



Houses built by cutting hills in Bahubal area of Khadimnagar union in Syhet Sadar upazila. Hill cutting was on there till last week.

PHOTO: STAR

Over 300 hills levelled in a decade in Sylhet, suburbs

25 cases pending with court, 20 more being filed: DoE

IQBAL SIDDIQUE, Sylhet

Over 300 hillocks were levelled totally or partially in Sylhet city and its suburb in last 10 years, official sources said yesterday.

Besides, an unspecified number of hills were cut in Golapganj, Beanibazar and Fenchuganj upazilas in the district and Barlekha and Kulaura in Moulvibazar district, the officials said. Most of the hills were ravaged for housing projects and building homes by individuals.

Local influential, mainly political leaders of ruling and opposition parties, were directly or indirectly involved in the hill cutting, done allegedly with the help of a section of government officials, the sources said. The Department of Environment (DoE) recently started a survey on hill cutting in Sylhet.

"We hope it would be completed in a week or two. After the survey, we will submit a detailed report to higher authorities", an official of DoE said.

He said 25 cases filed by the department in Sylhet is pending with

court.

"Two cases were disposed off in our favour and charge sheets in some other cases will be submitted soon", he said.

The department is preparing to file 20 more cases, the DoE official said.

Hills were cut indiscriminately by influential groups, having political clout mainly because of inaction by officials concerned who often feared reprisal, he claimed.

In many cases, officials were almost silent spectators as the offenders had links with bigwigs in government or major political parties, he said.

Another cause was rapid urbanisation and pressure for housing projects as number of people migrating to towns from rural areas increased.

Sharp rise in value of land prompted many people to level hills for sale or go for real estate business.

The rising number of expatriates and remittances also played a big

role in this regard, while there was virtually no protest against hill cutting by some NGOs and citizens' groups, sources said.

Law enforcers took some measures occasionally at places and caught some people for hill cutting but most of them were innocent day labourers or truckers while the real culprit remained untouched as the raids were allegedly just an eye-wash, the sources said.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) issued some legal notices on people engaged in hill cutting in 2006 in Sylhet Sadar and Golapganj upazilas. Hill cutting stopped for days in certain areas but resumed again.

Bela filed a case in favour of 400 poor families, who were about to be evicted by authorities of state run Chhatak Cement Factory from Fakirilla hillock in Chhatak and Nasimpur Tila in Doarabazar in March last year.

Lands worth about Tk 500 crore have so far been recovered from their possession.

The factory authorities attempted to evict them to collect earth by

cutting hill from the government-owned hillock, violating government order. The 400 families had been living there with permission from district administration and paying taxes. Following the move by Bela, the High Court stopped the hill cutting there.

Many government departments also cut hills to set up new institutions and for other purposes.

Sylhet divisional stadium, named after former president Ziaur Rahman, was built near Lackotora hills on the city suburb. Part of the hillock was leveled last year for the stadium and the approach road.

After takeover by the caretaker government, the district administration and joint forces asked authorities of housing project to free government lands and water bodies they grabbed to expand their project areas.

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Gaibandha still groans due to FAP's faulty groins

Brahmaputra erosion makes 30,000 homeless since 1995

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Over 20 kilometre area along the western bank of Brahmaputra river in Gaibandha Sader, Shaghata and Fulchhari upazilas have been devoured by the river as erosion accentuated after construction of seven groins under Flood Action Plan (FAP-21) in 1993-94 fiscal year at a cost of Tk 100 crore.

The groins, set up at Dhutichora and Anerchara, are now totally abandoned in the midstream of the river.

The groins protected only two villages from erosion at the cost of a vast area downstream.

Experts said the devastation befall the area due to faulty planning, which made over 30,000 families homeless since 1995.

Erosion in the affected areas downstream still continues in different vulnerable points along the western bank of the river.

The plan was undertaken to divert the river water eastward to a tributary to save eleven unions from erosion under a river control programme. It was a pilot project funded by the governments of the Netherlands, France and Germany.

The plan included construction of 'counter embankment', dumping of boulders, laying of GO textile sheet and construction of ten groins in one kilometer area from Dhutichora to Anerchara under Gaibandha Sadar upazila.

But instead of going eastward, the water course surprisingly moved towards the western bank allegedly due to fault in the plan, and soon after completion of seven groins, erosion devoured a big area, local people said.

As erosion took a serious turn in vast areas along the western bank downstream, the remaining work was stopped without construction of three more groins.

"It became a curse for a large number of people who had lost

everything due to unplanned construction of groins", Anisur Rahman chairman of Gideri Union Parishad told this correspondent during a visit.

"Every year, many more are losing homesteads and croplands union".

Vast areas in Bhasperpara, Chirakuthi, Baguria, Balashi Ghat, Kanchipara, Kallamari, Ratnepur, Uri, Gajaria and Nilkuthi have gone into the river.

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the two-story old building abandoned.

Gaibandha town is only three and half kilometers from erosion points at Bhasperpara, Baguria and Sayerpur now, the UP chairman said.

When contacted, Gaibandha WDB Executive Engineer Babul Chandra Shil said WDB had nothing to do in this regard as it was not involved in its planning and implementation.

It was a pilot project and the whole work was done under the supervision of consultants from the three donor countries. Even major construction materials including

steel pipes were supplied by the donors.

He however said WDB is now implementing a small project involving Tk 13.4 crore to check erosion in some most vulnerable points in the area.

The WDB engineer said they are dumping concrete blocks along 500 meters of the river bank at Baguria and Sayerpur on priority basis. But the work is incomplete as only Tk 8.92 crore of the fund has so far been released.

The work should be done at a time to make it effective but it is now stopped for want of money, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Ex-RU Syndicate member demands removal of VC

Memo sent to UGC chairman, ministry

RU CORRESPONDENT

A former Syndicate member of Rajshahi University yesterday submitted memoranda to the University Grants Commission (UGC) chairman and the education secretary demanding resignation of Vice Chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain for his alleged irregularities.

In the faxed memoranda, former Syndicate member and a assistant professor Fayekuzzaman of Islamic History and Culture department alleged that the vice-chancellor controversially recruited more than 500 teachers, officials and employees on political considerations by violating directives of the UGC and the ministry.

Fayekuzzaman also alleged that the VC appointed three relatives as lecturers in the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) though no post was vacant.

He (VC) abused power by appointing pro-Jamaat teacher Prof Nazrul Islam as a permanent

professor at the Education and Research Institute without any advertisement.

The VC also promoted a pro-Jamaat assistant registrar to the post of registrar without calling selection committee meeting.

Violating the University Act, the VC re-appointed some former deans to their posts after expiry of tenure without election, he alleged in the memo.

When contacted, VC Prof Altaf Hossain said, "I did not receive such a memorandum, so I can not say anything about the matter".

When he contacted Prof Fayekuzzaman said, "As a conscious man I protested the irregularities and corruption by the VC".

Earlier, some pro-Awami League teachers of RU met with the UGC chairman and demanded action against those involved in 'controversial' recruitment, corruption, nepotism and violation of the University Act during the BNP-Jamaat rule.

As he declined to pay, BNP leader Sarwar Khan and his men forcibly took away all his fishes from the water body on December 16, 2003.

27 BNP men sued for 'extortion' in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

An extortion case was filed against 27 leaders and activists of Rajnagar upazila BNP in Moulvibazar with the Second Cognisance Court here yesterday.

The accused include two chairmen of Union Parishads.

Md Fazlul Haque Niru of Khar Para village in Rajnagar upazila filed the case against.

The accused include Md Sarwar Khan, secretary of Rajnagar upazila BNP and chairman of Rajnagar Union Parishad; Samsun Noor Azad, senior BNP leader and chairman of Panchaon UP; upazila BNP organizing secretary Md Suruk Miah and treasurer Babur Miah.

In his case Md Fazlul Haque Niru alleged that Sarwar Khan and other accused had demanded Tk six lakh from him as he wanted to lease Majher Bandh Bill (water body) for fishery.

He paid them the money when he leased the water body for the first term in 2002. But when he leased the water body for the second term in 2003, he refused to pay toll to the BNP leaders again.

As he declined to pay, BNP leader Sarwar Khan and his men forcibly took away all his fishes from the water body on December 16, 2003.

The plaintiff also said that he did not file any case at that time fearing reprisal as they belonged to the then ruling party.

Advocate Diptendu Das Gupta, lawyer of the plaintiff, told this correspondent that the court ordered Rajnagar police to record the allegation as an 'ejahar' and take legal step.

Robbers kill cattle trader

UNB, Kushtia

A cattle trader was shot dead and three others were injured in an attack by a gang of armed robbers on Amla-Poradah Road in Mirpur upazila Saturday night.

The dead is Hauz Pagol, 40, while the injured are Enamul, 30, Sattar, 40, and Solaiman, 32.

The robbers looted about Tk 2 lakh and four mobile phone sets from the cattle traders.

Police said the robbers intercepted a Nasimon carrying seven cattle traders at Holsapoara Moshatola at about 9pm. Robbers swooped on them and looted their money and mobile sets.



PHOTO: STAR

Women and children collecting flowers in Bagintapur village in Trilochonpur union.

The 'flower garden' of Jhenidah

Growers in 17 villages under Trilochonpur sell around Tk 85,000 flowers a day

HOSSAIN SERAJ AND AZIBOR RAHMAN, from Kaliganj, Jhenidah

The dawn breaks with birds chirping and flowers blooming at Trilochonpur and adjoining villages.

It is an eye soothing scene all around most fields in 17 villages in Kaliganj upazila, about 25km south-west of Jhenidah district town.

The villagers also grow various types of roses.

Most of the farmers in the area started flower cultivation instead of growing traditional crops like paddy and jute as it is more profitable. Flowers can be cultivated three times a year, farmers and agriculture officials told the Daily Star correspondents recently.

The flowers grown in the villages include Trilochonpur, Balaidanga, Gobardanga, Boro-Ghaghati, Chhoto-Ghaghati, Boginathpur, Fadilpur, Banuria and Tillia.

Commercial flower cultivation in the area began about eight years ago. Trilochonpur union is now known in the district as a 'flower

garden', thanks to the initiative by farmer Sabdul Hossain.

Sabdul said he has already earned around Tk 50,000 from flowers on two bighas this year. A similar amount may be earned if the weather remains favourable, he said.

Flower cultivation is spreading to other areas of the upazila and parts of the adjoining Chaudanga district, Agriculture Extension Department (AED) officials said.

According to AED statistics, out of some 2,400 bighas of land in Trilochonpur union, around 2,000 bighas are now under flower cultivation.

Abdur Razzak, a former chairman of Trilochonpur Union Parishad said most of the people in the union are directly or indirectly involved with flower cultivation and trade.

The correspondents found that most of the people are flower lovers as it earns them bread and keeps the area beautiful.

During this ongoing peak season, farmers in Trilochonpur union sell two truckloads of Marigold and

at least 80 bundles of tuberoses per day at Kaliganj upazila headquarters.

Each bundle contains up to 3,000 sticks of tuberoses. The flowers find their way to flower markets in Dhaka, Chittagong, and other cities and towns.

Now people of 17 villages in Trilochonpur union sell flowers worth about Tk 85,000 a day. But we had bad times in the past", said Razzak, also a flower grower.

"Traders from Dhaka used to cheat us, make payments late and in small installments. Now we sell flowers on cash payment", said Saifur Rahman, a flower wholesaler in Kaliganj upazila headquarters.

Kaliganj upazila AED official Shahidul Islam said farmers in the area took to flower growing as it is more profitable than paddy, jute or other traditional crops.

Abdul Kader Sarkar, Deputy Director (DD) of Jhenidah district AED said, "Seeing their success, we have decided to provide them special training".

The administration is monitoring fertiliser distribution and order has been issued to all concerned