

# Hill rock extraction goes on unabated in CHT

**JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari**

Rampant extraction of hill rocks is going on in the district defying the government ban and posing serious threat to environment.

Continuous collection of hill rocks develops silt and mud in nearby rivers, which is a major reason for untimely flooding in Khagrachhari. Illegal extraction also deprives the government of huge revenue from rock extraction.

At least 40 places have been marked in eight upazilas of the district where the illegal collectors gather hill rocks and sell them to local constructors for using those in various development work.

Under the very nose of

security men and officials, the constructors are using the rocks in different development projects. The trade is mushrooming every day as they make windfall profit, sources said.

To legitimise the illegal construction materials, the contractors allegedly pay a hefty amount of bribe to the high officials at municipality, Local Government Engineering Department, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board and Roads and Highways Department.

Local sources said, at least 1200 to 1500 maunds of hill rocks are collected a day especially during dry season in the eight upazilas of Khagrachhari.

The collectors sell them at Tk 30-35 a maund to the local

constructors while the administration is also aware of the matter, they said.

This correspondent recently witnessed huge stockpiles of hill rocks at Alutilla, Nunchhari, Champagat, Gugrachhari, Mohalchhara in Sadar upazila, Akhbari, Dharmopur, Ramsira in Matirang upazila, Baradam, Babuchhara, Araimail in Dighinala, Kongchairipara, Simanapara in Panchhari, Sindukchhara, Karbaripara in Mohalchhara upazila, Jouthakhamar, Headmanpara in Ramgarh upazila and different parts of Laxmichhari and Manikchhari.

It was also found that the locally collected hill rocks were being used in the Tk11 crore Khagrachhari-Manikchhari

road project under the title "periodic maintenance programme 2008-09".

The constructor was using those low quality rocks in connivance with the road and highways department officials, sources alleged.

Abul Kashem, a hill rock collector from Alutilla, told this correspondent that he is not aware of any adverse effect of rock lifting. "Most of people here extract hill rock as it is profitable," he said.

Executive Engineer of Khagrachhari Roads and Highways Department admitted using local rocks for 38-kilometre Khagrachhari-Manikchhari road project.

"Constructors use local rocks only for base layer of roads. We permit this as those are fit to use", he said.

Hashem Mia, a construction labourer, however, said local rocks are also used for road carpeting.

Contacted over phone, Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Abdullah said, three separate committees headed by upazila nirbahi officers in Sadar, Dighinala and Panchhari have examined the quality of rocks.

There is no permission to extract or use the hill rocks as the committees found them below the standard, the DC said.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Mohammad Maksudur Rahman said, at least six cases were filed with different police stations for illegally collecting and using local rocks. Police submitted charge sheets in all six cases, he said.

Divisional Forest Officer Ali Kabir said, he was not aware of hill rocks collection and their use. Action will be taken on receipt of detailed report, he added.



Defying ban from forest and environment ministry, contractors continue using local rocks for construction works, much to the damage of environment in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The photo was taken from Alutilla in Khagrachhari Sadar upazila on Monday.



A large number of people look on as workers of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society 'rescue' a man 'trapped' on a tree during a cyclone preparedness drill at Teknaf in Cox's Bazar district yesterday. The programme from 1:30pm to 3:00pm was arranged to make local people aware about safety measures to be taken when faced with the fury of a real cyclone accompanied by tidal surge so that casualties can be minimised.

## 7 abducted UPDF men buy freedom

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati**

Seven activists of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) got freedom for Tk 25,000 each on Wednesday, six days after their abduction from Ghagra area.

The kidnappers had earlier demanded Tk 50,000 for release of each abducted activists of anti-peace treaty organisation. Later, they settled the matter with families of the victims and released the seven for Tk 25,000 each, said the members of their families.

The released UPDF activists are Pratul Chakma, Santosh Chakma, Jiten Chakma, Keru Chakma, Bikash Chakma, Mishan Chakma and Bindu Dhan Chakma.

They were abducted allegedly by the activists of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) from Munsii Abdur Rouf Square at Manikchhari, 20 km off the Rangamati town, on Friday.

When asked, PCJSS Rangamati unit secretary Bodhishatta Chakma refuted allegation of PCJSS involvement in the abduction.

## Natore people panicked as outlaws back again

**A CORRESPONDENT, Natore**

Members of banned Purbo Banglar Sarbahara Party pasted posters at Singra upazila headquarters in Natore district on Wednesday as the extremists have started getting organised in the area again.

Earlier on December 20, the extremists distributed leaflets at Katagari Bazar in Tarash upazila, threatening to kill five people.

On December 8, five people including two police officials were injured in an hour-long gunfight between PBCP men and police in Tarash upazila.

In the posters pasted at Singra upazila Sadar on Wednesday night, they protested extra-judicial killing in the name of crossfire and made nine demands including cancellation of 'anti-state agreements' like giving corridor to India and export of oil and gas.

After PBCP men killed three members of police and Ansar forces and looted 10 firearms and huge ammunition on December 28 in 2005, police camps were set up at Biash and Kaliganj of Singra upazila and law enforcers started combing operations against the outlaws, police and locals said.

During an operation by Rab in January 2007, local people beat to death nine extremists at Adimpur School ground.

Taking the opportunity of lax vigilance by law enforcers, especially in the remote areas, the outlaws have become active again.

Contacted, Singra Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abu Bakar said, "We have come to know about outlaws' pasting posters. People need not panic. Police will continue all out drive to arrest the anti-social elements."

## SNIPPETS

### Two shot in Rangamati

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati**

Two people were shot by unidentified criminals at a village in Jurachhari Sadar upazila early yesterday. The victims are Prashanta Chakma, 45, and Haysyina Ranjan Chakma, 35. Prashanta is an active member of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), sources said. A gang of criminals came to the village at around 4:00am, stormed into the houses of the two and fired at them. The injured were admitted to Jurachhari Upazila Health Complex.

### Housewife killed in Bogra

**UNB, Bogra**

A housewife was killed by unknown assailants at Dholahar village in Kahlalu upazila on Tuesday night. The victim was identified as Nargis Begum, 30, wife of Yasin Ali, a labourer of a brick kiln. Police quoted local people as saying that Yasin went to work at the brick kiln in Tarola in Dupachanchia upazila on Tuesday night. He was informed on Wednesday morning that miscreants strangled his wife Nargis and left the body in a field near his house. Police on information, rushed to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy. Police detained Yasin for interrogation.

### PIB workshop at B'Baria

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria**

A four-day long workshop on journalism organised by Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) began at Brahmanbaria Pourasabha Mahbul Huda Auditorium on Wednesday. Habibur Rahman Milon, chairman of PIB managing board, was the chief guest at the inaugural session. The workshop was moderated by Rafiza Rahman, senior trainer of PIB. Forty journalists from different national dailies, electronic media and local dailies and weeklies participated in the workshop.

### 35 sued for looting shops

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona**

Thirty-five people were sued on Tuesday on charge of looting and damaging 11 business establishments at Dugia Bazaar under Sadar upazila. Humayun Kabir, a trader of the bazaar filed the case with Netrakona senior judicial magistrate's court. In the case, the complainant said, on Sunday night the accused mentioned in the case came to the bazaar with sharp and lethal weapons and looted valuables, cash money from 11 business establishments. They also damaged those establishments.

## CASE UNDER EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES ACT

### Two JMB leaders jailed in Ctg

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg**

A Chittagong court yesterday sentenced two leaders of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to jail in a case filed against them under Explosive Substances Act.

They are JMB Chittagong divisional second-in-command Rafiqul Islam alias Javed and Chittagong divisional commander of the outfit Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad.

Judge Shafiqul Karim of Chittagong Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal awarded 20 years rigorous imprisonment to Rafiqul Islam while three years to Javed Iqbal.

A team of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) recovered two packets containing 600 grams of gunpowder from the residence of Rafiqul in the city's Nasirabad area immediately after his arrest on December 15, 2005.

Sub-Inspector Abu Raihan of Rab-7 filed a case with Pahartali Police Station under explosive Substances Act the same day against Rafiqul, Javed Iqbal, Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and JMB operation wing chief Ataur Rahman Sunny.

Charge sheet was submitted to the court on March 9, 2006 while the charges were framed on August 28, 2007. The court recorded statements of 18 witnesses during the trial of the case.

The tribunal exempted Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Bangla Bhai and Sunny from the charges as they were executed in Jalakathi Judges' murder case in 2007.

## BJMC retakes People's Jute Mills in Khulna

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna**

People's Jute Mills at Khalishpur in Khulna City has been returned to the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), much to the joy and satisfaction of workers and employees.

Hearing the news that Private concern Kazi Firms Group formally handed over the jute mill to the BJMC on Wednesday afternoon, a few thousand workers and employees brought out a jubilant procession at Khalishpur, braving biting cold in the evening. They congratulated the government for placing the jute mill again under BJMC.

Closure of the mill on August 1 in 2007 left 3013 permanent workers and 294 employees unemployed.

A notification issued on July 11 the same year cited corruption and mismanagement as reasons for shutting down the mill, identified as a 'losing enterprise'.

Kazi Firms of Dhaka took lease of the mill on condition of paying Tk 6 crore and 13 lakh per annum under an agreement signed with BJMC as part of privatisation programme of the last caretaker government.

Amid mounting unrest among workers and employees who alleged irregularities in payment of wages and salaries and high-handed behaviour of officials of the management, Kazi Firms suspended production at the mill on July 18 this year, making over three thousand workers jobless again.

Later, the government formed a 25-member committee to carry out a feasibility study before taking the mill back from the private concern.

Following submission of the report on findings of the feasibility study to BJMC chairman on December 22, Kazi Firms handed over the mill at 4:00pm on Wednesday.

People's Jute Mills will go into full operation from January under full control of BJMC, lawmaker elected from Khulna-4 Molla Jalaluddin, also a member of parliamentary standing committee on the jute ministry, told this correspondent.

## Temple land grabbed

**ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi**

A ruling party lawmaker's men have allegedly occupied 25 bighas of debottor (endowed) land of Radha Govinda and Durga Temple at Sohrapara in Godagari upazila of Rajshahi district.

Locals said the loyalists of lawmaker Omar Faruk Chowdhury, also general secretary of Rajshahi district Awami League, arbitrarily formed a committee in November making Omar Faruk's follower Sanjit Kumar Ghosh as its president to look after the temple and its properties.

On December 1, the self-styled temple-governing committee forced Anil Kumar Ghosh, the sebayet (custodian) of the temple, to leave the village and employed some 50 people to reap paddy from the land.

On completion of paddy harvest on December 5, the committee men announced their control over the land and the temple, witnesses and villagers said.

Temple committee president Sanjit acknowledged that they took control over the land at the lawmaker's directive that came after locals raised allegations of corruption against Anil.

"As Anil and his family did not take care of the temple, it turned almost into a cowshed. We, the villagers, were demanding recovery of the temple's properties from Anil's clutches over a long time and we did it when the MP gave consent," said Sanjit.

Anil, a retired high school headmaster, has been enjoying the endowed properties for last 54 years since the government employed him as custodian of the temple in 1955.

Anil and his son Debashish Kumar Ghosh alleged that local police refused to record any case in this regard.

Md Zakirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Godagari Police Station, denied the allegation of refusal to record the case.

Debashish alleged that they rushed to the lawmaker when his men started reaping paddy from the field but the public representative seemed reluctant to listen.

When contacted, lawmaker Omar Faruk Chowdhury denied the allegation of his backing in taking control of the temple land.

"I don't know about taking control of the temple land and police's refusal to record case. But I am aware that locals have become angry at Anil as he is enjoying the temple land without running the place of worship satisfactorily. No villager supports him due to his corruption," he said.

Asked if he thinks that the capture of the temple's properties was justified due to alleged corruption of Anil, the MP said, "There should be legal action against the acts of cutting away paddy and capturing the land as well as Anil's corruption."



Locals form a human chain on the Karatoa River at Bhatkandi on the outskirts of Bogra town yesterday demanding steps to stop sand extraction from the river to protect Bhatkandi Bridge, nearby cremation ground and local environment.

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