

Mindless pebble lifting from rivers poses landslide threat

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Large-scale lifting of pebbles from Dharla, Saniyazan and Singimari rivers in Patgram upazila of Lalmonirhat district poses threat of massive landslide in the areas including the upazila town, in addition to leading the rivers to gradual death.

About 600 draggers are being used in illegally lifting pebbles from the bed of three rivers and their tributaries in different areas including Sarkarer Hat, Kawamari, Baniyadangi, Burimari, Islampur, Banglabari, Chatrarpar, Masantari, Azizpur, Kuchlibari, Dhabolsuti, Majhipara, Shamsar Nagor, Jagotber, Jongra, Sreerampur, Bankandha, Upharmara, Ghospara and Rasulganj villages in Patgram upazila.

Owners of the 600 draggers, 400 with double machines and 200 others with single machines, have continued their illegal operation to lift pebbles through managing the administration, local people alleged.

During a recent visit to some villages in Patgram upazila, this correspondent learnt that a strong network comprising people belonging to different political parties are engaged in illegal pebble lifting by draggers from the three rivers. Men employed by them create obstruction if any journalist tries to take snap of an illegally run dragger.

"A dragger with double machines can lift 1,200 sft of pebbles in an hour and a machine used for lifting

pebbles runs 15 hours daily. An sft of pebbles is sold at Tk 3 on the spot," said a dragger owner seeking anonymity.

"Each dragger owner pays Tk 50,000 every month to the network boss for managing administration, police, political leaders, journalists and local influential men. We earn Tk 8 to 12 lakh from each dragger every month. After managing the cost, our monthly income stands at Tk 4 to 6 lakh if we can run our machine properly," he said.

School teacher Moinuddin Sarker, a resident of Sarkarerhat village of Patgram upazila, said, "Every month, some 600 draggers lift at least one crore sft of pebble from the three rivers, making them head towards death. If anyone dare protest the illegal act, he faces harassment even false cases from the influential people belonging to political parties."

Monzurul Hossain, a resident of Burimari village, said they fear floods during this current monsoon as some areas of the three rivers have been filled up while large and deep holes have been created in some other areas due to wide-spread pebble lifting.

Two bridges over Dharla River and another over Singimari River at Burimari, Sarkarerhat and Kuchlibari villages are facing threat as pebble is being lifted beside them, he said.

In response to local people's written allegation regarding the matter, district and upazila administrations sometimes conduct drive

but it remains mere eye-wash, said Monirul Islam, a trader at Patgram town.

If done in a planned and systematic way, pebble lifting could be a good source of income for the poor people in the area but the unplanned act is causing serious harm to environment and ecology there, said several locals.

There are allegations that the pebble lifting network

manages the Patgram upazila administration by regularly giving handsome amounts of money.

Refuting the allegation, Patgram Upazila Nirbahi Officer Harunur Rashid said, "I have conducted several drives against the illegal pebble lifting from the rivers. Many draggers have been thrown into river and at least 13 cases have been lodged against the dragger

owners."

"Dodging the administration and police, some 20 to 25 dragger owners lift pebbles from the rivers illegally in the dark of night. I will take necessary action against them soon after talking with deputy commissioner of Lalmonirhat," he said.

Admitting that pebble lifting from the three rivers poses serious threat to envi-

ronment, Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Makhlesar Rahman Sarker said, "I have already sent letter to the home ministry and mineral resources ministry for taking action against the dragger owners who illegally lift pebbles from Dharla, Saniyazan and Singimari rivers in Patgram upazila. I will again send letter in this regard soon."



A section of unscrupulous people have continued unplanned extraction of pebbles from Dharla River in Burimari village of Patgram upazila under Rangpur district, ignoring the environmental aspects, especially fate of the river and the people living around. Inset, workers sieve out pebbles from mud beside Lalmonirhat-Burimari road.

PHOTO: STAR

Chairman candidate drowns, 15 missing in boat capsizes

STAR NATIONAL DESK

A UP chairman candidate drowned and 15 others went missing as a boat capsized in Jadukata river in Tahirpur upazila of Sunamganj district on Sunday night.

According to a correspondent from Sunamganj, chairman candidate of Uttar Badaghat Union Parishad Abdus Samad along with his 30 supporters was crossing Jadukata river in Tahirpur upazila in a boat at around 8:00pm. He was going to Laurer Ghor village in the union for electioneering.

When the boat reached the middle of the river at around 8:00pm, it was caught in a strong current and sank. Of the passengers, nine managed to swim ashore while the rest, including the chairman candidate, went missing.

Local people recovered the body of Samad after a hectic search at night. The remaining 15 missing people remained untraced as of filing of this report at 5:00pm yesterday.

Our correspondent from Sylhet reported that Amir Ali Chowdhury, chairman-elect of Subilpur Union Parishad in Baniachang upazila of Habiganj, died at Square Hospital in the capital yesterday morning. He was 65.

Chowdhury was suffering from diabetes and admitted to the hospital on June 12.

He left behind his four sons, one daughter and a host of friends, relatives and admirers to mourn the death.

After a namaz-e-Janaja at Bolakipur village yesterday afternoon, Amir Ali Chowdhury was laid to rest at his family graveyard.

One killed, over 80 hurt in poll-related violence

STAR NATIONAL DESK

One person was killed and at least 85 others, including three assistant presiding officers, were injured in UP election-related violence in Jessore, Nilphamari, Pabna and Sylhet districts yesterday and on Sunday night.

In Jessore, a supporter of a chairman-elect was killed by unidentified criminals at Silumpur village under Bagharpara upazila on Sunday, reports our Jhenidah correspondent.

The victim, Hasan Mondol, 45, was an activist of Awami League Raipur union unit and also an active worker of chairman-elect of Raipur Union Parishad Manjur Hossain Swapan.

Local Awami League leaders claimed that Hasan was killed by the supporters of BNP backed defeated chairman candidate Jahurul Islam.

Chairman-elect Manjur Hossain Swapan blamed Jahurul Islam and his supporters for the killing. Jahurul denied the allegation. Hasan's son Aktarul Islam filed a case with

Bagharpara Police Station against 13 people of Silumpur village.

In Nilphamari, at least 25 people were injured as the supporters of a defeated member candidate clashed with police after the announcement of poll results at a polling centre in Joldhaka upazila on Sunday night, according to UNB.

Witnesses said the supporters of member candidate Hafijul rejected election results and demanded recounting of votes. As the presiding officer refused to accept the demand, Hafijul's men encircled the presiding officer and other election officials.

When law enforcers went to the spot to rescue the election officials, Hafizur's supporters swooped on them. Police charged batons, fired 41 rubber bullets and 12 tear-gas cells, leaving at least 35 people injured.

Our Pabna correspondent reported that three assistant presiding officers and two police constables were injured as the supporters of a defeated member candidate attacked them at a poll-

ing centre in Ishwardi upazila on Sunday night.

The incident took place at Bohorpur Primary School center in Muladuli Union after the announcement of election results at around 10:00pm.

In Sylhet, at least 50 people were injured in post-poll clashes at Ruhitanshi and Bejura villages in Lakhai Union of Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj district yesterday.

Our staff correspondent quoted chairman-elect of Lakhai Union Parishad Md Sirajul Islam as saying that the supporters of elected member Jamal Talukder and defeated candidate Taher Miah clashed at Ruhitanshi village at around 2:00pm, leaving at least 30 people from both sides injured.

At Bejura village, at least 20 people were injured and 50 houses ransacked during a clash between the supporters of member elect-Adil Hossain and defeated candidate Nur Mia at around 1:30pm. Of the injured, 11 were admitted to Madhabpur Upazila Health Complex while the rest given first aid.

Robbers loot 300 tolas gold from jeweller's house

UNB, Goalundo

Robbers took away 300 tolas of gold ornaments, over Tk 1.5 lakh and several valuables from the house of a jeweller at Das Patti in Goalundo bazaar area early yesterday.

Police quoting local people said, an armed gang numbering 15/16 entered the house of a Gokul Chandra Pal, owner of Loknath Jewellers at about 1:30am.

They looted cash, gold ornaments and six mobile phone sets from the house taking the members of the house hostage at gun point.

The robbers also injured eight people including Gokul's mother Maloti Chandra Pal, wife Dipa Rani Pal, son Dipta Chandra Pal, brothers Bharat Chandra, Laxman and Laxman's wife Sagori Rani.

Critically injured house owner Gokul Pal was rushed to Goalundo hospital and later shifted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital as

his condition deteriorated.

Officer in-charge of Goalundo police station Abul Bashar said a case was filed but none was arrested in this connection till yesterday afternoon.

In Sylhet, a court convicted a notorious robber and sentenced him to 15 years imprisonment in an arms case on Sunday.

The convict was identified as Babul Dakat of Dakkhin Surma upazila.

According to prosecution, a team of DB police in a drive arrested Babul along with a gun and two bullets from Chakgram village of the upazila on July 15, 1999.

Later, DB Inspector Shamsuddin filed a case against him under Arms Act with Kotwali police station.

After examining the records and witnesses, additional district and sessions judge Monzurul Haque handed down the verdict.

Police said Babul was accused in a number of murder, robbery and other criminal cases.

JOURNO BALU MURDER

Arrest 'real' culprits, demand newsmen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Journalists at a discussion at Khulna Press Club yesterday demanded arrest of 'real' culprits and masterminds behind the murder of Humayun Kabir Balu, editor of local daily Janmabhami.

They also expressed grave concern at the delay in extended investigation of the explosives case filed after Balu, also a freedom fighter, was killed in a bomb attack in front of his office-cum-residence on Haji Meher Ali Road in Khulna city on June 27 in 2004.

The next day, SI Maruf Hossain lodged two FIRs with Khulna Sadar police station -- one under Section 302 of BPC for murder and the other under Explosive Substances Act. None was named as accused in the FIRs.

All the seven charge-sheeted accused of the murder case -- extremists Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Dada Tapon (later killed in crossfire), Iqbal Hossain Shadhin, Zahid Hossain

Sabuj, Rimon, Nazrul Islam alias Khora Nazu, Nazimuddin and Masum Hossain, were acquitted by a court on February 13 in 2008.

Judge Md Abdus Salam Shikder of Khulna Speedy Trial Tribunal observed in his judgement that all the seven accused were acquitted as the allegation against them could not be proved beyond doubt due to weak investigation of the murder case.

On the other hand, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate as directed by the Speedy Trial Court issued an order on May 10 in 2009 for an extended investigation by Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the case filed under Explosive Substances Act.

The investigation officer of CID, ASP Abdul Kayyum received docket of the case on June 7 in 2009.

Iqbal Hossain Shadhin, Nazrul Islam alias Khora Nazu, Zahid Hossain Sabuj and Masum Hossain were named as accused in the first charge sheet of this case.

4 youths jailed for stalking

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Four people were jailed in Madaripur and Gazipur districts for stalking housewife and madrasa student on Saturday.

A mobile court in Madaripur sentenced three youth to jail on Saturday for stalking a housewife over mobile phone in Badamtala area of the district town, reports our correspondent.

Led by executive magistrate Faruque Ahmed, the court jailed Mujahid Shikder, 19, son of Mannan Shikder of Kulpaddi area in Shahartali for six months and Shahin Hawlader, 22, son of Shiraj Hawlader of Mobarakdi area and Rabin Mia, 25, son of Altaf Mia of Panichatra for five months.

Sources said the youths had been harassing the woman, a mother of three, for the last one month.

To get rid of the nuisance, the woman in a bid to trap the stalkers, called them on Saturday to enjoy a movie with her. When the youths came to the Badamtala area

at about 6.00pm a police team with the help of local people caught them from the spot.

Later, after examining the witnesses and other evidence, the mobile court handed down the punishment.

In Gazipur, a mobile court on Saturday night sentenced a young man to one year imprisonment for teasing a madrasa student.

The convict was identified as Ibnul Hossain, 26, hailed from Kapasia upazila, reports UNB.

The court also fined him Tk 5,000, in default, to suffer three months more RL.

Police said Ibnul used to tease a class ten student on her way to Sammania Dakhil Madrasa.

On Saturday afternoon, local people caught Ibnul red-handed when he was sexually harassing the girl and handed him over to police.

Later, the mobile court led by UNO Saroj Kumar Nath pronounced the verdict.

Acid attack on schoolgirl bewilders poor parents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A schoolgirl received serious burn injuries as criminals threw acid on her at Hosnabad village of Bawar union under Patgram upazila early yesterday.

The victim, Sajeda Akhter, 11, is daughter of Jamal Hossain of Hosnabad village and a class five student of Hosnabad Barobari Brac Primary School.

With most of her face and head acid-burnt, she was taken to Patgram upazila health complex at midnight and later transferred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

NGO Brac arranged sending the victim to Acid Survivors Foundation in Dhaka yesterday noon, as her condition deteriorated.

"Most of Sajeda's face and head was burnt with acid. Her condition was serious when she was brought here at midnight yesterday. And so,

she was referred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital for better treatment," said Dr Elina Parvin of Patgram upazila health complex.

"Sajeda was sleeping at her room and we were sleeping in another room. She screamed when criminals threw acid on her. We immediately entered her room and saw most of her face and head burnt," said victim's mother Merina Begum.

"We are poor. My husband is a day labourer. We have no enmity with anyone in the village. We do not know who and why threw acid on our innocent daughter," she said.

Victim's father Jamal Hossain said, "Sajeda's condition is serious and she was taken to Dhaka for treatment with the help of NGO Brac. I informed Patgram police of the acid attack."

Police is trying to find out the acid throwers, Patgram police station officer in-charge Farid Uddin said.



A policeman visits Patgram upazila health complex as acid attack victim Sajeda Akhter groans in pain.

PHOTO: STAR