

## CITY



The area surrounding Dulahazara canal has been subjected to rampant sand extraction. Its lessee has denied doing it himself, saying he realises fees from the trucks that carry the sand out of there. This has not only devastated the canal, but the damage has stretched as far as the walls of the Dulahazara safari park. PHOTO: COLLECTED

# 'LEGALISING' illegal sand mining

Local influentials prey upon protected forests using 'lease' papers; rake in Tk 180cr in 5 years

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

In the last five years, local influential people have raked in Tk 180 crore by ripping apart Fasiakhali and Fulchhari forests using a lease document, which Forest Department has repeatedly been trying to get cancelled, but in vain.

Two canals – Dulahazara and Paglir Bil – that Cox's Bazar district administration had leased out to Jubo League leaders don't have any sand left anymore. Locals alleged that armed by the lease document, the lessees have been preying upon the protected forests.

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five years, locals said.

Kaochar Uddin Kochir, general secretary of Chakaria upazila unit of Jubo League, was granted the lease of Dulahazara canal, while leaders Nurul Alam and Jafar Alam got the lease of Paglir Bil canal.

Contacted, Nurul admitted that they mine sand from a nearby orchard,



though they only got lease for a canal. Asked why, he said they pay money to the orchard owner for this. However, he refused to provide the owner's name.

Meanwhile, Kochir denied extracting sand himself, saying he only realises a Tk 100 fee from each truck.

Asked whether he is aware of the devastation caused by the sand extraction, he said authorities will take action if any environmental harm is being caused.

#### PLEAS TO CANCEL LEASE IGNORED

As per the documents obtained by The Daily Star, the Forest Department has repeatedly been writing letters to Cox's Bazar district and Chakaria upazila administrations since 2013 to cancel the lease and save the forest, its wildlife and Dulahazara safari park.

However, they have not paid any heed. In August 2021, forest staffers came under attack when they tried to stop

the sand mining, prompting the department to file cases with Chakaria Police Station, accusing 11 people.

Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of Chattogram Nature and Wildlife Conservation wing of Forest Department, told The Daily Star, "The damage is so severe that we may not be able to save the park, unless we can stop the sand extraction. The perpetrators keep showing the document to legalise their illegal sand mining."

"We've sought cooperation from the police and local lawmakers. All assured us of taking necessary action, but there

is no reflection of their assurance in reality," he said.

Contacted, Rahat Uz Zaman, assistant commissioner (land) of Chakaria upazila, said to the best of his knowledge, he did not receive any letter from the Forest Department.

"We have asked them to give us an assessment report of the damage being caused by the sand extraction. We can't cancel the lease all of a sudden. But we are thinking about cancelling it to save the environment," he said.

Cox's Bazar district administration leased out seven streams in Khutakhali and Dulahazara union of Chakaria, which earns the government Tk 99 lakh per year, Chakaria land office sources said.

The rampant sand extraction has even triggered landslides adjacent to Dulahazara Bangabandhu Safari Park, collapsing its 100-foot long boundary wall and creating a 20 to 25-foot deep gorge where wildlife could tread and die anytime.

Forest officials said another wall may fall down due to the mining.

The Quarries and Earth Management Law 2010 prohibits extraction of sand from forests and from spots where flora and fauna could be disrupted. Any violation of the law will strip the lessee off the lease agreement.



# Never forget

Genocide museum in Khulna preserving memories of the Liberation War

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

A microphone used in Bangabandhu's March 7 speech, indigenous weapons used in the resistance war, clothes and telephone sets used by freedom fighters, transmitters used in refugee camps, letter from then Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed to his wife on the white part of an empty cigarette box, which says, "Johra, if you can, join the seven and a half crore Bangalees."

All this and more are on display at "1971: Genocide-Torture Archives and Museums" in Khulna.

Museum authorities say it is the first and sole genocide museum in South Asia.

Beyond the hopeful artefacts, there's also the tragic. Skulls and bones from mass graves, boiler of the platinum jute mill used to burn people alive, and even a blueprint copy of Niazi's genocide, the museum evokes intense emotions within its visitors.

Monoranjan Mondal, a freedom fighter and former



The museum is situated in the same area where the Chuknagar killing field is located. Beyond photographs and documents, it features numerous remnants of the war, including broken pieces from bunkers used during that time.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

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5

# A fitting memorial



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The "Adommya Swadhinata" was completed a few years ago. Located beside Saidpur Rail Workshop's main gate, it honours 178 martyrs of the workshop who laid down their lives during the Liberation War.

The memorial was built as a voluntary initiative by workers and officials of the workshop. Fittingly, they built it using remnants of old and damaged rail engines and carriages.

Some of the material was also taken from burnt coaches damaged during agitation programmes of political parties in recent years.

Like every year, the workshop staffers marked Independence Day by placing floral wreaths at the monument at dawn and holding a discussion afterwards.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



# Art camp held at Savar National Memorial

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

An art camp was held marking Independence Day at the National Memorial in Savar yesterday.

Shilpkala Academy organised the event in collaboration with Dhaka district administration and Dhaka district police. Around 20 students from various universities took part in the camp.

Mahbubur Rahman, guide lecturer at Department of Fine Arts of Shilpkala Academy, told The Daily Star that the academy hosts camps like this ever year.

This year, the camp's theme was the Golden Jubilee of Independence. Due to its location, the camp attracted a huge number of visitors.

The paintings painted here will be kept at Shilpkala Academy's art gallery and will later be displayed in several exhibitions, Mahbubur said.

Afroza Nazneen, an art student of University of Development Alternative, said she drew a painting of her father's index finger, as he was a freedom fighter.

# Cycle rally marks Independence Day in M'singh



OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'singh

Marking Independence Day, more than 150 youths participated in a bicycle rally in Mymensingh city yesterday morning.

It was organised by Dhaka Round Table and Mymensingh City Cyclists, sponsored by Duranto Bicycle.

The inaugural ceremony was addressed by Harun-ur-Rashid, police superintendent, Mymensingh deputy inspector general (DIG) office.

# কমার্শিয়াল প্লট বিক্রয়

প্রগতি অ্যারো, মধ্য-বাড়া মেইন রোডে  
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