



PHOTOS: RAJIB RAIHAN

In the heart of Rangunia upazila in Chattogram lies a field of gold, where the shining sun illuminates the vast expanse of Boro paddy, and hardworking farmers and labourers toil from dawn to dusk to reap its bounty.

Hill razed for ATM booth in CRB

SIFAYET ULLAH

The Sonali Bank authorities have reportedly cut a hill in the port city's Central Railway Building (CRB) area to build an ATM booth, without any approval from the Department of Environment.

The DoE officials confirmed that no organisation sought their permission to cut hills in CRB area.

During a visit to the area on Saturday, this correspondent found that the hill near the CRB police outpost has been cut to build the 100 square feet ATM booth.

This hill is owned by Bangladesh Railway (BR).

A study conducted by a teacher of Chittagong University's botany department found that around 225 rare plant species are in the CRB area.

Meanwhile, a Detailed Area Plan (DAP) prepared by the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA), which was published in Gazette on January 25, 2009, announced that it is a cultural heritage site.

According to the gazette, no part of CRB can be used for commercial purposes and no high-rise buildings can be constructed there.

However, Sujon Chowdhury, estate officer of the Bangladesh Railway's (BR) east zone, claimed that Sonali Bank was permitted to build the ATM booth after getting permission from the Ministry of



According to Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act 1995 (amended in 2000), cutting a hill without DoE's approval is illegal. The punishment for breaking the law is up to two years of imprisonment or a Tk 2 lakh fine or both, for first-time offenders. For subsequent offences, the punishment is up to 10 years of imprisonment or a Tk 10 lakh fine or both.

Railways.

"Every day, countless city dwellers come to CRB for entertainment. But there was no ATM booth in this area, so we allowed a government bank to set up the booth," he added.

Md Abu Bakkar Siddik, deputy general manager of Sonali Bank and former manager of the bank's CRB branch, said, "After the railways permitted us, we started the construction of the ATM booth. We did not know that we have to take permission from the other authorities, including the Department of Environment. We will apply for their approval soon."

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This correspondent could not reach Hillol Biswas and Mia Mahmudul Hoque, director and deputy director of DoE respectively, despite repeated attempts.

Earlier, the railway wanted to build a hospital in CRB under a Public-Private

Partnership. However, the railway was forced to shift the hospital project amid continuous protests from the citizens of Chattogram.

According to data from Bangladesh Environment Forum, 120 hills disappeared from the port city in four decades. In 1976, there were 32.37 square km of hills in the port city, which decreased to 14.02 square km in 2008.

The data showed that there were 200 hills in the city 40 years ago, and 60 percent of them have disappeared. Of them, the Chattogram Development Authority cut 15 hills to build the Bayezid Link Road.

Harvesting the field of gold

Bumper boro yield brings smile to Gumai Beel's farmers

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Known as Gumai Beel, this field is one of the largest paddy fields in the country, and its golden aura brings a smile to the face of every farmer who has cultivated it.

Take the case of Amit Nath for example, who has cultivated BRRI-88 variety of paddy in three acres of land in Gumai Beel. He is happy with the yield this year. However, he is worried about the high wage demands of workers, which have increased from Tk 800-900 to Tk 1,100-1,200 per day.

Md Enam, another farmer, also expressed his concerns about the high wage demand. Around 1,500 farmers have cultivated Boro paddy of different varieties in Gumai Beel this year, and they are all busy harvesting. Md Salam, another farmer, said he has cultivated 2.5 acres of land, and the yield is very good this year.

The Rangunia Upazila Agriculture Office stated that Gumai Beel is the second-largest paddy field in Bangladesh, covering an area of about 3,000 hectares.

Ramij Uddin, sub-assistant agriculture officer, Rangunia upazila Agriculture Office, said harvesting of Boro paddy in Gumai Beel started in late April, and around 10 percent of harvesting has already been completed. He admitted that the wage of skilled workers is high this year due to the crisis of skilled manpower.

Imrul Kayes, Rangunia upazila Agriculture Officer, said the bill has shown a bumper yield of Boro paddy this year. He said the average yield of BRRI-88 is over six tonnes per hectare of land. He also mentioned that the upazila agriculture office has been providing all sorts of necessary help and cooperation to the farmers from cultivation to harvesting.

The fertility of the land, the labour and skill of farmers, and cooperation from the upazila agriculture office have contributed to the good yield of crops, he added.

The menace of makeshift markets

Illegal structures around rail gates continue to pose risk of accidents

SIFAYET ULLAH

Illegal structures selling fruits, vegetables, fish, and consumer products on both sides of the rail track in the Jan Ali Hat rail gate area on the Chattogram-Dohazari section of Bangladesh Railway (BR) continue to pose a risk of train accidents.

Despite several recommendations by probe bodies to remove these structures, the BR has failed to act, leading to chaotic situations and endangering the lives of passengers.

Sources inside the Jan Ali Hat station master's office, which is allocated beside the rail gate, claim that eviction drives have been conducted in the area but the shops return as soon as the drives end.

Meanwhile, vendors like Abul Kalam claim that their businesses do not disrupt train services. He sells vegetables beside the rail gate.

"Locals visit this place every day to buy daily commodities at a cheaper price," he added.



including the removal of all illegal structures from both sides of the rail lines and installing CCTV cameras.

BR has failed to implement most of these recommendations, leading to frequent minor and major train accidents. Md Arman Hossen,

additional chief engineer of the BR East Zone, confirmed that only three of the recommendations have been implemented, without going into further details.

Zahangir Hossen, general manager of the BR East Zone, claimed that probe bodies often make "unnecessary" recommendations.

"However, we plan to gradually implement long-term recommendations like constructing overpasses at railway gates," he added.

Mahmood Omar Imam, a professor at the Chittagong University of Engineering & Technology, said, "After accidents, BR investigates with its own people to find out the cause. This results in probe bodies being formed by incompetent people who cannot unearth the root cause of such incidents."

"To tackle train accidents, BR should include external experts in investigation committees and implement the recommendations they suggest," he added.

