

Save tiger, save the Sundarbans

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

WHILE addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 2nd Global Tiger Stocktaking Conference 2014 in Dhaka, Prime Minister Sk. Hasina has appealed to the global communities to come forward for saving the tigers worldwide by saving the nature.

In Bangladesh Sundarbans is the only abode of Royal Bengal Tiger. Unhappily, Sunderban's Royal Bengal Tiger is fast becoming extinct, disappearing faster than our people would have expected. Inside the forest these tigers are succumbing to poaching and relentless pressure of human population growth. No more than 4000 of the majestic carnivores remain on the planet, as a study suggests. But the actual number on the Bangladesh side would not be more than 440, as some unofficial estimate reveals. Unless something spectacular is done to reverse the trend, tigers will be seen only in captivity, prowling in zoos or performing in circuses. The tigers of nature will be gone forever, their glory surviving merely in storybooks, films and in dreams.

Worse, as these forest officials told me only about 500-600 employees, mostly guards are keeping watch over 4 ranges comprising 2300 sq mile forested area divided in 4 ranges namely, Khulna, Satkhira, Sharonkhola and Chadpai. With inadequate manpower, fire-arms, and lack of fast moving river vehicles

like launches and trawlers, they can ill-afford to protect the potential resources of the Sunderbans. A large chunk of people of Bagerhat, Khulna and specially, about 18 lakh people of Satkhira residing in the border belts of the Sunderbans, many of them working as Bawali (golpata and wood cutter), Mawali (fisherman) and Jawali (fishermen) depend on the Sunderbans for their livelihood and not infrequently, these people backed by armed poachers and greedy smugglers kill the majestic animal - Royal Bengal Tiger, because their pelts and body parts fetch princely prices on the black market.

The UN-sponsored study conducted by the School of Oceanographic Studies at Jadavpur University (SOS), Kolkata points out that large adjoining areas surrounding the Sundarbans including West Bengal and Bangladesh may be severely affected as early as 2020 because the Sundarbans - the world's largest delta and gene pool that straddles the region - is on the verge of destruction. The fallout, it is predicted, is not just wide-ranging but frightening. While the rising sea level and soil erosion would submerge large swathes of land rendering thousands living nearer the forest homeless, vast areas of West Bengal and Bangladesh on the coastline would be under the constant threat of cyclones, gales and storms. The diverse marine life - river sharks,



red crabs, shrimps, snakes - uniquely adapted to the saline water would be threatened, drastically affecting the food chain. Entire fisheries would be washed out and consumption of prawns would be cut by at least 40 per cent. Most worryingly, the disappearance of the largest carbon sink in the region would increase global warming and ultimately change the climate of South-east Asia. All these portents point to the fact that human ecosystem may not eventually be sustainable in the Sunderbans.

"There is a conflict between conservation and development", so says Sugato Hazra who spearheaded a three year study sponsored by the Union Ministry of forests and

Environment, India and Winrock International, a US-based NGO. Although the Sundarbans was declared a UNESCO heritage site in 1984, no spectacular effort other than stray focus on Royal Bengal Tiger, either by world community or by the governments in both the parts of the sub-continent was taken up.

Speaking about protecting the Sunderbans or conserving the tigers, deer population and marine resources by imposing embargo on human movement inside the forest without creating alternative means of living for the people residing in the border areas of the Sunderbans would be a gigantic challenge. On the other hand, it is true that over fishing and over exploitation of plant, wildlife and marine resources are placing increasing and irreplaceable amount of stress on the viability of the delicate ecosystem of the Sundarbans. During my visit to the Sunderbans, I saw hundreds and thousands of small fishing boats in the Shela river, heedless of the warnings of cyclones or storms engaged mainly in catching shrimp fries and in the process other fries or small fish that come up are discarded dead or alive because shrimp fries fetch higher price than other catches.

The main thrust of the country's effort is to build a national management strategy for tigers. The painstaking effort must focus on collecting data on diet, pack behaviour, gene

pool and habitat. Ironically, what makes the tiger so vulnerable to humans is its unshakable grip on human imagination. Given the voracious human appetite for land, forest resources like wood, golpata, honey and unrestricted exploitation of different species of fish through shrimp culture near the coastal belt, keeping the tigers or other wild life and plants species in the tranquil zone of the forest would be nothing short of a miracle. Unless something dramatic is done to reverse the trend, tigers will be seen only in captivity, prowling in zoos, or performing in circuses. The wild tigers will be gone forever, their glory merely surviving in storybooks, on film and in dreams.

Most shockingly, mainly because of human assault in the Sundarbans, 64 species of vertebrate animal, 40 species of mammal, 21 species of reptiles and 23 species of fish have disappeared. And a bigger threat is now waiting in the wings. With the construction of a power plant at Rampal, only 14 km off the edges of the forest and 4 km from the declared ecologically critical area along with industrialization in the adjoining places, the outskirts of the Sunderbans will lose its ecological balance affecting the lives of humans, plants and animals dependent on the bounty of the Sunderbans. Much to our concern, the government's initiative to set up a power plant has drawn many investors in the adjacent areas of the proposed power plant to buy land and set up industries there in the coming days. The overriding fear is that the exclusive flora and fauna and the majestic Royal Bengal Tiger may disappear in the process of industrialization.

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Constitutional amendment is no more a serious job

SHAKHAWAT LITON

AMENDING the constitution by parliament is no more a serious business! The way parliament passed the 16th amendment to the constitution on Wednesday night to empower itself to remove Supreme Court judges exposed the lack of its seriousness. The House had to spend around three and a half hours to pass the bill. The time was spent to allow around two dozens of MPs to speak during the process to pass the bill. Many of them spoke twice. Their proposals, discussions on them and finally taking stance against their own proposals made the process farce to some extent.

So far 22 MPs belonging to Jatiya Party, the hand maiden main opposition, two components of ruling Awami League-led alliance - Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Workers Party, Bangladesh Nationalist Front and independent camp placed various proposals. They proposed for publicising the bill soliciting the public opinion on it, sending the bill to select committee for scrutiny and for inclusion of some new provisions in the bill. While speaking on their proposals, many of them tried to defend the proposals, some

of them even spoke against own proposals. But when time came to give voice votes in favour of their proposals, they remained silent. Rather, many of them gave voice vote alongside the treasury bench members against their proposals. So, all the proposals were rejected unanimously.

More interesting, at least eight MPs exposed their callousness by proposing an unnecessary change in the bill. They proposed that the House include a provision in the bill empowering itself to make policy for the appointments of judges to the Supreme Court. Two more MPs proposed for inclusion a provision in the bill saying that this constitutional amendment will take immediate effect. Their proposals were unprecedented in nature. One other had proposed for a provision making it mandatory for an SC judge to physically present before the president to tender his resignation. Another one had proposed that a SC judge must put his/her seal on the resignation letter signed by him/her to be submitted to the president.

They placed the proposals and spoke in support of them, forcing the House to put their silly proposals on vote for disposal. But the current constitutional provision empowers parliament to

make a law to specify qualifications of individuals willing to get appointed as judges to the SC. This provision has been made a few decades ago, but the law has yet to make. When time came to defend their amendment proposals by giving voice votes, they again failed to defend their own proposals. And many of them joined the treasury bench MPs to reject the amendment proposals in voice vote. Then what's the meaning of such proposals and spending time for discussion? What happened on Wednesday has put a bizarre instance in the parliament proceedings. This will not glorify the image of those MPs who set the bizarre incident which they made only for the sake of making speeches regardless of their significance. Their parties have decided before hand to support the bill. But the instance they set will remain as an evident that the MPs do not stand by what they said.

Before the MPs made the bizarre record in the parliament proceeding on Wednesday, the cabinet itself exposed its callousness by approving the constitutional amendment bill with a preamble full of distorted facts about abolishing the parliament's power to remove Supreme Court judges. Prior to

placing the bill on parliament, the law minister had corrected some distorted facts. The parliamentary standing committee has corrected the rest of the distorted facts by rejecting the entire preamble of the bill. It had recommended that the House replace the original long preamble of the bill with one paragraph. And the House accepted it.

The government however is fortunate. All the MPs present in the House including those who placed various proposals voted for the constitutional amendment. The parliament itself may feel fortunate after getting back the authority to impeach a Supreme Court judge on grounds of misbehaviour or incapacity.

Should we now conclude that the entire nation is with the constitutional amendment as the almost full House unanimously passed the amendment bill? Going through theory, one may make such a conclusion considering the nature of the entire House's support to the bill. Not a single vote was cast against it. The highest ever number of MPs, 327, voted for it. Three years ago, the parliament passed the 15th amendment with a margin of 291 to 1 votes. The Awami League-led government may also

take credit of this if it wants to insult further those who have been opposing this amendment to the constitution.

The reality is however different to the theory. More than half of 327 MPs who voted for the amendment were not elected by people's votes. They were elected uncontested without a single vote being cast in the one-sided January 5 general election. So, those who were elected denying people's right to vote to pick their representatives can not claim themselves as true public representatives. Moreover, everyone knows about the nature of the main opposition Jatiya Party that extended wholehearted support to the amendment. The AL's main archival BNP that enjoys support of at least 30 percent of electorates does not have representation in the current parliament as it boycotted the last election. The party has been opposing the constitutional amendment alongside some other parties, many jurists and civil society individuals. So, this amendment can not claim to have obtained strong support from people no matter how many MPs voted for passage of the bill.

The writer is Sr. Reporter, The Daily Star.

QUOTABLE Quote

I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.

Leonardo da Vinci

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

CAN I GET A PASS TO TOWN, SARGE? I DON'T SEE WHY NOT

OH WAIT... NOW I SEE BECAUSE I WON'T GIVE YOU ONE

HENRY by Don Trachte

I ADMIRE TALL BOYS! I WISH YOU WERE TALLER, HENRY!

FREE LIBRARY

LONGFELLOW

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Ribald

5 Cribbage needs

9 Folder's phrase

11 One way to read

13 Score speed

14 Singer Patsy

15 Yale player

16 Concentrated

18 Tennis category

20 Tiara feature

21 Be in accord

22 Bar assn. members

23 Seth Mac-Parlane film

24 "Veep" carrier

25 Declare

27 Oozes

29 Ship record

30 Shot one under par

32 Violent weather

34 History chunk

35 Bye, in Baja

36 More polite

38 Lariats

39 Public out-burst

40 Capital on a fjord

41 Purposes

DOWN

1 Solemn ceremonies

2 Hilary Swank movie

3 Dealing (with)

4 "Nopel" opposite

5 Accords

6 "Legally Blonde" heroine

7 Cracking up

8 Western sight

10 Slogged away

12 Judges

17 Once called

19 Got bigger

22 Not yet up

24 Wading birds

25 Worship site

26 Haitian practice

27 Comic Caesar

28 Peaceful

30 Low singer

31 Is bold

33 Seasonal song

37 Hosp. ward

Yesterday's answer

SLAP CORPS

COMIC OPERA

ROMEO REGAL

ASA PENNANT

PENCIL ICE

HELD NED

LEER RUSS

VIM SAYS

ATA PENROD

PENALTY EVE

ORATE EAVES

RATON DRUNK

SLEPT MESS

CRYPTOQUOTE

XIVW F IJW WR SRWPVG ZVJC AR ATFWM RU ATV

DFIAFLK RU ZGRMVW TRLVK, F ZVFPW AR ATFWM RU

ATVDFIAFLK RU FWAJIA RWVK.

-- OVAVG HV DGFVK

Saturday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

Cryptoquote: NOTHING CAN SO ALLENATE A VOTER FROM THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AS BACKING A WINNING CANDIDATE.

-- MARK B. COHEN

A XYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

Dr. C M Delwar Rana
Director and Consultant of
National Healthcare Network (NHN)
Bangladesh Diabetic Shamity

The very talented and a sincere Urology Surgeon (physician) by profession, Dr. C M Delwar Rana, completed his graduation in MBBS in 1972 from Sylhet Medical College under University of Dhaka. His graduation was followed by the completion of D.Uro in 1982 from University of Vienna and later on FAMS in 1983 from American Medical Association. He has further accomplished FCGP (Bangladesh) and MPH (NIPSOM, University of Dhaka) in 1990 and 1998 respectively. Bearing such a diverse host of knowledge in medical sciences, Dr. Delwar has served as the Assistant Registrar and Registrar of Dhaka Medical College, Resident Surgeon and Junior Director & Consultant of BIRDEM, and as a part time lecturer of Bangladesh College of General Practitioners (BCGP). Currently he is designated as the Director and Consultant of National Healthcare Network (NHN), Bangladesh Diabetic Shamity. In his prolific career, Dr. Delwar received a number of awards from named organizations, among which the award from Indian Academy of General Physician is significant. He was also honoured as a freedom fighter by Sylhet Medical College.

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