

# Hills lost to greed

## Ghatail's red hillocks on verge of extinction

MIRZA SHAKIL, *Tangail*

Many hilly areas in Tangail's Ghatail upazila have been flattened due to rampant cutting of red clay hillocks by soil traders allegedly supported by local influential people.

As actions were not taken to prevent this practice in due time, the distinct geological feature of this part of the country has been disappearing slowly, putting the region's biodiversity in grave danger, according to experts.

Ghatail was home to around 500 small and large hillocks only two decades ago, said environmentalists. Most of the hillocks were in Sadar, Sandhanpur, Sangrampur, Deopara and Dhalapara unions.

In the process, roads have also been damaged due to the carrying of soil on heavy trucks, especially at nighttime.

Environmentalists alleged that soil traders have the support of local influential people with political clout and public representatives. The soil is mostly sold to local brick kilns and used to fill low or wetlands and construct roads.

A recent study by the Department of Environmental Science and Resource Management of Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University found that hillocks in Tangail were transforming due to commercialisation and urbanisation.

Earlier, the plunderers used to clear the forests on the hillocks. The earth traders

have also been extracting soil from the government's reserve forests surrounding the hillocks, alleged locals.

Contacted, Sazzadur Rahman, Tangail's divisional forest officer (DFO), told this correspondent that they have already seized 14 excavators from Ghatail and adjacent Sakhipur upazilas in the last six months on charges of extracting soil from forestlands.

Several cases have also been filed in this regard, he informed.

Goutam Chandra Chanda, divisional coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said many red clay hillocks in Ghatail's adjacent Sakhipur, Mirzapur and Madhupur upazilas under the Garh region have already been flattened.

The Tangail Sal forest grew around these hillocks, which have already disappeared, he said.

About three decades ago, these hillocks, locally known as "Chala" and "Tila", were covered in vegetation and were a habitat for birds and snakes. Razing the hillocks also raises the risk of landslides, he said.

"We could not recover this unique asset bestowed upon us by nature. We have already lost it due to negligence by the authorities concerned to protect the hillocks," said Goutam.

"The local administration should save the rest of the hillocks at any cost. The

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Once a red hillock, now a vast flattened surface. This is the current situation of Ghatail's Beluatiki, which fell victim to the never-ending greed of the area's soil traders.

PHOTO: STAR

## DU claims Tk 11.41 lakh due from Samia Rahman

DU CORRESPONDENT

D h a k a University authorities have claimed that Samia Rahman, who has voluntarily retired from Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, owes the institution Tk 11.41 lakh.

Samia, however, claimed she has no dues to pay, rather the university owes her money.

On March 31, Samia sought voluntary retirement, and then on April 26, the DU syndicate allowed her early retirement on November 15 last year. A letter signed on August 3 by DU Registrar Prabir Kumar Sarker said, "As per the syndicate's decision, if you [Samia Rahman] do not pay the dues, then action will be taken as per the rules."

Asked about this, Samia, who is now abroad, told The Daily Star that the university authorities are harassing her since they lost the legal battle. "They won't give me the money I deserve. So, they are making false claims."

## Lt Col Ismail dies in S'pore Rab's air wing director was hurt in a helicopter crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

R a p i d Action Battalion officer Lt Col Md Ismail Hossain, who was injured in a helicopter crash, has died while undergoing treatment at a hospital in Singapore. He was 45.

Two pilots -- Lt Col Ismail and Major Shams -- were injured as a training helicopter of the Bangladesh Army made a crash landing on a waterbody in Nawabganj upazila of Dhaka on July 27.

Ismail, who was a director of Rab's Air Wing, suffered critical injuries

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

PRAYER  
TIMING

AUGUST 11

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:25	12:45	4:45	6:41	8:00
JAMAT 5:00	1:15	5:00	6:44	8:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

# The last of the Monidas artisans

Known for making, repairing musical instruments, community now struggling for survival

S DILIP ROY, *Lalmonirhat*

Sushil Chandra Monidas (42) learned the craft of making musical instruments from his father Kalachan Monidas when he was 12 years old. When he lost his father at the age of 20, he took over the business.

With Sushil at the help, the family business was running smooth.

However, Sushil's business, based in BDR Haat area of Lalmonirhat municipality, is on the verge of closure. "There are no more musical events like before, so our musical instruments aren't being sold," said Sushil.

"For the sake of survival, many like me have moved to other professions since the price of leather, wood and other necessary materials have increased," he added.

"This wasn't the case even eight years ago when there used to be vibrant local music sessions often," recalled Sushil.

There are no official statistics on the number of families of the Monidas community in the greater Rangpur region.

However, according to the information of the elders of this community, there are 250-260 families in the five districts Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Nilphamari and Rangpur in the greater Rangpur region.

Even a decade ago, every family of the community was involved in making and repairing musical instruments. Now just 70-80 families in five districts are involved in their ancestral profession. The rest are earning a living by engaging in other work.

Members of the community are involved in making and repairing musical instruments, including, dhak, dhol, khol, tabla, dumdugi (baya), nal, kongkon, screw drum, ektara, dotara, sarinda, Bangla dhol and others.

These instruments are played in various cultural events like -- Jatra, Kushan, Palagan, Bhawaiya, Palligeeti and Manosamangal.

"Our ancestral profession is no longer sustainable. Most have left, while those who are clinging on to it are living an inhumane



life," said Dinesh Chandra Monidas (85) of Kurigram's Rajarhat area.

"Nowadays, we only get a handful of clients," he added.

Amal Chandra Monidas (50) of Mahendranagar area in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said around 10 years ago, members of various cultural organisations came to them to make or repair musical instruments. Now there's no music festival going on anywhere. Many artists have also given up their profession.

"Music has almost disappeared from society. If there is no music, there is no use of musical instruments," said Narayan Chandra Monidas (56) of Kurigram town. "If the musical instrument is not used, the Monidas community is not needed either."

Echoing Narayan, Pala Gaan (folktales and devotional songs) artist Amullo Barman (80) of Karnapur village, said, "Pala Gaan has almost become extinct. Now Jatra, Bhawaiya,

and Palli Geeti song sessions aren't held anymore. Sometimes Manosamangal song sessions are arranged, but they're rare."

Bhawaiya artist Shuklal Roy (46) of Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila said even some 4-5 years ago, he used to get calls to perform almost every day. At present, Bhawaiya sessions aren't even held once a month.

Shuklal has left the profession and is now working as a day labourer.

"The government should come forward to keep the Monidas community alive and help fellow artists of this community," Shuklal said.

Contacted, MA Matin, deputy director of the social services department, said the government has various projects to help communities with their trades or professions.

"If they apply to us, they will also get assistance. I will also look into the issue of the Monidas community," he told The Daily Star.

## ROBBERY, GANG RAPE IN BUS 6 give confessional statements

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

Six out of 10 suspects gave confessional statements before separate courts in Tangail, in a case filed over robbery and gang rape in a bus.

Sohag Mondol (20) and Babu Hossain alias Julhas (21) confessed before the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Nawrin Karim yesterday, after the case's investigation officer produced them, said court inspector Tanvir Ahmed.

Earlier on Tuesday, Md Alauddin (24), Rasel Talukder (32), Aslam Talukder alias Raihan (32), and Nayeem Sarkar Munna (19) did the same at the courts of senior judicial magistrates Farzana Hasanat, Badal Kumar Chanda, Mahbubur Rahman and Akramul Islam.

They were later sent to jail, said court sources.

On Monday night, Rab handed over the arrestees to detectives in Tangail, said Helal Uddin, investigation officer of the case and officer-in-charge of DB (North) in the district.

On Tuesday, the court of Magistrate Farzana Hasanat granted three-day remand each for the arrestees, said the IO.

On August 3, a gang robbed a Narayanganj-bound bus from Kustia and looted cash and valuables from passengers in Tangail. They also gang raped a female passenger in the vehicle.

Hekmat Ali, a passenger, filed a case against 10 to 12 unidentified criminals with Madhupur Police Station the same day.

## MONEY LAUNDERING CASE NSU trustee board member denied bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday refused to grant bail to North South University (NSU) trustee-board member Benazir Ahmed in a Tk 304-crore money laundering case.

The court, however, issued a rule asking the state and ACC to explain in two weeks why Benazir should not be granted bail.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat came up with the rule after hearing a petition filed by Benazir -- now in jail -- seeking bail in the case. The bench also fixed August 25 for hearing on the rule.

# 'This cannot go on forever'

## Tea workers protest for raise in daily wage

MINTU DESHIWARA, *Moulvibazar*

Permanent tea worker Koliti Rabidas earns a daily wage of Tk 120. They are a family of five, and only two kilos of rice are available at Tk 100.

"On most days, our entire family goes to sleep famished. Even eight hours of my labour every day cannot get us a litre of soyabean oil," she said.

Tea worker Sukhia Kairi echoed Koliti. "Prices of every daily essential have gone up, yet our wage remains the same after three years," she said.

"Our daily wage must be raised to Tk 300 for us to sustain," said another worker Sobita Gorait.

This correspondent talked to at least 20 tea workers in Moulvibazar, who are participating in a country-wide protest of tea workers demanding an increase in their daily wage.

The protest started on Tuesday. Tea workers of all plantations will be observing a two-hour strike today.

"Tea workers are deprived of their basic rights. This cannot go on forever," said Ajit Kairi, president of Luhaiuni Tea Garden Panchayat in Moulvibazar.

"The authorities have ignored us for two years. Moreover, the recent hike in fuel prices was a double blow for us," said Nipen Paul, acting general secretary of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union's Central Committee.

He also said they will go for a tougher movement if their demand for a Tk 300 daily wage is not realised immediately.

Contacted, Sylhet branch Chair of Bangladesh Tea Sangsad and General Manager of Finlay Tea Company Golam Mohammad Shibli said the government has constituted a wage board to determine their daily wage.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Tea workers of the country have united once again to fulfil their demand for a raise in daily wages. While prices of fuel and daily essentials have been hiked yet again, their wages remain the same, prompting the protests. The photo was taken in Moulvibazar.

PHOTO: STAR