

Dead Zone

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Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, which was established in 1929 as a sanctuary for birds devastated by decades of hunting for their colourful plumage. Accessible only by boat, today it's a rare island off Florida not dominated by human activity and development.

When the birds come to nest, so too do biologists and naturalists who study the different colonies. But this year, the birds' exit has the state's avian biologists scrambling for answers.

"It's not uncommon for birds to abandon nests," said Peter Frederick, a University of Florida wildlife biologist who has studied Florida's birds for nearly 30 years. "But, in this case, what's puzzling is that all of the species did it all at once."

Doig said some of the Seahorse birds seem to have moved to a nearby island, but they're just a fraction of the tens of thousands of birds that would normally be nesting on the key right now.

To find answers, service biologists have been acting on the few clues they have.

First, they tested left-behind bird carcasses for disease or contaminants. Those tests came back negative.

Next, they researched possible new predators. Did raccoons swim over from another island? Perhaps some great horned owls flew out at night and started feasting?

Traps caught a few raccoons, which is common, but not enough to have created a wholesale abandonment. There were no telltale signs of owls.

Family faces

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become an Indian national," Suchitra said.

89 inhabitants of Gotamari and Bashkata, another enclave in Patgram upazila, so far have expressed their desire to become Indian nationals to the joint survey by India and Bangladesh that started three days ago and will continue till July 16.

The Indian officials registered their names and took their photographs.

Minoti's husband Binoy Chandra Barmon, 65, said everyone in his family except her daughter Suchitra wishes to become Indian nationals. His family includes his wife, two sons Riton Chandra Barmon, 22, and Bipul Chandra Barmon, 28, and Bipul's wife Priyanka Rani, 19.

Binoy said most of the official processes have already been completed.

"We want to become Indian nationals willingly as we were born in an Indian enclave, and so we are Indian by birth," he said, adding there was no pressure on them.

Another inhabitant of the enclave Binod Chandra Barmon, 68, said five members of his family expressed desire to become Indian nationals, and they have already filled up the form.

"I have 20 bighas of land in the enclave, and I will sell them taking permission from the deputy commissioner after completion of all official formalities," he said, adding they desire to become Indian nationals willingly.

Hatibanda UNO Mahbubur Rahman said all of these 89 inhabitants are from the Hindu community.

There are at least 217 Hindu people living in the two enclaves of Lalmonirhat and more of them may express their willingness to become Indians, said sources at the UNO office.

However, the Muslims living in the enclaves are unwilling to become Indians, they added.

There are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh, including 59 in Lalmonirhat, 36 in Panchagarh, 12 in Kurigram and four in Nilphamari districts, and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves are in Cooch Behar district of Pashchimbanga in India. The Indian enclaves in Bangladesh comprise 17,149 acres of land while Bangladeshi enclaves in India cover 7,110 acres.

A joint census conducted in July 2011 found that 37,334 people live in Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 14,215 people in Bangladeshi enclaves.

Bangladeshi

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Jambu and his four fellows were returning home along with cattle from India through the border around 4:30am. A patrol team of Chamta Baburhat BSF camp in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal opened fire on the cattle traders. Jambu was critically injured in the firing, according to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Jambu then died in no-man's land.

A flag meeting between the BGB and the BSF was held near the border yesterday morning.

The BGB strongly protested the killing of the Bangladeshi in the meeting, said

Sree Shankar, Lohakuchi BGB camp commander, who led the Bangladeshi side.

Later, police recovered the body from the no-man's land and sent it to Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy, BGB sources said.

TRAFFICKING: MYANMAR SCENE

Rising exodus but no arrests

REUTERS, Nyaung Chaung

The bamboo-and-thatch village of Nyaung Chaung in Myanmar's Rakhine State is typical of the places from which Rohingya Muslims flee. The fields don't provide a living, locals say. Jobs are scarce. Daily life is a series of humiliations from Myanmar's government, which officially considers them intruders and denies them citizenship.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya have fled Rakhine since the start of the year, joining perilous journeys on the boats of human traffickers through the Bay of Bengal.

But local officials say no one has been arrested for trafficking in the Myanmar state that supplies the vast majority of victims to this brutal trade.

"There have been no trafficking cases in Rakhine State so far (this year). There is a police unit to track down human traffickers, so it's very rare in this area," Hla Thein, the Rakhine State Attorney General, told Reuters.

LOCAL MIDDLEMEN

Villagers give a very different account, linking local middlemen to a regional network that has been the subject of arrests abroad.

They say the link is a local man, Soe Naing - widely known as Anwar. His arrest in southern Thailand on April 28

led to the discovery of dozens of migrant graves along the Thailand-Malaysia border.

For years, Rohingya have fled poverty and persecution in Rakhine, boarding boats to Thailand, Malaysia and beyond to seek work and asylum. But clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in 2012 saw an explosion in the exodus, amid violence that killed hundreds and displaced more than 140,000.

As more than 100,000 fled, traffickers began holding migrants for ransom in jungle camps in Thailand and Malaysia. Untold numbers died on the journey.

In early May, Thailand began a sweeping crackdown on the trade after discovering scores of graves in abandoned trafficking camps along the Thailand-Malaysia border.

'BACK AND FORTH'

Since the crackdown, Anwar's family home - a rambling structure of bamboo and corrugated iron, slathered in sky blue paint - has stood empty behind a metal fence.

Local police have not yet paid a visit.

Police Lieutenant San Min, the head of the anti-human trafficking unit in Maungdaw township, whose office is a 10-minute drive away. "As far as I know, there hasn't been action against any human traffickers here."

Ministry probes

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Police took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where he died around 11:30am.

His four-page suicide note, recovered by police, holds Secretary Hannan responsible for his death.

"I gave money to Liberation War Affairs Secretary MA Hannan for declaration of South Chittagong district unit of Mukti Joddha Command Council. Even after repeated requests, he did nothing about this," reads the note as cited by an official of Shahbagh Police Station.

"When I went to his home to get my money back, Hannan grabbed me by the neck and pushed me out of his home. That's why I am committing suicide."

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq said the joint secretary (administration) of the ministry has been assigned to find out whether Hannan misbehaved with Ayub.

"The information is necessary for the departmental inquiry."

The joint secretary will also probe if there was any illegal exchange of money regarding the formation of the South Chittagong district unit. He has been given three days for the assignment, the minister said.

Yesterday, Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said they were verifying the authenticity of the suicide note. "We will collect handwritings of the victim from his family," he said.

Asked whether police will interrogate Hannan, the OC said they will but not now.

As the door of the hotel room was closed from inside and the note bore a seal of the freedom fighter's name engraved on it and his several signatures, it might be authentic, a police official told this newspaper preferring anonymity.

On Tuesday, victim's cousin Amir Hossain filed an unnatural death case with Shahbagh Police Station. It is under investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Special Branch of police and Shahbagh police.

HANNAN'S STATEMENT

Refuting the allegations, Hannan in a statement on Wednesday claimed that he did not even know Ayub. He also denied receiving any money from any freedom fighter or insulting anyone.

The declaration of the Chittagong (South) district unit is under the jurisdiction of the Mukti Joddha Sangsad Central Command Council. The ministry or any individual has nothing to do in this regard and it is not believable that anyone would visit the residence of the secretary over the issue, he added.

Malaysia hopes to be a signatory to Obama's legacy-defining Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which would link a dozen countries, cover 40 percent of the world economy and form a central element of this strategic shift towards Asia.

But a congressional source with knowledge of the decision told Reuters on Wednesday the administration had approved the upgraded status. A second source familiar with the matter confirmed the decision.

Some US lawmakers and human-rights advocates had expected Malaysia to remain on Tier 3 this year given its slow pace of convictions in human-trafficking cases and pervasive trafficking in industries such as electronics and palm oil.

This year's full State Department report, including details on each country's efforts to combat human trafficking, is expected to be released next week.

State Department spokesman John Kirby said the report was still being finalised and that "it would be premature to speculate on any particular outcome."

Obama visited Malaysia in April 2014 to cement economic and security ties. Malaysia is the current chair of the

10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It is seeking to promote unity within the bloc in the face of China's increasingly assertive pursuits of territorial claims in the South China Sea, an object of US criticism.

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