

SUNDARBANS

Back to the wall, fishermen take to logging

PINAKI ROY, back from the Sundarbans

Sundarban's poor farmers and fishermen are increasingly resorting to illegal logging and poaching to survive in the face of a government ban on catching shrimp fry, thus depleting precious plant and wildlife resources of the world's largest mangrove forest.

Coupled with a poor amharvest this season, the ban on shrimp fry has snatched the liveli-

hood of subsistence farmers and fishermen, who constitute around 80 percent of the population living on the fringes of the forest, depending solely on netting fish fry and collecting forest resources.

Last December, the government imposed the ban to protect the fish in the area as harvesting shrimp fry also means a large number of other fish fry end up dead in the fisherman's net.

According to the Department of

Forest, anywhere between 80,000 and 150,000 people of the 17 upazilas around the forest scratch out a living from catching shrimp in a network of 450 canals and rivers in addition to collecting other forest resources.

But with the ban in place, they are unable to pay back dadon or seasonal loan they traditionally take from money lenders during off season every year. Consequently, a

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Protest symbol on DU sculpture allegedly set afire by JCD

DU CORRESPONDENT

JCD men yesterday set fire to the red cover that Azad Mancha activists wrapped around the Raju Bhashkorjo (sculpture) in front of Dhaka University's Teacher-Student Centre to symbolise protest against the attack on eminent writer Humayun Azad, a Mancha activist alleged.

"The JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal) men did that as a sequel to their ongoing strategy to intimidate us," said the activist, adding that the pro-government student body has been issuing threats for a week now to thwart the movement under the banner of Azad Mancha.

About a hundred student activists of Humayun Azad Mancha brought out a silent procession on campus protesting yesterday's act of vandalism.

Other student organisations also brought out on-campus demonstration

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The red cover (left) on Dhaka University's Raju Bhashkorjo symbolising protest against the attack on Prof Humayun Azad was brought down and set on fire allegedly by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activists yesterday.

Indian foreign secy in city

UNB, Dhaka

Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank arrived in the capital yesterday on a four-day visit.

"The close ties between our two countries are rooted in a shared history, a common socio-cultural heritage and an enduring sense of fraternity," he said in

a written statement on arrival at Zia International Airport.

Shashank expressed his happiness and satisfaction with the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India "evolving positively."

He said he looks forward to conveying the "warm greetings of the Indian leaders to the leaders of the government of Bangladesh and through them to all the people of Bangladesh."

The Indian foreign secretary said the firm foundations of bilateral relations impart strength and dynamism to the growing interaction between people of the two next-door neighbours.

He termed his visit as a part of the frequent high-level exchanges and meetings taking place between the two countries, side by side with the wide-ranging people-to-people interaction.

Referring to the next Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit to be held in Dhaka and calling Bangladesh an important neighbour, he said: "My consultations will give us an idea how we can cooperate further in this direction."

As you know, the Saarc summit SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Govt action blocks equal rights

Women leaders observe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government intervention is standing in the way of equal rights and empowerment of women in Bangladesh and despite 94 years of worldwide success, women's movements here is shackled and suppressed.

Eminent women's rights leaders made the observation at a rally in the capital yesterday marking the International Women's Day yesterday, which was commemorated across the country.

The Samajik Pratirodh Committee (SPC), comprising 30

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A toxic concoction of organic and industrial wastes (top) flows into the river Buriganga (bottom) polluting its water used for bathing and other purposes. Years of efforts by citizens' groups and a set of recommendations by a taskforce have failed to put an end to the orgy of contamination of the river.

Three hurt while making bombs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three youths sustained fatal injuries in two separate incidents as bombs went off while in the making in city's Sutrapur and Tejgaon areas yesterday, police said.

Both the hands of Abdul Khalek, 19, were blown up when a bomb exploded inside a house at Battoia Lane of Thatari Bazar in Sutrapur at about 11:00am, police said.

Khalek, now admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), however told newsmen at the hospital that he suffered the wounds as muggers hurled bombs at him.

In another incident Liton, 25, and Mohammad Kamal, 20, suffered injuries to different parts of their body while the bombs they were making blew up in their hands inside the park at Farmgate at about 2:30pm, Tejgaon police said.

Both the young men were admitted to the DMCH with

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Bush, Blair knew they were hyping case for Iraq war: Blix

REUTERS, London

George W. Bush and Tony Blair probably knew they were exaggerating the threat from Iraq when they were making the case for war, according to former chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix.

The US president and the British prime minister ignored the few caveats in reports from intelligence services on Iraq's nuclear, chemical or biological weapons programmes, he writes in his account of the months leading up to the US-led invasion.

Blix says it was "probable that the governments were conscious that they were exaggerating the risks they saw in order to get the political support they would not

otherwise have had."

Blix was head of the International Atomic Energy Agency from 1981 to 1997 and later chief of UNMOVIC (the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission) until 2003.

At other points in his book "Disarming Iraq - The search for weapons of mass destruction," due to go on sale on Tuesday, the former Swedish diplomat appears to soften his criticism of the British and American leaders.

"I am not suggesting that Blair and Bush spoke in bad faith, but I am suggesting that it would not have taken much critical thinking on their own part or the part of their close advisers to prevent state-

ments that misled the public," he writes.

"It is understood and accepted that governments must simplify complex international matters in explaining them to the public in democratic states.

"However they are not vendors of merchandise but leaders of whom some sincerity should be asked when they exercise their responsibility for war and peace in the world."

Blix says he too had believed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had illegal weapons. But he adds he was unwilling to state it as fact until he saw concrete proof -- which was never obtained by his teams of

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DEFAMATION CASES

21 AL leaders get bail

UNB, Dhaka

Apprehending arrest in defamation cases pending with districts courts for the last five months, 21 senior Awami League (AL) leaders yesterday appeared before the High Court and secured anticipatory bail.

They sense that the pending cases would now be pursued by the government in a bid to keep them busy in courts and thus keep aloof from the anti-government movement.

The defamation suits were filed in October last year with different district courts for putting 102 BNP-Jamaat men in the list of 'godfathers' published by the Awami League. But the cases were not followed up.

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Man throws acid on cousins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A cousin threw acid on two sisters at Gowainghat in Sylhet yesterday.

Tota Mian threw acid on Khaleda Begum and her younger sister Tahera Begum, daughters of labourer Abdul Monnaf, at about 2:00am when they were sleeping in their Hadarpara village residence. He fled the area as the sisters cried for help, family members said.

Khaleda's face and throat were seriously scorched while Tahera received face burns, they added.

The victims were admitted to MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in the morning, sources said.

According to relatives, Tota proposed to marry Khaleda about two months ago, but her family rejected the offer and recently arranged her marriage elsewhere.

Table with Prayer Timings for March 9, including Azan and Jamaat times for Fajr, Zohr, Asr, Maghrib, and Esha.

Hasina accuses PM of spreading torture on women

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused her arch political rival Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of spreading torture on women and called for putting an end to the coalition rule.

"The number of repressed women under Khaleda Zia's rule is the highest. We must free them (women) from torture and repression by the coalition government," she said.

Addressing a discussion meeting marking the International Women's Day, organised by Bangladesh Awami Mohila League at Bangabandhu Avenue party office in the morning, she said the prime minister made a world record of women repression.

But, Hasina said, the womenfolk of the country will have to

change their own fate in the male-dominated society as the women are facing odds despite having a woman in the prime minister's post.

The Awami League (AL) chief said: "The way women were tortured under the rule of the alliance government is indescribable." She alleged that 50,000 women were raped and tortured during its two and a half years rule.

She accused the prime minister of violating the United Nations (UN) Declaration and Islamic rules regarding women's rights. "Not only by policemen, women were also tortured by party cadres of the alliance," she told the meeting.

"Women are now fed up with relentless repression and taking the path of suicide to save their

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HC judgement on Tofail's quashment petition stayed

BSS, Dhaka

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday stayed for two months the High Court (HC) judgement, dismissing a quashment petition filed by Awami League leader and former industries minister Tofail Ahmed in a corruption case.

Chamber Judge Justice Mohammad Tafazzul Islam passed the order upon a criminal miscellaneous petition moved before the court.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed a corruption case against former industries minister Tofail Ahmed and former secretary of Economic Relations Division Mashur Rahman for their alleged corruption in establishing two fertilizer plants in collaboration with a Chinese company. The case is now pending with the Divisional Special Judge's Court, Dhaka.

Tofail filed a quashment petition before the High Court and after hearing, a division bench of the court dismissed the petition.

Iraq leaders sign new constitution

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's Governing Council yesterday signed an interim constitution after weeks of wrangling, in a key step towards a planned handover of sovereignty by US-led occupying powers to Iraqis on June 30.

The signing took place at a hastily arranged ceremony in Baghdad after Shia Muslim members of the 25-member council persuaded Iraq's foremost cleric at the weekend to go along with the document despite reservations.

Just before the signing, guerrillas fired mortars at a Baghdad police station, wounding three civilians and two policemen. Another missile hit a civilian house. On Sunday, insurgents fired multiple rockets at the Baghdad headquarters of the US-led administration but nobody was seriously hurt.

The signing had been delayed twice -- first by bomb attacks on Shias last Tuesday that killed at least 181 people and then by last-

minute Shia reservations that forced a high-profile ceremony on Friday to be abandoned.

Adnan Pachachi, a senior member of the Governing Council, said at Monday's ceremony that the event was "a great and historic day for Iraq". Iraq's US governor, Paul Bremer, also hailed the agreement and noted the difficulties it had faced.

"We are witnessing the birth of democracy and birth is painful, as we've learned over the last few evenings," he told the council. "Not everyone got everything they wanted in this law -- that's the way of democracy."

Representatives of the five Shias who backed out on Friday spent the weekend in the holy city of Najaf talking with top clerics including Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who wields immense influence over Iraq's 60 percent Shia majority.

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One in 8 of world's birds in peril

AFP, Johannesburg

One in eight of the world's birds face extinction, fuelled by unchecked agricultural expansion and unsustainable forestry, especially in the tropics, according to a new report by BirdLife International.

"The State of the World's Birds 2004" said the alarming statistics showed that "our global environment is under serious strain with a massive and still increasing haemorrhage of biodiversity".

It said one in eight of the world's birds -- or

1,211 species -- face extinction. Of these, 179 species are critically endangered, 344 face very high risk of extinction and 688 are listed as vulnerable.

The report said threatened species were not evenly distributed among bird families with particularly high proportions among species of albatrosses (95 percent), cranes (60 percent), parrots (29 percent), pheasants (26 percent) and pigeons (23 percent).

It said 966 species of globally threatened birds had populations of less than 10,000,

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Wattle crane: Magnificent, and in peril.

Two killed in car crashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two died in road accidents at Mirpur and Tejgaon in the city yesterday.

In Mirpur, a speeding bus hit and crushed Md Jalal Uddin, 18, a bus helper, to death while he was crossing the road in front of Pikepara Ansar camp at 10:00am.

Another bus in Tejgaon ran over Ataur Rahman when he was crossing the road in front of Mohakhali bus terminal at around 7:30am.

Ataur was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital at 8:00am where doctors declared him dead.

No cases were filed till the filing of this report at 7:00pm.