



Sand being extracted from the Dharla river in Boalmari char of Lalmonirhat and loaded on to a tractor trailer. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

LALMONIRHAT RIVERS

Illegal sand lifting poses erosion threat

S DILIP ROY with Andrew Eagle

Up to 17 times a day tractor driver Nabir Hossain from Kulaaghat village in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila carts a trailer-load of sand away from the Darla riverbed. "Each trailer load sells for up to Tk. 1,400 on the mainland," he says. Like Hossain many locals earn their keep as labourers engaged in the illegal sand trade, a business that dooms both the Darla and Teesta rivers to increased erosion, especially during the rainy season.

"We get about Tk. 400 per day for shifting sand," says tractor labourer Moslem Uddin of the same village. "Each tractor has about 5 labourers including the driver." Asked where the rest of the profits from the sand trading end up, Moslem says that most of it lines the pockets of local musclemen and tractor owners.

"The illegal mining is creating holes in the riverbed," says another local Sohel Rana. "These holes obstruct the natural water flow during rainy season,

causing the river to realign its banks and threaten our embankments, croplands and homes."

Along the length of the Teesta River the situation is the same. "Even the Lalmonirhat to Burimari highway is at high risk of being eroded because of the activities of the illegal sand traders," says Sabur Ali of Paruliya village in Hatibandha upazila.

"There's no planning to the sand mining," complains Delowar Hossain from Kalmati village in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila. "If sand was mined in a structured way it might not be as harmful to the river's natural flow."

Yet according to Delowar, even being aware of the problems locals do not dare to protest against the illegal mining due to the involvement of musclemen supported by both the AL and BNP political parties.

Curiously, Water Development Board (WDB) officials similarly keep silent. For reasons unknown they do not take any measures to bring the brisk and illegal sand business, carried

out entirely in the open, to a halt.

In Hatibandha upazila's Paruliya village, Akkas Ali rents his tractor to the sand traders for up to Tk. 1,500 per day. "A local man hires the tractor from morning until evening," he says.

Alleged sand lifter Mansur Ali who is also the AL ward president in Paruliya says he earns up to Tk 600 per day from trading river sand. "It's not illegal to take sand from the river," he claims.

According to WDB officials at least one hundred tractors are daily engaged in sand mining operations from riverbeds in 20 areas across the district. Within the last few months thousands of holes in the riverbeds have been excavated, sources estimate.

The sub-divisional engineer of the WDB in Lalmonirhat, Md Al-Mamun says the WDB authority has already informed the local administration of the problem and he hopes the administration will take legal action to stop the unsanctioned sand min-

Christian trader killed in Natore

FROM PAGE 1

Natore.

There were hacking marks in his neck, said police.

Law enforcers picked up Sabuz Hossain, 35, a tenant of Sunil, on suspicion over the killing.

The area where Sunil, father of two, lived for years is predominantly Christian. His grocery shop was adjacent to his house, said locals.

Hours after the incident, global terror outfit Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the killing, according to SITE Intelligence Group that monitors terrorist activities.

Apart from this one, as many as 13 more attacks since the beginning of this year had suspected militant links.

Inam Ahmed, inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department in Rajshahi, who visited the crime scene, said the attack had similarities with previous militant attacks on free thinkers and people belonging to differing faiths.

Sunil's wife Jasinta Gomez had gone to her father's house in Pabna to see an ailing relative.

His daughter Swapna Gomez, 32, lives in an adjacent village while his son Swapan Gomez died several years ago in an accident.

Swapna said her father had 10 decimals of land on which he had built the house. A portion of the house was

rented out to tenants.

"My father had no enmity with anyone," said a crying Swapna.

She told BBC Bangla Service that her father went to a local market to buy goods for his shop around 11:00am and came back around 45 minutes later.

Abdul Hai Talukdar, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch of Police in Natore, said the motive behind the killing was unclear.

Family members said they found some money in his hand after the attack.

Shukhi Begum, a tenant of Sunil, said she was asleep in her room when the incident took place and that she did not hear any screams or noises.

Swapna last night filed a case with Baraigram Police Station, accusing unidentified criminals, said Shafiqul Islam, assistant superintendent of police, Baraigram circle.

IS CLAIM
Referring to Amaq News Agency, the media wing of IS, SITE Intelligence on its website posted: "IS fighters in Bangladesh killed a Christian in Bonpara village..."

In the same post, IS also claimed responsibility for the killing of a Buddhist monk in Bandarban.

Shwe U Chak was found dead, with his throat slit, inside his Kyang (temple) in Naikkhangchhari upazila on

May 14.

The Daily Star could not independently verify the claims.

Asked about the IS claim over Sunil murder, Natore SP Shyamol said there was no presence of the terror outfit in Bangladesh.

He, however, said they would verify the claim during investigation.

PROTESTS
Protesting the killing, local Christian community held a rally around 04:30pm at Bonpara Bazar and blocked the Bonpara-Pabna highway for about half an hour.

They demanded immediate arrest of the killers and threatened to wage tougher programmes otherwise.

Speaking at the rally, Benedict Gomez, secretary of Bonpara Parish Council, said criminals hacked another Christian Gabriel Costa in the past.

But police were yet to find the attackers, he alleged. If the criminals were caught, Sunil Gomez might not have been killed, he added.

KM Zakir Hossain, mayor of Bonpara municipality, said Sunil was a gentleman who never quarrelled with anyone.

Sushanta Ghosh, secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad, Natore unit, condemned the killing.

[Our Natore correspondent contributed to this report.]

Militants seem to have

FROM PAGE 1

university professors, writers, publishers, secular bloggers, gay rights activists, foreigners, cops and members of religious minorities, including Shia and Sufi Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

But this is for the first time that a family member of a top cop has come under such an attack.

Reportedly, terror group Islamic State claimed responsibilities for many of the past attacks. But the government maintains the group has no presence in the country, and blames it all on the opposition parties such as the BNP and Jamaat.

Babul, who was promoted to the rank of superintendent of police a couple of months ago, led some drives since his joining as an additional deputy commissioner of Detective Branch in Chittagong in September last year.

He arrested several members of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), including its Chittagong unit Commander Md Javed in October last year.

Javed later died "in an explosion as he tried to throw a hand grenade" targeting Babul and other detectives during a search operation hours after his arrest.

Babul, 40, is also credited with busting a den of JMB's Chittagong Regional Commander Md Fardin at Hathazari from where police recovered a sophisticated rifle, army suits, bullets, explosives and bomb-making materials in December last year.

After these drives, Babul shared with colleagues his fear of attacks from militants. He even thought about shifting their house, said DB Inspector Santosh Chakma, who accompanied Babul in some of those raids.

Neighbours said Mitu too was worried about possible attacks. Her apprehension heightened after Babul left Chittagong on Thursday for joining his new office in the capital.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan was quick to hold militants responsible for the attack.

"They [militants] might have carried out the attack for her husband's expertise in curbing militancy," the minister told reporters after a programme in Chittagong.

He described Babul as an honest, capable and sincere police officer.

THE ONE-MINUTE MISSION
Mitu went out of her flat at GEC Intersection around 6:30am. As she walked just about 200 yards with her son Maheer, three bikers hit her with the bike in front of the city's Well Food, a food outlet.

They first stabbed her indiscriminately and then shot at her twice. One bullet missed but another hit her in the head, killing her instantly.

The whole operation lasted about a minute.

One of the assailants held Maheer during the attack, neighbours said,

quoting the grade one student of Chittagong Cantonment Public School.

Paritosh Ghosh, additional commissioner of CMP (south zone), said they were inspecting some footage from the CCTV cameras installed at the food shop and also on the street.

The footage shows, three men, one wearing helmet, were waiting just opposite Mitu's house, he said.

The bike rider, the one with the helmet, was wearing a punjabi or a fatua. One of his accomplices had a pistol in his hand. They quickly fled on the bike after the attack, said a top CMP official.

A security guard of Mitu's flat said he rushed to the spot hearing people scream, and saw the body of Mitu lying on the road and Maheer crying.

When Afroza Salam, a neighbour, went to the spot, she found Maheer crying: "They killed my mother, they killed my mother."

Mitu's body bore eight stab marks, police said, citing the inquest report. Cops suspect Mitu was shot by a 7.65mm pistol.

On hearing the news, Babul flew to Chittagong from Dhaka. He broke down in tears before his colleagues, as he said: "Why my family couldn't be saved? I asked you to keep them safe... I knew they [militants] would chase me."

Usually, two police constables remain on duty at his flat, but it was not clear if they were there at the time of the attack.

Babul's father Abdul Wadud is a retired police officer while Mitu's father, Mosharrar Hossain, retired as a police inspector.

'CONSPIRACY'
The home minister said Mitu's murder was pre-planned. "We have been saying that it is a national and international conspiracy. The conspirators are committing the target killings one by one."

He also claimed that law enforcers



The body of Mahmuda Khanam Mitu on the road near GEC intersection in Chittagong.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Dhaka, Riyadh to work

FROM PAGE 1

The PM is now in Saudi Arabia on a five-day official visit at the invitation of the Saudi King.

During the talks, the foreign secretary said, the Saudi King told the PM that his country "considers Bangladesh as a top Islamic country" and "Bangladesh is also an important country in the Muslim world."

"The Saudi King uttered this word twice," Haque said, adding that the King also acknowledged Dhaka of playing a big role in world peace, progress and development.

The King, he said, appreciated Bangladesh's decision to join the Islamic alliance to fight terrorism and violent extremism.

There are two parts in this concept of the alliance -- military and political, he said, adding: "It entirely depends on Bangladesh in which part it [would take part]... it [military participation] is not mandatory, it's voluntarily. We are only happy over Bangladesh's joining in the alliance," Haque quoted the King as saying.

Bangladesh last year joined the Saudi-led 34-nation military alliance that was formed to combat terrorism.

Reviewing Hasina's Saudi visit, the foreign secretary said it not only opened up a new chapter in the field of bilateral ties but also took the relationship to a new height.

"A comprehensive relationship has developed through the tour of the premier which we did not see earlier," he said, adding that the tour gained more significance as Dhaka was committed to work with Saudi Arabia for promoting peace, stability and development of the world.

The two leaders, Haque said, raised a strong voice against terrorism and violent extremism through Islamic alliance during the talks.

The foreign secretary and the press secretary said the two leaders also made a commitment to work together to remove instability and

insecurity that now exist in the world.

The Saudi King said that his country values the participation of Bangladesh in the Islamic alliance, and through this a far-reaching strategic relationship has been developed between the two countries.

The PM said there is a special place of Saudi Arabia in the heart of Bangladesh as the two holy mosques exist in Makkah and Madina and Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH).

She said: "We will have to work to reach the real message of Islam so that no one can gain benefit by misinterpreting Islam." In this connection, she told the King that she wants to build 560 Islamic centres across the country to spread the message of peace of Islam among all. "Through this we want to establish a peaceful, progressive and harmonious Bangladesh," the PM said.

In reply, the Saudi King expressed happiness over the concept in establishing Islamic centres. "We are very happy over her concept and we want to cooperate in this regard," the King said, adding that he would send senior ministers to Bangladesh to see the matter.

The premier mentioned the establishment of Islamic Arabic University in Dhaka and said through this she wants to promote Islam, culture and Arabic language in true spirit among the students of the university to remove worldwide propaganda against Islam.

Hasina said her government has already developed digital version of the holy Quran in Bangla, Arabic and English languages so that the younger generation could learn the Quran easily.

Listening this, the King became very happy and assured Bangladesh of extending cooperation in this regard, the foreign secretary and press secretary said.

9 Huji men jailed for militancy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

A Jhalakathi court yesterday sentenced nine members of the banned Islamic outfit Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) to four years' imprisonment for their involvement in criminal and militant activities.

It also fined each of them Tk 10,000. In case of failure to comply with the court order, they will have to serve three months more in jail.

The convicts are Moshir Rahman, Nurul Islam, Baki Billah and Sohag, of Jhalakathi's Nalchhity upazila, Mohammad Jubayer, of Jhalakathi's Kathalia upazila, Abul Bashar, Minhajul Abedin, and Abdul Aziz, of Rajoir upazila in Madaripur, and Serajul Islam, of Mukshudpur upazila in Gopalganj. They are aged between 18 and 45, said Abdul Mannan Rasul, public prosecutor of Jhalakathi.

District and Sessions Judge of Jhalakathi Shafiqul Karim convicted the nine in a case filed under the Anti-terrorism Act, 2009. He also acquitted them of two other cases lodged under the arms and explosive substances act, added the PP.

According to the case statement, on August 14, 2013, police arrested the nine Huji men from a mosque near Khademul Islamic Qawmi Madrasa of Paschim Kamdepur village in Nalchhity upazila while they were holding a secret meeting there. The drive was led by Majid Ali, the then superintendent of police in Jhalakathi.

Police also recovered a hand grenade, four sharp weapons and jihadi books from the mosque.

Abul Kalam Azad, sub-inspector of Nalchhity Police Station, later filed three cases against the nine under the anti-terrorism act and the arms and explosive substances act.

AZM Masudur Zaman, the then officer-in-charge of the police station,

SEE PAGE 11 COL.



Protesters block the Bonpara-Pabna highway yesterday after grocer Sunil Gomez was stabbed to death inside his shop in Bonpara of Natore. Wife and daughter of Sunil, inset, crying inside their home.

PHOTO: BULBUL AHMED