

1,000 tigers 'killed in a decade'

BBC ONLINE

The illegal trade in tiger parts has led to more than 1,000 wild tigers being killed over the past decade, a report suggests.

Traffic International, a wildlife trade monitoring network, found that skins, bones and claws were among the most common items seized by officials.

The trade continues unabated despite efforts to protect the cats, it warns.

Over the past century, tiger numbers have fallen from about 100,000 individuals to just an estimated 3,500.

The study, which used data from 11 of the 13 countries that are home to populations of Panthera tigris, estimated that between 1,069 and 1,220 tigers were killed to supply the illicit demand for tiger parts.

'POACHING PRESSURES'
Since October 1987, tigers have been listed as an Appendix I species (threatened with extinction) under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites), which means all commercial trade in the animals or their parts is banned.

The figure was based on analysis of 481 seizures. More than 275 of the seizures were in India, which - the report's authors said - represented between 469 and 533 tigers.

China, with 40, had the second highest number of seizures, accounting for up to 124 animals, while Nepal reported 39 seizures, or 113-130 tigers, they added.

"Given half the world's tigers live in India, it's no real surprise the country has the highest number of seizures," explained co-author Pauline Verheij, joint TRAFFIC and WWF tiger trade programme manager.

"While a high number of seizures could indicate high levels of trade or effective enforcement work, or a combination of both, it does highlight the nation's tigers are facing severe poaching pressure," she added.

"With parts of potentially more than 100 wild tigers actually seized each year, one can only speculate what the true numbers of animals are being plundered."

DRUGS, WEAPONS, WILDLIFE
The authors said the data

showed that the trade continued "unabated despite considerable and repeated efforts to curtail it on the part of tiger range and consumer countries, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs".

Commenting on the findings, leader of WWF's Tigers Alive initiative Mike Baltzer said: "Clearly enforcement efforts to date are either ineffective or an insufficient deterrent. "Not only must the risk of getting caught increase significantly, but seizures and arrests must also be followed up by swift prosecution and adequate sentencing, reflecting the seriousness of crimes against tigers," he added.

In March 2010, during the most recent high level meeting of Cites, nations agreed to increase intelligence sharing against criminal networks that smuggled big cat parts.

Speaking in 2009, World Bank chief Robert Zoellick said the global black market in wildlife products was worth about \$10bn (£6bn) per year, making wildlife the third most valuable illicit commodity after drugs and weapons.

Conservationists also point to China's "tiger farms" as a threat to the wild animals because, they say, it perpetuates a market into which wild tiger parts can be sold, often commanding a higher value as products made from wild animals are perceived to be more "potent".

Although China does not officially permit the sale of goods from these farms, in practice several investigations have revealed tiger parts are being sold.

The report called for an improved understanding of the tiger trade and much tighter law enforcement.

"But good enforcement alone will not solve the problem," warned Steven Broad, executive director of Traffic.

"To save tigers in the wild, concerted action is needed to reduce the demand for tiger parts altogether in key countries in Asia."

Enforcement efforts to date, the authors concluded, "point to a lack of political will among those responsible at national and international levels".

They hoped the report would provide an "important baseline to inform the understanding of this persistent yet illegal trade".

BSF kills 2 Bangladeshis

STAR REPORT

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) killed two Bangladeshi cattle traders in Jessore and Satkhira early yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Shariful Islam, 23, of Satkhira sadar upazila and Moju Biswas, 28, of Benapole upazila in Jessore.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and locals said Shariful received bullet injuries when BSF opened fire targeting a group of Bangladeshi cattle traders while they were crossing border near Gazipur border of Satkhira sadar around 4:30am.

Shariful was rushed to Satkhira General Hospital in a critical condition. Later he was shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries at noon.

Major Jahangir Alam, operation officer of 41 Rifle Battalion, said a protest letter has been sent to BSF in this connection.

In a separate incident, Moju Biswas was caught and beaten to death by BSF while he was crossing Putkhalia border in Benapole, said Locals and BDR sources.

Monju was taken to a local hospital in the morning, after BSF left him in Bangladeshi territory in a critical condition, where he died later, they added.

Kalyanpur canal

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The lawmaker, however, denied the allegation of obstructing the drive on that day.

The joint team, led by executive magistrates Nasir Uddin and Alid Mainul of Wasa and district administration respectively, began the drive at about 10:00 am, which continued till the afternoon.

The team comprising around 70 day-labourers knocked down at least 13 makeshift structures built illegally on the south alignment of the canal.

The canal stretches from Mirpur main road (Gabtoli) to Kalyanpur sluice gate.

The drive was being conducted at the south side of the Kalyanpur Ka Khal, Aslamul said adding that it will start at the northern part of the canal after the completion of a survey by the district administration.

He said the northern part is a proposed site for a canal, which was recommended in 1992 after an occurrence of waterlogging in the area and the district administration will now find out how much land will have to be acquired to dig the canal.

After the assessment, the authorities concerned will start the drive, said Aslamul, also a member of the taskforce of the government formed to save rivers and canals of Dhaka city.

At the middle of yesterday's drive, Aslamul became angry with Wasa officials, as they did not bring any electrician with them. The drive was stalled for about half an hour due to the delayed arrival of Wasa surveyor at noon.

Alid Mainul, executive magistrate of Dhaka district administration, said they knocked down 13 illegal structures.

Nasir Uddin, executive magistrate of Wasa, said the involvement of the lawmaker during the drive made their work easier.

After completing the drive, Wasa will start excavation work as soon as possible, he added.

Md Abu Salam, owner of Shah Ali Poultry, got some time from the lawmaker on request to shift his belongings from an illegal portion of land.

The canal was filled up by Pisciculture Housing around 10 years back, he said adding the housing authority also informed the plot owners and local people that a road will be built by the government through the land.

Manika Sarkar purchased 3 kathas of land at the canal site for Tk 7.5 lakh in 1998 from Pisciculture Housing. She had no idea that there was a canal there, as the housing authorities did not disclose it.

Foul play

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said. But in reality, a re-tender process can take around a year to be completed.

The finance minister requested his colleagues to give consent to his proposal. Sources said it is unlikely that his colleagues will disagree, since Muhith is a senior minister holding one of the most important portfolios.

SAHCO'S INVOLVEMENT IN POWER TENDER
Abul Hossain said he resigned from Sahco, and ever since he became a minister he is no longer a party to its business activities.

But his family owned Sahco holds various stakes in the power sector and is involved in many power project tender.

According to the Sahco website, the company was founded in 1975, and has been involved in power generation, transmission, and distribution projects.

Sahco is representing Chinese company Shandong in the tender. Shandong lodged formal complaints against PDB's selection of Sinohydro.

Sahco is also the local agent of Chinese companies Shanghai Electric, and CMEC which bagged contracts for power projects in Sylhet and Sirajganj.

Sahco is representing Shandong in a 150 MW power project in Khulna as well.

The tender process for this project has also become uncertain over selection of the lowest bidder. Northwest Power Generation Company (NWPGC) selected Shandong as the lowest bidder. But as per the guidelines of the project's financier Asian Development Bank (ADB), a Spanish company turns out to be the lowest bidder.

The power ministry is standing behind NWPGC, and the matter has not been resolved yet.

D R A M A O V E R GHORASHAL PROJECT
PDB invited tender for the Ghorashal plant last year along with nine other government-funded power projects. That tender was cancelled as it drew just one bid. PDB went for re-tendering in late July this year.

During evaluation, information about the selection of Sinohydro was leaked. PDB received an anonymous complaint that the selection of Sinohydro was wrong, as it had submitted fabricated documents. PDB was not convinced, as Sinohydro had already implemented one power project under the board before, without facing any allegation.

According to PDB officials, Sinohydro submitted two certificates to prove its experience. The first certificate was issued in March 2002 for successful implementation of a hydropower project in Ghazi Barotha in Pakistan, stating that the plant was running satisfactorily. But it was alleged that the construction of the plant was actually completed in April 2004.

Through the other certificate, Sinohydro claimed to have constructed a power plant in Paunglaung in Myanmar. But its competitors are accusing that it had supplied only the construction materials, while another Chinese company actually constructed the plant.

PDB verified both allegations, and did not find any anomaly in Sinohydro's certificates.

When PDB's bid evaluation committee recommended awarding the Ghorashal job to Sinohydro, an external member coming from Bangladesh Railway objected to the selection on grounds that Sinohydro's bid documents had been fabricated.

Bangladesh Railway is under the communications ministry that Syed Abul Hossain leads.

Since the majority of evaluation committee members agreed on picking Sinohydro, PDB forwarded its recommendation to the power ministry in late August.

In early September, the

Sand traders

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Meanwhile, the government declared four rivers around the capital, including the Turag, Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) in November last year.

During yesterday's drive in Ashulia and Nababbergh areas, led by DoE director Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, two excavators and other equipment of the three sand traders were seized and their managers picked up.

third lowest bidder in the tender, Shandong, formally lodged a complaint with the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) alleging that PDB was unduly awarding the contract to Sinohydro.

Shandong, of which Sahco is the local agent, even paid Tk 5 lakh registration fee to CPTU to review the tender.

At this point, PDB through the power ministry placed the proposal to the Cabinet Purchase Committee to award the contract to Sinohydro. The committee sent the project back, as the communications minister duly pointed out that the tender was being reviewed by CPTU.

But in early October, Shandong dramatically denied filing any complaint with CPTU, and declined to send any representative to the unit for further review. It said it had no allegation against Sinohydro. The CPTU review panel then concluded that PDB's selection was alright.

Soon afterwards in mid-October, PDB sent back its recommendation to the Cabinet Purchase Committee. But the communications minister opposed it again. The purchase committee then asked PDB to clarify various points raised by the minister.

PDB returned with its set of clarifications along with a PowerPoint presentation on October 24. But it did not work. And now the purchase committee is finally about to kill the tender.

SYED ABUL HOSSAIN'S TAKE ON THE ISSUE
"I was not asking for cancellation of the project. I was asking questions because the recommendation for Sinohydro had a note of dissent," said Syed Abul Hossain.

He added, he was not responsible for putting a Bangladesh Railway official (who gave the note of dissent) in the PDB tendering committee because the board itself had selected the members of that committee.

The communications minister said there is an allegation against Sinohydro that it gave a certificate claiming that it had completed a power project in 2002, whereas the project had actually been completed in 2004. There are around 11 such anomalies in Sinohydro's bid, he added.

"As a cabinet member, if I come to know there are so many anomalies, shouldn't I oppose them? If such a bid is approved, there could be allegations against the whole cabinet in the future. Why should we take the blame?" he told The Daily Star.

"I actually asked the tendering authorities to look into these anomalies. PDB can investigate the matter itself; it can involve our embassies in Pakistan and Myanmar. It can send a team to the Pakistani project site to see if that certification stands true. It can ask for a copy of the agreement. Why wouldn't they do that?" he argued.

Referring to the Chinese embassy's validation of the Sinohydro's certificates, the minister said, "That is a validation for the notarized copy of the actual certificate. The Chinese embassy did not validate Sinohydro's certificate."

Syed Abul Hossain reiterated his position regarding Sahco. "I am no longer in that company. Can't this company do business just because I was in it before? I requested Sahco not to participate in any bidding for jobs with the communications ministry."

Owners find

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the foothold of Biruttam CR Dutta Road. They were living in a two-storey tin-shed mess by the building, which, authorities say has been built violating the Building Code.

"I've been sleeping on the sidewalk for the last two nights, as I don't have any other place to go. All the eight people who used to share the room at the mess are facing the same problem," said Nazrul Mia, a pushcart operator from Jamalpur.

Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakkha (Rajuk) filed a case against the developer company but none was arrested as of yesterday, said Nasirul Alam, office-in-charge of Kolabagan Police Station.

Meanwhile, the developer company is trying to persuade Rajuk authorities to allow it demolish the building on its own, Rajuk sources said.

A number of flat owners yesterday met with the Rajuk chairman with a proposal in this regard, sources said. The Rajuk chief, however, turned down the request.

Rajuk

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building as per suggestions of the experts. The expenses would be borne by the developer of the building--Asia Haider Tower.

Meanwhile, representatives of the developer and flat owners yesterday met the Rajuk chairman and requested him to let them knock down the building, said sources.

"We have told them it would not be wise to let them demolish the structure," said Aminur Rahman, the Rajuk officer responsible for the area.

"We will do the job and the developer will have to pay for the expenses," he added.

Experts from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology have suggested that Rajuk build an emergency escape stair and erect pillars around the building so that it does not suddenly give way.

At first, Rajuk wanted to break open a window and send workers inside to tear down the building by hammers.

"But as it would have been risky for the workers, we have suggested they [Rajuk] arrange scrap holders and fall-proof pillars," said Professor AMM Shafiqullah of Buet, who is leader of the expert team.

Shafiqullah also suggested cranes to remove the debris from the site.

Rajuk officials said they would require at least 800 pieces of scrap holders, each 80 feet long.

"If we get the scrap holders from REHAB this evening or tomorrow morning, we will start building the stair and pillars," Rajuk official Aminur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

REHAB President Nasrul Hamid Bipu said they were arranging the scrap holders to help Rajuk.

Compensation

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Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Ecneec meeting sources said the affected people in the coalmine area will receive Tk 20 lakh per hectare of farmland and Tk 25 lakh per hectare of homelands. Even the landless people will receive Tk 2 lakh each.

Planning Minister AK Khandaker alleged that the previous BNP-led government didn't take any measures to rehabilitate the affected people in Barapukuria.

The present government would now compensate the affected people first and then start extracting coal, he added.

Answering a query, he said the government is yet to take any decision on whether open pit mining method will be followed or not.

The Ecneec also approved 10 development projects involving Tk 2,438 crore including a project to construct two bridges on the Meghna and Titras rivers aiming to facilitate two-way railway line on the Dhaka-Chittagong route in future.

"Of the total project cost of Tk 2,438 crore, Tk 1,207 crore will come from the government exchequer, while Tk 1,231 crore as project assistance," said the planning minister while briefing reporters after the meeting.

The 2nd Bhairab and the 2nd Titras bridge construction project with railway approach will be built under the Roads and Railways Division at a cost of Tk 959 crore, Khandker said.

"If these two bridges are not constructed, it would not be possible to set up two-way railway line on the Dhaka-Chittagong route in future," he said, adding that these will also reduce the hassle for the commuters as well as save time.

The other projects approved in the meeting were integrated sustainable water management planning project (special revised) (Tk 114 crore), Langan, Bemalia and Balbhadra river re-dredging project (Tk 42 crore), Bibiyana-Comilla 230 KV transmission line construction project (Tk 378 crore), women and child diabetic, endocrine and metabolic hospital (2nd revised project) (Tk 55 crore), child labour eradication from risky jobs in Bangladesh 3rd phase project (Tk 63 crore), 3rd Shitalakhyia bridge construction project at Narayanganj Bandar upazila (Tk 378 crore), rest of the work on Chimbuk-Thanchi and Dighinala Marishya road (Tk 94 crore) and Chittagong Hill Tracts power distribution development project (Tk 164 crore).

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain, Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan and advisers to the PM were present at the meeting.

With the election over, the spotlight will return to Suu Kyi, who has spent 15 of the past 21 years in detention but is due to be freed when her latest house arrest term expires on Saturday.

The United States, Britain,

35 jawans

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The court, led by Rangamati Sector Commander Col Bashirul Islam, began delivering the verdicts at about 10.30am on completion of the trial proceedings.

This was the eighth verdict in connection with last year's BDR Mutiny.

So far, 250 mutineers have been sentenced to different terms of imprisonment while 10 were acquitted. The first verdict was handed down on April 7.

Meanwhile, 30 BDR jawans among the 622 accused of 13 Rifles Battalion and signal sector at Pilkhana cross-examined the complainant and first prosecution witness of a mutiny case Subedar Fariduddin yesterday as the BDR Special Court-8 continued its trial proceedings of the mutiny case.

In Chittagong, the trial proceedings of the special court set up at Baitul Izzat Rifles Training Centre and School at Satkania began around 10.00am.

Two other members of the three-member judges' panel were Lt Col Md Abdur Rauf and Major MA Rakib while Deputy Attorney General Goutam Kumar Roy assisted the judges.

Commanding Officer (CO) of the 10 Rifle Battalion's Bolipara Camp Lt Col Rabiul Alam was the prosecutor of the case while Advocate Md Habibur Rahman and Advocate Bilayet Hossain assisted the prosecutor.

Barrister Asad Abdullah and Advocate Ridwanul Hoque appeared in the court as defendants' lawyers while Major Zulfikar Ali aided the mutineers in the court as 'friend of the accused'.

Army-backed

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army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in advance balloting ahead of Sunday's vote.

A day after US President Barack Obama dismissed it as stolen, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs lauded the election as "peaceful and successful," illustrating strengthening ties between energy-hungry China and its resource-rich neighbour.

As the votes were counted, government soldiers cleared ethnic minority rebels from an eastern border town after two days of sporadic clashes that killed at least 10 people and sent about 17,000 civilians fleeing into neighbouring Thailand.

By afternoon, many refugees had returned to Myanmar as the military pushed back the ethnic minority Karen rebels who have passed their war against the government down the generations since what was then Burma won independence in 1948 from Britain.

The fighters say the election and the military's continued dominance threaten any chance of achieving a degree of autonomy.

Stacked with recently retired generals and closely aligned with 77-year-old paramount leader Senior General Than Shwe, the USDP took as many as 80 percent of the available seats for parliament, a senior USDP official told Reuters.

But Khin Maung Swe, leader of the National Democratic Force, the largest opposition party, told Reuters: "We took the lead at the beginning but the USDP later came up with so-called advance votes and that changed the results completely, so we lost."

The second-largest pro-democracy party, the Democratic Party (Myanmar), also conceded defeat.

"I admit defeat but it was not fair play. It was full of malpractice and fraud and we will try to expose them and tell the people," said Democratic Party leader Thu Wai.

At least six parties have lodged complaints with the election commission, accusing the USDP of fraud -- a charge that is unlikely to gain traction in a country where more than 2,100 political activists are behind bars.

FOCUS ON SUU KYI
The vote was held with Nobel laureate and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in detention and her party disbanded for refusing to take part in an election it said was unfair. She had urged supporters to boycott the poll.

With the election over, the spotlight will return to Suu Kyi, who has spent 15 of the past 21 years in detention but is due to be freed when her latest house arrest term expires on Saturday.

Plaintiff of the case Subedar Sultan Ahmed, who placed charges against the 35 jawans on April 22 this year, gave his depositions before the court.

Sultan alleged the accused had looted arms from the armoury of Bolipara camp after assaulting the then commanding officer Lt Colonel Lutful Kabir. The jawans also created panic by firing blank shots and putting up barricades on Bandarban-Thanchi road, he said.

The trial started on October 10 and continued till October 13 until the court fixed November 9 for awarding the verdict.

The court announced the verdict yesterday after hearing 18 witnesses.

Twelve of the accused pleaded guilty while the remaining 23 claimed themselves as innocent, said the sources.

The mutiny spread in different barracks of the BDR across the country including 10 Rifles Battalion following the bloody mutiny in BDR headquarters in Pilkhana in the capital that left 74 people including 57 army officers killed.

Meanwhile, in Dhaka, the Special Court-8 set up at the Darbar Hall of Pilkhana started its proceedings by cross-examining the complainant Subedar Fariduddin.

Earlier on Monday, the complainant placed direct evidence against 63 jawans out of which 14 of the accused cross-examined the complainant.

The three-member court headed by BDR Deputy Director General Brig Gen Obaidul Haque will resume its proceedings at 10:00am today.

The European Union and Japan repeated calls this week to free the 65-year-old pro-democracy leader whose National League for Democracy beat an army-backed party by a landslide in 1990, a result ignored by the junta.

Myanmar's neighbours and partners in Asean have been hoping the election would end Myanmar's isolation and remove hurdles it poses to greater cooperation with the West.

China has built up close political and business links with Myanmar while the West has for years shunned its leaders and imposed sanctions over the suppression of democracy and a poor human rights record.

Russia also welcomed the vote.

"We see the elections as a step in the democratisation of Myanmar society in accordance with the political reforms taken by the country's leadership," Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

Cantt house

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petition challenging the government notice.

Meanwhile, around 500 leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations gathered on the SC premises yesterday as the leave to appeal petition of the leader of the opposition in parliament came up for hearing in the chamber judge's court.

Additional police contingents were deployed on the court premises to avoid any untoward incident.

Police detained nine people from there on charge of suspicious movement.

During the brief hearing in the chamber judge's court, Khaleda's chief counsel TH Khan prayed for staying the HC verdict till January next.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam opposed it and prayed for sending the petition to the full bench of the apex court for hearing.

The BNP chief filed the petition on Monday.

BNP leaders present on the SC premises yesterday included Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Amam Ullah Aman, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin, Shahiduddin Chowdhury, Anee and Shirin Sultana. Besides, Jatiyabadi Juo Dal President Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal, Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal President Sultan Salahuddin Tuku and its former president Azizul Bari Helal, among others, were present.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge of Shahbagh Police Station Rezaul Karim said those detained from the SC premises will be released if primary interrogation shows they are innocent.

RMG workers

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around noon, said Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station.

As the workers did not return, the owners closed the factory for the day, Sirajul told The Daily Star.

No property was vandalised and none was arrested during the work stoppage, said Islam.

CIPL is the Bangladesh venture of Hong Kong-based Epic Group, which has offices in China, Vietnam, the US and the UK. It manufactures clothing for international brands and retailers including Jones Apparel and Gap.

Workers of two other companies--Universal and Sew Industrial Park--too stayed off work yesterday, demanding advance wages and more holidays for the Eid-ul-Azha.

Said Sub-inspector M Sadequzaman of Ashulia Police Station.

Additional security personnel were called in to maintain order. However, nothing untoward was reported, he added.

None of the company officials was available