



The embankment of Sonaichhari union at Sitakunda upazila of Chittagong being eroded away by the Bay of Bengal. Locals and forest officials blame felling of trees for establishing ship breaking yards as the reason behind the erosion. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO:
ANURUP KANTI DAS

Deforestation causes embankment erosion in Sitakunda

PRANABESH CHAKRABORTY, Ctg

Rampant deforestation on the coastal green belt at Sonaichhari union of Chittagong's Sitakunda upazila for establishing ship breaking yards is causing the breakdown of the union's embankment.

Subsequently seawater from the Bay of Bengal is inundating the adjoining villages at every high tide, causing immense suffering to the residents.

Nityananda Jaladas, resident of one of the villages, Ghoramara, said the whole coastal area was a big government forest just three to four years ago.

"With the trees available, the embankment had not collapsed. But nowadays, since there is no tree, the embankment is breaking down everyday," he said, adding, "During high tide, seawater floods our houses, damaging our belongings."

Bangladesh Forest Department started afforestation of mangrove species in Sonaichhari from 1976 to develop a coastal green belt. From 1989 onwards, the department planted Kewra trees on

125 acres of coastal land, said sources.

But after 2007, Chittagong District Administration and the assistant commissioner (land) leased out land, assigned for the coastal green belt, for the establishment of ship breaking yards.

Since then, rampant tree felling went on in the area.

On July 3, 2009, some 15,000 mangrove trees were felled under the instruction of some influential quarters who wanted to set up at least four ship yards. On November 29 that year, another 5,000 trees were chopped down, said locals.

On a visit to Ghoramara, this correspondent found the embankment in a dilapidated condition, with its bricks, boulders and stones coming loose and scattered around. Only 10 Kewra trees were seen standing and the locals feared those could be felled anytime.

Two tin-shed houses were also found with two signboards. One read "Site for Nowshin Steel" and the other "MSS Steel Recycling". This correspondent could not trace any industry in Chittagong by the names.

Another resident, Khorshed, also stated that the embankment's destruction was being brought about by the destruction of the area's forest.

He urged the government to construct a durable embankment to save agricultural lands and houses of the area from high tide.

The benefit of coastal afforestation is that the tree roots help hold the soil together, which in turn keeps coastal embankments firm, said Divisional Forest Officer Sunil Kumar Kundi of Coastal Forest Division, Chittagong.

The plundering of the coastal forest and land grabbing, as in a domino effect, is leading to the gradual breakdown of the embankment, he added.

Echoing Sunil, Water Development Board Executive Engineer Swapan Kumar Barua said ship breaking yard owners, at different times, were felling trees intensively in the area.

"Saving the embankment, farmlands and coastal people's lives from seawater requires a restriction on ship breaking activities. Coastal afforestation should be immediately started again in the area," he added.

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Journo Fazley Rashid passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT


Eminent journalist Fazley Rashid died at a hospital in New York on Friday. He was 74.

Rashid, also the former president of National Press Club, was undergoing treatment for kidney disease and diabetes.

He left behind his wife, a daughter, a son and a host of relatives to mourn his death, said a press release of the National Press Club yesterday.

He was elected president of National Press Club for two times and general secretary for three times. He was also president of Bangladesh Sports Journalists' Association for two terms.

Fazley Rashid started his journalism career in 1963 with the Pakistan Observer. Later, he worked in different important positions at the New Nation, the Morning News, the Bangladesh Observer, the Morning Sun and the weekly Holiday.




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