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Jaflong RAVAGED

Stone traders turn beautiful Pyain river into mining site; labourers, not tourists, flock to the place

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and MINTU DESHWARA, back from Sylhet

"Man, do not pride yourself on your superiority to the animals, for they are without sin, while you, with all your greatness, you defile the earth wherever you appear and leave an ignoble trail behind you."

-- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.
Jaflong Zero Point in Sylhet is a horrid example of how cruel man can be to nature and environment.

Once a popular tourist destination with a river and hills and hillocks, it is now a mess of machines and man's greed.

Power pumps rumbling on the sandbars in the Pyain river, hundreds of people busy around wells dug with excavators, trucks waiting on the banks, boats anchored at a distance -- all for one thing: extracting stones from the riverbed and transporting those.

The place that once used to remain abuzz with nature-lovers now only sees assemblage of labourers.

The illegal mechanised stone extraction is virtually destroying the beauty of the tourist attraction and this is happening under the very nose of the administration.

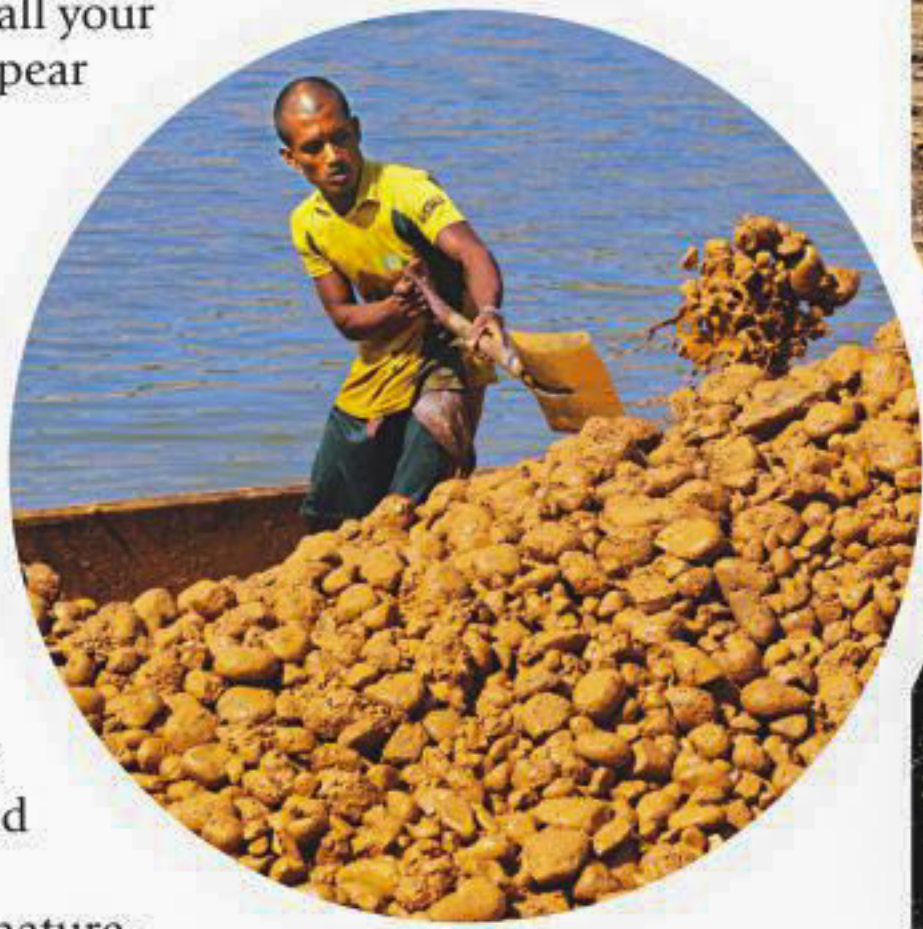
A section of unscrupulous businessmen, allegedly in collusion with the local administration and the ruling party men, is collecting stone from the Pyain using machines, including excavators, in complete violation of a High Court verdict.

Following a public interest litigation initiated by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela), the HC in January 2010 declared illegal stone extraction using excavators or any other machine from the beds of three

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The once pristine Pyain river now looks like a quarry at Jaflong Zero Point in Sylhet. Illegal mechanised stone extraction, extremely noisy crushers on the shore, workers pumping water out and busy heavy equipment have robbed the river of its beauty. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

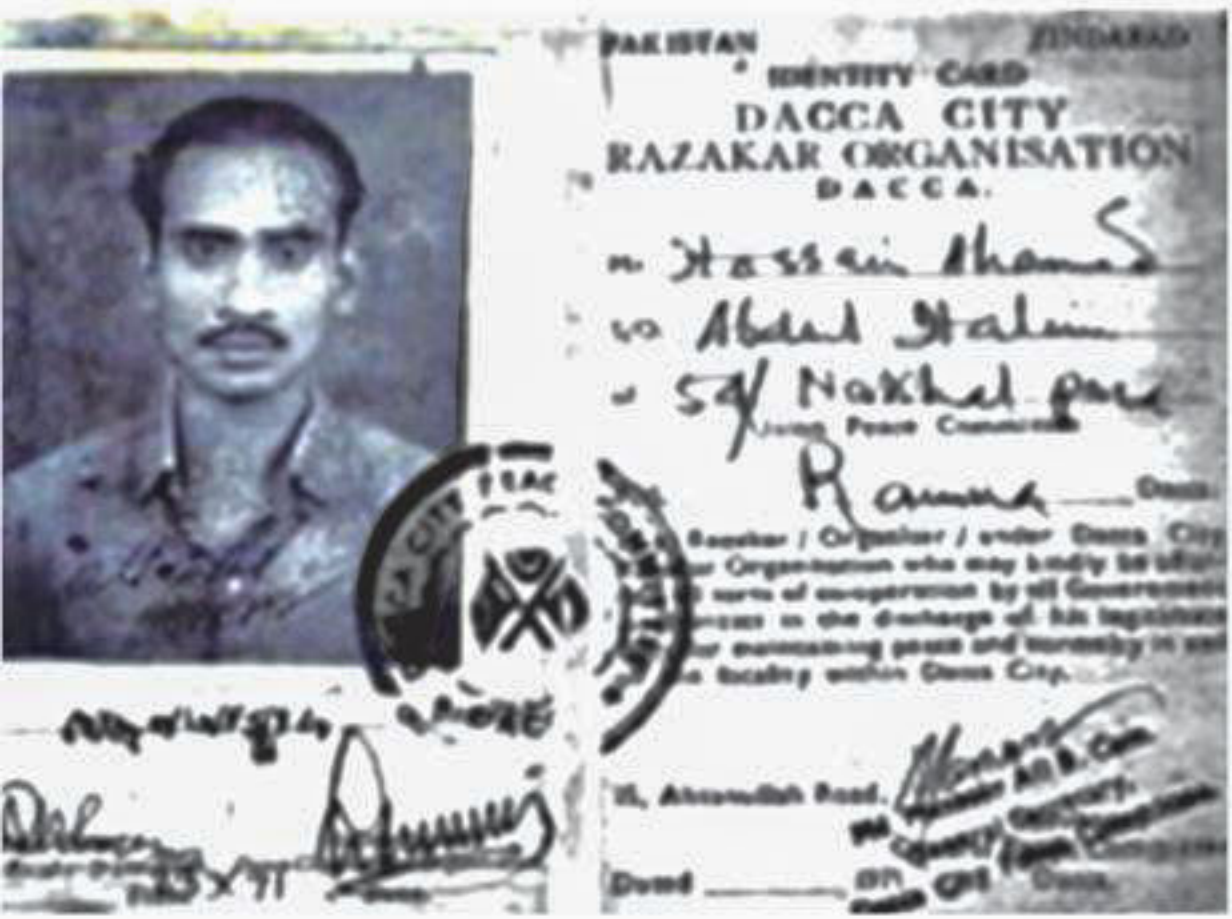


PAKISTAN LYING, STILL

We have used Pakistani sources--books written by Pakistani military officers involved in the operations in East Pakistan in 1971 and the report of a chief justice of Pakistan--to compile these reports to show the extent and complicity of the Pakistan Government and its military in the genocide, destruction, and uprooting of tens of millions of Bangalis in 1971. The facts speak for themselves.

Partners in the genocide

Hated by people, Pak army raised Razakars to gain control



ID card of a Razakar

INAM AHMED and SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Pakistan army was a hated name in Bangladesh. It had no public support. Every village actually sheltered freedom fighters waiting to ambush the invading enemy.

It dawned on the Pakistani rulers that without support from the locals it was impossible to continue its military campaign.

The Pakistan army would flinch at the slightest rustle of the leaves. Any sudden noise in the trees would make them jump out of their skin. The freedom fighters were training hard with weapons from India. They would make hit-and-run ambushes, making it difficult for the Pakistan army to venture deep into the villages.

Waging war against such a hostile people became a psychological war for the Pakistan army.

Brigadier General Siddik Salik, who had worked as the Pakistan army's public relations officer, reflected on the nervousness of the troops in his book "Witness to surrender".

"Let me describe here the march of one column from Dacca to Tangail on 1 April, which I accompanied," he wrote. "... Nothing was to escape their wrath. Behind infantry column was a battery of filed guns which fired a few shells at suitable intervals in the general direction of the move. The infantry column opened up on the slightest pretext or suspicion. A stir in a bunch of trees or a little rustle

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Govt assessing ties with Pakistan

Says foreign minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali yesterday said Bangladesh was evaluating its relationship with Pakistan and thinking about measures that could be taken over Pakistan's reaction to the execution of two war criminals last month.

"We're evaluating our relations with them [Pakistan]. We're also thinking of what needs to be done. But the entire thing is a continuous process," he said while addressing a discussion in the city's WVA auditorium.

Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee organised the discussion titled "Relationship between Bangladesh-India in the Touchstone of Time" with

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Right thinking Pakistanis acknowledge '71 brutalities

Says Pak rights activist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"Right thinking people of Pakistan" acknowledge and accept the brutalities done to the people of Bangladesh during the military action in 1971, said Pakistani human rights activist Hina Jilani.

Jilani, chairperson of South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), made the comment in reply to a question about Pakistani government's recent denial of the genocide its army committed in Bangladesh during the Liberation War in 1971.

She was speaking at a press conference titled

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MAYORAL CANDIDATES

17 of BNP, 3 of AL disqualified

STAR REPORT

The nomination papers of 17 mayoral candidates backed by the BNP and three endorsed by the Awami league have been declared void.

During the scrutiny of nomination papers yesterday and on Saturday, Returning Officers (ROs) also disqualified at least 33 rebel aspirants of the ruling party.

Among the BNP dissidents, 31 have been denied candidacy, The Daily Star learnt from its correspondents and other sources in some 120 municipalities.

Apart from these, 18 mayor hopefuls from the Jatiya Party, nine from the Jamaat-e-Islami and 33 others, including independent contenders, have failed to get the RO's clearance to contest the December 30 elections.

Thursday was the deadline for filing the



nominations of mayor and councillor candidates in the 235 municipalities. Mayor contenders will for the first time fight the battle of ballots with their party symbols. The councillor aspirants, however, will have to remain happy with non-party symbols.

Those denied candidature can challenge the RO's decisions to the deputy commissioners of the districts concerned within three days. Then the DCs will have another three days to dispose of the appeals.

On Saturday, the Election Commission disqualified BNP candidates in Chandpur's Chengarchar and Feni's Parshuram municipalities from running the polls.

If the decisions are upheld after the appeals, the AL candidates there will be declared elected unopposed. There are no other mayor aspirants in the municipalities.

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Facebook asked to filter content

Govt meets Facebook reps for the first time, requests it to set up office in Dhaka

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The government yesterday met Facebook executives for the first time to express its concerns about the negative impacts of the popular social platform and claimed that it was threatening national security.

The representatives of Facebook held at least two meetings with government high-ups yesterday and they were asked to set up an office in Bangladesh, take measures to filter local content, and share information with the government about users who post content that threaten the country's security.

The government put emphasis on contents related to religious provocation, cruelty against women, and conspiracy against the state.

Vikram Langeh, law enforcement specialist of Facebook in South Asia, and Deepali Liberhan, public policy manager for the region, attended a long meeting with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal at his office.



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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has a look around inside the cockpit of the newly commissioned maritime search and rescue helicopter Hel Augusta AW-139 at Air Base Bangabandhu in Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO



"I handed over power to protect the constitution and democracy."

JATIYA PARTY CHAIRMAN HM ERSHAD

At a programme marking December 6, which his party observes as "Constitution Protection Day", Ershad's autocratic rule ended on this day in 1990. The nation observes it as "Democracy Restoration Day"