

AL men encroach on Pabna river

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

In a flagrant breach of environmental law, ruling Awami League men have built dykes on Chiknai river in Chatmohar of Pabna in the name of a fish project, halting the natural flow of the river.

Within two kilometres of the river, the encroachers erected two embankments at Bonnagri and Sangram in Mulgram union, this correspondent found on a recent visit to the areas.

They are planning to build another dam at Atanka, some one km north of Bonnagri, local sources said.

Locals said Md Kazal Bishwas, joint secretary of the AL Mulgram union unit, along with the local ruling party men had constructed the dams around two weeks back.

But Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Chatmohar Md Samsuzzaman claimed they had stopped the construction last week and formed an inquiry committee in this regard.

Locals said 15 maunds of fish fries were released in the river-cum-pond last week, and more 25 maunds would be released by the next week.

Md Gias Uddin, chairman of Mulgram union parishad, said, "The embankments on Chiknai have literally turned the river into a pond."

He said they had protested at the move, but the ruling party-backed grabbers did not care a fig for their appeal.

They informed the local administration

regarding the illegal move, but no action had been taken, the chairman added.

Asked, Kazal Bishwas claimed that they had erected the embankments taking permission from the local lawmaker.

"The Chiknai river is dying now. We have built dykes on the river to store water for cultivating fish," he went on.

Terming the fish project as a temporary one, he said no fewer than 40 party men were engaged in the project.

When contacted, Md Mokbul Hossain, lawmaker of Pabna-3 constituency, said, "I did not permit anybody to occupy the river. The grabbers might have used my name to justify their deed."

He added that he had already asked the local administration to take measures against the occupiers.

Originating from Padma in Natore, Chiknai, one of the important tributaries to Chalan Beel, falls into Boral at Demra point of Faridpur upazila in Pabna.

Md Mizanur Rahman, secretary of the 'Chalan Beel Protection Movement', said the dams on Chiknai would halt the water flow to Chalan Beel, home to at least 40 to 50 local fish species.

Md Azmal Hossain, additional district commissioner (Revenue) in Pabna, said nobody could obstruct the flow of a river.

"As I have come to know about it, we will take legal action against the encroachers," he added.



Encroachers, reportedly ruling party men, have built an embankment across the Chiknai river in Chatmohar of Pabna to make an enclosure for fish farming. Even with such blatant violation of the law, the local administration has done nothing to restore the flow of the river.

PHOTO: STAR

Nobody willing

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the BNP told The Daily Star yesterday, preferring not to be quoted.

When contacted, both Hannan Shah and Rafiqul told The Daily Star on Tuesday that they lack physical fitness for shouldering the responsibility.

"In 1994, I was supposed to be the secretary general of the BNP. How can I carry out the task of overhauling the Dhaka city unit of BNP in 2014?" said 72-year old Rafiqul.

Hannan Shah, 70, said, "Young leaders should be picked for such a huge task of revamping the most crucial unit of the party".

Many city unit leaders, however, say the senior leaders do not want to accept the charge as it would be hard for them to form new committees defying "serious internal conflicts" between Sadeque Hossain Khoka, the convenor of Dhaka city BNP and a vice-chairman of the party, and his archrival Mirza Abbas, a standing committee member.

"Both of them [Khoka and Abbas] have strong influences over different ward and thana committees in city. They will interfere during the formation of new committees and try to maintain their influ-

ence over them," said a city unit BNP leader.

The conflict between the duo became evident soon after the existing convening committee of the city BNP was formed in 2011 with Khoka as the convenor, a post Abbas too had been vying for, according to party insiders. Abdus Salam was made the member secretary of the committee.

Many opposition activists told The Daily Star that Abbas's cell phone was found switched off throughout the day during the much talked about March for Democracy of the BNP on December 29 last year.

It is widely believed within the party that conflicts between Khoka and Abbas is one of the main reasons behind BNP's failure to forge a strong anti-government movement in the capital. Abbas and his men were found almost inactive during the entire phase of movement that was aimed at resisting the January 5 election, which was boycotted by the BNP-led opposition alliance. Eventually, the election was held, the Awami League again formed the government and the BNP ended up having no representation in parliament for the first time since 1991.

The Khoka-led convenor drew flak from the party chief as well.

In Monday's meeting, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia lambasted the convening committee for its "total" failure to form thana and ward committees in the city.

"In some wards and thanas, you [Salam] have formed pocket committees comprising people loyal to you ignoring the dedicated and tested men of the party," president of Mohammadpur thana Jubo Dal Haji Yousuf, who was present at the meeting, quoted Khaleda as saying.

Salam represented the committee in the meeting as Khoka is currently behind bars in eight cases of violence.

Criticising the committee, Khaleda also said, "You have totally failed to wage anti-government movement in the capital. This was because you and your men did not bother to take to the streets during the movement."

Khaleda also accused top leaders of the convening committee of "compromising" with the government, Yusuf told The Daily Star.

In the meeting, Khaleda also announced that she would appreciate only the dedicated, sincere and tested men in the new committee of the BNP's Dhaka city unit.

Key accused

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35, was killed in a gunfight with the joint forces on January 28 at Ziadanga in Abhaynagar.

Mesbah was wanted in a number of cases, including seven for murders, said Khairuddin Mollah, officer-in-charge of Abhaynagar Police Station.

On information, a team of Rab-6 conducted a drive at Panchtala village around 4:30am yesterday when Mesbah was holding a secret meeting with his associates there, said the OC.

Sensing the Rab's presence, his cohorts opened fire on them, triggering a gunfight with the law enforcers.

"Mesbah was caught in the line of fire and died on the spot while other members of the gang managed to escape," the OC said.

A pistol, a one-shooter gun and two bullets were recovered from the spot.

According to locals, Mesbah stepped into the crime world in the early nineties by joining the notorious Hasan-Mizan gang of Shankarpur in Jessore town. He soon engaged himself in crimes like murder and robbery under the leadership of gang leaders Hasan and Mizan, who were brothers.

After the brothers were killed in crossfire in 2009, Mesbah and two of his friends from the gang settled in Dhaka and continued their criminal activities. Two years ago, Mesbah returned to Abhaynagar and formed a new gang, locals said.

India committed to resolving Teesta issue

Manmohan tells Speaker Shirin

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said his country was fully committed to resolving the long-pending issues of Teesta river water-sharing and passage of the land boundary deal in its parliament.

He told this to visiting Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury on Thursday.

It was India's "political commitment" to resolve the issues and the government was continuing efforts for a domestic political consensus on both the issues, mentioned Manmohan.

Main opposition BJP and Trinamool Congress have opposed a constitution amendment bill to approve the LBA demarcating the boundary between the two countries and exchange of 161 enclaves, a spokesman of Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi said.

While Bangladesh has cleared the LBA long ago, Indian parliament is yet to approve it. Repeated attempts by Manmohan's government to place the bill in parliament were thwarted by the BJP, Trinamool Congress and Asom Gana

Parishad in last two years.

During the 30-minute meeting with Shirin, the Indian PM appreciated the steps taken by Sheikh Hasina's government to help the religious minorities in Bangladesh who had come under attacks in the run up to and after the recent parliamentary elections in Bangladesh.

On bilateral trade deficit, Manmohan said India has removed several restrictions on exports from Bangladesh and Bangladeshi businessmen should exploit that opportunity fully. If any further hurdle arises for them in doing that, India is willing to consider that, he added.

The Speaker stressed the need for greater exchange of visits by parliamentarians of India and Bangladesh and sharing of ideas.

Earlier, Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley met Shirin at the Parliament House. The visiting Speaker had met her Indian counterpart Meira Kumar on Wednesday.

She watched Thursday's proceedings of Lok Sabha where she was welcomed by Meira Kumar when the House assembled for the day at 11:00am (IST).

Nizami asked Nurul Amin to oversee

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seven years after the seizure. And finally on January 30 this year, the court found them guilty along with 12 others and handed down death penalty to the 14 in the smuggling case. The court also sentenced them to life in the other case filed for possession of illegal firearms.

The two cases were filed in connection with the April 2, 2004, arms haul. In the early hours on the day, a huge cache of sophisticated arms and ammunition was seized at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd (CUFL). The arms, made in China, were meant for the Indian separatist organisation United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

The court in its verdict said Shueb Ahmed, the then industries secretary, and Maj Gen (ret'd) Mohammad Imamuzzaman, former chairman of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), testified against Nizami.

The duo are socially dignified

persons and are not involved with any political party, said the court, adding that there was no ill-feeling between Nizami and these witnesses. Even Nizami did not mention of any ill-feeling against them in his written argument.

"So I don't think there is any reason to disbelieve their testimonies," said the court.

Shueb, also former adviser to a caretaker government, and Imamuzzaman gave almost similar depositions, it added.

The tribunal said despite being informed of such a big incident, Nizami did not fairly investigate it or take any step on the ministry's behalf.

"He [Nizami] avoided all the responsibilities, saying the home ministry will do whatever is needed. And he left the matter to the then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar.

"This proves that in relation to the incident the industries minister was in collusion with the then state minister

for home," the court said.

Nurul Amin, additional secretary of industries ministry, stayed at the CUFL rest house that falls under the industries ministry. He was tried in absentia and awarded the death sentence.

The court said Nurul had been overseeing the unloading of the weapons on instructions of the higher authorities. "This accused [Nurul] ran away at one stage of further investigation and did not show courage to face trial."

Hafizur Rahman, the prime accused who is a Chittagong-based arms smuggler, in his confessional statement said the CUFL authorities did not obstruct or object to the berthing of trawlers or unloading of the arms.

It is clear from the evidence and Hafizur's statement that the arms were being unloaded following collusion between Nizami, former CUFL managing director Mohsin Uddin Talukder and its general manager KM Enamul Haque. Nizami persuaded them to do

so, the court said.

Mohsin and Enamul were among the 14 sentenced to death.

Referring to the testimonies of several prosecution witnesses, the court said Babar attempted to save the NSI officials involved with the smuggling by not implicating them in the case. He instead had ordered the release of the five people arrested from the CUFL jetty on the night.

According to the verdict, Babar held a meeting at the Police Commissioner's office in Chittagong on the afternoon of April 2 and instructed the police officials concerned not to give any interview with the media, "apprehending the truth will out".

The former state minister also directed his ministry officials not to mention in the probe report NSI's involvement with the incident, said the court, adding, "It clearly shows that the then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar was fully involved with the incident."

KL detains

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the high commission, told The Daily Star over the phone they had no information about the arrest of any Bangladeshis.

The workers are not panicked because of the crackdown, she added.

Earlier on January 21, at least 451 Bangladeshis were detained in the crackdown that began to streamline the Malaysian labour market.

According to a report of the Malaysian English daily The Star, around 4,000 foreign workers of different nationalities were nabbed in police drives between January 21 and February 14.

A large number of detainees were Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka nationals.

These workers did not have valid work permit or had over-stayed their visas, the report said.

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The Vatican said there were around 20,000 future brides and grooms attending from 25 countries, all of them enrolled on Catholic marriage preparation courses.

On a sunny day in Rome, couples were regaled with love songs and dance numbers from the stage in front of St Peter's Basilica and even a stand-up comic cracking jokes about chat-up lines before the pope's arrival.

Couples also told stories about how they first met, including two lovebirds who said they first exchanged glances while admiring the traditional Nativity scene set up on St Peter's Square before Christmas.

"This pope is really close to the way we live, to modern life, the new family, who we are," said Emmanuelle, a 29-year-old from Nantes in France on a Valentine's holiday with her atheist boyfriend Benoit.

Michael, 24, said he had left the Catholic Church because of the scandal of child sex abuse by priests but his fiancée Rosa, 21, was still a believer and said she thought the new pope was "a great, positive change".

Valentine's Day is a secular celebration

even though it celebrates a third century bishop, Saint Valentine, who is believed to have secretly married couples with a Christian rite despite persecution by the Romans.

February 14 was the date of his martyrdom in the year 273.

"Today a lot of people are scared of making definitive choices," the Argentine pope said, adding: "Today everything is changing quickly, nothing lasts long".

"Living together is an art, a patient, beautiful and fascinating journey. It does not end when you conquer each other. In fact it is only just beginning," he said.

"Don't build your house on the sand of sentiments that come and go, but on the rock of real love," he added.

The Vatican invitation to the event organised by the Pontifical Council for the Family was decorated with silhouettes of a man and a woman embracing and a white cross with pink borders against a blue sky backdrop.

The celebration was not open to same-sex couples as Francis is opposed to gay marriage, even though he has called for a more tolerant approach to homosexuals.

Thai govt

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Security forces removed protesters' tents and ripped down their makeshift defences built from barbed wire, sandbags and piles of rubber tyres, according to AFP reporters.

It seems, the government also got the powerful army's backing.

Lt Gen Paradon Patthanathabut, Thailand's national security chief, told CNN that enough was enough. He said the authorities planned to re-take several other government buildings including the interior ministry, and arrest protest leaders.

"Public sentiment now is 'That's enough'. It has gone beyond peaceful protest," he said.

But it was unclear if the operation was a success as demonstrators were later seen rebuilding barricades. Police also pulled back from an occupied

government complex in the north of the city before they could clear the area.

Thailand remains deeply divided more than seven years after a controversial military coup ousted then-premier Thaksin Shinawatra -- Yingluck's brother.

The kingdom has been periodically rocked by mass demonstrations by rival protest groups broadly allied or opposed to the tycoon-turned-politician, who wooed rural voters with policies such as affordable healthcare and micro-loans.

Thaksin is hated by many southerners, middle class Thais and members of the Bangkok elite who see him as authoritarian, corruption and a threat to the revered monarchy.

The deployment of security forces

revived memories of a bloody crackdown on mass pro-Thaksin "Red Shirt" rallies in 2010 under the previous government, using armed troops backed by armoured vehicles.

Unlike on that occasion, when scores were killed, there were no serious injuries in Friday's operation, which targeted an area of the government district where few demonstrators remained, rather than the main rally stages in the heart of the commercial district.

So far the authorities have not announced any plan to clear major intersections in the retail and hotel districts that have become the main focus of the rallies in recent weeks as part of what protesters have described as the "Bangkok shutdown".

Supervisor suspended

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The suspension order came hours after the High Court formed a three-member committee and asked it to confirm in a week as to who were responsible for the torture at the correction centre.

It also directed the authorities to explain in two weeks why their negligence in stopping the torture on those teenagers should not be declared illegal, and why they should not be directed to take steps to address the matter.

The secretaries of social welfare, and women and children affairs ministries, DG of the social welfare department, deputy inspector general of prisons, the DC and the SP of Gazipur and superintendent of the correction centre have been made respondents to the rule.

As part of the investigation, Deputy Commissioner of Gazipur Nurul Islam and

Superintendent of Police Abdul Baten, who are among the probe body members, visited the centre yesterday morning.

Besides, the district administration has formed a committee of five members headed by ADC Shahnawaz to investigate the matter and submit a report within the next seven working days.

Shahnawaz visited the centre on Thursday afternoon.

Quoting the inmates, she said the centre authorities had assaulted the boys and also mentally tortured them for not complying with the rules.

"They found no other way to protest. They want removal of the supervisor-in-charge," Shahnawaz said.

The injured were rushed to Tongi Government Hospital where their wounds were stitched up. They are now at the centre.