

INDISCRIMINATE POACHING, RAPID DEPLETION OF FORESTS IN CHT

Many wildlife species on verge of extinction



SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, RANGAMATI

Many species of wildlife have now become critically endangered in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) due to indiscriminate poaching and rapid depletion of forests.

Rare species of wildlife like Yak (goyal), Tiger, Panther (chitabagh), large and small civet cat, Pangolin, Gibbon (Ulluk), Barking deer and Samber, Slow Loris (Lajjabati Banor) and peacock are already on the verge of extinction in the CHT forests. At the same time many common species are also fleeing the forests across the border as illegal poaching and fast depleting of forests reserves are causing their safe abode to shrink faster, observe zoologists.

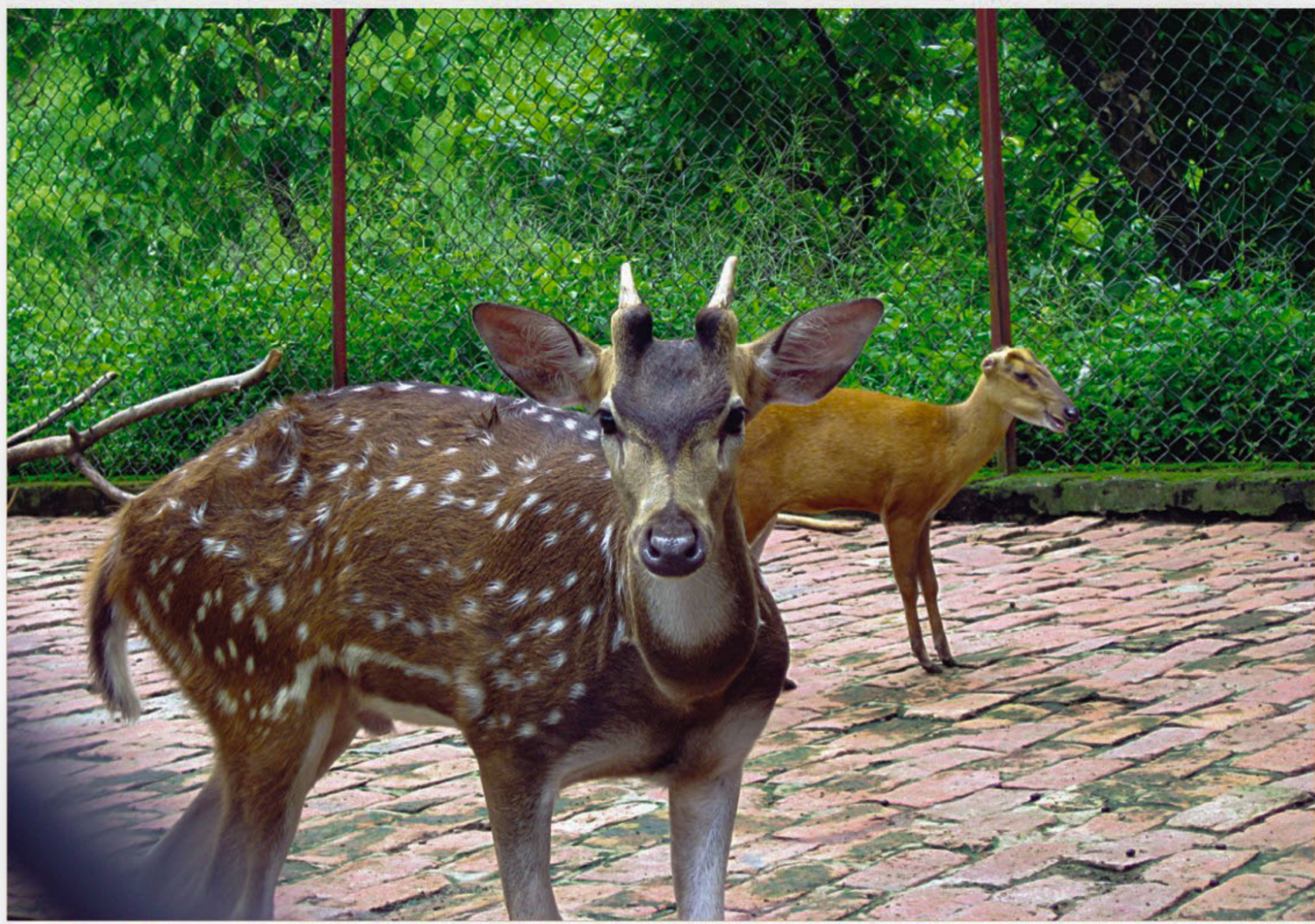
Sources at Department of Forest (DoF) said illegal logging, growing population, lack of wildlife conservation and awareness campaign and hunting by the indigenous people are the major reasons behind depletion of forests and disappearance of wildlife.

Prof M Monirul H Khan of Department of Zoology at Jahangirnagar University, said during his recent visit to Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaptai National Park in Rangamati he saw that people living near the reserve forests basically earn livelihoods from the illegal logging.

He said number of such people is very little and alternative livelihoods for them through building of environment-friendly ecotourism could have saved the forests and wildlife.

Animals like deer, wild pigs and wild birds are being killed by the poachers in different natural and reserve forests in the CHT due to lack of manpower required to ensure protection.

There are two wildlife sanctuaries -- Kaptai National Park (Rampahar-Sitapahar reserve forest) that was declared sanctuary on only 14,000 acres of forestland in 1991 and Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary was created in



Longudu upazila in 1983 on 92,000 acres of forestland.

The Daily Star correspondent recently visited the two wildlife sanctuaries and talked to forest department employees and local indigenous people.

"Wild animals are always on the run as poachers follow them wherever they hide",

said forest staffs on condition of anonymity.

"Though there are two sanctuaries in hills but you would never see any wild animal unless you are lucky", they continued.

They said deer, tigers, leopards, wild pigs, pythons, peacocks, spotted deer and wild cocks are not seen nowadays in Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary except only a herd of wild

elephants. These were once seen even near human habitations, they added.

"They have left the forests for survival and due to presence of poachers. These are sanctuaries in name only now", they added.

Even the Jhum cultivation through denudation of hills in and around the reserve forests areas also threatened biodiversity,

they said.

Sources said poachers mostly hunt deer, barking deer, samber, porcupine, wild pig as meat of these animals is very popular among the tribal people.

A section of unscrupulous meat traders and dishonest forest officials are blamed for encouraging the bad practice when such meats are sold publicly in the local markets and there is hardly any raid by forest officials.

A survey conducted in 1975 found 76 species of wild mammals, 183 species of wild birds, seven species of amphibious animals and 25 species of reptiles and snakes in the CHT forests.

But many of these, including wild elephants, wild pigs, deer, wild dogs, porcupines, wild cocks, snakes, some species of monkeys, baboons (honuman), jackals, hares, few species of frogs, mongoose, leopards, wild buffaloes are now rarely seen in the forests.

Deer, wild pig, porcupine, 'Murkura' (a beautiful wild bird like peacock), pangolin and python are the main targets to the poachers as they bring handsome amount of money to them, indigenous people in the hills said.

Md Moyeen Uddin Khan, divisional forest officer of North Division, said fast depleting forest reserves and high consumption of the species due to increasing population have led to the concern that the species are likely to become extinct.

Besides, most wild animals and birds are popular as food among the indigenous people, which is another cause of endangering wildlife, he added.

When contacted Md Shafiu Alam Chowdhury, conservator of forest (CF) of CHT Circle, said their duty is to conserve forests for the interest of wildlife. Now Integrated Protected Area Co-management (IPAC) is taking care of two sanctuaries. IPAC has already carried out a survey at Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary, he added.

theweekthatwas



Photo Anurup Kanti Das

Vehicles, particularly inter-district tucks, get stuck in a gridlock at the DT (Dhaka Trunk) Road as traders of scrap iron and materials from shipbreaking conduct their business on footpaths as well as a huge portion of some one-km stretch of the road at Madarbari. Heaps of scrap iron and pipes on the sidewalks also cause immense suffering to pedestrians.

Call to institutionalise Zakat for poverty cut

Speakers at a discussion titled "Exploring potential of Zakat" in the port city on Monday called for institutionalising Zakat system for poverty alleviation.

Centre for Zakat Management (CZM) and AK Khan Foundation jointly organised the meeting at a local hotel on the eve of Ramadan.

The speakers said as practiced in the Muslim world, Zakat could be an effective instrument for reducing poverty and income inequality.

They called upon the affluent section of the people to come forward side by side with government to raise Zakat fund and make its proper utilisation through planning and implementation for human development.

Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, a former adviser to a caretaker government, moderated the meeting where CZM Chairman Niaz Rahim and AK Khan Foundation Trustee Secretary Salahuddin Kasem Khan made address of welcome and gave vote of thanks.

Prof Dr Kabir Hasan of New Orleans University in the USA presented the keynote paper while Dr Rosli Yaaqob of Malaysian, Dr Methat Attia of Society for Social Reform Kuwait and CZM Chief Executive Officer Dr Mohammad Ayub Miah spoke at the meeting.

Computer fair held

A six-day computer and cellphone fair was held at Yunusco City Centre in the port city on Friday.

The fair titled "Yunusco Computer and Mobile Fair" was held on the 4th floor of the shopping mall at CDA Avenue.

Twenty-five computer and cellphone shops participated in the fair organised by computer and cellphone traders of Yunusco City

Centre under the auspices of Computer Source Limited.

Participating computer shops include Compunix, Janani Computers, Winchip Computer, Power Line Computer, Rangunia Computer, Nano Computer, Vision Computer, Multi-view Computer, Spark Computer, Ideal Computer, Computer Park, Sayeed Communications, Ocean Computer, KBR Computer, Origin Computer, Kantab IT and Laptop City.

Items and services of communication technology would be provided by e-zone, City Telecom, S-A Telecom, Sony-Erickson Service Centre, Samsung RDS, Samsung Sales and Services Centre.

Vet university observes 4th founding anniversary

The 4th founding anniversary of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) was observed on Saturday.

Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Nitish Chandra Devnath at a discussion held on the occasion said the university administration has taken long-term plans to upgrade the university into one of the five top universities in Asia.

He urged the teachers, staffs and students of the university to work sincerely in this regard.

CVASU Treasurer Prof Chowdhury Alauddin, Food Science and Technology faculty Dean Prof Dr Gourango Chandra Chanda, Acting Registrar Prof Goutam Buddha Das, Director of Veterinary Clinic Dr AKM Saifuddin and Chief Engineer Shah Md Zillur Rahman also addressed the meeting. The VC also held a view exchange with the teachers and staffs in the afternoon.



Star Photo

Local artistes perform at a cultural function organised by Chittagong Shilpakala Academy auditorium in the port city on Friday marking the 69th death anniversary of poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Call to work for the distressed children

Speakers at an orientation programme urged the private organisations to come forward for the development of the distressed children.

They were addressing a daylong orientation organised by a non-government organisation Jugantor Samaj Unnayan Sangstha.

Representatives of different NGOs working for the distressed children participated in the orientation.

Speakers emphasised proper guidance and safety measures to prevent the distressed children from being involved in anti-social activities.

They said due to lack of proper guidance a number of distressed children are easily becoming drug addicts.

Brac Regional Coordinator Nabab Sharif Hossain, Programme Coordinator of Antar Abdul Khalek and Jugantor Child Club President Sabrina Akhter spoke at the programme.