

Water bodies disappearing fast in Khagrachhari

Most grabbers belong to political parties

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Natural lakes, canals and other water bodies in picturesque Khagrachhari town are disappearing as land grabbers are illegally filling up those and constructing buildings and makeshift structures.

Neither the district administration nor the Khagrachhari municipality has taken any effective step to stop the land grabbing as most of the grabbers belong to political parties, sources told this correspondent.

They are building houses, shops and slums as the authorities seldom take any action against encroachment, the sources said.

During a spot survey this correspondent found illegal structures encroaching upon water bodies including Kalabagan lake, Master Para lake, Pankhiyapara lake, Muslim Para canal, Narikel Bagan canal and Golabari canal. Most of the illegal structures sprang up in last five years, locals said.

Khagrachhari Government College Principal Bodhi Sattya Dewan said, administration took some lukewarm initiative to evict grabber from the government land but they are again trying to grab the land.

Investigation by this correspondent revealed that most of the encroachers are leaders of major political parties.

In some of the cases, the encroachers have procured papers showing some sort of 'lease' from the authorities. But the authorities, when contacted, denied having leased the areas.

Kalabagum Lake, the largest lake in the town, has lost its beauty as land grabbers have built structures on all its banks. The lake, once an attractive place for townspeople and tourists for its scenic beauty, is now virtually off-limits to them because of encroachment and pollution.

"We have lost a nice recreation spot", Hasan Mia, a local resident lamented while talking to The Daily Star correspondent.

The municipal authorities took some 'face saving' steps in Shantinagar area in the town by demolishing some illegal structures, leaving those on banks of water bodies untouched.



Illegal structures built by filling up Golabari Canal along the road in Khagrachhari town. The canal is one of many water bodies encroached by land grabbers.

Some sources alleged that Municipality Chairman Joyanal Abedin, being a BNP leader, could not take any effective step as most of the encroachers either belong to the party or enjoy political clout.

There are at least 30 illegal shops on banks of Pankhiyapara Lake. The municipality issued notices on the encroachers several months ago, only to be ignored by them, sources said.

The most luxurious hotel in the town Ziran-- was built on encroached land along the bank of Chengi river by a former lawmaker of Jatiya Party (Ershed) during their rule.

An influential member of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council also built a house and office complex illegally on the bank of the canal.

As the authorities did not take any step to demolish the massive illegal structures, others are now building slums on Chengi river bank and renting those, locals said.

As the land grabbing continues and water bodies disappearing, the environment is threatened with pollution. As natural outlets are clogged, the areas are flooded almost every year during rainy season causing sufferings to people,

environmentalist Nurul Azam said.

Seeking anonymity, a high official of Khagrachhari municipality said the authorities are helpless as most of the land grabbers are political leaders.

When contacted, Khagrachhari municipality chairman Joyanal Abedin said, "I heard about it and some illegal structure have been demolished and others will also be evicted with help of the administration".

"We warned them through announcements yesterday to remove the structures voluntarily, otherwise action will be taken as per law", he said.

Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Shahadat Hossen said, a mobile court has started working and proper action will be taken against the culprits, he said.

Some members of the elite told this correspondent that they expect proper action by the caretaker government to remove the illegal structures and restore beauty of the water bodies.

MISAPPROPRIATION OF 200 MT WHEAT

Probe body finds charges against ex-whip correct

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

An investigation committee has detected misappropriation of 200 metric tons (MT) of rice sanctioned for relief work in five unions of Banaripara upazila by former whip and BNP lawmaker Shahidul Huq Jamal.

Banaripara upazila administration formed the probe body as per order of joint forces just after promulgation of the countrywide state of emergency on January 11.

The rice was sanctioned for relief work among the distressed people in the unions and were delivered from government food godowns on October 19 last year only eight days before transfer of power of the BNP-led 4-party Alliance government.

The probe team is being headed

by upazila public health engineering officer Sayed Quddus while other members are woman affairs officer Dipika Sen, statistical officer Abdul Rahman, cooperatives officer Hafiz Ahmed and education officer Abdul Latif.

On investigation, the committee detected that 20 tons of rice was sanctioned in name of Iuhar Union Parishad (UP) member Zakir Hussein, 48 tons in the name of Chakhar UP member Idris Sardar, 50 tons in names of Baishari UP members Nazrul Islam and Berek Mridha, 30 tons in names of Udaykati UP members Abdus Sattar and Altaf Hussein and 52 tons in names of Sadar UP members Nurul Huq Kalu, Shafiqul Islam and Abdur Rashid under Banaripara upazila.

But the entire rice was misappropriated without giving a single grain to any distressed people and sold at black market.

While giving witnesses before the investigation team, the recipients of rice said they were forced to sign false receiving letters and master rolls of rice distribution by order of Shahidul Huq Jamal, former whip and local BNP lawmaker, Ismail Hussein, the then UNO of the upazila and upazila BNP secretary Aftab Hussein Mofakkher.

When contacted, Banaripara Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Rafiqul Huq and other sources acknowledged the report.

The probe committee will submit report by next week. Afterwards, legal action would be taken against the persons responsible for misappropriation of rice, they said.

Jhalakathi pouro chairman gets 10 yrs' RI

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A court here yesterday sentenced expelled BNP leader and Jhalakathi municipality chairman Abdul Halim Gazi to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing illegal arms.

Rabiul Hassan, judge of Barisal Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal, handed down the punishment under Section 19(ka) of Arms Act in presence of the accused after examining 8 witnesses and evidences.

Court sources said Halim Gazi was arrested from his Jhalakathi town residence on March 10 by joint forces.

During interrogation he confessed possessing illegal arms and handed over a revolver to joint forces on March 11.

Voter roll work begins in Khulna city Aug 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Voter registration with photographs and preparation of national identity cards will begin in 31 wards of Khulna city on August 19.

Meanwhile, Khulna district election office has got about five lakh voter forms from the office of the Chief Election Commissioner, sources at the district election office said.

They said 1600 enumerators have already been appointed.

Five enumerators will be guided by a supervisor. A total of 320 supervisors have been appointed for guiding the 1,600 enumerators.

The source said that 35 assistant registration officers (ARO)

and 320 supervisors are to undergo training along with 1,600 enumerator, which will begin today and continue till August 15.

The training of enumerators will take place at the office of Sonadanga Jubo Unnayan Kendra and of AROs and supervisors at the Collegiate Girls' School in Khulna city.

Khulna district election officer said that 649 people have been appointed as computer data entry operators. In addition, six computer experts from the army will also assist data entry operators.

According to the latest voter list, there were 4, 81,480 voters including 2,24,806 women in Khulna city.

More 592 jute workers get arrears

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

More 592 retrenched workers of closed People Jute Mills were paid their arrear wages yesterday.

Sources in Patkal Sangram Parishad, a body of jute workers, said many workers could not open accounts with any bank due to financial crisis though they got payment of arrears in cheques. Besides, workers who opened accounts could not yet cash their cheques.

Ruhul Amin, a retrenched worker told this correspondent that he could not open account with any bank till due to want to money though he received a cheque for Tk. 14,250 on August 7 against his arrear wages for 15 weeks.

Another worker Anwar Hossain said he came to Khulna from Nalchity upazila in Pirojpur district to receive payment. "But I am yet to get my cheque", he said.

When contacted, project director of the closed jute mill Habibur Rahman said all retrenched workers will get their arrears.

Payment of arrear wages began on August 7 under supervision of a four-member high-level team of BJMC (Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation).

So far, (till August 12) 2907 out of 35,00 workers got cheques against their arrear wages, the project director said.

NGO trains jute workers' families

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Jagarani Chakra Foundation (JCF), a local NGO, has taken up a programme to help needy workers of state-round Jessore Jute Industries (JJI) at Rajshahi.

Under the programme, JCF has introduced a three-day training on embroidery for women members of workers' families who did not get their wages for several months.

The training programme began on Saturday at the workers' union office at JJI with participation of 40 women in the first batch.

The training programme was inaugurated by Director (Micro-finance) of JCF Md. Wahiduzzaman.

Training for second and third batches will begin on August 14 and August 18.

Park gobbled up for nursery business

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

Rangamati Pouro Park, the lone park in the hill town, has virtually fallen to nursery business.

A businessman is using two-thirds of the park for nursery business, claiming that he leased the area from municipality authorities.

Now the park is off-limits to people including children as the lessee has erected several sheds for his nursery. He hung a big sign board reading Pouro Nursery.

The park was built in 1985 to create recreation facilities for townspeople and enhance beauty of the hill town. It was inaugurated by the then Brigade Commander Mohammed Anwar Hossain on August 25, 1985.

"I leased the area in 2005 for three years to set up a nursery. I am paying a monthly rent of Tk 300 to the Poursabha", lessee Md. Mozaffar Ahmed told this correspondent on Saturday.

"Off course, the municipal authorities can cancel the lease any time because this is a govern-

ment land", he said.

Mozaffar said the area was leased after the municipal authorities stopped construction of a community center following protests by local people and environmentalists and a stay order by court. The protests followed felling of several big trees in the park for construction of the planned community centre.

The municipal authorities called a tender to construct a community centre at a cost of Tk 12 crore at park in 2004. The work was started in the same year but was stopped in the face of protests and a stay order by court following a writ petition by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyer Association (BELA), sources said.

The municipal authorities also filed a petition against the writ but the court dismissed it.

In last two years, many illegal structures have sprang up in the park as there is none to take care of it.

The nursery owner erected

fences around two-thirds portion of the park and his workers do not allow us to enter," school student Md. Iyasar Arafat lamented while talking to this correspondent during a visit.

Contacted, former poursabha chairman Kazi Nazrul Islam said the park should be restored at any cost. The park can not be destroyed for construction of a community centre. The park is part of civics amenities in the tourist town, he said.

Poursabha chairman Md. Habibur Rahman however said the park land was not leased.

"How can we lease a government land? We have just given permission for raising a nursery on temporary basis.

He said a plan has been prepared for beautification of the park and work will be started when the court stay order is withdrawn.

"We will hold a meeting with the plaintiffs within days. All illegal structures will be demolished when the work begins", he said.

EC to prepare correct voter list: Sahul

BSS, Comilla

Election Commissioner Muhammad Sahul Hussain yesterday said here that the prime object of the Election Commission (EC) is to conduct a fair and neutral election by presenting the nation a sound and correct voter list.

He said this while addressing a coordination meeting of the field level officials to be engaged for preparing voter list with photograph and national identity card.

Election Commissioner Brigadier General (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain was present.

The election commissioner also called upon the officials concerned to discharge their duties sincerely by taking the task of voter list preparation as a noble act.

He said as soon as the work of enlisting voters in a ward is completed, the draft voter list will be displayed at an open place for further correction.

"The final voter list will be published after correcting it properly, if found any fault in the draft voter list," he said adding, that the national ID card will be given on the basis of the voter list.

With Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Comilla Manjurur Rahman in the chair, the meeting was also addressed, among others, by commander of joint forces in Comilla region Lt Col Mohammad Anwar Hossain, district election officer Nabi Chowdhury and superintendent of police Mir Shahidul Islam.

Date-expired soft drinks recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) recovered 4,220 cans of date-expired Crown drinks packed in 120 cartons from a wholesale rice shop at Fariapotty in Barisal city in the early hours of yesterday.

Lt. Com. Mamun of RAB Unit-8 said, on basis of a tip-off, RAB searched the shop and recovered the cans of Crown drinks.

Owners and staffs of the shop managed escape sensing presence of law enforcers.

A case has been lodged in this connection with Kotwali police station.



Croplands have turned into vast fishing zones as flood has washed away fishes from ponds and other water bodies in Tarash and Natore Gurudashpur upazilas in Sirajganj.

EEXTORTION CASE AGAINST NASER RAHMAN

Court records plaintiff's deposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT Sylhet

Deposition of the complainant in the much talked about extortion case against former BNP lawmaker Naser Rahman was recorded yesterday in the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge-III, Sylhet.

Among the accused, Naser Rahman, also Moulvibazar district BNP chief, Moulvibazar poursabha chairman and district BNP secretary Foyzul Karim Moyun and sub divisional engineer of the Roads and Highways department Monwar Sadique were present at the dock while complainant contractor Nuruzzaman submitted his deposition.

The court on August 6 framed charges in the Tk 2 crore extortion case filed against Naser Rahman, son of former finance minister M Saifur Rahman and five others. On the other hand, a High Court bench on July 25 stayed trail of another accused in the same case-- Sylhet city BNP chief Ariful Haque Chowdhury for six months.

District Judge Abdul Gafur earlier on August 5 ordered shifting of the case to the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Binoy

Kumar Majumder.

There are allegations of corruption against the former finance minister's son and Ariful Haque Chowdhury.

Both of them are on the Anti Corruption Commission's (ACC) first list of 50 corruption suspects. On February 17, contractor Nuruzzaman filed the extortion case against Naser Rahman and seven others including Ariful Haque Chowdhury, Foizul Karim Moyun and some R & H officials.

In the case, Nuruzzaman alleged that on October 10, 2003, Naser in connivance with others demanded Tk 2 crore toll from him.

Arif and Moyun, close aides to former finance minister are in jail hajat while other accused are absconding. Detective Branch police filed charge sheet against the seven accused.

Contractor Nuruzzaman first came to limelight 4 years ago after he brought extortion charge against the then Naser Rahman.

Naser asked for the toll as Nuruzzaman was awarded some road construction and reconstruction work by, Nuruzzaman alleged.

Unscreened blood trader's den busted in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Joint forces yesterday seized 15 bags of unscreened blood and other equipment from a house of an illegal blood trader here.

Tipped-off, joint forces raided the house of Abdul Mannan, a former employee of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) blood bank and seized the blood bags, seals of fake doctors, five pieces of empty bags of blood and blood testing equipment.

Sensing danger, Mannan fled the scene.

Mannan used to collect blood from professional blood donors. Drug-users were his main donors and he sold their blood regularly without proper test to different clinics here and different upazilas including Bagha, Charghat, Godagari, Tanore, Durgapur and Mohonpur.

Joint forces officials said they are trying to arrest Mannan. There is a big and deep-rooted network of illegal blood traders in and around the city, they said.

Mannan was dismissed from service for corrupt practices last year. After dismissal, he started blood business at Sepoypara in name of Islami Pathology and Blood Bank. He closed his blood bank when army personnel started a drive against illegal health service providers here. But he continued the illegal trade at his house.



A nursery trader has raised a fencing covering two-thirds of Rangamati Pouro Park, making the area off-limits to visitors.