



A bulldozer levelling hilly forest area in Bandarban, right, earth being pulped into bricks in a nearby brick field.



PHOTO: STAR

100 brick kilns in CHT harming agri lands, denuding forests

MONIRUL ISLAM MONU, Bandarban

Around 100 brick kilns in Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati hill districts use 5.40 lakh tonnes of loamy soil every year, much to the harm of agricultural lands in addition to causing damage to hills, forest resources and environment.

A recent research conducted by Bandarban Soil and Water Conservation Centre run by Bangladesh Soil Research Institute revealed the alarming information.

The research found that 52 brick kilns in Khagrachhari, 31 in Bandarban and 17 in Rangamati produce and refract about 18 crore pieces of bricks every year. In the process topsoil of at least 270 hectares of crop land is destroyed every year.

"Brick kilns have to use loamy soil to maintain quality of bricks. If the

process continues 74,903 hectares of crop land in Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari will be destroyed soon," said agriculturist Jobaer Al Arman, officer-in-charge of Bandarban Soil and Water Conservation Centre.

"Crop lands throughout the country are facing threat as setting up of brick kilns continues. Existing law has provision for jail term of different tenure and monetary fine for using firewood for burning bricks. But there is no law to take action against the use of soil from agricultural land for the purpose," said agriculturist AKM Farhad Hossain, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension at Bandarban.

"According to the latest account, there are 34,114 hectares of sloppy crop lands in Khagrachhari, 22,443 hectares in Bandarban and 18,346 hectares in Rangamati district. The

brick kilns now threaten these lands," noted soil researcher Mohammad Shahin said.

A medium sized brick kiln produces about 18 lakh pieces of brick every year and at least 3 kg earth is required for a piece of 150 cubic inch brick, said a brick field manager seeking anonymity.

Brick field owners buy earth from nearby crop lands at nominal prices and earth is taken from up to six inches deep to make pulp for brick, he said.

According to an estimate of Bandarban Soil and Water Conservation Centre, 18,346 hectares of crop land in the district will be lost in only 68 years if the earth is extracted at the present rate.

Environmentalists alleged that the brick field owners do not need to take any permission from local administration, agricultural depart-

ment or Directorate of Environment for extracting soil.

As per conditions for setting up a brick field, all bricks and other properties of a brick field can be seized if proof of burning firewood is found.

Review of the office records and spot visits however show that no brick was seized for such crime in Bandarban district in last 28 years.

It was found during spot visits that 84 of the 100 brick fields in three hill districts have been set up very close to human habitations, educational institutions or health care facilities violating laws concerned.

The brick field authorities got approval for mysterious reasons although the committee concerned comprised members of district administration, forest or environment directorate and upazila nirbahi officer, said sources concerned.

In Bandarban Sadar upazila, eight

brick fields have been set up adjacent to densely populated areas near Dhophchhari Reserve Forest, one near a primary school and another within a few yards of a health centre.

When contacted, DFO RASM Monirul Islam of Bandarban Forest Department said, "Rules have been relaxed considering requirement of bricks for development work as there was no scope for setting up brick field in the district Sadar except at Majherpara.

"The district administration has been keeping an eye on the presence of 'too many' brick fields in the district. Four out of five applications for setting up brick fields have been rejected in the current season. Similar steps would also be taken in case of the remaining applications," Bandarban Additional Deputy Commissioner Abdul Mannan said.

7 UPDF men abducted in Rangamati

The anti-peace accord body places 4-pt demand in Khagrachhari

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Seven activists of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) were abducted in Rangamati on Friday while the anti-peace accord organisation placed 4-point demand at a function in Khagrachhari yesterday.

Our Correspondent in Rangamati reports: Seven activists of UPDF that has been demanding full autonomy for indigenous people in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), were kidnapped on Friday evening allegedly by the people of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) from Munshi Abdur Rouf Square at Manikchhari, some 20 kilometers away from the district town.

The abducted UPDF men are Pratul Chakma, Santosh Chakma, Jiten Chakma, Keru Chakma, Bikash Chakma, Mishan Chakma and Bindu Dhan Chakma.

They were picked up while putting posters marking UPDF's 11th founding anniversary.

They are residents of Kutukchhari of Sadar upazila and Ghilachhari of Naniachar upazila, UPDF leader Michael Chakma said yesterday.

PCJSS cadres kidnapped our activists to foil our programme, said Michael, who is also convener of Rangamati UPDF unit.

Sources said, a group of armed cadres of PCJSS went to the spot and picked them up on three-wheelers at gun point. The kidnappers later took them to unknown places in the deep forests of Rangapani areas, they said.

Shantideb Chakma, a leader of UPDF, Rangamati

unit, strongly condemned the incident and urged the administration to rescue their activists immediately.

Babul Uddin Sarder, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali police station, told this correspondent that the police are still investigating the incident. "We have not received any written complaint yet," he added.

Our Correspondent in Khagrachhari reports: UPDF leaders here yesterday placed 4-point demand to ensure rights of the indigenous people.

The demands include resolving land dispute within shortest possible time, stopping special operation in hill districts, withdrawal of security men and constitutional recognition to indigenous people in the CHT.

UPDF leaders were holding a meeting on the occasion of 11th founding anniversary of the organisation at Narankhiya Red Square under Sadar upazila in Khagrachhari district.

Presided by Democratic Youth Forum (DYF) district unit general secretary Arpon Chakma, the meeting was attended as chief guest by Khagrachhari district UPDF coordinator Ujjal Smritty Chakma.

Among others, Hill Women's Federation district unit vice president Chandoni Chakma, Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) district unit general secretary Aprushi Marmar, Hill Women Federation secretary Swarna Chakma also spoke at the meeting.

Earlier, they held a bicycle procession which paraded the main roads of the hill town.



STAR: FILE PHOTO

Chakma Raja Devashis Roy, accompanied by members of the royal family, heading towards Raj Darbar during the last Raj Punyah festival in Rangamati in 2003.

Rangamati wears festive look for Raj Punyah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Rangamati hill town assumes a festive look as preparations are on to celebrate the three-day-long traditional 'Raj Punyah' festival that will begin at the compound of Chakma Rajbari (palace) today.

A big canopy has been erected on the Rajbari (palace) premises and a temporary bamboo bridge has been constructed along the Rajbarighat for convenience of the visitors.

Chakma Raja Devashis Roy and prince Tribhuban Aryadev Roy will ascend the makeshift throne as the 'Raj Darbar' will be held according to the traditional customs at Chakma Rajbari at 1:00pm today.

Raja Devashis will receive annual jhum taxes from the 175 headmen (mouza chiefs) at the function. The Raja himself oversees three other mouzas.

As per tradition, they will also bring different gifts including chicken, pig and wine for the king during the three-day festival.

Headmen and karbaries have been providing jhum taxes to the government through the chiefs of Chakma, Bomang and Moung circles in three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts for a

long time.

Alongside land and tax management, the headmen and karbaries play important role in maintaining law and order at the local level and conduct social arbitration in the indigenous society.

Despite performing important jobs, the traditional leaders are utterly neglected as they get Tk 300 only as monthly allowance from the government. Many of them have to struggle hard to maintain family.

Gautam Muni Mela, indigenous cultural function and sports, drama and jatra will mark the three-day Raj Punyah festival. Besides, there will be exhibition of different indigenous attires and bamboo-made furniture.

Indigenous people, especially those belonging to the Chakma community, have arrived in Rangamati town from far-flung areas to join the royal festival.

Hotels, motels and guest houses in the town are already booked as people from different parts of the country have come to see and enjoy the traditional festival.

Raj Punyah was held in Rangamati in 2003 after a long time. Then it did not take place during the last five years for various reasons.

C'nawabganj, Chuadanga demand gas connection

STAR NATIONAL DESK

A citizens' committee in Chapainawabganj has demanded installation of pipeline to supply gas to the district while a citizens' forum in Chuadanga pressed its demand for bringing the district under gas pipeline installation project (Kushtia to Khulna) that approved recently by the Ecneec.

In Chapainawabganj, Nagorik Adhikar Adai Committee (committee for realisation of citizen's rights) made the demands at a press conference at local municipality auditorium on Friday, according to our correspondent.

It also raised the demand for introducing Chapainawabganj-Dhaka and Chapainawabganj-Rajshahi intercity train services.

The committee urged the government to make an announcement in this regard within the next four days. Otherwise, it threatened to launch an indefinite sit-in programme in front of Shah Neyamatullah College from December 30.

The committee leaders told the press conference that Sonamasjid land port in the district plays an important role in country's economy. "If gas supply is ensued, businessmen will show their interest in setting up industries here," they said.

They also demanded proper maintenance of Chapainawabganj-Rajshahi rail route, which

has been in deplorable condition for long.

The committee urged the government to immediately start construction of second Mohananda Bridge and expand the BSCIC area to set up more industries there.

President of Nagorik Adhikar Adai Committee Mahfuzur Rahman, its General Secretary Torikul Islam Siddiqi, Social Welfare Secretary Dilshad Tahmina Mimi, and member Rimon Rohan were present at the press conference.

In Chuadanga, people from all walks of life have demanded inclusion of the district in the gas pipeline installation scheme.

They formed a citizens' forum on Friday named Gas Link Implementation Forum (GLIF) in this regard.

Mayor of Chuadanga Municipality Riazul Islam Joardar has been made convener while Chuadanga Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Habibur Rahman Labu member-secretary.

The forum will work to press home the demand for inclusion of Chuadanga district into the project that passed recently by Ecneec. Sources said Chuadanga and Meherpur out of 10 districts under Khulna division have been kept out of the project.

The GLIF in a meeting on Friday also decided to form human chain and hold rallies and processions in the district to realise the demand.

Two more lawyers fired for moving cases for militants

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two more government lawyers in Tangail were dismissed from their services on charges of conducting cases for the militants.

They are AKM Nasimul Akhter, special public prosecutor (SPP), and AKM Shamimul Akhter, assistant public prosecutor (APP).

Dismissal letters will be sent to the two law officers tomorrow. Deputy Commissioner M Bazlul Karim Chowdhury told this correspondent yesterday.

The Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs in a letter on December 20 directed the deputy commissioner to dismiss the two government law officers in public interest.

On August 2, assistant public prosecutors (APPs) in Tangail Shahan Shah Siddique and Abu Bakar Siddique Khan were dismissed from their jobs on same allegations.

The all four dismissed lawyers were appointed as government law officers after the Awami League-led grand alliance government came to power.

They were conducting cases for JMB and Allar Dal cadres who were arrested with firearms, explosives and others documents at different places of the district, court sources said.

AKM Nasimul Akhter is vice-president of Tangail Jubo League while AKM Shamimul Akhter law secretary of Tangail district Awami League.



PHOTO: STAR

Teachers and students of Rajshahi Bholanath Bishweshwar Hindu Academy bring out a colourful procession in the city yesterday as the renowned institution started a two-day programme marking 111 years of glory and heritage yesterday.