

# 'Animals, fish dying in Sundarbans'

## Oil Spill Taking Its Toll, Say Bangladeshi Activists

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**Kolkata:** Within 72 hours of the oil spill on the Shela river in Bangladesh Sundarbans, animal carcasses are reportedly being spotted in the Unesco World Heritage site. However, an official confirmation from the forest department is still awaited.

"The spilled fuel, flowing down Shela and Pashur rivers, has changed the look of the Sundarbans. Some trees have reportedly gone under a thick layer of oil. Locals have spotted carcasses of an otter and a water monitor lizard on the banks of Shela," said Kallol Mustafa, an environment ac-



Oil slick line the banks of the Shela River at Sundarbans in Bangladesh

tivist from Bangladesh.

However, Tapan Dey, Bangladesh conservator of forests (wildlife), told **TOI** that they have not received any report on animal death from the Sundarbans yet. "Movement of animals along Shela and Pashur rivers is less, though. Very few dolphins were seen in the area today. In spite of the fact that winter is the basking time for salt-water crocodiles, not a

single one was found along those two rivers and canals connected to them in the last couple of days," he said.

An oil tanker carrying 350 tonnes of oil crashed on Tuesday, spilling its cargo over an 80sq-km area along Shela river in Bangladesh and threatening a sanctuary of rare Irrawaddy and Gangetic dolphins.

Md Abdul Matin, general secretary of NGO Bangladesh

## Sponges, spoons for clean-up operation

Bangladeshi villagers using sponges, shovels and even spoons worked on Friday to clean up the oil spill in the Sundarbans mangrove area, home to rare Irrawaddy and Ganges dolphins, after environmentalists warned of an ecological "catastrophe". The government has sent a ship carrying oil dispersants to the area. But environmentalists say the chemicals could harm the delicate ecology of the Sundarbans. The company that owns the stricken oil tanker said it would buy up the oil that villagers have collected. "It has no commercial value, but we are using the offer to encourage people so that the cleaning up process speeds up," said Rafiqul Islam Babul of the Padma Oil Company. "Villagers including children are going out onto the river in boats to collect the oil floating on the water using sponges, shovels and spoons," he said. "Then they are putting it in small ditches on the river banks and our employees are buying it." The head of local port authority earlier said fishermen would use "sponges and sacks" to collect the spilt oil. **AFF**

Poribesh Andoloan, said that immediate steps are needed to clear the oil. "Dolphins come out of water every 20 minutes to take in oxygen. Imagine the impact this oil spill will have on their habitat," he warned.

Is there any danger to the Indian Sundarbans? River expert and West Bengal Pollution Control Board chairman Kalyan Rudra points out that tide and river flow do not rec-

ognize international boundaries. "If there is an easterly wind, Indian Sundarbans may get affected. In winter, the wind flow is generally towards the northeast. But if the wind direction were to change due to differential pressure gradient or formation of a low pressure over Bengal, then Indian Sundarbans will be at risk as the slick will flow westward," Rudra said.