



Living in a death trap

15 years, 210 deaths in landslides

On June 11, 2007, 132 people died in a landslide that occurred due to a heavy downpour in Chattogram.

The deaths occurred in Baghghona, Kusumbagh residential area, Sekandarpur and Chittagong University areas of the port city.

MD NAZRUL ISLAM

On August 18, 2008, 11 people, including five members of the same family, died in a landslide at Matijharna of the city's Lalakhan Bazar.

The death count does not stop here. In 2011, 17 died in Tiger pass. On June 26-27, 2012, 24 people died in Matijharna, Aambagan, Akbar Shah, Kaibaldham Bishsho Bank Colony, Jalalabad and Harbatali areas.

In 2013, the port city saw two deaths in landslides, while in 2015, the number was



eight. Seven and four people died respectively in 2017 and 2018.

Last Friday, four people died in Akbar Shah and Foy's Lake areas, followed by the death of a 12 year old in Sholoshohor Choshma Hill area on Monday.

In the last 15 years, the port city saw 210 deaths in total due to landslides. A heavy, continuous downpour during the monsoon brings death with it every year.

Those living on the foot of the hills are the most vulnerable to the risks. Yet, the



construction of illegal establishments by cutting hills has not stopped.

After the 2007 incident, a well-functioning Hill Management Committee was formed by the government, which in turn formed multiple investigating committees. The investigating committees submitted their probe reports as well. Since then, these committees have been holding coordination meetings every year, where disconnecting water, electricity and gas supply lines was discussed to discourage illegal establishments.

On behalf of these committees, eviction drives are conducted against such settlements every monsoon. However, the death train has not stopped.

"Heavy downpours and subsequent landslides are considered a natural process. However, multiple recommendations were made by the committees to put an end to the deaths, none of which have been implemented," said environmental activist Shareef Chauhan.

After the 2007 incident, an investigating committee, convened by MAN Siddique, then

additional divisional commissioner, submitted an 18 page report. In the report, the committee identified 28 reasons behind the occurrence and made a 36 point recommendation but to no avail.

Two more committees were formed in 2008 and 2013, under Dr Md Shahidul Islam, then professor of geography and environment at Chittagong University and Prof Mozammel Haque, then Vice Chancellor of Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology. Both the committees made detailed recommendations, none of which were implemented or taken into consideration.

"Those bearing the brunt of it are mostly from the lower income class. The lands on the foot of the hill are grabbed by rich influential people, who make illegal establishments there and rent those to the poverty-afflicted. As a result, these are the people who are dying every year," added Shareef.

Contacted, Hill Management Committee President and Divisional Commissioner of Chattogram Ashrafuddin told this correspondent, "We are trying our best. But the people we evict from the risk-prone areas start living there again a few days after the drives. Hence, the deaths have become unstoppable."

A road has recently been constructed by the city corporation authorities in Akbar Shah area despite the risks of landslides. When asked, CCC Panel Mayor Giyas Uddin, while visiting the accident spot in the area, told this correspondent, "People have been living here for a long time. If the establishments were illegal, an eviction from the concerned authorities would do. The road has been built taking the conveniences of the people living here into consideration."

Cattle farming sees boom

SIFAYET ULLAH

Chattogram's livestock production has nearly doubled over the last 5 years -- thanks to the rising popularity of cattle farming.

According to livestock services department data, in the 2021-2022 fiscal, livestock (cow, buffalo, goat and sheep) production rose to 7.91 lakh from 3.56 lakh in 2016-17.

With Eid-ul-Azha around the corner, 7.91 lakh animals are kept ready in Chattogram. This time the total target has been set at 8.21 lakh.

For the last five to six years, dependence on sacrificing local animals has increased, moving away from Indian cattle import. Farmers are getting a good price for cattle and many are getting involved in the business.

According to the district livestock office data, this year, the total animal production stands at 5,35,803 cows, 66,237 buffaloes, 1,81,362 goats, and sheep. Besides, the number of livestock farms in Chattogram has increased.

Since 2019, the number of livestock farms has also doubled.

Delwar Hossain, livestock officer in Chattogram, said, "The government has decided to stop importing cattle from India and Myanmar. As a result,

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Nurul Amin,
Farmer in Anwara upazila of Chattogram

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Nazim Haider, president of Chattogram Farmers' Association, said, "Targeting Eid-ul-Azha, smugglers are bringing in cattle from India and Myanmar. This too is affecting local cattle prices."

"We will write to the government to take action against cattle smugglers and reduce cattle feed prices soon," he added.

marginal farmers and ranchers have benefited."

During a recent visit to Garduara union in Hathazari upazila of Chattogram, this correspondent found that a considerable number of farmers have turned to cattle rearing on their own initiative.

However, farmers are worried about getting a good price for animals if the number of buyers is low due to the current financial crisis. Besides, the price of animal feed has climbed rapidly in recent months, making farming costlier for farmers, they said.

Farmers worry that if the demand is less than the supply, the price will go down.

Nurul Amin, a farmer in Anwara upazila of Chattogram, said the cow feed price has doubled in just one

year. "With the people's purchasing power decreasing day by day, we're worried about getting the right price."

Nazim Haider, president of Chattogram Farmers' Association, said, "Targeting Eid-ul-Azha, smugglers are bringing in cattle from India and Myanmar. This too is affecting local cattle prices."

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MD NAZRUL ISLAM

Pushing through the front door, visitors' eyes would be greeted by a range of unfamiliar trees. A mangrove garden has been set up at the front -- with saplings collected from the Sundarbans. But the main attraction of the place is the bees -- showcased in a way that visitors can see firsthand where they're collecting honey from.

This scene is set in front of Syed Mohammad Moinul Anwar's "Alwan Honey Museum and Research Center" at Joypahar Abasi on Sarson Road in Chattogram. The institution has been established on Moinul's own initiative in a room of his house.

Visiting the location recently, this correspondent saw hundreds of honey jars of different sizes, colours, and varieties neatly arranged. Different species of bees have been

stored in small bottles for research purposes. Moinul has been researching honey for the last 17 years. According to him, there are 70 types of honey in his collection depending on the crop, season, and bee species. For medicinal and research purposes, the museum also has rare honey from stingless bees and 20-year-old Khalisha flowers.

"I have visited almost every district to learn about the different colours and ways to identify adulterated and pure honey," he said.

Apart from honey, he said he has collected the five common species of bees prevalent in Bangladesh from his travels and stored them in formalin for further research. Flowers that produce honey have also been dried and stored.

Recently, Chittagong University's botany department has signed an agreement with the centre for their students' research. Discussions are underway with the authorities of Sher-

HOUSE OF HONEY



e-Bangla Agricultural University as well, he added.

Elaborating on the start of this fascination with honey, Moinul said, "When my father was sick during 2004-2005, I couldn't find a single source where they were selling unadulterated honey." Thus, he began his journey of collecting honey out of necessity, he added.

Moinul said in addition to his laboratory, he has assisted in setting up 11 laboratories in Dhaka and the Sundarbans. He also arranges free training sessions.

He further said, "At present, I am doing research on bee pollen, royal jelly and bee venom."

Although bee pollen has medicinal properties, it remains to be seen whether these can be collected and marketed. Attempts are being made to collect bee venom in the laboratory, he added.

