

Wetland bird species on extinction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of species of waterfowls found in Bangladesh's wetlands has come down to 70 from more than 250 in early 1990s, a study conducted by bird-watchers revealed yesterday.

"Environmental pollution and offensive activities of people such as killing of birds and spoiling their eggs and dwelling places are major reasons for this decline," said Sajahan Sarder, president of Bangladesh Bird Watchers' Society.

Nature Conservation Committee (NCC) conducted the bird census in the country's central south coast, southeast coast (Cox's

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Move to list most voters before HC hearing

CEC invites press but leaves office without briefing

SHAKHAWAT LITON

With two writ petitions pending over the decision to make a fresh voter roll, the preparation for the list starts on January 1 in a hasty manner to complete the maximum task of enumeration on the opening day.

The chief election commissioner (CEC) yesterday kept the media waiting for eight hours for a briefing but eventually left office under police escort, without saying a word.

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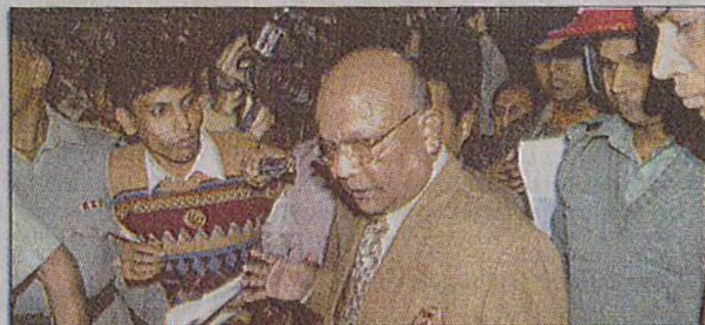


PHOTO: STAR

CEC MA Aziz yesterday leaves his office without talking to journalists.

Mirpur traders held hostage by toll-takers

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Extortionists in city's Mirpur area demanded toll from over 100 traders in the last two days while the latter continue to protest the killing of fellow businessman Aftab Uddin, who died Wednesday, four days after criminals shot him.

The criminals have also been threatening Aftab's family still reeling from the shock of his death.

Meanwhile, business leaders at a meeting yesterday called off the indefinite strike, considering heavy public inconvenience before the Eid-ul-Azha.

DEMANDS FOR TOLL CONTINUE

Businessmen of Mirpur, where six traders have been killed in the last

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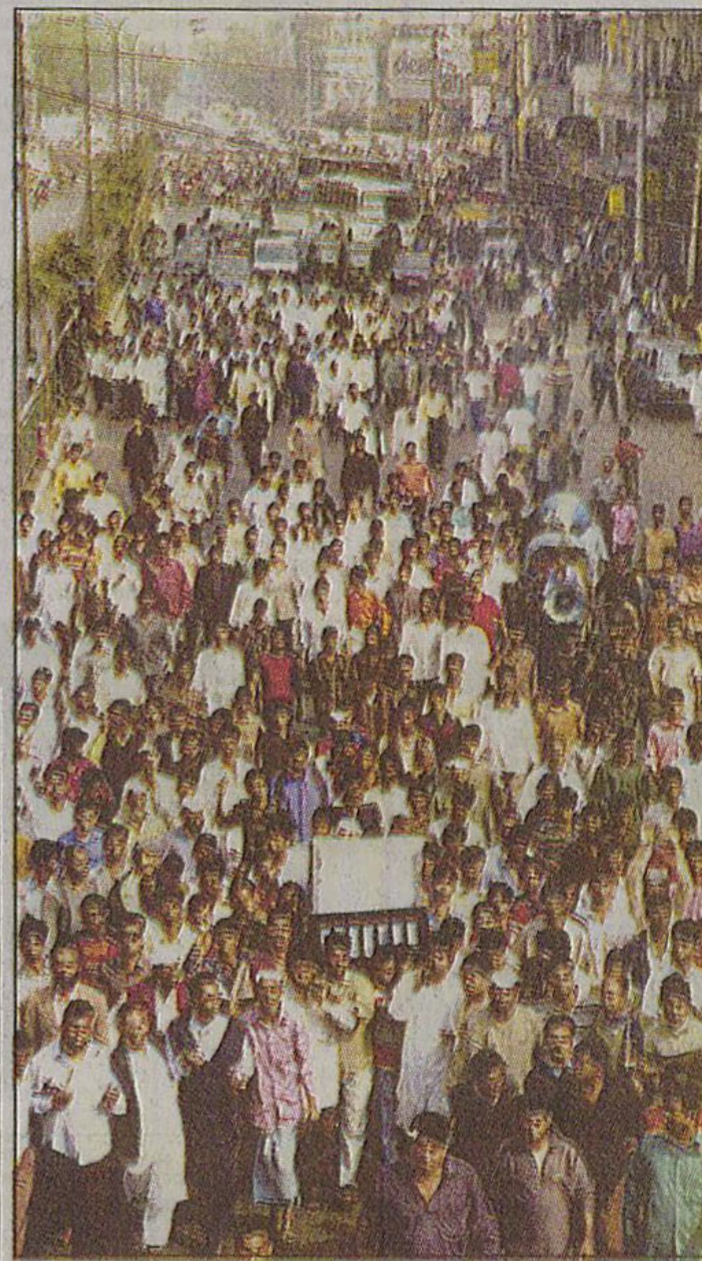


PHOTO: STAR

Mourners carrying the body of slain businessman Aftab Uddin march the street in Mirpur in the capital yesterday. Bullet-hit by extortionists on Sunday, Aftab died on Wednesday.

PM's speeches provocative

Says opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14-party opposition yesterday alleged the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government is hatching conspiracy to hand over power to a "third force" to save their skin sensing defeat in the next elections.

The prime minister is creating ground for the intervention of the "third force" through provocative speeches, leading the nation to a confrontation, said the opposition leaders. They were addressing a news conference at the Awami League (AL) office on Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital.

"Instead of taking actions against the Islamist militants, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is

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Sunny remanded for record 119 days

Huji chief, JMB leader Awal sent for further interrogation

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday remanded Military Commander of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) Ataur Rahman Sunny for a record 119 days, showing him arrested in 15 cases under the Explosive Substances Act.

His latest remand, highest in the history of Bangladesh, came on the heels of 14-day interrogation in two cases.

Two other militant linchpins

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TIPAIMUKH DAM IN INDIA Experts meet today to protest its impact

REAZ AHMAD

With India finalising construction of the Tipaimukh hydroelectric dam in its northeast, water experts and rights activists from across whole South Asia meet in the city today to protest the project that poses severe environmental bearings on Bangladesh's major river systems.

The two-day International Tipaimukh Dam Conference 2005 begins in the capital this morning with 10 South Asian neighbours--

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal,

Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Afghanistan, Myanmar and China--who share many rivers among themselves.

Academician Muhammad Zafar Iqbal will inaugurate the conference at the Institution of Engineers.

The Public Investment Board of India gave final nod to the construction of the Tipaimukh dam on the Barak river in November and sanctioned Rs 6,000 crore.

In the last meeting of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers

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Hajj flight crisis ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hajj agencies and hundreds of intending pilgrims have called off their demonstration planned for today following Biman's securing 10 more landing slots at Jeddah airport and assurance of arranging more special flights enabling all hajj pilgrims to make it.

The Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab) took the decision at a meeting yesterday upon the government's assurance that Biman has got 10 more slots in addition to 86 it had already secured from Saudi authorities and now Biman would be able to carry 3,000 pilgrims in addition to previous flight arrangements for 40,000.

A Biman press release said that

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US undersecretary due in January

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas R Burns is expected to pay a two-day official visit to Dhaka in late January.

This will be Burns' second visit to Bangladesh since his last visit on June 26.

An official of the US Embassy confirmed Burns' visit likely in the third week of next month. The official, however, could not confirm the date and detail itinerary as well as agenda of his visit only six months after his first one.

Sources said the undersecretary will discuss political and bilateral

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In sugar trap

Low price, graft turn sugarcane farmers against mills

AMANUR AMAN, back from South Bhurkapara

A tense situation is prevailing in South Bhurkapara amidst frequent police patrolling in the wake of Wednesday's killing of three people during agitation of sugarcane farmers.

The villagers and sugarcane farmers expressed their anger and unhappiness while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Kushitia Deputy Commissioner Jamal A Naer Choudhury, local lawmaker Reza Ahmed Bachchu

Mollah and sugar mill officials visited the village.

The police filed a case against 300 villagers including sugarcane farmers for attacking the magistrate and members of a mobile court on Wednesday.

The farmers said they were always reluctant to sell their products to the Kushtia Sugar Mill due to low price, mismanagement and corruption of the officials and, above all, irregular payments.

This situation has forced the farmers to produce molasses using homemade crushers. On the other

hand, the mill counts gross loss as it does not get the required amount of sugarcane every year.

The farmers alleged they face several problems after selling sugarcane to the mill due to exploitation of its staff and officials.

"If I sell sugarcane in November, I will receive my dues in between January and March," a farmer told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The price of sugarcane the mill fixes is much less than what we get from producing molasses. So why should we go for supplying our

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Work on the 11km-long Nikunja-Eastern Bypass link road has begun. The 100-foot-wide road will connect Dhaka city with the bypass.

EASTERN BYPASS

No plan to save canals, water retention ponds

MORSHED ALI KHAN

While preparations are underway to launch the long awaited TK 2,475 crore eastern bypass-cum-embankment project in

Dhaka, the government has no plan in hand to save the natural canals and water retention ponds in the 124 square kilometre area under the project, mostly low-lying, now being

filled up indiscriminately. Lack of initiative to retain the natural canals and water retention ponds before the project starts has raised fears among environmentalists and experts

that as in the case of the western flood protection embankment, the 'new city extension' on the eastern fringe would be an environmental nightmare.

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