

Custodians

FROM PAGE 1
International Associates on June 26 to extract 10 lakh cubic feet of sand from areas near Basila and Ishaqbar with three dredgers for 30 days.

The company, however, deployed 14 powerful dredgers in the area to lift a lot more sand than is permitted.

An investigation by The Daily Star reveals that in connivance with the officials of the BIWTA the company is actually extracting sand at least 10 times the permitted quantity.

It instantly sells the sand to the booming construction sector in the capital.

The massive sand extraction raised alarm among the residents of Basila and the BIWTA suspended the permission following a report published in The Daily Star on July 13.

Dismayed by the suspension, officials of Ali International Associates openly said that they had given huge amounts of bribe to BIWTA officials in the hydrography, port, conservancy and engineering departments and at the headquarters to obtain the permission. They also vowed to return to extract sand.

On Friday, the company returned to the site with more dredgers and resumed extracting sand, claiming that they filed a writ petition with the High Court against the BIWTA decision.

Yesterday scores of vessels were seen lined up at Basila to carry sand amid continuous patrolling by hoodlums hired by the company in mechanised boats.

Residents of Basila said they feel very insecure about their homes because of a serious threat of riverbank erosion.

Engineers of the under-construction third Buriganga Bridge also expressed concerns, saying the foundation of the bridge will be under risk if so much sand is lifted from an area so close to it.

Senior Deputy Director and Port Officer (Dhaka River Port) Golam Kabir said his office did not take any action against Ali International Associates as he heard that the company had obtained a court order against the BIWTA decision of suspending the work order.

He, however, admitted that he has not seen or received any certified copy of the court order.

"I have not sent any official to the site as I have not received any complaint from anybody," Kabir said. "They [Ali International Associates] must have obtained a stay order against the BIWTA suspension order."

He termed the third Buriganga Bridge authority's claim false, saying, "Those engineers are lying. The sand extraction site is quite faraway."

Asked about the necessity of such commercial activities at the cost of natural course and environment of a river, Kabir said when interested parties or contractors apply for sand lifting, BIWTA's hydrography department carries out a survey and files a report. Then the port, conservancy and engineering departments examine the work and approve the work.

The state coffers get about Tk 0.40 per square feet of sand extracted from the riverbed.

Kabir said the BIWTA chairman gives the final approval.

Usually, the chief engineer of BIWTA's dredging department asks for proposals from port officers on required dredging for maintaining navigability in a river.

At present, only Ali International Associates has an official work order to extract 10 lakh cubic feet of sand in the Dhaka river port area. There are other unauthorised sand lifters as well.

Fazir Rahman Khandker, director of Hydrography Department, said the BIWTA departments of port, conservancy and engineering together submit a proposal on how much sand and mud should be extracted from riverbeds for the navigability of a river.

Hydrography department carries out a pre-dredging survey and also prepares an alignment.

But sand extractors often deviate from the approved alignment to maximise their commercial gain, he added.

Although the Hydrography Department is supposed to oversee the contractors' extraction work if the local BIWTA office demands for it, never gets any request.

The local office should constantly monitor such work and inform the Hydrography Department but I am not aware of sand lifting in the Buriganga near Basila," Khandker said.

BIWTA Director (port division) Mahabubul Alam said there are no specific policies for sand extraction from riverbeds.

"Generally, we call for a spot quotation for the work," he said.

3 more die

FROM PAGE 16
The man's wife too has contracted H1N1 and is undergoing treatment in hospital.

A 42-year-old school teacher Sanjay Tukaram Tokre and a 53-year-old woman Fahmida Panwala, who was also suffering from severe diabetes and hypertension, died of the disease in Pune and Mumbai cities respectively on Saturday night, five days after India recorded its first swine flu victim in the form of a 14-year-old girl Reeda Sheikhan on August 3.

The condition of a 28-year-old unidentified man admitted to a hospital in Mumbai was also stated to be critical.

Meanwhile, 74 people tested positive for the disease on Saturday taking the total number of confirmed cases across the country to 784.

Pune, the cultural capital of Maharashtra, has registered the maximum number of cases—34—and a team of experts has been sent to that city to assess the situation and put in place appropriate public health measures to contain the spread of the disease.

The Indian capital has recorded 13 confirmed cases of swine flu.

Indian Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said doctors and scientists have been successful in checking the spread of the disease and 10,000 Tamiflu tablets, the only medicine available in the world against H1N1, will be sent to each district hospital in the country to cope with the pandemic.

Secy-level talks

FROM PAGE 1
The state minister said the government has taken the anti-Tipaimukh Dam long march positively. Now, it would be easy to show New Delhi that the people of Bangladesh are against the dam construction, he added.

Meanwhile, BNP secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday claimed that their government several times protested India's plan to build a dam at Tipaimukh during the Joint River Commission meetings while Awami League kept silent.

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"We've asked Baira, the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training and Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited to submit detailed recommendations for curbing irregularities in the sector including fake visas and fake work permits, and also other harassment of the workers face in their attempts to go overseas," Jatiya Party lawmaker Anisul Islam Mahmud who is the committee chief, told reporters after a committee meeting in the parliament building.

The parliamentary watchdog committee also asked the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) to fix the migration cost for workers at no more than Tk 1 lakh, and also to fix the minimum salary for them.

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