contain rare minerals such as uranium.

Whereas the maximum thickness of sediment in Australia is about 25 meters and in China 30 m, its about 50 m in some areas of Brahmaputra river. Consequently the some mineral contents in the Brahmaputra sediments seems significantly high. Mineral content here is apparently much higher than that in the Cox's Bazar sea beach, which is already a recognised mineral zone.

Based on its 2005 application, Carbon Minerals Plc was given a

one-year license in February to explore 3987 hectares of land in Brahmaputra around the Chilmari area. Since then it collected samples from about two dozen spots.

Alam says, studies indicate heavy mineral percentage is more than 8 percent in the sediments of the Brahmaputra river. Mining of heavy minerals in North Strandbroke island, Australia is considered profitable if this figure is 0.5 percent or above.

Based on the Atomic Energy Commission report, Alam notes that whereas the world's proven Garnet reserve is 67 million tonnes, the leased area in Brahmaputra alone has the potential of 68 m tonnes of this mineral. The leased area may also contain 23 m tonnes of ilmenite, 7.6 m tonnes of kyanite, 7.6 m tonnes of magnetite, 15 m tons of rutile and a half million tonnes of zircon.

Mining of such minerals typically involves dredging, comparatively small area for setting up mineral separation processing plants and can involve huge local participation at the level of mineral collection. Required investment may be no less than one billion dollars.

Alam, who has played a key role in mapping geological resources of the country, explains the use of the minerals. Garnet is an abrasive used in leather, aluminum, ship building etc; imported by the USA in large quantities. Ilmenite and rutile is used for making titanium paint used in aerospace and industries. Japan is a large consumer. Kianite is used in steel industry. Magnetite is used for making magnets and iron. Zircon is used in nuclear reactor, sand blasting, nuclear submarine, guided missiles, steel industry, bullet proof glass, ceramics and production of innumerable kinds of high end products. The per ton cost of zircon in the present world market is 712 dollars.

SPOT VISIT

From a layman's perspective, Ashtamir Char would look like a near barren ordinary shoal on the Brahmaputra river. To the local people, the best utility of this shoal is to have the cattle graze there.

This shoal is located 12 to 15 kilometres off the old Chilmari river port, which is now abandoned. During the rainy seasons, this shoal remains submerged like many other shoals in the river.

But if you simply grab a handful of sand and look closely, you would instantly realise that something is different about this place. Its dark and yet colourful texture shows presence of various minerals even to the naked eye. This is one of the two dozen spots from where Carbon Mining's people are collecting sand samples from surface to a depth of up to 150 feet.

Khurshid Alam demonstrates how rich the mineral contents of this sand is. He dips a magnet in some surface sand, slightly screened in the water to shred off the lighter particles. After he raises the magnet, it was sparsely coated with heavy metal mineral that has magnetic properties.

"This is a simple and a low technology way to collect magnetic minerals. In future, if this venture is successful, we can deploy large number of poor people to collect magnetic minerals from the shoals and rivers," he says.

"If we find this feasible, the livelihood of the people will change," Alam notes, "this would be a different type of mining that does not affect any community or the environment."

Wahid Salam points out that Carbon Mining was investing there with the understanding that it would be given the mining license after the one-year term of exploration license is over.



Md Yeasin Ali, managing director of Dutch-Bangla Bank, hands over a payment order of Tk 25 lakh to Communications Adviser Maj Gen (Retd) MA Matin at Chittagong Circuit House yesterday.

US aid for landslide victims

The US has provided emergency assistance to the victims of the flooding and landslides in Chittagong, says a US embassy special release.

The USAID has authorised CARE to respond immediately, initially providing \$43,000 worth of relief supplies.

CARE will provide food, water, and temporary shelter to some 2,500 families who have been displaced by the disaster.

The US Embassy has also expressed condolences to friends and families of the victims.

DBBL donates Tk 25 lakh

Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited (DBBL) has donated Tk 25 lakh for the victims of devastating landslides in Chittagong, says a press release.

Md Yeasin Ali, managing director of the bank, handed over a payment order of Tk 25 lakh to Communications Adviser Maj Gen (Retd) MA Matin at Chittagong Circuit House yesterday.

Speaking on the occasion, Adviser MA Matin, who is overseeing the relief efforts, lauded the role of Dutch-Bangla Bank for its social and philanthropic activities.

He added that this donation is very timely and would inspire others to stand by the victims of landslides.

Md Muklesur Rahman, divisional commissioner, Chittagong, Ashraf Shamim, deputy commissioner, and other high officials of district administration were also present.