



PHOTO: STAR

Idrakpur fort: a museum without artefacts

TANJIL HASAN

Abdur Rahman Mustakim, a student from Narayanganj, visited the Idrakpur Fort Museum in Munshiganj with his relatives on Tuesday. While he was impressed by the fort itself, he was deeply disappointed by the museum's lack of antiquities.

"I traveled a long way expecting to see many traditional artifacts unearthed in Munshiganj," he said. "But there is nothing traditional in the museum. I expected something better."

Other visitors, including madrasa student Naeem, teacher Mizanur Rahman, and homemaker Sonia Akhtar, shared similar sentiments. They all demanded that the antiquities found in Munshiganj be exhibited at the fort museum.

Idrakpur Fort is a Mughal structure. According to the Archaeological Survey Report of the Directorate of Archeology (published in April, 2000), Mughal Subedar Mir Jumla of Bengal built the fort in 1660 as an outpost to guard the water route to Dhaka against the raids of the Portuguese and Mogh pirates.

The fort stands on the northern bank of the dried up Ichamati river in Munshiganj, 24 kilometers south-east of Dhaka.

Since the British era, the fort has been used as the residence of the

sub-divisional officer and later, after independence as the residence of the district commissioner.

The fort complex also housed the district jail.

In 1993, the residence of the DC was shifted from the fort to a new place. After that, the jail was also shifted to a new building.

On March 19, 2022, the Directorate of Archeology established the Idrakpur Fort Museum in the old jail building. But there is nothing in the museum except some pictures and terracotta replicas. While visitors are enamoured by the more than 400-year-old fort, the museum leaves them bitterly disappointed.

Meanwhile, various ancient statues have been discovered at regular intervals in Munshiganj. But none of those artifacts are on display in local museums.

Sufi Mustafizur Rahman, professor of Archeology at Jahangirnagar University, said, "The Vishnu idols found in Munshiganj recently are from the 19th century. They are invaluable resources made of black basalt stone. Since there is a museum in Munshiganj, these idols should be kept there."

Omar Sharif Fahad, assistant commissioner (treasury branch) of Munshiganj district administration office, said, "There are some idols in

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From left, a truckload of logs seized by forest guards. Meanwhile, vested groups tried to grab a large part of the natural forest by turning it into commercial fruit orchards. Miscreants allegedly set fire to the forest to clear forest land for grabbing and collecting firewood. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Sal forest shrinking fast

Tree felling, land grabbing continue unabated

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

The Sal forest under Madhupur National Park in Tangail is disappearing at an alarming rate due to unabated tree felling and grabbing of land.

According to the Forest Department, the Sal forest -- scattered across several districts including Gazipur, Tangail, and Mymensingh -- has a total area of 1,21,000 hectares, around 2.4 percent of the country's forest area.

In Tangail, the Sal forest cover is the largest in Bangladesh. In 1925, it was spread across more than 1,22,876 acres of land in Madhupur, Sakhipur, Ghatail, Mirzapur, and Kalihati upazilas, of which 58,206 acres were part of the reserve forest.

It was once home to diverse flora and fauna -- including tigers, bears, peafowl, and langurs.

Over the years, the decimation of the natural forest has allegedly been going on right under the nose of the authorities concerned.

In fact, a section of unscrupulous forest officials and community forest workers are assisting those

destroying the forest in exchange for unethical personal benefits, locals alleged.

Around 25,000 people, including those belonging to ethnic minority communities, live in 41 villages in the vicinity of the forest in Madhupur upazila.

Around 26,048 acres of the forest have been grabbed in Sakhipur upazila and around 19,861 acres in Madhupur, according to the Forest Department's data.

"A section of foresters are helping vested groups to grab, clear, and turn a large part of the natural forest into commercial fruit orchards in the name of social afforestation," alleged Prince Edward Mangsang, a local resident.

Advocate Jhon Jetra, a leader

of the local Garo community, said compared to the extent of damage caused to the forest, the foresters' efforts are inadequate.

Meanwhile, hundreds of acres of the forest have been razed in at least 50 fire incidents in and around the forest in April and May this year. In most cases, miscreants set fire to the forest to collect firewood or to clear forest land for grabbing, locals alleged.

The Forest Department, however, blamed local population growth and their dependence on forest resources for their livelihoods as reasons for the forest destruction.

"Some locals are involved in tree felling and forest land grabbing. The forest guards find it difficult to take action against them with a limited workforce," said Abdul Hamid, ranger of Dokhala Range in Madhupur National Park.

Around 26,048 acres of the forest have been grabbed in Sakhipur upazila and around 19,861 acres in Madhupur, according to Forest Department's data.

The office of the Divisional Forest

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Poet Asim Saha no more

BSS, Dhaka

Ekushey Padak-winning poet and novelist Asim Saha passed away

on Tuesday afternoon while undergoing treatment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University hospital in the capital. He was 75.

"He was undergoing treatment at the intensive care unit of the BSMMU with Parkinson's disease, constipation, and diabetes," his family friend poet Mahbuba Rahman Laki told the news agency.

He left behind his wife Anjona Saha, also a noted singer and poet, and two sons -- Avro and Aorga, and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep

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Eid festivities cut short litchi season



PHOTO: STAR

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Although litchi is grown all over the country, the little red round spheres of sweetness coming from Dinajpur are renowned for their taste and flavour.

However, Dinajpur's litchi is experiencing a challenging season this year.

The season for litchi typically lasts between 45 and 60 days from the start of its harvest. However, this year's season is expected to be shorter as growers expedite harvesting to avoid transportation hassles before and after Eid-ul-Azha.

Mominul Islam, a wholesale trader in Dinajpur's Kalitola litchi market, expressed concerns about demand decreasing after the Eid festival as consumers' attention will be elsewhere during the festival.

Additionally, the suspension of truck services during Eid will complicate litchi transportation, prompting growers to hasten their harvest to ensure timely sales, said traders.

Despite the challenges, the litchi markets in Dinajpur are bustling.

According to Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) officials, harvesting usually begins at the end of May and lasts for at least two months. This year, however, harvesting started about a week earlier, leading to an ample supply in the market.

Dinajpur's largest litchi markets, located around the Kotwali Police Station and New Market, are vibrant with activity.

Wholesalers from across the country are purchasing litchis in bulk and transporting them to their

respective regions.

Some wholesalers even buy directly from the orchards.

The adverse weather conditions, including severe heat and lack of rain, have significantly impacted this season's litchi yield. According to Nuruzzaman, Deputy Director of the Dinajpur DAE, last year's production was around 30,000 tonnes.

Although this year's yield is lower, specific figures are unavailable. With over 5,500 hectares dedicated to litchi cultivation, varieties like Bombay and Madrazi have shown resilience, while Bedana and China-3 varieties have seen yields drop by 50 percent due to the prolonged heatwave and drought-like situation.

Besides, the large number of litchi orchards were affected by storms that hit several times this season.

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DR. TOUFIQ M. SERAJ
(1956-2019)
FOUNDER MANAGING DIRECTOR
SHELTECH GROUP

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