



Different structures of Kuakata Eco Park in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district still lie ravaged, as the authorities concerned failed to do repair works after a series of destruction caused by cyclones and tidal surges during the last several years.

Cyclone-ravaged Kuakata Eco Park not repaired in years

The now uncared area repulses visitors; renovation project hangs in the balance

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Bereft of its former beauty, Kuakata Eco Park no longer attracts visitors.

Super cyclones Sidr in 2007, Aila in 2009, and Mahasen in 2013, accompanied by tidal surges from the Bay, caused serious damage to the structures and trees of the park but no renovation work has been done due to lack of funds.

Patuakhali forest department set up the eco-park covering 3,984 acres of land in Gangamoti area, about three km to the east of Kuakata Zero Point at a cost of Tk

2.90 crore.

The forest department dug a one km long lake with arrangement of six pedal boats for use by tourists, built a wooden bridge across the water body, set concrete benches with umbrellas, made four km long earthen walkways and five picnic spots there, making it an attractive tourist spot.

Adequate electrification was arranged there.

A beautiful flower garden adorned the entrance and a tamarisk garden was created just outside the park to save it from tidal surges from the Bay.

Tourists from home and abroad and many picnic parties came to the picturesque park.

But aforesaid cyclones wreaked havoc on the park, causing serious damage to its walkways, wooden bridge, pedal boats, and concrete benches.

Over 1,000 tamarisk trees were uprooted by cyclones and tidal surges from the Bay. Uncared, the lake is now full of water-hyacinths.

The park no longer attracts tourists, said Ruman Intiaj Tushar, former president of Kuakata Press Club.

Often drug addicts enter the park, several locals said.

Contacted, Mehir Kanti Do, divisional forest officer in Patuakhali, said they sent a Tk 15.69 crore Project Proposal (PP) titled 'Kuakata Eco-park Development Project' to the higher authorities in 2010 but it is yet to be approved.

"The PP includes construction of roads, picnic spots, bridge, watch towers, parking spot and public toilets, as well as beautification works, as part of rebuilding the eco-park to attract tourists," he said.

145 out of 298 brick kilns in Barisal flouting rules

SUSHANTO GHOSH, Barisal

About half of the brick kilns in six districts of Barisal division are operating in violation of rules.

The Directorate of Environment (DoE) realised fine of Tk 54.16 lakh from 128 brick kilns during last 17 months but the attempts proved too inadequate to stop the illegal operations, sources said.

Of the 298 brick kilns in Barisal division, 230 have received license from the DoE, but 145 of those are yet to be modernised as per instructions, said Sukumar Biswas, director DoE, Barisal office.

According to the Brick Kiln Amendment Rule 2001 and Environment Conservation Act 1995

(amended in 2010), brick kilns should not be constructed around three kilometres of dwellings or crop fields, and they are not allowed to use old types of low-height (less than 120 feet) chimneys and logs for brick burning, he said.

A notice was issued on October 2, 2012, asking brick kilns to convert into modern technology-based non wood-usable ones like zigzag, Hybrid Hoffman and vertical shaft kilns, divisional DoE office sources said.

But six out of 29 brick kilns in Jhalakathi, 10 of 26 in Pirojpur, 14 of 37 in Patuakhali, 53 of 116 in Barisal, 39 of 51 in Bhola and 31 of 39 brick kilns in Barguna districts of the division are now operating in line with the

directions of DoE.

Despite shortage of manpower, transportation, budget and equipment, DoE conducted drives in different districts of Barisal division and realised fine of Tk 41.93 lakh from 100 brick kilns in 2014 and Tk 12.23 lakh from 28 brick kilns in first five months of 2015, said DoE Director Sukumar Biswas.

"Many brick kiln owners are yet to follow the direction of the DoE about improvement of chimney due to financial crisis, lack of knowledge about modern technology and awareness about environment. We want proper help from the government in this regard," said Monir Hossain Rubel, owner of the Sico Bricks, and secretary of brick kiln owners association in Barisal.



Like many others in the region, a brick kiln in Charkawa union of Barisal Sadar upazila operates with old-modelled chimney and uses firewood as fuel, flouting rules.

Tobacco markets on school premises in Lalmonirhat

The callous act disturbs classes of 25 schools

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Classes as well as extra-curricular activities of 25 schools in the district are badly hampered as a section of local influential people use the grounds of the educational institutions for tobacco trading for a couple of months during this period of the year.

The students of Saptibari High School in Aditmari upazila said they cannot stay long in the classrooms due to bad smell as tobacco is sold in their school ground two days every week.

Protest against the callous act went unheeded, they said. "We can't play in our school field two days every week as tobacco market is set up there," said several students of Saptibari

Government Primary School.

The students of Saptibari Blind School at the same village said they are seriously affected due to bad smell as there is a tobacco market just in front the classrooms.

Students of Kalmati Adarsha High School in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila said they cannot regularly attend their classes due to large-scale tobacco sale in the school field two days every week.

Protest against the callous act went unheeded, they said.

Tobacco market is set up on the school premises during April, May and June every year, locals said.

The practice has contin-

ued for the last few years but the school authorities or local administration never took any step against it, said people at Saptibari village.

Talking to this correspondent, Saptibari High School Headmaster Tayez Uddin, Saptibari Government Primary School Headmaster Rasheda Begum and Saptibari Blind School's resource teacher Ershadul Haque said they are helpless in this regard as local influential people arrange the tobacco markets for earning windfall profit.

Admitting the situation, District Education Officer Moslem Uddin and District Primary Education Officer Nabez Uddin said they are going to take action with the help of administration.



Huge tobacco leaves lie on the premises of Saptibari High School in Aditmari upazila under Lalmonirhat district, much to the nuisance of students and teachers, especially during the class hours. Twenty-five schools in the district see a similar situation.

The changing traditions of Moheshkhali's Rakhines

BY ANDREW EAGLE

To venture into Rakhine Para of Moheshkhali Island's Gorakghata is to step into Southeast Asia. It's not only the Buddhist temple complex, glittering in gold, or the Rakhine faces of residents. In the back alleys the faded frilly facades of some of the old apartment blocks could, to the newcomer, easily belong in suburban Rangoon. There are examples of beautiful wooden homes perched on stilts, where family and friends relax beneath, chatting and taking advantage of the architectural shade. Rakhine Para evidences a diverse Bangladesh.

It feels like a neighbourhood where life returns in familiar patterns with each dawn, year after year. But to speak with Kyaw Ching, a retired petty naval officer and area resident, in his goldsmith and pawnbroker's, is to appreciate that the Rakhines have adopted contemporary ways.

It used to be that the Rakhine community primarily engaged in fishing. Ching's father had four sailing boats for the purpose; but nowadays in the whole community it'd be difficult to find one.

"Fishing was dangerous," says Ching, a father of three. "Many people died. There's hardly a family in the village where someone didn't die at sea." Over a decade ago the last of Moheshkhali's Rakhine fishing nets were stowed for a final time.

For Rakhine women economic activity also changed. "Our women don't sit down," says



Rakhine women in Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazar district still favour their traditional dress, despite touch of modernity in the lives of the indigenous people in recent times.

Ching, "They like to help support the family and there used to be a handloom in every house. But there are no handlooms now."

Cost increase in the price of cotton and low retail rates for finished items made the area's longstanding weaving tradition unviable. These days while local women still try their hand at sewing, the distinctive Rakhine textiles sold in the market opposite the temple are imported from Cox's Bazar or Myanmar.

Change has also come to education. Whereas earlier

not every child attended school they now do; yet the younger generation is losing touch with the Rakhine language, especially the ability to read its Burmese script. "We used to have a Rakhine teacher," says Ching, who explains the difference between the Burmese and Rakhine languages as akin to the difference between Chittagonian and standard Bangla. "I wish the government could make provision for a teacher."

Formerly known as Arakanese, Rakhines trace their heritage to the estab-

lishment of the first independent Rakhine kingdom by King Marayu in 3325 BCE at Dhanyawadi northeast of Myanmar's Sittwe. It is said that Gautama Buddha visited the civilisation during his lifetime.

Subsequent centuries saw the Rakhines establish a prosperous trading society that stretched into modern day Chittagong Division and beyond, along the shores of the Bay of Bengal. With British documents to demonstrate their long-established local presence, the approximately 3,000

Rakhines living in six Moheshkhali villages are considered indigenous to the island.

In place of traditional livelihoods a younger generation of Rakhines have become technicians, mechanics and master tailors. Goldsmith shops and pawnbroker businesses are prominent.

"A few have taken government jobs," says Ching, who had some work to do to convince his parents decades back to let him sign up to the Bangladeshi navy where he worked for twenty years. "They thought of war and worried," he says, "but afterwards they came to accept it."

The Rakhines often favour business they can carry out close to home, fearing discrimination if they embark on lucrative ventures further afield. "It's for safety," says Ching, "We cannot easily spread out because we don't have a strong position." Yet he is the first to acknowledge Rakhines face no difficulties in Moheshkhali.

While modernity has brought change to Rakhine daily life, other aspects remain the same. Women still favour the Burmese sarong-like thami while among Rakhine men the signature longyi (lungie) tied with a prominent knot at the front and worn with shirt tucked in, is ubiquitous. And at mealtimes of crab, fish or meat with vegetables it can come as no surprise to detect the wafting aroma of the signature shrimp and chilli paste called napi, which also forms part of the cuisine of some hill tracts peoples.

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