

Bangladesh sits on oceanic floor

Researchers say 18-km-thick sediments formed over 23m yrs created most part of the country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Researchers have found the presence of an ocean floor beneath Bangladesh and are calling it a "unique case on planet Earth".

Bangladesh is not underlain by the rocks usually found beneath global continents but by oceanic rocks, Nature India quoted them as saying. Such a geologic phenomenon, they say, has been observed for the first time.

"Most of the present territory of Bangladesh was under the ocean at least until about 23 million years ago," says marine geophysicist Kolluru Sree Krishna, also the corresponding author of the study at the University of Hyderabad (UoHd). The finding is an outcome of research carried out over the years to understand the tectonic evolution of the Bay of Bengal.

Other researchers in the study include M Ismael of the university, K Srinivas of the National Institute of Oceanography Regional Centre in Visakhapatnam, and D Saha of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation.

The breaking away of Greater India from the Gondwana supercontinent 132 million years ago was followed by the opening of a new oceanic domain – called the proto Bay of Bengal – along India's eastern margin. The present location of Kolkata, the report says, was once on the verge of the continental margin neighbouring the proto Bay of

Bengal. Krishna and his team showed that oceanic rocks were accumulated on the seafloor and spread from Kolkata to the Rajmahal-Sylhet line, close to the Shillong Plateau.

As Bay of Bengal continued to evolve, these primitive oceanic rocks were completely buried under large sediment volume carried by the Ganges and Brahmaputra river systems from the Himalayas. The sediments built an alluvial cover of more than 18 km thickness in the Bengal Basin to Kolkata's east, which is a major part of present day Bangladesh.

The researchers say the Bay of Bengal, therefore, is unique among global ocean basins for its thick accumulated sediments that completely carpet the oceanic rocks. Earth scientists have been curious to know what kind of crust lies beneath the thick sediments in Bangladesh.

"Using different geological and geophysical tools it has now been shown that oceanic- and not continental-type of crust lies beneath the alluvial cover over most parts of Bangladesh," says the report. A petroleum company drilled more than 70 wells in the Bangladesh region but could not recover basement rocks as the sediments were about 18 km thick.

"Extension of oceanic crust well within the land mass is a rare feature," the report concludes. "The Bengal Basin region constitutes a good example."



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives *Champion for Skills Development for Young People* award at the Unicef House at New York's UN Plaza on Thursday. The award was conferred on her by the Unicef for Bangladesh's great success in youth skill development. Unicef Bangladesh Goodwill Ambassador Shakib Al Hasan, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Unicef Executive Director Henrietta Fore, extreme right, are also seen with Hasina. PHOTO: BSS

Murders in a distant land

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Ahmad Chowdhury, Bangladesh high commissioner to South Africa, told The Daily Star on September 17.

"However, information from the Bangladeshi community suggests that every year around 50 to 60 cases of deaths are not reported to us. They are buried here."

Of all the deaths, about 95 percent are murders, he said.

The foreign ministry has reports that rivalry over business among Bangladeshis and conflicts over relationship with South African women often result in the murders. And kidnapping for ransom often leads to killings.

Abdul Awal Tansen, a Bangladeshi community leader in Johannesburg, said murders of Bangladeshis in South Africa have become a matter of serious concern.

"Suppose a Bangladeshi has a shop and his business is good. Another Bangladeshi then sets up one more shop close by. Eventually, the two shop owners become enemies because one's shop hurts the business of the other. In that case, one hires African goons to kill the other."

Besides, there are cases of affairs between Bangladeshi men and South African women, some of whom maintain more than one relationship.

If the African boyfriend of the woman learns of his fiancé's relation with a Bangladeshi, he turns furious leading serious consequences like killing, said Tansen.

The high commissioner said in most incidents, Bangladeshis are found to be linked. They hire South Africans as hit men, taking advantage of lax law enforcement.

"Bangladesh High Commission can do little to prevent such killings. This is alarming and seriously tarnishing the image of Bangladesh here," he said.

There is also little scope of getting justice.

"There was no way we could file a case against anyone over the murder of my father. We had no clue," said Manik, son of Enamul.

According to an official of the foreign ministry's Africa wing, South Africa is not a labour-hiring country and it has no deal with Bangladesh on labour recruitment.

However, an estimated three lakh Bangladeshis live there. A tiny section

of them are professionals, and the rest are mostly victims of human trafficking.

"There are rackets of human traffickers and smugglers based in Bangladesh and South Africa and its surrounding countries like Mozambique, Botswana and Zimbabwe," he told The Daily Star, preferring anonymity.

It's very difficult for Bangladeshis to get tourist visas for South Africa. But trafficking gangs arrange tourist visas of other African countries and then transport them to South Africa, using the country's porous borders.

"On an average, each of the Bangladeshis pays Tk 10 lakh to reach South Africa," he said.

The law related to asylum in South Africa is quite flexible, and many of the Bangladeshis secure political asylum there while some get refugee status.

Some Bangladeshis also arrange contract marriages with local women as a pathway to secure legal documents, which allow them to work or do business there. Some are also involved in business without approval of the authorities, said the official.

CASINOS IN CITY

Don't publish reports based on rumours

Rab boss tells journos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed yesterday said reports on casinos were often based on assumptions and gossips because Rab had closed all of them.

"Do not spread rumours," he told reporters.

"Some of you [journalists] are saying that there are 60 casinos, some are saying 150 while some are saying 600. Where is the list, brother?" he asked reporters after a special exercise session of Rab in the capital's Banani yesterday afternoon.

"But information like 60, 150, 600, 1000 [casinos] and at homes is not a good thing. This will hamper the main goal of the drive."

All casinos are now closed, he said. "We have dismantled all the casinos."

Rab launched the drive against illegal casinos on September 18.



Expelled Jubo League leader Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan, top, and Mohammedan Sporting Club Director in-charge Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan, bottom, are being taken to a Dhaka court yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Khaled formed armed gangs

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on charges of running a "casino" at a football club in Fakirapool.

Rab also seized three firearms, bullets, yaba pills and foreign currencies worth Tk 7.64 lakh and 10.34 lakh in cash in his possession. One of the firearms had no licence while the licences of two others were expired.

On September 19, Khaled was placed on four-day remand in the Arms case and three-day remand in the narcotics case.

In the forwarding letter yesterday, ASP Belayet, who is the investigation officer of the case filed under the Arms Act, said Rab investigation found Khaled to be an infamous underworld criminal.

"He bagged a huge amount of money through running casinos and drug business at Youngmen's Club, Wanderers Club, Arambagh Club and many other clubs in Fakirapool area of the city. The accused used to control gambling, drug trade and engaged in different anti-social activities there."

The letter said using his gang members, Khaled kept Motijheel, Shahjahanpur, Rampura, Sabujbagh, Meradia, Kamalapur and Khilgaon areas under his "control". He also collected extortion money from markets and public transport, it said.

Khaled also engaged in tender manipulation under the name of "Bhuiyan and Bhuiyan Company" at different public offices, including that of Rajuk, Dhaka South City Corporation, Rail Bhaban, Jatiya Krira Parishad and Water Development Board, it said.

Jubo League, the youth wing of the ruling Awami League, expelled Khaled on September 20 for breaching the organisation's discipline and his involvement in anti-social activities.

LOKMAN ON REMAND

Police investigating a case against Mohammedan Sporting Club Director in-charge M Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan yesterday claimed that he is a member of an organised gang of narcotics traders.

Sub-Inspector Mohammad Kamrul Islam of Tejgaon police station, the investigation officer of the case, placed a forwarding letter to a Dhaka court

seeking five-day remand for Lokman.

The IO told the court Lokman needed to be interrogated to trace the other members of his drugs syndicate and know more about his alleged involvement in "casino" business at Mohammedan Sporting Club.

The court granted two-day remand for Lokman.

Defence lawyer claimed his client was innocent.

Meanwhile, Rab officials claimed during his interrogation, Lokman, a former security staffer of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, admitted owning seven to eight houses at different places of the city.

Lokman also owns 52 decimal land near Bheribandh in the city's Mirpur, Rab-2 Commanding Officer Lt Col Ashique Billah told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides, he has fixed deposit receipts (FDR) worth Tk 1 crore, said Rab sources.

On Thursday, Rab said that during primary interrogation, Lokman admitted amassing huge sums of money and depositing around Tk 41 crore into two banks in Australia.

Lokman, also a director of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), was arrested by the elite force on Wednesday night allegedly with four bottles of liquor.

"NONE TO BE SPARED" Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said none of those who got shares of casino money would be spared, UNB reports.

At a programme in Sylhet, he said, "Investigation is going on to catch not only the small fry, but also the big fish involved in misdeeds. Those who got the share of the casino money, no matter whether they belong to Awami League or any other party, or the police administration, won't be spared," he told reporters.

Asked whether any action would be taken against Jubo League leader Ismail Hossain Samrat for his alleged involvement in such activities, he said, "It's not just Samrat. Many names are surfacing... the investigation has already begun. We'll take steps against all based on the probe findings."

Bangladesh need not worry about NRC

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Bangladesh in its journey for shared benefits and prosperity as the fourth industrial revolution is knocking at the door.

The meeting, organised by the US Chamber of Commerce, was held at Lotte New York Palace hotel.

"I am happy to see that the USA is our second largest trading and the largest investment partner. For further development, your investment and engagement are imperative. This is a win-win option for both of us," she said.

Hasina said the strategic location of Bangladesh provides tremendous potential for being the economic hub of the region. "With India on the west, China on the north and South East Asia on the east, and with a population of 165 million of its own, Bangladesh is in the middle of a combined market of 4 billion people."

She said since regional connectivity is vital for trade, initiatives under Saarc, Bimstec, BBIN and BCIM-EC have been undertaken to connect with the neighbours and the region physically.

The PM said Bangladesh has the most liberal investment policy in South Asia. "It includes protection of foreign investment by law, generous tax holiday, concessionary duty on import of machinery, unrestricted exit policy, and full repatriation of dividend and capital on exit, to name a few."

Foreign investment is protected by relevant acts and bilateral investment treaties, she said, adding that Bangladesh and the USA have signed a "Bilateral Investment Treaty" and the "Convention on Avoidance of Double Taxation".

Hasina also mentioned that Bangladesh is in the process of establishing 100 special economic zones with one-stop service in different parts of the country.

About a dozen of them are ready, with four allotted to three countries. A number of high-tech parks are also ready for technology and innovation enterprises, she said.

The PM said the persistent growth of global FDI in Bangladesh since her government took over in 2009 reflects the increasing confidence of the foreign investors in Bangladesh. "Even, US investment in Bangladesh crossed \$1 billion during the last five years, though this is far below the potential the US has in term of its economic and technological ability."

Hasina said Bangladesh over the years has evolved into an investment destination from an aid recipient country. Bangladesh is now the 30th largest economy in the world based

on purchasing power parity (PPP), and has a growing global recognition as a role model of development.

She said Asian Development Bank Outlook 2019 mentioned that Bangladesh is the fastest growing economy in the Asia Pacific region.

The HSBC in its report of 2018 predicted that Bangladesh would be the 26th largest economy of the world by 2030, the PM added.

PM's ICT Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, and PM's Private Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman were present, among others.

Officials of the US Chambers of Commerce and business leaders of the USA and Bangladesh joined the meeting.

PM RECEIVES UNICEF AWARD

Hasina on Thursday received the prestigious *Champion for Skills Development for Young People* award in recognition of her outstanding contributions to skill development of the youth.

Unicef Executive Director Henrietta Fore handed over the award to her at a ceremony titled "An Evening with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina" at the Unicef House in New York.

Receiving the award, the PM dedicated it to the people and children of Bangladesh and the entire world.

"This honour is not for me alone... it belongs to Bangladesh because the people of Bangladesh have elected me through votes. That's why I have got an opportunity to serve them," Hasina said.

She said education is the backbone of a nation and no nation can hold their heads high without education.

The PM said millions of young people with their skills are constantly making a difference in our lives and livelihoods. "This recognition also manifests our steady strides in transforming Bangladesh into a responsible and knowledge-based society and economy."

The premier said after the emergence of Bangladesh, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had realised that it was not possible to make progress without using the potentials of the youth.

She said her government is committed to building a knowledgeable young generation which can face challenges and help build "Golden Bengal" as envisioned by the father of the nation.

Hasina mentioned that the government has focused on skill development and taken several initiatives to equip youths with proper knowledge and skills. She thanked

Unicef for its continued support to Bangladesh in this regard.

Referring to her government's steps for providing stipends, distributing free textbooks and introduction of school feeding activities, the PM said such initiatives played a vital role in ensuring cent percent enrolment of children.

She said the recognition of Unicef would help a lot in advancing the activities of her government in this regard.

Addressing the programme, Unicef Executive Director Henrietta Fore praised Bangladesh's development in different sectors under the PM's dynamic leadership.

She lauded the Bangladesh government for framing a time-befitting National Skill Development Policy and implementing it.

She also commended the government for sheltering 1.1 million Rohingya.

Speaking at the event, Unicef Bangladesh Goodwill Ambassador and cricket icon Shakib Al Hasan said since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has placed children at the centre of its policies. The country made great strides in reducing child mortality rate, increasing access to education and ensuring gender parity in schools.

"It's truly wonderful that Bangladesh as represented by her excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was recognised by Unicef for its [country] very conscious pursuance in skill development for young people," he added.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen also spoke on the occasion.

AFRICAN REFUGEES FROM LIBYA Rwanda welcomes first group

AFP Kigali

A group of 66 African refugees and asylum-seekers have arrived in Kigali from Libya, the UN said, the first of what could be thousands relocated from the north African country under a new programme.

The move follows a pledge by President Paul Kagame in 2017 to offer a "home" to Africans after reports emerged of the torture, sexual violence and forced labour they suffer in Libya.

Earlier this month, Rwanda signed a deal with the African Union (AU) and the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR agreeing to take in African refugees and asylum-seekers stranded in Libya.

Three 'drug dealers'

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two yaba peddlers were hurt, while others fled, the BGB official claimed.

The two were rushed to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared them dead, the BGB official said, adding that three BGB members were hurt and they took first aid.

The BGB claimed to have recovered 70,000 yaba tablets, a homemade firearm, two bullets, and a sharp weapon from the spot.

Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said the BGB team informed them of the incident. Autopsies on the dead were completed.

In Mymensingh, another suspected drug peddler was killed in a similar incident with police in Tarakanda upazila.

The dead is Abdul Karim, 45, of Nolphapra village in the upazila, said Shah Kamal Akanda, OC of Detective Branch of police in Mymensingh.

Acting on a tip-off, a DB team raided Mukamiakanda Rice Mill area when some criminals were trading drugs around 1:15am, the OC said.

Sensing the law enforcers' presence, the criminals opened fire, triggering a "gunfight", the OC claimed.

At one stage, Karim was hit, while others fled, the police official said.

Police took Karim to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, the OC added.

Police claimed to have recovered a homemade gun with a bullet, and 200gm of heroin from the spot.

Assistant Sub-inspector of DB Anwar Hossain was also injured during the "gunfight" and he took primary treatment at Mymensingh Police Lines Hospital, the OC said.

Karim stood accused in 15 cases, including 13 drug-related ones, filed with Tarakanda Police Station, the police official added.

A case was lodged with Tarakanda Police Station in connection with yesterday's incident.

Our Cox's Bazar and Mymensingh correspondents contributed to this report.

RIGHTS ABUSES

EU sanctions 7 Venezuelan officials

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday imposed sanctions on seven Venezuelan intelligence and security officials for alleged grave rights violations including torture and the killing of a renegade captain.

The "additional targeted measures", set out in a statement and published in the bloc's official journal, come on top of sanctions the European Union has in place since 2017 which include 18 other individuals and a ban on the export of arms and other equipment that Venezuela could use for repression.