



A good number of boats lie anchored just beside the shoreline near Kuakata Zero Point while many others are kept on the adjacent beach, much to the nuisance of tourists willing to have a walk or bath in the picturesque area. PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

# Tourists suffer as Kuakata beach turns 'boat landing station'

### Separate spot for watercraft demanded as visitors can't walk and bathe with ease

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Trawlers, speedboats and other small watercrafts are often kept anchored haphazardly in Kuakata sea beach, much to the nuisance for a large number of tourists in the picturesque area.

Tourists coming from different areas of the country as well as from abroad often walk on the beach and most of them like to take bath in the sea.

But they face disturbance as numerous trawlers, water bikes and speedboats, some of them meant for arranging rides for tourists, are anchored in the water beside the beach. Many small fishing boats are also kept on the beach where tourists are supposed to walk freely.

The situation worsens during the tourism season in winter when larger number of fishermen also go for fishing in the sea.



The unscrupulous anchoring of boats affects around a two-kilometre area on both sides of the Zero Point at Kuakata, said locals and visitors.

A section of traders keep boats in the water to carry tourists from

keeping of a large number of boats there.

"We cannot walk on the beach and take bath in the water smoothly. Natural beauty of the spot is also affected due to scattering of the boats," he said.

"Sea water is polluted by fuel waste falling from these boats. Wastes from fishing boats including pieces of fishing nets also lie on the beach," said Sabiha Muntasir of Faridpur.

The authorities concerned should arrange a separate station for anchoring of these water vehicles, keeping in view the interest of tourists, said Kamal Maruf, a tourist from Dhaka.

Kalapara Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Munibur Rahman, also member secretary of Kuakata beach management committee, said, "We have already asked the tourist police to take necessary steps in this regard. We will take required measures to keep the beach neat and clean."



Boro seedlings turn yellowish at a field of Sakoya village in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila as cold wave coupled with fog persists in the country's northern area. The photo was taken on Monday. PHOTO: STAR

# Fog, cold harm Boro seedbeds

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Boro seedbeds in many areas of Lalmonirhat district are turning yellowish under the impact of the ongoing cold wave and dense fog.

Farmers are now worried about rise in the production cost as many of them will have to sow seeds again to cultivate the paddy due to damage of seedlings caused by the adverse weather.

Several farmers said they are covering their seedbeds with polythene sheets but it does not help much to prevent the damage due to lack of sunlight.

Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Enamul Haque said Boro seedbeds in some areas of the district are affected due to severe cold and fog but seedlings won't be damaged if the weather improves shortly.

"We suggest the farmers to water seedbeds at night, cover them with polythene sheets and use proper fertiliser to save seedlings from the harmful effects of cold and fog. Our officials are visiting the fields and sharing views with farmers

on ways to save the seedlings," he said. Afzal Hossain, 65, a farmer at Sakoya village in Aditmari upazila said cold and fog has caused damaged to two-week-old seedlings on his 25 decimals of land.

"Boro seedlings on many seedbeds here have already turned yellowish due to lack of sunlight for the last few days. It will not be possible for me to cultivate the crop this year if seedlings on my 20 decimals of land are completely damaged," said Nayeb Ali, 55, another farmer of the village.

"If the cold and fog continues for more several days, our Boro seedlings will be badly damaged and we will face seedling crisis during Boro transplantation in January," said Delowar Hossain, 58, a farmer at Rajpur village in a Teesta river basin area of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

The Department of Agriculture Extension in Lalmonirhat has set a target of Boro cultivation on 70,000 hectares of land, including high yielding varieties on 48,000 hectares, in five upazilas of the district.

# Illegal sand trade poses threat to Titas bridge

MASUK HRIDOY, Brahmanbaria

At a time when the government is conducting drives against river encroachment, an influential sand trader is not only constricting flow of the Titas river in Banchharampur upazila by occupying its bank, but also endangering Sheikh Hasina Titas Setu over the river.

Ignoring the risk posed to the Tk 94-crore bridge that the prime minister herself inaugurated last year, the sand trader, Saidul Islam, has taken up several bridge piers that he is using to make an enclosure where he stockpiles sand for sale.

Moreover, the sand stockpiled in the enclosure is being lifted from the river right below the bridge -- another violation of the law.

Sheikh Hasina Titas Setu, the first Y-shaped bridge in the country, connects three upazilas -- Banchharampur in Brahmanbaria and Muradnagar and Homna in Cumilla. The eye-pleasing structure, 771.20 metres in length, has become a popular site to visit among locals and is an alternative route option for travellers going

to Chittagong from Dhaka and vice versa.

Such an asset of the country is under threat, but the authorities concerned seem to be indifferent to their duties, alleged many locals.

Saidul has been conducting sand trade for a year in a similar fashion by occupying the bank of the Titas in Charlohania area under Fardabad union of the same upazila as well, they also said.

While visiting the bridge, this correspondent found a wide area below the bridge, alongside the bridge piers on the south side of the river, filled with sand, while a large number of heavy vehicles including trucks were being loaded with sand.

Workers there said the sand business belongs to Saidul Islam of Charlohania village.

Requesting not to be named, a school teacher from Charlohania village said, "We see activity of hundreds of trucks and power tillers beside the piers every day. Although selling and lifting of sand from the river near the bridge are prohibited, no one came forward to put a stop to the illegal business."

Boatman Solaiman Mia said the sand enclosure has choked the river's flow below the bridge, causing hindrance to two-way movement of river vessels.

Accidents between vessels are quite frequent in the area since the business sprung up there, he added.

When reached for his comment, Saidul Islam claimed that he pays rent to conduct his sand trade below the bridge. "Not just me, many others in the area are occupying land below the bridge as well as the river bank," he said.

Engineer Jahangir Hossain of Local Government Engineering Department in Banchharampur upazila said he was not aware of any sand trade next to the bridge. "If that's the case, I will take action."

Nafisa Naz Neera, assistant commissioner (land) in the upazila, said she asked land officer in Fardabad union to find out about the allegations of encroachment on the Titas river.

Necessary action would be taken once the allegations of encroachment are found to be true, she added.



An influential local has been extracting sand from the Titas river, right below Sheikh Hasina bridge in Brahmanbaria's Banchharampur upazila. Several piers of the bridge have been made part of an enclosure for selling and stockpiling sand. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

# KILLING OF 3 SANTALS IN GAIBANDHA Court orders further probe by CID

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A court in Gobindaganj upazila of Gaibandha on Monday ordered Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to conduct investigation of the case filed over the killing of three Santal people, and torching and looting their houses in Bagda Farm area of Gobindaganj on November 6 in 2016.

Judge Partha Bhadra of Gobindaganj Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court passed the order after accepting a naraji (no-confidence) petition of filed on behalf of Santals on September 4, against the Police Bureau of Investigation's (PBI) charge sheet.

"Gaibandha PBI in their final charge sheet submitted on July 28 this year dropped the names of 11 main accused of the November 6, 2016 incident," said Advocate Sirajul Islam Babu, one of the lawyers who were present on behalf of the Santal community during the third hearing of the naraji petition on Monday.

"Through our naraji petition we urged the court to include the main accused including former MP Abul Kalam Azad, Abdul Awal, former managing director of Rangpur Sugar Mill, its former general manager Abdul Mazid, Abdul Hannan, former UNO of Gobindaganj, Shubrata Kumar Sarkar, former OC of Gobindaganj Police Station, Mahabur Rahman, sub-inspector of DB police, constable Sajjad Hossain and Rezaul Karim Rafik, chairman of Katabari Union Parishad.

"The court accepted our naraji petition and ordered the CID to conduct further investigation in the case that Thomas Hembrom filed on November 26, 2016 against 33 named and 500/600 unknown people who allegedly attacked the Santal Palli, set fire on their makeshift houses, looted their properties and killed three Santal men on November 6, 2016," said Sirajul Islam Babu.

On that day, more than 2,000 Santal and Bangalee families were ousted from the "disputed" Sahebganj-Bagda farmland under Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila, where Rangpur Sugar Mill was established during the Pakistan period.

The eviction took place following a violent clash between the dweller families, mill employees and police. Three Santal men were killed and 20 others, including nine policemen, injured in the incident.

On behalf of the Santal and Bangalee communities, Thomas Hembrom filed a case with Gobindaganj Police Station against 33 named and 500-600 unnamed accused on November 26, 2016.

But the charge sheet submitted by Gaibandha PBI on July 28 this year dropped the names of 11 prime accused in the case, said Santal leaders, adding that the charge sheet did not include name of any police officials although a video footage of the attack showed their involvement and two cops were suspended in 2017, following a police investigation.

"Through our naraji petition we appealed to the court to include the 11 prime accused in the PBI charge sheet, but the court ordered the CID to do further investigation. We are afraid that verdict of the case will now take much longer time," Zafrul Islam Prodhon, secretary of Sahebganj-Bagda farm Bhumi Uddhar Sangram Committee, told The Daily Star after Monday's court order.

# Wild elephants kill one

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

An elderly man was trampled to death by a herd of wild elephants in Bandarban's Naikhyangchhari upazila early yesterday.

The deceased is Siddique Ahmed, 85, of Sonaichhari area. Naikhyangchhari Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Sadia Afrin Kochi said wild elephants broke into the mud house of Siddique and trampled him to death on the spot around 3:00am.

During the winter every year, elephants from nearby forest often come down in different areas of the upazila in search of food, the UNO added.

Mentionable, two people, including a woman, were killed in separate elephant attacks on Friday and Sunday.