

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

India for trans-border protected areas

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday proposed trans-border protected areas for cooperation in wildlife conservation with neighbouring countries.

"Several protected areas in India share boundaries with the protected areas of neighbouring countries," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, adding that cooperation in conservation of wildlife by establishing 'trans-boundary protected areas' would lead to very positive outcomes."

For instance, the Sundarbans forest, home of the Bengal tiger and other wildlife, spread across India and Bangladesh.

Modi was speaking after inaugurating via video conferencing the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

India took over the presidency of the conference for three years in the presence of senior government officials, environment activists, researchers and biodiversity leaders from 130 countries.

Modi elaborated some of India's priority areas while holding the presidency.

India is a part of the Central Asian flyway for migratory birds, he said, adding that with a view to conserving birds along the flyway and their habitats, India has prepared a national action plan for conservation of migratory birds and would be happy to facilitate preparation of such plans for other countries.

"We are keen on taking the conservation of migratory birds to a new paradigm with active cooperation of all the Central Asian flyway range countries," he added.

Modi said India is one of the seven megadiverse countries in the world and has four biodiversity hotspots -- Eastern Himalayas, Western Ghats, Indo-Myanmar landscape and Andaman and Nicobar Islands -- and is home to 500

species of migratory birds from across the globe.

India's Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said migratory birds, mammals and aquatic species are in increased danger on their migration routes and countries need to work together to protect them.

Stressing the need for taking collaborative action towards conservation, Convention on Migratory Species Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel said, "COP13 comes at a critical time for wildlife conservation, with continued downward trends of habitat loss and species decline."

The Convention on Migratory Species is the only multilateral treaty dedicated to addressing the needs of migratory species and their habitats on a global scale. The conference will set in motion actions needed to better protect migratory species that rely on multilateral cooperation for their survival."

India is home to several migratory species of wildlife including snow leopard, Amur falcons, bar-headed Geese, black-necked cranes, marine turtles, dugongs and humpbacked whales.

Modi said India has been championing the cause of "climate action" through conservation, sustainable lifestyle and green development model. In this context, he mentioned the push towards electric vehicles, smart cities and conservation of water.

He explained how conservation programmes focused on species have shown encouraging results.

"India has achieved its target of doubling the number of tigers from 1,411 in 2010 to 2,967, two years before the committed date of 2022," he said, before elaborating initiatives taken for the conservation of Asian elephants, snow leopard, Asiatic Lions, one-horned rhinoceros and the Great Indian Bustard.

GAS EXPLOSION IN N'GANJ HOUSE

Woman killed, seven of her family suffer burns

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A woman died and seven of her family members suffered burn injuries in a gas explosion at a Shahedpara residence in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj upazila early yesterday.

Nur Jahan, 60, was declared dead at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) around 10:15am, said Inspector Bachchu Miah, in-charge of DMCH police camp.

She had sustained 100 percent burn injuries, he said.

The injured -- Kiron Miah, 45, Abul

Hossain, 25, Hiron Miah, 25, Kausar Miah, 16, Mukta Akter, 20, Ilma Akter, 3, and Apon, 10 -- were also admitted to the burn unit.

Five of the injured are in critical condition, according to DMCH sources.

The family lives on the ground floor of a five-storey building, said Abdullah Al Arefin, deputy director of Narayanganj Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Officials suspect that the family may not have switched their gas stove off at night, which caused the explosion when a match was struck in the kitchen around 5:00am, said Al Arefin.

Death toll nears 1,800

FROM PAGE 1

State media said China may postpone its annual parliamentary session, which has been held in March for the last 35 years.

Outside China, the biggest cluster of infections is from the Diamond Princess cruise ship off Japan's Yokohama, where an additional 99 cases were revealed yesterday.

That brought the total to 454 diagnosed despite passengers being confined to their cabins during a 14-day quarantine.

As criticism grows of Japan's handling of the ship crisis, governments are scrambling to repatriate their citizens. Canada, Australia, Italy, and Hong Kong were poised to follow Washington in removing nationals from the vessel.

The first US flight touched down at Travis Air Force Base in California shortly before midnight Sunday, followed by the second early yesterday at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas.

Before they boarded the flights, US officials were informed that 14 of the passengers tested days earlier had received positive results. Authorities allowed them to fly but isolated them from other passengers in a 'special containment area'.

Those on board will undergo a further two-week quarantine period on US soil.

"Every precaution to ensure proper isolation and community protection measures are being taken, driven by the most up-to-date risk assessments by US health authorities," said a joint statement from the State Department and the Department of Health and Human Services. "We continue all possible efforts to protect the welfare of US citizens."

"I am happy and ready to go," American traveler Sarah Arana told AFP before leaving the ship. "We need a proper quarantine. This was not it."

The latest country to order its citizens evacuated from the ship is Australia, whose more than 200 citizens still on board were to be rescued on Wednesday. Some Americans on the Diamond Princess declined their government's offer.

"My health is fine. And my two-week quarantine is almost over," tweeted Matt Smith, questioning why he should want to leave.

Forty other US passengers tested positive for the virus and were taken to hospitals in Japan, said Anthony

Fauci, a senior official at the National Institutes for Health.

It was not immediately clear if they were already counted among the confirmed cases of infection on the ship.

In China, authorities have placed about 56 million people in the central province of Hubei under quarantine, virtually sealing off the epicentre province from the rest of the country in an unprecedented effort to contain the virus.

New cases outside the epicentre have been declining for the last 13 days. There were 115 fresh cases outside Hubei announced yesterday-- sharply down from nearly 450 a week ago.

Chinese authorities have pointed to the slowing rise in cases as proof their measures are working even as the total death toll reached 1,770.

But World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned it is "impossible to predict which direction this epidemic will take".

Concerns remain about global transmission, especially on cruise ships which appear to have become especially virulent breeding grounds.

Fears are mounting over passengers on one vessel, the Westerdam, who all received a clean bill of health when they disembarked in Cambodia -- a staunch Beijing ally.

But an 83-year-old American woman was stopped by authorities in Malaysia over the weekend when she was detected with a fever and later diagnosed with the virus.

There were more than 2,200 passengers and crew on the ship when it docked in Sihanoukville, many of whom have now dispersed around the globe.

With the virus battering tourism and disrupting global supply chains, experts are fretting about the toll it could take on a fragile global economy.

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said there could be a cut of around 0.1-0.2 percentage points to global growth but stressed there was "still a great deal of uncertainty."

Fears over the new coronavirus weighed on Asian markets, and Singapore cut its growth forecast for this year as the virus hammers the city-state's tourism and trade.

"If it comes out bad enough for confidence to plummet, investors could quickly find themselves up the creek... without a paddle," said Stephen Innes of AxiCorp.



In Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's presence, Bangladesh Honda Private Limited Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Himihiko Katsuki hands the keys of two 1800CC motorcycles to SSF Director General Maj Gen Md Majibur Rahman at a function at her office yesterday.

PHOTO: P10

Dhaka Wasa for 80pc tariff hike

FROM PAGE 1

assumed power.

According to section 23 of the Wasa Act-1996, Wasa board can raise water price by five percent annually.

It also hiked the price five percent last year, citing inflation.

City dwellers and experts said water price hike would be a burden for people.

In summer, people of Jatrabari, Shyampur, Mir Hazirbagh, and adjacent areas suffer severe water crisis.

"Last year, there were instances that we stayed awake all night to get water but failed," said Sirajul Hoque Khan, a resident of Mir Hazirbagh.

"Like in ancient times, we had to wait for rain. Because on rainy days the supply [of water] used to get normal," he said.

He sees the decision as a blow to the city dwellers.

Sazzadur Rahman, a resident of Mohammadpur area, said he does not get adequate water supply every day.

"We are not getting the water we are paying for. If the service does not get better, why will we pay more?" he asked.

Contacted, Consumers Association of Bangladesh President Ghulam

Rahman said, "Wasa's overall service quality is not good. In some places, the service is good, but in most places, especially in the densely populated areas, the service is poor. In this context, price hike of water every year is not acceptable in anyway."

Quality of Wasa water always remains a big concern.

Last year, Transparency International Bangladesh in a survey report said nearly 45 percent people in the capital do not get the desired amount of water from Wasa.

Besides, about 35 percent complain of poor-quality water throughout the year.

It also said 91 percent clients of the Wasa have to boil the water before drinking, although it is supposed to be safe for drinking.

LETTERS

On September 2 last year, Wasa sent the letter to LGRD secretary.

In the letter, it was mentioned that from 2016-19 some projects were implemented and some were under implementation. So, the existing prices of water for residential and commercial uses are not sufficient.

It added that if water supply starts from Padma Water Treatment Plant in

Munshiganj, costs of each unit of water will be Tk 27-28.

In the letter, the Wasa MD said to make the Dhaka Wasa financially sustainable, its income should be increased. It is hard to provide the city dwellers with quality service when the organisation is run with subsidy.

Wasa requested the price hike from January last.

The local government ministry replied to the letter on January 14.

In its letter, the ministry asked costs of each unit of water, amount of Wasa's loan, water price in Delhi and Kolkata of India, Kathmandu of Nepal, Seoul of South Korea, Manila of the Philippines, London of the UK, and Stockholm of Sweden.

Wasa replied on January 16. In a letter, it mentioned that only production costs of each unit of water is around Tk 20. With other expenses, the total costs go up to Tk 25.

It added that Dhaka Wasa's loans for implementing different projects is around Tk 600 crore.

It also mentioned each unit of water price is Tk 31 in Delhi, Tk 21.73 in Kathmandu, Tk 39.52 in Seoul, and Tk 21.87 in Stockholm.

Defaulted loans still going up

FROM PAGE 1

outstanding amount instead of the existing 10-50 percent.

The banks recovered only Tk 479 crore as down payment from the loans rescheduled under the relaxed policy.

"It is a temporary relief -- the negative situation will come back in a very dreadful way," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

Loan rescheduling following a relaxed manner is not a lasting solution as defaulters earlier misused such facilities, he said.

Given the generous policy support afforded to delinquent borrowers historically, many good borrowers are tempted to default, said Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, a former deputy governor of the central bank, while urging the BB to crack down on habitual defaulters with fervour.

"The soured loan situation would

not have been this bad had a good amount of the rescheduled loans did not become defaults again," said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

In fact, Tk 13,284 crore of the bad loans regularised last year have defaulted, according to data from the BB.

This means, nearly one-fourth of the rescheduled loans has turned bad again.

"There is no scope to feel satisfaction given the feeble recovery track record," Fahmida said.

Ahsan, also the chairman of Brac Bank, urged both the central bank and the government to ramp up their recovery drive.

The high volume of toxic assets means the banks will be unable to bring down the interest rate on lending to single digits, he said, while advising the BB to start calculating classified loans by including the rescheduled and written-

off loans as well to take stock of the stressed asset scenario properly.

"The ongoing haphazard situation in the banking sector will get worse in the days ahead," Fahmida added.

The upward trend of defaulted loans cannot be stopped if banks do not follow the rules and regulations when disbursing loans, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank.

Going forward, banks should sanction loans only to compliant borrowers, who repay on a regular basis, he added.

BB data showed more than 50 percent of the defaulted loans were with the eight state-run banks. As of December, the eight banks had Tk 48,057 crore of defaulted loans, down 10.14 percent year-on-year.

The 41 private banks together had defaulted loans amounting to Tk 44,174 crore, up 16 percent from a year earlier.

Demarcation to be completed by 2022

FROM PAGE 1

supervision of a 25-member committee led by the LGRD minister, according to the documents. Some of the work would be monitored directly by the Prime Minister's Office, the documents read.

Since January, the authorities have started identifying the reasons, types, and sources of river pollution. They would continue their work until December 2021.

In 2007, the government and the World Bank jointly conducted a study which found that around 7,000 industries in and around the capital were discharging 1.5 million cubic metres of liquid waste into the rivers every day.

It also found that 61 percent of the liquid waste was from factories and the rest from homes.

By 2022, the government plans to demarcate the rivers as per the documents available at the land record office, district administration office, Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), and Chattogram Development Authorities (CDA).

It plans to evict grabbers after demarcation but continue the effort.

However, eviction of already identified river grabbers and closure of factories polluting the rivers have begun, according to the documents.

As per a recent report of the National River Conservation Commission (NRCC), there are 49,162 river grabbers in the country. The report did not mention river and canal grabbers in the capital.

Within the first few months of this year, the committee would decide if existing laws need amending to protect the rivers.

Between 2022 and 2025, the law; environment, forest and climate change; LGRD; and industries ministries will complete formulating laws and guidelines, if required, for protecting the rivers.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), and Chattogram Port Authority have been dredging rivers for maintaining navigability.

The NRCC; the Department of Environment; the CDA; Dhaka and Chattogram Wasa; three city corporations concerned; Rajuk; Dhaka and Chattogram district

HC can't give inexecutable directives

FROM PAGE 1

pollution.

It also directed the Election Commission to disqualify the people responsible for river grabbing and pollution from running for public office.

The HC also said the grabbers and polluters would not be able to get bank loans.

It asked the government to recover the land of the Turag under the possession of Nishut Jute Mills Ltd of Hameem Group and Hossain Dyeing and Printing Mills Ltd of Anwar Group. Challenging the HC verdict, Nishut

Jute Mills and Hossain Dyeing filed appeals with the SC.

The top court rejected the appeals on February 4.

However, the SC held an additional hearing yesterday.

During the hearing, the SC asked Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh's lawyer Manzill Murshid whether all the directives issued by the HC were implementable in accordance with the law and whether the HC could order the government to formulate a law.

The lawyer told the SC that the HC had kept his petition as a continued

mandamus [which allows people to seek further orders on the matter] and any aggrieved person could approach the HC if there was any hurdle in executing the directives.

The SC said many of the HC directives and findings regarding the Turag were not acceptable and implementable and it would expunge those from the full text of its verdict.

"What will the government do if we do its tasks?" said the bench.

Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star that the government, following the SC verdict, could recover the land in the companies' possession.

Chinese envoy plays down

Rohingya crisis

Compares Bangladesh-Myanmar tension with quarrel of a couple

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming has apparently downplayed the Rohingya crisis as he compared Bangladesh-Myanmar tension over the issue with a quarrel of a couple.

He said there is a Chinese saying that goes: "If a couple quarrels and goes to someone else and tries to settle the dispute, that could be a problem."

"If they can settle the problem between the two then the problem never becomes too serious. That's the basic idea of China," he said while addressing DCAB (Diplomatic Correspondent Association of Bangladesh) Talk at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

A journalist then suggested that the Rohingya crisis involving Bangladesh and Myanmar should to be considered a domestic issue as seen by the ambassador.

The journalist pointed out that Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh after Myanmar military killed many of them. Bangladesh took the matter to an international platform only after becoming a victim of the crisis.

In response, Jiming said he agreed to the journalist's view.

At the programme, journalists repeatedly asked a question: Why China has been protecting Myanmar which is accused of genocide against the Rohingyas and is now facing a genocide case filed with the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The ambassador said China too wanted a solution to the crisis, but emphasised on finding it through bilateral discussions between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Fleeing military crackdown in Rakhine, some 750,000 Rohingyas took shelter in Bangladesh since August 2017. Since the beginning, China has been seeking a bilateral solution to the issue, although UN investigators said the crackdown had genocidal intent.

UN Security Council has not taken any concrete actions against Myanmar amid opposition from China and Russia, which hold veto powers.

Jiming said since the ICJ was still working on the case, he would not make any comment, except that the ICJ decision should be fully respected.

He said Bangladesh and Myanmar are good friends and as a friend of both the countries, China is trying to help solve the problem.

"If two neighbors are quarrelling, as a friend, you probably try to stop the quarrel and try to calm down the neighbours ... In the international platforms, we are not trying to protect anyone. We are just trying to calm down those neighbors."

He said if Myanmar was pushed too hard, there would be some misunderstandings. Since Myanmar faced pressure from Western countries for many years, its people have some fundamental reactions of resistance to pressure, Jiming said.

"They [Bangladesh and Myanmar] are like brothers and sisters ... they are good neighbours. They don't have to go somewhere else to solve the problem."

China, as a friend of both Myanmar and Bangladesh, wants to help, he said, adding that China wants immediate stoppage of further violence in Rakhine state, speeding up of Rohingya repatriation from Bangladesh and economic development in Rakhine.

"We are working on it," Jiming added.