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## Modhupur forest merely exists

85pc of natural greenery gone in 40 years; govt's wrong policies blamed

PINAKI ROY

Adoption of wrong policies by the government and corruption by foresters have nearly eaten away the entire Madhupur forest, reducing the unique habitat of flora and fauna down to 8,000 acres from 45,000 acres.

A large variety of wildlife including Royal Bengal Tiger, Asiatic black bear, peafowls, Sambar and deer used to roam in the Madhupur forest just a few decades ago.

But now the forest has been degenerated and reshaped with commercially planted pineapples and bananas and woods of alien species. Though it once abounded with medicinal plants and tubers, it now hardly produces these species of vegetation anymore.

A comparison of satellite images of 1963 and 2003 clearly shows 85 percent greenery of Madhupur has disappeared in last 40 years. Now noise of vehicles and bombings and shootings of the armed forces

overwhelm the chirping of birds.

"The Madhupur forest is valuable in ecological aspects as it's the country's last remaining patches of natural forest. If we cannot conserve this, we'll lose a unique biodiversity system forever," said Dr Tawhidul Islam, one of the eminent forest experts in the country.

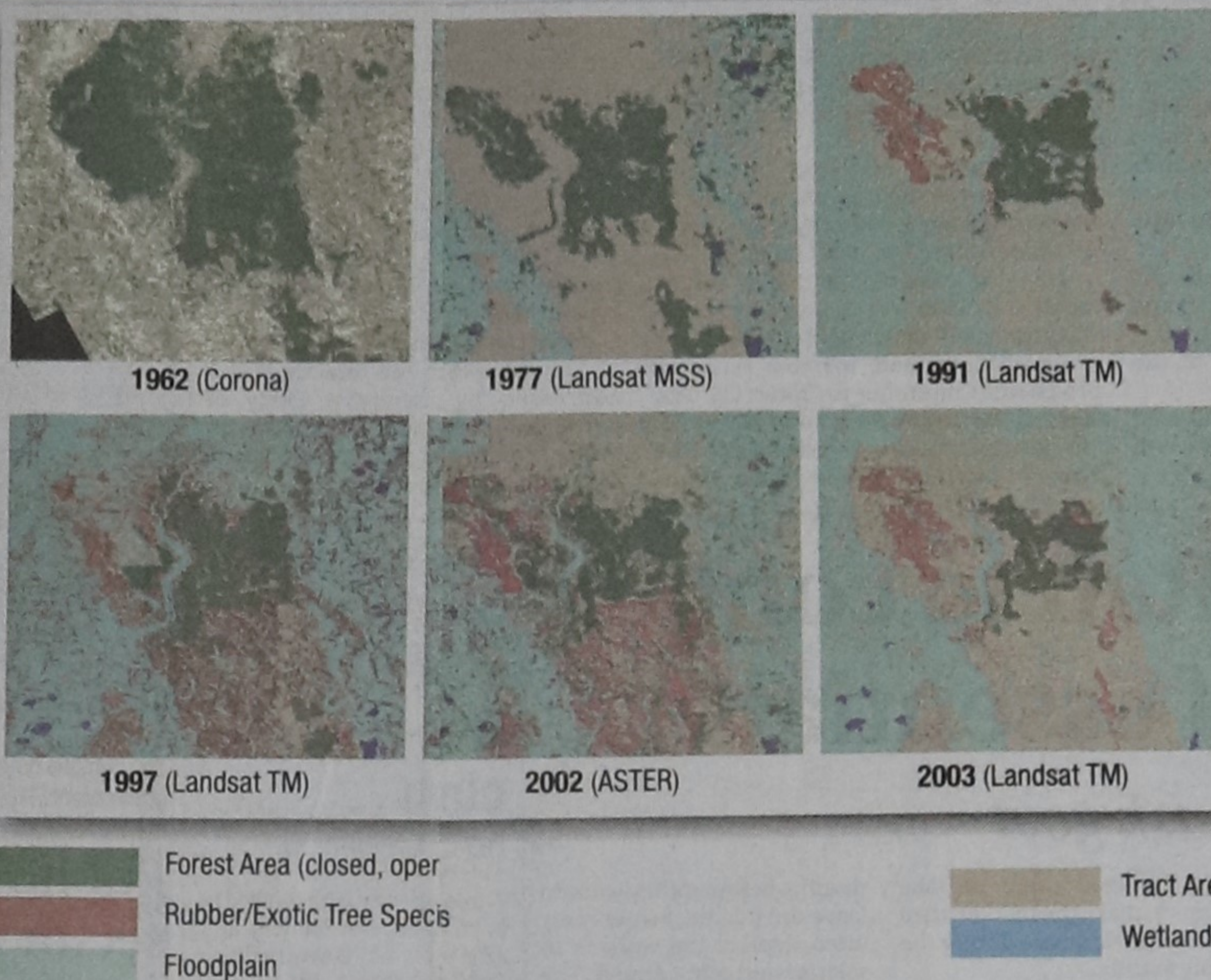
Following up the Department of Forest activities, it was learned that the government has never taken up any serious projects to conserve or revive the degraded natural forest. Rather forest officials promoted projects which helped them make quick bucks and destroyed the forest.

The forest department has been implementing donor-funded tree plantation projects in the forestland in different names since 1984. These projects actually encouraged the officials to strip off natural trees and plant alien species including acacia, eucalyptus, ghoran, gamari and rubber.

The government kept a blind eye when local

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### Forest map distribution in Madhupur tract area



## Ramadan starts today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The holy month of Ramadan begins today amidst religious fervour with the devout Muslims observing dawn-to-dusk fast for self-purification and divine blessings.

The Ramadan, ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is considered a period of restraint and austerity for the purification of the souls. During the month, devotees focus on abstinence and prayers including Tarabai at night.

In separate messages President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia have greeted the countrymen.

President Zillur Rahman in his message said, "The lessons of the holy month of Ramadan should reflect in our life." He prayed for the peace of the people of the country and the Muslim Ummah across the world.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "We get chance to" SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## Bangladeshi whizkid on the block

Mega-search engine launched to find local contents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

First-ever Bangladeshi meta-search engine SearchW3.net, created by a 13-year-old kid, has been launched to help Internet users find local contents and applications easily on the Web.

Shehzad Noor Taus, a student of class seven at Seabreeze International

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## Biman flights go haywire

All 5 aircraft on int'l routes down with glitches; cause 10-30 hours delays

RASHIDUL HASAN

Technical glitches grounded all five key aircraft of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Friday causing untold suffering to over 2,700 passengers at home and abroad.

The three DC-10-30s and the two Airbus Biman has been scheduled to fly to five major international destinations--Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Jeddah and Rome, Biman sources said.

The five departing and return flights were supposed to be loaded to aircraft capacities. At least 2,784 Biman passengers were stranded at Zia International Airport and other international airports, a

high official of Biman told The Daily Star.

Biman's flight schedule for other destinations also suffered a blow. Delays tormented those passengers as well. Biman's international flights of yesterday and today suffered 10- to 30-hour delays and the backlog will not go away until Tuesday, said a Biman official.

Incoming and outgoing passengers are staying in different hotels. "We are also informing passengers about the delays to reduce their worry," said Abdul Mamdud Khan, general manager (central) Flight Operations.

Biman sources said three of the five grounded aircraft were mended and went

on service.

Biman Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Air Commodore (ret'd) Zakiul Islam told The Daily Star that they are trying to recover from the problem as soon as possible.

"An aircraft may become unserviceable due to technical glitches and it's normal. Our engineers are trying to remove those glitches," he added.

He said many of the aircraft in Biman fleet are old. Some of the planes that fly international routes are 29 years old. He hoped that the situation would improve once the 10 Boeings Biman has ordered

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## Two schools shut amid swine flu fear

Experts term steps drastic; 4 more cases confirmed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two leading English medium schools in the city have shut down for an indefinite period yesterday amidst fears that the number of swine flu cases might increase in the country.

Experts, however, said the swine-flu situation in the country does not warrant such drastic steps.

The number of swine flu patients crossed a hundred in the country yesterday as government officials confirmed that four more people have been infected with the virus A/H1N1.

Authorities of Scholastica issued a notice yesterday saying the school will remain closed from August 23rd until further notice.

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## Tk 5 lakh looted from gas station

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A gang of armed muggers looted over Tk 5 lakh from a CNG refuelling station in the capital's Badda area yesterday.

Employees of the Dhaka CNG Filling Station, owned by BNP leader Major (ret'd) Mohammad Mannan, said a gang of five to six muggers snatched the filling station's cash box at gunpoint and escaped the scene in a private car.

Mohammad Ripon, an

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The real-estate developer wanted this marked age-old building in Sutrapur. Inset, a number of the family members waiting at the Sutrapur Police Station after they were rescued from the abductors.

PHOTO: SHAFIQUE ALAM

## 9 of three families kidnapped, rescued

Victims, police claim of land grab bid, looting of belongings; 4 criminals arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday rescued the nine members of three Hindu families kidnapped by a gang of criminals from a workshop in the city's Sutrapur area after eight hours of effort.

During the raid the law enforcers arrested four gangsters, who kidnapped the victims early yesterday from their houses in Hrishikesh Das Lane in the area and kept them tied and gagged at Janata Engineering Workshop.

The police suspect the kidnapping has links to grabbing the piece of land on which the victims have an over 100-year-old building.

Armed local criminals picked up Nitai Chandra Das, 70, his cousin Shambhu Das, 50, Shambhu's wife Kajol Rani Das, 42, her son

Sajal, 14, and daughter Swarna, 8, Shambhu's brother Mohabir Das, 45, his wife Lakshmi Rani Das, 38, her daughters Beauty, 18, and Sweetie, 12, from their houses around 3:00am and confined them to the workshop.

The criminals also looted belongings including gold ornaments from the victims' houses.

The four arrested criminals are identified as Hossain Mohammad Babul, owner of the workshop, and his relatives Akter Hossain, Shohag and Nizam.

Quoting the victims, Officer-in-Charge of Sutrapur Police Station Tofazzal Hossain said the gang entered the house of Shambhu Das introducing themselves as police at about 3:00am and kidnapped the victims.

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## TCB sale yet to influence market

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The sale of basic commodities by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) in the city could not make any positive impact on their prices due to scanty supply against the increased demand for such items on the eve of Ramadan.

Traders said both the quantity and varieties of basic commodities sold by the TCB dealers is too inadequate to have any positive impact on the market.

The TCB is selling only edible oil and sugar through its appointed dealers in Dhaka city in a limited scale while other imported items are yet to arrive in the country.

The demand for edible oil, sugar, chickpeas, onion and lentil goes up during the Ramadan.

The commerce ministry started its sales operation from Wednesday through the TCB dealers to have a positive

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## Essentials' prices spiralling up

Mobile court to start vigilance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday said mobile courts would soon start vigilance to prevent businessmen from selling daily necessities at higher prices than the price mentioned on the hanging price list.

City corporations and the district administrations are also ordered to monitor the market, the minister said emerging from a discussion meeting held at the National Museum.

But he stressed that the government does not want to control the market with the help of Rab, police or any other law enforcing agencies.

He said, the essential prices would become cheaper when the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh would start its activity in full swing.

Though the essentials' price is soaring up following the Ramadan, he claimed the prices remain stable.

The minister said only the vegetables' prices have gone up while edible oil and sugar's price remains stable and within the people's buying capacity.

He also said the goods go through a number of middlemen before reaching the market from the farmer and so prices rise each time a middleman hands them over to another.

Meanwhile, the prices of Ramadan items like onion, brinjal, chickpea, Khesari Dal, cucumber, many fruits, small fishes and Muri have seen fresh rise.

However, the prices of green chilli, some vegetables decreased from earlier high while prices of edible oil, spices and

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## ইদ করুন নিশ্চিতে

ইদ এসেই কেনাকাটার আপনার বাড়তি খরচের সুবিধা বাড়বে। তবে এবার আসন্ন করুন গ্রান্ড স্টারের আদর্শ কেনাকাটার দায়িত্ব ছেড়ে দিন গ্রাইম ব্যাংক ক্রেডিট কার্ডের কাছে। কারণ গ্রাইম ব্যাংকের ক্রেডিট কার্ডে পাচ্ছেন...



এই অফার শুধুমাত্র গ্রান্ড স্টারের গ্রাইম ব্যাংক ক্রেডিট কার্ডের মালিকদের জন্যে।

\*শর্তাবলী প্রযোজ্য

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