

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Mixed Welcome to Guest Birds in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

At the beginning of winter, a large number of migratory birds arrive in this country from colder climes in Siberia and Europe. The total number of such birds is estimated at five to ten lakhs each year. Their arrival starts from mid-August and it reaches its peak in January-February. They start returning to their original habitats from April.

The ornithologists have identified the impulse that drives the migration of birds of many species. According to them most species of birds, because of their high metabolic rate, require a rich, abundant supply of food at frequent intervals. Such a situation does not always prevail throughout the year in any given region. Birds have thus evolved a highly efficient means for travelling swiftly over long distances with great economy of energy. There are certain characteristics of their migration. The migration flights follow specific routes, sometimes well defined over long distances. The majority of bird migrants, however, travel along broad airways. The speed of migratory birds depends largely on the species and the type of terrain covered. Birds in migration, however, go faster than otherwise. Most migrations occur at relatively low altitudes. Some birds, however, fly much higher—even to an altitude of 14,000 feet. Many species of migrant birds are nocturnal (night time) migrants. Most birds are gregarious during migration, even those that display a fierce individualism at all other times. Birds of similar habits sometimes travel together.

At the height of influx of migratory birds, in January-February of this year, it was estimated by some ornithologists that, as compared with previous years, the volume of their arrival is 40 per cent less this year. One reason for this reduction, according to such ornithologists, may be that

winter this year was much less severe. The other reason may be that the birds face disturbance from large-scale hunting in the haor areas which these birds choose as their temporary abode. The Hakaluki haor in Sylhet shelters the highest number of the guest birds. Srimangal is another important place of their concentration.

A total of 632 species of birds are found in Bangladesh, of which nearly 200 are migratory, according to a noted ornithologist. Of these migratory birds, nearly 25 species are ducks that fall prey to the poachers the most. The other duck species are pintail, brahmany, bareheaded, shoveller, common pocard, common ruddy, shel, topted and lag goose.

In the Dhaka city, the main locations of their concentration are the lakes in BDR HQ at Peelkhana, Mirpur Zoo, Bangabhaban and the beels and water areas around the city.

Poaching and selling of guest birds continue despite Prime Minister's directive issued a couple of years ago to apply the law prohibiting the hunting of winter birds, witnesses say. Raids by law enforcing agencies are usually rare, and when the law enforcers do come, the hunters flee to remote areas of haors. Netted mostly in the haor areas, the birds are shipped to the capital and other major cities where buyers can afford the prices the sellers demand. The duck species like gargery, mallard, common teal from the Siberian region are found on sale, in peak season of migration, at Elephant Road, Manik Miah Avenue, Panthapath, Baily Road, Mirpur Road, Mouchak Market areas and some other city points.

It is a clear violation of the country's Wild Life Preservation Law, wild life experts say. The law prohibiting hunting of winter fowls provides a penalty of up to 2 years in jail and Tk 2000/- fine for a person charged with killing or endangering wild life.

There are good and bad effects of the huge influx of the guest birds, but on balance, according to ornithologists, the good effects tip the scale. Among the bad effects may be cited the damage they cause to corn fields when they swoop down on them for feeding. One redeeming feature in this respect is said to be that some of the bird species do not feed on corn. Another redeeming aspect is that in April when boro paddies are ripe for harvesting, it is the time for most of the species of guest birds to leave.

The good effects mainly relate to their environmental impact. The droppings of such large numbers of birds in the water areas turn into planktons which serve as food for different kinds of fish in water areas. As for those species of birds which are land-based, the droppings serve to enhance the fertility of the soil and enrich the vegetation. They also play a helpful role in pest control-inasmuch as they feed on different kinds of harmful insects and also field mice and rodents etc, which damage crops. On the whole, their influence on the ecology of the regions where they temporarily settle is held to be beneficial, outweighing whatever evil effects their presence brings about.

The Wild Life Society is understood to be campaigning for years to protect the winter birds from the hunters but their appeal has so far fallen on deaf ears, as is felt by some wild life experts.

The responsibility for their preservation is now with the Forest Conservation Wing of the Ministry of Forest and Environment. But lack of funds and initiative are understood to be main impediments in their effectiveness.



Israeli and Palestinian chief negotiators, General Amnon Shahak (R) and Nabil Shaath (L) sign an agreement in Cairo on Thursday to deploy foreign observers in the mosque massacre town of Hebron. — AFP photo

## Talks on self-rule resume tomorrow

### Israel to start pullout from Gaza, Jericho Apr 12

JERUSALEM, Apr 1: A Palestinian official said on Thursday Israel has agreed to start pulling out its troops from Gaza and Jericho on April 12 and complete the withdrawal by April 30, reports Reuters.

The official said the new target dates for the withdrawal from proposed areas of Palestinian self-rule were agreed during PLO-Israeli negotiations in Cairo on Thursday.

The talk, in which Israel agreed to station armed foreign observers in the volatile West Bank town of Hebron, could clear the way for implementation of the self-rule agreement the sides signed in Washington last September.

'Israel has agreed to start pulling out its troops from Gaza Strip and Jericho starting April 12. It should complete withdrawal by April 30,' said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

According to the September agreement, Israel should have completed its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and an enclave around the West Bank town of Jericho by April 13.

Disagreements over security arrangements and the killing of over 30 Palestinian worshippers in a Hebron mosque by an extremist Jewish settler last month have delayed implementation.

Following the massacre, the PLO suspended formal peace talks on Palestinian self-rule until security arrangements for Hebron were agreed on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Israel and the PLO will resume full negotiations on launching Palestinian self-rule on Sunday, a PLO source said Friday.

## Stormy weather dislocates flights

By Staff Correspondent

Stormy weather caused major dislocation in the flight operations to and from Dhaka's Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday, airport sources said.

A number of domestic and international flights were diverted to alternative destinations or delayed because of thunderstorms accompanied with intermittent rain, a Flight Inquiry official told The Daily Star.

She, however, said that none of the flights was cancelled.

Biman's flight from Hong Kong, scheduled to land at ZIA at 7:50 pm had to be diverted to Calcutta because of bad weather, she said.

Airport sources said that both the Biman and Indian Airlines flights from Calcutta were delayed by about eight to 10 hours, while British Airways' London flight was delayed by seven hours.

Another airport official in the domestic terminal said flights from Rajshahi and Jessore were diverted to Chittagong while flights from Syedpur, Sylhet and Chittagong were also delayed yesterday.

All the flights, however, landed at Dhaka after several hours.

Saleem Samad, a passenger who flew from Rajshahi and was taken to Chittagong, said he had met the passengers of Biman's Jessore flight at the Chittagong airport.

Some 8 passengers of the Rajshahi flight did not avail the ATP return flight from Chittagong fearing bad weather, Samad said.

Quoting a passenger from Jessore he said the Jessore flight was caught in turbulent weather and bumped heavily, creating panic among the passengers. Some of passengers threw up because of the heavy buffeting.

Airport officials said most of the flights in the afternoon were delayed. Even so, some 17 flights took off from and landed at ZIA yesterday.

# The Midnight File

## Lockerbie bombing affair 'closed': Libya

ANKARA, Apr 1: Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Al-Mountasser said today that the Lockerbie bombing affair was 'closed' as far as Tripoli was concerned, although he conceded that talks were continuing. "We want to see the end of this affair, and for Libya it is closed," he told a press conference here after two days of talks with his Turkish counterpart Hikmet Cetin. But he added "negotiations are continuing," without giving any further details, reports AFP.

## Yeltsin's envoys in Syria

DAMASCUS, Apr 1: Envoys of Russian President Boris Yeltsin arrived today in the Syrian capital to discuss the resumption of Arab-Israeli peace talks due later this month, a Russian diplomat said. Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and the ministry's Middle East Director Viktor Posuvaluk were to give Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad a message from Yeltsin about the peace process, the diplomat said, reports AFP.

## Greek govt plans to seize royal property

ATHENS, Apr 1: Greece's Socialist government is preparing to strip former king Constantine and his family of their citizenship and extensive property holdings, a Cabinet minister announced Friday. Finance Minister Alexandros Papadopoulos said he had asked a parliamentary committee to draft legislation that will expropriate the family's summer home in Corfu, expansive estates at Tatoi and Polydendri near Athens, and all moveable property. The government also plans to deprive the former royal family of Greek citizenship and revoke their passports, reports AP.

## Dhaka now ready: PM

From Page 1 Col 3

on the large South Asian market.

"These opportunities are for you to exploit to our mutual benefit. I have come here all the way to personally invite you to invest in Bangladesh," the Prime Minister told the Japanese investors and business leaders.

Begum Zia said, "Bangladesh wants to be your partner in the creation of new hope, new wealth and new opportunities in international relations."

The Prime Minister commended the historic contributions made by Osaka in the economic and commercial miracles of Japan. Osaka has been in the vanguard of the Japanese industrial revolution.

Expressing 'Bangladesh's wish to have more trade with Japan she said Bangladesh products could find a larger share of the vast Japanese market through Tokyo continued cooperation and support.

Bangladesh is exporting ready-made garments, fish, leather and leather goods to Japan, Begum Zia said as products of a least developed country, Bangladesh exports merit special and differential market access in Japan.

"We would like to benefit from Japanese technology whose quality and innovativeness are a wonder of the modern world," she added.

"Our common Asian culture and heritage, and our trust in the future of humanity create a strong basis for united efforts towards peace and prosperity," she added.

Begum Zia said Bangladesh has opened up her economy to the world and added 'repatriation of capital and profit from Bangladesh is now quite simple'.

"It is possible for foreign investors in Bangladesh to have hundred per cent ownership," Begum Zia said.

The Prime Minister said, "Bangladesh is also planning to set up a special industrial zone solely for Japanese investors."

The Prime Minister said Japan had made a commitment to the least developed countries like Bangladesh to offer special and differential opportunities for trade and investment.

She said Bangladesh also had urged the Japanese government to create attractive funds for encouraging private investments in Bangladesh and proposed some tax advantages for the Japanese investors.

During her meetings with Japanese leaders of government and industry the Prime Minister said, she had requested them for signing an investment promotion and protection agreement between Bangladesh and Japan.

Speaking on the occasion Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman gave a resume of Bangladesh economy and wide-scale reform measures undertaken by the present government to enter into the global village by integrating the country's economy and to lift it to a much higher plane of development.

He said Bangladesh had also become the Chairman of the Board of Governors of Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) reflecting the level of confidence and trust of the international community. "We fully guarantee your investment," Rahman told the Japanese business community.

Special Envoy of the Prime Minister M Morshed Khan highlighted the government's major policy shift from assistance seeker to investment seeker, saying Japanese investors could now reposition some of their funds in Bangladesh for making super normal profits.

FBCCI President Mahbubur Rahman dwelt on how the private sectors of both the countries could work together for mutual advantages and suggested some specific areas of cooperation and investment.

OCCE international committee vice-chairman Toshio Oda lauded Bangladesh as a land of opportunities and hoped the seminar would be successful to bring the investors and businessmen of the two friendly countries nearer.

A number of Japanese entrepreneurs told BSS they were impressed that Bangladesh was now attaching so much importance to investment rather than seeking foreign assistance.

They said they were convinced that under the far-sighted leadership of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Bangladesh could now travel to the wide trading and investment avenues for improving the living standards of Bangladeshis.

They also highly lauded the leadership of Begum Zia who spent the entire morning amid the participants of the seminar, taking interest in the deliberations.

A video on the Bangladesh export processing zones was also screened.

# Export incentives

From Page 1 Col 7

cent on export incomes has now been imposed, which stands at a higher level, at around two per cent, when the real export income is taken into consideration.

The duty on capital machinery has been increased from 2.5 to 7.5 per cent, the report said, which is acting as a disincentive. "Although after the units go into operation a rebate of five per cent is to be provided, the stuck-up capital and the complexity of recovering the rebate is considered to be a disincentive to the entrepreneurs."

Neighbouring countries, the report pointed out, also use the bonded warehouse facility — for hundred per cent export-oriented industries — extensively, while its adequate use is only limited to the ready-made garments sector in Bangladesh.

Both in India and Pakistan the export-oriented industries enjoy much the same incentives as the units in the export processing zones (EPZ), the report said. "In Bangladesh, there is still a marked degree of difference between incentives provided to EPZ units and to the hundred per cent export-oriented units outside the EPZs, although for all practical purposes they serve the same objective."

EPZ units are exempted from any duty on importing capital machinery, spare parts and raw materials. These units are also exempted from paying any income tax and enjoy a more flexible tax holiday period of 10 years.

"Yet another incentive which needs revision is the range of period for which concessional interest rate facility can be enjoyed by the exporters (for back to back letters of credit)," the report said.

The current practice is that an exporter can enjoy concessional interest rate if the bank credit is adjusted within 180 days from the date of availing of export credit. Otherwise, the exporter is charged at the commercial rate of interest for the whole period of utilization.

"This, of course, raises the cost of production for the exporters of some products whose distinct trade cycle do not permit completion of export activities within the stipulated period," the report explained.

Both India and Pakistan have pre-shipment, post-shipment and comprehensive Export Credit Guarantee Schemes (ECGS) in place. Although Bangladesh also has ECGS in place, the report noted, yet it has been observed that till now only the pre-shipment ECGS has been extensively used (in about 90 per cent of the cases) while the other two facilities remain mostly unutilised for various reasons."

The effectiveness of the incentive package in terms of export promotion is dependent on the value of the package itself and the effectiveness with which it is implemented and administered, the report noted.

It quotes from a recent study which showed that only 79 per cent of a group of sampled exporters were found to be aware of the incentives while none considered them to be adequate and a majority of them said that they experienced difficulty in availing the incentives.

The report also noted that at a meeting of the Export Promotion Council it was pointed out that out of 37 decisions of the 1991-93 export policy, requisite orders were made regarding 12 of the decisions; 18 were at different stages of implementation and the rest seven were not implemented at all as of February last year. "In fact, implementation of the incentives involves a large number of ministries and departments; co-ordination is difficult and interests are sometimes conflicting."

Concessional interest rates for exporters have been abolished in Bangladesh with the introduction of interest rate bands under the financial sector reform project. The moral persuasion by Bangladesh Bank encouraging charging of lower band limit interest rate to exporters has mostly gone unheeded by the commercial banks as more pressure is being placed on them to run of profit basis, the report noted.

It suggested establishing a special bank, as recommended by the chambers, to cater to the specific needs of export credit. Such export promotion banks are already in existence in the neighbouring countries.

## Nor'wester hits Dhaka

By Staff Correspondent

A moderate nor'wester swept over parts of Dhaka yesterday but no casualty or damage was reported, Met office and Fire Service sources said.

The storm, at a speed of up to 46 km per hour, hit the capital at around 8:20 pm. Similar storms may hit the country during the next two days, a Met official said. Rain and thundershower would also continue.

## Muggings

From Page 1 Col 4

ing robberies and burglaries were committed in the city. Two city filling stations and a medicare centre were looted and 17 rooms of the Health and Information ministries in the highly protected Bangladesh Secretariat were burgled on March 2. No headway has been made in the police investigation in these cases.

Besides, A K M Zainul Abedin, an Additional Director General of the Bangladesh Railway was killed in a road accident on March 12 and a director of the Bangladesh Observer, Khaled Hamdul Huq Chowdhury, was severely stabbed at his Green Road residence by a group of gangsters.

## Flag meet held at Benapole: Tension defused

From Our Correspondent

JESSORE, Apr 1: A flag meeting between BDR and BSF was held at Benapole today from 12 noon to 5 pm. The meeting was held to defuse tension prevailing in the border area following attempt to construct a road within 150 yards of border zero line between newly constructed disputed Petrapole Customs and Immigration Complex on the Indian side in violation of International boundary rules.

## Jamaat

From Page 1 Col 4

Rahman was set on fire by the terrorists, jointly backed by the BNP and the Awami League in Sathkhira.

He demanded a judicial enquiry into the incidents and withdrawal of cases against the Jamaat leaders and workers.

Central leaders of the party including Muhammad Yusuf Ali, Makbul Ahmed, Quamaruzzaman and Sheikh Ansar Ali, MP were also present at the news conference.

## Property worth Tk 10 lakh gutted at Dilkusha

By Staff Correspondent

A fire broke out at an electronic show-room at Dilkusha in the city and damaged a property reportedly worth Tk 10 lakh.

The fire, according to Fire Service, originated from an electric short circuit at around 8:30 am and lasted nearly an hour.

The firemen broke into the locked ground floor office room of Sharp Trade Linkers Office Automation Ltd and extinguished the blaze.

The damaged items include type writers, a photo copier and a telex machine.

## Students of 5 new medical colleges go on strike today

By Staff Correspondent

Students of the five new government medical colleges in Khulna, Bogra, Dinajpur, Comilla and Faridpur will begin an indefinite strike from today at the call of the Medical Chhatra Oikya Parishad demanding urgent development works at their institutions.

The government recognised the five medical colleges in 1992 but according to the agitating students no infrastructures have been built in these colleges yet.

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## Jahangirnagar

From Page 1 Col 8

Initiatives to patch-up the differences within the party. Five of the JCD activists, belonging to the local faction — hailing from Savar and adjoining areas — were ousted from the party Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the long waited admission of the first year Honours classes began on Thursday.

## UP chairman shot dead in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Apr 1: Armed miscreants shot dead a union parishad chairman at village Dasherhat in Guthia Union of the district this morning.

Abdur Rashid Molla, 52, Chairman of Guthia Union Parishad, was attacked and shot dead by a group of about 10 armed men while he was going to his office by a motor cycle at around 8:30 am.

Police said Molla was an accused in four murder cases and one arms case. He was released on bail in January.

Bakerganj thana SP visited the scene. The body was sent to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

A case has been filed with Wazirpur thana.

# Acute water crisis in G-K project area

From Page 1 Col 4

Like thousands of others, Abdul Wahab, a young farmer of Charulia village in Kushtia, was also unprepared.

He has already employed five farmhands to plant Aus seedlings in his seven-bigha land on the bank of the Padma.

From Charulia, under Mirpur thana, the Padma looks more like a broad expanse of dwindling waterway, scattered with shoals and sand dunes, conjuring unmistakable signs of desertification.

The dusty leaves of the sugarcane grown on the riverside farm plots were parched. The green in other vegetation was faded.

Trucks rolled straight into the bed of the Padma where several sand quarries have been set up.

"There is no moisture in the soil," said Wahab, removing a fistful of top-soil from his plot. "Whatever crop you plant in this plot gets burned out," he said.

Far up, in north-west Bheramara, the huge screws of the G-K Project's three main pumps, each with a capacity of diverting 1300 cusecs of water, remained in place, the pumps silent.

Twelve other subsidiary pumps, each with 125 cusec capacity, were also switched

off since November last year. The screws of the subsidiary pumps could be seen half submerged in the water.

Earlier, during the dry season, the G-K pumps diverted water from the Padma through a 200-kilometer main canal, and a maze of 1518.33 km

sary to switch the pumps on during the dry season, said Khairul Bashar Khan, a WDB engineer in charge of the G-K pumps.

"We cannot operate these pumps with the water level below 17 feet," he said. "Still, if we do that, the pumps will just

blow apart."

The consequences of the acute water crisis have already begun to show.

In a land of controlled irrigation, the Kushtia farmers are struggling hard to arrange irrigation facilities for their plots. The use of low-lift pumps are not prevalent. Price of fuel oil

