

SHORELINE EROSION

Part of Kuakata beach threatened

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Two coconut and tamarisk gardens along the Kuakata sea beach are on the verge of extinction as erosion during the monsoon season has been wiping out garden land for decades.

The government, however, is yet to make any move to prevent the damage.

Some local nongovernmental organisations, with assistance from the then government in the 1960s, had planted 15,000 coconut trees on 167 acres of land, said forest department officials in Patuakhali.

Since then the garden has been facing damage from shoreline erosion almost every year due to strong tides. Now only about 50 coconut trees are left, added the officials.

One lakh tamarisk trees were planted on 10 acres at Gongamoti in 2007-08 fiscal year to save an eco-park along the beach of Bay of Bengal.

Patuakhali Coastal Forest Department constructed the eco-park on 34,540 acres at Gongamoti, Khajura, Latachaplee and Fatrar Char areas. The project was implemented in FY 2005-06 at a cost of Tk 2.76 crore.

Over 10,000 trees of the tamarisk garden have been destroyed by coastal erosion in the last five years. On the other hand, the eight-kilometre area of the coconut garden has now shrunk to less

than a kilometre, said sources at Patuakhali forest office.

The natural beauty of the gardens attracts many tourists to the beach, said local resident Shahjahan Akon. He urged the government to take prompt measures to save the gardens.

Mihir Kanti Do, divisional forest officer in Patuakhali, said they sent several letters to their higher authorities asking for action in this regard, but in vain.

Md Jahangir Hossain, chairman of Kuakata Beach Management Committee and UNO of Kalapara upazila, said he wrote to the Patuakhali deputy commissioner in July last year asking for steps to save Kuakata beach from erosion. The DC forwarded the letter to the water resources ministry, but was yet to receive a response, he added.

He, however, said the authorities concerned have approved a master plan for development of Kuakata.

In order to save Kuakata beach from erosion,

Bangladesh Water Development Board sent a draft project proposal on protection of Kuakata beach to the water resources ministry seven months ago, said Shahidul Islam, deputy assistant engineer of the board in Kalapara. The proposal involving Tk 55 crore is awaiting the ministry's approval, he added.



An erosion-hit stretch of the Kuakata beach in Patuakhali. For decades the erosion during monsoon has been wiping out the coconut and tamarisk trees on the beach. The photo has been taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Indian troops kill 6 rebels in Nagaland

AFP, Guwahati

Indian security forces yesterday killed at least six suspected armed separatist rebels in the country's insurgency-hit northeastern state of Nagaland, police said.

Police said Indian armed forces killed the rebels from one faction of the National Socialist Council (NSCN) of Nagaland in Tuensang district, close to the Myanmar border.

"This encounter happened in Tuensang district of the state and six militants have been killed," G Akheta Sema, Nagaland's additional director general of police told AFP on phone.

Initial reports also showed a civilian casualty and injuries to a several people including a security personnel, Sema said. He added that it was not yet clear whether the civilian casualty was fatal.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a peace

accord with the Isak-Muivah faction -- the largest faction of the NSCN -- effectively ending the country's oldest insurgency in the under-developed state of Nagaland that shares its border with Myanmar.

But the Khaplang faction, involved in yesterday's encounter, has opposed any truce with the Indian government.

Indian intelligence officials say several militant groups including the NSCN-K, operating in India's north-east, have their training camps in northern Myanmar's thick jungles.

In June, India's main investigation agency captured NSCN-Khaplang's leader more than three weeks after heavily armed rebels ambushed a military convoy, killing 20 soldiers.

It was one of the most deadly attacks in the restive region in recent times and led to a rare cross-border operation against the rebels in coordination with the Myanmar government, according to local Indian media.

10 killed as India

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"Six civilians embraced shahadat and 46 were severely injured including 22 females due to Indian unprovoked firing/shelling on working boundary near Sialkot in Chaprar and Harpal sector," a statement from the Pakistani military said, adding that they had returned fire.

In Indian-controlled Kashmir, Border Security Force (BSF) official Rakesh Kumar Sharma accused Pakistan of targeting civilians with "unprovoked" mortar fire.

"Four villagers died in the shelling from across the border, three of them were killed early morning and one died of injuries in a hospital later," Pawan Kotwal, the top administrator of the region told AFP.

Another BSF officer, JS Oberio, put the number of injured at 16, saying at least 10 border posts and several villages were targeted by Pakistani troops.

Pakistan and India have fought two of their three wars over the Himalayan region since both gained independence in 1947, and it remains a major source of tension.

About a dozen militant groups have

been fighting since 1989 for either the independence of the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan.

Shelling across the de facto border, known as the Line of Control (LoC) in disputed Kashmir and the "working boundary" in Punjab, has been on the rise this month.

Sunday's talks had brought hopes of a possible easing of tensions, but these were dashed as the meeting was sunk amid a welter of angry rhetoric on Saturday.

The plan for Sunday's talks came from a meeting between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi at a regional summit in Russia last month.

Little of substance was expected but the very fact that the security advisors, Sartaj Aziz for Pakistan and Ajit Doval for India, were to meet at all was seen as progress.

But the plan faltered at familiar obstacles: Aziz's intention to meet Kashmiri leaders in New Delhi -- an issue that scuppered foreign secretary-level talks last year -- and India's insistence the agenda should focus on terrorism.

Reasons for hike not clear

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industrial users and bulk users like power and fertiliser companies in the country.

A competent source in the Power Development Board (PDB) said that the power generation cost, including financial charge now stands at Tk 6.32 per unit—which is 20 paisa less than that of last year's cost.

The Berc's increase of average power tariff by almost 3 percent will annually bring in an extra income of Tk 1200 to Tk 1300 crore to PDB. But it will not be enough to cover its overall loss.

The PDB would still need around Tk 4000 crore in annual subsidy to make up for the loss it makes because of the higher price it pays BPC for fuel.

The private power companies buy fuel at a much lower rate from the international market.

"Out of around 2200 mw electricity produced by petroleum, several private power producers are allowed to import their oil directly. These producers generate around 750 mw and currently they are charging the PDB Tk 32 per litre of furnace oil used for power generation. For the remaining majority liquid fuel plants, the PDB has to buy the same oil from the BPC for Tk 62 per litre," said the PDB source.

The country now has an average supply of 7500 megawatts power daily—one third of it comes from petroleum based power plants; the rest of it is supplied mostly from gas fired plants and around 500 mw is imported from India.

He noted that this year had been favourable for the PDB in terms of power generation and its cost. "Firstly we had good supply of power from the Indian grid at a reasonable price. Our gas fired power plants could generate more power this year because of better availability of gas. Electricity demand was low in June because of more than usual rain. So we did not have to run all our liquid fuel based power plants. These factors have contributed to a drop in power generation cost," he pointed out.

The PDB official however argued that the latest power tariff hike would not hurt domestic users much as it was nominal. He pointed out that the hike would be felt more at the level of commercial and industrial users—where the percentage was higher.

Meanwhile the gas utilities were presently providing 2700 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas—up by a few hundred mmcf this year from last year mainly because Chevron has added 300 mmcf new gas from the gigantic Bibiyana gas field from January. The government buys this gas under a production sharing contract (PSC) where a good part of the gas is totally free for the government, while for the rest the government pays Chevron around \$3 per mmcf.

But even with gas procured from an international oil company and rampant gas theft along the gas pipeline grid—Titas has been making profit every year.

"At this point, the gas price hike looks like the behaviour of a private monopoly company," said an expert.

According to a survey by Titas, on average a domestic double burner customer consumes about 87 cubic meter gas and its cost around Tk 450 per month.

But the latest price hike put that price up to Tk 650 per month. For a single burner, the cost was pushed up to Tk 600 from Tk 400.

"We do not know what the basis of this new price was. It follows no formula," said an official, "we were

directed to increase the price this way and thus this was done."

A top Titas official notes, "The domestic gas price was last adjusted in 2008. Therefore the Titas company had been seeking a price adjustment."

"This hike may look unreasonable but only about one crore people in the country are getting the benefit of cheap piped natural gas. The rest of the people are buying costly LPG."

The government wants to lower the price of LPG at the same time hike the price of domestic gas," he said.

However he said illegal gas connections around the country controlled by powerful thugs deprive the company of any revenue and the government can hardly take any action to stop it.

"It is irrational for legal consumers to pay more for gas while the illegal users get a pass," he said.

Meanwhile the BPC, which had been in the red from 1999 due to soaring oil prices, has started seeing profits from September-October last year. Oil prices that hovered around \$110 per barrel have dipped down to \$40.

In recent years, the country has been spending between Tk 34,000 crore and Tk 38,000 crore per year to import crude, refined and lube base oil. Since the oil prices fell down, the BPC has been saving around 45 to 50 percent of its previous year's import cost. That translates into an annual saving of around Tk 17,000 crore to Tk 19,000 crore.

Guidelines

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billboards have been put up in an unplanned way all over the capital, posing a great danger to pedestrians and passing vehicles.

Deaths and damages of property due to collapse of poorly-mounted billboards have been in the news for quite some time.

Last month, a student was injured and a rickshaw was damaged after a huge unipole billboard collapsed at Shapla Chattar in the city's commercial hub of Motijheel.

In March 2009, a loosely-mounted hoarding atop Gulshan Shopping Centre collapsed, leaving two people dead and eight others wounded in the capital's Gulshan-1 area.

A person was crushed to death and three others were injured after a billboard fell on them near Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on May 6 the same year.

In April this year, a gigantic hoarding collapsed near Dhaka Club during a nor'wester. Two rickshaw pullers were wounded and a lawmaker's car, a police van, three minibuses and several rickshaws were damaged.

According to official records of fiscal 2014-15, the two city corporations had approved installation of around 1,000 billboards.

Moreover, government agencies and private building owners have rented out spaces and rooftops for billboards without permission from the authorities concerned.

CLEAN-UP DRIVE

DNCC officials and employees along with Japanese students in Bangladesh took part in the special clean-up drive launched by the DNCC mayor at Gabtoli.

Stressing the need for creating public awareness of cleanliness, Annisul said city dwellers should play their part in keeping their city clean.

"It is not possible for staffs of the city corporations alone to keep the city clean without the help of city residents," he added.



One of the boats, recovered off the Mediterranean coast in Libya, is being towed to the port of Zuwara yesterday.

PHOTO: BBC

Eight Bangladeshis among 82 dead

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But the boat overturned one hour after sailing off due to a leakage beneath the vessel. Two children -- one six-year-old and another six of months -- died instantly. Four members of two families went missing.

The families were living in Libya and their children born there. They have long been trying to go Italy through sea following deterioration of the situation in Libya.

Several other families had attempted to go in Italy in the past. They took risky journey despite repeated warnings, he added.

Quoting embassy sources, the BBC report said most of the Bangladesh nationals could be rescued as they were wearing lifejackets. "They were floating on the sea throughout the night and rescued early this morning."

Embassy officials confirmed that Bangladeshis nationals, who were rescued

from the sea, have been brought back to Libya.

The next course of action will be taken regarding the repatriation as per the wish of the families, they added.

Al Jazeera quoting Libyan security officials reported that the people on board had been from sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan, Syria, Morocco and Bangladesh.

"The boat was in a bad condition and people died with us," said Ayman Talaal, a Syrian survivor, standing next to his daughter. "We have been forced into this route. It's now called the grave of the Mediterranean Sea."

One of the rescued migrants told AFP that he and two friends had each paid 2,200 Libyan dinars (\$1,600) to board the boat.

The migrants pay thousands of dollars for the land and sea passage with smugglers often beating and torturing them to press for more money for the final leg of

the trip by sea in unseaworthy vessels, rights groups say, reports Reuters.

Yesterday, Red Crescent teams wearing protective white clothing and masks yesterday collected bodies that had washed ashore on a Zuwara beach, placing them in orange plastic bags and carrying them to ambulances.

Lacking navy ships, Libyan officials were searching for survivors with fishing boats and inflatable provided by locals. About 198 people had been rescued by noon, officials said.

Local officials and residents were putting bodies into red bags on a beach littered with shoes, trousers and other personal items from drowned migrants. A blue inflatable brought in more bodies.

"We, the Red Crescent, work with nothing. Some fishermen help us with a boat," said Ibrahim al-Attoushi, an official at the Red Crescent in Zuwara. "We only have one ambulance car."

Libyan officials brought 147 survivors to a detention facility for illegal migrants in Sabratha, west of Tripoli, a Libyan security official said, asking not to be named.

"We have not received a request for help," said a spokesman for the Italian coast guard, which has been coordinating rescue operations with the European Union off the Libyan coast.

About 100 angry Zuwara residents took to the town's main square on Thursday when news of the sinking spread, demanding that authorities stop human traffickers, witnesses said.

Lawless Libya has turned into a major transit route for migrants fleeing conflict and poverty to make it to Europe.

The UN says about 2,500 migrants have died trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe so far this year, compared with 3,500 who died or went missing in the Mediterranean in 2014.