



This sign beside the Pyain river in Jaflong Zero Point in Sylhet warns visitors of turbulent water. However, in many places the river has lost its strong current, inset, due to illegal mechanised stone extraction. The photos were taken recently.

Jaflong ravaged

FROM PAGE 1
Sylhet rivers -- Pyain, Dawki and Dhalai.

The court also directed the government to immediately remove all the machines from there to protect ecosystem, biodiversity and livelihoods of people living along the rivers.

During a recent visit to the area, these correspondents found labourers using a number of excavators to dig big holes on the sandbars popped up in the Pyain and several dozen machines to pump water out.

A large number of stone crushers were set up on the riverside hillocks. The round stones collected from the riverbed were being crushed into chips to be transported to different parts of the country for use in construction work.

On condition of anonymity, a stone trader said 90 percent businessmen there extract stone using mechanised equipment illegally.

"There is a syndicate, dominated by the ruling party leaders here. They collect money from the businessmen and pay the local administration officials from that.

Each businessman has to pay between Tk 20,000 and Tk 25,000 per day for using a dredger machines locally known as Boma Machine, he said. "No one can run businesses without paying the bribes."

Altaf Hossain, a boatman, said the stone extraction started in mid-September this season and would

continue till the monsoon begins.

Though this is the peak of tourist season, only a handful of visitors could be seen there.

Jahidul Islam, who runs a tiny restaurant on the riverbank, said his business declined sharply in the past two-three years as the tourists' flow dropped.

"Most of the people who come here now are labourers. We see only a handful of tourists in a day."

Shah Shaheda Akhter, coordinator of Sylhet division chapter of the Bela, is shocked to see how the administration is ignoring the HC order.

"If someone without prior knowledge of Jaflong goes there, they might mistake the place for some industrial area."

"We repeatedly asked the authorities concerned to do something but some sort of reluctance is evident in their attitude," Shaheda added.

The indiscriminate stone extraction is hurting the adjacent tea gardens as well.

Authorities of Jaflong Tea Garden filed a general diary on September 12 with Gowainghat Police Station, saying around 300 acres of the tea estate had already been devoured by the river due to stone extraction.

They mentioned names of 32 people as the ones responsible for this. The Daily Star has a copy of the GD.

The garden authorities also requested the local administration to take necessary steps to save the century-old tea estate from destruc-



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Star LIVE

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PART 1

PART 2

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tion. Then again, extraction of stones using machines and unplanned dumping of the sand obstructs the water flow of the river and eventually change its

course, said Abdul Karim Kim, member secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon's Sylhet chapter.

"The Dawki river is almost dead due to the unplanned stone extraction from its bed."

The stone crushers cause sound and environmental pollution and health hazards, Karim said.

In the face of pressures from the media and environmentalists, the administration sometimes conducts drives, "which in many cases are merely an eyewash," Kim alleged.

"If anyone wants to go to Jaflong, I simply tell them, 'You can go there not to see the nature but to witness how the beautiful nature is being destroyed,'" he said.

Director Saleh Uddin of the Department of Environment in Sylhet, however, refuted all the allegations.

He claimed he hadn't seen any excavators or stone-carrying boats during a recent visit there.

"They [environmentalists] always blame the administration when they speak to the media. But they do not play any role in protecting the environment," he alleged.

Asked about the complaints of Jaflong Tear Garden authorities, Officer-in-Charge Abdul Hye of Gowainghat Police Station, said they had conducted raids in the area on several occasions.

"But somehow they had got information about the raid beforehand and removed the equipment before we

17 of BNP, 3 of AL

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A number of AL rebels, meanwhile, alleged that the returning officers rejected their nomination papers on pressure from the local ruling party leaders.

Rejaul Islam Sangram, an AL-dissident mayor aspirant in Munshiganj municipality, said he was denied candidature over a case in which he was acquitted one and a half years ago.

"But the Returning Officer declared my nomination void, saying I was still accused in that case."

"It is not my fault that the local police station didn't send the information to the election authorities that I was acquitted in the case," he told The Daily Star, adding that he would appeal against the RO's decision.

Jalal Uddin Rumi, a leader of the pro-AL Jubo League in the same municipality, said the RO rejected his nomination papers on being influenced by the local AL leaders.

Mohammad Fazle Azim, the returning officer, however said Jalal had not submitted the list of supporters on his behalf, which a must for contesting the polls.

The municipalities where BNP mayoral contenders were denied candidacies include Sariakandi of Bogra, Pirojpur, Golapganj in Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Kamalganj of Moulvibazar, Gopalganj, and Dhonbari of Tangail.

The places where AL favourites failed to get the RO's clearance are Shariatpur and Damudda of Shariatpur and Dhonbari of Tangail.

If the disqualifications are upheld in the appeal, both the AL and its political foe BNP will extend their support to the dissident candidates in these areas.

BNP insiders said they would wait till December 13, the deadline for withdrawing nominations, and then would decide whom they would endorse.

A total of 1,223 mayoral aspirants filed nomination papers for the municipal elections.

Another 9,798 nominations were

NOMINATION CANCELLATION	
(mayoral aspirants)	
AWAMI LEAGUE	3
AWAMI LEAGUE REBEL	33
BNP	17
BNP REBEL	31
JATIYA PARTY	18
JAMAAT MEN	9
OTHERS	33

(BASED ON INFORMATION FROM 120 MUNICIPALITIES)

submitted for the councillor posts and 2,668 for the reserved (women) councillor posts.

EC NOTICE TO THREE MPS

Three MPs have been served show-cause notices by the Election Commission for violation of the electoral code of conduct.

They are Safiqul Islam Shimul from Natore-2, MA Malek from Dhaka-20 and Shawkat Hasnur Rahman from Barguna-2, all ruling party lawmakers.

They have been asked to reply within three days, said EC Deputy Secretary Shamsul Alam.

The code of conduct bars MPs from joining any sort of election activities.

Ignoring the provision, Malek and Shimul on Thursday accompanied AL-nominated candidates when they submitted their nomination papers.

Shawkat, on the other hand, took an AL-backed mayor contender to Barguna from Dhaka in his car the same day, according to media reports. Our correspondents in the districts

Right thinking Pakistanis

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"South Asian Peace Mission" organised by SAHR at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday.

SAHR is a regional network committed to addressing human rights issues at both national and regional levels.

Hina said the struggle for freedom of the Bangladeshis in fact gave many Pakistanis the courage to question the oppressive military government.

In reply to another question on the Pakistan government's interference in the trial of the war criminals of Bangladesh, Hina said that as a Pakistani citizen and a human rights defender, she believed in the importance of transitional justice, but the process of justice must conform to all standards of law.

She also said her government needed

to do some "introspection" before commenting on the legal process of another country.

Leading an eight-member delegation from Pakistan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, Hina came here on a two-day peace mission to bring the message of regional peace and solidarity amongst South Asian civil societies.

At yesterday's press conference, Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra and also a Bureau Member of SAHR, Bangladesh, talked about the regional human rights network. She said it envisages "a region that promotes, protects, and respects women's human rights as equal citizens and where women's contributions in peace building are not only recognised, but also actively facilitated".

Govt assessing ties

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the committee's adviser Justice Syed Amirul Islam in the chair.

The discussion marked the 44th anniversary of the recognition of Bangladesh as an independent country by India. Hours after Bhutan's recognition, India recognised Bangladesh as an independent country on December 6, 1971.

The foreign minister said many Pakistanis, including human rights activist Asma Jahangir and journalist Hamid Mir, admitted that war crimes were committed in 1971.

He said former Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf also apologised for his country's role in 1971. "Now there is no point of denying it that they didn't do anything. It's ridiculous."

On November 22, Pakistan's foreign ministry in a statement voiced "deep concern and anguish" over the capital punishments of Jamaat leader Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury.

It prompted Bangladesh to summon the Pakistan envoy in Dhaka for lodging a formal protest the next day.

In an apparent response to Bangladesh's move, Pakistan on November 30 summoned acting high commissioner of Bangladesh Maushumi Rahman to its foreign ministry and denied committing any war crimes or atrocities during the 1971 Liberation War.

Pakistan also rejected Bangladesh's statement that trashed Islamabad's concern over the recent executions of Mojaheed and Salauddin.

Pakistan's moves triggered outrage in Bangladesh as war crimes trial campaigners accused the country of "resorting to falsehood" over its role in 1971.

On Bangladesh-India relations, the foreign minister said the relations between the two countries have reached a new height after 1975. "The problems between Bangladesh

and India are psychological and need to be resolved with everyone's participation."

Describing various aspects of the relationship, he said the Bangladesh Visa Office in Agartala had been upgraded to an assistant high commission and an assistant high commissioner took over charge yesterday.

Eminent historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon said the relationship between Bangladesh and India went through many ups and downs over the years. He urged the authorities to solve the problems like visa and border killings.

The historian suggested that the government become more vocal in the international arena against Pakistan over the crimes it had committed during 1971.

Prof Ajoy Roy, president of Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minority and also father of slain blogger Avijit Roy, called upon the new generation to confront religious fanatics.

Shyamoli Nasrin Chowdhury, vice-president of Ektattor Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, also spoke at the programme.

Tourist hurt in Athens clashes

AFP, Athens

Clashes erupted between police and youths in central Athens early Sunday, leaving a tourist lightly injured, as Greek demonstrators prepared to mark seven years since police shot dead a teenager.

The tourist, a Portuguese national, was hit in the head by a stone as he passed through the Exarcheia neighbourhood where police were locked in clashes with stone-throwing youths.

The neighbourhood is a popular meeting point for anarchists and the place where 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot dead by police on December 6, 2008.

Partners in the genocide

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in the bari was enough to evoke a burst of automatic fire or at least a rifle shot. The searching troops passed through it, putting a match to the thatched huts and the adjoining bamboo plants. As soon as they advanced ahead, a bamboo stick burst with a crack because of the heat of the fire; everybody took it as a rifle shot by some hidden 'miscreants'.

This caused their weight of the entire column to be riveted on the locality and all sorts of weapons fired in to the trees.

Pakistan's only mentionable political friend in then East Pakistan was Jamaat-e-Islami, which vowed to lend all-out support for the unity of Pakistan. But Jamaat was a despicable organisation despised by the people.

So, Pakistan needed a local armed force which would guide it through the unknown terrain and fight a proxy war. It is then that Pakistan thought of raising an auxiliary force called the Rajakars, which ultimately played a vital role in the killings, lootings and raping of the Bangalis.

It is therefore a must to revisit the roles that Rajakars played. They acted on behalf of and at the instruction of the Pakistan army to commit these crimes against humanity.

And it is these Rajakar leaders and other collaborators that Bangladesh is holding trials of and it is these same people that Pakistan is showing anguish and grief for.

In fact, General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi dedicated his book "The Betrayal of East Pakistan", among others, to these Razakars who he thought had fought valiantly for Pakistan.

He wrote: "Although their recruitment had started earlier, sanction for the raising of this force was given at the end of August 1971. A separate Razakar Directorate was established,

and the whole set-up started taking proper shape. Two separate wings called -- Al-Badr and Al-Shams were organised."

He further described that the two wings had separate functions -- Al-Badr was for "specialized operations" of which Jamaat leader Matiur Rahman Nizami was the chief and the just-hanged war criminal Mojaheed second-in-command while "Al-Shams ... was responsible for the protection of bridge, vital points and other areas."

Niazi, the man who led the Pakistan army in Bangladesh, described that the Razakars were mostly employed in areas where army elements were around to control and utilise them. "Seventy percent of the target ceiling of 50,000 Razakars, spread over all the districts of the province, was achieved. Battle schools were established to train Razakar platoon and company commanders," he wrote.

The regular army felt comfortable to take Razakar platoons along during operations.

"The border outposts were mainly to be manned by the Mijahidis, Razakars, Scouts and Rangers, who were also to protect the lines of communications," Niazi wrote. "They did an admirable job."

Siddiq Salik, too, wrote about the necessity of the Razakars. He said the Pakistan army during their operations had "indulged in looting, killing and rape".

"These atrocities naturally alienated the Bengali population. They were not very fond of us before, but now they hated us bitterly. Hence, there was no question of mass cooperation by the Bengalis. Only those people joined hands with us who, in the name of Islam and Pakistan, were prepared to risk everything," he wrote.

These "patriotic elements" were organised into two groups. The

elderly and prominent among them formed Peace Committees while the young and able-bodied were recruited as Razakars.

"The committees were formed in Dacca as well as in the rural areas and they served as a useful link between the Army and the local people," Salik maintained.

"Razakars were raised to augment the strength of the West Pakistani troops and to give a sense of participation to the local population," he wrote.

What kind of "participation" these Rajakars and Al-Badr men did is known to the world now. Al-Badr, as part of Tikka Khan's scorched earth policy, drew up a list of intellectuals and picked them up in the middle of December when it was evident that Pakistan was going to lose the war.

The best minds of the soil -- writers, teachers, editors and intellectuals -- were taken to Rayer Bazar and Mirpur where they were shot and bayoneted to death on December 14. Their bodies were discovered later, though the whereabouts of many still remain unknown.

Al-Badr chief Nizami, now awaiting death sentence, has been charged with the killings of intellectuals, murders of 450 civilians and rape in Bausgari and Demra, killings of 52 people in Dhulaura, killings of 10 people and rape of three women in Karamja in Pabna. He's been awarded death sentence in all these charges.

He was also sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of involvement in the killing of Kasim Uddin and two others, and Sohrab Ali in Pabna, and torture and killing at Mohammadpur Physical Training Centre in Dhaka.

Mojaheed was hanged for leading the killings of intellectuals and other atrocities.

Salik also mentioned the other

important collaborators who aided the genocide campaign.

"The Bengalis, by and large, still cherished the hope of Mujib's return and assumed an attitude of passive indifference. The only people who came forward were the rightists like Khaja Khairuddin of the Council Muslim League, Fazlul Quader Chowdhury of the Convention of Muslim League, Khan Sobour A. Khan of the Qayyum Muslim League, Professor Ghulam Azam of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Maulvi Farid Ahmed of the Nizam-e-Islam Party," he wrote.

Fazlul Quader Chowdhury is the father of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury who was recently hanged for his war crimes.

Bangladesh would not forget the brutalities these collaborators had perpetrated for their masters, the Pakistan army and the Pakistani rulers.

Clarification, our reply

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal has given a clarification in response to our report published in The Daily Star on Thursday with the headline "Govt using Facebook".

The clarification, sent by the ministry's Public Relation Officer M Shefaet Hossain, said the minister never uses Facebook nor has he authorised any person to use Facebook on his behalf.

OUR REPLY

There are at least three Facebook accounts found in Mustafa Kamal's name and all the pages have photographs of the minister and his family members with updates of his daily activities. The clarification, however, did not mention about taking measures against those accounts which, as per the clarification, are not his.