



PHOTO:RAJIB RAIHAN

NASIRABAD SOCIAL FORESTRY NURSERY AND TRAINING CENTRE

Grabbers eye forestland

According to Mohammad Kamal Hossain, former professor of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, the forest is protecting the balance of the environment.

SIFAYET ULLAH

Land grabbers, including those belonging to the influential quarters, are hatching a conspiracy to occupy three acres of land in Chattogram's Nasirabad Social Forestry Nursery and Training Centre (SFNTC), alleged forest officials.

The land falls under the jurisdiction of the forest department, which has already filed a case against the influential group, led by one Elias Hossain of the area, to the Chattogram



Forest Court to prevent encroachment.

Earlier, the forest department evicted 20 illegal structures from the land.

"Elias and his goons continued threatening us to leave the land," said Nazmul Hasan, ranger of SFNTC.

"To stop the land from being encroached, we have already filed a case and a grabber has also been arrested. Besides, we pleaded with



the higher authorities to set up a barrack there. A request has also been made to augment the workforce," he added.

During a recent visit to the area, this correspondent saw that various species of trees have been planted in SFNTC area under the social forestry project. Three forest guards were guarding the area.

A signboard has also been installed by the forest department at the recently reclaimed site.

Mohammel Babul, a beneficiary of the social forestry project, told The Daily Star that occupiers had their eyes on the land for a long time.

"Recently, a group had occupied the place by forcibly constructing a structure. Later, we informed the forest department. Forest officials came and cleared the illegal structures," he added.

Mozammel Hoque Shah Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of the Chattogram

North forest department, said an influential group have always been trying to grab the land as it is located in the city.

"We have already evicted a group of grabbers. We have set up a perimeter there to keep the site free from grabbers. The entire area will be surrounded by a boundary wall to keep it free from encroachment," he said.

"Besides, a proposal has been made to the forest department for setting up barracks and dormitories. If we get the allocation, we will build the facility there," he added.

According to Mohammad Kamal Hossain, former professor of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, the forest is protecting the balance of the environment of the port city.

"If this forest vanishes, all that is green will disappear from the city," he added.

The Chattogram North Forest Division reports that 13,130 acres of land are occupied by grabbers.

Mentionable, over 1.60 lakh individuals and organisations have grabbed 2.57 lakh acres of forest land across the country, the forest department reported to a Jatiya Sangsad committee in February 2021.

Of the total grabbed land, 1.38 lakh acres of reserved forests were occupied by 88,215 individuals and organisations.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not get in touch with Elias Hossain for comments.

'Left by family, loved by all'

Two unattended babies being treated with care at CMCH

FM MIZANUR RAHMAN

Ten-month-old Arif kept crying and gesturing to passers-by with his tiny hands, as if to look for his mother's warmth.

Since October 22, his current home has been the child healthcare department of Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Arif's aunt admitted him to the hospital, and then he was diagnosed with malnutrition and pneumonia.

A few days later, his aunt left him in the hospital with a letter.

"A humanitarian appeal... The parents of this kid are no more. Can anyone adopt him? I'm his aunt, but I can't look after him. I'm very poor," read the letter.

Staffers of the hospital believe the relatives left the baby fearing medical expenses. Even their addresses mentioned in the hospital documents are not properly written.

Since then, hospital staffers, doctors and nurses are taking turns looking after the child, fulfilling all his needs, including food and medicine.

Professor AKM Rezaul Karim, head of the child health department, said, "The baby is on his way to recovery. He has been suffering from pneumonia, malnutrition and other health issues."

"After his recovery, we will complete the necessary procedures to hand him over to the authorities concerned," he added.

Soma Das, in charge of CMCH's child ward, said, "We are looking after the child round the clock with love and affection. Besides that, relatives of the other patients are also taking care of him."

Arif is not the only one receiving such adoration. Another girl child is being treated at the hospital's child surgery department, after she was found inside Panchlaish's Jatisangha Park on July 25. Locals and pedestrians rescued and brought her to CMCH.

She has birth defects on her forehead. Dr Kamal Hossen, assistant registrar of the child surgery department, said, "The on-duty doctors and nurses are currently looking after the child. We have plans to operate on the defect so that she can lead a normal life."

Nesar Foundation, which works for unidentified patients at CMCH, along with the hospital administration, has been providing food, medicine, clothes and other items for the two babies, confirmed Md Nesar, head of the foundation.



SANDWIP TO SITAKUNDA

First-ever ferry service on the cards

SIFAYET ULLAH

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) plans to start the first ever ferry service between Sandwip island and Sitakunda in Chattogram.

BIWTC has formed a committee to conduct feasibility study and cost estimation for launching the new ferry route on September 5.

Earlier, committee members, including SM Ashikuzzaman, director of BIWTC and committee head, visited the area.

AKM Arif Uddin, committee member and director (ports and transport) of BIWTA, said, "We have already visited the project area. We are preparing a report on this and we will send it to the chairman of BIWTA and BIWTC."

A BIWTA official told The Daily Star that it's not possible to run the ferry as the road from Dhaka-Chattogram highway to Bakkhali Ghat is narrow.

BIWTA has already requested the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) to



widen the road.

According to LGED, the road's width is now eight feet. But it should be made at least 18 feet to make it suitable for the ferry terminal.

AKM Amiruzzaman, executive engineer of LGED Chattogram, said, "We have already sent a proposal to the ministry to widen the road. If the ministry approves and allocates funds, we will start the road widening work."

At present, people rely on small or speed boats for travelling.

Sandwip is located in the north-east of the Bay of Bengal, near the port city. It's close to the mouth of the Meghna river in the Bay and is separated from the Chattogram coast by the Sandwip channel.



Land crisis hampers water ATM expansion

CWasa to ask CCC for space to set up 100 booths

ARUN BIKASH DEY

The much-anticipated Water ATM service was launched in Chattogram, back in 2020. But the service couldn't be expanded due to land constraints, said the relevant authorities.

First launched in Khulshi Road-1 area of Chattogram on January 1, 2020, water ATM booths were set up at five more places in the city -- at Firoj Shah Colony, Wasa Intersection, Halishahar Nayabazar, Halishahar Block A and Sadarghat Saheb Bazar areas.

Residents can buy drinking water at a cost of Tk 0.60 per litre from these places, which is much cheaper than the market



price as one litre is sold between Tk 15 and Tk 20 in shops.

The water pipeline of the booth is connected to that of Wasa. The company has set up water purification instruments in the booth. The whole process is operated and controlled through a computerised system, said CWasa officials.



Chattogram Wasa took the project in 2019, aiming to provide fresh water at a minimal rate. The initial plan was to set up 100 water ATMs. A memorandum of understanding was also signed with US-based Drinkwell in this regard.

However, due to space constraints, such booths were only placed in six areas, meaning the majority of the city still has freshwater crisis.

Asked, why the service could not be expanded in two years, AKM Fazlullah, managing director of CWasa, said, "We have set up six ATM booths on our own land in different areas but we could not go for expansion as we do not have land in other areas," he said.

"Our partners (Drinkwell) in this project will immediately apply to Chattogram City Corporation, asking it to provide land to set

up ATM booths throughout the city."

Asked about the purity of the water supplied through ATM service, Fazlullah said, "The ATM booth is connected to main Wasa pipeline, so the water is supposed to be safe for drinking. But we cannot give 100 percent assurance as in some areas Wasa pipelines get damaged at times."

"Besides, there are purifying machines inside the ATM booths, so the water there gets purified further," he added.

Contacted, Manjur Alam, area manager of Drinkwell Chattogram, said a meeting would be held in Dhaka on November 12 in presence of the LGED minister, CCC mayor and CWasa officials and Drinkwell.

"The land issue would be discussed in the meeting," he added.

CCC Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury could not be contacted for comments.