

Indiscriminate sand lifting threatens Surma dyke

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Indiscriminate sand lifting from riverbeds in several areas in four upazilas of Sylhet by using dredgers is threatening the Surma dyke in Golapganj and Kanaighat.

Massive erosion has already affected the dyke at several points in Golapganj and at Kanaighat upazilas, putting the areas at risk of devastating flood, locals said. Some organised groups are engaged in it as selling sand and soil for earth-filling is now a profitable business.

Villagers in Zakiganj, Kanaighat, Sylhet Sadar and Golapganj lodged several complaints to the administration demanding immediate stoppage of sand lifting. Villagers said whenever they protest, the illegal dredging is stopped for a few days, only to resume at another point nearby.

This correspondent during a visit to erosion-hit Shingpur village in Golapganj upazila on Friday saw concrete blocks dumped by Water Development

Board (WDB) for protection of the Surma dyke damaged at several places.

"We pass days amid great worries because erosion may devour our ancestral houses", said elderly Shamsuddin at Shingpur village.

"There is none to stop dredging which is causing disaster. Whenever we protest, they leave the area, but come back again at night or after days", he said.

Nurul Haque of the same area said, "We had filed complaints to the authorities, but there is no action. We are bracing for a serious flood like 2004 due to river dredging".

The WDB spent Tk 1.32 crore last year for protection of the Surma dyke. But the dyke has become vulnerable again due to sand lifting, WDB sources said.

Some organised gangs are engaged in the work without any permission from the administration or WDB, they said.

Local Union Parishad member Ansar Uddin said RCC blocks

have disappeared into the river at many points.

"As we protested to save our lands, the gangs implicated me and some others in a false extortion case", he told this correspondent. Seeking anonymity, an official of Golapganj upazila administration said only intervention by joint forces can stop the illegal dredging.

When contacted, WDB Superintending Engineer GM Shamsur Rahman said WDB did not give permission to anybody to lift sand from Surma in Shingpur or any other point by using dredgers.

Erosion in those areas accentuated only due to indiscriminate extraction of sand from the riverbed, he said. Some people in Zakiganj and Kanaighat filed a complaint with the Deputy Commissioner on June 24 demanding immediate stoppage of sand lifting from Surma riverbed. Several villages including Karaballa, Karaballa Nij, Karaballa Pashchim, Charigram,

Moricha, Baroband, Akashmollika and Atgram Bazar may be devoured by the river as both its banks have been badly affected by erosion, the locals told this correspondent.

People in Kandigaon union in Sadar upazila said, Jangail, Herakhola, Jugirgaon, Dhanpur, Govindapur, Hausa, Chandpur and Pashchim Ghopal villages face erosion due to random extraction of sand from riverbed.

They said they will launch a fresh agitation if the illegal dredging is not stopped immediately.

Asabuddin of Jangail village said they submitted a memorandum to Sylhet Deputy Commissioner earlier to stop illegal dredging, but to no effect.

Some local elite in Shingpur and Mollagaon villages said WDB spends huge amounts of money almost every year to protect the Surma dyke, but all go down the drain due to the illegal sand lifting.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Ishaq Shaikh casts a vacant look as he sits by the devastating Padma that devoured his property like many others in Sadipur and Godadhor Dangi villages in Faridpur.

Villagers build river dam to shame authorities

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

As repeated appeals failed to draw authorities' attention, people in their hundreds joined hands to construct a dam to protect 25 villages from flooding by Brahmaputra in Mymensingh Sadar upazila.

Ataharul Islam Bulbul, Chairman of Boror Char Union Parishad, took the lead. The villagers responded to his call and came forward to construct a 1000 feet dam along the Brahmaputra at Kustiapara village in Boror Char union.

The work started late last month will be completed soon, Bulbul told this correspondent during a visit to the site recently.

Local people, affected almost every year by Brahmaputra flooding, submitted applications to local Water Development Board (WDB) several times in last two years but to no effect.

Villagers said they faced serious erosion every year when the Brahmaputra swelled with onrush of waters from across the border. Several hundred families were displaced in last coupe of years, they said.

Many establishments including educational institutions had to be shifted several times due to river erosion, Nurul Amin of Kustiar Char village said.

Boror Char Kachari Bazar High School, Kachari Bazar Hossainia Islamia Madrassah, Boror Char Union Parishad building and a mosque were shifted several times in last three years, Amin said.

Boror Char Government High School is only five metres from the river bank and if proper steps are not taken immediately, the school will be devoured by the Brahmaputra during monsoon this year, said Abdul Majid, a former member of Boror Char UP.

UP Chairman Ataharul Islam Bulbul said, a 1000 metre dam has to be built to save the area.

He said he managed Tk 3.50 lakh from the Union Parishad fund and local administration to construct spurs on the Brahmaputra river as a temporary measure.

The local upazila administration



PHOTO: STAR

Boror Char Government Primary School (top) threatened by Brahmaputra erosion and villagers constructing a dam at Kushtia para to protect the area.

however came forward and sanctioned Tk 1.5 lakh to construct two spurs in the river to check erosion.

Water Development Board (WDB) Director Md. Abdul Jalil visited the spot early this month and assured steps to construct a dam.

Such pledges were made earlier by WDB and lawmakers from

the area but nothing was done, villagers said.

UP chairman Bulbul said the dam will protect 25 villages in Boror Char, Char Sirta, Paranganj, Char Iswardia and Char Nilaxia unions from flood.

UNPAID POWER BILLS Barisal BNP leader Chand sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A court here yesterday sent a BNP leader to jail for alleged defalcation of electricity bill and tampering of meter during his surrender to court for confirmation of ad interim bail granted by the High Court earlier, court sources said.

Barisal District Judge Court has sent BNP leader Ebaidul Huq Chand, also president of Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industries and director of Federal Chamber of Commerce and Industries, to jail in the afternoon, they said.

Barisal Power Development Board sub-assistant engineer (SAE) Md Bashiruddin filed the case against Chand for defalcation of Tk 16.06 lakh arrear electricity bills of Aviruchi Cinema Complex and Royal Restaurant, owned by him on February 12 this year.

Following issuance of warrant of arrest by court, the High Court (HC) granted Chand ad interim bail for six weeks in response to a prayer submitted by him on May 22.

On the last date of tenure of bail, Chand appeared before the district judge court for confirmation of ad interim bail in the morning.

But Barisal District and Sessions Judge Md Safiuddin refused to grant his bail prayer and ordered to send him to jail in the afternoon.

Anti-corruption body formed in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A 6-member Assassuni Upazila Corruption Preventive Committee was formed at a meeting held at the office of Assassuni Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Rafiqul Islam yesterday.

The committee is being headed by Principal SM Saidul Islam as president. Principal Chitta Ranjan Ghosh has become its vice president and GM Mujibar Rahman member secretary. Other members are Maulana Abul Hasan, Alamgir Hossain and Purabi Bala Sarkar.

Assassuni UNO presided the meeting which was attended by the civil society members.

Son brands parents drug addicts to grab property!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

A mother yesterday narrated a sensational incident how she and her husband were allegedly kidnapped by their son and kept at two rehabilitation clinics in Dhaka branding them as drug addicts and mental patients only to grab the family house at Kishoreganj town. Their son is an expatriate in Belgium, who returned home recently.

Rahela Khatun, 60, told newsmen here yesterday that she escaped from the clinic in Dhaka on June 28 and reached Kishoreganj town yesterday.

Rahela Khatun said her son Masudul Hoque Sikder and daughter Minu tried to grab the Alormela family house keeping them at rehabilitation centers. Earlier, she and her husband filed a general diary (GD) with Kishoreganj police station, she added.

She said her son with the help of a gang kidnapped her and her husband Dr. Shafiuddin Sikder, 70, from their residence at Alormela on June 17.

The kidnappers took them into a microbus with black glasses. As they tried to resist, the kidnappers pushed wet towels into their mouths.

Rahela Khatun said she was taken to a hospital for rehabilitation of mental and drug addicts at Babar Road in Mohammadpur in Dhaka city. Her husband was taken to another rehabilitation hospital in Monipuri Para in Tejgaon in the capital.

Rahela Khatun claimed that while they were being kidnapped, five persons from the hospitals were also at the microbus.

Rahela Khatun said she was kept at the drug rehabilitation center for 12 days. As she was a diabetic, she was allowed to have morning walk inside the clinic.

On June 28, early in the morning, she was having a stroll when most of the hospital staff were asleep. She managed to escape and came to Kapasia in Mymensingh and then went to her sister's residence at Kharampatti in Mymensingh town on July 1.

She talked to newsmen at the



PHOTO: STAR

Rahela Khatun talking to newsmen at the Kharampatti residence of her sister.

Kharampatti residence of her sister.

Nusrat Jahan Dina, youngest daughter of Rahela Khatun, earlier filed a kidnapping case with Kishoreganj police station accusing her elder brother Masudul Hoque Sikder, her elder sister Monwara Akter Minu and Minu's husband Aminul Islam Babul.

As the sensational incident came to light, three newsmen on June 27 went to the victims' residence at Alormela, which was already 'occupied' by Masudul Hoque Sikder.

Masudul Hoque's men detained the newsmen there. Joint forces later freed them and arrested Masudul Hoque and Monwara Akter Minu from the house.

On June 28, SI Salahuddin of Kishoreganj police station, who was investigation officer (IO) of the kidnapping case, produced Masudul Hoque Sikder and his elder sister Monwara Akter Minu before a magistrate court in Kishoreganj. The court placed Masudul Hoque on two days' remand and sent Minu to jail.

On July 30, acting on information given by Masudul Hoque, SI Salahuddin accompanied by the accused (Masud) went to the clinic at Tejgaon and rescued Masud's

father Dr. Safiuddin Sikder.

Dr. Shafiuddin was produced before the court, which sent him to his Alormela residence under the custody of complainant Dina.

The court recorded Dr. Safiuddin's statement, court sources said.

But Dina, who was with her mother Rahela Khatun at her aunt's house at Kharampatti yesterday, said she was driven out of the Alormela residence by accused Aminul Islam Babul.

Dina claimed that said her father was confined at a room at the Alormela residence, now occupied by the accused.

Dr. Shafiuddin's younger brother retired agriculture official Toufiq Uddin Sikder told newsmen correspondent that his brother (Dr. Shafiuddin) was physically sound and had been practising as a doctor at a private clinic in Kishoreganj town.

But he looked pale and abnormal when he was produced before court, Toufiq Uddin said.

The accused could not be contacted as they were in police custody.

Farmers batoned as they attack dealer shops for fertiliser

UNB, Kishoreganj

Five people were injured as police charged baton on farmers when they were staging demonstration for fertiliser in Hossainpur upazila yesterday morning.

Local sources said hundreds of farmers of different parts of Hossainpur upazila gathered at the upazila town and besieged the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and agriculture offices at about 11 am demanding fertiliser.

On information, police rushed to the spot and charged batons on the demonstrators after they attacked four shops of fertiliser dealers, leaving five farmers injured.

Police also arrested farmer Delwar Hossain Quddus of Dakshin Harenja village.

However, Hossainpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) denied the allegation of baton charge.

Later, the farmers were given fertiliser under supervision of local administration. Each four farmers received one bag of fertiliser.

Local administration, however, admitted the crisis of fertiliser.

Power saving drive by KCC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna City Corporation has taken up a plan to use energy saver lights instead of sodium lights and tube lights at 20,000 points in the city.

This will save about two megawatt electricity a day, KCC engineer Shaikh Zahid Hossain has said.

KCC has taken this decision in the face of problems including erratic power supply, low voltage, frequent load shedding and excessive maintenance cost, he said.

KCC sources said that there were 18,505 points in city in January this year where streetlights were needed. This number rose to 20,000 which require at least four and a half megawatt of electricity a day.

Most of the sodium lights have gone out of order due to power outage and low voltage. It is expensive to buy a sodium light at between Tk 1500 and Tk 2,000, said chief engineer Liaquat Ali Sharif.

2 Khulna power plants to be repaired soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Repair of the 110 mw and the 60 mw power plants in Khulna will begin soon. Tenders for their repair have been invited.

Executive Engineer of Goalpara Power Station Kamrul Islam said both the power plants would be fully operational after repair.

Sources in West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited told this correspondent that the 110 MW plant will resume generation in less than a month and the 60 MW plant before December.

The 110 MW plant went out of order due to leakage in tubes in May. It would be able to generate at least 80 MW electricity a day after repair, sources at Goalpara power station said.

Only 40 MW power is supplied now against a daily need of 100 MW.

Jamboree on the Train ends in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Jamboree on the Train 07 ended here with a call on the members of Bangladesh Scouts to play pivotal role in establishing peace and friendship in the South Asian region.

Earlier, Jamboree on the Train 07 arrived here via Joypurhat as per schedule at about 9:00 Sunday night. The scouts started their journey from Chittagong on Friday and travelled at least 800 kilometres.

As many as 3,000 officials and scouts of 11 zones in the country paraded different streets of Dinajpur town in colorful processions.

Later, the closing programme was held at Dinajpur Zilla School Auditorium where Dr Shah Mohammad Farid, president of Bangladesh Scouts was present as chief guest.

Speakers hoped the journey would inspire young generation to involve themselves in social welfare activities.

On conclusion of the programme, Dr Farid handed over certificates to the participants. Later, Jamboree on the Train left Dinajpur for Chittagong at about 12 noon.



PHOTO: STAR

The Jamboree on the Train-07 leaving Dinajpur railway station for Chittagong at noon yesterday.

High price of Hilsha being investigated

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A high power investigation team of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock visited Barisal and Bhola to find out the cause of high price and scarcity of Hilsha fish in the ongoing season.

The three-member team was led by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock Deputy secretary Md Imran. The other members were Bangladesh Fishing Development Corporation (BFDC) manager Abu Sayed and Directorate of Fisheries deputy chief Joarder Shibendra Nath.

The team visited the two districts following publication of reports in newspapers about high price of Hilsa in Bangladesh and comparatively lower price in India. Bangladesh is the main Hilsa exporting country to India.

During the visit on Saturday, the team talked with Hilsa fish merchants including whole sellers, retailers, exporters and importers, fishermen and fishing and livestock ministry and directorate

officials before their visit to BFDC Fish Loading and Unloading Centre here.

While talking to local journalists, they said that they would also visit Cox's Bazar. On their return to Dhaka, they would submit a report to the ministry about their findings today, they said.

The government would monitor the whole system of Hilsa fishing including breeding, catching, demand in local in market and amount of export and checking smuggling, the team sources said.

Nur Muhammed, manager of Barisal BFDC Fish Loading and Unloading Centre said a guideline on Hilsa fishing, marketing and exporting policy will be prepared on the basis the findings of the team.

As many as 4,15,000 kilograms of Hilsa fish were exported to India through this centre within a week since June 26. If one fourth of those was sold at local markets then the price in internal markets would have been decreased, he said.