

SADA PATHOR stripped bare

Sylhet's iconic white-stone landmark falls victim to rampant looting

DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Bholaganj's Sada Pathor, a broad, shallow stretch of the Dholai River where smooth white stones once lay against the backdrop of Meghalaya's hills, has long been one of Sylhet's top tourist attractions.

Now, after months of rampant extraction and looting, the area resembles a ravaged quarry -- scarred with pits and mud, with its iconic boulders almost gone.

Environmental groups and locals said the illegal extraction in Companiganj and Gowainghat upazilas surged after the Awami League government's ouster in August last year.

They estimate the plunder is worth hundreds of crores of taka, though there is no official valuation.

"These are no random incidents. The stones have been and are being extracted through organised looting, carried out on a massive scale and backed by politically influential figures," said Advocate Shah Shaheda Akhter, divisional coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.

- Locals say looting intensified after August last year
- ACC launches probe into looting
- Writ petition seeks action against culprits

Abdul Karim Kim, member secretary of Dhoritri Rokhkhay Amra (DHORA), said the massive looting started immediately following the AL regime's collapse on August 5 last year, after a quiet period of nearly four years at the stone extraction sites in the Sylhet region.

"It just a few days after the fall of the Awami League regime, stones worth over a thousand crore taka were looted from the extraction sites in Companiganj and Gowainghat upazilas, including all nearby areas of Sada Pathor tourist attraction," Abdul Karim Kim claimed.

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Sylhet's iconic white-stone landmark and tourist attraction, the Bholaganj Sada Pathor now lies barren after miscreants looted stones worth hundreds of crores over the past year. *Inset*, what Sada Pathor looked like in April last year.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH NASIR

ELECTION READINESS Fault lines exposed after NCP leader's comments

MD ABBAS



As the nation looks toward a smooth transfer of power to elected representatives, National Citizen Party leader Nasiruddin Patwary's remarks that the polls cannot be held in February 2026 without reforms have ignited a political debate.

While another NCP leader later insisted that Patwary was stressing the need for reforms before polls, several political parties and analysts yesterday criticised his language as "dictatorial, irresponsible, and reminiscent of old political tactics".

Patwary, the NCP's chief coordinator, made the remarks at the National Youth Conference at Dhaka's Krishibid Institution on Tuesday, organised to mark International Youth Day.

"The election date has been announced for February, but it cannot happen then... If the polls are held before completing reforms, the government must return the lives of my brothers who were killed in the uprising...."

He alleged the election was being planned under the same "fascist" constitution and system.

Patwary's comments came around a week after Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus announced that the polls would be held in February, starting the process of returning to an elected government.

Political observers said the declaration, coming after weeks of speculation, set a clear target for the Election Commission and government agencies to work toward,

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We will hand over power to people thru free, fair polls

Says Yunus
DIPLOMATIC
CORRESPONDENT

The interim government is working hard to hold a free, fair, and transparent election in February next year so that power is handed over to the people, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said.

"Our government is focused on ensuring peace and stability. We are committed to strengthening democracy and giving power back to its rightful owner -- the people,"

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Speaking to The Daily Star recently, the adviser said her

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Promises on paper, pollution in reality

PINAKI ROY

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan's admission of failure to stop rampant stone extraction in Sylhet's Jaflong may be honest, but it highlights her glaring limitations as an administrator.

The adviser, who has championed environmental causes for nearly three decades, recently acknowledged that, as a de facto minister, she has failed to achieve what she had previously achieved as an environmentalist.

At an event on July 26, she said, "For four years, we were able to stop stone extraction in Jaflong, but I could not prevent it now when I am an adviser. So, this is our reality. We saw all-party consensus on extracting stones... but we haven't seen consensus on protecting Jaflong."

Venting her frustration over Sada Pathor, a popular tourist destination in Sylhet, which has been stripped bare of its white stones in a matter of months, she said, "If you want to learn how to destroy a beautiful place, you have to come to Bangladesh."

However, it's not all bad news: there have been successes on some fronts.

Speaking to The Daily Star recently, the adviser said her

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ALMOST NO PROGRESS

River pollution remains as high as before

Markets still flooded with single-use poly bags

No concrete measure to combat air pollution

SOME SUCCESS

Recovered over 5,000-acre forest land

Temporarily banned tourists from St Martin's

Demolished 830 brick kilns, shut 18 lead factories

Rights situation stabilises, but concerns linger

Says US state dept report on Bangladesh last year

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The human rights situation in Bangladesh has stabilised following the July uprising but concerns remain, according to the US State Department's 2024 Human Rights Report.

Although the interim government has taken steps to address impunity, including collaboration with the UN and the use of the International Crimes Tribunal, challenges persist, said the report, which was released on Tuesday.

Restrictions on speech, vague definitions of hate speech, and legal tools for repression are there in the statute books, giving future governments potential means to stifle dissent.

Concerns centre on the protection of civil liberties, prevention of abuse by security forces and ensuring accountability for past and future violations.

The interim government began taking steps to address past abuses, including arrests of former officials and party activists accused of rights violations.

The report details sweeping abuses under the previous government, including arbitrary killings, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary

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'We reject such sweeping statements'

Editors' Council responds to Jatiya Juboshakti's claims against media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Editors' Council yesterday strongly protested the "unwanted" allegations against the media made by the National Citizen Party's youth wing Jatiya Juboshakti at a programme on Sunday.

A statement, signed by the council's President Mahfuz Anam and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud, said, "We clearly reject such sweeping remarks. A majority of the print media played an extremely important role during last year's student-public uprising."

On Sunday, speakers at the National Youth Conference 2025, organised by Jatiya Juboshakti to mark International Youth Day, accused the media of "character assassination" of those involved in the July uprising.

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Teachers of MPO-enlisted schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical institutions engage with police during a demonstration in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday. Their demands, among other things, include a 45 percent house rent allowance. Story on Page 3.

End the war or face 'very severe consequences'

Trump tells Putin ahead of Alaska meet

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday threatened Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin with "very severe consequences" if he does not agree to end the war in Ukraine during their upcoming summit in Alaska.

Asked if Russia would face repercussions if Putin does not agree to end the conflict, Trump told reporters, "Yes, they will."

"They will face very serious consequences," he said during remarks at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

The remarks came just hours after Trump took part in a virtual meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other European leaders, which the US president said was "very good."

"I would rate it a 10, you know, very, very friendly," he said.

The comments come as the president prepares to sit down with Putin for the first time in his second term.

Trump said the face-to-face summit, slated to take place in Alaska's most populous city of Anchorage, is likely to result in the establishment of a trilateral summit with Putin, Zelensky and himself.

"There's a very good chance that we're going to have a second meeting, which will be more productive than the first, because the first is, I'm going to find out where we are and what we're doing," he said.

"If the first one goes okay, we'll have a quick second

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