

Beach land grabbed for hotel project in Kuakata

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

What began as a makeshift market on the sands of Kuakata Sea Beach in Patuakhali, is now creeping illegally toward the shoreline to make way for a two-storey residential hotel and restaurant, alleges locals.

Known locally as the "Tiles Market," the structure -- made of corrugated iron sheets and wood -- was earlier declared risky by Kuakata Municipality authorities, who even put up warning signs.

Despite that, expansion has resumed under the alleged supervision of one Md Sajidul Islam Hiru Mia, said to be the market's owner.

According to residents, Hiru Mia has extended the market approximately 200 feet westward, pushing into the Zero Point of Kuakata beach.

The new development is being built on wooden stilts using iron sheets and concrete slabs -- part of a two-storey hotel-restaurant venture. Sand is reportedly being extracted from the shore to fill the construction area.

The second floor, now being cast in concrete, is rising without any supporting pillars -- posing serious risk to more than 50 traders who run businesses under the structure.

"This place gets hit by huge waves during the monsoon. Previously, it was

somewhat manageable, but now they're building a concrete second floor with no supporting pillars," said a shopkeeper, speaking anonymously.

"The entire structure could collapse any time. And if we raise our voices, the owner threatens to evict us. How can we run our businesses under such risk?" he questioned.

Municipal officials said the beach is government-owned, and no legal provision exists for constructing a market



or commercial building on the site.

KM Bacchu, president of the Kuakata Tour Guides' Association, said, "Due to the absence of a permanent market, this place has become a hub for selling cosmetic items and daily essentials to tourists. But the municipality has already declared it a risky zone, so expansion should not be allowed, especially not onto the beach itself."

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During the extended Eid holidays, people from different parts of the country flock to Karamjal area of the Sundarbans to witness the mangrove's greenery and natural beauty. Several thousand people are visiting the site with their family and friends boarding small barges from Mongla. The photo was taken at Mongla ferry ghat in Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Freedom fighter's house vandalised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A group of alleged Jamaat-Shibir members attacked and vandalised the house of freedom fighter Abdul Hai Kanu in Cumilla's Chaudhogram upazila early yesterday.

Hilal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Chaudhogram Police Station, confirmed the incident to The Daily Star.

He said he was informed of the attack shortly after it occurred and visited the victim's residence in Ludhia village with a police team, where they found evidence of vandalism.

"The attackers fled upon sensing our presence. However, no formal complaint or case has been filed regarding the incident," the OC added.

Freedom Fighter Kanu said, "Around 12:55am, a group of 20 to 25 Jamaat-Shibir cadres tried to storm my house. They attempted to break in using sharp weapons and detonated crude bombs. They damaged doors, windows, and the tin roof. They arrived on 10 to 12 motorcycles."

Contacted, Md Mahfuzur Rahman, chief of Jamaat's Chaudhogram upazila unit, said, "I heard about the incident, but we had no involvement. The allegations against us are untrue."

Earlier on December 22, a group of people placed a garland of shoes around his neck and ordered him to leave the area by nightfall -- a video of which later went viral on social media. Around 10 to 12

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Railway land up for grabs

Ministry probe body says at least 350-acre land grabbed in Saidpur

ASADUZZAMAN TIPLI, Nilphamari

Encroachment of railway land continues unabated in Saidpur town of Nilphamari as authorities have yet to act on 24 recommendations made by a ministerial probe body in mid-2021.

The recommendations included recovering the occupied land and bringing those responsible, including corrupt railway officials, to book.

The probe body found that influential grabbers, with the backing of political leaders and railway officials, had illegally occupied 350 acres of railway land worth Tk 5,000 crore in Saidpur, home to the country's largest railway workshop.

It also revealed that 70 percent of the 2,488 railway quarters for staff and officers had been grabbed.

Railway authorities formed the probe body after journalist Motaleb Hossain lodged a complaint with the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in late 2020, which was later forwarded to the railways ministry. However, despite the passage of nearly four years, no concrete action has been taken, and land grabbing continues openly, Hossain said.

As an example of fresh encroachment, he claimed that eight high-rise buildings have recently been constructed illegally on both sides of Shahid Dr Shamsul Huque Road and Shahid Zikrul Huque Road.

The probe report identified six political party offices, including those of BNP, Awami League, and Jatiyo Party, as being set up on occupied railway land.

Additionally, it found 36 multi-storey residential hotels, 16 commercial banks, 43 industries, 150 multi-storey business centres, and 5,000 shops built on the encroached land.

The report said Joinal demolished a railway food warehouse to construct a four-storey market. Altaf reportedly built 12 multi-storey buildings, while upazila unit president of the Corruption Prevention Committee, Lion Nazrul Islam, constructed a multi-storey building for Lion School and College on encroached land.

Each of the accused denied the allegations when contacted.

Joinal refuted claims of demolishing the railway food warehouse, saying the British-era building had been in ruins long before he took a 99-year lease from the railway market committee in 1984.



Structures of various sorts, including high-rise buildings, political party offices, residential hotels, commercial banks, business centres, shops, and even educational institutions, have been illegally built upon encroached railway lands.

PHOTO: STAR

KEY ISSUES

- 350 acres of railway land grabbed in Saidpur
- Encroached lands amount to Tk 5,000cr
- Probe body's 24 recommendations unheeded
- 70% of railway quarters illegally occupied

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Magistracy power for swift action
- Criminal cases against land grabbers
- Strengthen railway estate dept's monitoring system
- Hold corrupt officials, political leaders accountable

REASONS

- Encroachment continues despite court order
- Corrupt officials, political leaders involved
- Municipality misinterprets land agreement, fuelling occupation
- Criminal cases recommended but no action taken

A bridge built by the people, for the people

SDILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

For years, residents of Baura in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila had to rely on a bamboo bridge to cross the Saniajan river -- a structure that was frequently damaged during the rainy season, forcing villagers to use boats or take long detours.

This year, the community came together to find a more durable solution.

With no external funding, villagers took the initiative to build a 200-foot-long floating bridge, using 100 plastic drums, over 300 bamboos, iron rods, and galvanised iron wire. The project cost around Tk 3 lakh, entirely raised through community contributions.

According to 60-year-old farmer Baktar Ali, 15 villagers



worked for seven days to complete the bridge. "Everyone helped. Some gave money; others gave time and labour," he said. "It has made our daily

travel much easier."

The bridge now serves over 5,000 people from three nearby villages, offering a year-round solution to a long-standing

"During the rainy season, the river floods. But this floating bridge stays above the water, so we can use it at all times."

School student Shihab Hossain said it used to be difficult and frightening to cross the bamboo bridge. "Now we can walk across safely," he added.

Contacted, Patgram Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Jilur Rahman said he was not aware of the floating bridge. "I will visit the site and speak to the relevant authorities about this," he said.

Locals also urged the authorities to build a permanent concrete bridge. They said this temporary solution has helped, but a concrete bridge would bring long-term relief.

Ansar member run over by truck

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

An Ansar commander was killed after being run over by a soil-laden truck in Tangail's Delduar upazila yesterday.

The deceased has been identified as Shafiullah Miah, 47, of Moulvibazar village in the sub-district.

He was serving as commander of the Ansar personnel assigned to the security detail of the Manoharganj UNO in Cumilla.

According to police, Shafiullah was out for a morning walk when the truck lost control and ran him over. He died on the spot.

On information, fire service and civil defense personnel rushed to the spot and recovered the body from under the truck.

Azizur Rahman Howlader, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Delduar Police Station, said the truck was seized but its driver managed to flee.

The body will be handed over to the family upon completion of legal procedures, he added.

18-year-old's body recovered from Gorai

UNB, Magura

The body of an 18-year-old boy, who drowned while swimming in the Gorai river, was recovered yesterday morning after an overnight rescue operation.

The victim, Rahat, drowned on Thursday afternoon while swimming near the Kamarkhali Bridge in Majail Mandartola village under Nakol union of Sreepur upazila.

A diving team from Khulna conducted a rescue operation throughout the night and recovered his body in the morning. A case was filed with Sreepur Police Station regarding the matter, said OC Bisharul Islam of the police station.

According to locals, Rahat and his friends had gone to the river to bathe. While swimming, Rahat fell ill and drowned.

Despite attempts by local fishermen and residents, he could not be rescued.

Rahat was a resident of Vita Sahr village in Magura and the son of Rakib Mollah.

Couple dies by suicide in Barguna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A man and his second wife reportedly died by suicide on Thursday in Barguna's Taltali upazila after his first wife refused to accept his second marriage.

The incident took place in the evening in Chaulapara area under Sharikkhali union of the upazila, said Md Shahjalal, officer-in-charge of Taltali Police Station, confirming the matter.

The deceased were Md Iqbal Hawladar of Purbo Laxmipur in Barguna's Betagi upazila, and Lamia Begum of Subidkhali area under Patuakhali's Mirzaganj upazila.

Iqbal used to work at a garment factory in Dhaka and lived there alone, leaving his first wife at home in Barguna. He met Lamia, a divorcee, in the capital, and got married, said family sources.

After Iqbal returned home with Lamia during Eid holidays, his first wife refused to accept it and reportedly threatened to take legal action against him.

Unable to return to his own house, Iqbal and Lamia took shelter in the house of his elder sister's in-laws, where they later died by suicide in a room.

OC Shahjalal said the bodies were recovered and sent to Barguna General Hospital for autopsy, adding that no case has been filed in this connection yet.