

KORAI BEEL

Not friendly to guest birds now

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinaipur

Fewer flocks of migratory birds are coming to Korai Beel, once a safe haven for them during winter, in the face of human onslaught.

Located in Biral upazila of Dinaipur, the wetland was buzzing with guest birds even seven years ago, a sharp contrast to the present spectacle.

Bird lover Abdur Razzak, who has visited the place recently, said, "The beel was crowded with a lot of guest birds when I last visited the place in 2006. But they have decreased drastically over the years."

Locals said caretakers of a fish project run commercially in the waterbody had been driving away the birds by generating sounds and throwing stones.

The 54.10-acre wetland was leased to local cooperative organisation, Khamar Samobay Samity, in 2007.

The guest birds had been decreasing in the sanctuary since then, they added.

"We are driving away the birds as they devour the fish cultivated in the waterbody," said a caretaker, on condition of anonymity.

The guest birds were first spotted in the area back in 1986. Until 2007, they had been flocking to the swamp from Siberia and Europe between the end of November and March.

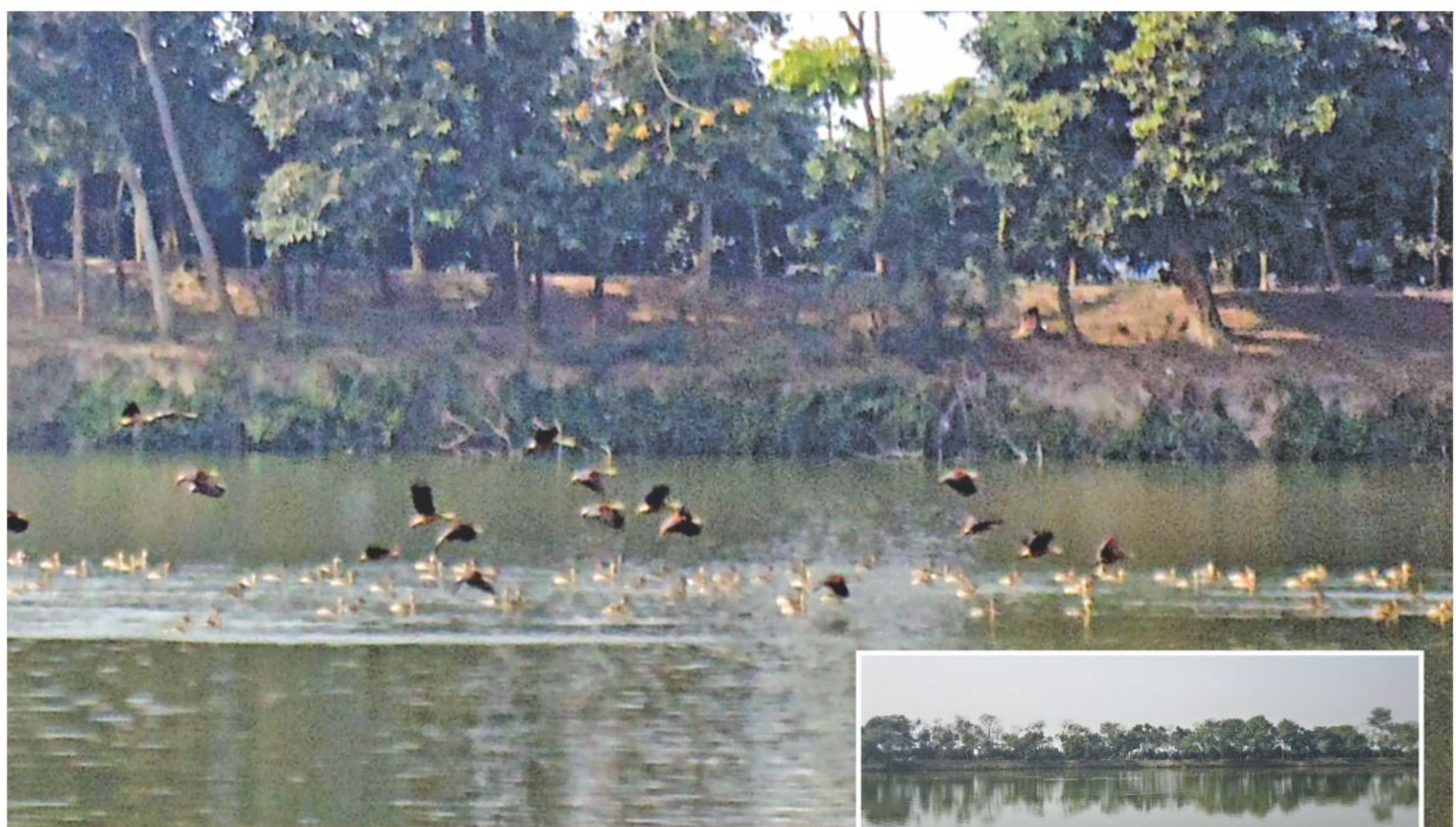
Azizar Rahman, a local, alleged that the water of Korai had also been polluted by the rampant use of waste materials as fish feed.

Contacted, Md Abdullah Al Khairum, upazila nirbahi officer of Biral, said he was unaware of the birds being forced to leave in such a way by the leaseholders.

He added that he would take care of the matter.

He, however, did not make any comment when asked about the lease of Korai.

Meanwhile, locals expected that the place would be abuzz with both the guest birds and visitors again if the authorities concerned take proper measures.



Guest birds at the Korai Beel in Biral of Dinaipur. The birds had found a safe haven there but it could all change as the water body has been leased out for fish farming.

PHOTO: STAR

Govt plays

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with it, he alleged.

An audiovisual message purported to be from al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri had urged the Muslims in Bangladesh to wage an intifada (popular uprising) to confront the "crusader onslaught against Islam".

Posted in Jihadology.net, the message alleged thousands of people were being killed in the streets of Bangladesh for protesting the "collusion of the anti-Islam secular government with a bunch of transgressing secularists".

The government does have the mechanism to detect the sources of such activities and will be able to find out its authenticity, Alam told reporters.

He also said whatever the network al-Qaeda had in the country in the past had already been destroyed during the tenure of the immediate past government, reports UNB.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday issued a statement regarding media reports on the audiovisual message of al-Qaeda leader.

"We are deeply concerned about the video message of the so-called al-Qaeda group's incumbent chief Ayman al-Zawahiri which has asked the Muslim of Bangladesh to launch protest against those who had declared war against Islam," said Dr Shafiqur Rahman, acting secretary general of Jamaat, in the statement.

"The people are deeply worried apprehending this campaign as a new conspiracy against the independence, sovereignty, Islam and patriotic citizens of the country.

"Bangladesh is free from any types of extremism, militancy and terrorism," the statement read.

"We do not have any knowledge even whether the religious section and the mainstream Islamic parties of Bangladesh have any ties with al-Qaeda," it said.

A few news media had published bogus reports citing the relation between Jamaat-e-Islami and al-Qaeda, which was totally false and baseless.

"We want to assert that no question arose at all from the side of Jamaat-e-Islami or Islami Chhatra Shibir of having relationship with al-Qaeda.

"We sincerely and truly hate any types of militancy," said the statement signed by Md Ibrahim of the party's central publicity department.

Back to barbarism?

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About 20 days ago, Shobel allegedly stole some gold ornaments and did not share those with Mamun. But Mamun came to know about it and wanted his share, said Rezaul Karim, sub-inspector of Bhasantek Police Station.

However, Shobel denied stealing any ornaments and went into hiding, and returned to the slum on Tuesday morning, said Rezaul.

Finding Shobel at his aunt's house on that morning, Mamun and his accomplices dragged him out, beating.

Taslima, a slum dweller, said, "They [the gang] beat Shobel up severely. When we asked what was going on, Mamun said they were beating him for stealing."

Equipped with iron rods, sticks and machetes, Mamun and his cohorts then forced out Shobel's three aunts, one uncle, three female and two male cousins and the husband of a cousin from their rooms on Tuesday evening.

They took them all in the room of a neighbour, Nurjahan Begum, who was not home at the time.

Narrating the incident, one of Shobel's aunts said, "They tied us with ropes and gagged our mouths with clothes. Mamun started asking

us who had kept the ornaments. He continued beating us, asking about the ornaments.

"As we did not have those, we kept denying and they increased torture on us. At one stage, they undressed my daughter, my sister and two nieces and put cricket stumps in their private parts.

"They also filmed it on their mobile phones and showed us the video. The gang then threatened to kill us, put our bodies in sacks and dump those somewhere. Even they brought some sacks."

Around 11:30pm, six or seven family members rushed to the house, rescued them and took them to local clinics, police said.

Asked, Nurjahan said when she returned home in the evening, the gang did not allow her to go inside for about three hours. Later, she found blood stains on the floor of her room.

Rahima Begum, sister of accused Mamun, said, "As a woman, I want punishment to my brother for what he has done."

Bilkis Begum, gynaecologist at the one-stop crisis centre at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, told The Daily Star that two tortured women went to her and she found injuries in their private parts.

Of the two other women, one was sent to her village home in Comilla and the other was taken home after primary treatment at a clinic, family sources said.

Shobel is also taking treatment at a Comilla hospital.

Toll 668

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said, 229 people fell victim to extrajudicial killings in 2009, 133 in 2010, 100 in 2011, 91 in 2012, 71 in 2013 and 44 between January 1 and February 10 this year.

He urged the government to form the probe committee with representatives from Bangladesh Bar Council, Jatiya Press Club and human rights bodies, and make its report public within a short time.

"If the government does not form the probe body, Bangladesh Bar Council will place the issue before the international platform," Mahub said.

He claimed that the extrajudicial killings, incidents of forced disappearances and torture reached an alarming level before the January 5 polls.

But the government has been playing a silent role in such cases of human rights violation in order to eliminate the people opposed to the government, he told the conference.

He also alleged that the ruling party criminals were attacking the pro-BNP students in different universities in presence of law enforcers.

ILLEGAL GAS CONNECTIONS

Weather, security hold drive back

HELEMIUL ALAM

The Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd yesterday failed to begin a full-scale drive against illegal connections in the capital and adjoining areas, as it did not get enough security personnel due to the ongoing SSC examinations.

Inclement weather too played a part.

Yesterday, the state-run utility service provider conducted an operation only in Savar, where a team led by magistrate Liakat Ali disconnected an illegal gas connection to a garment factory named JKS Garments and Washing at Tetulghara.

Titas had earlier announced it would launch a massive drive yesterday to dismantle around 200km distribution lines set up illegally to cater to around three lakh households in the city and adjoining districts like Narayanganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi.

Nowshad Islam, managing director

of Titas, said the operation would begin today.

"We are taking all-out preparations to conduct the drive at full throttle from tomorrow [today]," he told The Daily Star.

Earlier, Titas had asked the illegal users to disconnect the connections on their own by February 15, but the announcement had met with lukewarm response, according to Titas officials.

As the deadline expired on Saturday, Titas now goes for a full-scale crackdown.

"We will conduct our drives again if the illegal connections are re-established. Illegal links from the Titas network are totally unacceptable," said the Titas MD.

He said that in some cases, local politicians in the past instigated the mob to foil the drives. So, Titas would take adequate security preparation to ensure maximum success this time.

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Newspaper banned, editor held

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movement was aimed at destabilising it, swiftly went into action by taking a number of prominent figures into police custody.

Hamidul Haq Chowdhury, owner of the Pakistan Observer newspaper and known for his vocal opposition to chief minister Nurul Amin, was arrested. At the same time, Abdus Salam, editor of the newspaper, was carted off to prison on the excuse that in an editorial criticising the government, he had committed blasphemy through making certain derogatory remarks about Hazrat Osman, the third Caliph of Islam. For good measure, the government decreed a ban on the Pakistan Observer. Despite the fact that the directors of the newspaper as well as its editorial team offered apologies for the editorial in question, the ban on the newspaper remained.

The gathering force of the movement for Bangla as the state language

of Pakistan clearly had unnerved the government. In spite of the reality that the students of Dhaka University as well as the general public had done nothing that could be construed as violent in intent or nature, the authorities made it known on February 20 that any assembly of five or more persons and the carrying of objects that might cause bodily harm to people had been banned under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

The government's action quickly led to rethinking on the part of the All Party State Language Committee of Action. By an overwhelming majority, 20 out of 24 members, it was decided that the general strike planned for the next day, February 21, would be called off. Only four went against the majority decision. A major factor that appeared to have guided the Action Committee into its new move was the

view of those present that a violation of the restraining orders could lead to a delay in the holding of provincial elections, something that was expected to be held sooner rather than later.

It may be noted that elections to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly had repeatedly been delayed on one pretext or another. The provincial government, fearing a rout at the polls, was not willing to call elections only to lose office. The Action Committee was, therefore, reluctant to give the government any more chance of keeping the elections at bay.

The move to call off the strike was, however, strongly opposed by the students. Tempers ran high, so much so that eventually the Action Committee decided that the next day, February 21, the option of whether the strike would go ahead or would be called off would be left to the students. The moment of decision was thus at hand.

Attempt to lay egg

FROM PAGE 16

getting caught in the fishing nets or being hit by fishing trawlers.

Moreover, stray dogs and foxes were also a hazard to the species on the beach, he added.

The turtles, which somehow dodge the fishing nets and reach on the beach, fall in trouble as the grounds for laying eggs have shrunk due to rampant human settlement there.

Meanwhile, several rare species of sea turtles had also been found dead in coastal areas like Kattali, Rani Rushmonir Ghat of Chittagong city recently.

Local fishermen said the dead tortoises had been coming to the beach with high tide, while some of the turtles had been reaching the shore alive but dying subsequently.

The species had been seen dead not only on the sandy beaches, but also in forest areas of Kattali, a local eyewitness said.

Experts have said the species lay eggs at secluded places, which have

been rare nowadays, as marine drive roads, hotels, makeshift houses have sprouted in the areas along the Cox's Bazar beach.

Local environment department had launched a drive on January 21 to kill the stray dogs in the areas along the beach for ensuring safe sanctuary for the species. The drive ended on January 24.

In the meantime, around 500 stray dogs had been killed by lethal injection, Shariful Islam added.

Dr Md Rashed-Un-Nabi of the Institute of Marine Sciences and Fisheries, University of Chittagong, said the turtles had been being killed due to adverse conditions in the beach areas.

Chief scientific officer of fisheries institute in Cox's Bazar, Dr Mohammad Jahirul Haque, said the environment of the beach area had been getting worse day by day.

Sea creatures were falling prey to man-made environmental hazards, he added.

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

Alliance in a one month period ending 27th January this year under the Awami League led government.

The report under reference, as presented in your daily, is an attempt to distort facts on the ground. It is also baseless and is motivated.

In this regard, we would like to present the following:

1. The BNP Central offices have carefully collected the facts and figures from various parts of the country over a period of time. These were presented on 4th February. The details are available with the Party with full names and addresses of the unfortunate victims of the prevailing reign of terror. Their authenticity is beyond doubt. These can be verified. The BNP is ready to provide the data to you if your newspaper wishes to have them.

2. The report has quoted "sources" at the district levels of the BNP in an attempt to distort the truth. We wish to state here for the record that the Party has been in touch with the concerned local level leaders. All of them have categorically denied any contact with reporters from the Daily Star on this. One of them, in fact, has said someone from a vernacular daily had contacted

him but none from Daily Star. This further destroys the credibility of the said report and exposes its motivation.

3. In her statement to the media, the BNP Chairperson has given figures covering thirty-five districts where these wanton acts of murder, extrajudicial killings and abductions have occurred. Your report, however, has spoken of only nine districts. Hence the report as published in your newspaper is selective as it has chosen to ignore the real and broader picture prevailing on the ground in Bangladesh today. Significantly, your report ignores the gruesome incidents of abductions and subsequent killing of Chhatra Dal members by the law enforcement personnel in Nilphamari. This was in retribution to the attacks on the motorcade of the local Awami League MP.

That this government has instituted a culture of impunity when it comes to unlawful actions of some partisan members of the law enforcement agencies and the Awami League cadres has gone missing in your attempt to distort facts. It may even be seen by objective observers as an attempt to cover up for the government.

For someone engaged in journal-

ism, professional ethics demands that one does not undermine the truth on state sponsored target murders, extrajudicial killing, serial abductions and the overall denial of human rights. To do so would be a grave injustice to the victims of such atrocity and their more innocent family members.

While there may be slight differences on specific dates, what remains undeniable is that the facts provided on 4th February by Party Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia represent a vivid picture of brutality the Awami Government has unleashed on its political adversary. In your attempt to nitpick on minor details, you have disregarded the fact that in today's Bangladesh, targeted killings and abductions have become a routine matter. Sadly, human life in Bangladesh has become a matter of just another statistic.

Keeping in mind the need for balanced reporting, we would request that this rejoinder from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP be published in full and be given the same prominence given to the original report.

Past experience has shown that the Daily Star follows a practice of printing

its own own response to any rejoinders. While you are at liberty to do so, one would hope that your response would be substantiated by verifiable evidence and not become a response just for the sake of it.

YOURSTRULY,
(Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed)
Joint Secretary General and Office Secretary
Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP

In a separate rejoinder, General Secretary of Noakhali district unit of BNP Harunur Rashid Azad claimed that he was quoted that no leader and activist of the 18-party alliance was killed. He termed the report false.

OUR REPLY
The Daily Star condemns every single extra-judicial killing and has always reported against extra-judicial killings. But when Khaleda Zia at her press conference claimed that the BNP-led opposition alliance's 242 leaders and activists were killed between December 26 last year and January 27 this year, she could provide the press with only five names. As this figure seemed unusually high, we cross-checked the facts and found out that the figures were grossly inaccurate.

The rejoinder failed to show us how The Daily Star attempted to distort facts.

While the BNP says it is ready to provide the data to us, it has actually failed to provide us with any data. On receiving the rejoinder on Friday, we talked to Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed twice seeking the data. He first told us that he would call us back. Then he said he himself would inform us after two or three days when his party would provide the data to us. This brings into question BNP's claim of "careful collection of the facts and figures".

The BNP claim that The Daily Star actually did not talk to its district leaders is a total lie. We put on record identities of the local BNP leaders and journalists.

In fact, when we called back some of those leaders after the story had out, we found that some central BNP leaders have blasted them for providing us with the actual figures.

The BNP questions our move to cross-check death figures in nine districts and it blames us for ignoring the real picture prevailing in Bangladesh. We explained why we had chosen the nine districts -- each of them had more than 10 deaths accord-

ing to Khaleda's list. The rejoinder did not refute our findings in these districts and instead tried to divert the focus elsewhere.

In fact, after receiving the BNP rejoinder, we checked the death figures in Nilphamari where Khaleda Zia had claimed death of six of her party men in one month. Upon a cross-check, we found two deaths.

Through this cross-checking, we served our readers by showing what our top politicians feed us with. We found that when Khaleda claimed 152 deaths in nine districts, the actual figure is 17.

We also believe that every single loss of life through violence is deplorable and every single life is valuable. So we do not see any reason to bloat figures.

The BNP has termed our cross-checking attempt "nitpick on minor details" through which we have "disregarded the fact". But when figures so wildly differ, --17 against the claim of 152 deaths-- then we believe this is not looking at "minor details".

On Harunur Rashid Azad's rejoinder, we want to point out that our report quoted him as saying 11 activists of the BNP-led alliance were killed in Noakhali in the last three months. He