

Predators now saviours of sal forest

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Earlier accused in 107 cases for stealing trees from Madhupur forests, Hasan Ali of Gachhabari village in Madhupur upazila under Tangail district now serves as a community forest worker, thanks to the forest department's initiative to revive the traditional sal forest.

"Forest officials told me and others about the importance of forest and environment. Now I am very tired of the cases filed by forest department and want to live a tension-free life," he said while talking to this correspondent a couple of days ago.

"Now I want to contribute to protecting the forests which I had been damaging for long. No matter how much money it brings me, I will get mental peace," said the 45-year-old man, who had been stealing trees from the Madhupur forests for around 30 years.

Nobi Hossain, 48, of Kamalapur in Muktagachha upazila in Mymensingh district, started stealing forest resources including trees from Madhupur forests in his boyhood and has already made accused in 79 cases filed by the forest department.

"Local influential people engaged me for stealing trees from Madhupur forest but I could not realise that it was wrong. I have agreed to the proposal of forest department officials as they have taken responsibility of all my cases," he said.

Like Hasan Ali and Nobi Hossain are among the 400 listed 'tree thieves' of Madhupur forests, who joined the forest department's initiative to protect the traditional forests.

The department has provided them two months' training under its 'Re-vegetation of Madhupur Forests Through Rehabilitation of Local and Ethnic Communities' project during June 1 to July 31 this year.

For the purpose, Tk 15 crore government fund was



PHOTO: STAR

Once engaged in felling and removing trees from Madhupur forests, they are now serving as community forest workers to protect the traditional sal forest following a two-month-long motivation and training programme provided by forest department.

provided from its Climate Trust Fund.

Earlier spread over 45,000 acres of lands, the Madhupur forests has now shrunk into only 8,000 acres, forest department sources said.

Influential forest plunderers, both locals and outsiders, have also grabbed vast areas of forestlands and raised different fruit orchards including pineapple and banana and constructed makeshift structures there, forest department sources said.

Over 40,000 people living in 57 villages, set up inside Madhupur forests after 1950, are dependent on the forest resources for livelihood.

Besides, over 100 brickfields made around Madhupur forests in seven upazilas of Tangail and Mymensingh districts are

dependent on the firewood from the forest to burn bricks.

The local forest department with its 50 officials and employees failed to protect the forest properly, they said.

"We have made a list of 500 plunderers of Madhupur forests and provided 400 of them different trainings to reduce their dependence on the forests by improving their life," said Sarfuddin Ahmed, assistant conservator of forest (South-2) in Tangail.

The programme included trainings on apiculture, mushroom cultivation, nursery, afforestation, fire fighting, poultry, cow fattening, fish farming, vegetable gardening, grass growing, compost fertiliser production, cultivation of medicinal plants, production of jam and jelly etc.

After getting the trainings, the 400 people are now working as community forest workers. They are assisting the forest guards to protect the forests and actively participating in activities to save and develop forest.

A community forest worker got Tk 150 per day during the training period and after the training they are getting Tk 200 each per week, the forest official said.

They have been provided with identity cards and complete uniforms including boots, belts and caps.

The 5500 families living inside Madhupur forests will get government grants and aids for their rehabilitation. As per plan to turn the dwelling houses of the families as environment friendly farm-houses, each family will get 100 saplings of firewood

trees, 50 saplings of fruit trees and 50 saplings of forest trees. Besides, they will get grants for cattle raising and cultivation of vegetables and medicinal plants.

Each family will also get a modern furnace so that they do not have to use wood as fire.

"When I joined here six months ago, I found Madhupur forest in a very pitiable condition. We have provided trainings to 400 local forest thieves and they have vowed to protect the forests. We also re-created forests on 200 hectares of grabbed and treeless lands on participatory basis. Plantation of local varieties of trees have got priority in it," said Asit Ranjan Paul, divisional forest officer in Tangail.



PHOTO: STAR

Synthia (marked with circle) was leading a procession against stalking in the Baroikhali area under Sreenagar upazila of Munshiganj district a few days before committing suicide.

SUICIDE BY SCHOOLGIRL CYNTHIA

Bring the stalkers to book, demand locals

A CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Students and local people yesterday brought out a procession in protest against stalking that led to the suicide of schoolgirl Hasna Rahman Cynthia on Wednesday.

Students of Baroikhali High School, of which Cynthia '14' was a class ten student, boycotted classes and joined the procession.

People caught stalker Jahangir and handed him over to police but his two accomplices are still at large. The protesters demanded immediate arrest of his accomplices and exemplary punishment to them.

Cynthia's uncle Sheikh Rustam Ali filed a case with Sreenagar police Station yesterday. Jahangir's father Jamal Hossain and his brother Zakir Hossain have also been accused in the case. After namaz-e-jaanaza at



Hasna Rahman Cynthia

Aminul of Sreenagar Police Station, were present, he said, adding that instead of arresting Jahangir police showed clemency to him.

The headmaster said immediately after the meeting, Jahangir in an agitated mood went to Cynthia's house and threatened her. Tormented by feelings of insecurity, Cynthia committed suicide at their house, he added.

Local union parishad chairman Md Iqbal Hossain said when Cynthia was returning home from her school on Wednesday, Jahangir again threatened her.

He said when the matter came to light a meeting was held in the room of the headmaster of Baroikhali High School at around 3:00pm on Wednesday. As local influential people urged police to arrest Jahangir, his father Jamal Hossain sought clemency to correct his son to which police responded, the UP chairman added.

her School ground yesterday, the body of Cynthia was buried at the local graveyard.

Yusuf Ali, headmaster of Baroikhali High School under Sreenagar upazils, said Jahangir and his accomplices had been stalking Cynthia for more than one year and several meetings were held to resolve the issue, but to no effect.

On the day of incident, a meeting was held where a number of police personnel, including Sub-Inspector

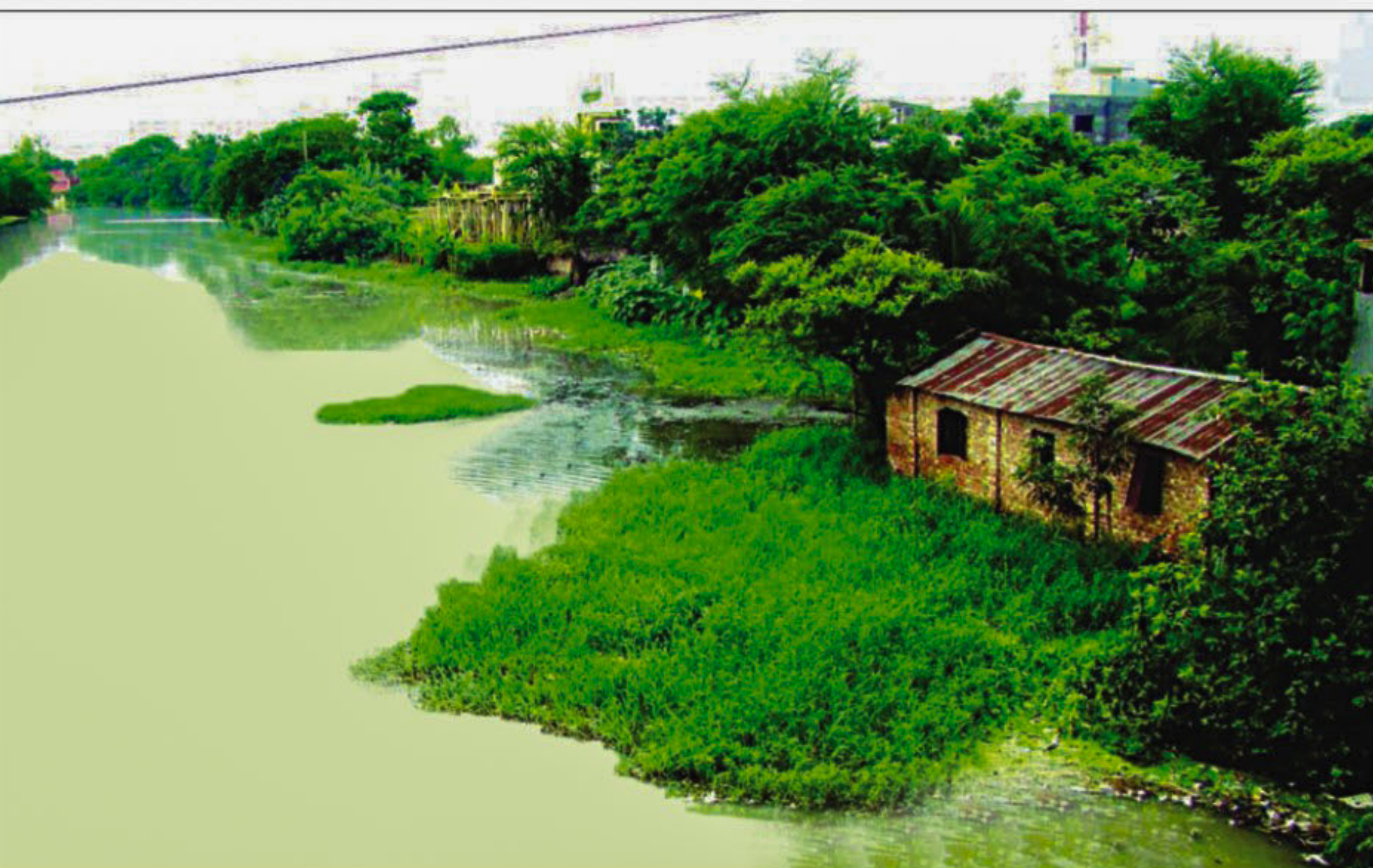


PHOTO: STAR

Encroachers continue erecting illegal structures on the Mayur River as Khulna City Corporation's drive to free the river and several canals from grabbers has remained suspended since February.

MAYUR RIVER, OTHER CANALS IN KHULNA

Grabbers active again as demolition drive stalled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A section of unscrupulous people have again started erecting unauthorised structures on the bank of Mayur River and different canals under the jurisdiction of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) as drive against illegal occupation has remained suspended since February this year.

Twenty-five of the 56 listed canals in KCC area were freed from illegal occupiers in two phases as KCC on July 1 last year started the drive for a permanent solution to menacing water logging by facilitating easy flow-out of rainwater from drains of Khulna city.

Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque formed a 15-member committee with ward councillor Shahid Iqbal Bithar as its convenor.

But only a few days after start of the drive, criminals gunned down Bithar on July 11 in front of his residence in the city and it led to suspension of the demolition drive for two months.

The drive resumed on September 2 last year with KCC Panel Mayor-1 Ajmol Ahmed Tapan as new convenor of the drive committee.

However, the second drive went on at a slow pace reportedly due to some legal complications that stood in the way of demolishing unauthorised structures from canals encroached by different

influential people, mostly belonging to the ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP.

A few businessmen and government officials are also allegedly among the illegal occupiers.

In February this year, drive against encroachers was suspended again.

By that time, unauthorised structures on 25 of the 51 canals listed by the committee were demolished.

Following suspension of the drive, illegal occupiers again started erecting buildings on both sides of Mayur River and several canals in the city.

Talking to this correspondent, convenor of the demolition drive committee

Ajmol Ahmed Tapan reiterated their firm determination to resume the drive to free remaining 26 canals from encroachers as early as possible.

"Fund crisis is the main cause for suspension of the demolition drive. Tk 8 to 10 thousand is required per day to continue the drive. We have asked for fund from the ministry concerned for that purpose," he said.

"Legal action will be taken against those who have erected unauthorised buildings again on the canals and the banks of Mayur River, which were freed earlier during first and second drives. We have collected names of the occupiers," said Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque.

Child missing as river in Koira devours homesteads

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A five-year-old child went missing and five others received injuries as the Shakbaria river devoured their homesteads in Koira upazila of Khulna district at midnight on Wednesday.

The missing child Aasia, 5, daughter of Yasin Gazi, Sadar Union, could not be traced as of 5:00pm yesterday. The injured rescued by the boatmen at the time of incident are now undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College and Hospital (KMCH).

The incident occurred at around 11:50pm when Yasin Gazi and his younger brother Hossain Gazi along with their family members were asleep. Boatmen also rescued both Yasin and Hossain.

Of the injured, condition of Jamila Khatun, wife of Hossain Gazi, and Asma Khatun, wife of Yasin Gazi, is still critical, attending doctors said.

According to Koira Sadar Union Parishad Chairman Md Shahabuddin Ahmed, erosion by the Shakbaria river has become more serious after cyclonic storm Aila.

At least 60 to 70 percent homesteads and all embankments in the area were completely damaged by Aila on May 2009, rendering a large number of families homeless.

The chairman said the lone model primary school at his union still remains inundated. Apart from the primary school, all other academic institutions including a high school, a technical college, a girls' high school, two degree colleges, two madrasas and two Kindergartens in Koira upazila go under water at the time of high tide everyday, he added.

Koira upazila Parishad Chairman Mohsin Reza said the Shakbaria river has devoured East Mathbari registered primary school as Pabna embankment collapsed after Aila is yet to be rebuilt.

Abducted speech impaired girl rescued, 2 arrested

Kidnapped from Ctg, she was held in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Wednesday midnight rescued a young speech impaired woman from the city's Chouhatta area and arrested two alleged abductors.

The arrestees are Riazul Islam Chowdhury Rumon of Turukkhola under Dakshin Surma upazila and Delwar Hossain of village Dargabaharpur in Zakiganj upazila.

Rumon picked up the 20-year old deaf and dumb girl on 28 June from Chittagong and took her to the house of one Moni Begum at Khashgaon in Srimongal upazila of Moulvibazar district.

Being informed, Rab called Moni to their Srimongal camp Tuesday last and told her to hand over the victim immediately. Although she committed

to do that by the next day, she handed the girl over to Rumon in Sylhet on that night.

The same night Rab rescued the girl and caught two abductors. They also raided several places in the city's Rainagar, Bandarabazar and Dargah gate areas for the other members of the gang.

They claimed that the gang had demanded ransom for release of the victim. Drive is on to arrest the other culprits, they added.

Rab officials said that the hapless girl was raped by a gang in 2006. The Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal of Chittagong sentenced the culprits to jail in December 2009.

The victim was then sent to the safe custody for women and children of the Chittagong jail, as none of her family was ready to take her

home.

After a few months, as the girl declined to continue there, Chittagong Mahila Parishad activist Nurjahan Khan gave her shelter at her house in Patharghata in February 2010. Therefrom the girl went missing on 28 June last, they said.

On August 10, one Ohidur Rahman Chowdhury from Sylhet contacted Nurjahan Khan's daughter Sumi Khan and demanded a handsome amount for release of the girl. Sumi Khan informed the matter to the Rab-9 headquarters in Sylhet the same night and sought their help.

ASP SM Nurul Huda of Rab-9, Sylhet told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon that the arrestees will be handed over to the Sylhet Kotwali police. The victim would be produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate of Sylhet today, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Foreign Minister DR Dipu Moni visits Benapole land port to discuss with officials various issues related to India-Bangladesh trade yesterday.