

KALIRCHHARA RESERVE FOREST IN COX'S BAZAR

# Destroying a forest in guise of 'legal' sand lifting

MOKAMMEL SHUVO, Cox's Bazar

For over six years, vested quarters have been illegally extracting sand from a more than 3km stretch of land in the hilly area of Kalirchhara Reserve Forest in Cox's Bazar, resulting in extensive damage to the forest, hills, and wildlife.

At least a hundred large water bodies, each being 2-3 acres in area, have been created due to extracting sand there. The authorities concerned, however, have yet to take any measures to stop this crime.

The perpetrators have been continuing this illicit activity in the region by showing lease documents for a 4.43 acre area of Balu Mohol (sand field) from the district administration.

For years, the district administration has annually leased the sand field situated in Masuakhali canal under Eidgaon upazila of Cox's Bazar. The forest department has sent two letters in the last two years seeking lease cancellation due to its close proximity, only about 100 feet away, to the Kalirchhara Reserve Forest.

The forest department in the letters mentioned that a syndicate has been extracting sand in the area beyond the leased field and is thereby doing irrecoverable damage to the forest, hill and wildlife.

The district administration, however, did

not pay heed to their request.

On October 5 this year, a task force comprising Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila administration, law enforcers, forest department and Department of Environment (DoE) raided the area and seized a huge amount of sand.

After the raid, DoE lodged a case against five persons including the lease owner Md Shah Alam, chairman of Rashidnagar union under Ramu upazila, bringing allegations of harming the environment by illegal sand lifting.

Confirming the development, Cox's Bazar UNO Mohammad Jakaria, who led the task force, said the DoE is taking necessary action against the people involved with illegal sand lifting.

Nurul Amin, deputy director of DoE in Cox's Bazar, said around 1.05 crore cubic feet of sand in 35 heaps have been seized while around 25 lakh cubic feet of earth have been dug due to sand extraction outside the leased sand field.

In April, Shah Alam got lease of the sand field being the highest bidder with Tk 32 lakh.

"A syndicate controls the whole operation and even we were not allowed to enter the area," said Reaz Rahman, forest ranger of Meherghona Range under Cox's Bazar North division.

The syndicate has been extracting sand from a large part of agricultural land between the hills of the reserve forest. Around 30 to 35 persons are involved in soil and sand extraction and have been trying to legalise the activity using documents from the lease owners, including Shah Alam, he said.

The illicit activity of plundering soil and sand began around 15 years ago but turned rampant around six years back when the demand for sand went up due to the construction of Chattogram-Cox's Bazar rail link, he said.

"We filed around 16 cases and seized their sand lifting equipment at different times," he added.

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## DENGUE NOW a year-long threat

HELEMUL ALAM

Dengue has emerged as a year-round threat in recent years, in contrast to the common understanding that the mosquito-borne fever occurs mainly during the monsoon.

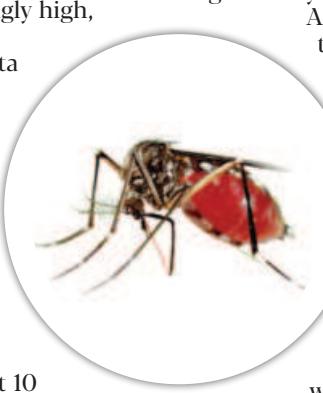
This year, the country is grappling with its most severe outbreak. Despite a gradual decline in infection rates, the number of cases and fatalities remains alarmingly high, even as November begins.

Till 2014, DGHS data indicated dengue infection typically begins in June. Only 12 dengue cases were diagnosed in the country before June (from 2001 to 2014) – five in May 2001, one each in May 2003, 2004, and 2009, and four in 2013 of the same month. But the situation started to change after 2014.

According to DGHS, at least 10 dengue patients died while 1,357 were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

The total number of dengue cases this year till yesterday rose to 2,76,163, while fatalities increased to 1,380.

The total number of cases in the first three days of November this year stands at 4,968, while 30 died during the same time. Last



year, as many as 19,334 dengue cases and 113 deaths were recorded in November, when entomologists thought cases would start to decline from this month.

Entomologist Prof Kabirul Bashar said dengue is no longer a seasonal fever, rather it is now a round the year problem. However, he hopes the number of cases would reduce significantly in upcoming months.

As an Aedes mosquito can live up to 40 days, the impact will remain active for 40 days after rain and will reduce further during winter, he said.

Bashar advised the government to start destroying Aedes breeding sources immediately to control dengue next year.

He said authorities will have to conduct a door-to-door drive, with the cooperation of the city's health workers, once every 15 days. They should also impose a fine if they find breeding sources after visiting a house for the third time.

Bashar said the reasons for round the year dengue menace are climate change, multi-story buildings (where cars are kept and washed), a huge number of under-construction buildings, and preserving water in drums or buckets.

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## Prothom Alo celebrates 25th anniv

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The silver jubilee of Bangla daily Prothom Alo was celebrated with much enthusiasm and fanfare yesterday.

To mark the day, a programme was held at the auditorium of Krishibid Institution Bangladesh in the capital, where employees of the daily from across the country took part. Distinguished personalities also joined the event.

The programme started with the chorus of the national anthem followed by a welcome speech by Prothom Alo's Executive Editor Sajjad Sharif.

Four distinguished guests -- Ferdousi Qadri, a scientist at icddr,b, who won the Magsaysay Award; Syed Nasim Manzur, managing director of Apex Footwear; Rahul Ananda, a musician, lyricist, and instrumentalist of the popular band Joler Gaan; and Sabina Khatun, captain of the Bangladesh

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The Bangla daily Prothom Alo celebrated its 25th anniversary at Krishibid Institute of Bangladesh (KIB) in Dhaka yesterday. As part of the event, a cultural programme was also held.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

**BNP-led forces must be resisted and defeated**  
**Says Quader**

UNB, Dhaka

Amami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the BNP-led "communal forces" will have to be resisted and defeated to protect Bangladesh's democracy, the spirit of Liberation War, and independence.

Describing BNP as the main enemy of the nation, Quader said, "Once again the party (BNP) has announced a blockade to commit vandalism and arson violence."

Quader, also the road, transport and bridges minister, made the remarks after paying homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhamondi 32 on the occasion of Jail Killing Day.

He said, "24 journalists were brutally attacked on October 28. A policeman was killed, a hospital was attacked, and the chief justice's residence was attacked. They torched a parked bus, killing the sleeping helper inside."

"How is it repressive to arrest those who led these misdeeds?" Quader asked.



**No govt tactics can suppress BNP's movement**  
**Says Rizvi**

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday said the fall of the current regime is imminent as none of its strategies will work to suppress the opposition's ongoing one-point movement.

In a statement, he also said the government is arresting BNP leaders and activists, repressing them by taking them on remand as it became scared of the blockade programme.

He issued the statement condemning the arrest of BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury.

"BNP is the largest and most popular political party in the country and it has relations with people. So, none of your (government) tactics to suppress the movement will succeed," Rizvi said.

He also said the BNP leadership cannot be weakened by wholesale arrests as the last leader or worker who is out of jail will lead the movement.



**DEATH OF HOMAIRA HIMU Rab arrests one**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested a man in connection with the death of actress Homaira Himu.

The arrestee is Mohammad Ziauddin alias Rifi, her friend.

The Rab's media wing confirmed this in a message.

Further details regarding the arrest could not be known immediately.

Homaira Himu died at her residence in Dhaka on Thursday.

Actors Equity Guild President and actor Ahsan Habib Nasim said she died by suicide.

