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MOVE TO LEGALISE ILLEGAL INDUSTRIES

Depleting forest in Gazipur to lose 600 more acres

PINAKI ROY

The government move to regularise illegal industries in and around the Gazipur National Park will cause the forest department a permanent loss of around 618 acres of land, officials say.

The government, instead of removing the illegal industries and other establishments, has recently made a decision to regularise those and would formulate stringent regulations about it.

A meeting of the advisory council chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed on January 21 decided the government would consider giving clearance certificates to the factories and other structures there.

Experts say the decision will turn another forest into a legal

industrial zone where wildlife like tiger, deer, bear and peafowl used to roam just decades ago.

Now Bangladesh has only seven percent forestland against 25 percent of the coverage a country should have.

The government move came when the illegal grabbers have already occupied over 11,000 acres of forestland out of 64,000 acres that include the 12,435-acre National Park in Gazipur.

As it is a neighbouring district of the capital with very good location, influential people over the years have already grabbed 20 percent of its forestland.

Many observe the government move would further encourage illegal occupiers in the future.

A committee comprising Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF) AKM

Shamsuddin and Director General of Department of Environment Dr Rashidul Hasan has already submitted a report.

The report says around 300 industries are being run there, some of which are situated absolutely on the illegally occupied forestland.

Asked, AKM Shamsuddin said: "We're waiting for the government decision. We don't know anything more."

Neyamat Ullah Bhuiyan, director of the environment department, Dhaka division, also said he does not know anything about it.

According to existing laws, it is prohibited to provide clearance certificates to the industries in and around the National Park situated in eight mouzas -- Araisha Prasad, Bishayakuribari, Baraipara, Bon

Khorla, Uttar Salna, Baupara, Bahadurpur, and Mahna Bhabanipur.

During a recent visit to the environment department, a notice was seen still posted on the board that reads no clearance will be given to the industries on these mouzas.

Since declared National Park in 1982, around 1,900 people have so far occupied the 618-acre forestland and constructed over 3,500 structures violating prohibitions, forest sources say.

The sources add that there is 119 acres of grabbed land in Araisha Prasad mouza, 210 acres in Baraipara, 2.5 acres in Bon Khorla, 16 acres in Uttar Salna, 19 acres in Baupara, 14 acres in Bahadurpur, and 183 acres in Mahna Bhabanipur.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Jubo Dal GS Alal held, remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP lawmaker and General Secretary of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal was arrested at his Lalmitia residence in the capital yesterday.

Mohammadpur police arrested Alal, former MP from Barisal-2 constituency, at his house at 1/6 Lucky Apartments at about 8:30am on charge of violating the Emergency Powers Rules (EPR).

ABM Siddique, second officer of Mohammadpur Police Station, produced Alal in the Court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate in the afternoon and prayed for a three-day remand. But the court granted two days' remand.

"Alal has been arrested as he was uniting the youths of his party against the ongoing anti-corruption drive," the police officer said, adding that a case was filed against the BNP leader with Mohammad Police Station under section 16 (2) of the EPR.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Lift emergency, hold polls

British FM calls for ensuring democracy



British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury at a press conference at the foreign ministry yesterday. British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury, middle, was present.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband yesterday urged the government to lift the state of emergency and hold general elections as soon as possible to ensure a fully functioning democracy.

He also said Britain is impressed with the performance of the army-backed caretaker government during 'a difficult year'.

Miliband, the highest profile British visitor since this government took charge in January last year and the first foreign minister of his country here since 2002, was talking to reporters after meeting Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury on the first day of his two-day visit to Bangladesh.

"A fully functional democracy cannot operate under a state of emergency," said Miliband when asked about Bangladesh's return to democracy.

"We certainly look forward to

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

EXTORTION CASE

Charges pressed against ex-MP Mashiur, 8 others

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

CID police yesterday pressed charges against former BNP lawmaker Mashiur Rahman and his eight associates in an extortion case.

They submitted the charge sheet to Jhenidah court through the court inspector in the afternoon.

On September 16, 2007, contractor Subodh Kumar Kundu filed a Tk 50.8 lakh extortion case against the former BNP lawmaker from Jhenidah-2 constituency and his eight associates -- Zahidul Islam, Akhtaruzzaman, Kamal Azad Pannu, Zahiduzzaman Moni, MA Majid, Abdul Majid, Asaduzzaman and Shawkat Akbar.

In the case, Subodh alleged that Mashiur and his associates extorted the money from him.

But Subodh was shot dead 18 days after the filing of the case. Police lodged a case, accusing Mashiur of the killing. CID, Khulna, is now investigating the murder case.



Poultry traders at Dhaka Hansh-Murgi Banijjik Kendra at Tejgaon, the largest poultry market of the capital, wear gloves and masks as a precaution against bird flu.

BIRD FLU

Control room set up, mobile labs suggested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) yesterday set up a control room on its premises to receive information on the spread of avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu.

The DCC high-ups at an emergency meeting made the decision of setting up the control room on the first floor of the city corporation building.

DCC veterinary officer Dr Azmat will be in charge of it.

The city corporation will provide special containers to 50 kitchen markets in the capital for keeping the dead fowls and the leftovers in those. Those will be buried in the Matuail landfill.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), an environmental

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Fish, meat prices soar as chicken off the menu

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The plummeting demand for chickens in the wake of bird flu outbreaks across the country has led to a sharp rise in prices of fish, beef and mutton over the last week.

Various small fish were selling at prices up by Tk 20 to Tk 30 per kg at Karwan Bazar, New Market, Hatirpool and Ananda Bazar yesterday.

Fish including mola, chapila, meni, pui, kholsha and small ruhi that sold at Tk 100 to Tk 120 a kg last week cost Tk 130 to Tk 160 a kg yesterday.

During the same period, prices of hilsha, big ruhi, koi, tengra, pabda, chital and prawn increased by Tk 50 to Tk 100 a kg. Hilsa sold at Tk 350 to Tk 400, ruhi at Tk 200 to Tk 220 and local koi at Tk 300 to Tk 400 a kg yesterday.

Fish traders at Karwan Bazar said despite adequate supplies, prices have been rising steeply because more and more people are turning to fish.

They, however, said fish prices usually start going up during this time of the year since the pick fishing season ends by the end of February.

"Customers don't want to eat chicken for fear of bird flu. They want fish and beef," said Rokeya Begum, owner of a restaurant at Agamasi Lane in old Dhaka.

She said she had to increase price of a meal by Tk 5. "I'm afraid I'll have to raise it by Tk 5 more, or else I won't be able to manage my business."

Meanwhile, traders said the price of poultry has come down to Tk 65 to Tk 75 a kg from Tk 80 to Tk 90 in a week.

Jahangir Hossain, a poultry trader at Karwan Bazar, said, "I used to sell around 100 kilograms of chicken a day, whereas now I sell only 60 kgs."

Beef sold at Tk 180 to Tk 200 a kg yesterday while only a week ago it was Tk 170 to Tk 180. The price of better quality mutton rose to Tk 280 to Tk 300 a kg from Tk 260 to Tk 280 a kg.

The mutton that sold at Tk 200 to Tk 220 a kg last week was Tk 220 to Tk 250 a kg yesterday.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of the situation, the unscrupulous traders have been selling buffalo meat as beef.

"We are forced to do so because the price of cow has increased manifold. If we are to sell pure beef, we'll have to charge Tk 220 per kg," said a meat trader at Ananda Bazar.

ALAL'S ARREST

Pro-Khaleda leaders go into hiding

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most of the pro-Khaleda BNP leaders have gone into hiding after the arrest of former lawmaker Moazzem Hossain Alal at his Lalmitia residence yesterday.

Those siding with Khandakar Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by Khaleda Zia, alleged the arrest is part of the government strategy to press-gang them into accepting the proposal of M Saifur Rahman, acting chairman appointed by the standing committee.

Recently, Saifur called on the Delwar-led faction to accept intraparty reforms and reinstate those expelled by the detained chairperson. In reply, Delwar asked the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

3-PRONGED PROBLEM IN MALAYSIA

Dream turns to nightmare for 3 lakh Bangladeshis

PORIMOL PALMA

The hopes of changing fortune with which around 3 lakh Bangladeshi workers have migrated to Malaysia are likely to be dashed due to high cost of migration, low wage offered by their employers and high cost of living there.

A calculation suggests that the three-pronged problem would leave most of the migrant labour with savings far less than they had spent to go to the East Asian country.

Though the government-fixed

rate was Tk 84,000, each worker had been charged between Tk 2 lakh and 2.5 lakh by their recruiting agents and middlemen for migration.

Upon completing the usual three-year contract period, a worker can save only around Tk 1.5 lakh after paying his daily expenses and levy, according to the calculation.

The misfortune of the workers does not end here as they took out loans at high interest rate to arrange the migration fees, experts observe adding that the price of the land they sold for going to Malaysia

have almost doubled.

It is unlikely that these workers will be able to recover the money they had put in, hoping for a successful future, they added.

Considering Malaysian Ringgit (RM) 18.5 as basic salary per day as per the employment contracts, a worker gets about RM 500 or Tk 10,000, monthly for 26 working days, meaning he earns Tk 3,60,000 in three years.

However, a worker has to pay over RM 300 for levy, food, housing and medicines in Malaysia leaving only RM 150 to RM 200 for sending

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

AL's quest for fresh electoral alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) will seek to form a fresh grand electoral alliance with like-minded parties for contesting the next general election, acting AL President Zillur Rahman said yesterday.

"We will start talks with components of the 14-party combine this Sunday and we will act to form a grand electoral alliance with like minded political parties and liberation forces," Zillur said.

The acting AL chief was talking to reporters when leaders of Krishak League, Faridpur district unit, and Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote met him at his Gulshan residence in the capital.

"You [leaders] should forget any differences among yourselves and be united at any cost. If we live we will live altogether and if we die we will die altogether," he said.

"None, even the present government, cannot hand over power without holding election. So, election must have to be held," said the AL leader.

Echoing AL President Sheikh Hasina's views, Zillur said, "I urge both the caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC) to hold the election in March-April."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



Relatives mourn the death of Dhaka City Corporation ward commissioner Abdul Qayum Khan at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Pro-BNP ward commissioner dies in custody

Family alleges lack of treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained ward commissioner and BNP leader Abdul Qayum Khan died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday morning.

The dead body of Qayum was handed over to his relatives at 4:00pm after autopsy.

Qayum, who was cultural secretary of Dhaka municipal BNP, was detained from his South Kafrul residence on January 12 last year, the day after the state of emergency was declared. He was kept in cell-7 of Dhaka Central Jail.

Family members meanwhile claimed that Qayum, 45, died because of lack of treatment for heart diseases he had been suffering from for the last four years. They demanded probe into the matter.

Jail authorities, however, claimed that Qayum received treatment under supervision of jail doctors.

Abdul Baten, brother-in-law of Qayum, told The Daily Star that the ward commissioner was detained although there was neither any case nor even a general diary (GD) filed against him. Qayum was

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

5,000 fowls culled in Narayanganj

STAR REPORT

Over 5,000 chickens and other fowls and pigeons were culled in Narayanganj on Thursday night after detection of avian influenza.

Narayanganj livestock officer Mohammad Abu Taher told reporters that they culled 5,137 chickens and other domestic fowls and pigeons at a poultry farm owned by Ali noor alias Tito.

He said they raided one kilometre around Tito's poultry farm on Thursday night after they detected the virus in Masdar and Golachipa areas of the town.

According to another report, some 5,000 chickens died of bird flu at Deegram under Godabari upazila in Rajshahi for the last few days and at least 10 dogs died after

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Subsidised primary textbooks being sold at higher prices

Many students yet to get free books

SURANJITH DEABNATH

A large number of primary school students are yet to receive the textbooks meant to be distributed for free due to poor coordination between the government bodies concerned.

Besides, books that are supposed to be sold at a subsidised price cost three to four times the rate.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) did not take any measures to print additional textbooks even after being

warned of the crisis.

Teachers, guardians and book traders believe the situation is the result of lack of coordination between NCTB, Directorate of Primary Education and primary and mass education ministry.

Leaders of Bangladesh Publishers and Booksellers Association say they did not get permission to print additional textbooks for primary level students even after applying to the authorities several times.

Besides, like previous years, a syndicate in connivance with

dishonest NCTB officers has created an artificial shortage, forcing guardians to buy the books from the market.

The primary and mass education ministry in the first week of January had decided that primary schools attached to high schools would not be given free textbooks. Later, the rule was withdrawn, but most of the teachers, guardians and students were not informed.

Books available on the market were not enough to meet this additional demand.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4