

Century-old tea estate on the verge of ruin

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN and
RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI

Laxmi Charan Bagti, 45, was born in a tea garden and has been working for Pallathal Tea Estate in Moulvibazar. His father and grandfather did the same.

But now uncertainty has gripped him as neighbouring Indian state of Assam has moved to establish its control over a part of the land workers see as the lifeline of the century-old garden.

"We have been working here for generations. We were born here. Our parents and grandparents earned their livelihood in this estate. We have followed our ancestors' footsteps," he said.

"Where shall we go if India takes over the garden? We know no other trade," he told The Daily Star.

Laxmi Charan is not alone; there are about 500 others who have been making a living in the tea garden for years and maintaining families.

Spread over 1,200 acres of land, Pallathal Tea Estate under Borolekha upazila was established in the 1920s as Pallathal Division of the Hindustan Tea Company Ltd. Since then tea has been growing in the area, according to documents of the Directorate of Land Record and Survey (DLRS).

The existence of the tea estate, which is now owned by Riazur Rahman, managing director of Pallathal Tea Estate, has come under threat after Indian state of Assam claimed 360 acres of the estate.

Bangladesh Tea Board records and garden maps also fully back up the fact that sections 2, 3 and 4, that constitute the major parts of the 360-acre garden under question, are an integral part of the tea estate.

"If the areas are taken away it will cut off the main artery

of the estate, the main access road and also the key part of the estate. This would mean the death of the tea estate and would deprive the workers of their livelihood," said Rahman.

The workers, who are mostly Hindus, have got worried as their existence and future appear to be uncertain as Delhi has stepped up efforts to complete the groundwork and demarcation of the disputed Indo-Bangla border in Karimganj district of Assam before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka this week, reported Kolkata-based The Telegraph.

Karimganj has a 92-kilometre long border with Bangladesh where about 300 acres are in 'adverse possession' of Bangladesh, something Delhi is striving to resolve, the newspaper quoted Indian officials as saying.

"Due to the reluctance of the Assam government to give up this land, India has now sent their own version of a sketched map, which if accepted by us, will give us 60 acres and they will take away 300 acres," said Rahman.

"This means that our tea plantation and our main road will also fall into their territory leaving us some paddy and grazing lands. In which case, the garden can no longer survive and the workers will also be deprived of their livelihoods and future," he told The Daily Star by telephone.

The owners and the workers of Pallathal Tea Estate have appealed to the government against giving in to the 'unjust' demand of India to save the century-old estate from total ruination.

"My father and grandfather worked for this garden. If the 360-acre land is taken away, then the tea garden will be destroyed," said Nikhil Bagti,



STAR

Tea garden workers and their family members protest the move against taking away a key part of the garden in Moulvibazar.

65, secretary of the tea estate Panchayat, who has been working in the garden for more than four decades. His one son and two daughters also work in the tea garden.

Rajkumar Bagti, 45, president of the Panchayat, was also born in the tea garden, as his father also worked there. He said: "If we cannot retain the place we will be completely ruined. We will have nowhere to go."

The people of Khasia tribe grow betel leaf on a part of the 360-acre area. Cultivating betel leaves is the main earning source for them. "Our livelihood will face ruination if the land is taken away by India," said Lukash Bahadur, a Khasia 'mantree' (headman) and also a newly elected

union parishad member.

Rahman bought the estate from Pushpa Rani Chowdhury in 1989-90 and has been producing tea since then.

Pallathal Tea Estate produces 1.5 lakh kilograms of tea annually. It is registered with the Bangladesh Tea Board and is also a member of the Bangladesh Tea Association.

In 1976, the deputy commissioner of Cachar district (now Karimganj) of Assam and deputy commissioner of Sylhet met and decided that the status quo of the 360 acres land would be maintained until finalisation of the matter at government level, according to documents obtained by The Daily Star.

Since then no decision has been taken.

However, the land department of Assam claims that there is no such ad hoc position on the land.

On Saturday, survey teams from India and Bangladesh signed a boundary map in Lathitila in Juri upazila as they could not do so on August 28 in Pallathal due to protest from the tea estate workers, sources said.

The mapping gave Assam 291 acres and the rest went to Bangladesh.

Rahman said the mapping has been signed in a clandestine manner, and the main road to the tea estate has been affected. "According to the signed mapping, the Indian side is taking away 80 percent of the key part of the tea estate." Meanwhile, Assam Chief

Minister Tarun Gogoi claimed that Assam would gain more in the proposed land swap agreement between India and Bangladesh to be discussed and signed during the Indian prime minister's scheduled visit to Bangladesh, according to a report published on the Times of Assam on Saturday.

"The agreement would not only be beneficial for Assam. But Assam would gain more land than Bangladesh once the land swapping pact is signed between India and Bangladesh," the newspaper quoted Gogoi as saying.

"The garden is full of memories of our parents and grandparents. We have cremated them in the crematory inside the garden," said Gouri Goala, 50, a worker of the tea estate.

Economic woes could hit Indian festive spending

AFP, Mumbai

India's retailers look set for a tough annual religious festival season -- traditionally a time for exuberant spending -- as high inflation and interest rates force consumers to tighten their belts.

The season, which began with the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on August 31, and ends with the Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, in late October, is seen as a lucky time for big purchases from cars and property to gold.

But analysts warn that expenditures could be curtailed this year as the country's economy slows under the brunt of nearly a dozen interest rate hikes in 18 months, aimed at taming nine percent-plus inflation.

"High-value purchases and where borrowed money is involved could slow down," Siddhartha Sanyal, chief India economist with Barclays Capital, told AFP.

Hemen Kapadia, a Mumbai-based stockbroker, has his heart set on buying the latest Ford Fiesta, which costs nearly one million rupees (\$22,000) for a diesel version.

But he said he has postponed the purchase because of India's weakening economic situation, which has sent the Bombay Stock Exchange's benchmark share index down by more than 20 percent and hit his earnings.

India posted its slowest economic growth in six quarters last week, with output up 7.7 percent year-on-year, as expansion was hit by the longest stretch of monetary tightening in a decade.

"I won't buy the car for another year. It's too costly," Kapadia said.

Indian car sales are viewed as a barometer of the national's overall economic health. Car sales slumped 16 percent year-on-year to 133,747 units in July -- their biggest drop in nearly three years -- as high interest rates and

rising fuel prices kept buyers out of showrooms.

"The next wave of buying will come only when incomes rise or consumers find a good deal," said auto analyst Mahantesh Sabarad of Fortune Equity Brokers in Mumbai.

Ajit Joshi, chief executive of Tata Group's Infiniti Retail, which runs the electronics megastore Croma, described the current market as "challenging".

He warned that discounts alone, normally offered during the festival period, would not necessarily boost sales.

But there was one bright prospect in gold, another festive favourite whose purchasing season extends to India's peak wedding period in late December.

"Demand is likely to be fairly good this season," said Rajesh Mehta, chairman of Bangalore-based Rajesh Exports, India's largest jewellery maker and exporter by volume.

"But it would have been



AFP

Indian customers visit the computer section at the Croma electronics mega-store in Mumbai.

much higher if prices were lower," he added.

Last month, gold peaked at \$1,913.50 per ounce as global equity markets slumped and investors were spooked by the US sovereign debt downgrade, adding to existing nervousness

about Eurozone debt.

Mehta predicted that Indians -- the country is the world's largest consumer and importer of gold -- would follow wider trends to buy jewellery as an investment and safe haven in troubled times.

Hitachi aims to double its revenues from India

REUTERS, Mumbai

Japan's biggest industrial electronics firm Hitachi Ltd said on Sunday it aims to double its revenues in India from 54 billion rupees (\$1.2 billion) and is keen to acquire firms to gain a bigger market share in a short span of time.

"In the coming few years, we expect to increase revenues of Hitachi India to around 120 billion rupees (\$2.6 billion) as compared to 54 billion rupees (\$1.2 billion) for the last fiscal," said Ichiro Iino, managing director, Hitachi India Pvt Ltd in an emailed statement.

India, which was a part of Hitachi's regional Headquarters for Asia business

and contributed just 1 percent of its global revenue in FY11, has been repositioned as an independent management area for the firm, the statement said.

India will join China -- which contributed 13 percent of its global revenue in FY11 --, Southeast Asia, Europe and the Americas as key management areas outside of Japan for Hitachi, it added.

"The company's staff will be increased, mainly in the corporate division in order to support the smooth rollout of business at Hitachi Group companies," Iino added.

It plans to open a new research and development centre for information and telecommunication systems business in Bangalore by March 2012, it said.

LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 295 OF 2011

In the matter of:
An application under Section 43 of the Companies Act, 1994

A N D

In the matter of:
Mrs. Ayesha Hussain, wife of Al-Hajj Md. Nur Hussain daughter of late Dr. Abdul Aziz Promanik and Mrs. Latifunnessa Begum, of 47/1 A R.K. Mission Road, Police Station-Sutrapur, Dhaka-1203, Sponsor Shareholder-Director of Jamuna Bank Ltd.Petitioner

-Versus-

1. Jamuna Bank Limited, Registered Office: Chini Shilpa Bhaban 3, Dilkusha Commercial Area, Dhaka-1000, 2. Mr. Md. Belal Hossain, 3. Alhaj M.A. Khayer, 4. Eng. A.K.M. Mosharraf Hussain, 5. Engr. Md. Atiqur Rahman, 6. Mr. Golam Dastagir Gazi, 7. Mr. Fazlur Rahman, 8. Alhaj Nur Mohammad, 9. Mr. Md. Tajul Islam, 10. Mr. Sakhawat Abu Khair Mohammad, 11. Al-haj Md. Rezaul Karim Ansari, 12. Mr. Md. Mohammadul Hoque, 13. Mr. Md. Sirajul Islam Varosha, 14. Mr. Md. Ismail Hossain Siraj, 18. Mr. Gazi Golam Murtoza, 19. Dhaka Insurance Limited, represented by Mr. A.S.M. Abdul Halim, 20. Mr. Md. Motior Rahman, 21. Mr. Malik Muntazir Reza, above respondent No. 2 is the Chairman, respondent Nos. 3-19 are the Directors respondent No. 20 and 21 are the Managing Director and Company Secretary of Respondent No.1, Jamuna Bank Ltd. all address at Chini Shilpa Bhaban, 3 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka-1000, 22. The Chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission, 10 Dilkusha C/A, Police Station-Motijheel, Dhaka-1000, 23. The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firm of Bangladesh 1, Karwanbazar, TCB Bhaban, Dhaka. 24. The Dhaka Stock Exchange, Stock Exchange Building 9/F Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, 25. The Chittagong Stock Exchange, CSE Building, 1080 Sheikh Mujib Road, Arabad, Chittagong-4110, 26. The Governor, Bangladesh Bank, Motijheel, Dhaka.

.....Respondents

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that an application under Section 43 of the Companies Act, 1994 for rectification of Share Register of the respondent No. 1 company, namely, Jamuna Bank Ltd. was filed and moved before the Company Bench of the High Court Division of the said Hon'ble Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The Company Bench of the High Court Division of the said Hon'ble Court presided over by Mr. Mamnoon Rahman was pleased to admit the same on 21st August, 2011. The learned Company Judge while admitting the matter was pleased to pass the following interim orders:

"Considering the facts and circumstances, the respondent No. 1 Bank and others is directed not to issue any bonus or right shares if any, to the respondents without making any offer to the petitioner in proportionate to her present share holding and also restrained from transferring the shares as claimed by the petitioner which were declared and accrued in the 9th and 10th Annual General Meeting (AGM)'s of the respondent No. 1 Bank held on 13.06.2010 and 19.05.2011 respectively for a period of 3 (three) months from date."

The matter was fixed by his Lordship for hearing on 10.10.2011.

Any one desirous of opposing the said application may appear before the Hon'ble Court either in person or through advocate to contest the matters on the date fixed.

Copy of this application may be obtained from the undersigned payment of prescribed charges.

(Shah Mohammad Ahsanur Rahman)
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AFP

Some of an estimated 400,000 Israelis hold banners reading in Hebrew "No hope" as they demonstrate in the centre of Tel Aviv on Saturday to protest rising housing prices and social inequalities in the Jewish state.