

Hills disappearing fast in Cox's Bazar town

Denudation of forests also continue unabated as land grabbers enjoy blessings of administration officials

MUAZZEM HOSSAIN SHAKIL,
Cox's Bazar

Hills are disappearing fast in the resort town of Cox's Bazar while denudation of forests is going on unabated.

During a visit to the areas, this

by hanging signboards of their so-called housing projects in Ghonarpara, bus terminal, Pahartoli, Larpara, Boidderghona areas and then destroyed the hills. Following publication of reports of hill cutting in major national dailies, the land grabbers man-

influentials and top district administration officials.

Some environmental and professional organisations tried to build up agitation to stop hill cutting but it did not last longer. It has been learnt that the administration also shut their mouth against hill cutting.

have set up a housing project in Kalatoli by-pass area of the town by grabbing 51 acres of hill land. The Forest Department filed cases with the assistant judge's court for permanent bar on it on October 22, but the ruling went against them. 'We have appealed to the higher court against the ruling', he said.

Forest Department sources said the district administration staffers destroyed hills and fell many 'Segun' (teak) trees after grabbing the land. On the day, a team of forest guards led by Forest Department writ officer, Khondker Ariful Islam tried to prevent them from their act, but government staffers beat them up. As a result, Ariful Islam and three others sustained serious injuries and later shifted to hospital.

As many as 28 bulldozers were demolishing hills and forests in the area till filing of this report yesterday afternoon, the sources said.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) informed that their organisation filed a writ against the activities. The High Court banned setting up of housing projects by destroying hills and denuding forests in Kalatoli area. Show cause notices were issued on concerned officials. The court also ordered not to allot land to anybody or organisation in the protected area.

But defying the court order denudation of forest and hill cutting have been going on unabated, a Bela member lamented.

Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Aminul Islam said he himself does not support hill cutting. It started during the tenure of his predecessors, he said.

A source in the district administration said a few ministers, state ministers, secretaries and big wigs of the earstwhile 4-party Alliance were involved in the housing projects speeding up hill cutting and denudation of trees.

However, Cox's Bazar District Lawyers Association brought out protest processions, formed human chains and protest rallies for long to stop hill cutting. District Lawyers' Association president Advocate Momtaz Ahmed said a disaster looms due to indiscriminate hill cutting. He alleged that the culprits are still out of dragnet as because a group of Forest Department employees are involved in hill cutting.

Cox's Bazar Divisional Forest official Abani Bhushan Thakur disclosed that government staff

aged many local newsmen allegedly by bribing them to stop publication of stories in local papers. In the recent time, the foulplay became an 'open secret' as a section of the district administration officials 'came to aid' of the land grabbers, sources said.

Forest officials informed that about 900 acres of hill lands worth about Tk 500 crore already went under 'unauthorised control'. The Forest Department could not take action against them because of close association of the land grabbers with political leaders,

correspondent saw a number of hills in the main town being cut for construction of new buildings and establishments.

Local people complained that the Four-party Alliance leaders in the area destroyed a large number of hills since the very beginning of their rule. They said, influentials led by a Cox's Bazar municipality BNP leader levelled to the ground some hills behind the district jail. Work on a housing project is going on there. Forest Department has claimed ownership of the lands.

Influentials started their projects



PHOTO: STAR

Trees being felled at the foot of a Kalatoli hill for construction of road for bulldozers.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Children going to school amid dense fog in Panchagarh. A cold spell is blowing across the northern region where mercury fell below 5 degree Celsius in several districts.

2 BNP leaders expelled from party in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Two district level BNP leaders have been expelled from the party for violating party discipline.

The expelled leaders are district BNP vice-president Md Ahad Miah, also chairman of Srimongal Pourasabha and district social welfare secretary Alauddin Rana.

Ahad Miah was expelled for his bid to contest election as an independent candidate from Moulvibazar-4 (Srimongal and Kamalganj) constituency.

Al-haj Mujibur Rahman Choudhury (Hazi Mujib) got BNP nomination in this constituency.

District BNP social welfare secretary Alauddin Rana was expelled for joining Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

District BNP publicity secretary Bakshi Misbaur Rahman told this correspondent the decision was taken at a meeting held at Srimongal BNP office with district unit president M Naser Rahman in the chair.

Mushroom healthy for all, makes some wealthy

GOLAM MOSTAFA JIBON,
Sirajganj

Mushroom cultivation has changed the lot of a young man in Sirajganj town.

Arifur Rahman Shamim, 25, son of late Abdul Jabbar of Shoyadhanghora village who started mushroom cultivation in a thatched room at his residence just one year ago, is now self-reliant.

He started cultivation after a seven-day training with an initial investment of Tk. 15000. But, now he earns around Tk 15,000 a month.

Shamim passed SSC examination and was looking for a job. But, he did not get any job because of his little education. At one stage, he started mushroom cultivation when he came in contact with a mushroom trader at Savar in Dhaka.

With his inspiration, he took training at Savar Mushroom Unnayan Centre for seven days and returned to his hometown to start mushroom cultivation. His project is known as Sirajganj Mushroom Centre.

Shamim is now cultivating oyster hybrid mushroom which is one of six eatable varieties among



PHOTO: STAR

Guest birds chirping and fluttering their wings at Hakaluki Haor (water body) in Moulvibazar.

No step to stop poaching of guest birds in Moulvibazar

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI,
Moulvibazar

Migratory birds are chirping and fluttering their wings at different water bodies including Hail Haor and Hakaluki Haor.

This year, the number of winter birds increased substantially, experts said here.

Every winter tens of thousands of guest birds of about 150 species flock to different water bodies and haors here from Siberia and other cold regions.

With their arrival, the poachers also have become active and started violating laws. Members of the law enforcement agencies are indifferent although illegal hunting goes on under their nose.

While visiting the water bodies, this correspondent talked to local people who complained of bird hunting with poisonous traps and nets. The poachers sell guest birds at high prices in different markets in the district, they said.

Locals alleged that government officials and political leaders openly go to different haors for hunting guest birds. Usually, they do the job on holidays. Some also bribe 'live' guest birds to their bosses for getting favour. Local politicians also send guest birds to influentials at Moulvibazar or Dhaka.

Most of the licensed gun holders who visit haor are amateur hunters while poor and unemployed people of the area hunt birds just to earn a living, sources

said.

In the winter of 2004, thousands of guest birds were killed by poisoning in Hakaluki Haor. Following publication of the news in various national dailies, environmentalists and people of all walks of life were shocked and thronged the haor. From then on, the environmentalists started motivational campaigns to save guest birds.

Environmentalists expressed their opinion in favour of fresh government policy for preservation of water bodies and guest birds.

However, NGOs like 'CNRS' and 'MEECH Project' have started working to establish sanctuaries for winter birds at

Hakaluki Haor and Hail Haor.

Srimongal MEECH Project office sources said a survey on migratory birds of Hail Haor was conducted by its project advisor and bird specialist Poll M Thompson in the first week of February last year. During the period, he counted birds for three days and said that 152 species of birds flocked to the haor that year. Of these, 88 species were aquatic birds.

Thompson also marked eight endangered species of birds in the haor during the study.

On contact, a field officer of MEECH Project told this correspondent that guest birds start coming to water bodies and haors in December. Their number increased this year.



PHOTO: STAR

A happy Shamim poses for photograph at the Sirajganj Mushroom Centre, set up by him only a year ago.