

Kalapara's cries under the guise of development: A humanitarian document

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Introduction :

Once, Kalapara of Patuakhali was known as a serene and green land, where life was deeply intertwined with nature. The endless crop fields and the captivating beauty of Kuakata beach were a reflection of the simple, straightforward lives of its people. Their livelihood depended on farming and fishing. In a word, they lived a simple life in harmony with nature.

However, over time, that picture has changed. Kalapara is no longer just an agricultural and fishing region; it has become known as the country's "Power Hub." This transformation is due to large-scale mega-projects, including the Payra 1320 MW Thermal Power Plant, Payra Seaport, Patuakhali 1320 MW Thermal Power Plant, Ashuganj Power Station Company Limited, and other major facilities. These projects have undoubtedly opened a new door to the country's economic development. But behind this development lies the immense sacrifice and suffering of the local people.

This book is about the untold stories of those whose lives have been crushed by the wheels of progress. It is not just a collection of statistics on land acquisition or details of environmental damage; it is a human document that highlights the emotions, frustrations, and continuous struggles of those affected. In these pages, you will see how one family lost their dream home built with 14 years of savings, how a farmer became jobless after losing his land, and how a helpless family endures endless suffering due to complex legal battles.

Every page of this book reflects the personal experiences of the people of Kalapara, for whom "development" does not mean economic prosperity, but rather landlessness, an uncertain future, and the pain of being denied their rights. It reminds us that true development is not only in building infrastructure but also in ensuring the lives and livelihoods of all people.

We hope this book will not only highlight the reality of Kalapara but also spark a new discussion on protecting the rights of those affected by land acquisition and development projects. It leaves a silent question for all of us: Should development come at the cost of human sacrifice and suffering? Or should development be something that makes everyone's life easier and more beautiful?



Md. Tauhedul Islam Shahazada
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Development vs. Livelihood: The Plight of Displaced Farmers in Kolapara

Kolapara in Patuakhali was once a green hub of life along the country's southern coast. This area, filled with fertile agricultural land, rivers, canals, and boundless natural beauty, was a source of livelihood for thousands of farmers. The lives of its people revolved around the green paddy fields and the hilsa from the rivers. However, with the arrival of one mega project after another, the traditional landscape of Kolapara is undergoing significant changes. An unstoppable tide of 'development' is sweeping away the old way of life, where the dreams and life stories of farmers are being buried under concrete.

Hundreds of farmers, displaced from the fertile land of Kolapara, now spend their days in the agony of eviction. The glittering lights of mega projects overshadow their stories of loss. Once self-reliant farmers, for whom land was life, they now face an uncertain future after losing their livelihoods.

The story of Salam Begum is familiar to many. After leaving her 40-year-old homestead, she now resides in a shelter center. Her 12 kathas of homestead and cropland were acquired for a coal-based power plant. Out of the 17-lac taka received as compensation, 3 lac

went into the pockets of middlemen. Her husband, Abdur Rahman, has left farming and now runs a grocery store, but it doesn't provide the comfort of their previous life.

Champa Begum's suffering is of another kind. She lived happily in a house built on the 45 decimals of land given by her father. But everything changed with the notice for the power plant. She received no compensation for her house, nor was she provided with an alternative shelter. Helpless, she bought a small plot by the roadside and managed to create a makeshift shelter.

There are many like Mujibur Rahman, for whom land was the capital of life. His 21.73 acres of land were acquired for the Payra Port. He used to earn five lac taka annually just from rice cultivation. However, there is now uncertainty regarding compensation due to legal complications related to land ownership.

For Farid Talukdar's family, their 40 acres of triple-crop land is now just a memory. Although the government promised a fair price, their rightful compensation is stuck in a web of middlemen and legal disputes. There is also no news of the promised alternative housing. The family of once-prosperous farmers is now directionless. The wave of development has changed their lives, but this change has brought no happiness - only sighs of loss.

Agriculture and Farmers' Dreams Crushed Under the Wheels of Development

Kolapara, a sub-district under Patuakhali, is a picturesque region in southern Bangladesh. On one side lie vast crop fields, while on the other stretches the immense sea. The green paddy fields, rows of coconut trees, and rich biodiversity of this area are truly captivating. However, recently, this region has been rapidly transforming due to mega projects, which, alongside development, are bringing new challenges to the environment and people's lives.

The soil of Kolapara was once the life of Anisur Rahman. He had clung to the ancestral profession of farming on the fertile land of West Sonatala village. However, his agricultural land was acquired for a power project. All his dreams were shattered. Anisur, once a self-reliant farmer, is now burdened with debt and has left his homestead. He has moved with his wife and daughter to Chattogram in search of a new address, where he struggles to make ends meet working as a sanitary fitter.

Another like him is Khalilur Rahman. He also gave up farming four years ago. In his words, "Since the power plant came, the yield has decreased. The paddy grains are unfilled, and the temperature has risen so much that farming itself has become difficult." Now, he also supports his family by working as a sanitary fitter or a day laborer in Kolapara town.

“ The impact is not limited to the project area alone; it has spread to neighboring villages. Sand extraction using dredgers for the mega projects has caused saline water to seep into the surrounding cultivable land. This is causing extensive damage to crops. Ponds and fish enclosures are being inundated with saline water. ”

According to data from the Agriculture Department, in 2014, the amount of cultivable land in Kolapara was 35,000 hectares. In 10 years, it has reduced to nearly 25,000 hectares. Fertile land that once yielded 100 to 120 maunds of paddy per acre, and watermelon crops worth 5 to 7 lakh taka, is now mostly cultivated only once a year or irregularly. Crops like Aus, Aman, pulses, chili, sunflower, wheat, and corn were commonly grown; now, they are scarce.

Agricultural Officer Mohammad Arafat Hossain states that from 2013 to 2023, paddy production in Kolapara has decreased by 30%. Development is indeed changing the face of Kolapara, but beneath it, the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers and their crop fields are being buried.

Endangered Hilsa: Kolapara's Mega Projects Threaten the Ramnabad and Andharmanik Rivers

Kolapara in Patuakhali was once known as an abundant source of hilsa fish. The Andharmanik, Payra, and Ramnabad rivers were major breeding grounds for hilsa migrating from the Bay of Bengal. The clear water and favorable environment of these rivers allowed hilsa to thrive and move freely. Fishermen used to catch large quantities of hilsa daily, which was their primary source of livelihood. But now, that scene has changed. Due to mega projects, river water is being polluted, hilsa migration is being disrupted, and breeding grounds are under threat.

The decline in hilsa numbers in Kolapara's rivers has plunged local fishermen into deep despair, marking a sorrowful chapter for a region once celebrated as a paradise for hilsa. Environmentalists warn that the area's unique biodiversity, which once hosted dolphins, kingfishers, red crabs, and even wild civets, is now on the verge of destruction.

The words of Mohammad Jalal Hossen, an elderly fisherman from Kolapara, paint a picture of the current crisis. He shares, "We used to catch 8-10 kg of hilsa a day. Now, if we get 2-3 kg, we consider ourselves lucky." He complains that the river water now has a foul odor, and the number of fish has significantly decreased.



According to experts, the root cause of this crisis is the construction of mega projects. Industrial waste and untreated hot water from these projects are being discharged directly into the rivers. This is disrupting the breeding and migration patterns of hilsa. The main entry routes for hilsa from the Bay of Bengal are now almost blocked.

Additionally, increased ship traffic is disturbing the river's natural ecosystem.

Hilsa is an extremely sensitive fish. Even minor pollution significantly impacts its life cycle. Due to the power plants and other infrastructures developed in Kolapara, the size of hilsa is decreasing, and they are choosing alternative paths for spawning. Local fishermen and environmentalists fear that if this pollution continues, the rivers of Kolapara will soon be devoid of hilsa. This would adversely affect the country's overall hilsa production, and the region once known as the capital of hilsa will remain only a story.

Development at the Cost of Agriculture : Kolapara's Lost Lands and Livelihoods

Kolapara was once a vibrant tapestry of green farmlands and winding rivers. In this coastal sub-district, crops were harvested three times a year, and hilsa danced in the river waves. But the successive mega projects, branded under the "Energy Hub" initiative, have completely transformed this landscape. Now, towering structures stand where green paddy fields once flourished, and the mechanical roar of construction drowns out the gentle murmur of rivers.

Behind this development lies the tears and anguish of thousands who have lost their livelihoods. Since the announcement of the Payra Seaport project in 2013, a relentless process of land acquisition began. Without any public consultation, nearly 10,000 acres of land were acquired, 60% which was fertile agricultural land. Additionally, 25% wetlands and 15% homesteads and other infrastructures were also seized.



The most affected are the unions of Lalua and Dhankhali. In Lalua Union, 21 villages are now nearly depopulated.

Many have been left landless and homeless. Those who were solely dependent on agriculture for survival are now directionless without their source of income.

Many farmers have abandoned land they have cultivated for generations; some have given up farming altogether.

The natural environment has not been spared from the onslaught of development. The devastating impact on rivers and ecosystems has disrupted the breeding of hilsa and other fish, endangering the livelihoods of fishing communities. To date, 9,923.28 acres of land have been acquired in Kolapara, with another 300 acres in the process. While this development has brought progress to Kolapara, it has come at the irreplaceable cost of thousands of dreams, livelihoods, and the environment.

The Tears of Farmer Haidar Ali

Once, standing in the vast fields of Dhankhali, Haidar Ali would see ripe paddy swaying in the wind. In the distance, he would watch his cows grazing, and his little grandson playing with his feet dipped in the canal water. That scene is now just a memory. Standing there today, one sees wide roads, bricks, sand, and piles of iron covered in dust. Occasionally, the air trembles with the sound of whistles, and smoke obscures the sky. In a voice filled with resentment, Haidar Ali says, "I had land. I had fields. I had a home. Now, I have nothing."

His two acres of land were acquired for a coal-based power plant. In return, he received a one-time compensation, with which he built a semi-pucca house on the outskirts of the town. But what about his livelihood?

This question is not Haidar Ali's alone. Mahfuzur Rahman, a resident of Champapur in Kolapara, had most of his two and a half acres of land acquired by the Ashuganj Power Generation Company. The compensation money has already been spent on various expenses. Now, he has no means of earning a living. He says, "After everything, only 80 decimals of land remain. Because the land is next to the power plant, the paddy doesn't grow as it used to. The plants are stunted, or the panicles don't emerge properly. I had planted some banana trees; the bunches came out, but there were no bananas."

These are the people who have heard the name of development but have not seen its light. Since the announcement of the power plant in Kolapara, Patuakhali, in 2013, the lives of its people have begun to change.

Haidar Ali asks, "The land was my bank, my means of survival. Where do I go now? One day, my grandson will ask, 'Grandpa, why did you lose the land?' What will I tell him then?"



A Dream of Rehabilitation, A Complex Reality : The Story of Fazlul Rahman's Family

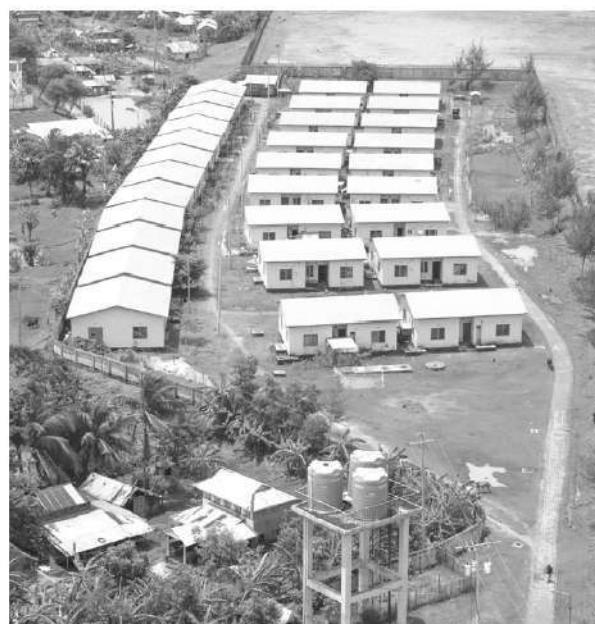
The Kalapara Upazila of Patuakhali, once known for its vast green fields and the mesmerizing beauty of Kuakata beach, is now swept up in a new wave of development. However, this progress hides many stories of deprivation and suffering. The family of Fazlul Rahman Khan from Londa village is a prime example of this tragic reality.

Fazlul Rahman, his two wives, and five children were living a peaceful life in Londa village. But when land was acquired for the Patuakhali 1320 MW Thermal Power Plant in the villages of Nishanbaria, Dhankhali, and Londa, Fazlul Rahman lost his two homesteads and several acres of agricultural land. The government promised that displaced families would be rehabilitated, and accordingly, two houses were allocated to Fazlul's two wives in the rehabilitation projects, Maya Neer and Ananda Palli.

However, the gap between dream and reality was immense. On the day of the key handover, Fazlul's third wife, Mahmuda, was informed that her allocated house had been cancelled. It was later revealed that due to similar complications, about fifty other families, not just Fazlul's, were also denied their promised homes. Fazlul's son, Shaheen Khan, explained that his two mothers were supposed to receive two separate houses because they lived in two different homesteads owned by his father. But since their father's name was the same on their national ID cards, only one house was allocated. They have been visiting the District Commissioner's office for over a year, but without any resolution.

The stories of other affected families are equally painful. Rakib Hawlader's family from Londa village, who had lived on government-owned khas land for 50 years, saw their rehabilitation home given to a local influential person. Similarly, Abbas Sarder's father bought land 20 years ago and built a homestead, but because another person's name appeared on the land survey (VS porcha), they were denied both compensation and a rehabilitation house.

While these rehabilitation projects promised a new life for the people of Kalapara, bureaucratic complexities, flawed land acquisition processes, and the power of local influencers have overshadowed that promise. Countless families like Fazlul Rahman's now face an uncertain future, where the light of development only pushes their lives further into darkness. Their stories reveal a different side of Kalapara's development, where the cries of the deprived can still be heard.



Not Development, But a Destructive Trap

Patuakhali's Kalapara, once known as a peaceful green landscape, is now recognized as the country's "power hub." On one side, there's the massive construction of mega-projects, and on the other, the simple lives of people lost in the shadow of this development. The traditional way of life, built around vast green fields and rivers full of fish, now faces a new reality where only a handful of middlemen profit from this progress.

Jalal Hawlader from Chandupara village had his ancestral home and farmland acquired for the Payra Port project. Despite losing his family's last bit of security, Jalal held onto the hope that the compensation money would allow him to start a new life. He didn't know how difficult it would be to get that money. His wife, Monira Begum, says, "We didn't know how to get the compensation money or which office to go to." It was at this moment of vulnerability that two young men from a nearby village approached them, introducing themselves as "helpers."

The innocent couple trusted them and signed blank stamped paper. Days, months, and years passed, but they never saw the money. Frustrated, their elder son, Enamul Haque, contacted the acquisition department at the Patuakhali DC office and learned that a check was ready for them. When the two young men found out, they demanded 1.5 lakh Taka from Enamul. When he refused to pay, they beat him and threatened to kill him. Jalal Hawlader's family then lived in fear. Left with no choice, they appealed to the administration for help.

Thanks to the administration's swift action, two middlemen named Shahadat Talukdar and Mostafizur Rahman were arrested. However, Jalal Hawlader's family still lives in terror. "We're scared of what they'll do to us when they get out of jail," says Monira Begum.

This development in Kalapara feels like a destructive trap, where landless and marginalized people are deprived of their rightful claims. Their lives have been held hostage by a syndicate of middlemen. Jalal's story is not just an isolated incident; it's a tragic reflection of thousands of affected families in Kalapara. These people, who had hoped for development, are now on the verge of losing their last refuge.



The Tragic Tale of Development : 30 Families Trapped Between Two Embankments

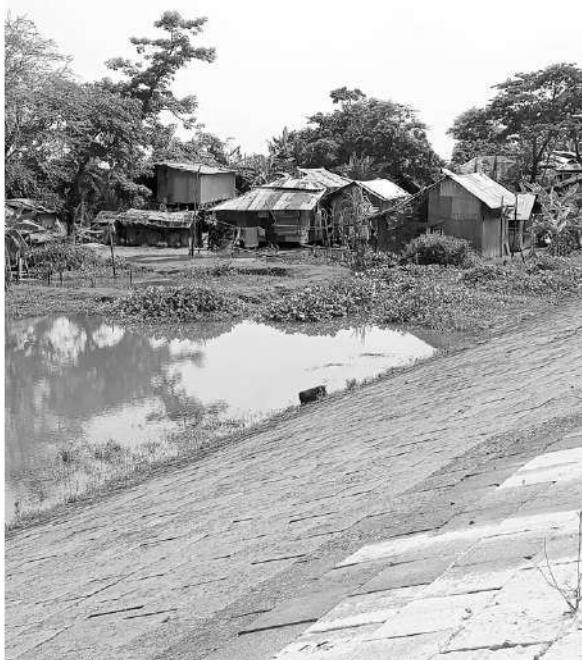
Once known as a serene, green land, Patuakhali's Kalapara Upazila is now losing its identity to the rush of development. This region, where people's lives were once intertwined with nature—their livelihoods tied to the rivers and farmlands—is now facing a harsh and difficult new reality. This grim truth is starkly visible in the lives of 30 families from Chaltabunia village, who are trapped between two embankments near the Ashuganj Power Plant.

The Patuakhali 1,320 MW Super Thermal Power Plant, also known as the Ashuganj Power Plant, built a massive ring embankment and boundary wall for its construction. Just beyond it lies the main embankment of the Water Development Board. Squeezed between these two embankments, on a low-lying strip of land measuring a hundred to one hundred and fifty feet, 30 families from Chaltabunia live a miserable existence. They lost their homes but received no rehabilitation.

Ruhul Amin Sikdar, whose land was also acquired for the plant, shared their painful story. He explained that in 2023, 88 families from the villages of Debpur and Chaltabunia were evicted with only a 15-day notice. Among them, these 30 families have not even received compensation for their homes. For people like Firoza Begum, life is a constant battle with water. "For six to seven months of the year, the floor of my house is submerged in waist-deep water," she said, painting a horrifying picture. They are forced to build makeshift lofts inside their huts to survive.

Rashid Sikdar, another affected resident, said, "We were promised 5,000 Taka per month for house rent until we were rehabilitated, but we haven't received a single penny in three and a half years." Their farmlands have turned into a barren desert, forcing them to switch to fishing, but there are hardly any fish left in the river. The hopelessness of these jobless people is clear in their eyes.

Rashida Begum, who was born by the river, said, "Fear has settled in our hearts, wondering when a storm or flood will sweep our homes away." Rina Begum spoke of the lack of clean water, sanitation, and electricity, forcing them to spend nights in darkness. These 30 families are a tragic byproduct of development. Their lives are a symbol of uncertainty, where both nature and development have become their adversaries.



The Cry of Londa Village : A Story of Life Without Embankments

The beauty of Kalapara in Patuakhali captivates everyone; it also hides the silent tears of some people. On a piece of land rising of the banks of the Tiakhali River, about 250 families in the village of west Londa have been struggling against the odds for four decades. Their lives are like raft swaying with the tides.

Every morning, water enters their kitchen stoves, and the path to school is submerged. The village is like a water-locked settlement. Their only hope is a durable embankment, without which hundreds of acres of fertile three-crop land fail to yield even one harvest. Farmer Mosharraf Hawladar says, "We sink and float with the tides." These words seem to echo the heartfelt sentiments of everyone in the village.

Recently, the mother of Shafiqur Rahman, a resident of the village, passed away. At that time, the entire village was waterlogged. Not a single patch of high ground could be found for the burial and funeral prayer. They were forced to carry her on a raft made of banana plants for about a kilometer to hold the funeral prayer. She was then buried at a relative's house two kilometers away. This incident highlights the tragic reality of their lives.

For everyone in Paschim Londa, from schoolchildren to pregnant women, this life without an embankment is a curse. Mariam Jahan Mouri says, "During the tides of new and full moons, everything gets submerged. At that time, children can't go to school, water gets into our stoves, and taking the sick to the hospital becomes nearly impossible." Volunteer Halima Ayesha's research indicates that the decline in agricultural production, transportation issues, children dropping out of school, and lack of healthcare are all rooted in one core problem: the absence of a sustainable embankment.

Freedom fighter Aminul Islam Fokulaments, "About 200 acres of our land remain submerged. Even though it is three-crop land, we cannot produce even one harvest." For years, they have been appealing to the government, but their pleas seem to be suppressed for some unknown reason. The lives of the people of Paschim Londa are a never-ending battle, where their only hope is for the government to take notice. Will these tears ever cease? Or will the cries of Londa Village remain hidden beneath the shining light of development?



Adrift in the Current of Life: The Uncertain Story of Reshma Begum

The 1320 MW Patuakhali Thermal Power Plant may generate thousands of megawatts of electricity, but it has stolen the lives of hundreds of people like Reshma Begum. A life that was intertwined with the soil, built on dreams along the riverbank, now floats adrift in a current of uncertainty. The 1320 MW Patuakhali Thermal Power Plant may generate thousands of megawatts of electricity, but it has stolen the lives of hundreds of people like Reshma Begum. A life that was intertwined with the soil, built on dreams along the riverbank, now floats adrift in a current of uncertainty.

Reshma Begum, age 33, husband: Mohammad Amin Mollah, village: Pashchim Londa, Dhankhali Union, Kolapara Upazila, Patuakhali District. She had no homestead of her own and had built her small family life in her father's house. Her husband was a day labourer, and she herself kept the household afloat by farming, cultivating vegetables, and raising ducks and chickens. Life was managed with the help of her father and brothers, but the 'development' of the power plant snatched away that stability.



Only one resettlement house was provided for their three families, and it was registered solely in Reshma's father's name. Consequently, the other two families were evicted with a small amount of money. Now, they struggle to survive on the riverbank, battling tides and erosion. River erosion and tidal floods are their constant companions. A life that was once deeply rooted in the land now searches for temporary shelter on the river's edge.

Reshma Begum's story is not hers alone. It is the story of hundreds of people whose lives have been crushed under the wheels of development. Their cries, their lost dreams, may never see the light of day, but their struggle, their relentless battle for survival, reveals a tragic reality.

They were told they would be paid three times the market value for their land and homes, that they would get jobs according to their qualifications, and that training would be arranged. But all those promises remained mere words. Reshma Begum's husband, a construction worker, did not get a job at the power plant. With the loss of their farmland, Reshma also lost her means of farming. With their sources of income severed, extreme poverty has descended upon their lives. 99

The Untold Story of Hasan: The Cries Hidden Behind Development

The Kalapara Upazila in Patuakhali district was once known as a peaceful green kingdom. Its main features are vast crop fields and the beautiful Kuakata sea beach. The local way of life is deeply connected to nature, with the river and farming being the main sources of livelihood.

Hasan, a fisherman living in Zia Colony by the Andharmanik River, and his family also lived off nature's grace. His life with his father Jasim Uddin, mother Amena Begum, wife, and child was beautiful, fishing in the Ramnabad Channel. The sight of his nets full of hilsha, poa, and coral fish was a symbol of his family's happiness and prosperity. But a dark shadow fell over this happy life in 2022 when the Payra Thermal Power Plant started operating on the banks of the Ramnabad River.

After the power plant opened, Hasan's life began to change. The number of fish in the river started to decrease. A year passed, and his nets were no longer catching as many fish as before. Within two years, he was about 2.5 lakh Taka in debt from buying a boat and nets, and from loans from money lenders. Overwhelmed by debt, Hasan was eventually forced to leave his village out of shame. His mother, Amena Begum, still remembers the night Hasan left without telling anyone. A few days later, his wife and child also moved to Dhaka, living in hiding. "My son hasn't been home for two years," Amena Begum says, her voice filled with a mother's silent grief.

Local fisherman Zakir Hossain Hawlader explains that since the Payra power plant began its operations, the fish population in the Andharmanik River has alarmingly declined. The main reason is that the treated and untreated waste and hot water from the power plant are polluting the river.

This is severely disrupting the fish breeding process and causing a decline in their population.

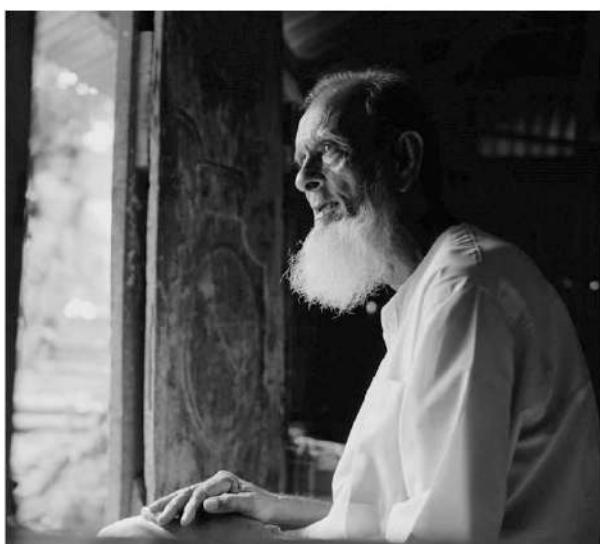
Hasan's family is a symbol. This is not just one family's story but the story of hundreds of families in Kalapara whose traditional way of life has been lost due to development, leaving them in debt. This wave of development has brought them sadness and uncertainty instead of prosperity.

From Landlord to Landless: The Plight of Kalam Master

Once a peaceful rural area known for its rivers and agriculture, Kalapara in Patuakhali has been transformed into a "power hub" by modern development. But beneath this progress lies the silent suffering of many, including Kalam Master.

Kalam Master used to be a very wealthy man in the area. He owned 22 acres of land, including a 5-acre homestead filled with fruit trees and forests. His ponds were full of fish, and his barns were full of cows—symbols of his prosperity. However, his life changed completely when his land was acquired for the Payra 1320 MW Thermal Power Plant. Today, a huge chimney of the power plant stands where his family pond used to be, and a generator room now sits on his homestead.

Now, he is a man with nothing. He lives with his family in a small hut on the slope of a water embankment. The phrase "from landlord to landless" perfectly describes his tragic situation. Both of his sons are unemployed, his wife is ill, and supporting his family has become incredibly difficult.



In 2017, when his land was acquired, Kalam Master and 130 other families were promised compensation. Although they received some money, they have not yet been paid the fair value of their land. They were also promised a house on a 7% share of land in a rehabilitation project called "Swapner Thikana" (Address of Dreams), but that dream remains unfulfilled. No one knows when they will get their houses.

The struggles of Kalam Master and many others are often due to legal issues related to inheritance. According to Oliur Rahman from Uttar Lalua village, the land acquisition process led to many lawsuits over land ownership and inheritance. As a result, many families, like Kalam Master's, have yet to receive their compensation. Local volunteers, such as Halima Ayesha, confirm that these legal complexities have left the affected families in a state of uncertainty.

The story of Kalam Master is not just a personal tragedy but a representation of thousands of people who have been made landless in the name of development. Like him, many families have become victims of progress, leaving their prosperous past behind for a very uncertain future.

Minara Begum's Life in the Web of Uncertainty

Patuakhali's Kalapara, once known for its vast greenery and the beautiful Kuakata beach, has now transformed into a major economic hub for the country. However, this progress has left some people in a state of great uncertainty, and Minara Begum's story is a prime example.

Minara Begum, a 55-year-old woman, lives in a small hut in Zia Colony, located on the banks of the Andharmanik River in Itbaria village. She supports herself by running a small shop. Having lived there for over two decades, this once-shelterless woman has built a loving home for her children and herself.

Minara explains that she built her home on land provided by the Prime Minister. She spent about six lakh taka to build two semi-concrete rooms. However, her dream home is now at risk of being demolished to make way for the construction of an alternative road for the Payra Port. She received an eviction notice nearly a year ago, but she and 136 other families are still living on the embankment, facing an uncertain future. They have been promised rehabilitation, but no compensation.

Minara says, "We are poor people; where will we get the money to build a new house?" The land offered to her is a piece of a river char (a type of sandbank or island) that is submerged for six months of the year, with water levels reaching her waist during high tide. The area lacks access to clean water and electricity, and is at high risk of being washed away during storms.



The people in this colony, like Minara, earn their living through daily wage labor and fishing. But due to the mega-projects, farmland has decreased, and the number of fish in the river has also gone down. With their income reduced, many families are trapped in a cycle of debt. Minara's story is not just about one family's struggles; it is a painful reflection of how development often comes at the cost of the landless and marginalized. Their sacrifices are building the country's economic foundation, while their own futures become more and more uncertain.

Caught in the Broker's Web : The Plight of the Homeless

Kalapara, Patuakhali, once known for its natural beauty and simple way of life, now tells a different story of development. Thousands of homes and lands are being acquired for mega-projects, but behind this progress lies the silent suffering of displaced people and the inhumane exploitation by brokers.

Salma Begum from Dhankhali Union had a simple, peaceful life. Her husband worked in a garment factory in Dhaka, and they lived contentedly in their ancestral home for 40 years. However, their 12-katha homestead and farmland were acquired for a coal power plant. To get her compensation of 1.7 million taka, she was forced to pay 300,000 taka to a local broker, Azizur Rahman. Having lost everything, her family now lives in a rehabilitation center.

Another victim, Abul Bashar, shares a similar fate. The value of his house was assessed at only 6 Lac taka, while its actual cost was 1.6 million. To collect a total compensation of 1.8 million taka for his house and farmland, he had to pay 5.5 Lac taka to a broker named Ataullah. Everything he had built with a lifetime of hard work was devalued in an instant.

In Kalapara's Lalua Union, many families, including Mosaref Hawlader, are trapped in legal disputes related to land acquisition for the Payra sea port. Having lost their ancestral homes, they now live in makeshift huts on the embankment. They allege that brokers have filed false cases to block their compensation money.

Champa Begum's situation is no different. She and her husband, who works in a garment factory in Narayanganj, built a home on land gifted by her father. This 45-decimal plot was acquired for the Payra sea port. Although she received 600,000 taka for her trees and pond, she was not given a place in any government shelter. She was forced to buy a small piece of land by the roadside to build a new home.

These are not isolated incidents but a harsh reality of Kalapara's development. Countless families are being denied their rightful compensation due to fraudulent cases, false accusations, and bureaucratic red tape orchestrated by broker rings. In this town, illuminated by the light of development, the cries of the homeless stand as a quiet testament to its darker side.



Payra Power Plant: Land Disputes and Life's Hardships



Due to the construction project of the 1320 MW Payra Thermal Power Plant, Md. Aliur Rahman (Nipul), a 50-year-old resident of Kolapara Upazila in Patuakhali, and many other affected families like his are now living in inhumane conditions. Approximately 10 acres of agricultural land, which they had been cultivating for nearly 60 years and was their sole means of livelihood, has been acquired. However, since the land acquisition, legal complications and lawsuits began, which remain unresolved to this day.

In 2014, the government initiated the land acquisition process for the construction of the Payra Thermal Power Plant. Shortly after the issuance of the Section 7 notice, land grabbers filed lawsuits against Aliur Rahman's land using forged documents. Fighting these legal battles forced him to quit his job and return to the village. After a prolonged legal fight lasting nine years, he filed counter-lawsuits against the land grabbers and obtained affidavits from them.

However, due to the long-drawn legal proceedings, he has not received the compensation for his land. As land compensation, he received only 5,100 taka per decimal, which is insufficient to buy land elsewhere. As a result, he has become unemployed and is unable to support his family members or bear the educational expenses of his children.

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Waliur Rahman mentioned that during the land acquisition, they were promised jobs, but those promises were not fulfilled. Consequently, many farmers in the area lost their land and became unemployed.

This has led to an increase in drug trade and other illegal activities in the community.

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Currently, owners of nearly 250 acres of land have still not received compensation. Aliur Rahman and many other affected people are living in hope, waiting for the day when this struggle will end and they will receive their due compensation. Their fight is not just for the monetary value of the land, but for their dignity and right to survival.

The Crumbling Wall of a Dream

Papri Begum, husband: Salam Howlader, village: Panchjuniya, union: Dhankhali, upazila: Kolapara, district: Patuakhali. The story of Papri Begum's life is like an unfinished poem, where the lines of happiness were suddenly erased. It was a life of hard work that began in 1998, centered around one dream: a permanent home of their own. Through the relentless toil of the husband and wife-working as garment workers and construction laborers in Dhaka-they turned that dream into reality. Returning to the village in 2002, they built a semi-pucca tin-shed house on 16 decimals of land, complete with a small pond and a garden full of greenery. This house was not just a shelter; it was the fruit of 14 years of dreams, sweat, and love. It was where their two daughters got married, and where countless joyful moments were lived.

Today, that same Papri Begum lives in a makeshift shack on someone else's land, where water rises during the monsoons, and she has to fetch water from neighboring houses to cook. Yet, they had been promised rehabilitation and employment.

Even more distressing is that they have still not received the compensation for their land. Legal complexities and the dominance of middlemen have made their lives even more unbearable. When there is no roof over their heads, dreaming of the future becomes a luxury. Papri Begum's story is not hers alone; it is the story of hundreds of people who have been crushed under the wheels of development-now homeless, embarking on a journey of uncertain life.



But the wall of that dream came crashing down in an instant. During land acquisition for the Ashuganj Power Station Company, bulldozers reduced their carefully built home to dust in moments. In Papri Begum's words, "They didn't even give us time to process the demolition. Eight to ten excavators destroyed our home in an instant." For a house built at a cost of over 12 lac taka, they received only 12 lac 69 thousand taka as compensation-and that too after enduring bribes and endless hassles.

Hawa Begum's Struggle: A Life Sacrificed for Development

Hawa Begum-a name that signifies a new beginning in life-now finds herself frozen in the face of a harsh reality. Once a development worker who strived to improve the lives of others, she has now become a victim of development herself, having lost everything she built with her own hands. Professionally, she is now unemployed, as development organizations halted their operations in the area due to the acquisition process.

A resident of Pashurbunia village in Kolapara Upazila, Patuakhali, Hawa Begum works as a group leader for the Ramnabad Grassroots Land Rights Movement, yet she must fight for her own rights. Her inherited 60 decimals of land have been affected by three different projects: the Payra First Terminal, the Payra Terminal Link Road, and, most recently, the Sher-e-Bangla Naval Base Expansion Project. This last project has led to the acquisition of her homestead, pond, and farmland-the most devastating blow of her life.

Unfortunately, the misfortune does not end there. Due to legal complexities over land ownership, she has not received any compensation money to date. One neighbor has filed a lawsuit claiming ownership of the land based on an old deed. Meanwhile, a dispute over property distribution among her uncles and cousins has left her own land entangled in litigation. These legal battles have cast her life into a future of uncertainty.

Hawa Begum's story is not just one family's plight-it is the story of hundreds of people who are losing their lives, livelihoods, and dreams in the name of development. They have not yet been evicted, but their lives now feel as shaky as a temporary shack.



At any moment, it could be swept away by a tide of sand. There is no hope for rehabilitation, as she is not eligible for resettlement because she is an agricultural landowner. Moreover, there is no resettlement plan for those displaced by the naval base expansion.

The core message of this story is that development does not benefit everyone equally. People like Hawa Begum, who once stood on their own feet, now wander from door to door seeking justice and rights, searching for their last hope in the corridors of the courts. Their fight is not just for compensation-it is for dignity, livelihood, and the right to survive.

From Farmer to Small Trader: The Helpless Story of Ibrahim Sikdar

Md. Ibrahim Sikdar, once a farmer, is now a small trader. The 1320 MW coal-based Patuakhali Thermal Power Plant (RPL) has completely altered his life. The land his father farmed to sustain the family, the home where their family found peace and happiness-all of this has now been seized through acquisition.

Ibrahim Sikdar's family made their living from farming, fish farming, and fishing. Though they did not own land, they had built a small homestead on their father's 40 decimals of land. But even this modest shelter has been taken away. During the land acquisition process, Ibrahim Sikdar's house was not listed in the records. Still, he did not lose hope. He appealed to the District Administrator, trying to save his home. But when no response came, and sand filling began, he fought for 17 days-building barriers around his house and draining water from the sand-filled area to protect his home.

In the end, however, he was forced to leave. Police arrived, threatening him with legal action, and evicted him from his home.

“Extreme uncertainty descended upon Ibrahim Sikdar's life. While his father received a resettlement house, Ibrahim Sikdar and his family were left with no rehabilitation-simply because the land was registered in his father's name. As a result, having lost both their home and their livelihood, they are now helpless.”



In the name of compensation, they received only a small amount for the trees on the land-a pittance compared to the life they have lost. Land with a market value of 10,000 taka per decimal was acquired at a rate of only 4,100 taka.

Ibrahim Sikdar's story is not just one of a family's displacement-it is a tragic illustration of how development can strip people of their lives, livelihoods, and rights. Even today, he continues to work as the group leader of the Ramnabad Grassroots Land Rights Movement, participating in various protests; yet, his own problems remain unresolved. Like him, thousands of families have become victims of so-called development, left only wishing for a small shelter and the basic right to survive.

Lives Buried Under Development: The Plight of Kolapara's Landless

In Itbaria village of Tiyakhali Union in Kolapara, on the slope of an embankment along the Andharmanik River, the lives of 136 landless families read like a tragic tale. Having lost everything to river erosion and natural disasters, the shelter provided by the government in 2004 was their last hope. They dreamed of surviving by fishing and day labor. But since the wave of development arrived in Kolapara, endless misery has descended upon their lives.

No government support has reached them; instead, their days are filled with threats and insecurity. Since receiving eviction notices in 2023, their nights have been sleepless. They are constantly threatened that if they do not leave voluntarily, their homes will be forcibly demolished.

Selina Begum has lived here for the past 18 years. The roof and walls of her tin-shed house are rusted, yet this is her final refuge. She is exhausted from supporting her ill husband and nine family members. The fear of eviction has stolen the last remnants of peace from their lives.

The situation is no different for Amena Begum and Jasim Uddin. Their seven-member family survives by fishing in the river and working at brick kilns. The prospect of losing their only shelter has left them helpless.

Locals report that these 136 families are being threatened with eviction to make way for an alternative road for the Payra Port. Despite repeated protests, nothing has changed. Ibrahim Mia laments, "It's as if we are not citizens of this country. After Cyclone Remal, everyone received relief except us." He adds that while the Payra Port Authority acquired land elsewhere and provided permanent housing for rehabilitation, they are being forced to leave empty-handed.

Another resident, Forkan Howladar, says, "We already battle cyclones, tidal surges, and floodwaters every day to survive. If we lose our last shelter, our survival will become even more uncertain. I don't know where we will go or what we will do."

For nearly 500 members of these helpless families, there is no alternative arrangement. The wheel of development is turning rapidly, but beneath it, the dreams and last means of survival of these landless people are being crushed.



Harassed in a Web of Lawsuits: The Story of Kolapara's Displaced People

Kolapara in Patuakhali, once vibrant with green crop fields and the murmuring sounds of rivers, is now buried under the weight of mega projects. Behind this development lies the silent suffering of hundreds of people. Many families have lost their ancestral homes and agricultural land—their only means of livelihood—due to land acquisition for the Payra Seaport. But their sorrow does not end here; instead, a new ordeal has emerged: harassment through a web of lawsuits.

The story of 214 families in Lalua Union is a glaring example. After the acquisition, their rightful compensation money is stuck due to false lawsuits filed by middlemen. People like Chan Mia, Akbar Fakir, Babul Mia, Mosharraf Howladar, and Rimon Howladar have lost everything and now live in miserable conditions in makeshift huts outside the embankments. Their only complaint is that brokers have trapped their due compensation through fake legal cases.

People like Mujibur Rahman have lost the dreams of a lifetime. The owner of 21.73 acres of triple-crop land, Mujibur Rahman gave everything for the Payra Port. His annual income from that land was in the millions. Yet, his compensation is also frozen, as a Rohingya family has filed a lawsuit claiming inheritance rights to his land.

Farid Talukdar and his family owned 40 acres of land, which yielded substantial annual income as triple-crop farmland. Although the government promised compensation at one and a half times the market value, they have not received the money due to the manipulation by brokers and ongoing lawsuits. The promise of alternative housing also remains unfulfilled. Their lives are now uncertain.

While development in Kolapara has been a blessing for many, for these people, it has become a sign of despair.

