



A welcome impact, but challenges remain

Sand mining slows down in Chakaria after HC ban

PHOTO: STAR



“The sand is being extracted at night in stealth. I am an upazila chairman, I don’t need to engage in such affairs to earn money. I live off on timber trade. The allegation is baseless,”

FAZLUL KARIM SAYDEE
Chakaria Upazila Chairman

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, back from Cox’s Bazar

Unbridled sand mining that had been ravaging the reserve forest in Cox’s Bazar’s Chakaria has slowed down, thanks to the heightened surveillance by the Forest Department.

Meanwhile, the local administration has also suspended operation from nine quarries following a High Court ban.

On July 08, this correspondent visited Paglirbil area. The mining left a trail of devastation turning the undergrowth vegetation in the forest which once served as an ideal foraging spot for wildlife, particularly the herbivore elephant, turned into a huge lake encompassing an area of three kilometres.

Foresters and range officers were seen patrolling the area where dozens of sand piles were stacked along a one-kilometre stretch of the Shah Suja road inside the forest.

Seeking anonymity, locals of Paglirbil told this correspondent that the miners prefer nighttime for mining. According to them, the miners are the followers of Chakaria Upazila Chairman Fazlul Karim Saydee, who surreptitiously extract sand.

Hasanul Islam Ador, chairman of Dolahazara union parishad under Chakaria upazila, said the sand mining has slowed down after the HC order came into effect. However, challenges remain, as the extractors mine sand at night.

More than one forest official and local political leaders pointed fingers at the upazila chair who was the last lessee for most of the quarries in Chakaria upazila. However, they sought anonymity to avoid repercussions from the powerful politician.

Fazlul Karim Saydee, however, denied the allegation and said the extractors could be his supporters but he has no firsthand involvement in such activities.

He brought allegations against local chairman Hasanul Islam Ador of benefiting from sand mining.

“The sand is being extracted at night in stealth. I am an upazila chairman, I don’t need to engage in such affairs to earn money. I live off on timber trade. The allegation is baseless,” he claimed.

Hasanul Islam Ador denied the allegations against him.

Contacted, Mamunur Rashid, deputy commissioner of Cox’s Bazar, said as per the Forest Department’s requirement, they have suspended the nine quarries in Chakaria to save the forest.



“We are ready to extend our assistance to the Forest Department, which is supposed to form a dedicated team to safeguard the reserve forest from sand miners. I have to look into the matter to know where the gaps lie in the execution. Otherwise, the motive behind the stopping sand extraction would remain elusive,” he said.

Following the report ran by The Daily Star on March 27 and a subsequent petition by Bangladesh Environmentalist Lawyers Association (Bela), an HC bench directed the authorities to prevent sand lifting from eight

areas of Chakaria on May 25.

Following the court order, on May 25 Ministry of Land scrapped eight quarries, including Khutakhali-02, Khutakhali-03, Dulahazara-01, Dulahazara-02, Dulahazara-03, Fasiakhali-01, Fasiakhali-02 and Paglir quarry.

As per the documents of the Forest Department, at least 42 people – 20 in Paglirbil area and 22 in Khutakhali – are engaged in sand mining.

Cox’s Bazar Divisional Forest Office (north) has so far seized nine dumper trucks and destroyed 4,300 feet of pipe used to extract sand.



They also installed 25 signboards at various spots of Dulahazara union detailing the cancellation of the lease and warning of action against sand extraction.

Anwar Hossen Sarkar, divisional forest officer of Cox’s Bazar (north), said they formed a team comprising the forest staffers to keep surveillance on the spot.

“We are trying our best with manpower shortage to rein in the menace. The miners are still trying to sneak into the forest. We are keeping watch keep them away from the forest,” he said.

BIRTH REG SERVER HACK Noncooperation from Dhaka stalls probe in Chattogram

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Investigation into the 18 dubious birth certificates, which were issued hacking the user IDs and passwords of three ward councillor offices under Chattogram City Corporation, has been halted as police did not get any help from the registrar general’s office, despite repeated letters in this regard.

Currently, the Counter Terrorism division of Chattogram Metropolitan Police has been investigating the much-talked-about three cases filed with Patenga and Chawkbazar police stations but there are no clues or headway in the cases.

Investigators believe there are several Rohingyas out of the 18 who managed to get Bangladeshi birth certificates with the help of a well-organised gang. The hacking incident took place on February 14 last year during the upgradation work of bdris.gov.bd, the official server for birth and death registrations.

After detecting the incident, officials of CCC ward-40 (North Patenga), ward-41 (South Patenga) and ward-16 filed three cases on June 9 last year with Patenga and Chawkbazar police

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stations under the Digital Security Act.

Meanwhile, the investigation officer (IO) of the cases Sub-inspector Shapan Kumar sent several letters to the office of registrar general in Dhaka, requesting to provide information regarding the dubious entries but there was no reply.

The letters were sent on July 5, 2021 and April 18 this year. On July 20, a court in Chattogram ordered the registrar general’s office asking to provide the information as soon as possible but to no avail.

In the letters, police sought which IDs were used to log-in to create the birth certificates, which devices were used, the location of the data entry operator and data on IP users.

Contacted, IO Shapan Kumar said, “The cases are under investigation. The court ordered the registrar general’s office to provide the information and we are waiting for their reply.”

This correspondent made several attempts to contact the deputy registrar general in Dhaka. After calling his official land phone number, his personal secretary said he was in a meeting and they will get back to this correspondent soon.

During another attempt, the office secretary said the deputy registrar general was not in office and declined to provide his cell phone number.

‘How will we survive?’

Middle, low-income people suffer due to food, medicine price hike

ARUN BIKASH DEY

People from low- and middle-income groups in Chattogram have been facing difficult times to maintain their livelihood with the rising prices of daily essentials.

The situation got even worse when prices of essential medicines and toiletries shot up as well recently.

“If I pull my rickshaw for 12 hours, I can earn Tk 600 at best. I could barely maintain my family expenses with this income earlier, but now it’s just impossible,” said Berek Miah, a rickshaw-puller in the port city and bread-earner of his family of six.

“The rice that I used to buy at Tk 50 per kilo now goes for Tk 60,” he said. “I don’t dare buy chicken since it costs Tk 180 to 190 a kilo. Now-a-days, I can’t even buy eggs.”

“The price of fish has shot up, while vegetables are now sold for Tk 60 to 90 per kilo in kitchen markets,” he said. “The price of sugar was Tk 80 per kilo around a month ago, but now, it’s Tk 90.”

“I have to buy medicines for my parents regularly, but I can’t cope with the expenditure, and so now, all my family members are compelled to eat less,” he said.

School teacher Dipak Biswas



echoed the same. “My monthly income is around Tk 30,000 and I could somehow maintain my six-member family with this amount earlier,” he said. “My children are students, while my parents need to take medicine regularly due to old-age illness.”

“High prices of both daily essentials and medicines are putting us in distress,” he said. “I have to pay Tk 10,000 for house rent, and it’s almost impossible to maintain other family expenses with the rest of my income.”

Shahedul Alam, a pharmacy salesman, said prices of around 54 types of medicines have shot up by 25 to 44 percent in the span of a month.

Iftekher Hossain, a grocery shopkeeper at Hem Sen Lane, said prices of all sorts of toiletries also shot up by 20 to 50 percent within this period, but income of consumers hasn’t increased.

Contacted, SM Nazer Hossain, vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said a section of businesspeople are increasing prices of essential goods, capitalising on the present economic situation.

“The government should take strict steps against the illegal, illogical and unethical price hike of essential goods,” he said.

CDA plans to collect toll from Bayezid link road

Transport experts, locals oppose move

SIFAYET ULLAH

Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) plans to bring Bayezid-Faujdarhat Link Road under toll system to raise funds for developing and maintaining the six-kilometre road.

“Last month, the Ministry of Housing and Public Works approved the revised DPP (development project proposal) to collect toll from this road,” Asad Bin Anwar, CDA engineer and director of the link road project, told The Daily Star.

Development works of the road are almost complete, and many vehicles already use it every day.

CDA officials claimed that once the project is complete, motorists will be able to get to Dhaka-Chattogram highway from Kaptai, Rangamati, Hathazari, Rauzan and Rangunia, without having to enter the port city.

Earlier, CDA spent its own money for the roadwork. Then, authorities proposed to levy tolls to raise money for maintenance and development. But the plan is still in its early stages. The final decision will be taken after all the stakeholders give their consent, he said.

Transport experts, however, opposed the proposal. Engineer Subhash Barua, transport expert and vice-president of Forum for Planned Chattogram, told The Daily Star, “It is not a highway. There is no reason to charge toll for a connecting road. Traffic on this road will decrease if this is done, which will result in little benefits.”

Meanwhile, locals and transport operators are urging the authorities to cancel the proposal.



Shamsuzzaman Sumon, port affairs secretary of Covered Van-Truck-Prime Mover Goods Transport Owners Association, said the road plays a vital role in decongesting Dhaka-Chattogram highway, because it acts as an alternative route.

But if toll is collected, traffic on the link road will decrease, which means congestion on the highway will return.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found that although roadwork has not been completely finished, small and big vehicles were plying it.

The authorities concerned are not facing backlash for the first time. They have allegedly razed as many as 18 hills beyond the permitted

levels in Pahartoli, Jalalabad and Salimpur to construct this road.

Recently, Department of Environment (DoE) declared eight of the hills “risky”.

In February 2020, DoE fined CDA Tk 10 lakh for causing environmental damage while implementing the project.

CDA started constructing the link road as a two-lane one under a Tk 172-crore project, known as Loop Road Project, in the middle of 2015, around eight years after the initiative was taken back in 2007.

Later, the authorities prepared a revised DPP to make the road have four lanes, with a revised budget of Tk 320.78 crore, including Tk 100 crore for land acquisition.