

The forest in Kuakata beach disappearing fast

Amphan and tidal surges have uprooted thousands of trees

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The reserve forest in Kuakata sea beach is disappearing day by day due to continuous erosion by the Bay. Sand is getting removed from the tree roots due to frequent tidal surges.

The rise in water levels is abnormal due to climate change impacts. As a result, huge waves of the sea are flooding the coast. Every year, erosion due to frequent hit by tidal surges causes depletion of the reserve forest in Kuakata sea beach, badly affecting the natural beauty of the picturesque tourist spot. Thousands of trees are disappearing. The recent cyclone Amphan and high tides have uprooted a number of trees in the forest.

Kuakata is a spectacular beach where one can have a sight of both the rising and setting sun. At one time, coconut garden, palm garden and the tamarisk garden of the National Park on Kuakata beach attracted more tourists. But coconut orchards and palm orchards are now facing extinction. The mangrove forest is now disappearing.

Sources at Patuakhali forest department said in 2005, the government declared 5,661 hectares of forest land in Kuakata as National Park. To make Kuakata more attractive to tourists, the forest department created a tamarisk garden covering about 10,000 hectares of land adjacent to the beach in the financial year 2007-2008.

Mahipur Range Officer of the forest department Abul Kalam Azad said new gardens were created in the forest adjacent to Kuakata beach from 2010 to 2012. Last year, tamarisk garden was created on 40 hectares of land in Gangamati area. The Kuakata beach has been planted



Tidal surges have uprooted trees at Tamarisk garden in Kuakata sea beach of Patuakhali.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

with acacia trees on 25 hectares of land and the forest department plants tamarisk orchards on 20 hectares of land. In addition, 10 hectares of land have been planted in Khajura area and 85 hectares in Gangamati area this year. Moreover, 20 hectares of low-lying land have been raised.

He added that at least 50 hectares of forest land are being destroyed every year due to erosion and tidal surges. Thus, in the last five years, 250 hectares of forest land have been lost to the sea as tidal surges frequently hit the beach. Thousands of trees have also been uprooted due to cyclone Amphan and high

tides for five days since August 19 this year.

Meanwhile, the width of the longest beach was 18 km that has now shrunk due to continuous erosion. At high tide, tourists are unable to walk on the beach. If the beach is not protected from erosion, the whole forest will disappear one day.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw that high tides uprooted a number of large trees.

Ruman Imtiaz Tushar, managing director of Kuakata Tourist Centre, said coconut orchards and tamarisk orchard are now on the verge of extinction.

Kuakata municipality Mayor Berek Mollah said sustainable measures must be taken to prevent erosion. Otherwise, Kuakata beach will lose its attraction to tourists.

Patuakhali Divisional Forest Officer Aminul Islam said new gardens are being created in Gangamati and Kawar Char areas. Apart from this, 20,000 palm trees have been planted to prevent tidal surges.

Contacted, Khan Mohammad Waliuzzaman, executive engineer of Water Development Board (WDB) in Patuakhali, said he has informed the ministry concerned about the matter.

Narrow bridge stands in way of development

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Economic activities in three upazilas of Kurigram and Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila did not escalate as anticipated despite the inauguration of the Sheikh Hasina Bridge over the Dharla river in 2018.

Businesspeople and traders said business as well as development activities in the region -- especially in Phulbari, Nageshwari and Bhurungamari upazilas of Kurigram and Lalmonirhat Sadar -- could not pick up pace due to a rickety and narrow Bailey bridge in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila's Kulaghat area, on the Ratnai river.

The derelict bridge remains as an obstacle to operating larger transport and cargo vehicles on the road between Lalmonirhat and Bhurungamari, Kurigram's northernmost upazila, they also said.

Jahangir Alam, a businessman from Phulbari Upazila in Kurigram, said they are unable to take advantage of the new Dharla bridge as the wobbly and narrow Bailey bridge on the Ratnai river stands in

the way of larger payloads of cargo.

In order to catalyse socioeconomic development in the region, the new Dharla bridge -- built at a cost of Tk 206.85 crore -- has to be used to its full potential, said Emdadul Haque Sarker, another businessman from the same upazila.

To achieve that objective, the Bailey bridge on the Ratnai river needs to be replaced with a stronger and wider bridge as soon as possible, he added.

Echoing the same sentiment, Sirazul Haque, president of Lalmonirhat District Chambers of Commerce and Industries, frustratingly said that he had been pursuing the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) for a new bridge on the Ratnai, but his efforts so far bore no result.

Contacted, Lalmonirhat RHD Executive Engineer Mahbub Alam said they already submitted a project proposal for constructing a 138-meter long bridge in Kulaghat area on the Ratnai river.

However, the status of the proposal is yet to be known, he added.



The Bailey bridge in Kulaghat area of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

ROUNDTABLE

YOUTH: LARGER SHARE OF POPULATION, WHAT SHARE IN MAKING DECISIONS?

The Daily Star in association with ActionAid Bangladesh organised an online discussion titled "Youth: Larger share of population, what share in making decisions?" on August 27, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

Nazmul Ahsan, Manager-Young People, ActionAid Bangladesh

The existing policy framework and practices do not allow young people, particularly young women from excluded and marginalised communities, to engage and contribute meaningfully. The National Youth Council should be constituted soon to implement the National Youth Policy 2017 and to ensure participation of young people from diverse backgrounds.

Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh

Issues such as the impacts of climate change on communities, livelihoods and employment opportunities in the informal sector, RMG sector, etc., arise while working with the youth. We must decide which issues deserve to be addressed first. This will increase our credibility among the youth and decision-makers.

In the current context, young people, particularly young women should be engaged in various formal and informal leadership positions to incorporate their opinions in the planning and overall development processes.

Civic education needs to be reintroduced within the schooling system so the youths are familiar with democratic practices. Political parties should carry out political orientation induction programmes.

Shuvashish Roy, Digital Marketing Manager, The Daily Star

Many youths of Bangladesh possess various traits of leadership. So, it is very important to evaluate if youths are being given sufficient opportunities to become leaders. Followership is also another element which needs to be discussed when speaking of leadership. It is very important that structured 'paths' are made for followers so that they can support their leaders. It might be easier to think of leaders and followers being part of the same ecosystem and thus, plenty of work remains in this area.

Korban Ali, Deputy Manager-Youth Representation, ActionAid Bangladesh

Though the state recognises the political engagement of the youth in the national youth policy, the Representation of the People Order and the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009 needs to be reformed to reserve a minimum representation of young people in the parliament and Union Parishad. The Queen's Young Leaders programme of the UK is an example of recognising contributions of the youth, which Bangladesh can follow. A state-funded national youth parliament could

PARTICIPANTS



Nazmul Ahsan



Farah Kabir



Shuvashish Roy



Korban Ali



Jesmin Tarif Jui



Irfan Ahmed



Shammy Wadud



Sabitri Hembrom



Abdul Aziz Ripon



Minhaz Ahmed Prince



Susmita Sultana



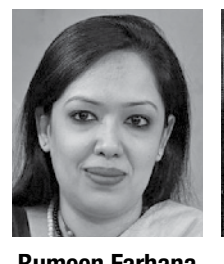
Alamgir Kabir



Tanbir Hasan Shaikat



Tania Sultana Nila



Rumeen Farhana



Chandara Tripura



Zonayed Abdur Rahim Saki



Shekh Sharif Hasan



Shorna Akter



Mohammad Hefajur



SM Imran

still some gaps. The indigenous society is struggling to produce transformative leadership mainly due to the knowledge gap between the elders and the new young leaders. More cooperation is required between the policymakers and the indigenous groups to end the gap.

Zonayed Abdur Rahim Saki, Chief Coordinator, Ganosamhati Andolon

The main problem in Bangladesh is the lack of democratic practices. We need to question whether our youth have proper access to climb the political ladder as any democratic country should.

In our political structure, many youths are in charge but do not have the authority to make the final decisions. At every level, youth participation is treated as a reserved quota. If there is no apolitical power resisting the spark of the youths, then their participation in the political parties will be more widely accepted.

Shekh Sharif Hasan, Volunteer, Alor Michil Samaj Ummayan Jubo Sangho

Every year, a budget can be allocated for youth leadership under which there will be opportunities for the youth to work at governmental levels and also beyond politics. Moreover, our education system should incorporate teachings about teamwork.

Shorna Akter, President, Ushar Alo Jubo Sangho

In some cases, the youth can participate in decision-making but are unable to implement the decisions. The youth are also held behind in terms of communication because of the lack of technological knowledge. So, more training opportunities for the youth are required.

Mohammad Hefajur, Founder, Progressive Youth Club

We work with youth dropouts and emphasise on building their leadership abilities. The youths do not have the opportunity to work at the local and city corporation level. The youths must work as a team and claim the rights and opportunities they are deprived of.

SM Imran, President, Rising Youth Group

The people who are in charge of the decision-making process find youth participation unnecessary as they believe the youths have nothing new to contribute due to lack of their experiences. Many youths also lack the urge to gain knowledge on and involve themselves in the decision-making processes.

Mst. Setu Akter, Youth Member, Agragami Jubo Sangstha

The decisions of the youth need to be accepted for the sake of encouraging them to continue participating in the decision-making process. The youth also need to treat the points of the decision-makers with more respect.

Khadizatul Anwar, MP, Awami League, Women Seat-6

It is very important to provide youth with the opportunities to share their opinions as they are going to shape the future of our country.

groundwork is limited.

Minhaz Ahmed Prince, Jatiyatabadi Chitra Dal (JCD), University of Dhaka

Youths should be able to become a part of all kinds of organisations in Bangladesh and not just at decision-making levels and political parties. Our concern is that Bangladesh political culture permits politicians to retain power for multiple terms, which shrinks the opportunities for young people towards meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making process. Therefore, we need systematic changes so that youths can take up more leadership positions.

Susmita Sultana, Youth Member, Alor Sandhane Juba Dal

A misconception which is rampant in Bangladesh is that males should have the upper hand in all matters. We tend to believe that females are not capable of making decisions at personal and societal levels. Such perceptions exist at core institutional levels and we must change that.

Alamgir Kabir, National Activist Adviser-Ghashful Child Forum, Ambassador of Dhaka Girls Empowerment Project-Youth for Change BD, National Member of Youth Advisory Panel & CMT Member Youth Representative-Plan International Bangladesh

Persons with disabilities lack accessibility and therefore they require sustainable solutions. If these people continue to be ignored, they will be

further discouraged. Those of us who are getting the opportunity to represent our communities must act responsibly to encourage change.

Tanbir Hasan Shaikat, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and DUCSU member, University of Dhaka

It is essential that we leave nobody behind. Youths who are considered "muted", that is, who reside in isolated areas and do not have the scope to share their opinions as well as be skillful, must be given every opportunity and platforms to harness their potential.

Tania Sultana Nila, Treasurer, Udayan Jubo Sangstha

If given the right opportunities, youths like us can participate more in decision-making and extra-curricular activities. Such participation helps us become more confident to voice our opinions and take better decisions.

Rumeen Farhana, MP, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Women Seat-50

One-third of our population consists of youths aged 15 to 34. However, since 50 percent of the population comprises of women, society cannot fully realise the opportunities of the demographic dividend while demeaning or excluding women. If women believe in themselves and utilise their courage, then families and the society will believe them.

Chandara Tripura, Youth representative, Rangamati

There have been positive changes in indigenous representation, but there are