



A Correspondent

Khulna, Dec 15 - Six days after the oil tanker crash in the Shela River, Forest Department officials on Monday started spraying water to remove oil slicks from trees and grasses.

Amir Hossain Chowdhury, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the Sundarbans East Zone, said they started removing oil slicks with three water pumps from plants and grasses near Chandpai Range of the forest office around 2:30 am.

Besides, they brought hyacinth from Sharankhola and Bagi areas in the Sundarbans which will be dumped in the canals and on riverbanks for soaking, and then those will be dumped in another place after a few days, he said.

The Forest Department on Saturday launched their drive to clean up the oil by hiring some 100 boats and 200 day-labourers.

Forest officials claimed that the dissolved oxygen (DO) on the water of Shela River in the Sundarbans came back to tolerable level on Monday, minimizing the risk of wildlife and aquatic plants and animals in the world's largest mangrove forest.

They said the amount of floating oil on water of the Shela River, where an oil tanker carrying huge oil capsized, is decreasing gradually, so there is no abnormal situation in the Sundarbans right now, according to an Environment Ministry handout.

The officials who involved in cleaning up oil spill in the river also claimed that the existing situation of the river will get normal within a week.

According to the Department of Environment (DoE), the dissolved oxygen level in the river water was 6.5 parts per million (ppm) at Baniashanta point on Sunday while it was 6.5 ppm at Dalia Mariya, Mirkumari and Karamjal points, 7 ppm at Joymonigol point and 6.3 ppm at Chadpai point.

Fish growth and activity usually require 5-6 ppm of dissolved oxygen. Dissolved oxygen levels below 3 ppm are stressful to most aquatic organisms. Levels below 2 ppm will not support fish at all.

International wildlife expert Bryan Smith, forest conservator (Wildlife Circle) Dr Tapan Kumar Dey and divisional forest officer (Khulna region) Jahidul Kabir confirmed that there is no possibility to die aquatic species at the current DO level in water.

Meanwhile, some environmental organizations like Paribesh Bachao Andolon (paba), Janouddyeg and Barosik, at a roundtable at the Dialogue Centre of the East Zone on Monday demanded that the oil clean-up drive be to protect the wildlife of the Sundarbans from peril.

An oil tanker carrying some 3.57 lakh litres of furnace oil sank in the river at Mrigmari under East Zone of the Sundarbans after being hit by a cargo 'MT Total' vessel on Tuesday, causing a serious threat to the existence of the mangrove forest and its natural resources due to the oil spill.

Earlier, police in a drive seized the cargo vessel, 'MT Total', along with its four crew members from Shitalakkhya River here on Monday in connection with the oil tanker capsized in the Shela River that caused a serious oil spill over a huge area of the Sundarbans, threatening its flora and fauna, mainly the aquatic animals.