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## ENDANGERED FOSSA

Predatory cat-like animal of Madagascar facing extinction

PAGE 7

## DOUBLE WAR

Short story by Selina Hossain, also her life as a writer

READ STAR INSIGHT

## SEHWAG VOWS REVENGE

Indian batsman wants to win against Tigers

PAGE 17



## Let's rally for river

About 20 months back, we exposed some of the many outrageous encroachments on four Dhaka rivers -- Turag, Buriganga, Balu and Shitalakhya-- with a plea to the government to go and check encroachers' claims of ownerships.

Since then, courts and people from all walks of life have rallied forward to save the lifeline of the capital from river-gobblers. The courts issued guidelines and directives one after another, and the government weighed in with some steps. But little those could help stymie the grabbers, who remain, seemingly, as invincible and greedy as they were before.

We will take our readers again to the encroachments we reported on and show how grabbers stayed beyond the hands of law.

But should we continue to let them get away with the crime? Lend your hands and together we can win a war.

The Daily Star



The pavement demarcating the Gabtoli bank of the river Turag shows how the river is grabbed by sand traders. They have made sand piles well inside the river's boundary. They continue to narrow down the river by around 100 feet from the shore even though the BIWTA conducted several drives over the years to evict the river encroachers and demolish illegal structures.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

PINAKI ROY

Encroachment and pollution of the Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Turag and Balu rivers in and around the capital continue despite the government's pledges to put an end to those.

In response to a campaign by the media, the government in June 2009 pledged to restore water flow in the rivers, stop pollution and encroachment, and recover the grabbed land.

In May-June that year The Daily Star ran two series of reports on encroachment and pollution of the four rivers--the lifeline for the densely populated capital--and a campaign styled "Save River, Save Dhaka".

The pledges apart, the government is legally bound to restore the

COURT DIRECTIVES, GOVT WARNINGS, PUBLIC OUTCRY

## Result close to ZERO

river systems, as the High Court on June 25 the same year issued a set of directives for it to stop pollution and encroachment.

The directives, which were to be implemented by different deadlines, included demarcating the river shorelines, removing the illegal structures and stopping pollution and encroachment.

The government responded posi-

tively with the prime minister making a raft of pledges to save the rivers. Even a project of around Tk 1,000 crore was initiated.

But little has changed since then. Instead of taking proper and adequate measures to protect the rivers, the ministries concerned seem more interested in projects involving mega budgets.

The government is now going for a

Tk 944 crore project to connect the Dhaka river systems with the Jamuna through the Pungli. Planned to be completed within 2013, the project will start this month.

In the first phase of the project, the Water Development Board will dredge 23 kilometres of the rivers at a cost of Tk 75 crore.

In light of the HC directives, a government taskforce on rivers sug-

gested a number of steps, but few of those have been implemented.

Though Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Munshiganj district administration completed surveys and demarcation of the four rivers by November 30, the government has yet to complete its drive against the grabbers.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) had

conducted several drives on the banks of the Buriganga, Turag and Shitalakhya, but could not recover the grabbed portions of the rivers.

Many of the encroachers have land documents that belong to the British era, though "their land" clearly falls into the rivers.

"Whenever we find reports of river-grabbing and earth-filling, we file cases. But the encroachers take legal protection from the courts showing their British-era land documents," said BIWTA Secretary Monowar Hossain.

In a follow-up visit 20 months after publishing the river series, this correspondent found pollution not decreasing though the Department

SEE PAGE 19 COL 1



## PM's remarks on 'crossfire', wealth report contradict AL manifesto

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Thursday's statements on making public wealth statements of ministers, lawmakers and herself, and stopping extrajudicial killings contradict her party's election manifesto.

Awami League in its manifesto placed before the nation ahead of the December 29, 2008 parliamentary elections, said, "Wealth statements and sources of income of the prime minister, members of the cabinet, parliament members and of their family members will be made public every year."

However, addressing a

## Encephalitis claims 4 more

Lab test confirms Nipah virus causing the disease; bats are natural hosts of the virus; can spread disease thru' date juice

STAR REPORT

The government has confirmed the disease that claimed at least 20 people in Lalmonirhat and Rangpur districts in the last four days as Nipah encephalitis, caused by Nipah virus.

"The laboratory test has identified the virus as Nipah," said Prof Mahmudur Rahman, director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), yesterday.

Meanwhile, two more virologists from Dhaka went to

SEE PAGE 19 COL 4

## Tremor jolts country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale shook the country at 7:53:47pm yesterday.

The earthquake had its epicentre on Myanmar-India border about 402 kilometres east-northeast of Agargaon Met office, Dhaka, said the Met office sources.

Earthquake expert ASM Maksud Kamal said the tremor was stronger than 14 atom bombs. Many old and weak buildings in the

SEE PAGE 19 COL 2

## Egyptians rally on 'Departure Day'

Vow to continue until Mubarak goes

REUTERS, Cairo

Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians marched peacefully in Cairo yesterday to demand an immediate end to President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule, but there was no word of his generals, or his US allies, squeezing him out just yet.

Hoping for a million-strong turnout nationwide to mark what they called "Departure Day," men and women from across Egyptian society streamed past patient soldiers to join a crowd estimated

at about 200,000 in the capital's Tahrir, or Liberation, Square.

Similar pro-democracy rallies were held in other cities.

"Leave! Leave! Leave!" they chanted after weekly Friday prayers in Cairo. A cleric praised the "revolution of the young" and declared: "We want the head of the regime removed."

There was a festive, weekend atmosphere as secular, middle-class professionals and pious, generally poorer,

SEE PAGE 19 COL 6  
PHOTO ON PAGE 20

## 9 BCL men killed in Faridpur road crash

Head-on collision between microbus, tank lorry also kills a driver

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Nine Chhatra League activists and the driver of a microbus carrying them were killed in a road crash in Faridpur yesterday evening.

Dadhon Fakir, officer-in-charge of Bhanga Police Station, told The Daily Star the microbus collided head-on with an oil

tanker near Biswa Road intersection at the Bhanga upazila around 5:46pm.

Seven people died on the spot and three others were declared dead at Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Ataur Rahman Kabir, a witness, said, the collision occurred as the microbus swerved sharply to avoid a cow.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

## Miladunnabi on Feb 16

UNB, Dhaka

Eid-e-Miladunnabi, the day of birth and demise of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) will be observed on February 16.

The decision was taken at a meeting of National Moon Sighting Committee as the moon of Rabiul Awal month of Hijri 1432 was sighted in the sky of Bangladesh yesterday.

That is why counting of Rabiul Awal Month will be

SEE PAGE 19 COL 5

## AIRCRAFT SHORTAGE

## Biman suspends London flights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shortage of aircraft has forced Biman Bangladesh Airlines to suspend its direct flights to London indefinitely from Thursday.

Biman authorities are still unsure when they can resume direct flights on the popular route.

The flights had to be called off after Biman's agreement with the Euro Atlantic Airways on lease of a Boeing aircraft expired on February 3.

Biman had resumed direct flight on the Dhaka-London route on February 6 last year after a break of 12 years.

The authorities said their five other London-bound

SEE PAGE 19 COL 4



## Jinnah faced challenge to his diktat

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

March 24, 1948 could have been the day when Mohammad Ali Jinnah would rise to the occasion and assure Bangalis that their worries about the place of Bangla in Pakistan would be taken into serious and sympathetic consideration. He missed the chance and thereby set the people of East Bengal on a course that was to lead, over the next twenty-four years, to the break-up of Pakistan and the rise of East Bengal as the independent republic of Bangladesh. Addressing a special convocation of Dhaka University at Curzon Hall on the day, an imperious Jinnah made it abundantly and unequivocally clear that 'Urdu and Urdu alone' would be the language of the state of Pakistan. His remarks did not go down well with his

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1