

Predators turn protectors of Lauachhara forest

PINAKI ROY

Even a couple of years ago most men of Dolubari Muslimpara, a village adjacent to Lauachhara forest, used to live by illegal tree felling. But everything has changed as these men themselves have now become the protectors of the forest.

A 20-member team from Dolubari Muslimpara has been working under the Nishorgo Support Project of the Forest Department to guard some areas of the forest, 10km off Srimangal, so that none can fell trees at the protected place.

The project is being financed by the USAID and implemented by International Resource Group.

Interestingly, many of these men had several cases against them for their illegal trade, but those cases have been withheld now.

"We are happy that now we have honest incomes and the police also do not look for us. We can prevent more than 80 percent tree felling as we know well how and when the illegal traders operate," said Ahad Miah, leader of the patrolling team.



Forest officials and locals most of whom used to live by felling trees illegally, now jointly guard the Lauachhara forest in Srimongal, Moulvibazar.

The members of the team said they used to fell trees to earn money for their livelihood but the work involved a lot of risk.

"But now we can live with honour and courage. Nobody now calls us thieves," said Aziz, 56, who had been involved with the illegal trade for 30 years.

The members of the patrolling team have sometimes been threatened over telephone for catching illegal traders several times, but none left the patrol team, they said.

"Now I cannot go to Srimangal because of their threats. Some influential people are engaged with this activity," Ahad Miah said.

The decline in illegal tree felling has, however, resulted in increased price of timber recently.

"The price of per cubic feet teak was Tk 500 here in Srimangal a couple of years ago. But now the price has reached Tk 1,800," said a forest officer of the Lauachhara forest beat.

Nishorgo supports each member of the patrolling team with Tk 2,250 per month. It has also trained the villagers to earn through alternative sources

including poultry, nursery, weaving, cattle farming, and rickshaw pulling.

Md Abdul Hai of Dolubari Muslimpara has earned Tk 40,000 from his nursery in last one year after receiving training under the Nishorgo project.

"We will not pay them the salary for long. We will eventually make them earn from alternative sources through training and other facilities," said Mehrin M Mahbub, communication specialist of the project.

Shyamal, a resident of Doluchhara Tripura village, said they have come to know through the project that they can earn money out of the forest if they can save it.

"We have engaged the locals in managing and protecting the forest. It proved to be helpful for Lauachhara but the pressure [of illegal tree felling] has shifted to the adjoining parts of the forest," Nishorgo support project chief Dr Philip JD Cosse said.

Nishorgo has provided income opportunities to 404 people by facilitating training and monetary supports.

Two held for preaching for 'armed revolution'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Police yesterday arrested two persons from a mosque in Nilphamari while they were preaching sermon "for an armed revolution to establish an Islamic state."

The arrestees are Monwar Khan, 40, and Saidur Rahman Sayeed, 27, both from Tangail district. They claimed themselves as preachers of Islam, said police.

Quoting locals, police said the two were asking the people to take part in an "armed revolution" for an Islamic state after jumma prayers at a mosque at Sutipara in Dimla upazila.

Suspecting the two as militants, the musallis handed them over to the police.

Officer-in-Charge of Dimla Police Station Akhtar Hossain said the arrestees had first claimed themselves as members of an

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Grand Alliance co-ordinator Abdul Jalil (inset) addressing a protest meeting at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Activity spotted at North Korea nuclear test site

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korean officials said yesterday activity had been spotted near a suspected nuclear test site in North Korea but there was no evidence to suggest Pyongyang was about to test another atomic device.

ABC News had earlier quoted a US defence official as saying that North Korea appeared to have made preparations for a second nuclear test. Its first, on October 9 last year, drew worldwide condemnation and punitive UN sanctions.

"We think they've put everything in place to conduct a test without any notice or warning," the US television network quoted the official as saying.

In response, a US official said he had no reason to believe North Korea was preparing for a test -- and there was in fact considerable uncertainty within the US government about whether Pyongyang had any intention of conducting one.

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Oil prices at lowest level since 2005

AFP, Singapore

Oil prices traded at their lowest levels since mid-2005 in Asian hours Friday as the market reacted to high US stockpiles and unusually warm winter weather, dealers said.

At 10:32 am (0232 GMT) New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in February, was down 14 cents to \$55.45 dollars a barrel from \$55.59 dollars in late US trade when the contract sank 2.73 dollars.

The contract had not fallen as low in Asia since June 2005 when it was below \$54 dollars.

Brent North Sea crude for February was at \$55.25 dollars after plunging 2.85 dollars overnight to a low of \$54.76 dollars, its lowest level since December 1, 2005.

"The short-term negative driving factor remains the warmer weather in the Northern hemisphere and North Asian countries like Korea and Japan," said Victor

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New outlaw group kills 4 in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Fouz (GMF).

The Lal Juddho cadres stormed a house of Nintola village in Mirpur upazila where Moinul and Masud went to attend a secret meeting of GMF at about 9:30pm, sources said.

They were taken to Kodalkathi village and slaughtered at around 1:30am. The bodies were left in a mango orchard of the village.

Another group of Lal Juddho picked up Saheb and Hasem from their house, took them to Maharghat of Gangni upazila and slaughtered them.

A gang of 10 armed men went to the house of Saheb at about 1:30am, called him out and picked him up at gunpoint, the victim's family said.

The gang then picked up Hasem from his house, which is adjacent to Saheb's.

The criminals took away the two blindfolded.

The murders were done

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Basque airport evacuated after bomb alert

AFP, Bilbao

Basque police received a telephone warning in the name of armed Basque separatist group ETA of a bomb at Bilbao airport yesterday, prompting the facility's evacuation as a precaution, the regional interior ministry said.

A police spokesman told AFP that the caller "spoke in ETA's name".

A ministry spokesman added that police in the northern region were "for the moment not giving much credibility" to the call.

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Prayer Timing

January 6		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-30	5-35
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Bush reshuffles top positions

Iraq policy speech next week

AFP, Washington

President George W Bush was set to announce the new US spy chief yesterday as he reshuffles top intelligence, diplomatic, and military aides tied to the Iraq conflict ahead of announcing his retooled war-fighting strategy next week.

The White House however remains deeply split over sending more US troops to Iraq, and Bush advisers disagree whether the Iraqi government is able to provide the military support and implement the political reforms necessary for US forces to eventually withdraw, the Washington Post reported Friday.

The current US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, will be

citing officials familiar with the debate.

Bush set to nominate retired vice admiral Michael McConnell, a former head of the National Security Agency, to be the director of national intelligence, a top aide said speaking on condition of anonymity.

The current spy chief, John Negroponte -- the first US ambassador to post-Saddam Hussein Iraq -- will be US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's deputy, the aide said. Both picks require US Senate approval.

The current US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, will be

nominated to be US ambassador to the United Nations, a senior State Department official said. He would replace the controversial John Bolton, whose tenure ended last week.

Replacing Khalilzad in Baghdad is Ryan Crocker, 57, the current US ambassador in Pakistan since November 2004. Crocker is one of the State Department's most experienced Middle East experts and a fluent Arabic speaker.

On the military side, the head of the US Central Command and the top US military commander in Iraq are both set to change, ABC

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US sanctions on arms suppliers to Iran, Syria

AFP, Washington/Beijing

The US government has imposed sanctions on Chinese, Russian and North Korean companies for selling missiles and other weapons to Iran and Syria, the Washington Times reported yesterday, citing US administration officials.

The three Chinese state-run companies, three Russian firms and a North Korean mining company were sanctioned under the Iran and Syria Nonproliferation Act in 2005, the Times reported.

The sanctions prevent US government business and support to the companies for two years, and blocks US firms from selling certain items to them, according to the Times.

The newspaper described the sanctions as symbolic, but US officials said they have been effective in singling out the companies for public shaming.

Officials told the Times the sales included missiles to Syria, and weapons and weapons-related sales to both Iran and Syria.

Earlier Chinese President Hu Jintao urged Iran yesterday to make a "serious response" to a United Nations Security Council resolution on its nuclear programme, China's state media said.

"The resolution reflects the shared concerns of the international community over the Iranian nuclear issue," Hu told Ali Larjani, Iran's visiting top nuclear negotiator.

"We hope Iran can make a

serious response to the resolution," Hu was quoted as saying by Chinese state television.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad this week vowed Iran will step up its atomic programme in defiance of the resolution last month which imposed sanctions against Tehran for its failure to suspend uranium enrichment.

China is a key player in the diplomatic manoeuvrings over Iran's nuclear programme as it is a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council.

"The international community should continue its diplomatic efforts for a return to negotiations as soon as possible, and seek a

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