



Sand being pumped to the shore via large pipes to fill up the bank of the Kumar river, inset, to construct a bus stand in Magura's Sreepur upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Kumar river under threat

Sreepur upazila parishad extracting sand to fill riverbank for constructing a bus stand

AZIBOR RAHMAN, back from Magura

A portion of the Kumar river is being filled up with sand for construction of a permanent bus stand in Magura's Sreepur upazila.

Sreepur Upazila Parishad has been filling the riverbank for the last three months by extracting sand from the same riverbed using dredger machines, locals said.

According to the law, filling up the riverbank without permission from the Department of Environment (DoE) is a criminal offence, yet Sreepur Upazila Parishad has already filled up around 140-foot-long and 120-foot-wide portion of the riverbank.

Local people alleged that the illegal act is not only threatening a big bridge, just 200 feet from the dredging spot, over the river, but also hampering study of several hundred students of Government Mahesh Chandra Secondary School, located near the proposed bus terminal.

A number of guardians and several teachers of the institution said filling up the riverbank for construction of any public establishment by excavating sands from the same river it is completely unlawful.

Moreover, if a bus stand is built here, academic activities of about 700 students



of the nearby secondary school will be seriously hampered as a bus stand is always a noisy place.

While talking, many local residents said a few years back the upazila parishad authorities built a public park by occupying around 70 decimals of the river land, opposite to the proposed bus stand.

Before that the upazila authorities occupied a 20-foot portion of the river bank and built a CNG stand about three

years ago.

The illegal occupation of river land was stopped for the while after different newspapers published several news in this regard, the alleged.

Several teachers at Government Mahesh Chandra Secondary School, seeking anonymity, said the school authorities have informed the upazila parishad chairman about the demerits of the bus terminal, but he did not pay heed

to their words.

One of the guardians, seeking not to be named, said if filling up the riverbank is a part of any development work, local administration should fill up the entire river.

Head of Bangla Department at Rangpur Begum Rokeya University Dr Tuhin Adut, also president of Riverine People of Bangladesh, said though River Unnayan Committee of Bangladesh is trying to free the river land from the illegal occupiers, in some cases government officials are filling up riverbanks in the name of developments.

Sreekol Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Kutubullah Hossain said if the government officials take such initiative no one dares to say anything.

Contacted, Sreepur Upazila Chairman Mahmudul Goni Shahin said decision to construct a bus stand was taken at a upazila monthly meeting as there is no other suitable place.

Sreepur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Momotaj Mohol said the decision was taken a few months before her joining, but she will look in to the matter. Magura Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mohammad Abu Naser said filling up the riverbank in order to setup a bus stand is completely unlawful and he should have been informed in this regard earlier.

Radiotherapy machine inoperative for 8 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Cancer patients are compelled to go to different government hospitals or private clinics in Dhaka for getting their therapies done as the only radiotherapy machine at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) has remained inoperative for nearly eight years.

As a result, hundreds of patients from Mymensingh, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Netrakona and Kishoreganj and adjacent Tangail, Gazipur, Sunamganj, Bogura and Gaibandha are being deprived of cancer treatment since 2015, said the hospital sources.

According to sources at the Oncology Department of the hospital, about Tk 30 lakh is required for repairing the radiotherapy machine, procured in 1996.

Surprisingly, although the money was allocated twice by the government, the MMCH authorities allegedly did not take initiatives for servicing the machine and the money was later returned, the sources said.

There are two cancer wards at the department with 13-bed facilities, but currently there is no patient admitted as radiotherapy can't be done here.

Dr Mujibur Rahman Khan, head of Oncology Department at MMCH, said all the patients are referred to Dhaka for getting their radiotherapies done, but many could not manage their appointment in time there.

He has informed the matter to the hospital authorities on several occasions, but nothing has been done to fix the problem yet, said the doctor.

Usually, a cancer patient needs Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000 to undergo a month-long radiotherapy at a government hospital, while it costs Tk 1 lakh at private hospitals, he added.

Currently, only cameo therapy is done at the department and on an average about 60 patients visit the department every day, sources said.

Patients have to pay only Tk 600 per dose for cameo therapy, which is Tk 20,000 to Tk 30,000 at private clinics.

While talking, trader Saiful Islam, a cancer patient from Mymensingh Sadar upazila, said after completing cameo therapies at MMCH he was referred to Dhaka for radiotherapy, but he cannot afford to go there.

Contacted, MMCH Deputy Director Dr Zakiul Islam said construction of a 17-storied building for Oncology, Nephrology and Cardiology Departments is already under way, where a 160-bed cancer unit will start functioning within two years.

But the deputy director could not say when the radiotherapy machine will start functioning again.



Polls officials at the ready from 3am

FROM PAGE 14

In Residential Model School and College, Sabirul Islam, returning officer of Dhaka, started distributing the materials among the presiding officers under Dhaka-15 around 10:30am.

The EC, for the first time in the election history of the country, decided to send ballot papers to polling centres on the morning of the voting day in a bid to ensure transparency of the voting process and security of the papers.

According to the commission, 11,93,33,157 voters, including

6,05,92,169 males, 5,87,40,140 females, and 848 hijras, will vote to elect 299 out of 300 members of parliament. The EC earlier postponed the election to Naogaon 2 due to the death of independent candidate Aminul Islam.

There will be 260,858 polling booths in 42,024 voting centres across the country.

Of those, 10,300 centres -- situated near a candidate's home or in remote or hilly areas -- have been termed "risky" by the police, either for poor structural condition or for being prone to violence, Anwar Hossain,

deputy inspector general (operations) of the Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star.

A total of 1,969 candidates, including 1,532 from 28 political parties and 437 independents, are contesting the 12th national parliamentary polls today.

Of the candidates, 265 are from the ruling Awami League, 264 are from Jatiya Party (JaPa), 135 are from Trinamool BNP, 66 are from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, 122 are from National People's Party, 13 are from Jatiya Party (JP), and 10 are from Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh.

'Petrol, chemicals used'

FROM PAGE 14

in a seat. But we are also checking whether anyone threw something from outside as the window was open."

Meanwhile, the Detective Branch of police yesterday claimed to have found involvement of the BNP and Jubo Dal activists in the "arson attack" after the arrest of eight people, including the BNP's Dhaka south city unit Joint Convener Nabi Ullah Nabi.

Nabi, 66, and Jubo Dal activist Mansur Alam, 42, were among the planners and financiers of the attack, DB chief Harun-Or-Rashid told a press briefing yesterday.

"At least 10-12 Jubo Dal leaders of their eight units in the city held a virtual conference on Thursday around 6:00pm. They discussed arson, crude bomb attacks at various polling centres in different wards, and setting fire to Dhaka-bound trains. Their focus was to draw national and international media attention," Harun claimed.

"One of them agreed to execute the attack on the train," he said without mentioning his name.

The planners engaged three criminals who carried out the arson attacks in Banglamotor area in 2013-14, he said, adding that detectives got

their names and were trying to arrest them.

SM Nurul Islam, a director of the train, yesterday evening filed a murder case with the Dhaka Railway Police Station against unnamed people.

A five-member body is investigating the incident, Lt Col Mohammad Tajul Islam Chowdhury, director (operations) of fire service, told The Daily Star.

"We had intelligence that sabotage could happen in the capital, but it was not known where it would take place," said M Khurshid Hossain, director general of Rab.

Meanwhile, the BNP raised questions about the arrest of BNP activists in connection with the incident.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday denounced the attack and said the government was playing with fire to make political gains by blaming the opposition.

At a virtual press briefing, Rizvi said the law enforcement agencies are making the same story in every sabotage case.

Within the hours of the incident, detectives claimed to have found the involvement of BNP men without any investigation, added Rizvi.

US grounds 171 Boeing 737 MAX 9s

FROM PAGE 14

The Federal Aviation Administration's decision falls well short of a full indefinite safety ban comparable to the grounding of all MAX-family jets almost five years ago, but deals a new blow to Boeing as it tries to recover from back-to-back crises over safety and the pandemic under massive debts.

Boeing's best-selling model was grounded for almost two years following crashes in 2018 and 2019.

The latest mishap also comes as Boeing and a major supplier are grappling with a succession of production or quality problems.

There were no immediate indications of the cause of the apparent structural failure, nor any reports of injuries.

Alaska Airlines ALK.N had already started grounding dozens of the Boeing B.A.N jets for safety checks.

As of Saturday morning, Alaska said in a statement that it had completed more than a quarter of the inspections and found no issues. It did not respond to a request for further comment.

Int'l community keeping

FROM PAGE 14

The New York Times published a report with the headline "A One-Sided Affair as Bangladesh's Ailing Democracy Goes to the Polls" and The Financial Times published an in-depth report titled "Bangladesh election raises fears of descent into one-party rule".

American news agency Associated Press ran a report titled "Sheikh Hasina once fought for democracy in Bangladesh. Her critics say she now threatens it", while BBC ran a story titled "Bangladesh: The election that has turned into a one-woman show".

Times of India published an opinion titled "Why Sheikh Hasina's fourth term will see screws tighten on Bangladesh", and the Voice of America in its digital platform

published a report "Bangladesh Election Unlikely to Resolve Political Turmoil".

Al Jazeera ran a nearly 30-minute video story with the title "Is Bangladesh on a path to becoming a one-party state?".

Analysts feared the country may move towards authoritarianism as the ruling Awami League is almost sure to form the next government for the fourth time in a row.

The Western countries, which are Bangladesh's major export destinations, have been pressing for free, fair and peaceful elections, said M Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador.

"Therefore, moving away from democratic values will definitely create more challenges for us," he added.

Israel, Hezbollah trade fire

FROM PAGE 12

The World Health Organization (WHO) said the majority of the Palestinian territory's 36 hospitals have been put out of action by the fighting, while remaining medical facilities face dire shortages.

The ministry said in a statement that it had recorded 122 deaths over the past 24 hours, while a total of 58,166 people had been wounded in the Gaza Strip in nearly three months of fighting.

The traumatised residents of Gaza, most of whose population have been displaced by the bombardment, are facing a devastating humanitarian crisis, with food, medicine and fuel in low supply.

With much of the territory already reduced to rubble, UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said Friday that "Gaza has simply become uninhabitable".

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported shelling and drone fire in the area around Al-Amal hospital in Khan Yunis.

It said seven displaced people, including a five-day-old baby, had been killed while sheltering in the compound.

AL aims for a 'tough' 50pc turnout

FROM PAGE 1

many voters on election day as they believe that a low turnout will mean the base AL voters have shown up to vote for "boat".

On the other hand, the AL independents are banking on a higher number of voters, which they believe would mean people with anti-incumbency sentiment and people deprived by the AL have shown up to vote. And they think these people would not vote for the party nominees.

Party high-ups who want to see a high turnout are worried about the election-day environment. They think any untoward incident would encourage voters to stay home.

The AL believes the party base accounts for 35 to 40 percent of the votes and has asked the grassroots to ensure the base votes today.

The party has already formed centre-wise committees comprising around 50 members. They have been asked to be completely focused on getting voters to the polling stations.

The committee members will cast their votes first, then bring their family members, relatives and neighbours to the polling centres, said the AL insiders.

The members have also been asked to ensure that around 3 to 3.35 crore voters who enjoy benefits from the government's safety net programmes show up.

The AL will be relying on around 15 million first-time voters and 10 million young voters for a good show.

The grassroots, especially ward-level and union-level leaders, have been asked to take voters to polling centres.

Law enforcers have been asked to ensure a peaceful voting environment and the AL's centre-wise committee members would also be at the polling stations to prevent any unwanted situation, party insiders said.