

This used to be an embankment. The mindless extraction of sand from the Sandwip Channel of the Bay of Bengal has resulted in the destruction of dykes and coastal forests.

PHOTO: STAR



## A gross misuse of SPECIAL PROVISION

Permitted by ministry, Sitakunda shipbreakers indulge in mindless sand extraction

SIFAYET ULLAH

Although many people have applied for permission, we have not allowed anyone to extract sand from this channel. We are taking legal action if someone extracts sand illegally from there.

Chattogram DC  
Abul Bashar  
Mohammed  
Fakhruzzaman

Jahangir Hossain, a local resident of Alakdia village in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila, used to cultivate various types of crops on half an acre of land adjacent to the coastline. However, his land remains uncultivable for the last five years due to the saline water entering the land.

"I now work as a day labourer in different industries as I have lost my farming land," said Jahangir.

Jahangir, however, is not the only one. Many farmers in Sitakunda lost their land, thanks to the mindless extraction of sand from the Sandwip Channel of the Bay of Bengal by some shipbreakers and influential locals. This has resulted in the destruction of embankments and coastal forests, enabling saline water to enter the cultivable pieces of land from the sea.

During a recent visit to Alakdia village, this correspondent found that a large portion of an adjacent dyke has broken down, making way for saline water to enter the area.

According to locals, dyke and coastal forests protect Sitakunda from natural calamities. But now, vast areas of farmland, households and properties are at risk.

sand, said Ashraful Alam, executive magistrate and assistant commissioner (land) of Sitakunda. He also claimed that shipbreakers are lifting sand from the sea and selling it to local buyers.

Abul Kashem, owner of Mother Steel Limited, who has recently been fined for illegal mining of sand, said, "We dredged up the sand because the foreshore in front of our recycling yard has been raised. Sand lifting is beneficial to restore seaworthiness in the channel. But the administration fined me. I will appeal against



Sand lifting goes on under the guise of shipbreaking.

PHOTO: STAR

this order to the proper authority."

A team from the Department of Environment (DoE) has recently submitted an enquiry report, stating that three lakh cubic feet of sand has been excavated from the Sitakunda coast.

According to the Sand Fields and Soil Management Act, 2010, no one can extract sand from the sea, rivers or any place unless the deputy commissioner declares the place as "Balu Mahal" (sand field).

Besides, lifting sand from open spaces and waterbodies for commercial purposes without permission from the relevant authorities is a punishable offence under the act.

According to the Chattogram District Administration, Sandwip Channel has not been declared as a "Balu Mahal" yet.

Chattogram DC Abul Bashar Mohammed Fakhruzzaman said, "Although many people have applied for permission, we have not allowed anyone to extract sand from this channel. We are taking legal action if someone extracts sand illegally from there."

Meanwhile, more than two kilometres of embankments have already collapsed due to uncontrolled sand mining, while more embankments are at risk of collapsing, said an official of the Bangladesh Water Development

Board (BWDB), requesting anonymity.

Due to the destruction of a large portion of mangrove forest resulting from the sand extraction, hundreds of wildlife species are at risk of being displaced from the area.

Kamal Uddin, ranger of Sitakunda Coastal Forest Department, said thousands of trees in the Sitakunda coastal forest are in danger due to the uncontrolled sand extraction.

"Hundreds of trees have already fallen. Scores of wild animals, including deer, have been displaced," he added.

Due to sand mining, the biodiversity and breeding sites of the area will be destroyed, said Dr Mohammad Muslem Uddin, associate professor of oceanography at Chittagong University.

"Many species will be displaced. Fishers will suffer financially as sand mining will result in a reduction of marine resources," he added.

Meanwhile, the Sitakunda upazila administration and the DoE have fined the authorities of three shipbreaking yards – OWW Shipbreaking Yard, SL Steel Shipbreaking Yard and Mother Steel Limited – for lifting sand from the channel illegally.

"The Sand Fields Management Act is implemented by the Ministry of Land and its affiliates. We can only levy environmental compensation due to sand mining against the accused under the Environment Protection Act, so there is very little scope for us to take stricter action," said Ferdous Anwar, deputy director of the DoE's Chattogram office.

"We have already fined three companies Tk 2,50,000 after our team visited different areas in Sitakunda and assessed environmental damage," he added.

AC (land) Ashraful Alam of Sitakunda said, "We have conducted 10 mobile courts in the last two years to stop sand mining and we are also patrolling the deep sea to control sand dredgers."

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

According to data, the Ministry of Industries had approved 186 shipbreaking yards in Sitakunda. However, several yards have been closed due to various complications, including the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and bank loans.

Currently, there are around 20-25 shipbreaking yards in operation in Sitakunda.

Many pieces of land in the area has become uncultivable in the area due to saline water.

PHOTO: STAR

Moreover, some shipbreakers are lifting sand from the Bay of Bengal in Sitakunda, increasing the risk of coastline erosion. This has been made possible as the Ministry of Industry has given permission to shipbreakers to lift sand from in front of their yards to facilitate the anchoring and navigability of ships.

However, the authorities of some ship recycling yards have been misusing this special provision with their mindless extraction of

## Chattogram's Pekin duck farming frenzy

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Pekin duck farming is gaining popularity in different areas of Chattogram, especially in South Chattogram. Small farmers in Karnaphuli, Anwara, and Patiya upazilas are farming this species of duck since it is very much profitable for meat and egg within a short time.

Pekin duck or white Pekin is an American breed of domestic duck. According to data available from different sources, around 90 percent of duck meat is collected from the breed in America.

In North Bengal districts and Sylhet, Pekin duck farming is very popular. However, the breed has been unfamiliar to the farmers in the Chattogram belt despite having a good natural breeding environment. Homemakers and youths in rural areas have been able to gain striking profits in Pekin duck farming.

Homemaker Nasima Akhter of Hajigaon village in Anwara's Barokhan union had started Pekin farming since November last year with the help of Chattogram-based NGO "Mamata".

This NGO has been helping several families to be financially solvent by providing Pekin ducklings,



According to different studies, Pekin ducks are highly regarded for their environmentally hardy nature, even in locales that suffer long and cold winters. They are also known to possess a strong immune system. On average, Pekin ducks lay between 200 to 300 extra-large white eggs annually.

food and other support necessary. According to the NGO's data, nearly 1,500 Pekin ducks are growing in different sheds of 50 farmers.

Nasima's son Mobarak Hossain, who is an undergraduate student at a private university, said, "We started Pekin duck farming after the NGO pursued us and presented many highlights of this breed. We're happy to see their words were true."

"The ducks mature in two months, with the meat weighing nearly two kilos if taken care of properly or given nutritious food," he added.

Nasima's neighbours were also encouraged to get in on this business after seeing her success.

According to different studies, Pekin ducks are highly regarded for their environmentally hardy nature, even in locales that suffer long and cold winters. They are also known to possess a strong immune system. On average, Pekin ducks lay between 200 to 300 extra-large white eggs annually. They start laying eggs when five to six months old.

Chattogram Livestock Officer Dr Md Delwar Hossen, said, "In Feni, lots of farmers are farming Pekin duck. Apart from that, families in rural areas are raising the breed with domestic chickens and animals. As it is profitable, entrepreneurs are focusing on this breed."

"From our office, we are encouraging people to farm the breed and providing information and other assistance," he added.

Md Rafiq Ahmed, chief executive of Mamata, said, "We are helping underprivileged people to turn their fate through farming this breed. Many families are already taking our support and encouraging others to farm the Pekin duck."

## Chittagong College's pivotal role in 1971

ARUN BIKASH DEY

In May 1971, Abani Mohan Dutta, a professor of the Department of Philosophy of the then Chittagong College, was picked up by the Pakistan army from the college quarter. His crime was that he was a progressive-minded teacher, who supported the Liberation War of Bangladesh, said his then student Dr Shafiqul Alam.

"I was a student of Chittagong College in 1971. Abani sir was my direct teacher. He was such a nice person that everybody used to love him. But he became a target of the Pakistan army as he supported the Liberation War of Bangladesh," said Dr Alam.

The professor's example is not a stand alone incident. Chittagong College, established in 1869, played a pivotal role in Bangladesh's struggle for freedom, especially during the tumultuous times of March, 1971.



The college teachers met on March 9, 1971, with Principal Abu Sufian in the chair, to voice their support for the freedom movement of Bangladesh, after Bangabandhu had instructed the Bangalees to be ready to fight in his 7th March speech.

On March 15, 1971, a rally was organised at Laldighi Maidan in the city, where Professor Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed of the college's Bangla Department delivered a speech supporting the liberation struggle.

A play named "Ebarer Sangram" written by Prof Ahmed was also staged at the event.

On March 24, 1971, another rally was held at Chittagong College ground, popularly known

as Parade Maidan, where around 80,000 people attended. A play named "Swadhinor Sangram" written by Prof Ahmed was staged, and news of Pakistani rulers unloading arms at Chattogram Port from the ship "MV Swat", spread among the people on the ground, said Prof Dr Anupam Sen, then a teacher

Echoing the same, Freedom Fighter Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, a group leader of Bangladesh Liberation Force, Karnaphuli Contingent 3, said teachers and students of Chittagong College played a pivotal role in the freedom struggle of Bangladesh.

of Chittagong University.

The people, inspired with patriotic zeal, rushed towards Chattogram Port to resist the invading forces, he added.

Echoing the same, freedom fighter Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, a group leader of Bangladesh Liberation Force, Karnaphuli Contingent 3, said teachers and students of Chittagong College played a pivotal role in the freedom struggle of Bangladesh. They organised rallies and cultural programmes from the beginning of March, 1971, he said.

"Many students of the college took part in the Liberation War actively," he added.

Information for this piece was also collected from the articles "Aaj o Dipumoy Chattogram College" by Belal Hossain, published in Prothom Alo on January 09, 2019, and "Muktijuddhe Chattogram Bishwobidyaloy" by Anupam Sen, published in Bhoror Kagoj, on February 28, 2019.