



PHOTO: PMO
Newly appointed Inspector General of Police (IGP) Hassan Mahmood Khandker and outgoing IGP Nur Mohammad call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhavan in the city yesterday.

WETLANDS DECLINE IN CITY Experts fear 'disaster'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka city will face a disaster in near future unless the last remaining wetlands in and around it are conserved accordingly, said leading planners and environmentalists yesterday at a discussion.

Poribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba), an environmentalist group, organised the discussion on "Liveable City: Necessity for Wetland and Open Spaces" at the National Press Club in the city.

The wetlands of the city declined from 29 percent (of Dhaka metropolitan area) in 1989 to 17 percent by 2005 due to unplanned housing and development works, said Prof Sarwar Jahan, president of Bangladesh Planners Institute.

"We are heading towards a disaster," said Jahan, adding, "There will be left no wetland by the year 2035 if the depletion continues at the present pace."

Ironically, the wetlands disappeared in a rather faster rate of 2000 hectares per year since the year (2000) the wetland conservation act was enacted, he said.

Prof Shahnaz Huq-Hussain, dean of the faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Dhaka University, said that Dhaka used to be a pleasant and wholesome town in the yester years abundant with greenery, parks and open spaces.

It has turned into a lifeless city over the

years thanks to unplanned urban development despite the plans were ready at hand, she said.

Syed Mahbubul Alam, assistant secretary of Poba, said in a presentation that Dhaka dwellers already reels under the water shortfall by 50 crore litres against a daily total demand for 220 crore litres.

Of the total water supplied in the capital, 87 percent is extracted from the underground.

To reduce the excessive dependence on the ground water in near future, he said, more and more clean rivers and water bodies will be needed as sources of surface water.

Various government agencies, some as custodians, have consistently destroyed most of 47 canals that were once flowing across the capital, said Alam.

The speakers said that bureaucrats on deputation predominantly run the affairs of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), a regulatory body to control development of the city, though it requires top urban planners in decision-making.

They called for involving urban planners, geographers and environmentalists to run the functions of Rajuk.

Abu Naser Khan, chairman of Poba, who moderated the discussion, said that the government must immediately determine the ownership of wetlands to protect them against the land grabbers.

Koko's parole hearing Oct 3

UNB, Dhaka

The Appellate Division has set October 3 to hear a government petition seeking a stay on the High Court order that halted the government to cancel the parole for Arafat Rahman Koko.

The chamber court of Justice ABM Khairul Haque passed the order yesterday, turning a deaf ear to the government plea.

Attorney General Mahbubul Alam moved the stay petition as the government prefers to have leave to appeal against the High Court interim order.

On August 26, the High Court upon a writ petition stayed for 40 days the government order cancelling parole for Koko, now in Bangkok for treatment.

The High Court had also issued a rule upon the government to explain why its action cancelling the accused-petitioner's parole should not be declared illegal.

Besides, the HC has asked Koko to report to the Bangladesh Embassy in Thailand every three days, in default of which his parole will be automatically cancelled.

Unborn baby senses a cruel world

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The baby was growing happily in its mother's womb until before cruelty of the unseen world struck. And it was none but the father who changed the happy going forever.

He set his wife on fire. Sharmin Akhter Molina, yet another victim of the dowry system of our society, is now into four months of her pregnancy.

Twenty-five percent of her body has been burned, Dhaka Medical College Hospital's (DMCH) burn unit sources said.

Her neck, chest, abdomen, shoulders and back were burnt, doctors said. Fortunately, the baby is in normal condition, they confirmed after several tests.

Shujan Mollah, her husband, has gone into hiding since August 4, the day he set Sharmin on fire at their residence in Sadarpur of Faridpur district, police said.

Sharmin, 22, had a dream to make a nice family with her beloved. She married him to fulfil that dream but the fire has shattered her dream along with burning some of her body parts.

Talking to The Daily Star on her bed of the DMCH burn unit, Sharmin said she fled her home to marry Shujan in 2008 as her family refused to accept Shujan as her husband.

Situation changed quickly after their marriage. Shujan, who was an employee of an embroidery shop own by Sharmin's family, started pressing Sharmin for dowry within five months into the wed-

ding. The plain demand turned into physical torture soon and at one stage, her family had to give Shujan Tk 60,000 to save her from torture.

"My parents gave us all the furniture we needed for our house. He [Shujan] had been demanding another taka one lakh for the last three months," she said.

On the day of the incident, Sharmin went to have a shower and asked Shujan to give her saree while she was inside the bathroom. She smelled kerosene from the saree Shujan gave her but ignored it.

"As I grabbed it and started to wear it, he suddenly set the other end of the saree on fire."

Sharmin herself doused the fire with the water in the bathroom but her neck, chest, abdomen, shoulders and back were already burned.

She was rushed to Faridpur Sadar Hospital and later sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit on August 18. It will take at least another month before she could be released from the hospital.

Sharmin's father Shahjahan Hawlader filed a case with the Sadarpur Police Station under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act accusing four people including Shujan.

Officer-in-charge, Mohammad Ali Biswas, of the police station told The Daily Star that they are investigating the case and trying to arrest Shujan, the prime accused.

Sharmin is now worried about the future of her baby, the fruit of her love.

PABAN'S CASE

Police asked to submit reports by Oct 6

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again directed police to submit reports on execution of the arrest warrants to it by October 6 against Khandaker Abdul Hamid Paban and Omar Faruk in connection with a cracker explosion case.

The court issued arrest of warrants against Paban, son of BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, and Faruk, former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) president of Chatkhil thana, on charge of exploding home-made bombs in front of the BNP chairperson's office.

Judge (in charge) Mohammad Ismail Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order as Bangshal and Chatkhil police failed to submit reports by yesterday on execution of arrest warrants against the two accused.

The same court on July 5 took the charges into cognizance against Paban and five others and issued the arrest warrants against Paban and Faruk as they have been absconding since the case was filed.

The case was filed with Gulshan Police Station against Paban and five others on charge of exploding crackers in front of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office on February 23 this year.

Four other accused -- Golam Sabbir alias Shovon, Syed Hasan Rony and Pradip Saha, secretary of Sonaimuri upazila of JCD and Dakat Babu -- were arrested on different dates.

During the investigation, Shovon, Rony and Pradip Saha had given confessional statements saying that they had exploded home-made bombs in front of the BNP chairperson's office as per Paban's direction.

In their confessional statements given before the magistrate under section 164 of the penal code, they said Paban had hired two other young men to carry out a mock bomb attack on himself to gain sympathy of the BNP high-ups. The whole charade was aimed at consolidating his (Paban's) position in the party, they told the court.

Ban tobacco farming in hilly region

Demand NGOs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different non-government organisations demanded that the government ban tobacco farming in the hilly regions to increase crop production and also save the environment, a press release said yesterday.

Speakers at a sit-in, organised by Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance, also urged necessary steps to execute the high court's directives issued for stop of tobacco farming and removal of chimneys from the hilly areas.

A number of NGOs staged the sit-in in front of Jatiya Press Club, demanding end of tobacco farming in the hilly regions so that more food grains can be produced in freed

farmland, and the environment can be protected.

The speakers said tobacco product manufacturers use firewood to dry tobacco leaves, destroying forests and jeopardising wildlife.

The huge amount of pesticides, used in tobacco farms, gets mixed with the river water, posing threats to fish and other aquatic life forms, they added.

Helal Ahmed, secretary of Protayasa; AM Mohidul Islam, vice-president of National Non-Smoker Forum; Abul Hasan, founder of Bangladesh Sangjukta Sramik Federation took part in the sit-in among others.

The programme was presided over by Ibnul Syed Rana, chairman of Nirapod Development Foundation.

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