

Hilsa flecks away from Bangladesh

Indiscriminate fishing of jatka, pollution, siltation drive hilsa to Myanmar-India waters

PINAKI ROY

Hilsa, the national fish of Bangladesh, is going extinct from the river system mainly due to overexploitation of the precious resources, sources at the Department of Fishing (DoF) said.

Indiscriminate and large-scale fishing of adult and juvenile hilsa has so severely depleted the fish stock that as many as 20 rivers now have very little or no hilsa

population.

Fish industry experts also attribute the drastic fall in hilsa to man made barriers like unplanned river dams built over the past few years as well as to natural barriers like river siltation and accretion of islands, forcing the fish to shift their habitat away from rivers and estuaries.

The fish live in both marine and fresh waters. But experts believe the migratory routes and feeding grounds of hilsa are

being gradually diverted to the sea due to excessive gathering of vessels, high levels of water pollution from garbage dumped by foreign ships, industrial and household wastes, and other forms of environmental degradation.

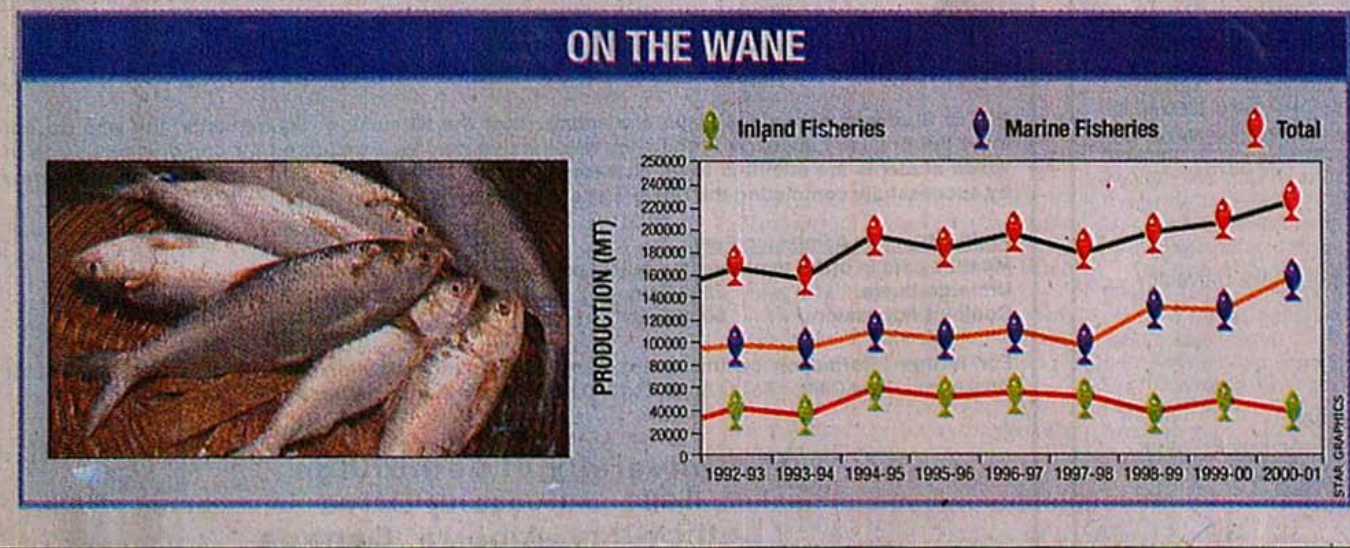
Experts pointed out that the fish are shifting their habitat towards Myanmar and Indian waters due to high levels of pollution in Bangladesh waters. According to a DoF study, nearly

2,750 tons of pesticides used in the crop fields are washed into the river every year.

They also cited withdrawal of the Ganges water at Farakka as another reason for the dwindling hilsa productivity.

But excessive fishing of both adult fish and fish fry presents the most frightful scenario. "The real problem is too many people chasing too few fish," said William J Collis, natural resources advisor

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Vajpayee for direct talks with Dhaka on 'infiltration'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday advocated direct talks with Bangladesh to help stop large-scale infiltration from across the border.

"This is a very decisive moment in the history of Assam as it is full of problems -- infiltration being the most serious," he told an election rally in Guwahati, capital of Assam state, which coincided with Bharatiya Janata Party's Foundation Day.

"We assisted Bangladesh in winning independence and Bangladeshis should be happy living in their own country. But it appears they have some serious problems forcing their citizens to infiltrate into our country. This is a very dangerous trend," he said.

The need of the hour, according to Vajpayee, is for both countries to sit together and discuss their problems to reach a solution.

Vajpayee, who has hit the campaign trail for his Hindu nationalist BJP before the polls are held in stages between April 20 and May 10, also said India's border with

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JCD leader shot, accomplice killed in mugging bid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jatiyatadhi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader was bullet-hit and one of the two alleged muggers accompanying him was killed in firing during a bid to mug mobile telephone sets from a phone shop at Dhanmondi in the capital yesterday, witnesses and police said.

The other mugger managed to escape.

The dead was identified as Shafiq. The injured -- Golam Shams Tabriz, general secretary of Tejgaon College unit of the JCD -- was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) under police custody.

The circumstances leading to the firing were not clear.

Traders said the armed gang led by Tabriz went to Cell Telecom on the first floor of Orchid Plaza at about 5:00pm and asked its owner Kazi Tanvirul Huda to show them mobile sets. Posing as customers, they were bargaining over the prices of phonesets.

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"As the salespersons were showing them phone sets, the three tried to walk away snatching several sets," said the shop owner. When resisted, a scuffle ensued between the gang members and the shop owner and his men. At one stage, the muggers opened fire in which one of them was killed and another injured, the shop owner claimed.

A police patrol rushed to the spot and nabbed Tabriz with a pistol. They also seized seven bullets and six cartridges from him.

But Tabriz told newsmen at the DMCH later he along with a friend went to buy mobile sets from the shop. "We chose two sets priced Tk 10,000 but we had Tk 8,500 with us. As the shop owner refused to give us the sets on credit, I telephoned ward commissioner Babul to request him. But that also did not do. Then suddenly the shop owner opened fire on us."

His mother Monowara Kamal said Tabriz told her over phone at around 1:30pm, "I would come to

Resign to fulfil people's expectation

Hasina asks govt

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the alliance government should quit immediately, fulfilling people's expectation "generated by the AL general secretary's April 30 deadline."

Talking to reporters on board the Maowra Ferry on her way back to the capital ending a five-day tour of southern districts, Hasina said the

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No list of persons to bar their travel, says Babar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has not prepared any confidential list of opposition leaders to bar them from going abroad.

State Minister for Home Affairs, Lutfozzaman Babar told the Daily Star yesterday dismissing the press report that said the government has listed 29 people including 13 top opposition leaders to restrict their

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CTG GUNFIGHT Another Jamaat cadre caught

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested another Jamaat-e-Islami cadre with suspected links to a gunbattle in a remote hilly village in Chittagong, a day after a nephew of an Islamist party lawmaker was caught preparing for an apparent robbery.

Sarwar Alam, 30, was tracked down in a deep forest in Satkania upazila, 48 kilometres off the port city, at about 1:30am yesterday, bringing the number of arrestees to five including Monzurul Alam, who identified himself as the nephew of Jamaat lawmaker Shahjahan Chowdhury.

The firefight that rocked the village predominantly of Jamaat adherents on Monday came three days after joint forces seized the largest ever arms haul in Chittagong on April 2 exposing the region as an easy route for gunrunning.

Monzurul and three others Mohammad Lokman, Mohammad Harun and Sagir Ahmad were taken

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CTG ARMS HAUL Probe committee grills officials of Chittagong port, Coastguard

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A five-member government probe committee headed by Home Secretary Omar Farooq yesterday questioned some key officials of Chittagong port and Bangladesh Coastguard in connection with the April 2 weapons haul in Chittagong, by far the largest arms recovery.

Official sources said Kazi Abdul Momin, director (traffic) of Chittagong port and Coastguard commanders Anwar Khurshid and Tafsir Uddin Ahmed underwent closed-door interrogation at the

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CTG ARMS HAUL Cops 'steal, sell' 500 sacks of seized rice, salt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Several hundred sacks of rice and salt seized with the biggest ever arms cache were reported yesterday to be secretly sold out from Karnaphuli Police Station.

The seizure list shows 87 sacks of rice, 20 sacks of rotten rice and 30 sacks of husk as seized with the cache of arms and ammunition. But local people allege additional 200 sacks of rice and 300 sacks of salt were also recovered with the haul last Friday.

They allege the policemen concerned sold those 500 sacks of rice and salt worth around Tk 2 lakh after

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Heavy fighting in sealed Fallujah

8 more US soldiers killed

AP, Fallujah, Iraq

US troops battled guerrillas yesterday on the edges of Fallujah, where hundreds of Marines and Iraqi troops have surrounded one of Iraq's most violent cities in an operation to crush the insurgency there. The military reported five Marines were killed and two wounded in the operation, which was more than 24 hours old.

With the Marines engaged in fighting around Fallujah, there was more violence in northern Baghdad in which three soldiers died Monday and yesterday.

The US-led coalition remained in a standoff with anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose supporters and militias were responsible for clashes throughout the country over the weekend.

In a series of US television inter-

views yesterday, Paul Bremer, the top civilian administrator in Iraq, conceded not all was going smoothly as the coalition approached a June 30 handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis.

The military did not give details on the five deaths, saying only that they occurred in Anbar province, home to Fallujah. Witnesses reported another American had

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2-day AL hartal starts today, BNP throws countermove

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Awami League (AL) and its front organisations enforce a countrywide back-to-back dawn-to-dusk hartal from today to press for resignation of the coalition government by the month-end and snap polls.

The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) of Hasanul Haq Inu has also declared a similar shutdown programme beginning today.

Blaming the alliance government for its 'absolute failure in running the country', the AL at a central working committee meeting on March 24 called the two-day strike,

first of its kind during the 30-month rule of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

AL presidium members at a meeting on April 1 however decided to take an hour off from today's dawn-to-dusk shutdown to facilitate the World Health Organisation (WHO) programmes marking International Health Day. The general strike hours today are from 6:00am to 5:00pm while tomorrow's hartal hours -- from 6:00am to 6:00pm -- remain unchanged.

Ruling BNP's city chapter yesterday meanwhile declared a series of programmes this month to thwart AL's move to unseat the government

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Machine gun seized in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Bogra police yesterday retrieved a heavy machine gun with an extra barrel and parts of two Chinese rifles from a septic tank on Mohammad Ali Hospital premises.

Senior police officials said possibly Pakistani troops used the arms during our liberation war.

Amimul Islam, assistant superintendent of police, told newsmen that some labours found the fire-arms and parts during maintenance work of the septic tank.

Recently, police recovered around 30 bullets from the adjoining area, locals said.

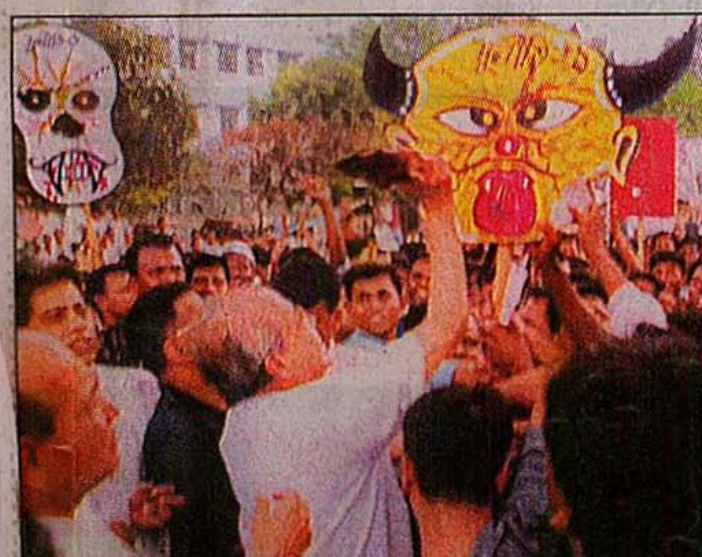
A case was lodged with Bogra Sadar Police Station.



A boy wades through tangles of water hyacinth and other weeds that infest a Moghbazar pond making it a breeding ground for mosquitoes in Dhaka where residents fear a dengue outbreak.

PHOTO: STAR

Bikalpa Dhara throws shoes at placards to show hatred



Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury hits a placard with shoes in symbolic protest at corruption during a demonstration of Bikalpa Dhara (alternative stream) leaders and activists at Muktangan in Dhaka yesterday.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A few hundred Bikalpa Dhara (Alternative Stream) activists led by former president Badruddoza Chowdhury hurled shoes at symbolic placards of corrupt people, expressing 'hatred' in a demonstration in the city yesterday.

Police however snatched the main effigy from demonstrators when they gathered at the Segun Bagicha area, near the Bureau of Anti-Corruption office, to begin their 'Hatred Day' programme at about 3:00pm.

The big effigy was torn apart following a scuffle between police and demonstrators.

A few minutes after the scuffle, when Badruddoza arrived, the Bikalpa Dhara men started their procession, shouting slogans against the corrupt and waving banners and placards that read "Let's show hatred to the corrupt,"

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Inzi, Farhat put Pakistan in command

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul Haq and opener Imran Farhat hit sparkling centuries to put the hosts in command of the second cricket Test against India here on Tuesday.

Pakistan, hoping to level the three-match series after losing the first Test by an innings last week, ended the ill-tempered second day's play at 355-3 to take a 68-run lead with seven wickets in hand.

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New SL PM turns to India for peace

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's new prime minister Mahinda Rajapakse assumed office yesterday vowing to pursue the peace efforts of his predecessor and seek a greater Indian involvement to end ethnic bloodshed.

Rajapakse, 58, said he wanted neighbouring India to play a role in the island's peace efforts, but did not specify how he wanted New Delhi to become involved.

"We must keep the peace process moving," Rajapakse said at President Chandrika Kumaratunga's office where he was sworn in to head a minority government in independent Sri Lanka's 13th parliament.

"I have always said that we should get more Indian involvement in the process. They are our biggest neighbour," Rajapakse told reporters here. "But, I don't mean stopping the Norwegian involvement."

India had been supportive of the

Norwegian-backed peace process but has refused a hands-on approach after New Delhi's bitter experience of deploying troops in the island ended with conflict against rebels between 1987 and 1990.

Rajapakse said the peace process of his predecessor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, will be pursued, but admitted that Kumaratunga as head of state and leader of their Freedom Alliance will be the main driving force.

Soon after his swearing-in, Rajapakse went in for a meeting with India's High Commissioner (ambassador) here, Nirupam Sen, officials said, underscoring his close links with the South Asian country.

Rajapakse was named premier by Kumaratunga on Monday night after he emerged on top after a bitter struggle within her Freedom Alliance, which won 105 seats in the 225-member assembly.

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