

Nature reigns supreme in Banskhali Eco-Park

BSS, Dhaka

Banskhali Eco-Park, where nature reigns supreme, is located in the western edge of the Chunar Wildlife Sanctuary and 60 kilometres south of Chittagong Metropolitan City.

Nature manifests here in almost all its forms -- hills, lake, wildlife sanctuary, reserve forest and valleys. Besides, the Department of Forest has created a wide variety of recreational facilities where the visitors can take boat rides in lake, hike along the trails or climb to the top of the observation towers or hills.

Banskhali upazila headquarters is only four kilometres away from the Eco-Park. The whole region enjoys pleasant climate throughout the year. Chunar Wildlife Sanctuary is nearby and elephants come down from the sanctuary during the rainy season.

The Banskhali Eco-Park is a cluster of hills, which are being planted with trees of timber value as well as exotic ornamental and medicinal plants.

Created in a picturesque hilly area of about 1,200 hectares, the Banskhali Eco-Park started under

a project in 2003 in the once ever-green forest which was dominated by sun grass and other planted species.

The Bay of Bengal is only two kilometres away from Banskhali Eco-Park and from the observation towers and hill tops one can take a glimpse of the blue expanse of the sea.

The vast lake, which is about five kilometres long, enhances beauty of the whole area. It was created by connecting two separate water bodies 'Daner Chhara' and 'Bamer Chhara' digging a canal through the hills.

Local Government Engineering Department has constructed two small irrigation barrages with financial supports from IFAD and World Bank in 1993 and 1999 for facilitating irrigation to nearby Jaladi, Shilkup and Chhambal areas, and thus the lake is created.

Visitors can enjoy the beauty of almost the total Eco-Park area, the eye soothing greenery and newly created forests riding mechanised boats, speed boats and pedal boats provided by the park management.

Lazily plying on the boat one can easily realise that though time seems to stand still here, people in the surrounding areas are at peace with their environment.

Once this place was a natural forest rich in bio-diversity, but over the years due to indiscriminate felling of trees and poaching of wild animals, the hills of the reserve forest under Jaladi beat of Chunar Forest Range became barren.

The forest once full of valuable trees like garjan, chapalish, teak, baulim and animals like elephant, tiger, deer, fox, wild boar and bear now became a place free of animals and hillocks without tree or bush.

For conserving bio-diversity, developing eco-tourism and entertainment and recreational facilities, a three-year project was taken in 2003-2004 fiscal. A 400-foot long hanging bridge, which is the longest such bridge in the country, was constructed to connect two hills which has added extra beauty to the Eco-Park.

Up to the 2005-2006 fiscal, the government has spent about Tk 6.5 crore to develop infrastructure facilities in the Banskhali Eco-Park. Two picnic sheds, two rest houses, two hilltop observation towers, a 100 feet long suspension bridge on the canal connecting Daner Chhara and Bamer Chhara have been constructed besides creation of some other facilities.

For enjoying boat ride two engine boats, four pedal boats, two

speed boats and two swan boats were collected which are being rented out to the tourists on hour basis.

Initiative has also been taken for setting up a reproduction centre of the rare species of local animals like sambar, maya harin, leopard and a few birds, which are on the verge of extinction.

In a survey, conducted in 1997, there were 45 species of mammals, 85 species of birds, 25 species of reptiles and seven species of amphibians in the area where the Eco-Park has created. But encroachment and poaching have left the area with fewer numbers of animals.

Earlier, there were 310 species of trees in the area, but many of the plant species are not available now.

The facilities already created in the Banskhali Eco-Park are no doubt could attract tourists. But lack of publicity about the facilities, narrow road, unavailability of secure accommodation and hygienic food and drink are the main hindrances to enjoy the natural beauty of the Eco-Park for the tourists.



President Iajuddin Ahmed exchanges greetings with Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri at a reception for members of the Hindu Community on the occasion of Durga Puja at Bangabhaban in the city yesterday.

President hosts reception for Hindus

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed and his wife Prof Dr Anwara Begum hosted a reception for the members of the Hindu community at Bangabhaban yesterday on the occasion Durga Puja.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharef Hossain Shahjahan, State Minister for Water Resources Adv Goutam Chakraverty, Religious Affairs Secretary Muhammad Ataur Rahman, Military Secretary to the President Maj Gen M Aminul Karim, Secretary to the President Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury, Press Secretary to the president M Mukhlesur Rahman Chowdhury and senior officials of other ministries were present.

Judges, political and religious leaders, diplomats, including Indian High Commissioner and charge d'affaires of Nepal in Bangladesh, professors of universities and medical colleges, representatives of international organisations, freedom fighters, recipients of national awards, defence attaches of different foreign missions in Bangladesh, high officials, lawyers, doctors, journalists, artists, leaders and members of the Hindu Religious Welfare Trust, businessmen and other professionals were also present.

The President and his wife welcomed the guests and exchanged pleasantries and wished them a happy and prosperous future.

Obituary

BSS, Dhaka

Muhammad Aulad Hossain, father of BS Jubayer, assistant coach of Bangladesh National Football Team, passed away due to old age complications at his Jamtala residence in Narayanganj on Sunday night at the age of 78.

Aulad was also a footballer, who played in the Dhaka 1st Division Football League in the 60s and 70s with Jimkhana, Wari and Dhaka Wanderers Clubs.

Ex-footballers club Sonali Oit expressed deep shock at the death of Aulad Hossain and conveyed deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Maulana Abdul Khaleque

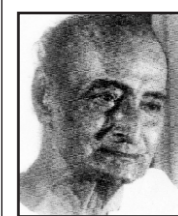
UNB, Dhaka

Maulana Abdul Khaleque, nephew of Hazrat Maulana Oli Ahmed Nizamपुरi (R), passed away at his residence at Mandarbaria village in Mirsarai, Chittagong, on Sunday at the age of 65.

He had long been suffering from diabetes and kidney problems.

Maulana Khaleque left behind his wife, four sons, five daughters and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death. He was buried at his family graveyard yesterday.

Death anniversary



Today is the 5th death anniversary of Barin Majumdar, a renowned classical vocalist, says a press release.

Born on February 14, 1919 in Pabna, he established the College of Music, the first music college in the country.

He received many awards and accolades, including Ekushey and Independence awards, for his contribution to music.

He died in the Holy family Hospital after a prolonged illness in 2001.



Discussion Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) will hold a discussion on the occasion of the Holy Ramadan. Venue: Tota Mian Community Centre, Nakhal Pata. Time: 4:30pm.

Discussion Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) organises a discussion on 'The role of US in Bangladesh Development'. Venue: BCIC Bhaban. Time: 12:00noon.

Roundtable The International Association of Lions Clubs organises a roundtable on 'Responsible citizens-Prosperous country'. Venue: Hotel Purbani. Time: 3:00pm.

Discussion Bangladesh Tariqat Foundation organises a discussion to mark the first founding anniversary of the party. Venue: Institution of Engineers. Time: 3:00pm.

Appeal for help

BSS, Dhaka

Mojibur Rahman, an employee of a foreign mission, has sought financial assistance from generous people for the treatment for his liver ailment.

Doctors have advised him to undergo liver transplantation, which involves Tk 35 lakh.

But it is quite impossible for him, the only earning member of his family, to afford such an expensive treatment.

So, he has appealed to all to extend a helping hand to save his life.

Contributions can be sent to MSA Account No. 8790, Islami Bank, Gulshan Branch, Dhaka, or Mohammad Mojibur Rahman, Current Account No.-01280888901, Standard Chartered Bank, Dhaka. Interested persons can also contact him over phone -- 0189113398 and 8835255.

President, PM greet S Korean counterparts

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday greeted their South Korean counterparts on the occasion of National Day of that country to be observed today.

In a message to Roh Moo-Hyun, the President said he believed that the existing bonds of friendship between the two countries would further strengthen in the years ahead.

Khaleda Zia, in a separate message to South Korean Prime Minister Han Myung-Sook, said, "Bangladesh and the Republic of Korea share close and cooperative relations that have matured and flourished over the centuries through historical interactions between the two countries".

Both the President and Prime Minister wished good health, long life and happiness for their counterparts and also the continued peace and progress and prosperity for the people of South Korea.

Urs Mubarak

A daylong Urs Mubarak of Alhaj Hazrat Mazhar-e-Asare Karim Maulana Shah Sufi Sayed Abdur Rahim Shaheed (R) will be held at 'Mia Saheber Maidan' Khankah Sharif at Laxmibazar in the city today, says a press release.

The programmes will begin after Fajr prayers. A milad and doa mahfil will be held after Asr prayers.

Alhaj Shah Sufi Sayed Hamidullah will conduct the Akheri Munajat while Alhaj Dr Sayed Wali Ullah will preside.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka will be present as the chief guest.



Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at a few places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Sylhet, Chittagong, Khulna and Barisal divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Country's highest temperature 35.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Mongla and lowest 23.2 degree Celsius at Srimogol.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:44pm today and rises at 5:51am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns today were:

Table with 5 columns: City/Town, Max, Min, Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.

Ansars selling essentials at fair price

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ansars and Village Defence Party (VDP) have opened 30 outlets in different areas of the city to sell essential commodities at fair prices.

The initiative titled 'Operation Fair price-2006' is aimed at controlling the prices of essentials during the month of Ramadan.

Beef, chilli, onion, potato, gram, sugar, lentil, aubergine and cucumber are available in these outlets, which will remain open until Ramadan 28.

Beef is selling at Tk 135 per kg, green chilli at Tk 25 per kg, onion at Tk 15 per kg, potato at 20 per kg, gram at Tk 55 per kg, sugar at Tk 41 per kg, lentil at Tk 50 per kg, aubergine at Tk 35 per kg and cucumber at Tk 25 per kg.

The Ansars and VDP have also taken a similar initiative for the people in Chittagong city.



Members of Ansars and Village Defence Party sell essential commodities at fair prices at Khilgaon Chowdhurypara Community Centre in the city.

UK minister calls on Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Secretary to the Treasury of the UK Stephen Timms yesterday met the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina at her Shudha Sadan residence in the city and talked about a number of issues.

After the meeting, he told newsmen that they talked about aid support, importance of free and fair election and proposed dialogue on electoral reforms.

"We talked about the importance of holding a free and fair election and we are very much hopeful that the dialogue will be successful in building mutual confidence," he added.

Timms hoped that the dialogue between the secretaries general of the ruling BNP and the opposition Awami League (AL) will help ensure a free and fair election.

Replying to a question Timms said the importance of dialogue lies in the fact that it will help arrange a credible election for the people of Bangladesh to choose a government according to their own wish.

Heroin worth Tk 2 crore seized in Joypurhat

UNB, Joypurhat

BDR members seized 2.50 kg heroin worth over Tk 2 crore from a bus at Pikortoli on Mongolbari-Joypurhat road yesterday.

BDR sources said acting on a secret information they searched a Joypurhat bound bus from Mongolbari at noon and recovered the heroin from an abandoned sack.

None was arrested in this connection.

It is apprehended smugglers brought the heroin from India and was taking it to Dhaka by bus.

PM inaugurates Arial Khan Bridge today

UNB, Narsingdi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will formally inaugurate the Arial Khan Bridge during her whirlwind tour of the district today, officials here said.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to embark on her Narsingdi tour from Belabo upazila at about 1:00pm.

She will first inaugurate the bridge constructed over the Arial Khan River by Roads and Highways Department.

Later, she will inaugurate bungalow and pourasava building of Monohordi. Besides, she will lay the foundation stones of the buildings of upazila auditorium, 50-bed hospital and fire service.

On the occasion, local BNP will organise a public meeting at Monohordi Degree College at about 3:00pm. The Prime Minister will attend the meeting as chief guest.

Khaleda will travel 20 kilometers by road and inaugurate and lay foundation stones of different projects as part of her hectic schedule.

Over 100 arches have been erected along the route to welcome the prime minister.

New Thai PM a model general who shunned politics

REUTERS, Bangkok

When Thai soldiers fired on crowds of pro-democracy protesters in Bangkok in 1992, killing dozens, General Surayud Chulanont was head of special forces units seen dragging demonstrators through the lobby of a nearby hotel.

But the career army officer, who was made interim prime minister on Sunday by Thailand's latest military rulers, denied giving any orders to shoot and said the bloodshed hammered home a message he had pondered throughout his days in uniform.

"It convinced me that the army should never be involved in politics," he said on national television in the aftermath of the uprising, which

stemmed from the previous year's military take-over -- Thailand's 17th since the 1930s.

Fifteen years and one coup later, the 63-year-old former army commander-in-chief and devout Buddhist faces a re-run of history.

Following the September 19 military putsch against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Surayud has become head of a stop-gap government charged with keeping the country and economy ticking over while an eminent persons panel draws up a new constitution.

Coup leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin has promised elections within a year but, as with 1991, there are concerns the shadow of the army, in the form of a Council for

National Security, will loom large over the process and beyond.

For Surayud, Sonthi's direct superior at the Special Warfare Command in the early 1990s and one of Time Magazine's "Asian Heroes" in 2003 for his efforts to instill modern values into the Thai military, it could be a testing time.

"He earned a lot of respect as a man of his word, as a professional soldier," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak of Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

In many ways, he's the iconic army chief in the minds of Thais. Someone who was professional, capable, competent -- and reluctant to mess around with politics."

FOUGHT HIS FATHER Born into a distinguished military

family, Surayud's boyhood was turned upside down when his father, a lieutenant-colonel, disappeared into the jungle to become a key member of the Communist underground.

According to Time, as an anti-communist platoon leader in the 1960s Surayud was haunted by visions of killing his father, who defected because he had come to see the army as an institution more concerned with enriching itself than serving the people.

Despite being battlefield adversaries, Surayud could not but admire his father's principles. "He taught me how to be a good officer," he said. "He taught me how to be a good citizen of this country."

It was a lesson he would not

Janajuddho leader killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushlia

A top leader of outlawed Janajuddho, a faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP), was killed in a 'shootout' between the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members and his cohorts at Nilmoniganj village in Chuadanga early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Ikhtiar Hossain, 31, son of late Samad Ali. He was the second-in-command of Janajuddho in the district.

According to a statement issued by Rab-6, a team from Nagda camp arrested Ikhtiar at his village home at Amirpur on Sunday evening and handed him over to Chuadanga Rab at night.

During an interrogation at Chuadanga Rab office, Ikhtiar confessed to his involvement with

the PBCP faction and said he has many firearms concealed through-out Chuadanga.

Later, a Rab team along with Ikhtiar went to Amirpur village to arrest his accomplices and recover the firearms.

When they reached Nilmoniganj Girls' High School at around midnight, the PBCP men started firing at the Rab team, prompting the elite force to retaliate with fire.

Rab claimed that Ikhtiar, during the shootout, tried to escape but he was caught in crossfire and died on the spot.

Rab also claimed that they retrieved a revolver and six bullets from the spot.

Chuadanga police said Ikhtiar was an accused in 12 cases, including six murder cases.

3 die in road mishaps

STAR REPORT

At least three people, including an army man, were killed in separate road accidents in Rajshahi and Pabna yesterday.

Our Staff Correspondent from Rajshahi reports: A retired army man was killed and his wife injured when a speeding bus hit the motorcycle in which they were travelling in the city's Binodpur area yesterday.

In protest, a mob set fire to the bus and barricaded the road for one hour. However, the driver and helper of the bus managed to escape.

Nazim Uddin, 48, a retired sergeant, along with his wife Nasima Khatun Hasna was going to the house of his father-in-law at Dasmari at around 10:30am when the accident took place.

Nazim Uddin died on the spot while his wife was rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in an unconscious state. She did not regain consciousness as of yesterday afternoon.

The accident sparked off violent protest. Later, the police brought the situation under control.

Our Correspondent from Pabna adds: At least two people, including a child, were killed and five others injured in a road accident at Kashinatpur intersection on the Dhaka-Pabna highway yesterday.

Sources said the accident occurred when a speeding truck hit a rickshaw as the traffic police chased the Pabna-bound truck. It is learnt that police chased the truck for extortion.

A five-year old girl Eti, daughter of Lal Miah of village Majhdia under Shanthia upazila, died on the spot, leaving five others injured. Of the injured, rickshawpuller Alam, 25, son of Abdul Gofur, succumbed to his injuries on the way to hospital.

Agitated people put up barricade on the highway for an hour and beat up traffic police Rafiz Uddin for realising toll from the vehicles. Meanwhile, police charged batons to disperse the mob, leaving five injured. The barricade was withdrawn at about 7:30pm.

Vendor murdered in Khulna

UNB, Khulna

A trader was stabbed to death allegedly by his friend at Tutpara in the city early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mintu Sheikh, 35, a chicken vendor.

Police said Mintu's friend and neighbour Al Amin invited him to stay in his house at night on Sunday.

He stayed in Amin's house at night. "But, suddenly, Mintu's wife and brother-in-law heard screams

of Mintu at about 4:00am and rushed in.

They found Mintu stabbed and in critical condition," says a family account of the murder.

Mintu was rushed to Khulna Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

A case was filed with police. Amin was taken into police custody for interrogation.