

Another death at illegal stone extraction site in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Another worker died during extracting stones as he was hit by an excavator at a stone quarry of Jaflong in Gowainghat, Sylhet yesterday morning.

Fourteen other workers have died in separate incidents in last two months as extraction of stones using dredgers from the Pyan river continues unabated ignoring a government ban.

Yesterday's deceased was identified as Mustakim Mia, 20, of Isopur village in Baniarchang upazila of Habiganj.

The excavator hit him when he was extracting stones in Jumpara area around 8:30am, said Md Jahangir Hossain, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Gowainghat police.

Locals allege a number of politically influential people are making a quick buck on stones and are badly affecting the environment.

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan, Sylhet chapter, said major landslides may occur anytime, as mechanical extractors like dredgers are extracting stones from the river and adjacent areas at depths of 60-70 feet, creating a hollow underground.

"The locals dare not protest against this harmful and illegal act fearing harassment by the stone lifters as they are linked with political parties," said Joyal Abedin, a resident of Jaflong and a rights activist. He added local administration and police should take stern action against the stone lifting.

Speaking anonymously, a dredger owner said each machine can lift 10,000 square feet of stones a day. He added they run the dredgers at night to avoid the mobile courts.

Admitting illegal extraction of stones, Md Suhel Mahmud, upazila nirbahi officer of Gowainghat, said he was conducting drives at night against it in addition to separate drives by police and border guards.

Abdul Hakim Chowdhury, chairman of Gowainghat Upazila Parishad, said several deep large holes had been created in the rivers thanks to unplanned stone lifting.

"We have already announced in the area that unauthorised extraction or sales of stones will be severely dealt with," he added.

Mostafizur Rahman, assistant director of the Department of Environment, told this correspondent they cannot stop the business due mainly to shortage of workforce.

BGMEA

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Attorney General Mahbub Alam, representing the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk), on that day said the apex garment body might need a year to move and demolish the structure.

But BGMEA lawyer Kamrul Haque Siddiqui said they needed at least three years.

The building's foundation was laid in 1998 by the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and it was opened in 2006 by the then PM Khaleda Zia.

The HC verdict had ordered the government to demolish the building within three months, saying it was built on land acquired through forgery and filled with earth illegally.

Later, the SC stayed the HC verdict following a petition by the BGMEA.

On June 2 last year, the SC gave a short order, dismissing the BGMEA appeal and upholding the HC verdict.

The SC released the full verdict on November 8, asking the BGMEA to immediately demolish the building with its own money. Otherwise, Rajuk would do it within 90 days of receiving the order and realise the cost from the BGMEA.

The BGMEA submitted the review petition on December 8.

Accomplice

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On Monday, suspected militants hurled several bombs at a convoy of four prison vans near Tongi College Gate area. One of the vans was carrying condemned Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) chief Mufi Abdul Hannan and his associates. They were being taken to Kashimpur Jail in Gazipur from a Dhaka court.

The bombs did not hit any of the targets.

Police suspect the attack was carried out to snatch the top militant.

Law enforcers claimed that they recovered a homemade grenade, five crude bombs, two petrol bombs, two machetes, some bomb-making materials and Tk 7,000 from Mustafa's possession.

During the attack, three of Mustafa's accomplices showed him the vans and asked him to hurl crude bombs at them, Firoz Talukder, officer-in-charge of Tongi Police Station, said earlier.

Contacted, Maulana Ashraf Ali, principal of Jamia Emdadia Arabia Madrasa, said Minhajul is a student of his madrasa. But the madrasa authorities did not know whether he was involved in militancy.

He said Mustafa and Minhajul are students of the madrasa.



Defying a government ban, extraction of stones with dredgers from the Pyan river in Sylhet's Jaflong continues unabated. At least 14 workers have been killed in landslides during illegal stone extraction in Sylhet in the last two months. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Amid barrage of queries New law to cut

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During the review of Bangladesh's human rights record by the committee, its members asked the minister questions relating to the newly passed Child Marriage Restraint Act, allegations of extra-judicial killings, torture and abduction against law enforcement officials, and security of writers, bloggers and journalists.

They also wanted to know the status of investigation in the cases of writer and blogger killings; steps taken to stop child, forced labour and preventive detention; alleged use of force by police, allegations of torture, custodial death etc. Rights of religious and ethnic minorities, attacks on minorities and their places of worship also featured in the committee's questionnaire.

The UN panel also enquired about the Election Commission and the status of investigations and trials against the perpetrators of poll-time violence and other destructive activities.

According to a foreign ministry press release issued yesterday, questions relating to freedom of expression also covered a significant portion of the dialogue. The panel also requested information on the status of the Rohingya Muslims living in Bangladesh.

The dialogue was convened by the UN committee for consideration of Bangladesh's initial report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

In response to the questions, officials said the law minister gave various statistics and mentioned that killing by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) reduced drastically in recent years. He said the number of deaths were 25 in 2014-2015 while the number was 261 in 2005-2006.

They said the UN committee members appreciated the minister for responding to almost all the questions.

On the first day of the public session, the minister provided a brief account of various statutory and practical measures taken by the current

government for the implementation of ICCPR in the Bangladesh context.

"In our endeavour to establish a just society, we have always taken the international community, particularly the United Nations, as an essential partner. Our sincerity and commitment is evident in the fact that during the tenure of this government, we have twice been elected as member of Human Rights Council," he said.

"During the tenure of this government, we have facilitated the visit of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion, thought and conscience and the special rapporteur on violence against women. We have also taken initiatives to clear the backlog of our periodic reports to the treaty bodies starting with the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights," he added.

The committee appreciated Bangladesh for submitting its initial report on ICCPR, said the foreign ministry press release.

Terming the head of delegation's presentation as comprehensive, straight-forward and frank, the committee members thanked the Bangladesh delegation for engaging with the Human Rights Committee into this dialogue.

The law minister reiterated Bangladesh's commitment to making further efforts in realising the civil and political rights of its people irrespective of their age, sex and colour.

Bangladesh acceded to ICCPR in 2000 during the first tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The initial report, however, was submitted by the Bangladesh government to the committee in June 2015.

The UN committee of 18 international independent experts is also reviewing the situation in Serbia, Turkmenistan, Italy, Thailand, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The committee is hearing from NGOs and national human rights institutions. Its findings, officially termed concluding observations, on the countries reviewed, will be published on March 28.

Apple, Samsung

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'program', including 'weaponised exploits' used against operating systems including Android, iOS, Linux, macOS, Windows and "even Samsung TVs, which are turned into cover microphones".

The documents claim that CIA's Mobile Devices Branch has created multiple tools for hacking both Android and iOS smartphones, enabling it to remotely acquire location data, audio and text communications, and to switch on the phones' camera and microphones at will.

Microsoft's Windows OS is also named a target, with WikiLeaks noting that "the CIA also runs a very substantial effort to infect and control Microsoft Windows users with its malware."

In response, Microsoft said vaguely that it is "aware of the report in question" and "urgently looking into the matter."

Linux has also fallen victim to the CIA's shady hacking tactics, according to the leak, but the Linux Foundation has yet to comment.

Human rights watchdog Privacy International has been quick to comment on the revelations.

"If today's leaks are authenticated, they demonstrate what we've long been warning about government hacking powers - that they can be extremely intrusive, have enormous security implications, and are not sufficiently regulated," a spokesperson told the INQUIRER.

"Insufficient security protections in the growing amount of devices connected to the internet or so-called 'smart' devices, such as Samsung Smart TVs, only compound the problem, giving governments easier access to our private lives. If the CIA knew of security weaknesses in the devices many of us use - from 'smart' phones to 'smart' TVs - they should have been working

with companies to fix the vulnerabilities, not exploit them.

"Privacy International continues to fight for transparency and accountability around government hacking and sharing powers, as well as improvements in the security of our networks and devices."

"Without such, we increasingly face a world where we are vulnerable in ways most of us cannot imagine, and our governments contribute to the problem as often as they try to fix it."

HBM Iqbal

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fined them Tk 1 lakh each. In default they will have to serve three more months in jail.

On the same day, Iqbal was sentenced to 10 years' rigorous and three years' simple imprisonment in the graft case for committing two offences, including amassing wealth illegally.

The court also fined him Tk 50 lakh, in default, to serve one more year in jail. The verdict was announced in their absence.

Later, the High Court quashed the conviction and sentences of Iqbal.

His family members also filed a writ petition with the HC, challenging their conviction and sentences. But the HC on November 27 last year dismissed the petition and asked them to surrender before the lower court.

Mohammad Ibrahim, assistant director of the Anti-Corruption Commission, filed the case with Gulshan Police Station on June 25, 2007.

According to the case statement, Iqbal in his wealth statement concealed information about an illegally acquired house on Gulshan Avenue worth Tk 5.3 crore which he registered in his wife's name and a fixed deposit of Tk 5 crore.

Dhaka hosts

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police of the region," AKM Sahidur Rahman, deputy inspector general (media) of the police headquarters, told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh police are hoping to get a clear idea about the recent trends of crimes that pose immense threats to the region, he added.

The government took up the measure at a time when militancy has become a matter of grave concern with rising militant and terrorist attacks in recent years. Bangladesh faced the worst-ever terrorist attack at the highly secured diplomatic zone in the capital's Gulshan last year.

The three-day conference is expected to encourage an exchange of information and best practices to fight terrorism and transitional crime and to expand the professional network and strategic alliance among law enforcement agencies of this region.

That would in turn help law enforcers here track down militants, who took refuge in South Asian and neighbouring countries, and Bangladeshi nationals who had been radicalised in other countries, top police officials said.

A number of Bangladeshis were radicalised after they had gone to Malaysia. Some of them are believed to have fled to Syria to join Islamic State.

Investigations also reveal that militants after coming from other countries entice many people here into extremism.

The conference may form a transnational crime unit (TCU) to share information about these issues linked to extremism, according to sources in the police headquarters.

Bringing back Bangabandhu's killers, human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal arms trade will get top priority for discussion, according to the concept paper of the conference.

Members of law enforcement agencies of Afghanistan, Australia, Bhutan, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Vietnam would join the conference.

Bangladesh also invited the other South Asian nation, Pakistan, to the conference but it didn't give any response.

Interpol Secretary General Jurgen Stock, Facebook Trust and Safety Manager Vikram Lenghe, Asian Pole Executive Director Yohaness Agus Mulyono, ICGI (Interpol Global Complex for Innovation) Head of Protocol and Conference Sin Lee Chua, and Gray Barr, director of International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Programme, are

supposed to attend the conference.

Organisers said Bangladesh would seek assistance from Stock in bringing back Lt Col SHMB Noor Chowdhury from Canada and Lt Col AM Rashed Chowdhury from the USA.

Bangladesh will also request Stock to track down other killers of Bangabandhu -- Lt Col Shariful Hoque Dalim, Lt Col Abdur Rashid, Capt Abdul Mazed and Resalder Mosle Uddin -- by forming a special taskforce.

Bangladesh police will seek help from the police chief of Afghanistan in ensuring that no militant come to Bangladesh from that country.

Besides, Indian chief of police will be asked to shut down illegal Phensedyl factories in India and Myanmar police chief to stop yaba factories set up near the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

During talks with Myanmar, Bangladesh will also raise the issue of 13 Bangladeshis languishing in Myanmar jail from 2014. Myanmar authorities were informed of the matter on October 29 that year and then reminded of it in March next year but no response has yet been received from that side.

Bangladesh would also hold bilateral talks with Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Brunei on the sideline of the conference.

Sources in the police headquarters said the foreign delegates are supposed to arrive in Dhaka on March 11. Special measures have already been taken to ensure their safety.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal will inaugurate the conference at Sonargaon Hotel, while Foreign Minister AH Mahmud Ali will be the chief guest in the concluding session.

Tk 45cr

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this illegal business to make a quick buck, the police official said.

During primary interrogation, Solaiman said the venom was collected from France and brought to the country through India illegally. He was looking for some local brokers to sell the venom.

Baten said they got some information that international and local syndicates were behind the illegal venom business. They were trying to bust the rackets.

Md Asaduzzaman, additional deputy commissioner of the DB, who conducted the drive, told The Daily Star that they were suspecting many people were involved in this trade.

A case was filed with Dhanmondi Model Police Station.

2 Bangladeshis tricked

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arrived in Japan in 2013 saying they were escaping political persecution, said they were told by brokers and construction companies that their visas would be extended if they did decontamination work, the Chunichi newspaper reported.

"We believed the visa story because they said it's a job Japanese people don't want to do," Chunichi quoted one of the men, Monir Hossain, as saying.

Reuters was not able to reach the two men.

The men did the decontamination work in Iitate village, about 50 km (30 miles) south of the plant, from January to March 2015, Chunichi said.

Japan maintains tight controls on the entry of foreign workers but asylum seekers are allowed to work while their applications are reviewed. Many have permits allowing them to stay and work that have to be renewed every six months.

Mitsubishi Uragami, a justice ministry official who oversees refugee recognition, said there were no residence permits on offer for people doing decontamination.

"The length of asylum seekers'

residence permits and them doing decontamination work are unrelated. If anyone is giving inaccurate explanations about this, it's problematic," Uragami told Reuters.

The department was investigating the case, he said.

Takuya Nomoto, an environment ministry official overseeing decontamination, said the Chunichi report did not give the names of the companies or labour brokers involved, and as such the ministry was not able to confirm it.

"The ministry expects all contractors involved in decontamination to comply with the law," he said.

The Fukushima Labour Bureau said this month more than half of the 1,020 companies involved in decontamination violated labour and safety laws last year.

Reuters revealed in 2013 that homeless men were put to work clearing radioactive soil and debris in Fukushima for less than the minimum wage.

Reuters also found the clean-up depended on a little scrutinised network of subcontractors - many of them inexperienced with nuclear work and some with ties to organised crime.

Firefighter drone

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building and help direct those working to put out the flames on the roof.

The fire broke out around 6:20 pm Monday night on the top floor of a six-storey apartment building near Cortona Park North and Arthur Avenue in the Bronx.

"We deployed the drone for the first time in support of a 4th alarm fire in the Bronx," said FDNY Director of FDNY Operations Center, Timothy Herlocker.

"We were able to get a good view of the roof, which allowed the Incident Commander on the ground to view the Firefighters as they were conducting roof operations, venting the roof and putting water on the fire."

The tethered drone, which cost \$85,000, weighs 8 pounds and is fitted with both a high-definition and infrared camera.

These capabilities allow the drone to transmit live images of a fire operation to the Chief in charge of the incident.

And the cameras on the drone gives Chiefs at the command post a close

look at where firefighters are working on the roof.

This ability lets them help navigate those on the roof to where the fire is and also lets them to monitor those firefighters who are putting their lives on the line.

The images are then fed directly to the Incident Commander, which is a designated person in charge of all aspects of the emergency response.

And it is also shared with senior decision makers in the Fire Department through the FDNY Operations Center.

"This fire was helped by our drone," said Deputy Assistant Chief Dan Donoghue, the incident commander at the 4th alarm fire.

"The roof started to fail and we had a lot of great radio reports but that's only verbal, so with the drone we had good visual pictures and it really helped us make decisions to put this fire out and keep our members safe."

Approximately 168 firefighters responded to the scene Monday night and two suffered minor injuries while tackling the 4-alarm blaze.