

The Midnight File

Body to look into background of Chakma, Hajong in Arunachal

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The central government today set up a sub-committee to look into the entire background of Chakma and Hajong tribals in Arunachal Pradesh in view of the prevailing situation in the north-eastern state, reports PTI.

15 more killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Jan 5: Seven Indian soldiers and eight Muslim militants, seven of them foreigners, were killed in a sudden upsurge of violence in strife-torn Kashmir, authorities said today, reports AFP.

Fourteen soldiers were also injured in fierce gunbattles and by land mines in the Kashmir valley which remained crippled for the second day running by a strike called by Muslim separatists.

Four army men and two militants, including one foreigner, were killed during a 20-hour gunbattle in the Gandherbal hills overlooking Srinagar, summer capital of the northern Indian state of

Jamaat iterates demand for PM's resignation

Jamaat-e-Islami secretary general Muttar Rahman Nizami yesterday reiterated their demand for immediate resignation of the Prime Minister and general elections under a caretaker government, reports UNB.

Addressing a conference of the thana and ward presidents of Dhaka City Jamaat, Nizami warned that the people would not tolerate any farcical elections.

The whole nation is now united to realise the demand for a 91-model meaningful elections under a neutral non-party caretaker government," he said.

British tip-off

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to the Indian government the value of which I believe helped them to apprehend the plane," Home Secretary Michael Howard told reporters.

Howard, who is in New Delhi on the first leg of a 13-day visit to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, declined to reveal the nature of the British tip-off to the Indian authorities.

But Indian newspapers have reported that one of the arrested crewmen of the plane, Peter Bleach, a Briton, had been in touch with British intelligence agencies prior to the parachuting of the weapons over West Bengal state.

It remains unclear who the arms were intended for and how a plane which originated in the Pakistani city of Karachi loaded with weapons was allowed into Indian airspace.

AL team

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the present election schedule and holding the elections sometimes in late March.

Besides, frequent meetings of the opposition leaders with the president as well as the Chief Election Commissioner, an international pressure to resolve the long-drawn crisis within the shortest possible time and the role of the left-leaning organisation in the dialogue have also moved the parleys faster, they pointed out.

The opposition political organisations could take part in an election under the advisory body headed by the President on assurances of deferring the polls further, correcting the existing anomalies in the voter list, and if necessary, reorganising the Election Commission (EC), opposition sources indicated.

A senior leader of the Jatiya Party said that the dialogue's nature was more focused than before.

"We are now working on arrangements and settling a suitable date for the elections so that the opposition parties could take part in it," he said, requesting anonymity.

An Awami League leader said that there was a strong possibility of a round-table hosted by the President where all the parties could sit together to settle the outstanding problems.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister had a meeting with three important ministers at her Cantonment residence late last night, BNP sources said.

The three were BNP Secretary General and LGRD minister Abdus Salam Talukder, Commerce and Information Minister Shamsul Islam and Food and Agriculture Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, they said.

Camel race

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published in the local press every day.

Senior Sheikhs and thousands of people, including westerners, travel to Al-Wathba daily to watch the race, which was missed by Sheikh Zayed as he is on a private trip to Pakistan. Sheikh Zayed, a fervent camel race fan, is one of the biggest camel owners in the region, with more than 2,000 head.

The president, 78, has offered prizes and other incentives to encourage bedouins to breed camels and participate in camel racing, the most popular sport in the Gulf. He and his elder son Sheikh Khalifa have also set up a medical centre to upgrade camel breeding with the help of western experts.

DOWN TO EARTH
Smoke & Noise Pollution in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

The degree of environmental degradation resulting from smoke and noise pollution in the city has been steadily rising, so much so that it is no uncommon sight of some persons wearing muff or face mask to protect themselves from polluted air, particularly when caught up in horrendous traffic jams. It is now doubtful whether the air quality in the Dhaka city is within the permissible levels set by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to a World Bank report, the level of environmental degradation in East and South Asia is rapidly approaching thresholds of unacceptably high social and economic costs. This gloomy perspective applies in a large measure to the present state of air quality degradation in the city.

The pollution caused by the city's vast number of motor vehicles is a cause of great concern to us at the moment. Some of the factors cited as responsible for emission of poisonous exhausts from motor vehicles are poor maintenance and servicing, import of old models of vehicles and their use on roads, worn-out cylinder and piston ring affecting burning process of oil in engine, etc. Moreover, it is alleged lead is mixed with fuels which, without being completely burnt out in combustion, are emitted as harmful substances such as carbon monoxide, sulphur and lead with black smoke exhausts which are highly injurious to health. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Environment, commercial vehicles are the worst offenders in this respect. But it has also been observed that other categories of vehicles such as buses, jeeps, minibuses, auto tem-

pos are no less culpable. The practicable steps in the present situation seem to be the necessity for coordinated actions by the Department of Environment, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, police and magistracy to launch sustained drives to detect faulty vehicles and impose deterrent penalties to ensure operation of the vehicles without poisonous exhausts. The prime need of the hour also seems to be that everyone of us, as well as the vehicle owners should be conscious of the gravity of the problem and should be helpful and co-operative in ensuring a better environment for the present and future.

Another aspect of environmental degradation is noise pollution. Among the factors considered responsible in this respect are lack of proper planning in urban growth, existence of noise-creating industries and enterprises in residential and recreational areas within city limits and absence of awareness among city dwellers of the consequences stemming from constant exposure to noisy environment. A state of utter confusion seems to prevail in the field of environmental acoustics. For lack of proper zoning of growth activities into specific areas like residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational, we find an intermingling of a number of disparate entities in a given area.

There is a deplorable lack of effective measures to control or reduce the level of urban noise. In our legal system, there are provisions for prevention of public nuisance which term includes nuisance on account of excessive noise in any locality. The Department of Environment has

also made provisions for protection of environment against noise pollution. But the sad part of the situation is that there are obvious signs of indifference on the part of the authorities concerned to check the growing menace in this respect.

A fast growing city is generally plagued with many woes. If that city happens to be in the Third World, as we are, redress of the woes doesn't prove to be easy. Dhaka city presents a typical example of such a case. To ensure proper urban milieu and environmental care in a steady and effective manner requires a deep sense of commitment on the part of the authorities concerned as well as adequate civic awareness. These factors coupled with financial constraints seem to be standing in the way of our making significant progress in these fields.

Smoke and noise pollution are two of the other environmental perils besetting our city. Among such threats to our environmental scenario may be included the cruel denudation of trees in many areas of the city, the existing system of garbage disposal, the poor sanitary and drainage systems, the dumping of industrial wastes in the Buriganga river, and the proliferating slums and semi-slums.

We have a host of environmental problems which threaten to make the city look like a city in decay. Observers tend to feel that unless remedial measures are taken on priority basis, we will be placing at great peril the health and wellbeing of the entire populace of the city, particularly those who are living in the old town and the older parts of the new, who suffer the most.



A section of BNP activists in Chandpur-4 constituency brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting party nomination for Md Abdullah in the seat. - Star photo

8 killed in road accidents

By Staff Correspondent

At least eight persons, including a minor boy were killed and 20 others injured in road accidents in and outside the capital yesterday.

Our DMCH correspondent adds: The driver and a helper of a truck were killed when the vehicle crashed against the road divider in Demra area in the city yesterday.

The driver Abu Bakr, 40, and his helper died on the spot at about 6:30 pm, police and hospital sources said.

The Dhaka-bound truck swerved towards the road divider after brake failure near Santo petrol pump at Rayerbazar in the evening. Police later recovered the bodies and sent these to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy.

Meanwhile, one Mosharraf, 20, who received fatal injuries in a road accident near Kanchpur bridge Thursday night died at the DMCH early yesterday, hospital sources said.

Our Staff Correspondent from Sylhet reports: Four persons including a minor boy were killed and 20 others injured in two separate road accidents on Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

A Dhaka-bound bus from Sunamganj fell into a roadside pond after colliding with a truck at Kazirbazar near

Sylhet telephone exchange made digital

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Jan 5: The Sylhet telephone exchange has been converted into a digital one from 5 PM today. With this, all the 7500-lines of the analogue system have been turned into digital.

The newly-installed digital exchange will also facilitate 7500 new lines which will be allotted soon, an official source said.

Hartals

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football tournament at Rangunia as pro-hartal activists raided the venue.

Our Staff Correspondent in Sylhet reports: Many local leaders and workers of BNP and its front organisations warned that they would boycott the elections if Abdul Harris Chowdhury was not nominated for Sylhet-5 constituency, replacing Abdul Kahar Chowdhury. They also called a day-long hartal at Jakiganj and Kanaighat thanas on January 8.

In Kulara thana of Moulvibazar, a number of BNP workers observed a two-hour token hunger strike protesting the nomination of M M Shahin for Moulvibazar-2 constituency.

Our Staff Correspondent adds from Barisal: The supporters of Mujibur Rahman Sarwar, former BNP MP in the fifth Parliament, enforced a half-day hartal here yesterday protesting the nomination of Dr Ehteshamul Haq son of the President. They also announced a gherao programme and called a transport strike in Barisal today.

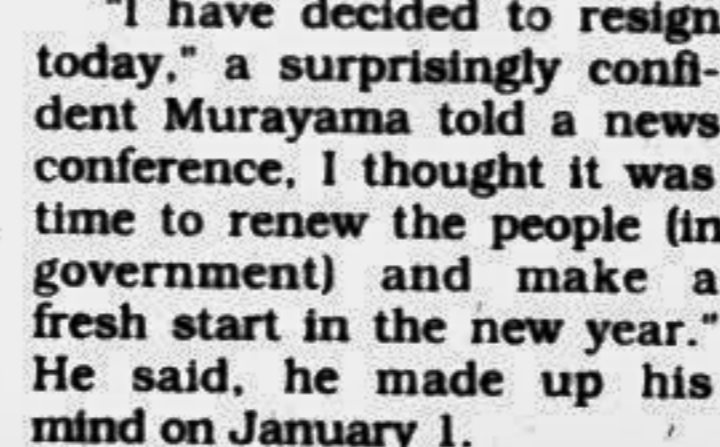
Supporters of Keramat Ali, Minister without portfolio, called an indefinite hartal from today at Dhumki thana in Patuakhali, demanding nomination for Ali.

A half-day hartal was observed by a faction of JCD at Borhanuddin and Doulatkhan thanas (Bhola-2) demanding nomination of Hafiz Ibrahim. They also removed the sign-board of BNP office at Borhanuddin.

Our Correspondent in Brahmanbaria reports: Nasir-nagar thana unit of JCD and that of Jubo Dal brought out processions and declared party nominee for Brahmanbaria-2 constituency Sayed Morshed Kamal, a former MP from Jatiya Party, persona non grata.

Thana units of BNP, JCD and Jubo Dal at Akhaura yesterday held a press conference to voice their demand for withdrawal of the nomination of Mia Abdullah Wazed for Brahmanbaria-4 (Akhaura-Kasba) and called a half-day hartal on January 8.

Murayama resigns



TOKYO, Jan 5: Japan's Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama announced his resignation as premier today to make way for a new government under the current three-party coalition, but ruled out calling snap general elections, reports Reuter.

"I have decided to resign today," a surprisingly confident Murayama told a news conference. I thought it was time to renew the people (in government) and make a fresh start in the new year." He said, he made up his mind on January 1.

GF: Dissolve cabinet

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Dr Kamal said the Gano Forum believes that the discussions centering around an interim, non-partisan and impartial administration under the president, has created the expectation that if a sincere effort is made on all sides, some adjustments can and should be made and an agreement can be reached.

Expressing grave concern over the long political crisis, the Gano Forum president said that politics of confrontation made the parliament non-functional for a period of over one and a half years and now it was obstructing the election of a new parliament.

Dr Kamal also urged the Election Commission to exercise effectively the powers vested in it by the constitution to ensure its directives on paper are truly implemented in practice.

Shamsuddoha, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Kamal Haider and other leaders were present at the press-conference.

Demanding immediate announcement of a framework for impartial elections he said, "The council should ensure that the day-to-day administration is carried out in an impartial manner so that a free and fair election can be held."

Dr Kamal stressed the need for utilising the time and opportunity which has emerged by the postponement of the last date for submission of the nomination papers.

"The delay is reaching an understanding on the issue of the interim caretaker administration for holding a free and fair election has deepened the crisis that now threatens the electoral process itself," he said.

Aliens married to Malaysian women will get jobs

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 5: Foreigners married to Malaysian women may be allowed to take jobs in the country to ease its labour crunch and make their stay worthwhile, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad said today, reports Reuter.

"We have to consider this, as the men may just be bumping and living off their wives... which is not good," Mahathir was quoted as saying by the national Bernama News Agency.

Labour-starved Malaysia relies on an army of foreign workers to keep its dynamic economy moving.

Photo exhibition on local birds opens in city

By Staff Correspondent

"Birds", a unique photographic exhibition by Monwar Ahmed, began yesterday at the National Museum in Shahbag.

The first ever exhibition of its kind in this country, they show brings together some 120 birds of 56 species, captured by Monwar in colour photographs over a four-year period.

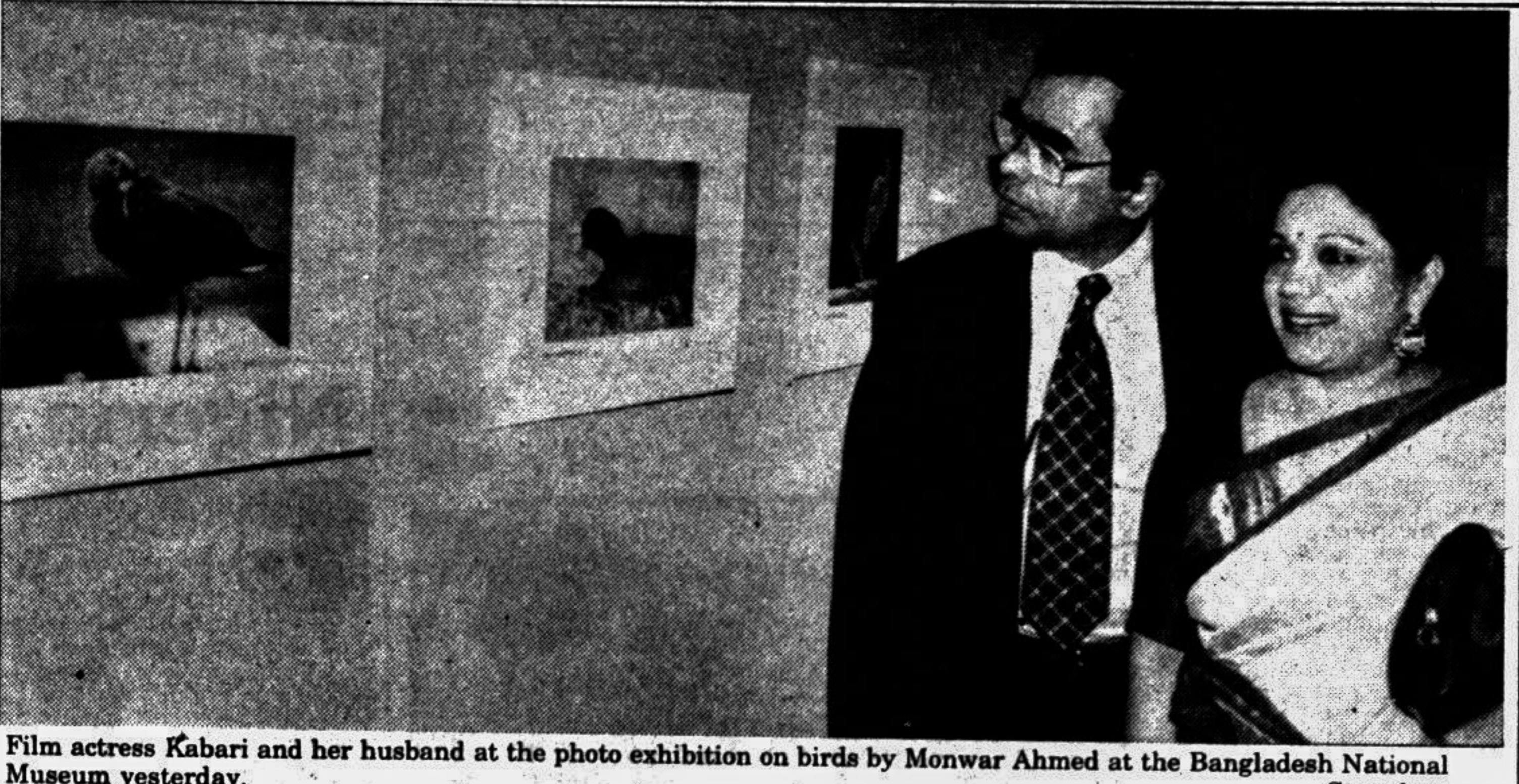
"Whenever I get bored, I go out into the countryside and photograph birds. Their songs and flawless melodies attract me," the veteran photojournalist said of his singular pleasure.

The five-day exhibition, sponsored by the National Museum, was inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Emajuddin Ahmed.

The opening ceremony was attended by Prof Kazi Z. Husain of DU Ziaul Islam Chowdhury, Director General of the National Museum, Nazrul Haque and scores of bird lovers.

Bangladesh is home to more than 600 bird species, and the exhibition aims at introducing them and their environment to the people, the organisers observed.

The show runs till Jan 9 and will be open daily from 11 am to 4 pm.



Film actress Kabari and her husband at the photo exhibition on birds by Monwar Ahmed at the Bangladesh National Museum yesterday. - Star photo

Russian FM, DPM resign

MOSCOW, Jan 5: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozыrev tendered his resignation to President Boris Yeltsin today, Interfax news agency said, quoting sources close to the minister, reports AFP.

The Foreign Ministry press office said it had no confirmation of the report.

AP adds: President Yeltsin has formally accepted the resignation of a deputy prime minister who was considered instrumental in Moscow's decision to launch the war against Chechnya.

Delhi confce to seek global sanctions against Myanmar

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: An international conference aimed at mobilising global sanctions to restore democracy in Myanmar discussed measures today, which organisers said would spell the end of the country's military regime.

"There are no human rights in Myanmar," Indian politician George Fernandes, a leader of the Samta (Equality) Party told AFP here. "We are absolutely certain you do not have anything like this anywhere today." Fernandes, the organiser

of the international convention for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar which began here Thursday, said the delegates including MPs lawyers and policy-makers would unveil the "action plan" tomorrow.

"We will lobby around the world asking governments, rights groups and trade unions to get involved in direct boycott and other forms of pressure," he said. "This is the first meeting of its kind in the world."

The ongoing collaboration with the military regime by western governments cannot go on. I believe that all those who stand for freedom and democracy anywhere in the world will never agree to any compromise with the military junta," Fernandes said.

The delegates from around the world demanded the restoration of full and equal rights to Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Exiled Myanmar leader U Aung Ko who heads a group called Aung San Suu Kyi Liberte in Exile in France, said her struggle to end tyranny would eventually triumph.

The Foreign Ministry press office said it had no confirmation of the report.