

# Oil spill getting larger

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Andharmanik and Nandobala.  
The forest department, which lacks logistics to deal with such a situation, could do nothing to stop oil from spreading through the river and canal networks of the mangrove forest.

"Mrigamari is a sanctuary for dolphins. It is tough to determine what kind of disaster the accident would bring to the vulnerable Sundarbans," said Amir Hossain Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of Chandpai (Eastern Range) of the Sundarbans.

It would leave a severe impact on the aquatic animals and fishes of the Sundarbans, he said.

Dr Dilip Kumar Dutta, professor of environmental science at Khulna University, said spill of such a huge quantity of oil would take a heavy toll on the mangrove forest and its wildlife.

During high tide, water from the Bay of Bengal would carry oil to the forest floor, and it would hamper the breathing process of mangrove plants.

Neither the forest department nor the Mongla Port Authority has the capacity to remove the oil from water, he said.

If the oil is not removed, it would take a long time to leach out naturally since there is not much pressure of water from the upstream which could flush out oil to the Bay.

Of the eight crew of Southern Star-7, master Mokhesur Rahman remained missing while seven swam ashore.

The tanker went down after a cargo vessel hit it from behind.

A team of Coast Guard and forest officials went to the spot to search for the missing man, said Mehedi Masud, commanding officer of the Coast Guard in Mongla.

He said Messrs Harun and Company, which owns the tanker, already hired a shipping company to launch an operation this morning to salvage the sunken vessel and stop the oil spill.

The tanker, which was carrying oil to Gopalganj from Padma Oil Depot in Khulna, anchored at Joymonir Ghol in the Sundarbans due to dense fog on Monday night, Md Giasuddin, managing director of Messrs Harun and Company, told The Daily Star.

Fearing such accidents, environmentalists have been demanding that the government must ensure no vessels ply through the Sundarbans.

Though it is illegal for commercial vessels to ply through protected forests, hundreds of vessels have been using the Shela river as an alternative route for the last few years since the Mongla-Chasiakhali channel lost navigability.



Cargo vessels and oil tankers sail across the Shela river crisscrossing the Sundarbans, posing a risk of ecological disaster to the world's largest mangrove forest through spill of oil and other harmful substances and sound pollution that can scare away wild animals.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Will gift work?

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Yet the man did not face the music for breaking the service rules.

Last month, the government sent three top government officials into forced retirement for obtaining war heroes' certificates fraudulently.

Presently, Wahidur is serving his one-year contract at the same office. His contract ends tomorrow, but he remains highly optimistic about another extension, LGED sources said, wishing anonymity.

One of his latest ventures has been buying a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) for about Tk 3.5 crore with funds from the Primary Education Development Programme-3 (PEDP-3). Under the rules, purchasing cars under the project is illegal.

The 4WD Cross Country Vehicle (Dhaka Metro Gha 13-9100) was registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority on 21 September.

Sources in the LGED said the vehicle was then given to the LGRD minister for his use.

This correspondent saw the min-

ister going to the secretariat on November 24 and also on Monday by that car.

Wahidur oversaw the purchase of this car even as the ACC holds him responsible for illegally buying three luxury vehicles at Tk 11.6 crore in March 2012 using PEDP funds.

Almost a year ago, the investigating officer submitted the probe report over the purchase of these three cars, seeking the commission's permission for filing a case. But the officer is yet to get the ACC nod, officials said.

Asked about the delay, ACC Chairman Mohammad Badiuzzaman said he would look into the matter. He declined to comment why it is taking so long.

This newspaper called Wahidur several times yesterday, but he did not pick up the phone. He also did not respond to the text message, requesting his comment on the matter.

Under various LGED projects, there are about 450 cars. Of them, at least 60 are being illegally used by

ministers, prime minister's advisers and top government officials, according to the sources.

The PEDP is tasked with improving school infrastructures by constructing or upgrading classrooms and labs, teachers and students' hostels, water and sanitation facilities and playground to facilitate admission of more students. At the moment, the highest number of vehicles being illegally used was bought under this project.

Project cars are purchased with government and foreign funds for specific projects implemented by the LGED, which is under the LGRD ministry. These cars are meant solely for project officials.

The proposal for buying the latest car in question was submitted to the LGRD ministry in May this year. The proposal said the car was needed for the project's implementation.

The document prepared by the ministry over this proposal shows that both the LGED and the LGRD ministry concede that car purchase under the project was against the

rules.

According to the document, obtained by The Daily Star, the price of the car was fixed at Tk 99,65,000, excluding the registration cost, CD VAT, IT and source tax.

Including all these cost, the car price stood at about Tk 3.5 crore, LGED sources said.

Ministry sources said some top LGRD officials verbally requested the Senior Secretary to the ministry Manjur Hossain not to approve the proposal, as the ACC was already investigating the 2012 purchase of three vehicles.

Contacted, Manjur yesterday said he had nothing to do when the minister himself approved the purchase.

This correspondent called the minister on Monday, but he did not pick up the phone. A text message seeking his comment on Monday night on the matter went unanswered.

In addition to this recently bought car, Ashraf is using two more project cars -- Dhaka Metro Gha 13-6110 and Dhaka Metro Gha 11-3779,

the sources said.

Allegations of misuse of taxpayers' money by the LGED officials are rife.

In July last year, a study by the Transparency International, Bangladesh found contractors have to pay up to 30 percent in commission to lawmakers, politicians and government officials to secure an LGED project.

It also said political influence, interference by ministries and lack of proper monitoring, evaluation, audit and transparency are the main reasons behind irregularities and corruption in the LGED.

According to the study, since the establishment of the LGED in 1992, as many as 1,772 audit objections involving Tk 1,369 crore remained unresolved till fiscal 2011-2012.

On institutional corruption, it says the chief engineer abuses power to control promotion, postings and transfer. Besides, LGED officials use official cars for private purposes, and even take money by showing fake bills for car repairs.

# Millionaire

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village and give everybody a place of their own to live.

Five years ago, the area was run down and many lived in basic homes. But the area has been transformed in recent years and now 72 families are enjoying life in luxury new flats.

Meanwhile, 18 families, who were particularly kind to the businessman, were given villas of their own in a project costing close to £4million.

After moving in, he even promised three meals a day to the older residents and people on a low income to make sure they could get by.

The multimillionaire made his money first of all in the construction industry and later by getting involved in the steel trade.

He said: "I earned more money than I knew what to do with, and I didn't want to forget my roots.

"I always pay my debts, and wanted to make sure the people who helped me when I was younger and my family were paid back."

Elderly local Qiong Chu, 75, said: "I remember his parents. They were kind-hearted people who cared very much for others, and it's great that their son has inherited that kindness."

# Cell phones so cheap!

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"Basically we buy the old phones, which still have a chance of working," said phone trader Yunus, who lives in Old Dhaka with his wife and a child.

Hailing from Munshiganj, Yunus, 33, started this business more than a year ago. He said the display panel, battery, mic, speakers and bezels of old and broken phones could often be reused.

"In some cases, we just replace the parts that are broken with parts of another phone and sell them.

"Sometimes, we just change the bezel of a phone with one in good condition," he said, adding, "I don't have any training."

Even the phones that are written off have value. Their circuit boards are sold in

bulks in Nimtoli area, said Yunus.

Another hawker, Shimul said customers are allowed to check the phones or any other goods before buying. "Once bought, there is no guarantee and no refund," he said.

He said he sold two mobile phones for Tk 300 each and each of the phones fetched a profit of Tk 75.

A few feet away, Anwar Hossain was hawking phones. Some new smart phones were put on display on a tiny table, all for sale.

"An iPhone [fake] will cost Tk 8,000 while the HTC One [fake] will be [Tk] 7,500," he replied promptly when asked. "These are Chinese sets. I have bought these from a wholesale market," he said.

After some haggling, a customer

bought a phone for Tk 2,000. "The set looks good and it has the features I need," the customer said.

Phones and their accessories are, however, not the only products sold there.

A dazzling array of old and a few new electronic goods like VCD players, cassette players, cameras, radios, small TV sets, computer parts, irons, table fans, rechargeable emergency lights, torches, stereo speakers, woofers, and hairdryers are also there on sale.

A cassette player could be bought for Tk 150 to Tk 500, speakers for Tk 400 to Tk 600, while a small fan costs just Tk 200. A table fan for Tk 800 to Tk 1,000, a food blender for Tk 350, all in good condition, more or less.

Abdus Sattar was seen haggling over a

cassette player with a couple running the shop. At one point, it was sold for Tk 100.

Sattar seemed happy. "The cassette player is broken but I can still use it as a radio. A new radio will cost me more than Tk 1,000," he said.

The seller, who was hesitant to tell his name after knowing the identity of this correspondent, said, "I sold a blender for Tk 350, two rechargeable lights for Tk 400 and a fan for Tk 200. From the sale, I had a profit of about Tk 400."

The trade has been the main source of livelihood of around 200 hawkers.

The traders said they pay Tk 70 as rent every day and Tk 20 for electricity. "A designated officer from the administration takes the money," said one of them, declining to mention the name of the officer or where he works.

# 2014 a devastating year for children: UN

AFF, United Nations

2014 has been a devastating year for children with up to 15 million swept up in wars in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Ukraine, the UN children's agency said Monday.

"Never in recent memory have so many children been subjected to such unspeakable brutality," UN director Anthony Lake said.

"Children have been killed while studying in the classroom and while sleeping in their beds; they have been orphaned, kidnapped, tortured, recruited, raped and even sold as slaves."

"This has been a devastating year for millions of children," he said.

Globally, 230 million children currently live in countries and areas engulfed in violent conflict, according to Unicef.

The wars in Syria and Iraq, which have seen the rise of the Islamic State group, have left children in the clutches of increasingly brutal and extreme violence, the agency said.

More than 7.3 million children are affected by the war in Syria and 2.7 million in Iraq.



In Gaza, 54,000 children remain homeless from the 50-day war between Israel and Hamas militants that ended in August. Of the more than 2,000 dead from the fighting, 538 were children.

Up to 10,000 children have been recruited by armed groups in the Central African Republic over the past year and more than 430 children have been killed and maimed -- three times as many as last year.

In South Sudan, which has been engulfed in a year-long war, 235,000 children under five are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, while 750,000 have been displaced and more than 320,000 are living as refugees.

South Sudan armed forces and groups have recruited around 12,000

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# Delay due to ministry

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party support. And this would help neutralise BNP-led 20-party alliances' possible anti-government movement in the capital.

Senior AL leaders think that with the announcement of DCC election schedules, most of the top leaders of the BNP in the city would start taking preparations for the polls, distancing themselves from the movement preparations.

"If the Awami League can resist BNP's upcoming movement in Dhaka, district level movements will also go off automatically," said a senior minister, preferring anonymity.

AL Joint General Secretary

Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star that the AL would remain active in the streets as the party will be holding district councils in next couple of months. If anyone tries to destabilise the government, party men would resist them, he added.

The last election to the undivided DCC was held in April 2002 and its tenure expired on May 2007. On November 4, 2011, the government split the DCC into two and appointed two administrators to run them.

But the elections to the Dhaka north and south city corporations could not be held due to different complexities like court verdicts and boundary demarcation.



Iron sheets have been placed over the manhole, left without a lid for more than a month, near an underpass on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue to warn pedestrians.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN