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Lost cousins

A colony of 1500 monkeys at Madaripur face uncertainty

By Shehab Ahmed

The monkeys of Char Muguria, a bazaar at Madaripur are facing an uncertain future, their numbers are growing but food supply is declining, forcing them to steal and land in an increasingly hostile environment of *Homo Sapiens* and animals.

More than 1500 monkeys belonging to *Rhesus Macaque* species are split in two rival groups live in and around the bazaar since the 18th century when the place was an important station for jute traders. The monkeys burgeoning numbers are posing a threat to their own existence. For a long time they were tolerated by traders, handing them food: Lentils, puffed rice or rice, an occasional banana, snacks like sindura and leftovers from their meal.

Sometimes they simply walk into restaurants and eateries, sit beside the customers and demand the same treat.

Normally they are complied with and they eat without any trouble. But all hell explodes if the monkeys are denied food, beaten or chased away. Even if one of them is wounded they ran amok in the bazaar, Anisuzzaman Khan, a wild life specialist at the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) says.

Khan had been to Char Muguria often and studied their behaviour, making the last trip

early this year. His estimate shows the primates' number over 1500. Two colonies generally divide the monkeys, who are also split in sub-groups.

They live on the ledges of homes, tin roofs of the shops and jute godowns, trees, a jute mill and in a nearby temple.

Those living in the temple share the offerings with the old priest. Milk, sweet meats, rice, banana and other fruits are among the offerings by devotees.

The bazaris offer them vegetables, fruits, puffed rice, sometime a banana.

No one knows how the primates settled at the bazaar which was an important jute trading post of the English colonials dating back to the East India Company on the bank of the Arial Khan river, an offshoot of the Padma.

Legend says at the dalpati or the corner for lentil in the sprawling bazaar the monkeys used to come often to pick at the spillover.

Gradually with their homes in the nearby forests disappearing the monkeys, by now, revered for good luck by the traders stayed on.

Now they have to fight, often, to have a morsel. As if to reconfirm the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest the stronger amongst them grab the most. The elderly and the



Survival of the fittest

A monkey fights a dog for food at Char Muguria, Madaripur, while fellow primates back him up.

young often suffer.

Sometimes they fight fierce battle with the urchins or stray dogs for food and leftovers, occasionally to retain their hold.

Battling an enemy however unites their ranks, everyone contributes their might. But the fights sometimes lands them in trouble. Itangers the otherwise tolerant traders.

We like them. We enjoy their company, said a young shopkeeper Taimus Ali. But if they

create problem or if there is nothing to offer I have no choice but to drive them away.

Something like that happened during the floods last year. There had been virtually nothing for them.

The district administration sanctioned a tonne of rice after forest and environment minister Begum Sajeda Chowdhury instructed them to do so after reading about their plight. But the rice never reached the

needy, shopkeepers alleged. A number of monkeys died due to starvation. Others fell ill, signs of it are visible among the primates.

Khan says to prevent repetition of such incidents the primates should be translocated to a reserve forest where their kin live like the Madhupur forest or any other forest. Otherwise the monkeys of Char Muguria face an uncertain future.

Extraction of groundwater greatly increased with the emergence of irrigated *boro* paddy as the biggest contributor to cereal production in the country in 1998-99.

Water resources and agriculture experts said irrigated *boro* is rapidly replacing rain-fed *aman* to become the major annual crop but at the cost of further exploitation of already depleted groundwater reserve.

The advantage is obvious that while *aman* production fully depends on favourable weather condition, *boro* involves lesser risk factor if irrigation is guaranteed.

An earlier survey had found that shallow tubewells (STWs) in 130 thanas out of the 450 in the country had problems in extracting groundwater. But in the recent *boro* season, farmers in many areas of the northern region had installed their STWs much below the surface for accessing water.

A BADC official said that a minimum distance of 1,750 feet between two STWs is required but that is no longer being followed. Too much concentration of STWs made it difficult to get in contact with the aquifer.

In the dry season, experts say, 73 per cent of the need for water is met from groundwater and over 85 per cent of it goes to agriculture. "At the same time, demand for other uses of water will increase along with population, urbanisation, and economic development", said a

try's total drinking water requirement.

Moreover, there are various side effects of the expansion of irrigation. These include reduction of fish habitat, depletion of groundwater reserve, deterioration of the quality of water, increased water logging and build-up of soil salinity.

Experts say 60 per cent of irrigation water in *boro* is lost because of on-farm water management inefficiency.

"It takes twice as much water to produce rice than any other cereal crop -- more than 2,000 tons of water are used to grow one ton of rice", said Ismail Seragedin, Chairman of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). An e-mail report received by this correspondent quoted him as saying this at mid-term meeting of CGIAR in China recently. CGIAR is the largest global agricultural research network.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is also concerned over scarcity of water and has come up with some suggestions for farmers to follow those to minimise water use by up to 25 per cent without causing any yield loss.

Reduction of the time for land preparation is one of the many water-saving techniques suggested by IRRI. Water used for land preparation is 27 per cent less in direct wet seeding compared with transplanting

Drug abusers pose big threat

By Mustak Hossain

The number of drug addicts has reached an "alarming proportion" in the country, especially in the capital.

The increase in use of injectable drugs is causing concern among experts as it is one of the principal ways of transmission of HIV.

"HIV epidemic among injectable drug users is expanding rapidly since August 1998," according to a survey conducted by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases and Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B).

The survey conducted on 400 injectable drug users found that 2.5 per cent of them were infected with HIV positive. On an average, an user takes 20 injections a week.

According to a rough estimate of the Department of Nar-

cotics Control, there are about 15 lakh drug addicts in the country now and they spend about Tk 20 crore a year on drugs. An addict spends about Tk 130 per day. About 90 per cent of the users share needles and syringes.

It is alarming that 20 per cent of the drug addicts sell their blood to blood banks to buy drugs. But in most cases, the blood thus purchased by the blood banks are not tested for HIV, the ICDDR,B survey said.

Drug users prefer Buprenophine, an Indian injection banned in the country. They also use Morphine, Estimtil, Phanargon as well as a cocktail prepared from these.

According to a study by an international NGO, there were about 7,650 injectable drug

users and at least 11,000 heroin smokers in the city in mid-1997. The number became more than double in June 1999.

There are also female users of injectable drugs. About 14 per cent of the street sex workers are injectable drug users and about 20 per cent of them have "regular" clients.

The spread of HIV among injectable drug users is more dangerous because it spreads very rapidly", the ICDDR,B survey said.

Most often, sex partners of drug users are sex workers who have "numerous" clients, majority of whom are small businessmen, rickshaw-pullers, students, police and service holders. In some specific areas in Dhaka, truckers make up a high proportion of the clients.

Most of the clients of sex workers are married who, without knowing that they have HIV positive, spread the incurable disease to their wives and new-borns.

Most of the people carrying HIV positive in the country do not know that they have it as there is no way to detect it without blood test.

There is little scope for rehabilitation of these addicts through detoxification and counselling due to lack of institutional services.

There is only one 40-bed government Drug Treatment Hospital at Tejgaon, which is not enough for treatment of the drug addicts. However, there are some private centres in the city which are very costly.

Dhaka-Agartala bus service

Star Report

Bus service between Dhaka and Agartala is likely to begin shortly, BBC reported last night.

Jiten Chowdhury, Information Minister of Tripura after return to his state told BBC that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already directed the authorities concerned to start road development work in Brahmanbaria area to connect the northeastern Indian State of Tripura with Bangladesh through bus service.

He said that during his visit he discussed the matter with Bangladeshi officials.

The sooner AL goes, the better'

From Our Correspondent SHAKHIPUR, Tangail, July 22: Rebel Awami League MP Kader Siddiqui today said the Hasina government has nothing to do with the ideology of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"As soon as the government goes, it would be better for the nation. The sooner the better", Siddiqui said while addressing a public meeting at Shakhipur PM High School ground.

Referring to the Prime Minister's reported green signal for issuing warrant of arrest against him, Siddiqui said: "How can I accept this government as a pro-liberation force when it has revived a case against me which was filed in 1976 by those who had formed a government on Mujib's body?"

Siddiqui also reiterated his announcement that he would resign from the Jatiya Sangsad if the government failed to repeal the Atia Forest Ordinance by August 23. According to him, the ordinance, promulgated in 1982, has affected some 25 lakh people in eight thanas of the country.

Bangladesh is persuading debt relief for not its own interest. Rather, debt relief will benefit many others as Bangladesh's most credits are multilateral and the loan is very less than that of other developing countries," said Finance Secretary Akbar Ali Khan.

He also criticised the government decision to rehabilitate the "rebels" of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the police force.

Referring to the alleged recent police atrocity against him, Siddiqui said, "No government can stay in power for ever. If Sheikh Hasina thinks that she will remain in power for ever, she is living in fool's paradise."

Presided over by former president of Shaphapur thana unit of the Awami League, Abdul Hye, the rally was also addressed by, among others, convenor of the Bangladesh Freedom Fighters Coordination Council Iftiqaq Aziz Ullah and former secretary of Sufipur thana unit of AL Idris Sarder.

The octogenarian BNP leader was also exempted from personal attendance in the court till the charge-sheet of the case is filed.

The traditional factionalism in Chittagong AL has never been addressed by the party high command, some insiders claim. Even allegations are there that some central level leaders patronise one group, while others provide shelter to another for their own interests.

In Rajshahi city, conflict between the city unit vice president Masudul Huq Dul and Secretary of the city unit A H M Khalruzzaman Liton is well known to party high-ups.

Advocate Abdur Razzaq Khan, Sanauallah Mia, Habibur Rahman, Mondol and others appeared for the accused.

Some changes in BNP's planned road march

BNP has made some changes in its planned three-day road march programmes beginning Sunday, reports UNB.

According to the change, the road march would begin from Azampur bus stand at Uttara instead of Paltan Maidan.

On the second day of the road march on July 26, the rally will reach at Tinani Bazar instead of Jhenidha thana headquarters at 4 pm and at Barikhila at 4:45 pm in Sherpur Sadar thana. BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia will address rallies at both the places.

On July 27, the BNP chairman will address public meetings at Chandipasha High School ground instead of Nandail Chowrashta at 4:15 pm and at Pulerhat Bazar in Pakundia thana at 6:15 pm.

Furniture shop owner killed in bomb attack

By Staff Correspondent

An owner of a furniture shop was killed when unidentified assailants hurled bombs at his shop in the city's Fulbaria area last night.

The dead was identified as Khokon, 29, son of Lat Mia, a resident of Siddique Bazar area.

Corruption case

Mirza Golam Hafiz granted bail

Former Law Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz was granted bail after he surrendered before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court in a corruption case yesterday, reports UNB.

The octogenarian BNP leader was also exempted from personal attendance in the court till the charge-sheet of the case is filed.

On April 22, 1997, the Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed a case with Tejgaon police station stating that Mirza Hafiz, while he was law Minister in 1993, created a forged deed in collusion with the then District Registrar Dhaka, A K M Fazlul Hoque, and became owner of a huge property in Savar.

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As economic disparity denies millions of children their right to basic education and health, the United Nations Children's Fund made an urgent appeal for debt relief of the world's poorest and most vulnerable nations, reports UNB.

With Bangladesh's annual loan-repayment expenditure snowballing over Tk 800 crore, the UNICEF report "Progress of Nations 1999" launched across the world yesterday, also addressed the debt-servicing burden.

Bangladesh is persuading debt relief for not its own interest. Rather, debt relief will benefit many others as Bangladesh's most credits are multilateral and the loan is very less than that of other developing countries," said Finance Secretary Akbar Ali Khan.

Addressing a press conference after the launch of the annual report, he informed that Bangladesh's 43 per cent credits are provided by the World Bank, 25 per cent by the Asian Development Bank, 20 per cent by Japan, 4 per cent by USA and the rest by others.

"We have already brought the issue of debt relief to notice of our donors, including major one, Japan, as well as international forums," the Finance Secretary said, adding that the expenditure relieved could be used for social development sectors.

In this respect, Akbar Ali Khan informed that a Bangladesh government gave emphasis on social-development sector and in 1999-2000 fiscal allocated Tk 8,752 crore, including Tk 5,313 crore in ADP and Tk 3,439 crore for poverty alleviation.

However, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia Nigel Fisher said debt relief alone won't guarantee that the substantial debt-servicing costs saved by the developing nations be spent to ensure rights of children-women to health and education.

Quoting the report he also

told the press conference that economic progress doesn't necessarily guarantee development.

"Some of the poorest nations are making greater progress towards the goal set at the World Summit for Children."

In this regard, he quoted the report that UNICEF and its partners like to view allocation of 20 per cent of official development assistance by industrialised nations and 20 per cent of national budget by developing countries to basic social programmes.

This year's UNICEF report highlighted four tasks: possible life profile of the six billion baby, global campaign to eradicate polio, challenge of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic and burden of debt servicing and urgent requirement for debt relief.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who launched the "Progress of Nations 1999" here in the morning, is one of the authors to the report. She wrote an article "A Priceless Legacy" on polio eradication.

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