

UKHIYA IN COX'S BAZAR

Hills razed to supply soil for LGED roadwork

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has allegedly been using red soil from neighbouring hills for the construction of a one-kilometre road in Machkaria area of Cox's Bazar's Ukhia upazila over the past two weeks.

Locals claimed the razing of hills began around two weeks ago, with the soil being used for road construction in broad daylight. They alleged that state agencies concerned, including the Forest Department and the Department of Environment, have yet to take any action, while villagers face intimidation for speaking out against the irregularities.

"LGED razed some three to four hills and used the soil, worth around Tk 30 lakh, instead of sand for road construction, apparently to cut costs. The authorities concerned have ignored the environmental damage despite protests from locals," said Abdul Haque, member of Ward 6 under Rajapalong union.

HM Ershad, president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's Cox's Bazar chapter, said, "Hill soil is easily identifiable due to its red colour. LGED engineers and the contractor are colluding to embezzle money by using hill soil instead of sand."

Contacted, Md Rokonuzzaman Khan, upazila engineer of LGED in Ukhia, said the one-kilometre concrete road in Machkaria is being constructed at a cost of Tk 4 crore.

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3 killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

At least three people were killed and one was injured in road accidents in Lalmonirhat and Munshiganj districts yesterday.

In Lalmonirhat, a passenger bus of Navila Paribahan hit a motorcycle coming from the opposite direction near Swarnamati Bridge in Aditmari, leaving its rider dead and pillion critically injured.

Locals rushed the injured to Aditmari Upazila Health Complex. As her condition worsened, she was referred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, but succumbed to her injuries on the way.

The deceased are Ramjan Ali, 52, and his niece Khadija Tul Kobra, 25, both residents of Kaliganj upazila, said Ali Akbar, officer-in-charge of Aditmari Police Station.

Police seized the bus but its driver and helper managed to flee.

In Munshiganj, Hafizur Rahman, 30, a truck driver, and his helper Abul Kalam, 45, were fixing their truck's wheel on the roadside near the Padma Bridge toll plaza on Dhaka-Mawa Expressway in the morning, when another truck hit it from behind, leaving Hafizur dead on the spot and Abul injured.

The deceased Hafizur Rahman was from Satkhira, said OC Abdul Kader Zilani of Hasara Police Station.

Man killed in elephant attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man was killed in an elephant attack inside Chhunati Wildlife Sanctuary in Chattogram's Banskhali upazila yesterday.

The deceased is Abu Siddique, 45, of Puichhari union.

"Siddique went inside the sanctuary on Thursday morning to collect sungrass (a type of perennial grass used for roofing in rural areas), but didn't return home. Today [Friday], relatives and locals went to look for him, and found his body in a field around 10:00am," said Anisuzzaman Sheikh, forester of Jaldi Wildlife Range. He said no one can enter any reserve forest without permission.

"We provide financial compensation to victims of elephant attacks. However, there is no provision for compensation if an elephant attack occurs inside a sanctuary or reserve forest area," he said.



Hills being razed to supply soil for the construction of a one-kilometre road in Machkaria area of Cox's Bazar's Ukhia upazila. Locals claim the cutting of hills began around two weeks ago, with the soil being used for construction in broad daylight.

PHOTO: STAR

BARAPUKURIA MINE
Outsourced workers on hunger strike
Demand permanent employmentOUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

A total of 287 outsourced workers of the Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited in Dinajpur yesterday launched an indefinite hunger strike, demanding permanent employment.

They began the strike in front of the union office of workers and employees within the mine premises, to press home their five-point demand including permanent employment, wage equality, annual increments, festival bonuses and overtime pay, and provisions for casual and maternity leave.

The workers said they continued their protests since the BCMCL authorities failed to respond to their demands by Thursday following their previous work abstention.

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RANGPUR MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL
Medical waste piles up amid disposal woes

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Rangpur Medical College Hospital has long been struggling with ensuring safe and effective disposal of medical waste, raising concerns over public health and the environment.

For the past five years, it has relied on a private organisation for medical waste disposal. However, the service has been largely inadequate.

The absence of a proper waste management system has resulted in the accumulation of hazardous waste within the hospital premises, posing health risks to visitors and patients alike.

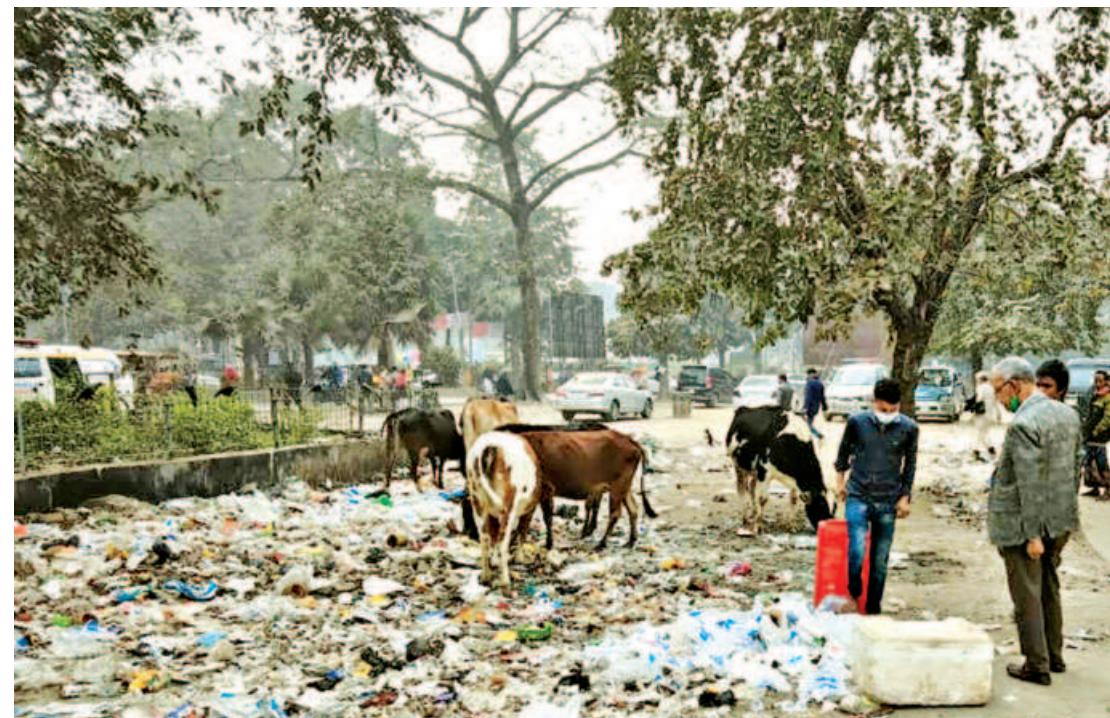
Adding to the crisis, the construction of a medical waste management plant at the hospital, intended to mitigate pollution and ensure safe disposal, has been halted due to strong opposition from locals.

According to the Health Engineering Department in Rangpur Division, the Tk 3.43 crore project was awarded to Jhenaidah-based contractor firm Gungun Enterprise through a tender process on May 8, 2024, with a one-year deadline for completion.

The proposed 5,500 square-foot plant was designed to include an office room, an autoclave and effluent treatment plant, a storage room, and a container washroom.

Saqib Ahmed, site engineer of the contractor firm, said workers cleared waste from the construction site and excavated the land for the building's foundation.

Necessary materials, including rods and cement, were also



stocked. However, due to resistance from locals, they were forced to halt the project, he added.

On September 15 last year, locals formally complained to the hospital director, arguing that the plant's location near the Bangladesh Medical Association building and adjacent residential areas posed health risks.

Additionally, they pointed out that the Department of Environment has yet to issue a location clearance certificate for the project.

Despite these concerns, healthcare experts stressed the urgent need for a proper waste management plant for RMCH.

Mohammad Istak Mahfuz, co-ordinator (Northern Zone) of Prism Bangladesh Foundation, which has been collecting medical waste from the hospital since 2020, said the hospital generates nearly 1.5 tonnes of waste daily, including 300 kilograms of hazardous waste.

"Due to poor waste segregation, much of the hazardous waste gets mixed with general waste, leading to improper disposal," he said.

Health experts warned that without a sustainable waste disposal system, the accumulation and poor disposal of hazardous medical waste will increase the risk of infections, disease outbreaks, groundwater contamination, and environmental degradation.

Contacted, Brigadier General Ashiqur Rahman, director of the hospital, said locals not only submitted a written complaint but also staged protests, threatening legal action if the plant's construction continued.

Dr ABM Mosiur Rahman, project director of the waste management plant, however, said the protesters were misguided.

"Similar waste management plants are being constructed at hospitals across the country. Some people have falsely linked these facilities to pollution risks, leading to unnecessary delays," he said.

2-month ban on hilsa fishing starts in Barishal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A two-month fishing ban will be enforced from today, impacting an 82-kilometre stretch across three rivers in ten upazilas of Barishal division. The ban, which has been in place since 2019, aims to protect juvenile hilsa (jatka), ensure safe breeding, and boost hilsa production.

The restriction will run from March 1 to April 30, covering the Meghna, Kalabazar, and Gojaria rivers in Barishal and Bhola districts. Affected upazilas include Hizla, Mehendiganj, and Barishal Sadar in Barishal, as well as all seven upazilas in Bhola district.

Ripon Kanti Ghosh, Barishal district fisheries officer, said, "The area is a crucial hilsa breeding zone. The ban is essential to protect juvenile fish and ensure increased production in the long run."

The ban will affect approximately 46,576 fishermen in the designated areas. While they will not receive separate compensation, all registered fishers are eligible for assistance under the government's Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme.

Bhanga Police Station OC sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

The Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police has arrested Md Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bhanga Police Station in Faridpur, for allegations of crimes against humanity.

He was detained from Bhanga Police Station and later produced before International Crimes Tribunal-1, which ordered his formal arrest and sent him to jail.

Shailesh Chakma, additional superintendent of police in Faridpur, said Shafiqul was taken into custody. However, he did not disclose specific details regarding the case.

DB police from Dhaka picked up Shafiqul around 8:00pm on Thursday from Bhanga Police Station.

Shafiqul had assumed charge as OC of Bhanga Police Station on February 15, and his arrest came just 11 days later. Before this posting, he served as a DB inspector in Habiganj and later in Gazipur Metropolitan Police.



The Sreemangal Public Library is now left in ruins, becoming a shadow of its former self. Once upon a time, bibliophiles of all ages would gather here in the afternoon to browse through the library's rich collection of books. The photo was taken from College Road in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar recently.

PHOTO: STAR

SREEMANGAL PUBLIC LIBRARY
Once a learning centre, now in ruins

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Located on College Road in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar, the Sreemangal Public Library was once a centre for learning and a vibrant hub of knowledge seekers.

Bibliophiles of all ages used to gather in the library every afternoon, browsing through its collection of books of diverse genres and contents.

Now, the library is left in ruins and has become a haunted shadow of its former self.

The abandoned structure, including the walls, is crumbling. Its tin roof was ripped off during a cyclone last year. None of the doors, windows, and even cupboards that once housed numerous books are left anymore. The floor is also in a shabby state, with remnants of destruction scattered all over it.

"The library was once a cultural landmark in Sreemangal. Its present condition is deplorable," said Ismail Uddin, a senior journalist in Sreemangal.

According to locals, the library was

established on July 22, 1983, initially in a tin-shed room of the Sreemangal Municipality Office. In 1984, it relocated to a tin-shed building on 1.5 acres of Khas land allocated by the upazila administration on College Road.

Later, in 1993, the upazila administration transferred the land along with the tin shed building to the municipality, and the library was renamed as Sreemangal Municipality Auditorium and Library.

Till 2012, the library remained functional, before the then Moulvibazar 4 (Sreemangal-Kamalganj) lawmaker Md Abdus Shaheed took over and founded a college there in his name.

The Vice Principal Md Abdus Shaheed College closed the library's operations and used its tin-shed building to hold classes and administrative activities for eight years. In 2020, the college relocated to its own campus in Matiganj area of the upazila, leaving the library building in a

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