



PHOTO: STAR

Saw-mills sprouting illegally on the Bandar (Port) land along the Karnaphuli at Bridgeghata not only cause massive siltation, chocking the river, but also help encroachment at the same time.

## 200 acres of CPA land gobbled

NURUL ALAM

The drive to recover the port land from illegal occupants have reportedly slowed down, sources said.

As a result, over 200 acres of land worth about Tk 1,000 crore owned by Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) remained under encroachment for decades.

These encroached lands could not be recovered due to reported political pressure, threat from dock labour leaders and connivance of a nexus of corrupt port employees and officials.

Those port lands have been illegally occupied by different government organisations, dock labour bodies and their leaders and various private parties, sources said.

Port sources, however, claimed that drive was always made after completion of due formalities.

"But in some cases we have face difficulties to go for drive due to unofficial pressure from upper circle," a senior official of Chittagong port related with eviction drive said on condition of anonymity.

"The illegal occupants reportedly maintain a link with some top

notchers of the higher circle to escape the eviction," he added.

During the drive, in the past one and a half years 36 acres of encroached land worth about Tk 250 crore were recovered.

Besides, fines of taka one crore were realised from the encroachers and polluters inside the port area during the drive launched by the port authority in the same period, port sources said.

The raids were launched by the port personnel led its magistrate frequently.

Over 2,000 illegal constructions from the recovered lands were demolished during the same period. The recovered ones included the lands which were under encroachment for even 50 years.

The demolished constructions and structures included residential hotel, godown, teachers' residential complex, madrassah, shopping complex, salt industries, commercial offices, cottage industries, restaurants, labour colony, markets, fish stalls, garages and offices of political parties and labour unions.

The biggest eviction drive was launched at south Halishahar on May 6 last year while 25 acres of land known as dock labourers' residential area, illegally occupied by a pro-Awami League labour leader Sirajul Islam Chowdhury alias 'dock Siraj' were recovered, port sources said. Siraj reportedly used to earn huge amount of money by letting out the illegally occupied lands to different private bodies, sources said.

The land is now under the control of port authority.

Port authority faced problem early this year to recover a land of 20 kathas occupied by ruling party labour organisation Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal of Chittagong port.

Though the drive was postponed at the request of a local minister but later port authority recovered the same land and demolished the office of Sramik Dal.

Meanwhile, 86 acres of land are still under illegal occupation at Laldiar Char at Patenga where clubs, mosques, shops and residential quarters were set up reportedly in connivance with the nexus of

corrupt port personnel, sources said.

Even huge lands owned by Chittagong port remained under encroachment at the areas from Banglabazar to Chaktai area, sources said.

According to port sources, 133 acres of land remained under encroachment of private parties who were running business or erected residential quarters.

Sources said that about 500 illegal establishments were erected inside the port colony without permission from the port authority.

The nexus reportedly collect huge money every month from the illegal occupants, sources said adding that few cases are forwarded for eviction.

The officials of estate department of Chittagong port, however, said they were not yet aware of any corrupt practice by any nexus of the port in handling the illegal occupants.

They rather informed that due to shortage of manpower it had become difficult to monitor the illegal occupation of port lands.

## BAT's massive afforestation programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BAT) is currently implementing a massive 'afforestation programme' throughout the country for creating a 'greener Bangladesh'.

The programme is nearing completion in the port city and other districts of Greater Chittagong.

Under the programme that started in March, the BAT is to plant 13 lakh saplings of different categories (herbal, fruit-bearing and medicinal) in Cox's Bazar, Khagrachhari and Bandarban of Greater Chittagong.

As per the programme, BAT has started its tree plantation of about 6 lakh saplings at Lama, Alikadam, Naikhyangchhari and Sadar of Bandarban district at a simple ceremony at Lama upazila on August 1.

State minister for Environment and Forests Jafrul Islam Chowdhury MP inaugurated the programme as chief guest.

Chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council Myma Ching and Deputy Commissioner of Bandarban Hafizur Rahman Bhuiyan were present at the function as special guests.

With Ezaz Ahmad Chowdhury, head of Leaf of BAT, in the chair the function was also addressed by an entrepreneur, Faisal Jilil Chowdhury, schoolteacher Md. Ashrafur Islam, and conservator of forests (CF) Mosharrar Hossain.

Later, the minister distributed saplings among the farmers, involved in tobacco production at Lama, for plantation at their respective areas.

In his speech, Jafrul Islam Chowdhury warned everybody about the danger of ecological imbalance being caused due to indiscriminate felling, cutting and plundering of trees across the country.

He said Bangladesh would lose one-third of its forest by the year 2005 if the country failed to reach the target of afforestation of at least 20 per cent.

He appealed to all conscious people of the country to come forward sincerely to protect Bangladesh from a probable extinct

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## Dengue strikes back

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Dengue, the 'awesome' haemorrhagic fever, strikes back in the port city of Chittagong, too. No death was, however, reported till date.

At least 20 people including a medical officer (MO) of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) have been admitted to different city hospitals and private clinics, with dengue infection, within a span of past two weeks. Of them, about 12 dengue-infected patients are now undergoing treatment.

However, the authorities concerned here including CCC and Health Department seemed somewhat indifferent to the matter and not prepared enough either to prevent the rise of the disease or fight it.

Officials and doctors of Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH), CCC and Health Department when asked avoided responding directly about the outbreak of dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF).

For this, one would be surely be embarrassed and wondered to the fact that while the hospitals and clinics of the capital city are now burdened with dengue patients, there exists different scenario in the port city, comparing to that of Dhaka!

Dr. Manjurul Karim Khan, who is working with the CCC under a partnership project was admitted last week to a private clinic in city's Panchlaish Residential Area with 'suspected' dengue infection. He was later tested positive after diagnosis and treated there for five days.

Poly clinic sources told this correspondent recently about the presence of at least two dengue patients including Dr. Manjurul Karim at their clinic in the last week of July.

Both the patients have left the clinic ten days ago after having treatment, clinic sources said.

It is learnt that at least 10 dengue patients underwent treatment at CMCH in last few days. Although none of the hospital sources was

ready to recognise them as dengue patients. They said the five were infected with simple influenza.

When asked about this 'hide-and-seek' behaviour regarding dengue patients, they said on condition of anonymity that they might face problem from higher authority if they disclose the truth.

The on-duty doctors, too, refused to disclose the fact for similar reasons.

At present, two dengue-patients - Nurul Amin and Bimal Chandra Das -- are now undergoing treatment at bed nos 10 and 22 respectively at ward no-13 at CMCH, while two more patients -- Ezahar Miah and Narayan Das -- were discharged from the same ward on Monday.

Sources said five more patients were also treated in two other city clinics.

Meanwhile, the Civil Surgeon of Chittagong Dr. Tarikul Islam said "I came to know at least about two such cases in recent time in Chittagong."



PHOTO: STAR

State Minister for Environment and Forest Jafrul Islam Chowdhury distributing saplings in Bandarban.

## To buy a car in Ctg ...

MOHIT UL ALAM

You've to be a very smart buyer to negotiate successfully with a car dealer in Chittagong. He seems to have all answers ready to all questions regarding cars. He'll first of all give you the impression that the Japanese manufacture cars only for Bangladeshis. He's very knowledgeable about the budget not only of Bangladesh but also that of Japan. In the recent Bangladesh budget there probably has been less duty tax on new cars, and slightly more on reconditioned cars. So he'll enlighten you with the information that Japan will now price its cars higher with an eye to the budget in Dhaka. Then he'll drop a hint that Japan might stop manufac-

turing cars for Bangladesh if the government bans the import of reconditioned cars. But then, to assuage you, he'll say that the Indian cars are all Japanese inside, so it matters little.

He'll first receive you at his showroom on the CDA Avenue. He's a wonderful talker and images gush through his lips as readily as anything. He'll first try to gauge a customer -- whether prospective or not. If you're a genuine one to his eyes then he'll try to judge whether you're of suspicious or generous nature. If you belong to the first category of buyers then he'll present you with a range of quotations and options. And that he does just to confuse you so that you'll begin to trust him as the only dealer around who can make a cakewalk of this most complicated

affair. Buying a car -- well, it's like buying tomatoes, if you're buying from him, but like buying a plane, if you're buying it from somebody else. But if you prove to him to be rather a simple nerd, kind of a straightforward guy, he'll at once establish his supremacy over you and give you, with an ingratiating smile, a pair of options, either to go to the jetty to choose a car from the car-shed or buy one from his showroom. But he'll always ask you to go out and see other showrooms around, saying at the same time that nobody around will be able to sell as cheaply as he does.

This done, he'll take you to the port, to jetty number 4, where all the cars are dumped straight from the ship in many different sheds. These cars, totalling around 4,500, are

imported by the dealers and the main gate to the sheds being guarded by army personnel, usually, an individual buyer is not allowed inside to see around. But this is managed by your car dealer and a C & F agent will accompany you. That is, you enter jetty 4 as a C & F agent.

Though there are too many cars parked at the shed, your dealer will cleverly guide you only to those cars he has imported. This will dampen your mood slightly, as you'll begin to feel that other cars that are not imported by your dealer are probably better and cheaper.

As you're a cautious buyer and wouldn't like to be cheated by your

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## Shrinking Sandwip

ATAUL GANI SUMON

Many people left the offshore island of Sandwip as river erosion threatened their lives.

Detached from the mainland of the country, the island known as 'The Valley of Death' has been facing erosion by the mighty Meghna and the Bay of Bengal.

Many people of Sandwip were rendered homeless due to the erosion caused by the Bay of Bengal. The Meghna with her 'wolfish appetite' also engulfed vast area of Sandwip. By the slaps of the waves of the Bay of Bengal and Meghna simultaneously, the 640 square kilometres Sandwip has now shrunk to 80 square kilometres.

Many people of the island took shelter in many cities including Chittagong and Dhaka as they were forced out of their ancestral home by the erosion. The town of the Sandwip island is now shifted to Haramia from Harishpur.

The Meghna and the Bay of Bengal devoured old town, houses, cornfields, beautiful coconut and betel nut gardens, the artificial forests, and mangrove forests.

Local Water Development Board sources said that due to erosion by the mighty Meghna, 12 square kilometres of the western part of Sandwip including Harishpur, Rahmatpur, and Azimpur and by the waves of the Bay of Bengal about one kilometre of Sarikaite, Maitbangha and Mogdhara were lost.

The people are being homeless as no steps were taken to check the erosion of the river.

According to the Major Regulation Map of 1789 the Sandwip island was 640 square kilometres and according to India Map Survey of 1913 to 1916, the area became 466 square kilometres. In 1960 it was 342 square kilometres, 311 square kilometres in 1970 and according to the land recovery survey of 1980 it is 280 square kilometres. According to the survey of 1997 the amount of solid mass was 100 square kilometres. And now the Sandwip is only 70 to 80 square kilometres.

The number of unions of Sandwip has now come down to 14 from 30. Sixteen other unions are now in the sea and riverbeds. The devastating erosion recently engulfed the Nayamst, Izzayatpur, Rohoni, Betajara, Katgoar,

Dirghapur, Hadrakhai, Char Bhadhu, Char Jabber, Char Ilahi. The unions including Kalpania, Harishpur, Rahmatpur, Azimpur, Musapur, Sarikaite, Maitbangha are also now under threat of erosion.

People of these unions took shelter in others parts of the town leaving their ancestral homes, cattle, ponds full of fish, forest and fruit trees due to erosion. But the Meghna also engulfed their new homes. The people of these areas now staying under the open air on the embankment with insecurity.

Local people said the Banglow of the Magistrate and Munsif, General Post Office, Court Office, Bar Office, Kargail Government High School, Guptachara Road, Sandwip High School, Sandwip Basiria Senior High School, Phulibibi Shaheini Jamee Mosque, Hospital building, Kargail bridge on the Satal canal, 11 food godowns, Meteorology Office, Sub-Register's Office, T&T Office, WAPDA Rest House, Public Library, National Bank building were engulfed by the river and sea.

Not only for the lack of sincerity of political leaders and the government but due to the devastating erosion of the river and the sea, the infrastructural development of this sandy island Sandwip was not possible, the local people said.

The people of the area are now eager to leave their ancestral houses due to the unabated erosion,

Haramia told this correspondent that once upon a time the Sandwip was 'the land of 62 Mouza'. Of them, 29 sank in the river and sea.

To protect the Sandwip island from the devastating erosion, the former governments spent huge money. But for the reason of massive corruptions the inhabitants of Sandwip did not get results.

When attention was drawn about this, local MP Mostafa Kamal Paasha told The Daily Star 'Erosion is the permanent problem of Sandwip. The 640 square Sandwip now limited to the 70 to 80 square kilometres'.

Blaming former MPs for not taking any steps to check erosion, he said 'he had talked to the water resource minister regarding this and the minister assured him of taking proper steps in this regard immediately'.

The resentment among the local people runs high as the project of the construction of 'Cross Dam' was hanging in balance over the last 40 years. The longfelt demand of the

local people was not yet implemented. But for the lack of sincerity of the previous governments the project to construct the cross dam was not yet implemented.

The then minister for irrigation, water resources and flood control, fisheries and livestock and ambassador of the Netherlands in Dhaka visited the area in January, 1982. After the visit, the Netherlands government conducted a feasibility study to build the Sandwip-Urrichar-Noakhali cross dam.

The study revealed that if the Sandwip-Urrichar-Noakhali cross dam was built, at least 135 thousand acres of land will be saved from the erosion. For implementation of the project, it will need Tk. 353 crore. The five countries including the Netherlands and Canada agreed to allocate funds for building the 22 kilometre cross dam with a condition for distributing the land to the landless people by permanent settlement. But the project has been tied up in the red tape over many years.

It is learnt that by building such kind of dam the Netherlands government changed its geographical situation by increasing its land by more than 7 per cent. By taking a 60-year plan the Netherlands increased its land by building a dam. We have also such kind of example of building of dam that saved quantity of land from the erosion. During the British rule, Ramgati had the same condition like Sandwip. But by building a small dam like 'Toha Dam', Rangamati was attached with the mainland of the country.

The local people also told this correspondent that the cost of building a cross dam now was decreasing due to rising the lands in the river.

The cyclones and the high-tides also hit the Sandwip many times and took the lives of people and cattle and damaged properties. In the last four decades, the catastrophic cyclones and high tides hit the Sandwip at least for six times. The cataclysmic storm took about 90 thousand to one lakh lives of the people of Sandwip. For this devastating deposition, the island is now known as 'The Valley of Death'.

For the flashes of news in both print and electronic media, many countries of the world helped the hapless people of the Sandwip after the catastrophic devastating natural disaster. But the hapless people got a little of the relief and foreign aid

'The people of Sandwip did not even get the 5 per cent of the grants of relief,' they told this correspondent.

'A section of dishonest people managed their future by capitalising the dead body of Sandwip,' they said.

The development in infrastructure sector is dissatisfactory due to the lack of sincerity and dishonesty of the authorities concerned. For four lakh people of Sandwip, it has only 98 cyclone shelter centres, which is very inadequate to cover them from the cataclysmic storms. Not a single cyclone centre was built in the last 11 years, even after the devastating catastrophic cyclone in 1991 took thousands of lives.

Ninety-eight cyclone centres were built in the Sandwip with the government and non-government fund. Of these, 15 are now in the river or seabed. And in rest 73 centres, about one lakh people can take shelter during natural disaster, leaving three lakh people in danger.

At least 400 shelter centres are needed to bring the people under the shelter umbrella, sources said.

Moreover, many of the shelter centres are now under the threat of erosion. The 20 shelter centres of Azimpur Union may go under water within a month or two.

Sources said, at least 20 thousand people died by the devil-like devastating catastrophic cyclone on April 29 in 1991. At least 30 thousand cattle died by that tumultuous cyclone.

The elderly people of Sandwip said the cyclones hit the island also in 1960, 1963 and 1970 with its devastating devil force.

The catastrophic cyclone in 1985 took three thousand lives of the people of the Sandwip. Many of the dead bodies were seen floated in the Meghna and the Bay of Bengal after the cyclone. The whole world was stunned to see the destruction caused by the devastating power of the cyclone.

The then seven representatives of the SAARC countries and Linda Chakar, environment minister of Britain came to the island with huge relief.

But the local people said they did not get the relief as the political leaders and the government officials misappropriates the lion's share of the relief.

'The hapless people did not get the 5 per cent of relief.' 'If the people got the 5 per cent of the relief it was enough for them, local people said.'



PHOTO: STAR

The road stretching from WASA intersection to Almas Cinema hall crossing at Dampara in the city has turned into an undeclared place for trading of sand. Long line of Trucks are always seen to occupy a portion of the road since its expansion with the authority caring a little.