



Influential people built this structure after ousting six families belonging to ethnic Marma community from their ancestral land at Saingya Marma Para in Bandarban Sadar upazila in January this year. *Inset*, a sign-board of Sylvan Wye Resort and Spa Ltd claims ownership of the land through purchase while several indigenous families said they were forced to leave the area.

PHOTO: STAR

Last six Marma families evicted

Land grabber plans to build 5-star hotel, resort in Bandarban Marma Para

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

The indigenous communities of Bandarban live on in fear as their ancestral land continues to be grabbed by influential people.

Once inhabited by 42 families, the Saingya Marma Para of Bandarban in southeast Bangladesh has been subject to land grabbing for long. There were a only six families remaining till middle of last year when they began receiving death threats to leave their homes and their government-allocated jhum lands.

The last of the inhabitants finally moved out in January, said Paincha Thoai Marma, headman of the affected para. He has currently taken shelter at his father-in-law's house at Dalu para.

The land and approximately 100 acres of jhum land are now under the control of Jasim Uddin Mantu, chairman of Sylvan Wye Resort and Spa Ltd, he added.

"When we protested, the grabbers lodged a false case with Bandarban Police Station. Later, the police picked up me and

my son."

The other victims include the families of Mong Kya Prue, Ani Mong, Mong Yoi, Mong Ba U and Fow Sha Ching, said the headman. They are now dispersed and have taken shelter in Joutokamar Para, TNT and Bakichhara area, about 12 to 15 kilometres away from their homes, he added.

"We are helpless; they forced us to leave our ancestral land. We want our land back."

According to the Hill District Council Act 1989 and Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900, no land shall be leased out, settled with, purchased, sold, or transferred without prior approval of the department concerned.

Since the 1997 signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace agreement, around 180 indigenous families have been evicted from their ancestral land in Bandarban, grabbed by Bangalee settlers, private rubber plantation owners and horticulturists, said Jumlian Amlai, president of Parbatya Chattagram Forest and Land Rights Protection Movement, Bandarban Chapter.

A handful of villages together are called a Mouza in Bandarban, each headed by a government appointed headman. There are 109 mouzas in the hill district.

The job of the headman is to look after the land and assign the indigenous people, who depend on jhum cultivation and forest resources for their livelihood in hills.

Refuting the allegation, Jasim, also younger brother of lawmaker Nazrul Islam Chowdhury of Chittagong-14, said he bought around 150 acres of land in the Bandarban Mouza.

"I bought the lands to build a five-star hotel," said Jasim.

"I gave a good sum of money to the six indigenous families while they transferred their land to me willingly," he claimed.

On receiving payment for the land, Mong Ba U, one of the victims, said, "I borrowed money from Jasim on several occasions for my wife's treatment. But I am not able to repay him."

He took money three to four times, ranging between Tk 20,000 and Tk 40,000, he added.

The Daily Star also obtained a document that shows that Jasim donated 0.1837 acres of this grabbed land to an individual -- Bandarban Superintendent of Police Md Jaker Hossain Majumdar.

When asked, Jaker said, "We only took the land to set up a police camp in the area."

Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council member KS Mong Marma said, "Our investigation is going on. Primarily, we found the involvement of local leaders in this case."

The grabbers will not stop unless the authorities concerned take stern action, he added.

Bohmong chief and headman of Bandarban Mouza U Chaw Prue refused to comment in this regard.

Aung Jai Khyang, head clerk of Bohmong office, said, "Jasim misguided us and grabbed the land."

Some 22 Tripura families of Saingya Tripura Para are also facing threat near the Saingya Marma Para area, said Birendro Tripura, headman of Saingya Tripura Para.

2 tortured women land in hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Two housewives were brutally tortured allegedly by their husbands over family feuds in Patuakhali and Barguna on Monday.

A housewife was tortured allegedly by her husband at Charghuni village in Patuakhali's Dashmina upazila on Monday night.

The victim, Rozina Begum, 35, wife of Osman Khan, is now undergoing treatment at Dashmina Upazila Health Complex, Rongopaldi UP Chairman ATM Nasir Uddin said.

Quoting locals, police said Rozina lives at Wari in the capital along with her two children Yusuf and Amena, while her husband Osman works at a garment factory in Savar and stays there.

About a week ago, Osman, who had been engaged in an extramarital relationship with another woman, took the two children to his village home without informing their mother.

When Rozina came to her husband's house on Monday to take her children back Osman mercilessly beat her and fled the scene.

Rozina filed a case with Dashmina Police Station accusing her husband the following day.

Away in Barguna, a housewife, who was tortured allegedly by her husband and in-laws in Taltali upazila on Monday, is undergoing treatment at Barguna General Hospital.

Victim Fatima, also a first-year honours student at Barisal BM College, filed a case with Barguna Woman and Children Repression Prevention Court against her husband Asif on Tuesday.

According to the case statement, Fatima had been living with her parents for study purpose since their marriage in 2011. Her husband married another woman recently.

On Monday, when Fatima went to her husband's house and protested his second marriage, Asif demanded Tk 5 lakh as dowry from her.

When Fatima refused to give the money, Asif with the help of his second wife Liza Akhter and father Afzal Hossain beat her mercilessly with sticks, leaving her severely injured.

5 get life for killing

Two were tried in absentia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A Chapainawabganj court here yesterday sentenced five people to life term imprisonment for killing a man in 2009.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Shawkat Ali pronounced the verdict.

The lifers are Erfan Ali alias Tipu, 52, his two sons Hamed, 32, and Rumed, 29, Akalu, 35, son of Abu Bakkar and Dobir, 30, son of Tohor Ali of Bhagolpur village in Gomostapur upazila of the district.

The court also fined them Tk 10,000 each. In default, they are to suffer another six months in jail.

Of them, Hamed and Rumed were tried in absentia.

Eight people were acquitted as the allegation brought against them could not be proved.

According to the prosecution, the accused hacked Ahadul and his associate Hakim over previous enmity on October 16 in 2009. Critically injured Ahadul later died at a hospital. The incident took place when the duo was returning to their Bhagolpur village home from Khoarer More.

The deceased's father-in-law Shamsul Islam later filed murder case, accusing 13 people with Gomostapur Police Station.

After investigation, Officer-in-Charge Babor Hossain, also the investigation officer of the case, pressed charges against 13 peons on December 31 the same year.

After examining witnesses and evidence, Additional District and Sessions Judge Shawkat Ali found the five guilty and pronounced the verdict.

Greener pastures gone

Bagerhat cow industry in decline as new homes, shrimp farms take grazing land

PARITHA CHAKRABORTY with ANDREW EAGLE

The incremental loss of open, grazing land to new homes and burgeoning shrimp farms in parts of Bagerhat is proving a hazard to the area's cattle breeders, who could once rely on an abundance of local pasture to feed their livestock.

"I have three cows," says Tandra Shikder from Mohishcharani village in Morrelganj upazila. "I have no choice but to sell them since it's difficult to find food for them. Even three years ago there were fields aplenty where the cows could graze. Most of those areas are gone now. They have become shrimp enclosures."

"In more recent years we were at least able to collect some grass from the shrimp farm dykes, though it was hardly sufficient," she continues.

"Now we can't even do that. The shrimp farmers cultivate vegetables on the dykes; and many shrimp farmers have fenced off their enclosures." "I had eight cows but now I only have two," says another farmer, Dibakor Battachariya from Joygachi village in Bagerhat Sadar upazila. "I had to sell some due to fodder shortages. It's very costly to rear cows only on straw, and straw isn't always available."

"I used to have ten cows. I earned quite a lot from selling their milk," says neighbour Mujibur Rahman. "But now, as there aren't any fields left for their feed, the cost of rearing the cows is higher than the profit from milk sales. I had to sell them."

The demise of cattle-rearing is having an effect on the broader community too. "It's hard to buy milk for my child," says Keya Chowdhury from Sangdia village. "Nobody wants

to rear cows anymore. Most farmers have already sold their livestock."

According to district livestock officer Dr Saifuzzaman Khan, there are still 3.12 lakh cows in the district. But he is aware of the issue. "Farmers here tend to favour shrimp cultivation rather than paddy," he says. "The production of grass and straw continues to fall. One solution could be for cattle farmers to grow Napier grass and maize on open land, to meet their need for fodder."

"We have lost a lot of arable land," notes the agriculture department's Additional Deputy Director in Bagerhat, Birendra Nath Majumder. "Three years ago the district total of nearly 1.5 lakh thousand hectares of agricultural land was 1,038 hectares higher than what we have now. We are trying our best to prevent farmland loss."

Teacher's tendons cut

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Rivals severed tendons of legs of a school teacher over a land dispute in Sadar upazila on Tuesday.

The victim, Siddiqur Rahman, 49, an assistant teacher at Shrirampur High School, was first taken to Patuakhali General Hospital and later shifted to Barisal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital for better treatment.

Victim's brother GM Malek said there had been a longstanding feud between Siddiqur and his nephews Anwar and Sourav over land.

As a sequel, when Siddiqur was returning home from Maukaran Bazar on Tuesday night both Anwar and Sourav swooped on him with sharp weapons, stabbed him indiscriminately and cut off tendons of both his legs.



Md Enamul Haque, deputy director of BADC's foundation potato seed producing farm in Nilphamari's Domar upazila, gives suggestions to a group of local growers.

PHOTO: STAR

Dhaincha as green manure

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Farmers in Sonarai village in Domar upazila are gradually adopting an environment-friendly procedure to enrich their farmland for a better yield of crops by growing dhaincha, a green bushy plant.

Thanks to the officials of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) for motivating farmers to leave excessive dependence on chemical fertilisers as their regular use reduces fertility of soil.

Every year, BADC's foundation potato seed producing farm, at the village grows dhaincha (scientific name sesbania) on its 320 acres of land to boost crop production, which also helps local growers get an idea of producing green manure.

Besides, the farm authorities also promote their contacted potato seed growers to cultivate dhaincha plant during the off period between April to August by providing seeds and other technical support free of cost.

During a recent visit to the village this correspondent saw there is rarely any house yard where dhaincha is not cultivated. The plant needs nearly two months for its growth.

As the plants grow four to five feet, farmers mix the plant with the soil through ploughing and it turns into green manure.

"As the villagers use an earthen road through the BADC farm to go to the upazila headquarters they can see how farm workers are producing the green manure from dhaincha plants," said Sonarai UP Chairman Abul Kalam Azad.

Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer Shahriar Alam said, "Farmers are greatly benefited by using dhaincha as green manure as the plant adds nitrogen, phosphate, potash and sulphate proportionately and increases water holding capacity of the soil."

Farmer Ahasan Habib, 40, said, "I have been producing green manure with dhaincha plant for couple of years and getting an additional two maunds of Aman paddy from each bigha of land."

Potato grower Sitaram Roy, 55, said, "Green manure not only increases yield, but also reduces chemical fertilizer cost by 50 percent."

Md Enamul Haque, deputy director of the farm in Domar, said, "We would like to shift our environment-friendly simple technology to our neighbouring farmers."

Yaba dealers' clever trick

FROM PAGE 16

Mufti Mahmud Khan, Rab's legal and media wing director, claimed that the truck was travelling ahead of the lorry to protect the larger consignment, in case law enforcers intercepted them.

Both the lorry and the truck started from Teknaf on August 3 and took a break at an automobile workshop in Chakaria upazila in Chittagong where the yaba was put in the hidden chamber, the Rab director said in a press conference in the capital yesterday.

Rafiq, a Teknaf-based yaba trader, brought the contraband items from Myanmar via Maheshkhali, a sea route yaba traders started using following strict law enforcers' vigilance on their usual routes, Mufti said, adding that the consignment was given to the transport workers at the Chittagong workshop.

This syndicate comprising 15 to 20 members of transport workers has so far delivered eight consignments in the last one year. Their task is to deliver the drugs to specified people, Rab said.

A group of Comilla-based yaba traders provide shelter to the syndicate members for a couple of hours during the trip.

The seized consignments were supposed to be delivered to five drug dealers in Keraniganj. The Rab is trying to hunt them down.

Rab, police and narcotics officials said long-route vehicles have become the main means of carrying yaba to the capital and elsewhere.

Drug peddlers do not risk carrying the items themselves during the anti-narcotics drive that saw 210 suspected drug traders killed, mostly in "shootouts" involving police

and Rab.

Officials believe some unscrupulous members of law-enforcement agencies are still facilitating the drug dealers in smuggling yaba.

Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed said drugs are coming to Dhaka on luxury buses despite operations by different law enforcement agencies. The elite force has recently seized at least 11 such buses including three luxury ones in a week.

The drug traders use a system to ferry yaba in which the transport workers, in most cases, do not even know the people they are going to deliver the drugs to.

"The bus owners have to take the responsibility and we will sit with them in this regard," the Rab DG has said recently.

Syed Tawfique Uddin

Ahmed, outgoing director (operations) of the Department of Narcotics Control, told The Daily Star that small consignments are being carried in buses and large ones in loaded trucks to dodge the law enforcers.

A section of transport workers in connivance with some unscrupulous law enforcers has been doing this, he said citing an intelligence report.

THE BRIEFING

Mufti Mahmud said they were waiting for days as they had information that two salt-laden vehicles would carry yaba pills ahead of Eid-ul-Azha.

The drivers of both the vehicles waited for hours at different points for a convenient time to reach Dhaka.

Responding to a query, Mufti said the Teknaf-Cox's