



In plain sight this may look like an ordinary construction site where stone chips are stockpiled. But in reality, this is a playground of a high school. The authorities of Taaldighi Bahumukhi High School, in Mymensingh's Tarakanda upazila, leased the playground to a construction firm for the purpose till March next year.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

School playground now construction site

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A school playground in Tarakanda upazila was leased out to a construction firm in September 2020 and the lease has been extended till March 2022.

The lessee, Rana Builders Private Ltd, is using the playground of Taaldighi Bahumukhi High School to crush stones and stockpile stone chips being used in the repair work of Mymensingh-Sherpur road.

Students of the high school used to share the playground with students of Taaldighi Government Primary School. This was the only playground for about one thousand students of both schools. Locals used to organise different sporting events, cultural programmes and recreational activities on the ground.

But ignoring the physical and psychological wellbeing of students of the schools, the high school authorities leased out the playground for six months in

September 2020, in exchange for Tk 1.2 lakh.

Moreover, they extended the lease for another 12 months for an additional payment of Tk 4.2 lakh.

Aside from being deprived of fun activities in the playground, the children of the schools are now being subjected to severe noise and dust pollution, caused by stone crushers and heaps of crushed stone.

Promi is a sixth grader at the high school. She is among many of the students who live nearby. She and several other students from the same neighbourhood said the noise pollution has made it extremely difficult for them to pay attention to classes while studying at home is not any easier either.

The dust emitted from the stone crushing site may cause respiratory illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis in children of the schools, said Ranjan Kumar Majumder, a medicine specialist who retired from Mymensingh

Medical College Hospital.

The dust and noise emitted from the school ground are also unbearable for people living in the vicinity, said locals.

Mohammad Shahidullah lives with his wife and four children in Taaldighi village, in close proximity to the playground. He said, "It has become so difficult for us to stay at home that I'm thinking about moving my family to Tarakanda upazila town."

The menacing noise from the stone crushers has been making life miserable, but the school authorities were not paying heed to their repeated complaints, alleged Mohammad Khalilullah, owner of a fish hatchery in the village.

Asked why he leased out the school playground ignoring health and safety concerns of students and locals, Dulal Chandra Sarker, the headteacher of the high school, claimed that he had to give in to tremendous "pressure from local politicians".

He, however, did not wish to disclose names of the politicians who allegedly exerted pressure on him.

"At first, I informed locals about the pressure, but they did not come forward. Finally, I spoke with Tarakanda upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), who is also the president of the school's managing committee, and he gave permission to lease out the playground."

The lease money is deposited in the school fund and it will be spent for development work of the school, he also said, assuring that the lease would not be extended further, after its tenure ends in March next year.

Contacted, Tarakanda UNO Mizabe Rahmat said he recently joined the post after the school ground was already leased out.

He also said that he would need to examine relevant documents before taking necessary steps in this regard.

Light at the end of the tunnel

25 years into suspension of Lalmonirhat-Mogholhat railway route, shimmering hopes prevail to revive the rail route

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The 10-kilometre-long Lalmonirhat-Mogholhat railway route in the bordering area of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila has been lying abandoned since 1996. But the railway dates back to the pre-independence era when it had rail links with India. The coal used to be brought from India's Assam province through this route. Before the independence, passenger and freight trains used to run on this route. After the independence, only freight trains used to run till 1986. However, the railway authorities stopped running trains on this route in May 1996.

A few years after the train services were stopped on the route, nine-kilometre of railway tracks and stones were stolen by organised gangs of thieves.

However, still, a one-kilometre rail track exists at Karnapur village on the route. Locals still dream that the railway will be restored and trains will start running on this route again as before.

"An organised gang has stolen railway lines and stones from all areas of Lalmonirhat-Mogholhat route but they could not do so in our village as we kept vigil. The members of the clique attempted to steal the rails and stones but we stood guard and chased the group several times," said Mobarak Hossain, 68, of Karnapur village.

Habibur Rahman, chairman of

Mogholhat Union Parishad, said that once a customs check post and train movement was normal at Mogholhat. This is a business-friendly area. The Mogholhat area has experienced an economic downfall due to the closure of customs check posts and train services.

"Mogholhat will get back to its golden days if trains resume on this route. The business here will thrive and the railway authorities will be able to earn revenue as expected" said Habibur Rahman.

Lalmonirhat Railway Divisional Engineer (DEn) Anwar Hossain said that the higher authorities have been informed to reopen the Lalmonirhat-Mogholhat railway route.

The government also has goodwill in this regard, he said.

"Three cases have also been registered against the organised thieves for stealing railway lines and stones on the route. If the route is resumed, Lalmonirhat Railway will get back its tradition," he said.

Lalmonirhat Railway Divisional Manager (DRM) Shah Sufi Nur Mohammad said that the Lalmonirhat-Mogholhat rail route has not yet been declared abandoned. A proposal has been sent to the higher authorities to resume train operations on this route. The authorities will soon visit the route and come up with steps.

There is a possibility that the train services will resume on this route, he hoped.



An organised gang of thieves have plundered the rails and stones from Lalmonirhat-Mogholhat railway route. The photo was taken from Khochabari area of Sadar upazila recently.

PHOTO: STAR

How to

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it is presumed to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Type of eczema is generally determined by the person's history and location of rash.

For example, irritant dermatitis often occurs on people's hands who frequently get them wet. Allergic contact dermatitis occurs upon exposure to allergen, causing a hypersensitivity reaction in the skin.

SYMPTOMS

Eczema symptoms are usually mild. The most common ones include dry, scaly skin; skin flushing; itching; open, crusted, or weeping sores.

TREATMENTS

Atopic dermatitis is typically treated with moisturisers and steroid creams.

Antibiotics may be required if there are signs of skin infection.

Contact dermatitis is typically treated by avoiding the allergen or irritant.

Antihistamines may help with sleep and decrease nighttime scratching.

Make sure to visit a doctor if the condition affects sleep or daily activities. You should also seek expert opinion if the affected part looks infected.

Why govt

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been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah came up with the rule following a writ petition filed by the Consumer Association of Bangladesh on November 14 seeking necessary directives on the respondents over this issue.

Lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua appeared for the petitioner while Deputy Attorney General Nawroz MR Chowdhury and Assistant Attorney General Golam Sarwar Payel represented the state during the hearing of the petition.

Pakistan cruising in Chattogram

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unbeaten fifties to help the visitors put 109 for no loss on the board before stumps yesterday.

The century stand also means that Pakistan openers have put on a hundred-run stand in both innings of a Test match only for the second time, with their first being back in 2003 against South Africa.

Although the fate of a cricket match, especially in Tests, can be turned around with a brilliant performance at any moment of the match, it seems highly unlikely that Bangladesh would pull a rabbit out of the hat especially with Abid and Shafique well set at the crease, scoring unbeaten 56 and 53, respectively.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who bowled 16 overs yesterday, was the only Bangladeshi bowler who was able to put the Pakistani batters in a bit of trouble, beating outside edges and producing a few close LBW calls.

Before Pakistan set themselves on a winning course, an early wicket and a concussion had put the Tigers on the backfoot.

Resuming the day on 39 for four and

with an 83-run lead, Bangladesh got off to a positive start when overnight batsman Mushfiqur Rahim (16 off 33) smashed pacer Hasan Ali for a boundary in the day's very first delivery.

However, Hasan had his revenge just a ball later as Mushfiqur shouldered arms to a delivery that nipped back in sharply to knock off the right-hander's off-stump.

The other overnight batter Yasir Ali, who made his debut in this Test after being in the national set-up for 955 days, was looking fluent with his strokes all around the ground before the right-hander was hit on the helmet off a Shaheen Shah Afridi bouncer just an hour into the first session.

Yasir batted on for an over after the blow but had to eventually retire hurt after a 72-ball 36. And as per rules of the concussion substitute, Yasir was later replaced by Nurul Hasan Sohan, who departed playing a rash shot after scoring only 15 runs.

Liton Das (59 off 89) followed up his first innings ton with a fifty before being trapped in front by Afridi, who ended with his fourth Test figure, returning figures of five for 32 in 15 overs.

Indira wants Pak troop

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Council for debate. The Secretary General could authorise sending of observers in the case of emergency but it had to be ultimately ratified by the Council.

HEATH REJECTS BANGLADESH RECOGNITION DEMAND

Recognition of Bangladesh and expulsion of Pakistan from the Commonwealth were demanded in the British Parliament today. However, the British Prime Minister Heath rejected both the suggestions.

ON THE WAR FRONT

After hours of fight from November 29, the joint force of Daukee sub-Sector troops and 3rd Bengal regiment eventually liberates

Radhanagar. Three freedom fighters embraced martyrdom. Pakistan army was devastated in this battle. Simultaneously Goyainghat was freed by the allied force and Mukti Bahini.

The Pakistan Army was suffering serious reverses in almost all the fronts in Bangladesh. Even according to Pakistan's own admission, Mukti Bahini established firm control over Chaugacha in Jashore, Radhanagar in Sylhet, Jibannagar in Kushtia and Panchagarh. Fierce battle continued at Sector No 3 in Akhaura.

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Robot gives public performance

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performance of poetry that she wrote using her algorithms in celebration of the great Italian poet Dante.

The recital took place at the University of Oxford's renowned Ashmolean Museum as part of an exhibition marking the 700th anniversary of Dante's death. Ai-Da's poem was produced as a response to the poet's epic "Divine Comedy" -- which Ai-Da consumed in its entirety, allowing her to then use her algorithms to take inspiration from Dante's speech patterns, and by using her own data bank of words, create her own work.

Ai-Da's poem was described as "deeply emotive" by Meller.

He said that Ai-Da's ability to imitate human writing is "so great, if you read it you wouldn't know that it wasn't written by a human" and told CNN that when Ai-Da was reading her poem on Friday evening, "it was easy to forget that you're not dealing with a human being."

"The Ai-Da project was developed to address the debate over the ethics of further developing AI to imitate humans and human behavior," Meller told CNN. "It's finally dawning on us all that technology is having a major impact on all aspects of life and we're seeking to understand just how much this technology can do and what it can teach us about ourselves."

Parliament

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to secure government prices for produces beyond just rice and wheat.

The government currently buys rice and wheat at state-set Minimum Support Prices (MSPs), but the subsidies only benefit about 6% of India's millions of farmers.

2 more held

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Salauddin Al Mahmud, inspector of the court, told The Daily Star that the court was yet to set a date for hearing the prayers.

Masked gunmen shot dead Sohel and his aide Haripada Das in Cumilla's Pathuriapara area on November 22.

Sohel, 48, was also the panel mayor of Cumilla City Corporation and a local Awami League leader.

Egyptian rights activist fined over 'insulting' online posts

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday fined prominent human rights activist Hossam Bahgat for "insulting" the country's electoral commission on social media, a judicial source said.

Bahgat, founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, was fined 10,000 pounds (\$635) after he alleged incidents of electoral fraud during last year's parliamentary elections, in tweets and Facebook posts.

Parliament is mostly comprised of loyalists of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and critics view the chamber as a "rubber-stamp" body.

Since Sisi became president in 2014 following the military overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi the year before, he has overseen a sweeping crackdown on dissent with estimates of 60,000 political prisoners jailed.

Students still on streets

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The demands include ensuring justice and compensation for victims of road accidents, issuing a gazette notification to provide half-passes for students and ensuring safety for women on public, using an automated and upgraded traffic management system, and including traffic laws in the national curriculum.

Meanwhile, police yesterday foiled the Shabbagh blockade programme of eight leftist student organisations, who took to the streets in solidarity with the ongoing student protests.

They gathered in front of the Public Library and spoke out against police obstruction and for their three-point demand, including ensuring half fare for students and reducing price hike of daily commodities.

Dilip Roy, general secretary of Chhatra Maitri, one of the eight organisations, said, "Police are not friends of the people. Their obstruction has proved that they do not

want safe roads. The movement cannot be stopped by the police."

Moudud Hawlader, officer-in-charge of Shabbagh Police Station, said, "Shabbagh is an important intersection. There are two hospitals on each side. Blocking this junction could lead to a miserable situation."

At Rampura, students detained 41 buses of Raida Paribahan around 2:30pm after a helper of a bus allegedly pushed a female student off the bus around 11:30am.

As the buses were kept on the roadside, the entire area was gridlocked.

Later, bus owners and student representatives held a discussion at the Rampura Police Station and resolved the issue, said Rampura Police OC Rafiqul Islam.

Students of different educational institutions in Chattogram also demonstrated at the Wasa intersection, demanding half fare for students in public transport.

Investors propose pumping

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BIDA organised the event at Radisson Blu Water Garden Dhaka to promote Bangladesh as one of the world's most profitable investment destinations and highlight specific private investment opportunities here. More than 6,000 participants joined the summit, including 5,000 in person.

The participants represented 54 countries which indicates how the brand of Bangladesh is expanding globally, the BIDA chairman said.

He said through this summit, BIDA received important policy suggestions to facilitate higher private investments, which include private sector engagement in power transmission, reform Non-Performing Loans (NPL) space, further liberalize the foreign exchange regime, develop the national logistics strategy and revisit the current equity cap for foreign investors.

The summit generated strong interest from investors in diverse and innovative sectors, Sirazul claimed.

He also claimed that it has attracted international investors from many of the source countries.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic,

participation of investors has been extremely encouraging and inspiring, he noted.

Replying to a question, the BIDA chairman said earlier Bangladesh received minimal investment from Saudi Arabia, but the summit mobilised a big amount in investment in engineering, pharmaceuticals, hospital, cement, readymade garments and IT sector.

Regarding reformation of different policies, he said, taxation and remittance related issues have been raised in the summit and it was a continuous process.

He also said during the pandemic a number of policies and strategies have been reformed.

Responding to a question, Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment affairs adviser to the prime minister, said they did not have a target to receive investment proposals in the summit; rather they wanted to showcase the present investment friendly situation of Bangladesh to the international community.

Regarding frequent policy changes, he said it was not a major issue as the government changes some rules every year in its budget.

Morocco to push for Israeli-Palestinian talks: King

AFP, Rabat

Morocco will push for a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, King Mohammed VI said yesterday, almost a year after his country renewed ties with the Jewish state.

"Morocco will continue its efforts, building on its position and its excellent

relations with all sides and relevant international actors, to provide the appropriate conditions for a return to the negotiating table," the monarch said in a televised address.

Morocco renewed official relations with Israel in December last year, two decades after it cut ties with the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada or uprising.