

Odhikar working to save Jamaat, Hefajat

Alleges Hasanul Haq Inu

UNB, Kushtia

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu yesterday accused human rights organisation Odhikar of being busy protecting the interests of Jamaat-e-Islami, Hefajat-e Islam and extremists.

He came up with the allegation against the rights watchdog while talking to reporters on Mirpur Upazila Parishad premises in Kushtia.

Criticising Odhikar for what he said its biased role, Inu said it was not comprehensible to him how the organisation could protect the human rights and democracy that had links with BNP-Jamaat and Hefajat.

Earlier, on Saturday night, plainclothes police arrested Odhikar Secretary General Adilur Rahman Khan on charge of violating the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act.

Apparently referring to his arrest, the minister said, "Bangladesh is an independent country. No one is above the law here. It's not violation of the human rights if action is taken against any one for violating the law."

Inu called upon the foreigners not to judge Bangladesh with the eyes of Odhikar. "Come to Bangladesh and see how despicable a role Hefajat and Jamaat are playing against human rights and women," he said.

The minister also asked the foreign-funded organisations to work in Bangladesh abiding by the laws and rules of the country.

He also criticised the main opposition BNP for what he said their efforts were to save the war criminals. "They (BNP) are threatening not to go to polls, but their main agenda is to save Jamaat, Hefajat and prevent the execution of death sentences given to the war criminals," he added.



Catherine Masud places a wreath at her husband Tareque Masud's grave in Faridpur yesterday marking his second death anniversary. Acclaimed filmmaker Tareque Masud and broadcast journalist Mishuk Munier died in a tragic road accident on Dhaka-Aricha highway in Manikganj on August 13, 2011.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Dhaka opens deputy high commission in Mumbai

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has opened a new deputy high commission in Mumbai to enhance the country's diplomatic representation to four destinations in India.

Samina Naz has been appointed as the first deputy high commissioner of Bangladesh.

From now on, Bangladesh will have diplomatic representation in New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and a Visa Office in Agartala.

The deputy high commission will have consular jurisdiction over the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Goa, and union territories of Puducherry, and Daman and Diu, said a media release of Indian high commission in Dhaka.

The decision to open the fourth diplomatic mission was made in pursuance of the agreement between the premier of India and Bangladesh as reflected in the Joint Communiqué, which was issued during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in January 2010, the release added.

BELOW-STANDARD ROADS Quader blames contractors' greed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said unscrupulous people involved in infrastructure development deliberately build below-standard roads to get more projects in the same place again and again.

Talking to journalists after visiting badly damaged parts of Keraniganj-Jinjira road under Keraniganj upazila, the minister said such type of projects do not benefit local communities at all.

"What is the benefit of a development project which will only be destroyed the next day?" the minister addressed the gathering on the road which included reporters and people involved in infrastructure development.

The minister visited several hundred metres of the road from Kodomtoli Gol Chatter area and found some parts of the road to be littered with numerous potholes.

He ordered concerned authorities to make the road usable in the next 10 days.

Locals said the 37km long road goes through three different upazilas under Dhaka and Manikganj districts. Other parts of the road not visited by the minister are also damaged, they said.

"A brand new CNG-run auto-rickshaw will be completely ruined if you drive it on the road for six months," said a local auto-rickshaw driver.

Quader said projects for carpeting the road would be launched after the rainy season, adding that carrying out development projects in the monsoon is difficult.

He also announced that a decision has been taken to make several bridges toll free including the second Buriganga Bridge at Babubazar.

Regarding incidents of extortion and robbery on roads and highways, the communications minister said there are people who regard extortion and robbery as their professions. Obaidul Quader sought help from people of all walks of life to prevent such criminal acts.

On the two-day countrywide hartal called by Jamaat-e-Islami, the communications minister said hartal affects people from all strata but particularly it will affect the livelihood of poor people.

SECOND DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF TAREQUE, MISHUK

Safe road demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The driver of the bus which crashed into the microbus carrying filmmaker Tareque Masud and journalist-cinematographer Mishuk Munier and killed the two on the spot is being tried, an official said, as different socio-cultural bodies observed their second death anniversary yesterday.

Abdus Salam, public prosecutor of Manikganj Judge Court, told our Manikganj correspondent that a charge sheet against the bus driver Jamir Hossain was submitted under section 304 of the penal code. The case is under trial now, he said.

The driver, however, is out on bail.

Officer-in-Charge of Ghior Police Station Ashraf-ul-Islam, also investigation officer of the case, said the charge sheet was submitted six months ago.

Cannes award winning filmmaker Tareque Masud and ATN News chief executive officer Mishuk Munier died along with three others in the road accident on the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Joka under Ghior upazila of Manikganj on August 13, 2011.

Different socio-cultural organisations, including Tareque Masud-Mishuk Munier Smriti Sangsad, observed their death anniversary through organising discussions, offering flowers, and screening films.

People from different walks of life placed wreaths at the monument built for Tareque and Mishuk on the crash site.



Tareque Masud



Mishuk Munier

Journalists from ATN News, where Mishuk had been the CEO till his death, visited his grave in the capital's Banani graveyard. Wreaths were placed at the grave of Tareque Masud in Bhanga of Faridpur on the occasion.

Speakers at a discussion at the Manikganj Press Club sought safe roads and demanded upgrading of the Dhaka-Aricha highway to four lanes.

Tareque Masud was best known for his Liberation War-based documentaries "Mukhtir Gaan" and "Mukhtir Kotha" and feature film "Matir Moina". The latter work won a FIPRESCI Prize in Director's Fortnight category in the 2002 Cannes Film Festival.

Mishuk Munier worked as cinematographer for Tareque's film "Runway". Mishuk was also working for "Kagojer Phool", which Tareque was planning to shoot before his death.

The duo was heading towards Manikganj from a location for the film in Shibalaya upazila of the district when the accident occurred.

Road crashes kill four

CITY DESK

Four people were killed and nine others injured in separate road accidents in the country yesterday and Monday.

Our staff correspondent reports, an unidentified woman, aged about 32, died after a speedy bus ran her over while she was crossing road in Chairmanbari area in the capital's Banani on Monday night.

She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared her dead.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports, a highway police constable died after a speedy bus hit him at Bakchar in Gobindaganj upazila on Bogra-Rangpur highway yesterday.

Constable Monjer Ali, 44, was patrolling in Bakchar area when a Rangpur-bound bus hit him from behind.

He died on the way to Gobindaganj health complex.

A Comilla correspondent adds, a youth was killed when a Dhaka-bound speedy truck rammed the CNG-run auto-rickshaw carrying him in Madaiya area on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Chandina upazila yesterday.

The deceased was Zainal Abedin, 19, son of Badsha Miah of Cox's Bazar.

Meanwhile, a person was killed and two others were injured when a covered van collided head-on with another covered van at Nimsher on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Chandina upazila yesterday.

The deceased was one of the drivers Sharif Ahmed, 25, of Narsingdi.

Staff Chittagong correspondent adds, seven police and Ansar members were injured as the pick-up van carrying them hit a road sign after its tyre went flat in Lalkhan Bazar area in the port city yesterday.

The injured are Sub-Inspector Md Kawsar, constables Sohag, Madhu and Miltan and Ansar members Mokhlesh, Bachhu and Lal Miyan. They were rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

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AVOIDING HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICTS

Mapping of elephant routes necessary: Experts

UNB, Dhaka

A comprehensive mapping of routes and corridors of elephants is essential to carry out development works in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) averting human-elephant conflicts in elephant ranges, said experts.

"Elephants follow specific corridors in their movement. As the government has been carrying out development works in the CHT, human-elephant conflict is on the rise," Prof M Anwarul Islam, the chief executive of Wildteam, told the news agency.

"If the mapping is carried out we will be able to know about the ecological requirements of elephants and their home ranges. Then a proper conservation plan can be prepared to protect them," Prof Anwarul said.

Dr Tapan Kumar Dey, a forest conservator, said human-elephant conflict is a common phenomenon in hilly areas, but if the elephant corridors could be chalked out, human-elephant conflict and crop damage will be reduced in those areas and elephants will be able to easily move from one place to another through their corridors.

He said there are a number of unidentified elephant corridors in the country. "A mapping is needed to identify the elephant corridors to avert human-elephant conflicts," he added.

Mohammad Abdul Motaleb, an official at International Union for Conservation of Nature Bangladesh, told the news agency that the government has already undertaken an initiative to set up a rail line from Dulahazra to Gundum, aiming to ensure rail connectivity with eastern Asian countries.

"But there are a number of elephant corridors in Dulahazra-Gundum (Cox's Bazar) area. If the mapping of elephant corridors is not sorted out before the rail

tracks are set up, the elephants will lose their corridors, triggering human-elephant conflicts in the region," he said.

Motaleb said there should be overpasses in the rail tracks from Dulahazra to Gundum so that the elephant can peacefully move through their corridors.

In Bangladesh, most elephants are found in the Chittagong Hill Tracts but some can also be found in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar Forest Divisions and Mymensingh and Sylhet areas.

Due to fragmentation of habitats, elephant ranges in Bangladesh have become small patches occupied by only a single or few small herds. Some corridors have been totally abandoned due to degradation of forest cover, extension of human settlements, intensification of agricultural practice, unsustainable slash and burn practice, unplanned road construction and establishment of monoculture forests.

Motaleb said conflicts between humans and elephants have become a major concern for conservationists during the last two decades.

Bangladesh is a small country of about 14.8 million hectares of land of which 2.53 million hectares (17.49 percent) is under forest cover. This includes 0.27 million hectares of home-forest and 2.26 million hectares of state-owned forest reserves and protected areas, he said.

"As a result, elephants and farmers, along with poor people, have become incompatible neighbours in many parts of the elephant ranges in Bangladesh," he said.

Motaleb said elephants and humans cannot live together without conflicts in a place where agriculture is the dominant form of land use. So, human-elephant conflict takes a brutal form and sometimes the situation turns dire leading to deaths of elephants and humans.

He said the IUCN Bangladesh has already initiated a project, "Status Survey and Development of Elephant Action Plan for Bangladesh", aiming to conduct an elephant survey, formulating an action plan in elephant conservation and mapping the elephant corridors.

Under the current initiative, the mapping will be carried out for all the elephant ranges of Bangladesh but Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts will be emphasised.

The specific objectives of the initiative include identifying the present status (population and distribution) of Asian elephants in Bangladesh, preparing maps of Asian elephant habitats, routes, corridors and human-elephant conflict areas, identifying location, causes and frequency of human-elephant conflict and preparing a long-term action plan for the conservation of Asian elephant.

After the two-year project, initiated in June 2013, is completed, the government can conduct development works in the elephant ranges (CHT region) following the maps of elephant corridors which will help avert human-elephant conflict, said Motaleb.

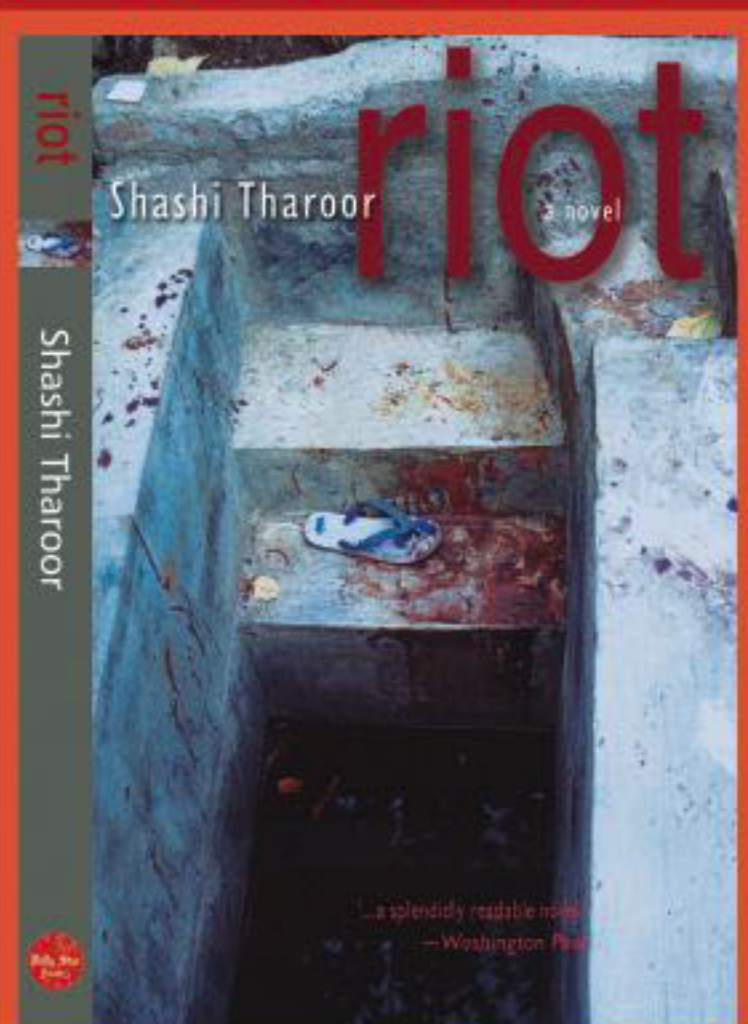
Meanwhile, Indian Border Security Force sent a proposal on elephant corridors to the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs. The proposed "elephant corridors" aimed at reducing human-animal conflict along Indo-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya are awaiting clearance and sanction from the ministry.

The BSF proposed five such corridors, all in the Garo Hills region, in collaboration with the state's forest department which kept track of elephant movements to and from Bangladesh from Balpakram National Park in South Garo Hills district, Meghalaya Frontier BSF Inspector General Sudesh Kumar recently told reporters in Meghalaya.



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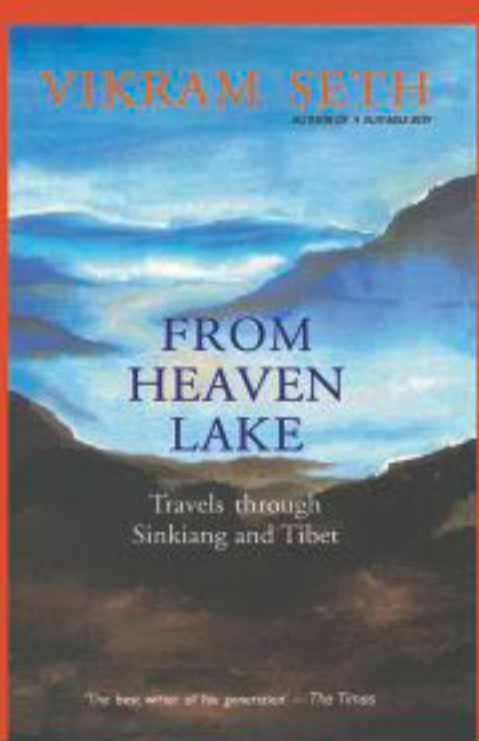
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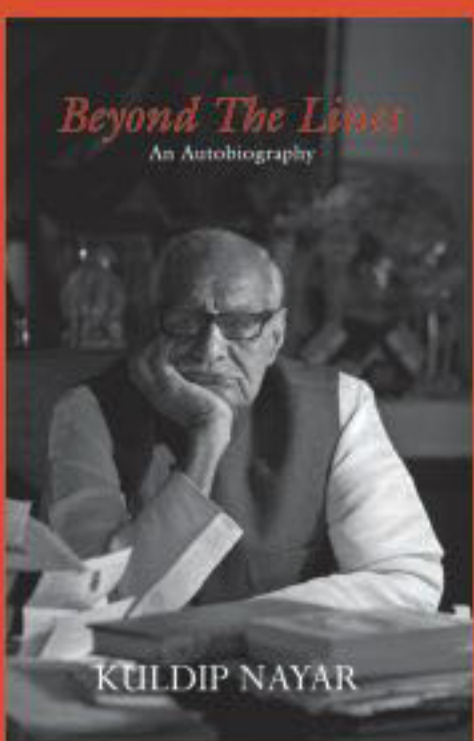
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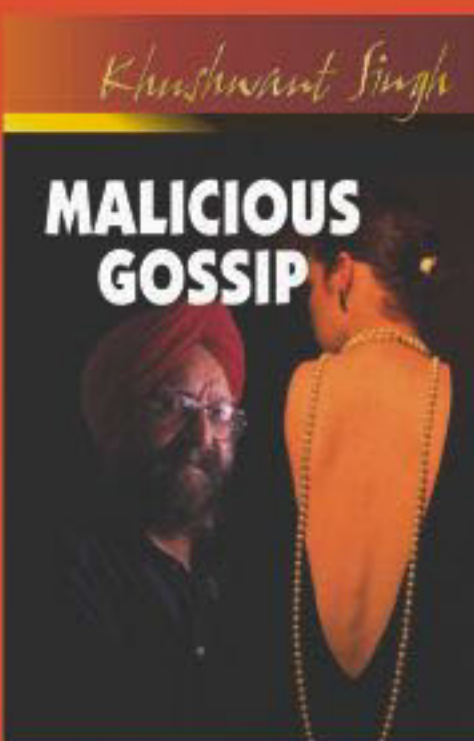
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