



Every winter, the country's animal kingdom is greeted with friendly-feathered visitors, who take refuge against the teeth-gritting cold of their homelands. Migratory birds can now be spotted in reservoirs and lakes in the countryside, enjoying the bounties this land has to offer. They can be seen taking flight in packs. However, at times, they also have to suffer the bitter fate of never returning to their homelands, getting trapped in the hands of poachers. The photos were taken in Chattogram's Raozan upazila recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



Ferry service between Boalkhali and port city on the cards

SIFAYET ULLAH

The Roads and Highway Department is planning to start a ferry service through the Karnaphuli river between Boalkhali and the port city, making communication between the southern Chattogram and port city smoother.

ABM Amin Ullah, secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Department, recently visited the relevant places to verify the feasibility of the ferry operation.

Pintu Chakma, executive engineer of RHD Chattogram, told The Daily Star that they have already started construction work of the link road for ferry vehicle traffic. "Initially we will run two ferries. The number of ferries will be increased later if the demand increases. We will determine the ferry fare in coordination with other areas."

The port city and Boalkhali upazila is connected by the century-old Kalurghat Bridge. Around 20 lakh people, from Boalkhali and port city, rely on this bridge for transportation. Meanwhile, a passenger demo train runs from Chattogram to Dohazari and crosses the bridge twice a day.

The current Kalurghat railway bridge, built in 1931, was declared "risky" by the railway in 2001. But trains and other large vehicles continue to travel through the crumbling bridge. The railway authorities have proposed to construct a new bridge recently, but it will take some time to start the operation, said a railway official.

On July 5 last year, Yooshin Engineering Corporation, a subsidiary of South Korea's state-owned Exim Bank, a potential donor of the project, submitted a revised proposal to the BR on location, design, cost and construction period of the 780-metre-long bridge. A feasibility study on the project and its architectural design have been prepared by the Korean company.

Golam Mostafa, a railway official and focal person of the Kalurghat bridge project, told The Daily Star that the new bridge would be built 70 metres north of the existing one. The construction work would begin in 2024 and end within four years if everything is on track.

JATISHANGHA PARK

Renovation work begins this month

ARUN BIKASH DEY

The work for renovation project of Jatishangha Park in the port city is finally going to start in this month. One of the very few parks in the port city with public access, the 59-year-old Jatishangha Park, located in Panchlaish Residential Area was left in a sorry state for over six years.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her visit to Chattogram on December 4 last year laid the foundation stone of the project. The Public Works Department (PWD) is implementing the project worth Tk 11.70 crore.

According to officials of PWD, Chattogram, the park will be adorned with attractive greenery so that the beauty of the park can be observed from outside. A boundary wall will be provided with iron grill around it.

Besides, a walkway will be constructed and the park will have adequate sitting arrangements for visitors. A fountain will be placed at the centre. Moreover, the entire park will be very well lit with appropriate washroom facility.

Before, the park used to be inundated



whenever it rained, and now the park will be elevated to match the height of the surrounding roads to prevent that issue.

Additionally, the park will have a kids zone and sports equipment and horizontal bars will be installed for physical exercise.

During a visit in the park on Sunday, this correspondent found that there was no room for the visitors to roam or sit in. There was no boundary wall around the park and logs were left inside the park. The whole park has become a place of

bushes, making it inaccessible to people for use.

Locals alleged that the park lost its distinguish character when Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) initiated a project to build swimming pools and a gymnasium in place of a water body in the park in 2012.

According to CCC sources, the park was divided in half, building a boundary wall to separate the two swimming pools built at a cost of Tk 4.80 crore. An adolescent had drowned in the swimming pool at that time and since then, the pools have been left abandoned.

In 2016, CCC initiated to lease out the



park to a private organisation for 25 years. However, locals and the then Minister for Housing and Public Works Engr Mosharraf Hossain opposed the initiative of CCC, said Khorshed Alam Sujan, former administrator of CCC.

"He (Mosharraf) was against the initiative of privatising a public park and said PWD would develop the park."

"The tug of war between CCC and PWD has left the park in a sorry state for around six years," he said, adding, "When I was the administrator of CCC in 2020, I released the park for PWD."

Contacted, Rahul Guha, executive engineer of PWD, Chattogram (Div-1), said, "We've handed over the project site to the contractor and the work will start in this month. The swimming pools will be dismantled while the park surface will be developed with 8,033 cubic metre of soil."

The project-work is scheduled to be completed by June 2024, he said.



Sitakunda coast: a hub of illegal sand lifting

SIFAYET ULLAH

With almost no obstructions, influential people are illegally lifting sand from the seabed along Chattogram's Sitakunda coast, increasing the risk of coastline erosion, endangering surrounding croplands and depleting soil fertility of the area.

During a recent visit to several points of Sitakunda upazila, this correspondent found that some influential people have long been using dredgers to lift sand from the Bay of Bengal. Due to the extraction,



several deep holes have developed in the seashore area.

They have lifted sand from Salimpur, Bar Aulia, Madam Bibir Hat, Kumira, Barabkunda, Syedpur and Guliakhali sea beach areas of the upazila.

Locals said the perpetrators are using banned dredgers at several points of the seabed along Sitakunda coast, hampering the bay's navigability. Traders are using long pipes to move sand from the bay to the croplands.

Nasir Uddin, a local of the upazila's Muradpur area, told The Daily Star that the local administration occasionally conducts mobile-court drives to halt extraction, fining or imprisoning people discovered there,



but the sand traffickers remain out of reach and continue operations after things cool off.

On December 11, the upazila administration seized a dredger and arrested three people while they were extracting sand in Muradpur.

Among the many influentials there, locals have accused Shawkat Ali Jahangir, chairperson of Bansheria Union Parishad, of illegally extracting sand from the sea.

However, Shawkat denied the allegations and said, "I have a few dredger machines. I only rent them out."

Ashrafur Alam, assistant commissioner (land) of the upazila, told this newspaper, "We immediately confront the perpetrators after we get information."

"It is not within our jurisdiction to take any legal action other than conducting mobile-court drives. But we cannot stop the activity this way; all departments must take a collective initiative," he said.

"If this [extraction] continues, the coastal defence dam will eventually disappear into the sea," he added.

Illegal sand lifting is destroying the coastal forest, posing danger for the animals, and spoiling the beauty of the coastline, said Kamal Uddin, ranger of Sitakunda Forest

Department.

Thousands of trees in Sitakunda coastal forest are in danger due to the activity; hundreds have already fallen. Scores of wild animals there, including deer, have been displaced, he added.

On behalf of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), lawyer S Hasanul Banna on January 17 last year served a notice to 14 government organisations to take measures against the sand lifters and protect the beach of Sitakunda upazila.

Dr Md Sharif Uddin, director of marine fisheries department in Chattogram, told The Daily Star that the crime is negatively impacting the area's entire marine ecosystem.

According to the Sand Fields and Soil Management Act, 2010, extracting sand from open spaces and waterbodies for commercial purposes without permission from authorities concerned is a punishable offence.

"We are taking legal action against illegal sand lifters regularly," said Ashraf Uddin, assistant director of the Department of Environment's Chattogram district office.

He claimed, "We conducted several drives at different points of Sitakunda upazila to stop illegal sand lifting and also fined the accused last year. We also filed more than 10 cases against the offenders."