

Mosquito menace intensifies as breeding season starts

SULTANA RAHMAN

Mosquito menace has turned worse in the city in the last couple of weeks with the start of the breeding season this month. But the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is yet to take any effective action to control the menace.

City residents alleged they are experiencing mosquito menace not only at night but also at daytime. The worst sufferers are the students who are preparing for school final exams.

"Mosquitoes bite us despite having anti-mosquito nets with our windows and doors at home. My study is repeatedly interrupted for it," said Samina, a student of Mirpur area.

The DCC officials said their anti-mosquito drive was hampered severely due to the six-day Eid vacation when more than 50 percent health workers enjoyed holiday.

"Larvaicide is our top priority in controlling the mosquito menace," said Dr Nasim, an official of entomology department of DCC.

"We have asked assistant health officials of 10 zonal offices to keep up the mosquito control programme," he added.

Drains, ponds, and canals in the city that cover over 2,000 acres of low-lying areas have become ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes. The residents of these places are highly vulnerable to the growing mosquito bites and infestation.

The DCC officials have claimed they would make further arrangements to intensify the mosquito control drive to check breeding of the insects. "We are hopeful to control the situation within weeks through special anti-breeding drive," Dr Nasim said.

However, DCC has failed to keep clean the city water bodies, including derelict ponds, polluted canals, and stagnant drains, that serve as a safe haven for mosquito breeding.

"The city administration is not doing what needs to be done to control the mosquito

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population," Manjur Hasan, a senior city dweller said. "I have hardly found any DCC drive against mosquito since the last month," he alleged.

The DCC officials said they have deployed four spray-men in each of 90 wards in the city to spray larvaecides in their particular areas regularly. "If it was done regularly, mosquito menace would not increase to such an extent," alleged an Uttara resident.

Officials in the DCC health department have identified the privately owned ponds and ditches which are beyond DCC's control. "We can't enforce drive on privately owned ponds and ditches as we have limited access there," said Dr Nasim.

He said the city outskirts such as Kamrangirchar are largely responsible for fast breeding and menace of mosquito in the capital but the DCC does not have the authority to conduct mosquito control drives in those areas.

Illegal wild bird sellers on streets, again

MANISHA GANGOPADHYAY

Poor enforcement of the Wildlife Preservation Act of 1974 banning the hunting of wild waterfowl threatens the survival of certain globally threatened species and hinders Bangladesh's rich biodiversity.

Every year, starting from mid-November, countless numbers of wild ducks and herons are sold for consumption on the streets of Dhaka. This is peak time for commercial wild bird traders looking to trap and sell these birds for high prices in the cities.

There is a big market for wild waterfowl in the capital where a single bird can fetch up to Tk500.

Wild waterfowl are generally sold on the street outside the legitimate market places, with their feet bound, held upside down. They are mostly traded in the evening on Elephant Road, Nilkhet, Katabon, Moghbazar and Purana Paltan.

Occasionally a rare bird is sold by wildlife vendors for consumption as they are

unaware that the bird could be in the international list of endangered species. However, little is being done to stop this illegal practice.

"The Department of Forestry is not enforcing the Wildlife Act, although it is their job to escort police in catching wildlife crime offenders," says Munjurul Khan, an expert of World Conservation Union (IUCN). The police are not trained to identify wild birds and are therefore ill equipped to handle the problem without support.

The absence of government initiative is further evident by the fact that the Wildlife Act in question has not been updated since its enactment 30 years ago. The highest penalty fine in the Act amounts to a meager Tk500.

"We need to take away their (bird sellers) means to a livelihood which is dependent on selling wild animals," says Munjurul Khan.

Three of the most globally threatened waterfowls that pass through Bangladesh

during the winter are the Baikal Teal, the Ferruginous Duck and Baer's Pochard.

Ducks are usually caught by nets in the wetlands of Sylhet and Srimangal and in coastal areas of Monpura, Nijhumdeep, Boyarchar, and Chorpia.

Munjurul Khan recalls capturing 500 wild birds from a commercial vendor, who later admitted bringing them for selling to a renowned politician. Among the bunch were two Baikal teals.

The commercial trapping of wild birds are at their highest from November to February, when thousands of birds, primarily ducks, arrive from the north on their way to warmer climates. Bangladesh is one of the most important locations in the world for these birds as two major migratory routes traverse it: the East Asian Austral-Asian Flyway and the Central Asian Flyway.

According to Wetland International's census last year, about half a million migratory birds passed through Bangladesh last year.

The only protected wetland in Bangladesh is Tangaor Haor, which was declared an officially protected site four years ago.

Nationwide commercial trading of ducks began in the early 1980's as cities began to develop. The further the point of capture from where it was being sold, the higher the price, which is how Dhaka became a popular destination for the illegal bird trade.

Surprisingly, the Department of Forestry's priorities are closer to those of the self-serving poachers than they are of conservationists.

"The department does not have a pro-conservation objective, but rather an objective to abstract revenues," says a forest department official.

Another official of the department claimed that commercial trapping was not a threat on the survival of bird species, emphasising instead on the deterioration of natural habitat and overcatching of fish as the dominant threats.

"There is no organised poaching of birds, only sporadic killing," claims the official. "Besides, if one duck gets stuck in a net, all the other birds will avoid the trap," he added.

Sajedul Islam, an ornithologist at IUCN, believes otherwise. "The pintail is the most hunted migratory bird and also the most widely sold in Dhaka as they tend to be large in size."

There is a debate among experts on whether or not there is a significant presence of migratory birds among the lot of wild birds sold for consumption. But most agree that, migratory or not, the survival of certain wild ducks is threatened by mass bird hunting for the purpose of trade.

Asked why the Department of Forestry is not going to key duck selling locations in the city, an official said that there were only two people on the job and they have become easily recognisable by the bird sellers who take care to avoid them.

25 Dhaka Zoo inmates face death

AVIK SANWAR RAHAMAN

At least 25 animals of Dhaka Zoo face death because of old age and lack of proper treatment.

The animals waiting for death are the lone Chimpanzee, a Tapir, a Mandrill, two elephants, a Goyal and a bear.

"Dhaka Zoo needs more facilities and cells for the ever-growing population. The ministry has already decided to provide Tk 30 lakh for the expansion and we have submitted a proposal and awaiting the ministry's approval," said Mofizur Rahman, curator of the zoo.

Recently, a Hippopotamus

and a Royal Bengal tiger died on November 11 and 16.

The authorities said the tiger was sick since 1999 and he was 16 years when he died. The Zoo treated the tiger with anti-vomiting drugs. The Central Disease Investigation Laboratory (CIDL) diagnosed the tiger died from liver cirrhosis.

The hippo died after a fight with other male hippos. In an ideal situation, a male hippo cannot stay with other males of the species. But at Dhaka Zoo, the authorities could not construct separate cells for the hippos because of fund crisis.

A pair of hippos were brought from Kenya in 1984. Since then,

their population increased to 10 - five males and five females -- and they were living in the same enclosure. Previously, a male hippo was shifted to another enclosure for fighting with others.

"It was not possible for us to treat the hippos as they fought and stayed in the water. We need separate enclosures to accommodate the hippos," said Dr Selim Iqbal, veterinary surgeon of the zoo.

He said the zoo hospital has a place for sick animals but it needs separate space for the old animals as well.

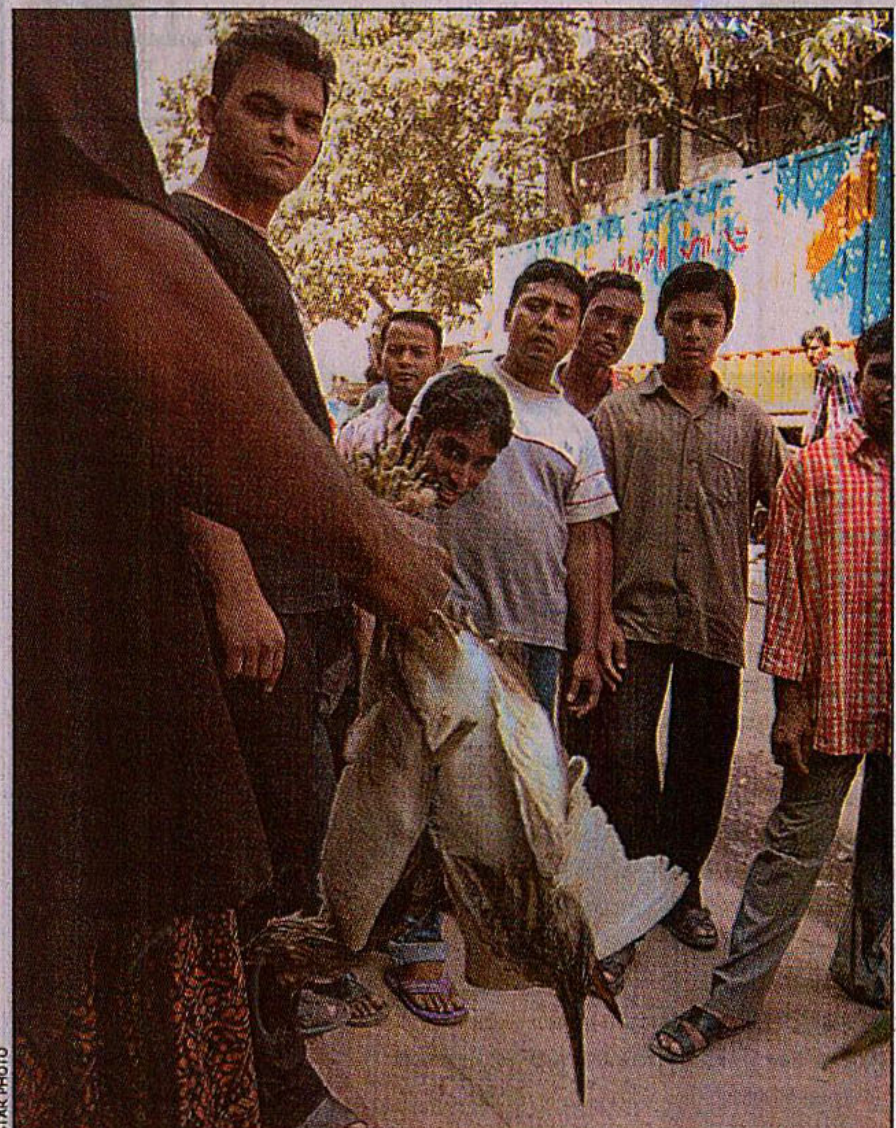
Dhaka Zoo has no disease detection facilities other than

detecting worms. It is the Central Disease Investigation Laboratory (CDIL) at Kazi Alauddin road that detects diseases but it also doesn't have facilities to detect virus infection.

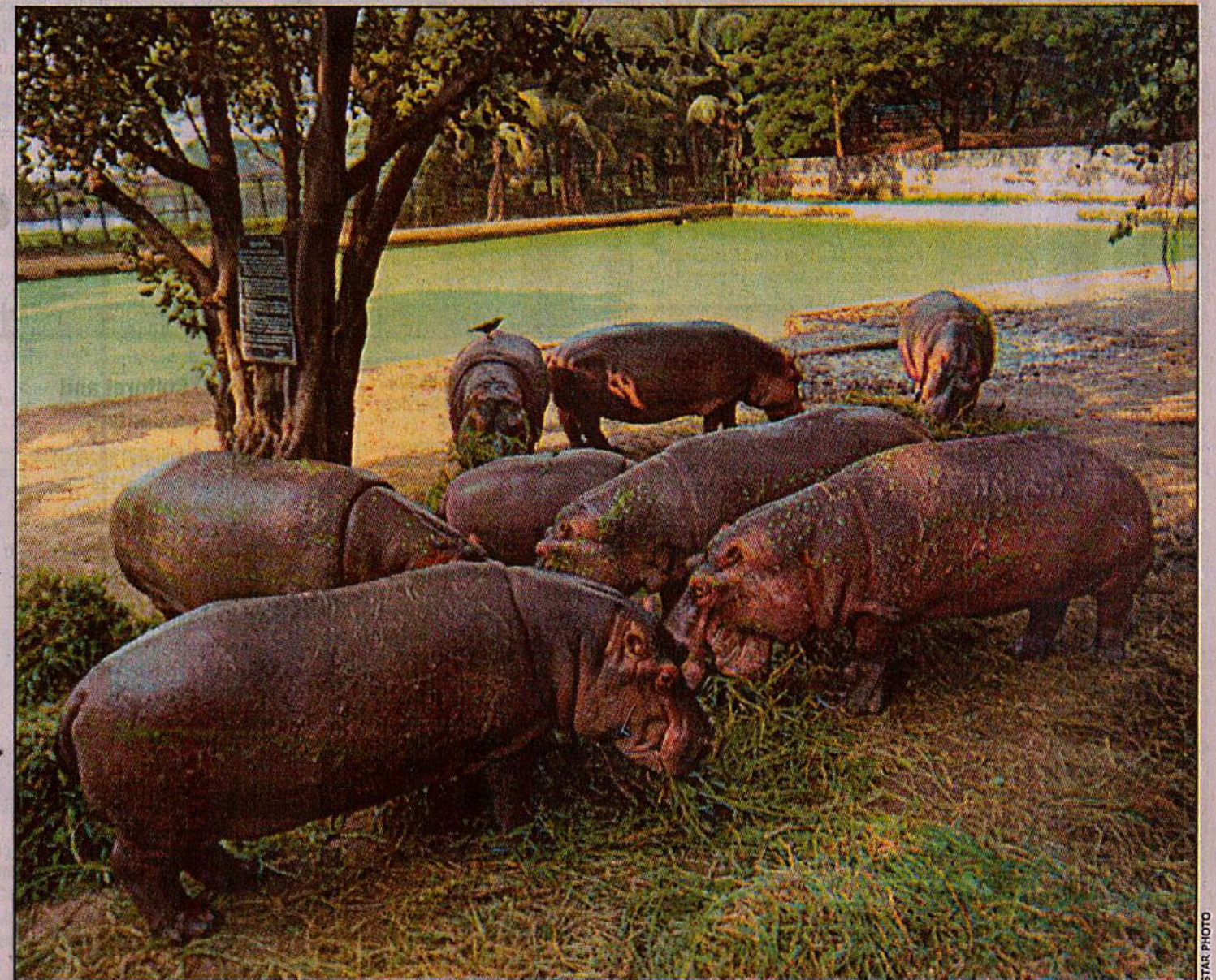
The zoo curator said a Tk19 crore National Zoo Modernisation Project is awaiting nod from the Planning Commission.

The project includes renovation of cages for animals, construction of two semi-intensive natural moats for lions and tigers. There is a proposal to dredge the zoo lake, build a wall around the lake to protect fish.

There are 2,172 animals of 184 species at the 186-acre Dhaka Zoo.



Endangered species at your doorstep! Migratory birds are sold open in the capital. This photo was taken from Purana Paltan area.



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