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Poachers raid reserve forest



En route to extinction

A Great Indian Hornbill, popularly known as Dhanesh, at its sanctuary in the Saapchari forest in southern Sylhet. Thanks to poachers, they have become a rarity and are on a further decline.

—Courtesy photo: Sirajul Hossain

By Shehab Ahmed

Poachers preying on the natural forest at Saapchari in southern Sylhet region are endangering a wide variety of wild life, including the last retreat of Hullock Gibbon in Bangladesh and 246 species of birds, nature watchers said.

"Poachers are working in the virgin forest, indiscriminately felling trees threatening the wild life," Wing Commander (ret) Inamul Haq, noted nature photographer and a leader of Nature Conservation Movement (NACOM) said.

By nightfall Wednesday, police had arrested 400 demonstrators in addition to 68 on Tuesday.

While the streets were calmer than Tuesday, police were still firing tear gas at demonstrators near US President Bill Clinton's hotel as night fell.

In late 1997 the forest department cleared one kilometre strip of the forest apparently for cane-planting in total disregard for the evergreen forest and its inhabitants.

Earlier some officials toyed with the idea of turning it into a palm plantation destroying a good portion of it and driving away the leopards who once lived there.

Law prohibits extraction in the natural forests under a five-year moratorium expires this month.

Ministry of Forests and Environment officials, however, denied that they have given anyone the permission to extract woods from Saapchari.

A highly-placed source admitted that they have received reports about poachers active in the forest in connivance of a section of forest officials.

He said that the government is keen to preserve natural forests. The moratorium on felling of trees is going to be extended for another five-year period from next month. Necessary process is under way to extend the moratorium, introduced in 1995, he added.

The moratorium covers seven per cent of the 17 per cent woodlands, including the Sundarbans.

But a FAO estimate put the country's total forest coverage to only nine per cent of the land mass.

Vetch changes colour

By Staff Correspondent

A section of unscrupulous businessmen are selling vetch, an imported toxic lentil, in grinded form as gram flower (besan) taking advantage of holy Ramadan that begins this month.

"We have received reports that vetch is being sold as besan, after a recent ban on import and sale of the toxic product," said a commerce ministry official.

The grinded vetch has been found in shops and markets of the city and officials feared that the flour might have already been despatched to different parts of the country.

Besan paste, made of a popular ground lentil known as khesari, is widely used as a dip for frying different types of eatables. The flour and the paste are particularly popular during the month of Ramadan, for preparing a wide range of iftar items.

It was in the wake of reports regarding its toxicity that the government had banned open sale or import of vetch marketed as lentil and ordered withdrawal of the entire quantum of vetch from the market, the official said.

The commerce ministry on Tuesday directed city corporations, municipalities and the district administrations to crack down on those involved in the malpractice.

"Faxed messages have been sent to all deputy commissioners for taking immediate steps in this regard," the official said. The government banned the item on October 17 following press reports that vetch, which looks like masoor pulse, is toxic and can impair eyesight,

affect human tissues and even cause lethargy.

The item was imported as 'lentil for human consumption', mainly from Australia.

Earlier, as a preliminary step, the government had ordered that vetch is to be seized if and when it was found being sold in the open market.

According to press reports, 1,100 tonnes of vetch had been imported from Australia during the last four months of the current fiscal, 6,410 tonnes during the last fiscal and a total of 50,000 tonnes since 1992.

Sources said that a section of unscrupulous traders, have this time opted to grind and convert the toxic merchandise into besan, which is hard to differentiate from normal besan.

The officials could not say if they had any mechanism to test the flour and confirm its level of toxicity.

On the other hand, the Sylhet district unit of Bangladesh Mukti Joddha Sangsad held a public meeting at the Registry Maidan this evening.

The speakers said the university authorities have named the halls and buildings after some national heroes to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War. These should remain unchanged for the greater national interest, they said.

Vested quarters are now out to create chaos in the name of movement, they alleged. The peace-loving people of Sylhet should take a strong stand on this issue, they said.

Later, a memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister was handed over to the Deputy Commissioner.

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed till December 8 operation of the High Court order staying the functioning of the Enquiry Committee on alleged irregularities and rigging of votes in the parliamentary election in Tangail-8 constituency.

The SC fixed December 8 for hearing the leave petition in this regard.

The HC on November 28 stayed functioning of the Enquiry Committee and issued a rule nisi on the government and the Chief Election Commissioner.

The government filed a civil petition with SC for leave to appeal against the HC order.

It was stated in a writ petition filed by Bangabir Kader Siddique that the Enquiry Committee was not formed as per the proposal of the Election Commission.

4 Khulna Jubo League activists held with arms

From Staff Correspondent.

FOUR activists of Jubo League were arrested on Wednesday night for allegedly trying to abduct a teenage girl from Nirala residential area.

Police recovered a six-shooter gun, two five-gauge and five bullets from their possession. The arrested were identified as Ripon, Al Amin, Sirajul and Abdullah.

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Niazi never wanted to quit the front

Twenty-eight years after his humiliating capitulation, Commander of the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971 Lt General (ret) Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi says he was hell-bent on fighting to the last, reports UNB.

He lamented — at a time when Bangladesh prepares to celebrate the victory in its Liberation War — he had not wanted to surrender, but was compelled to being asked by military ruler

late President General Yahya Khan.

"I never wanted to surrender to the enemy, but being a soldier of the most disciplined army I had to abide by the orders," he said about their defeat to Indo-Bangla Joint Command on December 16, 1971.

Niazi claimed on the night of December 13 he and Governor Abdul Malik received a phone call from Yahya ordering them to stop fighting, saying it was

beyond human strength to keep battling anymore.

The former general in a recent interview with an Islamabad Urdu magazine said he repeatedly requested — "rather begged" — to be allowed to face the "enemy," but the order was not changed.

"I sent the last signal on December 15 that I do not want to surrender, but was forced to do so," he said claiming some US officials praised him saying 'there have been only a few men like him in history.'

The last chief of Pakistan's 'Eastern Command' called for setting up of a new commission to determine 'real reasons for the fall of Dhaka and secession of Pakistan's eastern wing.'

"History has been deliberately distorted and needs to be corrected and peoples should be

informed about the historical truth," he said in the interview picked by Dubai-based daily Khaleej Times.

Niazi said "although three main characters involved in secession of East Pakistan — General Yahya Khan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto — are no more," he was ready to appear before such a tribunal and speak out the truth.

The Khaleej Times wrote: "Once known as 'tiger Niazi', the 83-year-old retired general met his Waterloo in Dhaka in December 1971 and had to face the humiliation of surrendering along with 90,000 troops."

Niazi said: "When he reached East Pakistan on April 14, 1971, everything was in a

Weary DMCH in ambulance trouble

By Naimul Haq

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) has no ambulance service.

"Both its ambulances are used on call to carry officials and other staff of the hospital. We don't use ambulance for carrying patients," said an official concerned about the service.

The hospital with over 30 departments and about 800 beds usually accommodate more than 1600 patients.

There is no end to sufferings of patients, particularly those in neurology, heart, gynaecology and surgery departments, due to lack of ambulance service. Patients have to make their own arrangement to come to the hospital or to return home.

An old patient said, "I had to hire a private ambulance paying Tk 400 to return to my house in the city's Bashabo area following a gall bladder operation."

Taking advantage of the situation, agents of a number of private companies engaged in renting ambulance move about in the hospital, particularly in the emergency wing, defying the authorities' warning against any business deals on the hospital premises. "Each one-way trip within the city would cost you Tk 400," one agent said.

It is alleged that a section of doctors and nurses are also involved in these deals for 'commission'.

Health Ministry sources said a number of proposals were given in the past for ambulance service in hospitals, but nothing has been done as yet in this regard.

shambles. Except for a few areas, there were virtually no borders between East Pakistan and India, rebels had occupied the entire region and blocked all land and sea routes.

"At that time, we needed a huge army of about 300,000 men with guerrilla training to control the situation, but with only 45,000 men we fought the guerrillas in East Pakistan and then the Indian forces along a 3,000-mile front," he was quoted by Khaleej Times as saying.

Niazi informed out of the 45,000 men, only 34,000 were regular army men, including 23,000 of infantry. They were required to fight 350,000 enemy troops in addition to Mukti Bahini guerrillas," he said.

CEC leaves hospital, advised complete rest

Chief Election Commissioner Abu Hena, who was admitted to the Dhaka Community Hospital on November 30, left the hospital yesterday, reports UNB.

He was under the treatment of Prof Mahmudur Rahman of Medicine department.

The physicians advised him to undergo regular check-up and take complete rest, said a press release of the hospital.

Illegal clinics go scot free

By Naimul Haq

No action is being taken against the private clinics operating in the city without registration.

More than half of the 214 private clinics operate without registration or with their licences expired, sources in the Health Directorate said. But the officials concerned maintain silence about it, sources in the department claimed.

Even a good number of clinics which have licences are also not properly equipped with manpower and other facilities, a member of the Clinic Inspection Team of the Directorate told The Daily Star.

But the officials concerned see no offence in it. "We have not found a single offender till today. All clinics are operating within the legal framework," said Dr Aklima Khatun, Deputy Director (Hospitals and Clinics) at the Directorate.

This correspondent visited 14 clinics recently following allegations of violation of the Private Clinics Ordinance, 1982. In most of the clinics, only one doctor was found against a legal provision for at least two including one for emergency duty. The number of

nurses was also short of the requirement.

Some of the clinics even lacked proper emergency equipment and other support services like transfusion set, endotracheal set, electric sucker, autoclave, steriliser and anaesthesia machine vacuum extractor.

Operation theatres in most of the clinics were found in unhygienic conditions. Some even lacked arrangement for emergency power supply.

Seeking anonymity, an official in the Directorate said, "Most of the clinics do not even bother for registration as they feel it is not necessary. Performance of the inspection team is also highly unsatisfactory."

Asked how inspection takes place, the leader of the inspection team said, "We alone are not responsible for inspection." He said there is no set programme for inspection. The team conducted inspection in six clinics so far this year and ten last year, he said.

The official also said that they have no vehicle for inspection. "We have only one vehicle which is also used by others."

Dhaka-Riyadh deal for regular contacts

Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia yesterday agreed to institutionalise annual consultation between the two countries for further strengthening bilateral relations and cooperation, reports UNB.

The agreement was reached during official talks held at the Foreign Ministry.

Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister Ismail Shoura led his country's delegation at the talks while Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami headed the hosts.

A Foreign Ministry sources said it was for the first time that top officials from the Saudi Foreign Ministry attended such annual consultation, a follow-up to a meeting in Riyadh that was attended by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad.

Meeting in a very cordial atmosphere, the two sides exchanged views on various issues relating to the Islamic ummah. Organisation of the Islamic Conference and Dhaka's candidature for the OIC Secretary General, in which Saudi Arabia has endorsed support to Humayun Rashed Chowdhury.

Shantu Larma blasts govt for delays

From Abdullah Al Mahmud

CHITTAGONG, Dec 2: Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council and president of Jango Sanghati Samity Jyotindra Larma has called upon the tribal people to get prepared for the CHT accord is not implemented immediately and fully.

Jyotindra Larma popularly known as Santu Larma bitterly criticised the government for the delay in the implementation of CHT accord and resented that after 24 months of the signing of the CHT deal, recognition to the 11 smaller tribal groups of 10 different languages has so far remained only in papers. He wondered whether the CHT deal was

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Onions aplenty allay consumer fear in Ramadan

By Mustak Hossain

Onion prices should remain stable during the holy month of Ramadan since supplies are adequate, says a commerce ministry official.

"There has been an adequate supply of onions in the market since the government withdrew the import tax," said the official. "Fortunately, the onion harvest and Ramadan coincide this year."

Government waived a 7.5 per cent import tax on onions when prices skyrocketed to Tk 65 per kilogram last year. Officials blamed the high prices a short-

age of Indian onions in local markets.

Onions cost Tk 28 per kilogram in October, 33 per cent lower than in October of last year, according to a statistics supplied by the Consumer Association of Bangladesh.

Onions currently retail for between Tk 22 per kilogram to Tk 26 per kilogram in local markets.

However, Emdad Hossain Malek, an association official, warned businesses always raise the prices of essentials, such as onions and spices, before the

start of Ramadan, since consumption increases during the month.

People use over 4 lakh metric tonnes of onions in Bangladesh annually, but the country only produces about 1 lakh metric tonnes annually. The country makes up the shortfall with imports from Myanmar, Iran, Iraq, Mozambique.

India used to be the country main source of onions, but the government stopped importing from India due to a product shortage in that country.

Oct. 15, 1996	Oct. 15, 1997	
Tk 15.23 per kilogram	20.00 per kilogram	+31.31 per cent increase
Oct. 15, 1997	Oct. 15, 1998	
Tk 20.00 per kilogram	42.00 per kilogram	+110 per cent increase
Oct. 15, 1998	Oct. 15, 1999	
Tk 42.00 per kilogram	Tk 28.00 per kilogram	-33.33 per cent decrease

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