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Fishing the fishy way

Influential people poach 'ecologically critical' Tanguar Haor

By Shehab Ahmed

Some influential people are trying to manipulate leasing of the Tanguar Haor in Tahirpur, Sunamganj, for fishing ignoring a government directive.

The government has listed the wetland as one of the four Ecologically Critical Areas (ECA) in the country, prohibiting unsustainable fishing and hunting to maintain bio-diversity, sources concerned said.

Home to as many as 140 rare species including the Pallash's fishing eagle, a globally endangered bird, and 17 critically endangered fishes, the 9725-hectare wetland supports the last surviving swamp forest in the country. The forest consists of Hijal, Karach, Gunjikata and Chhongra trees.

It sustains a wide variety of fish and aquatic life including many exotic species and waterfowl, seasonally harbouring at least 60,000 of them apart from the resident birds. A large flock of waterfowl visits the wetland every year.

Last year, a Black-necked Stork, a very rare species, was wounded by fishermen farming the wetland. A few hundred Blacknecks survive in Tibet only. The migratory birds from the Himalayas use the wetland as a transit point during their journey to and from the mountains.

Following mounting concern about the indiscriminate fishing and hunting, the government decided to include the haor to the list of the ECAs for a better wetland management policy, terminating a lease for



Palla's eagle, now an endangered species worldwide.

fisheries last December. The National Conservation Strategy (NCS) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests has already recommended the haor be declared a Ramsar site in compliance with a declaration adopted at Ramsar, Iran. Bangladesh is a signatory to the declaration that calls for preserving the world's wetlands and letting the nature survive in pristine condition under proper management.

The NCS recommendations follow a detailed study by six-

man expert team including a wetland conservation specialist from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Wim Giesen. The other experts - SMA Rashid, AKM Nuruzzaman Khan, Anisuzzaman Khan, Syed Shafique Ahmed and Abu Naser Khan from Bangladesh - studied the lake's management, fishery, and birds, socio-economic and land tenure aspects.

The report identified the decline of fisheries production due to over-fishing, depletion of natural resources like reed lands and swamp forest which threatened the birds like Pallash's eagle, decline in the numbers of migratory birds and against such backdrop a growing threat of conflict between the local community and the leaseholder of fisheries over resources as pressing issues of Tanguar Haor.

The study prepared with the help of the satellite imagery drew a sustainable management plan for the ecosystem of the haor and its natural resources. Considering the close relation between an estimated 25,000 people living around 46 villages, they suggested an integrated conservation and management plan involving the community without leasing the lake to any individuals or groups who usually hire seasonal labour from outside.

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sources from the area reported. But the environment and forests ministry officials said they have already asked the relevant ministries, departments, the local district administration and the Directorate of Fisheries to abide by the ECA guidelines regarding the haor.

Anisuzzaman Khan, one of the experts from the IUCN, says the wetland should be declared a Ramsar to preserve it for future generations. He said the unique lake, rich in bio-diversity, fits into the criteria set for declaring the wetland a Ramsar site. He also said its resources could be used on a sustainable basis with community participation.

According to an environment and forests ministry gazette notification on April 1999, three haors have been declared as ECA. Besides the Tanguar Haor, others are the Hakaluk Haor in Maulviabazar and Sylhet and Marjan Haor in Kishoreganj, Jhenaidah.

The notification prohibits destruction or felling of natural forest and trees, hunting of wildlife and trapping and collection of shells, coral, turtle and other wildlife. It also bars all activities that may destroy the habitat of wildlife and plants and alter or change the natural quality of land and water. Besides, setting up of industries or organisations that may pollute the soil, water, air and sound and any act that may harm the fish and other aquatic life, water, and air have also been banned in those wetlands.

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Counter campaign

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses a public rally at Postagola in the city yesterday.

—PID photo

Let's talk over tea

Hasina's public meeting call to Khaleda

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday invited Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia to the Secretariat during their planned sit-in to resolve all disputes through discussion, reports UNB.

"Come inside the Secretariat instead of suffering on the street under scorching heat of the sun, have a cup of tea, and resolve all problems through talks," she said while addressing a huge public meeting at Alam Market in the city's Postagola area.

The BNP-led opposition parties have planned to stage the sit-in outside Bangladesh Secretariat on September 12 to protest, what they called the government move to provide corridor to India in the name of transhipment.

The Prime Minister suggested that the opposition leader build up movement on public issues instead of loitering in want of issues.

"Do movement on public issues, on socio-economic issues, we will accept all your demands. Do movement with issues that will benefit the people. Otherwise, people would not be involved in the movement."

Hasina said the only issue of the opposition party is to protect the killers of Bangabandhu. Post-75 governments tried to save the killers by introducing Indemnity Ordinance, and Gen-

eral Zia rehabilitated the killers by giving them jobs, she said.

The Prime Minister said the people will not take part in this movement, which is targeted to save the killers as they want justice and rule of law.

The meeting, presided over by Habibur Rahman Mollah MP, was also addressed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Jalil and Mayor Mohammad Hanif.

The Prime Minister felt that the opposition leader had lost her patience and is using indecent words against the government because they have lost the chance for plundering public money that did during their rule.

She alleged that BNP had plundered people's money and was always busy in amassing wealth. "Now by not getting that chance they have become restless."

Hasina accused the opposition leader of spreading falsehood against her government and said, "she (Begum Zia) has mastered the art of spreading lies and mentioned opposition leader's allegation about CHT and Ganges water sharing treaty."

All the allegations of the opposition leader proved false, and the CHT has not become part of India, and water is

coming through the Ganges as per the accord, Hasina said adding not even "uludhan" is being heard in the mosques as appreciated by the opposition leader.

The Prime Minister said, "the opposition leader is trying to catch one issue after another and spreading lies against the government, but the people do not accept lies and bluffs, movement can not be forged through bluff."

Refuting the allegation of opposition leader that for one family crores of taka is being spent, the Prime Minister said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not leave anything for his descendants rather he sacrificed his life for the people of Bangladesh.

She said Road No 32 of Bhagabandhu has been turned into a museum and his village home at Tungipara has also been given for building a mausoleum.

Regarding traffic jam, she said members of the armed forces have extended help in this regard and added that they always stand beside the people at the time of need.

This government is involving the members of the armed forces in the welfare of the people, but in the past the armed forces were used for capturing and consolidating power.

CID to question six more UCBL directors

By Staff Correspondent
The CID is likely to interrogate six more directors and some other staff of the United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL) on Sunday at its Motijheel office in connection with the vandalism at the bank's board room on August 26, a CID official said.

Five directors and a number of staff of UCBL have so far been questioned. Investigators also interrogated Akteruzzaman Chowdhury Babu, a former director of the bank and an Awami League leader, at his Motijheel office on Tuesday.

Babu allegedly stormed the UCBL boardroom with about 50 people while a meeting of the board of directors was going on in the afternoon of August 26. It has also been alleged that Babu forced Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury, who was chairman of the bank when the meeting had started, and the directors at gunpoint to resign and declared himself the chairman of the bank.

Difficult state at DU dormitory

A big chunk of concrete fell from the ceiling of a room at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University with a big bang yesterday, creating panic among the residents of the dormitory, reports UNB.

Hall sources said the concrete materials fell on the table at room number 118 of Dr Govinda Chandra Dev Bhaban when its inmate Suman Talukder, a first year student of Physics Department, was sleeping at noon. However, he escaped unharmed.

Some 20 students, including Suman, residing in the hall at that time came out of their rooms.

They checked and found some 20 rooms and some corridors through which rainwater leaked from the rooftop.

The students said that the hall authorities temporarily repaired the worn parts of the hall time and again after the October 15 incident in 1985. Thirty-nine students were killed in ceiling collapse while watching TV drama at night.

The condition of Dr Jotiray Guh Thakurabha Bhaban of the hall was stated to be similar to that of Dr Govinda Chandra Dev Bhaban.

However, the hall Provost Dr Durgadas Bhattacharya could not be contacted by phone.

Chemical poisoning concerns WHO chiefs

By Staff Correspondent

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Committee for South-East Asia concluded its 52nd session here yesterday with a call to member states to intensify time bound action on priority health issues affecting the region.

The committee recognised the growing incidence of morbidity and mortality from chemical poisoning in some countries of the region.

It expressed concern at the high content of arsenic in groundwater and other toxic

chemicals in drinking water in some countries.

The committee also urged the member countries to prioritise malaria control programmes recognising the burden of the disease in the region and economic consequences of poor.

Earlier on Wednesday, the committee also adopted a regional action plan against tobacco and HIV/AIDS.

It called for intensification of HIV/AIDS surveillance and adopting regional policy framework for tobacco control.

A number of recommendations were finalised yesterday in this regard.

The four-day Regional Committee session was participated by representatives from all 11 member states.

The session, organised by the WHO, also decided that in 2000, technical discussions would be held on the subjects of equity in access to public health and healthy settings.

It was decided that the 53rd session of the committee would be held in New Delhi in September 2000.

BNP demands Nasim's departure

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has demanded resignation of Home Minister Mohammed Nasim for making audacious remarks about the higher courts.

The demand was made at the party's Standing Committee meeting yesterday, chaired by party chairperson Khaleda Zia.

The meeting held at the official residence of the leader of the opposition in parliament, said the remarks by a responsible minister on the higher courts are a serious threat to independence of the judiciary.

The party's highest decision-making body in a resolution said the government is doing this to destroy the country's most respected institution.

It said after destroying all democratic, administrative and educational institutions, the government is now interfering with the judiciary.

On approval of new anti-terror law by the Cabinet, BNP said the government is conspiring to step up repression on the Opposition to suppress its political opponents.

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Cross-examination of Rubel's father completes

By Court Correspondent

Defence lawyers yesterday advised upazila election of father of Rubel in the Third Additional Metropolitan sessions judge's court.

The ten of the 14 charged accused, including AC Akram and Mukuli Begum, were produced before the court yesterday at about 2 pm.

The ruling party parliamentarian informed that the MPs were further directed by the Prime Minister to ask all parlementmen not to get involved in

New UN offices open in city

By Staff Correspondent

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan praised Bangladesh's consistent involvement in peacekeeping, development and many other issues on the international agenda in 25 years of her membership in the UN, reports UNB.

This was conveyed in a message, delivered on his behalf by UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka, David E Lockwood on the occasion of the opening of new UN offices in the city yesterday.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad inaugurated the new premises of seven UN agencies at the magnificent IDB Bhaban at Agargaon in the city. Finance Minister Shah Ahsan Kibria was present.

Offices of UNDP, WFP, UNESCO, UNOPS, UNFPA, UNAIDS and UNIC have been shifted to IDB Bhaban

Two-storey bldg demolished at Dhanmondi

By Staff Correspondent

A two-storey 'unauthorised' building was finally demolished yesterday at Dhanmondi Road-5, House-26 after the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court rejected a prayer seeking status quo from Anjumanara, wife of Major (retd) Manjur Kader, editor of the weekly Evidence and a former Jatiya Party minister.

The demolition ended an eight-year long battle between the landlord and Anjumanara, the tenant of the building where her husband ran several shops and offices. A platoon of riot police stood guard when the workers were carrying out the demolition.

On Wednesday two of Rajuk's earth-removers had to stop halfway through the demolition of the building as the petitioner obtained a last minute 'status quo' order from the Appellate Division. The status quo expired at 11 am yesterday and the bench, after hearing the landlord, restored its rights.

The landlord of the premises Nurul Haque told The Daily Star that the tenant had lost all court battles but still refused to move out of his premises.</