

Experts meet on Sundarbans biodiversity strategy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Experts from Bangladesh and India met yesterday to work out a joint strategy for bio-diversity management in the Sundarbans to protect the world's largest mangrove shared by the two next-door neighbours.

The Sundarbans in the southwest sprawls over an area of 10,000 square km, 60 per cent of which lies in Bangladesh.

The day-long workshop was inaugurated by Environment Minister Shahjahan Siraj at a local hotel. It was jointly organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Once finalised, funding to implement the integrated management plan will be sought from Ted Turner's UN Foundation.

Already the UN International Partnership Trust Fund has contributed US\$ 100,000, while the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has contributed \$ 20,000. The UNDP is facilitating the process.

Recently, a similar national-level meeting was held in India. Shahajahan Siraj is expected to visit India to meet with his counterpart to finalise the cooperation plan.

"One eco-system needs one protection system, not two. That's why this ground breaking eco-partnership between the governments of Bangladesh

and India is a remarkable political initiative as much as it is an imaginative field operation in defence of an endangered global treasure," Jorgen Lissner, UNDP representative in Dhaka, said in a statement at the meeting.

Inaugurating the workshop, Siraj said, "It was a follow-up to a number of groundbreaking activities between Bangladesh and India, all aimed at protecting a unique wilderness that can only be found here in South Asia. This is why the Sundarbans is not only a common heritage of our neighbouring countries, but also a heritage shared with the mankind. Bearing this in mind, it is the shared responsibility of the two governments and the global community to protect and conserve this national and global treasure."

UNB adds: Shahjahan Siraj said the main thrust, therefore, should be to seek ways to strike a balance between saving the site and the people's livelihood at the same time.

He mentioned some other projects, including the ADB-funded Biodiversity Conservation Project, to protect the Sundarbans.

Conservationists Dr Ansarul Karim of Bangladesh and AK Raha of India have pointed out alternative livelihood for people around the heritage site in both countries.

Since agriculture is unproductive in the area, they suggested digging of canals and ponds to conserve rainwater for agricultural use. Besides, plant

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Motia, Dr Iqbal get anticipatory bail in graft cases

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail to former Food Minister Motia Chowdhury and former Awami League MP Dr HBM Iqbal in graft cases.

A Division Bench comprising Justice AK Badrul Hoque and Justice Mohammad Nazrul Islam Chowdhury heard two separate bail petitions and passed the order.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption filed a corruption case with Ramna police station on April 22 last against Motia Chowdhury and eight others for alleged embezzlement of more than Taka 13 crore concerning purchase of 35,000 metric tons of rice from India during the financial year 1998-99.

The court granted four months' anticipatory bail to Motia Chowdhury and issued rule returnable in four weeks.

The Bureau filed another corruption case with Gulshan police station on April 30 against Dr HBM Iqbal alleging that he took Taka 1.66 lakh from a person against the government rate of Taka 50 thousand for manpower export to Malaysia.

The court granted three months' anticipatory bail to Dr Iqbal in this case.

Barrister KS Nabi moved the petition for Motia Chowdhury while Barrister Rakan Uddin Mahmud moved for Dr Iqbal. Deputy Attorney General Golam Kibria stood for the state.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
May 13		6-33pm
May 14	5-17 am	

Prayer Timings		
May 13		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-37	6-43
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		



PHOTO: AFP

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia offers a wreath at Ground Zero, the site of the former World Trade Center in New York on Saturday. She was in the US city for attending the UN Special Session on children.

Israel postpones Gaza incursion plan

Reserve soldiers returning home

AP, Jerusalem

Israeli reserve soldiers began returning home yesterday as the army postponed a planned incursion into the Gaza Strip and worshippers returned to Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity for the first services since the end of a five-week siege of the church.

The Israeli army withdrew the last of its soldiers from Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank this weekend, after dozens of Palestinians gunmen, who had sought refuge in the church, agreed to leave for Gaza and Cyprus.

At the church, the smell of incense filled the air as different Christian denominations held

Sunday prayer services.

"We are happy to be here, to attend the services after a long absence," said Alberta Katan, 65, as she lit candles near the grotto believed to mark the birth place of Jesus. "When I entered, I felt the joy in the eyes of the people praying again in the basilica."

Christians, mostly local residents, sang hymns at the special service. Some worshippers looked over the outside walls of the church at gunshot holes as they entered the 4th-century church.

Another service was held yesterday led by Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, a Vatican envoy who had been involved in negotiations to end the standoff.

"We have to bring peace to Jesus' land by dialogue and justice and not by violence," he told the congregation.

After the siege ended Friday, American and Israeli bomb disposal experts defused about 40 explosive devices left behind by the militants, and then priests and volunteers cleaned away the refuse.

Suffering food and water shortages, the 200 gunmen and clergy holed up in the church left it dirty and smelly but with little actual damage.

Two groups of suspected Palestinian gunmen, the focus of the standoff, were staying at hotels in Gaza and Cyprus after being

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Meghna tragedy Probe body may suggest setting up marine courts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The inquiry committee on the May 3 launch disaster in the river Meghna that killed nearly 400 passengers will recommend some measures including setting up of marine courts at Chandpur and Barisal and equipping every long-distance passenger vessel with communication devices.

Sources in the committee told The Daily Star yesterday that it might take another seven days to submit the report.

The probe committee is headed by Deputy Secretary of the Shipping Ministry BD Mitra.

The committee members have already visited Patuakhali and other places to track down survivors of the fatal launch capsized and obtain vital information about the last few seconds of the MV Salauddin-2.

The committee members are likely to visit the salvaged MV Salauddin-2 now stationed at Chandpur today. They would examine the structure of the vessel, its hull and check whether there was any deviation in the design. The members would compare the original design of the launch with its present structure.

They would also examine the propellers of the ill-fated vessel to check if these were entangled in fishing nets and stalled during the storm, which might have instantly tipped it, sources said.

Among other recommendations, the committee might ask the government to assign a special force such as the coast guard to curb lawbreakers.

JCD procession dispersed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police dispersed a procession brought out by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists in the city yesterday protesting the killing of Saidur Rahman Newton, a central leader of JCD, ruling BNP's student front.

As the procession from BNP central office at Naya Paltan reached near the Paltan crossing at about 6 pm, police charged batons and fired some tear gas shells. Five activists were injured, JCD claimed.

The JCD leaders and workers regrouped and held a brief rally on the roadside where the speakers condemned the police action.

The injured are Manir Hossain, Alfaz, Mainul Hasan and SM Zilani. They were treated at a city clinic JCD sources said.

Jubo Dal men attack Shamim Osman's house again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Juba Dal cadres have again attacked the houses of former Awami League MP AKM Shamim Osman and his elder brother Selim Osman, former president of Narayanganj Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

According to witnesses, the Juba Dal cadres led by Sawkat Hashem alias Saku and Lablu reached in front of the house of Shamim Osman in Chashara area at around 11 pm on Saturday. They fired shots, breaking the window panes and lights of the house. None was present in the house during the attack. Later they went to the house of Salim Osman in the same area and fired 8 rounds shots on the house.

This is the second such armed attack on Shamim Osman's house in seven days.

The same group fired shots on former MP's house on May 5.

Dacoity in 2 houses at Jatrabari

UNB, Dhaka

Armed robbers stormed into two houses at Sanarpar in Jatrabari early yesterday and looted ornaments and other valuables.

Witnesses said the robbers, first entered the house of Bangladesh Bank officer M Golam Mostafa Khan at 4am by breaking open the main gate.

They tied up the family members and looted 35 tolas of gold ornaments, 2,000 US dollar and other valuables worth about Tk one lakh.

The gang then, stormed into a nearby house and took away valuables.



PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Executive Engineer (revenues) Krishnapada Pal works at the DESA's Paltan office under the light of a rechargeable lamp yesterday. The office plunged into blackout three times yesterday, one lasting one hour and a half.

3 to die for rape, killing girl in Jhenidah

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three persons have been sentenced to death for raping and killing a girl. The judgement in the case was pronounced by Mohammad Hossain Helel, Additional District and Sessions Judge-2, Jhenidah on Saturday.

The accused are Selim Mondal, 25, Oltu Mondol, 24 and Rafiz Mondol, 26. They hail from Khalisha Kundu village of Harinakundu upazila of Jhenidah district.

According to prosecution, the accused abducted Shila, 12, of Khalishakundu village on the night of February 16, 2000 while she was returning home after attending a marriage ceremony of her cousin.

The accused took Shila to a nearby bush and raped her. After gangrape they gouged out her eyes as she could know the rapists.

The accused left the place of occurrence, leaving the girl profusely bleeding. She was rushed to Khulna Medical College Hospital on February 17, where she succumbed to her injuries the same day.

Few minutes before death, Shila gave statement to police and a first class magistrate naming the accused rapists.

The victim's father Golam Faruque filed a case with Harinakundu thana on February 18, 2000 under Section 3 of Women and Children Repression Act.

The IO of the case submitted chargesheet accusing the three rapists. After cross-examination of 19 prosecution witnesses the judge gave the verdict. The accused were present in the court.

Monk murder in Raozan

3 weeks over, police 'still trying' to nab Aziz

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three weeks after the murder of Buddhist monk Gyanojoti Mohasthabir in Raozan, police are yet to arrest the prime suspect, Azizul Haq, allegedly sheltered by an influential leader of ruling BNP in the area.

Police say he is 'absconding'. Azizul Haq, ring leader of notorious Aziz Bahini, is wanted by police in 22 other cases.

Some sources in police and other circles say the motive behind the murder will be known if Aziz can be arrested.

Gyanojoti Mohasthabir, 52, founder of Wara Punya Bouddha Anathalaya (a Buddhist temple cum orphanage) at Hingala village in Raozan upazila, was killed by miscreants in his bedroom in the complex on the night of April 21.

Police later arrested Nipu Barua, wife of Gyanojoti's younger brother Sulal Barua, two neighbours and a teacher at orphanage on suspicion. Police interrogated them in remand but failed to find any clue to the murder.

Relatives of the slain monk and people of the Buddhist community in the area alleged that police arrested them at the behest of the BNP leader to divert the investigation to save the killers.

But the influential BNP leader in Raozan is still mum on the gruesome murder.

Some sources in police say they suspect that 15 to 20 criminals of Aziz Bahini including Taslimuddin Montu, Hasan, Gias, Jahur and Nizam were involved in the killing.

"We suspect this gang because Aziz Bahini controls the vast areas including Yasinagar, Janipathar,

Babla murder Token strike at petrol pumps observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Petroleum Dealers, Distributors, Agents and Petrol Pump Owners Association observed a four-hour token strike across the country yesterday protesting the murder of petrol pump owner Shaded Newaz Babla.

Owners of the filling stations across the country stopped sale of petrol and petroleum products during the strike from 2 pm to 6pm.

The association held a rally at Shaheed Tajuddin Sarani in the city at 3 pm.

Addressing the rally, the leaders of the association gave a 72-hour ultimatum to arrest the killers of Babla. Otherwise, the leaders threatened to enforce an indefinite strike.

Shaded Newaz Babla was gunned down by a gang of miscreants in the city's Narinda area on May 10.