

Land grabbers at it again in Kuakata beach

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Illegal structures are springing up along the Kuakata beach ignoring a High Court directive issued five years ago.

The structures, consisting of at least 18 sea-front stores, were built hurriedly over the past few days since Friday with corrugated tin sheet and wood in Narikel Bagan (coconut orchard) area near Zero Point of the beach town.

A local youth named Abdul Kuddus has built the structures and leased those out to various businesses at a rate of Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000 for each store, said locals.

On June 2, 2011, the HC in its directive required the authorities concerned to immediately remove all structures from the Kuakata sea beach. It also asked them to take necessary steps

to stop encroachment, earth filling and construction of structures on the beach.

The HC directive came following a writ petition filed the same day by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) on the basis of a report headlined "Realtor faces eviction case in Kuakata", published in The Daily Star on June 1 the same year.

Requesting to remain anonymous, a storeowner who leased a store space from Kuddus said all the storeowners have made oral contracts with Kuddus and made payments to him, ranging from Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000 for each space.

Kuddus even boasts of having the capability of managing anyone -- officials at the land office, journalists and even political leaders, he said.

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Structures go up on Kuakata beach ignoring a court order. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Making children smile

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and speak using small words like "ma" and "ba".

"After the incident [of liquid coming out of her ear], we discovered that she is losing her hearing ability gradually. She also stopped saying the words she used to utter and started communicating with us by using her arms," said her mother Sarower Nimmy, a homemaker.

The couple left no stone unturned to get their daughter cured. They shuttled from one hospital to another and met a number of doctors, but to no avail.

Then one day they came to know about a surgery -- Cochlear Implant -- from a doctor of Samorita Hospital in the capital. Upon further enquiry, they learned about the surgery and its costs, which the electrician father could not afford.

"We're told that the surgery would cost around Tk 15 lakh. We even thought of selling our organs for Elma's treatment," said Sarower.

Finally, their wish came true as Elma has recently undergone the Cochlear Implant surgery at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) at a very low cost. Her parents had to pay only Tk 15,000.

COCHLEAR IMPLANT

The surgery is being done under a special initiative taken by the social welfare ministry which is implementing it as a programme titled "Development of Cochlear Implant Programme" at the BSMMU. The ministry bears the larger portion of the cost while parents need to pay only Tk 15,000 to 50,000, depending on their monthly income.

The programme was launched in 2010 to treat people, mostly from low- and middle-income families, with hearing impairments. Children are the main focus of the programme as the surgery is more effective for children than for adults.

The ministry usually publishes advertisements in newspapers seeking applications from parents whose children suffer from the disability and the people who want to take the treatment. After getting applications, they analyse those and select patients, said the ministry officials.

A total of 48 children and six adults had been operated on in the first phase of the programme that continued until 2013. Most of the treated children can hear and talk, and are now studying in schools and leading a normal life, said doctors.

In the second phase that started in 2014, 40 children and an adult were chosen for the treatment after the selection process. Elma and some other children had already been treated as the surgeries began this year.

So far, the government had spent Tk 20 crore in the programme which is still continuing. This year, the government has decided to allocate Tk 7 crore as yearly budget following a rise in the demand for the treatment, said ABM Shafiqul Haidar, deputy chief (planning) of the ministry.

"We want to thank the government for taking such a great initiative, as it helped us cure our daughter. We can't express our happiness that Elma will be able to hear us again," Elma's father Mostakur told this newspaper.

Doctors at BSMMU said Elma would be able to hear and talk within a year of the surgery by following a rehabilitation process.

Abul Hasnat Joarder, director of the Cochlear Implant Programme, said, "We have set a cochlear implant device, known as bionic ear, inside her [Elma's] ear. After three to four weeks, we will set an external device at the outer side of her ear. It will work along with the implanted device, and then

she will begin to hear."

Then she will be given an auditory-verbal therapy, two days a week for a year, which will help her learn language, he said. To start talking within a year, Hasnat said, she would have to practice at home and take the therapy regularly.

Hasnat, also a professor at BSMMU, said hearing impairment can be cured, and children with severe hearing impairment can also be treated if their cochlear implant surgery is done within five years of their birth.

"It is better to do the surgery when patients are 2-3 years of age, as their language learning ability reduces with age," he said.

The doctor said Elma is lucky to have her surgery done within time.

Every year, around 2,600 children are born with hearing disability in the country, and approximately six percent of children (aged 0-14 years) suffer from mid-range hearing impairment, according to a 2013 survey by the World Health Organisation.

According to the survey, 9.6 percent of the country's population and 15 percent of world population suffer from different types of hearing complications.

Ershad's old case gets a hearing date

Former president claims people want to see JP in power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday fixed November 15 for hearing a 24-year-old appeal of former president HM Ershad against a lower court verdict that jailed him for three years in a corruption case.

The Bench of Justice Md Ruhul Quddus set the date after the Anti-Corruption Commission's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan prayed on August 22 for hearing the appeal for its disposal.

Khurshid yesterday told The Daily Star that the then Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac), which became defunct after formation of the ACC in 2004, had filed the case against Ershad with Cantonment Police Station on charge of misappropriating Tk 1.91 crore by misusing powers at different times when he was the president of the state from December 11, 1983 to December 6, 1990.

On February 3, 1992, a Dhaka court convicted Ershad, also chairman of the Jatiya Party, and sentenced him to three years' imprisonment for misappropriating the money and ordered the authorities concerned to confiscate the money and his Toyota Land Cruiser car for committing corruption.

Ershad the same year had filed an appeal with the HC, challenging the lower court judgment, he said.

Following the appeal, the HC stayed the lower court verdict, he said, adding that the ACC on February 26 in 2012 became a party of the case under the HC's permission, as the Bac was not functional.

The lawyer said Ershad had obtained bail from the HC in the case.

He, however, could not say how long Ershad had been in jail in the case.

Advocate Khurshid said they had earlier tried to get the appeal of Ershad moved before the HC, but there was no

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Good Samaritans outnumbered

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Abdur Rahim, headmaster of Ashutosh Pilot High School Rahim, tried to stop the attackers from looting a rich Hindu family in Dutta Bari area and he succeeded, said Kajal Dutta, head of that family.

However, the attackers pushed him aside and vandalised a large temple in that area later.

Abdur Rahim said such an attack was new in Nasirnagar.

"I never saw any such religious intolerance towards our Hindu brothers or attack on them before," he added.

Moulvi Rezaul Karim, a local, suffered injuries in his leg as the attackers threw brick chips at him when he tried to stop them from vandalising a Hindu house in the same area, said locals.

Another youth -- Sharifuzzaman Chowdhury Suman, a dealer of a mobile company -- was among the Muslims who came forward to help the Hindus that day.

"As soon as I heard about the attack, I rushed to several areas where Hindus live. I called the police but unfortunately, they did not respond on time," he said.

Victims and locals had said Sunday's attacks on the Hindus could have been averted had the local administration and police acted promptly and taken preventive measures.



Local youth Sharifuzzaman Chowdhury Suman, left, and Abdur Rahim, headmaster of Ashutosh Pilot High School. They tried to help Hindus at Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

Tensions had been brewing in the area since Saturday, as two Islamist groups -- Touhidi Janata and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat -- called two protest rallies for Sunday over the local Hindu youth's alleged Facebook post "hurting religious sentiment of the Muslims," they say.

But neither the law enforcement agencies nor the administration took the matter seriously. They didn't take steps to ward off any untoward incident, a number of victims and locals told this correspondent after the synchronised attack.

Tension rises as 2 Pakistani jawans killed

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One person died due to shock during shelling in the same area, raising the toll of those killed in the area to six, she said.

While three of the injured were given treatment in Ramgarh hospital, the rest were shifted to GMC hospital in Jammu, she said.

The casualties took place during shelling in Jarda and Rangoor camp villages along the IB in Ramgarh sector.

"Along the LoC, two women were killed in firing and shelling by Pakistani troops in Panjgrian border hamlet in Manjakote belt of Rajouri district," deputy commissioner of Rajouri Shabir Ahmed Bhat said.

He said three Army porters suffered injuries in the shelling in Noushera sector of the district and they have been hospitalised.

Pakistani shells landed in Mendhar town of Poonch district, injuring three

people, police said.

"Pakistani Rangers started firing with small arms followed by mortars at one place and further spread to four or five places in Ramgarh and Arnia sectors of Samba and Jammu district from 06:30am," DIG BSF (G) Dharmendra Pareek said.

They fired 82mm mortar bombs intermittently, Pareek said, adding, BSF gave them a befitting reply.

A woman aged between 21 to 22 years died during shelling in a hamlet in Ramgarh sector of Samba district, SSP Samba Joginder Singh said. Six persons have been injured in the ceasefire violations since Monday.

At 07:10am, three mortar shells landed in border village of Pindi in Arnia sector of Jammu district, injuring four persons identified as Bodraj, 44, Niky, Dharana Devi and Chanchla Devi, 49, he said.

Pakistani shelling in Mendhar sector of Poonch district on Monday evening and have been hospitalised, police said.

Earlier, defence PRO Lt Col Manish Mehta said Pakistani troops indulged in unprovoked ceasefire violation along the Line of Control in Naushera sector of Rajouri district from 05:30am using small arms, automatics, 82 and 120mm mortars.

There have been more than 60 ceasefire violations by Pakistani troops along the LoC and IB in the state since surgical strikes against terror launch pads by the Indian Army in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The increasing cross-border firing is raising fears that military escalation could trigger a potentially devastating nuclear exchange over Kashmir, the bone of contention that has sparked two of the three wars between India and Pakistan since partition and independence from Britain in 1947.

Just one slap by BCL leader perforates cop's eardrum

STAR REPORT

A policeman was assaulted by a Chhatra League leader over issuance of a fake medical certificate at Shariatpur Sadar Hospital yesterday.

Aktar Hossain Dhali, 27, vice president of the BCL's Shariatpur Sadar upazila unit, slapped the cop across the face during an altercation, causing perforation of his eardrum.

The incident took place when Shariatpur Upazila Parishad Vice Chairman Alamgir Hossain Hawladar

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21 may not get jobs

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whom objections have been raised, would not be appointed, as the law ministry would mention it in the recommendations to be sent to the president.

The law ministry is going to send the summaries of all 100 selected candidates in a day or two to the president through the Prime Minister's Office for approval of their appointment. Once approved by the president, the law ministry would give them posting upon advice from the Supreme Court.

The president may not approve the appointment of the 21 candidates, who face objections, the officials added.

A process for recruiting 115 new judges for the lower courts have meanwhile been underway to fill the vacant posts and ease the massive case backlog.

BJSC Secretary Paresh Chandra Sharma told The Daily Star that the commission has already held the written examinations of 1,225 candidates, who had earlier qualified in the preliminary test held on May 20.

Evaluation of their answer sheets has been going on, he said, adding that only the successful candidates would be called for viva.

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha on October 31 in a message stressed the need for doubling the number of judges in the lower courts.

The number of approved posts of judges for the lower courts is 1,655, of which 387 are now vacant. It is not possible for 1,268 judges to dispose of more than 27 lakh cases pending with the courts across the country, the chief justice observed.

Some buyers get new tool to cut prices

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against these opportunists.

"Compromise is the solution for us. We need orders to keep the wheel moving," quipped a sweater manufacturer from Gazipur.

Moreover, the cost of doing business is rising by at least 15 percent every year. Recently, it has gone up significantly for upgrading compliance standards recommended by the engineers of the Accord and Alliance, he said.

Siddiqui Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said it may be true that retailers are offering prices much lower than usual on security grounds, but no garment maker has complained to the BGMEA about it.

The leader of the garment makers' platform cited devaluation of the pound against US dollar and appreciation of the local currency against the US dollar as a major reason for the drop in prices of garment items in the US market.

Buyers from the US, Bangladesh's single largest export destination, are now cautious about purchasing apparel items from Bangladesh, as there could be changes in US trade policies after the November 8 election, he noted.

"The US retailers have recently decreased the volume of purchase of apparel items. This is one of the major reasons behind the fall in

prices of garment items."

Besides, the pound fell to \$1.18 from \$1.45 following the Brexit vote on June 23 this year, said Rahman.

"This is another major reason behind the decline in prices of garment items in UK markets," he noted.

After the US and Germany, the UK is Bangladesh's third largest export destination, accounting for 11.13 percent of the total shipments.

In fiscal 2015-16, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$3.80 billion to the UK, registering a 6.01 percent year-on-year growth, according to Export Promotion Bureau data.

Garment items account for 80 percent of the total shipments to the UK a year.

The slump in the pound means British consumers will have to pay more for the same basket of goods. This may lead them to cut back on their expenditure.

Bangladeshi exporters are getting less money, as the local currency appreciated against the greenback. Previously, the exporters could draw nearly Tk 80 against a US dollar, but now it has declined to around Tk 77 a dollar, Rahman said.

KI Hossain, president of Bangladesh Garment Buying House Association, echoed the BGMEA chief's view.

He said retailers are offering lower prices also because of the fall in retail prices of garment items in the

US markets.

"But, it's true that retailers are still asking local manufacturers to hold meetings in a third country for placing work orders," Hossain said.

Faruque Hassan, managing director of leading garment exporter Giant Apparels Ltd, said, "We are failing to make retailers understand that local manufacturers are in a bad shape due to the fall in prices of garment items."

"A few days ago, we, in presence of an influential minister of the Netherlands, urged international retailers to give us fair prices for apparel items."

"If we cannot deliver goods within the shortest possible time, we have to face order cancellation, or give discount or pay for expensive air shipments," he said.

"We are in trouble because the consumers in the West are spending less on apparel items nowadays. They are spending more on other items such as mobile phones and apps."

As a result, apparel export may face major challenges in the future. For example, export of garment items from China, the largest apparel supplier worldwide, has not seen any increase over the last couple of years, he pointed out.

In 2015, sales of apparel items declined by 7.8 percent year-on-year due to their low demand in the Western countries.