

St Martin's Island under threat

A Monitor Report

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Cox's Bazar : Pollution of the marine environment in and around Saint Martin's Island in Cox's Bazar, the only coral-reef island of Bangladesh and an Ecologically Critical Area, continues unabated as the government has failed to put in place an appropriate management mechanism for the protection of the island.

Green activists and researchers said that though the biodiversity-rich island in the Bay of Bengal was declared an Ecologically Critical Area in 1999, the authorities were yet to take any pragmatic step for its management, conservation and restoration of the island.

An average of over 4,000 tourists stay overnight in the 8-square kilometer island daily along with its 10,000 permanent residents, greens pointed out, as the government could not implement its plan to keep the tourist number within 1,250 each day in the once eye-catching island that is home to several species of globally threatened marine turtles and birds.

Researchers said that the eco-system and the biodiversity of the vulnerable island and its marine environment faced a serious threat due to the construction of unplanned structures there demolishing habitats of marine lives.

According to locals, the silent island, locally known as Narikel Jinjira, was declared an ECA when it started seeing sudden spikes in the number of tourists as the site became popular after its publicity in films and other media in the 90s.

To cater to the increasing number of tourists nearly 150 multi-storied resorts,

including Atlantic Resort, Blue Marine Resorts, Abakash, Fantasy Hotel and Resort, and CTB Resort with five floors were built after 2000 in violation of the restrictions but the Department of Environment did not take any effective step against such violation.

Chairman of Saint Martin's Island union parishad Nur Ahmed said that except 18 small structures all the residential hotels were built on the island by outsiders violating the relevant rules and laws.

'When I opposed any illegal construction, high officials and leaders created pressure,' he said.

'The government has now taken a hard line for punishing the polluters,' Md Humayun Kabir, additional director general of the Environment Department said and added that the DoE was conducting a massive awareness programme to this end.

Mamunur Rashid, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar said essential and effective steps will be taken to save this one and only coral island of Bangladesh as early as possible.