

ENCROACHERS' GRIP ON SEA BEACH

Picturesque Kuakata loses beauty

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The Kuakata sea beach area sees gradual encroachment as a section of people are making illegal structures in the picturesque tourist spot amid lax monitoring and lack of action by the authorities concerned.

Over 200 illegal structures with corrugated iron sheet and wood have already been set up near Kuakata Zero Point including Narikel Bagan (coconut orchard) area although the High Court in 2011 had issued a directive to keep the area free from illegal structures.

After publication of a report in The Daily Star on November 2, the district administration assured early steps to remove the illegal set-ups but no step has been taken yet.

Locals said Alauddin, secretary of ward No 6 of Kuakata town unit of Awami League, Shah Alam Howlader, councillor of ward No 3 of Kuakata municipality, Md Basir Uddin, a member of Bangladesh Chhatra League's Kuakata town unit, and local youth Md Kuddus built such structures to let those be used as store.

Requesting anonymity, several people who leased the stores spaces from these men said they have made payments, ranging from Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000 for each space.

Earlier, Kuddus built 18 structures on the beach and leased those to local traders. Later many others started the same business by setting up illegal structures.

Of alleged occupiers, Alauddin, Basir Uddin and Kuddus declined to make any comments over the matter while Shah Alam Howladers said, "I am not involved in the business."

Selim Khan, Tahshildar at Mohipur union land office under Kalapara upazila, said they sent a list of 38 illegal structures on November 28 to Kalapara upazila nirbahi officer for sending to the deputy commis-



Encroachers construct illegal structures for commercial use in Kuakata sea beach area. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

sioner's (DC) office.

Contacted, Patuakhali DC AKM Shamimul Haq Siddiquee said, "The list of the illegal structures is yet to reach my office. After getting the list we will take immediate step to remove those."

"When I visited the beach area two years ago, it was relatively neat and clean. But now it looks bad and we can't move here freely as so many structures have been set up here," said Aminul Islam Jewel, a tourist from Kushtia.

The authorities should take immediate steps to save the Kuakata beach from land

grabbers considering the interest of tourists, he added.

On June 2 in 2011, the High Court (HC) asked the authorities concerned to immediately remove all illegal structures from Kuakata sea beach and take necessary steps to prevent 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 on the basis of a report headlined "Realtor faces eviction case in Kuakata", published in The

Daily Star the day before.

The HC also ordered the Patuakhali DC to have Kuakata sea beach demarcated immediately by a special committee.

Finally on January 18 in 2012, a HC bench comprising Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim declared the construction of private structures on sea beaches and shores illegal and directed the government to draw up a master plan to turn Kuakata sea beach into an ideal tourist destination.

Halim's harrowing memory of 1971

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Sixty-one-year-old Halim still feels the horror when he remembers November 10 of the year 1971 when he and his family experienced the worst incident in their life.

On that day, seven of his relatives, including his father Soleman Majhi and brother Shah Alam Majhi, were brutally killed by the Pakistan army in Borchakathi village under Nesarabad upazila of the district for helping the freedom fighters.

"Food would be cooked in our house and we would take it to Binna High School in the upazila, where freedom fighters took shelter," said Abdul Halim.

The Pakistani army raided the village around 9:00am on November 10 with the help of collaborators as the matter came to their knowledge.

"I along with some other men and women of our house hid behind a bush in the nearby garden at Majhi Bari," said Halim, who runs a tea stall in front of his house now.

"We were caught by the Pakistani army as one of the women began to cough," he added.

The soldiers picked up 15 other men from near Shohagdal union land office and tied them with a rope. Fortunately, Halim was tied at the end of the rope.

"As one of my hands was free, I could untie my other hand. I fled when only one soldier was on guard. But my father, brother and uncle were killed on the spot along with the other men," he added.

The villagers recovered seven bodies of his relatives from the spot that they brought to his house. All the bodies were buried in one grave beside the canal of the village. The grave is known as Shat Bektir Ek Kobor (seven in one grave) in the area.

No step has been taken to preserve the grave of those brave sons of the nation. None of their family members gets any facilities from the government as martyrs' family, Halim said.

"The Pakistani army killed my father and brother for helping the freedom fighters," said Nuruzzaman, son of martyred Soleman.



Abdul Halim

Mud eel exporters all smiles

Support needed to realise industry potential in Barisal

SUSHANTA GHOSH with ANDREW EAGLE

In Barisal's Agailjhara upazila catching Gangeatic mud eels is a livelihood for many. The freshwater eel-like fish, which technically belong to the swamp eel family rather than being true eels, are locally called "cuchia". They are regularly sent to markets in Dhaka and beyond. But fixed purchase prices from exporters and limited government support over past years has impeded the growth of a potentially lucrative mud eel industry.

"We catch mud eels using various techniques including hooks and nets," says Kartik Mandal of Bakal village. "We also catch them with hands, while wading through ponds and water bodies."

"Mud eels from wetland areas can weigh up to one kilogram," says another mud eel fisher, Sushil Mandal from Gaila village. "But mostly they weigh between 400 and 700 grams. We sell the mud eels at a local wholesale

market where the rate is about Tk 250 per kilogram. In a day we can catch up to three kilograms of fish."

Around 500 people in Agailjhara upazila and across the Barisal region are engaged in mud eel catching and trading. Every week one or two truckloads of the fish leave for Dhaka, carrying up to seven tonnes of them. "Our product is on-sold to an exporter located in Dhaka," explains one wholesaler, Susil Mandal. "He exports them to China and other countries."

The local conditions are also suitable for mud eel farming, an activity that does not require huge expenditure up front. A waterhole or wetland where mud eels naturally occur can be ideal for an aquaculture project, as can local ponds.

"The government has set up three mud eel demonstration farms at Rajihar, Nagirpar and Gaila in Agailjhara upazila this year," says the local upazila fisheries officer Rojia Akhter. "If these projects succeed mud

eel production in the upazila may quickly double."

"The demand for mud eels in China is high," says Abul Kashem Gazi, secretary of the Bangladesh Crab and Cuchia Exporters' Association. "Per week it would be possible to export at least eight tonnes of mud eels to China, but we fulfil only about ten percent of that demand. If Bangladesh could increase its mud eel production, it promises significant foreign earnings."

President of the South Region Cuchia Traders' Society, Prodig Baroi, agrees. "If we had proper industry support mud eel production could be doubled or trebled," he says. "This area is absolutely fit for mud eel farming."

Apart from a lack of support in developing the industry previously, traders also note that the syndicate-like arrangements with exporters are also impeding the industry. "The rate for mud eels is more or less fixed and we are bound to sell to the exporters," says Baroi. "There is no competition."



A large concrete water container full of mud eels, locally called cuchia, at a wholesale market at Gaila village in Agailjhara upazila of Barisal.

PHOTO: STAR



Madhusudan Talukdar takes care of oranges in his orchard at Karbaripara village in Naniarchar upazila of Rangamati.

PHOTO: STAR

Mandarins show promise

ANVIL CHAKMA with ANDREW EAGLE

Branches hang heavy with ripe fruit in the mandarin orchards of Daane Sabekkhong Namakbari Para village in Rangamati's Naniarchar upazila. It's a welcome scene of plenty. Mandarins are yet a relatively new crop in the hill tracts, a crop that's proving its potential. Local orchardists cannot but smile at this year's results.

"In 2007 I planted more than 500 mandarin trees on two acres," says orchardist Madhusudan Talukdar, 40. "The first harvest was achieved in 2013; a year later about half of the trees bore fruit and sales were good. This year all of the trees are full of ripe mandarins."

With the fruit of a good size, up to

300 grams per piece, and sweet taste, the popularity of Madhusudan's crop among consumers is assured.

"I will earn over Tk 6 lakh from mandarins this year, more than previously. A pair of mandarins sells for Tk 50 in the local market and people like them," he says.

His efforts have inspired neighbours to do the same. "After seeing Madhusudan's work I planted my own orchard," says Sumanta Chakma, 32, of the same village. "This year for the first time I sold some mandarins from my grove."

"Last year I planted 1500 mandarin seedlings on my land," says neighbour Ripan Chakma. "After a few years I hope that I, too, can make a tidy income."

Fruit trader Sukomol Chakma, 40,

meanwhile, says that mandarins from Naniarchar upazila have experienced a much better yield this year. The burgeoning industry has brought him to the area.

According to local agriculture officials, while initially Sajek in Baghaichari upazila was famous within the hill tracts for mandarins, Naniarchar is fast gaining a similar reputation. Indeed the large size of Madhusudan's mandarins is new to Rangamati.

The deputy director of Rangamati's Department of Agriculture Extension, Ramani Kanti Chakma, observes that this year mandarin orchards have grown to cover 700 acres district-wide. He says the good yield in Naniarchar this year has been helped by favourable weather.

50kg hemp found in private car

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Police seized around 50 kg of contraband hemp from a private car in Bothuabari area under Dhunat upazila of the district yesterday.

Police said, acting on a tip-off, a team of police followed a private car on Shariakandi-Dhunat road. Sensing the presence of police, the driver speeded up. The narcotic traders abandoned the car on the road after driving around 20 km and fled from there. Police seized the car with the hemp, police added.

Dhunat Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mizanur Rahman said police lodged a case yesterday, accusing four unidentified people, including the driver.

2 brick kilns shut in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A mobile court yesterday shut two brick kilns in Raninagar upazila of Naogaon for not having clearance certificates of Department of Environment (DoE).

Former upazila vice-chairman Anwar Hossain is owner of the brick kilns, said police.

Police said a mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Zahangir Alam raided the brick kilns at Dhanpara village.

AMAN PRODUCTION IN NOAKHALI Bumper yield fails to delight farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Farmers in Noakhali region are worried because of low price of aman in local markets, despite achieving bumper productions of the paddy this year.

Pranab Bhattacharya, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Noakhali, said this year DAE in Noakhali set a target to cultivate aman paddy on about 1.27 lakh 900 hectares of land.

But farmers cultivated the paddy on about 2.65 lakh hectares which was 1.37 lakh hectares more than the fixed target in the season, Pranab added.

Of the actual target, 63,537 hectares in Hatiya upazila, 37,200 hectares in Subarnachar, 22,280 hectares in Companiganj and 17,910 hectares Sadar upazila were brought under the cultivation.

According to the DAE office, the total volume of harvested paddy is 2,87,062 tonnes this season.

Growers said one maund of aman paddy is selling for only Tk 550 to Tk 600 at different local market this year.

According to the farmers, production cost for one maund of paddy is about Tk 900 this year which is much higher compared to the previous season.

Speech impaired girl raped in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A 19-year-old speech impaired girl was raped, allegedly by her neighbour, at Sardarpara village in Khansama upazila of the district on Sunday.

Witnesses said Fazlul Haque, 50, son of late Yousuf Ali of the village, entered the house of the girl when she was alone and allegedly raped her and fled the spot.

Father of the girl filed a case with Khansama Police Station yesterday, accusing Fazlul, Officer-in-Charge Abdul Matin said.

Mumps creates panic in Khulna primary school

A CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Around 50 students have been suffering from mumps for one month, spreading panic among guardians and teachers and decreasing attendance of students.

Shabnam Shireen Akhter, headmistress of Damodar Karigorpara Government Primary School under Phultala upazila of the district, said a few students were attacked by the virus in early November, which gradually spread to other students.

This correspondent visited the school yesterday and saw that many students were wearing masks. Quack doctors are prescribing vitamins and antibiotic tablets, and some are using mud as an ointment for the throat.

Rafit Gazi, a Class II student, said he took treatment in his house for severe pain for the last five to six days, and the pain has gone.

Mirajul Sardar, a Class V student, has been suffering from this disease for the last ten days. He said he could not eat or even talk.

Shariful Islam, an assistant teacher and also a guardian, said he was attacked by the virus in 2014, and his two sons were attacked a few months later.

Paediatric consultant of Khulna General Hospital Dr Sharafat Hossain said the disease is called parotid gland inflammation, commonly known as mumps. It is not dangerous but contagious, he added.