

SAINT MARTIN'S ISLAND Govt mulls seaplanes, cruise ships for tourists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Operation of seaplanes and cruise ships will be introduced for tourists to access St Martin's Island round the year, said Chairman of Cox's Bazar Development Authority (CDA) Commodore Mohammad Nurul Abshar yesterday.



However, the launching date has yet to be finalised.

Works have started to implement the new master plan to develop Cox's Bazar as an eco-friendly tourism hub, he said. There will be restrictions on the construction of commercial buildings here and there on the island. At the same time, the arrival of tourists to the island will be controlled from this year, he added.

Experts fear that serious damage has already been done to the environment in Saint Martin's Island, the chairman said, adding that this island should be protected.

"Development plan of Saint Martin's Island has been taken up based on the model of various tourist centers in Maldives, Thailand and Vietnam. If necessary, the opinion of the tourism experts of those countries will be taken," he said.

CDA chairman also said plans have already been made to introduce a cable car from Cox's Bazar to Moheshkhali island and Cox's Bazar to Teknaf.

A huge under-sea aquarium at Sabrang Tourism Park, Circular Bus Terminal, Marina Bay Resort, Khurussul Smart City, Theme Park, Eco Resort, Riverrain Tourism at Chowfaldandi and plying of sea-plane from Cox's Bazar to St Martin's have been undertaken, he added.



Fish breeders are taking large pots full of hatchlings from their farm in Khulna to Bagerhat. Depending on the variety and species, each kg sells for up to Tk 12,000. The photo was taken yesterday in the Arrang Ghata area of Khulna.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Ukraine troops retake village near Bakhmut

Kyiv orders civilian evacuation in Kherson region regularly hit by Russian shelling

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday it had recaptured the devastated eastern village of Andriivka, setting the stage for further advances on the southern flank of Bakhmut, the city that fell into Russian hands in May after months of heavy fighting.

Kyiv's troops were securing their foothold in the area, while Russian forces suffered significant casualties and lost equipment, the Ukrainian General Staff said in a morning report. There was no immediate comment from Russia.

The village of Andriivka lies south of Bakhmut, the site of the fiercest and longest battle since the invasion by Russia in February last year. The General Staff reported "partial success" near Klischchiivka, a village also south of Bakhmut.

"Capturing and holding Andriivka - is our path to a breakthrough on the right flank of Bakhmut and the key to the success of the entire further offensive," said the Third Assault Brigade, which took part in the push.

In a separate development, Ukrainian officials ordered the evacuation of civilians from the southern Kherson region, partly controlled by Russian forces and regularly hit by shelling.

"The Regional Defence Counsel of Kherson decided to compulsorily evacuate families with children from areas subject to constant enemy fire," governor Oleksandr Prokudin said on Telegram.

Russian troops control areas in the Kherson region south of the Dniepr river, following their withdrawal last year from the city of Kherson, the regional capital,

which they regularly shell.

Meanwhile, a ship has left port in Ukraine's Odesa, lawmaker Oleksiy Honcharenko said yesterday, posting photographs on the Telegram messaging app of the vessel in the water.

"A few minutes ago, the Cayman Islands-flagged Puma vessel left the port of Odesa into the Black Sea," Honcharenko said on Telegram.

LSEG interactive map data showed the Puma had departed Odesa and was about 25 km from shore and underway just before 10:00 am.

If the Puma successfully leaves Odesa, it would be the fifth to do so since Moscow withdrew from the UN-brokered Black Sea grain export deal in July and threatened to treat all vessels as potential military targets.

Free Adilur, Elan at once

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human rights activists from doing their jobs," said the statement.

"We demand the immediate release of Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan. We also demand full protection and an end to the harassment of human rights defenders."

A Dhaka court convicted them of spreading "a distorted report and doctored images" about the May 5-6, 2013, police action on a Hefajat-e-Islam rally in Motijheel.

The signatories to the statement include Hossain Zillur Rahman, Dr Hameeda Hossain, Ali Imam Majumder, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, Professor Anu Muhammad, Professor CR Abrar, Shahdeen Malik, Shahidul Alam, Dr Asif Nazrul, Sara Hossain, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Sanjeeb Drong, Jyotirmoy Barua, and Dr Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan.

In another statement, 39 Bangladeshi academicians and professionals working abroad condemned the prison sentence to Adilur and Elan.

The statement also expressed concerns over "continuous harassment" of rights activists, Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, civil society members, and opposition party leaders and activists through the judiciary.

The statement said, "We demand that the government refrain from instrumentalising the judiciary to silence its critics and that the judiciary remain impartial, as the Constitution demands it to be."

The signatories to the statement include Sultan Mohammad Zakaria, former country specialist of Pakistan and Bangladesh at Amnesty International; Dr Hasan Mahmud, assistant professor, Northwestern University in Qatar; Dr Mohammad Al-Amin, postdoctoral fellow, University of Colorado, Denver, USA; Dr Jamal Uddin, lecturer at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

Meanwhile, the National Committee against Fascism and Imperialism demanded unconditional and immediate release of Adilur and Elan in an official statement.

The statement said there are sufficient reasons to believe that this verdict has been issued to create barriers to their activism and to intimidate other human rights organisations of this country.

The committee, in its statement, also demanded cancellation of the recently passed Cyber Security Act.

Study finds high level of microplastics in salt

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of the country. It is an essential part of our diet and an inevitable mineral for the human body.

Experts believe the increased presence of microplastics in salt may pose threats to public health.

The contamination in raw salt is caused mostly by toiletries products like soap, facewash, cleanser, and different kinds of packaging and single-use plastics, according to researchers.

Sultan Al Nahian, scientific officer of BORI and a part of the research team that conducted the 2021 study, told The Daily Star that the findings of the recent study suggested an alarming development.

"As the recent study has found more microplastics in salt than ours, I find it alarming that our sea is now more polluted given its exposure to transboundary and domestic plastic waste. We should take urgent action to rein in the microplastic pollution," he said.

The 2023 study has found the highest concentration of microplastics in Kutubdia, an offshore island. For each kg salt, the pan in South Kutubdia had 1,253 particles while North Kutubdia had 1,026 particles, reads the study.

24 percent of the particles were black followed by 17 percent transparent and 15 percent yellow. Dominance of black perhaps is explained by black threads and ropes used by the fishermen and also by black plastic cover, which farmers use to preserve salt, according to the study.

The size of the plastic particles ranges from 0.3 to 1.5 micrometres, most of which are fibres and foams, the researchers have found.

The 12 sites that were chosen for collecting samples for the study were

Napitkhali, Maheshkhali, Badarkhali, Chanua, Ilshia, Darbeskhata, South Kutubdia, North Kutubdia, Rajakhali, Puichari, and Gurakhali from Cox's Bazar; and the only salt pan from Chattogram district was selected from Dulahazara.

Concentration of microplastics in salt pans varies from one place to another depending on the level of pollution of sea waters.

The average of microplastics found in Bangladesh is 803 per kg of salt while it is 1,690 in Sri Lanka, 1,500 in China, 1,200 in Korea, 900 in Vietnam, and 700 in Thailand, says the study.

In India, the average of microplastics is 35 to 575 per kg of sea salt, according to a study jointly conducted by the Centre for Environmental Science and Engineering and the Indian Institute of Technology.

Mohammad Abdul Momin Siddique, assistant professor of the department of oceanography at NSTU, told The Daily Star that their study suggests surface seawater in the south-eastern coast of Bangladesh is highly contaminated by microplastics.

He said the study demonstrates that the coastal waters of Bangladesh have been polluted with plastic particles, and that the sites which are located offshore have higher concentration of microplastics.

"Filtering out seawater at the mouth of the dyke, through which the seawater flows into the salt pans, can reduce the presence of plastic particles including microplastics," he said.

A study done by the department of environmental sciences at Jahangirnagar University (JU) last year confirmed the presence of microplastics in commercial salt. They collected several packets of salt manufactured/produced by

ten different brands, as well as three samples of raw salt.

The samples the JU researchers studied contained microplastics between 370 and 7,400 per kg of salt. The study concludes that each year a person's intake of microplastics is 13,088.

Fahmida Parvin, assistant professor of the department of environmental sciences at JU told The Daily Star that among the different sizes of microplastics they extracted from the samples, higher concentration has occurred in commercial salt with a diameter less than 0.5 mm and transparent colour.

"That's why it may be difficult to remove the microplastics from salt during the purification process," she added.

Public health expert Dr Lenin Chowdhury told The Daily Star that gradual intake of microplastics could harm the human body at multiple stages.

"It primarily impedes the digestive enzyme in the human body, which may lead to the dysfunction of the stomach. Not only that, at one stage, it will prevent the liver and kidney from functioning normally," said Lenin.

"Policymakers must take it seriously, as it poses a huge threat to our public health," he noted.

Sarwar Hossen, deputy general manager (Salt Cell) of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, told The Daily Star that they wrote several letters to the research team, requesting them to outline a course of action to contain microplastic contamination in seawater. But they didn't receive any reply.

"We will treat the matter seriously as it's appearing as a public health crisis", he said.

Govt move to check prices falls flat

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Faisal Hossain, manager of the Shevrapara outlet of supermarket chain Swapno, said his company was selling eggs at the government-set price, and the prices of onions and potatoes may be lowered in the future.

Many have said they knew that the price cap would not make life any easier for those struggling to make ends meet.

Abid Reza, a shopper in Mohammadpur, said, "Setting the prices and not monitoring the kitchen market is farcical."

However, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi told reporters at an event in Rangpur yesterday that officials were actively monitoring the

markets.

"We are collectively striving to regulate the market. There may be some challenges in achieving the objectives set by the commerce ministry. Efforts are on to address these issues," he said.

He then blamed "unethical traders" for the rising prices.

The government last month set the retail price of 12kg LPG gas at Tk 1,140. Earlier in July, the government fixed the price of edible oil at Tk 179 a litre, and in May, the price of packaged sugar was fixed at Tk 125.

According to media reports, consumers can rarely manage to purchase these essentials at government-set prices.

Govt oblivious

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Referring to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent statement that all elections held under the AL government were transparent and peaceful, Fakhrul said, "This is the best joke of the year."

Senior BNP leaders also addressed the rally, with Dhaka South City BNP Convener Abdus Salam in the chair.

Earlier in the morning, Fakhrul at a press briefing at the party office demanded immediate release of rights body Odhikar Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director Nasiruddin Elan.

"He [Adilur] had been vocal about enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh. He raised these issues internationally.

That's why he has been jailed," he said.

The BNP leader also condemned the Cyber Tribunal's verdict sentencing the two.

"The new law [Cyber Security Act] is worse than the Digital Security Act. Under this law, police will be able to arrest anyone without any warrant, interrogate anyone and file cases."

Fakhrul said journalists would suffer more than the politicians due to the enactment of the new law.

On Thursday, Adilur and Elan were sentenced by the tribunal to two years in prison in a case filed for running "a distorted report and doctored images" about the May 5-6, 2013, police action on a Hefajat-e-Islam rally in Motijheel.

Foreigners get false reports

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Bangladesh are under threat and they have no right to speak.

"You speak to them. If one or two percent of them say that the Awami League has not ensured their security ... then we will not stay in power."

He also asked the AL activists to be ready to foil conspiracies by BNP-Jamaat.

Addressing the event, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbub ul Alam Hanif said a plot is being hatched over the sentencing of Adilur.

He mentioned that Odhikar had said 61 people died in a police action on the Hefajat rally in Motijheel on May 5-6, 2013. A case was filed for this misinformation, he added.

"Why is Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir [BNP secretary general] said

over the sentencing of Adilur? These anti-liberation people want to team up and topple the government. I will ask our foreign friends to refrain from hatching conspiracies against the people," Hanif said.

"I would like to tell those that this government cannot be overthrown through plotting. Foreigners who talk about democracy and humanity should not be with these conspirators," he added.

AL Organising Secretary Mirza Azam said, "It was reported in the media that the Odhikar report was based on false information. Still, domestic and foreign conspiracies are going on."

Its presidium member Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, among others, also spoke at the event.