

Thousands at risk of landslide

They live dangerously on slopes of hills in CHT, Ctg and Cox's Bazar

PRANABESH GHAKHARORY in Ctg and TORIMOS PALMA in Dhaka

Thousands of people living on the slopes of hills in Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Traces and Cox's Bazar are exposed to landslides in the rainy season due to cutting of hills and unauthorised use of public land.

Many cut hills and trees to build their houses while others rent shanties built on hilly land grabbed by influential people. The trend could not be stopped despite repeated landslides that claimed scores of lives in the districts over the years.

Yesterday's landslides in Chittagong, Rangamati and Bandarban after Monday night's downpour were history repeating itself.

Environmentalists had feared of such landslides, like that of 2007 when 117 were killed in Chittagong city.

In Chittagong city, over 50,000 people of low-income group live on the slopes of 30 hills.

Abdul Jalil, additional deputy commissioner (Revenue) of Chittagong, said they conduct eviction drives, and that the city authorities too should do the same to recover illegally

occupied land. The Hill Management Committee, after the landslides of 2007, proposed permanent rehabilitation of the hill dwellers, afforestation and building retaining walls on hills vulnerable to landslides.

Jalil, however, said for many years all that Chittagong district administration did was ask people to leave the hills via megaphones and evict them during the monsoon.

Amena Begum, a resident of Batali Hill area, said before cyclone Mocha she left her house along with her five-year-old son after the city corporation authorities disconnected her utility services.

She returned the next day.

"My husband is an addict. He does not take care of us. I have no choice but to return to my home as it is not possible for me to rent a house somewhere else," said Amena, a house help.

Abd Al Amin, a resident of Motijhorna area, said he has nowhere else to go.

"Our income is not enough to rent a house outside this area ... If they

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Cramped houses on the slope and foot of a hill in Chittagong's Motijhorna area create an unsafe living condition. Heavy rains during the monsoon frequently cause landslides and kill many. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Curious case

FROM PAGE 1

He has one vice-chairman, instead of two.

A foreign shareholder-director, Yusuf Akhlaq Al-Rajhi, has been holding the other post of vice-chairman much before Alam was removed.

Through the appointment of Shahabuddin, the board has in fact backedtracked from its earlier position less than within a month.

Interestingly, Shahabuddin seems to know nothing about JMC Builders though he is representing the company.

"I am not related with any builders company," said the new director.

He said he learned that a decision was taken to make him director of its executive posts after the AGM. Mabud was chairman of the risk management committee of the bank.

SHARE TRANSACTION

On May 23, the IDB expressed its intention to sell 36,930,960 shares or 5.4 percent of its total holdings of 52,078,585 shares.

Two days later, Excel Dyeing announced that it bought 32,038,814 shares, which amounts to about 2 percent of the total shares of Islami Bank.

Later, Excel Dyeing offloaded 96,60,000 shares in the stockmarket out of its total holdings of 6,43,53,914.

Islami Bank's share price was downward during the transaction. Its share traded between Tk 31 and Tk 33 from May 22 to May 28 when the shares changed hands. The price is way lower than the price of Tk 48 in January. Yesterday, its share traded at Tk 30.70 in the stock market.

Don't waste time

EU Brexit chief tells Britain

APP, Brussels

EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier has warned London not to waste time, as Brussels waits for embattled British Prime Minister Theresa May to name a date for talks.

In an interview with a group of European newspapers, Barnier lamented that it was already three months since May had formally triggered the two-year process of Britain leaving the European Union.

"My preoccupation is that time is passing, it is passing quicker than anyone believes because the subjects we have to deal with are extraordinarily complex. I can't negotiate with myself," Barnier was quoted as saying by the Financial Times.

"It will take us several months to draw out the conditions of an orderly withdrawal ... so let's not waste time," he said.

Formal negotiations between Barnier and British Brexit minister David Davis had been due to start next week but that timetable has been thrown into doubt by May's catastrophic loss of a majority in last Thursday's election.

She is now seeking an alliance with a hardline unionist party in Northern Ireland to cling on to power.

Barnier told "talks about talks" with May's Brexit advisor Olli Robbins and British EU ambassador Tim Barrow in Brussels on Monday but they failed to agree on a date for the negotiations to begin, an EU official said.

"I need a British delegation and a head of delegation who are stable responsible and have a mandate," Barnier was quoted as saying by French daily Le Monde.

A dark cloud on freedom of press

FROM PAGE 16

How did the daily tarnish the image of Habiganj-2 MP Abdul Majid Khan?

Giving a report of a Dhaka-based online newspaper that around 80 ruling Awami League MPs would not get the party's nomination in the next general elections, the Daily Habiganj Samachar published a report and mentioned the names of the lawmakers, including Abdul Majid, in the report.

Following the standard journalistic practice of localising news if that were possible, the newspaper focused on local MP Abdul Majid.

According to the online newspaper, the AL chief is conducting a survey to pick her party candidates in the next election. Allegations of various anomalies were raised against many MPs in the reports of different intelligence agencies, said the Habiganj Samachar report, adding that some other national dailies also ran similar reports recently.

However, the Daily Habiganj Samachar also included some information that underlined the good deeds of Abdul Majid for his constituency. The report said many locals think the MP has been working for the development of local people. His contribution to various development activities including construction of roads, school and college is undeniable. Through the development works Abdul Majid gained huge popularity. He is known as a leader of the mass, said the Habiganj Samachar report.

The additional paragraph of the Habiganj Samachar report seems to have questioned the inclusion of Majid's name in the list of 80 MPs

Code has attracted litigants to use this provision to silence the opposition, particularly journalists and writers.

Under the Penal Code of 1860, one may be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both for defamation. But one may be punished up to 14 years to imprisonment for defaming anybody under the ICT Act.

Moreover, the government in 2011 limited the court's powers to directly issue arrest warrant against journalists, writers and others for writing or saying anything defamatory. An amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) introduced a provision for issuing summons against them.

Some journalists were arrested in the past by the police after the case was filed under ICT Act. They were released later on bail.

But the case of Habiganj daily editor sets a bad instance. This may have a chilling effect on the media even in the innocuous act of publishing the result of a survey related to elections, even though the survey was done by the party itself.

It is because a newspaper editor may be sued under the draconian provision of ICT Act if the result goes against a party or politician. This instance is a dark cloud on freedom of the press until the arbitrary use of the law is stopped.

When the necessity of a law like Section 57 in modern democratic society is being debated, the least people can expect is the application of judicial mind and prudence in enforcement of this law.

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3 kids buried alive

FROM PAGE 1

The four army members died after being struck by a landslide from an adjacent hill while trying to clear a road in Rangamati's Manikchak around 11:00am yesterday.

The landslide pushed 15 army men down to around 30 feet, killing the four instantly, witnesses said.

They are Major Md Mahfuzul Haque, Captain Md Tanvir Salam Shanto, Corporal Mohammad Arizal Haque and Soldier Md Shabeen Alam. Soldier Md Azizur Rahman remains missing.

At least 10 more army men were injured, five critically, in the Rangamati incident, according to a press statement by the ISPR.

They were standing a bit far as three workers and 15 army personnel were clearing the road. Suddenly a huge chunk of soil fell down and buried them instantly," Md Abu Musa, a sub-assistant engineer of Roads and Highway, told this paper.

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Horror strikes hills

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Living on the hills slopes.

The victims include at least 39 women and 22 children.

Between Sunday and Monday, the district administration evacuated some 700-800 people who were deemed most vulnerable, said Md Manzarul Mannan, the deputy commissioner.

The district administration, fire brigade and law enforcers are jointly conducting the rescue operations since yesterday morning, he said, adding that those evacuated were getting food and other necessary items.

As of midnight last night, most areas in the district were experiencing a power blackout for 36 hours and its road communications with the rest of the country were cut off.

Mobile network also appeared to have been seriously disrupted.

Of the 26 deaths in Chittagong, at least 22 people died in Rangunia upazila alone, while the rest in Chandanah.

Ten of the victims are children and five are women.

Major Mahfuzul Captain Tanvir

Many people, including the army members.

General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiq, chief of army staff, visited the spot and inspected the rescue operations. He expressed deep shock at the death of the army members.

Reaz Ahmed, of the disaster management department, confirmed 107 deaths - 75 in Rangamati, 26 in Chittagong and six in Bandarban.

However, around 10:30pm yesterday, Rangamati deputy commissioner said the district's death toll at 98.

In Rangamati, which is the most affected district with over 6 lakh population, most of the victims are poor Bangalee and indigenous people

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In the district's Borbil of Moghachiroi, two families were buried alive.

Six bodies were recovered from under the mud, while two more remain missing. The landslide was so huge that we had to use an excavator to recover the bodies," said local Chairman Md Iqbal.

Locals in some areas said many of the houses were built by cutting hills.

The June 2007 landslides in the port city claimed at least 127 lives.

In Bandarban, locals said the district administration did not take any step to evacuate people living dangerously on hill slopes.

Contacted, DC Dilip Kumar Banik said, "People living at the foot of the hills have been asked today [yesterday] to leave risky areas. Bandarban Disaster Management Committee will sit in an emergency meeting tomorrow [today]."

[Our Chittagong office Rangamati correspondent Anvil Chakma and correspondent Bandarban Sanjoy Kumar Barua contributed to this report.]

Eighth wonder of the world 'rediscovered'

FROM PAGE 16

of the time, there was no record of their latitude or longitude.

But the 2010 discovery of a geologist's long-lost diaries in a Swiss collection has allowed researchers to estimate their location, to within 35 metres.

the team, Rex Bunin, told the Sunday Star Times. "We're confident, to the best of our ability, we have identified the terrace locations. We're closer than anyone has ever been in the last 130 years.

The diary was found by Dr Sascha Nolden in the Hochstetter Collection, based in the Swiss city of Basel. It belonged to Dr Ferdinand von

Hochstetter, a respected geologist who was employed by New Zealand's government in 1859 to survey the islands. He recorded the bearings of the terraces.

But the 2,000 acre lake area was never officially surveyed and the landscape changed dramatically after nearby Mount Tarawera erupted 27 years later.

After discovering the diary the researchers translated and interpreted the works, using a variety of complex geological methods. Publishing their findings in the Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand, they wrote that they believe the terraces were covered by ash during the eruption and lie at least 10 metres below the surface of the ground next to the lake.

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