



PHOTO: STAR

Unlike earlier time, Nilsagar, a large water body at Dhobadanga village in Nilphamari district hardly sees any winter migratory birds this season, as the natural surroundings became repulsive to the graceful creatures following construction works and felling of quite a few giant trees as part of the authorities' initiative to attract more visitors.

Birds unimpressed by Nilsagar sanctuary

Protection destroys favourite habitat

TEAM ASADUZZAMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Octogenarian Bishumuddin Mia of Nilphamari's Dhobadanga village isn't old enough to recall when the large tank once called Binna Dighi was constructed. What he does remember is that until a few years ago the picturesque water body 16 kilometres northwest of Nilphamari town hosted a multitude of migratory birds each winter, of at least eight to ten species. But this winter there are very few birds to be seen.

"There were all sorts of trees," says Mia, "banyans, blackberries, kadams, mangoes, jackfruits, dumurs and others, many over a century old. The birds used to eat the fruit and roost in them of night."

The tank, which features a temple on one side and a Muslim shrine on the other and is considered sacred by both Muslims and Hindus, suffered the major misfortune of being declared a bird sanctuary.

Where once the chirping of thousands of birds from as far away as Siberia used to entertain visitors, who were equally enchanted by the large flocks circling in the sky, after the

sanctuary was declared the birds stopped coming.

The plan for a sanctuary was initiated after a visit to Binna Dighi by then state minister for land Rashed Mosharraf in 1999. The state minister was impressed by the spectacle of the birds and the reasonable accessibility to the site by road, such that after his visit a project was undertaken to develop a bird sanctuary to include the 33 acres including the waterhole with an additional 20.9 acres of surrounding land. About Tk one crore was made available for this purpose, with the tank's name changed to Nilsagar, literally 'The Blue Sea.'

"It was then the environmental disaster began," says local journalist Shamsul Islam who resides nearby. The decisions to construct roads around the tank and a rest house that clutters the tank shore; and to fell indigenous trees, upset the ecological balance.

Disregarding the advice of ornithologists, authorities planted saplings of foreign species like shishu, mahogany and eucalyptus. Not only were saplings no substitute for the century-old trees that had been

felled, but the birds do not like trees they are unused to. The new trees could provide neither shelter nor food for the birds, Islam says.

Indeed, ornithologists warned that the migratory birds, which used to arrive in early November and stay until the start of April, favour local fruit and will not even perch or rest on unfamiliar tree species. But the warning was unheeded.

Nirmal Chakraborty, current Nilsagar caretaker, says the few migratory birds that do arrive these days, shelter in local-variety trees situated in neighbouring villages, rather than in the planted species at the tank.

Head of the zoology department of Nilphamari Government College, Professor Abdul Latif, who is also a prominent bird watcher, says a recent survey also identified the use of insecticides in surrounding croplands as a problem. With many insects eliminated a food source for many birds has been thus reduced.

Nilsagar now has a pretty name but the site is less serene than ever. The concrete structures and the rumbling of vehicles leave not only the

birds but many visitors and locals unimpressed.

Although Rafiqul Islam, the then chairman of Grogam union in which the pond lies, claims that only dead trees were felled on the directive of the district administration, what was once a busy winter habitat for birds has been lost. On a recent visit it was observed that the number of birds swimming, flying and scavenging around the pond was very low.

Current District Commissioner Zakir Hossain, who is also head of the Nilsagar development committee, says that the importance of local tree varieties has been realised, and the government arranged a few years ago to plant those. It is hoped these replacement local trees will encourage the birds back sometime in the future.

He also says the Nilsagar development committee has sent a project proposal to Dhaka with a proposed expenditure of Tk 11.70 crore to turn Nilsagar into a unique tourist site, with 2016 being the United Nations declared world tourism year. Let's hope that this time around, the migratory birds agree.

THAKURGAON, PANCHAGARH Late blight disease worries potato growers

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Potato growers of Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts are worried due to attack of late blight disease at different villages of the two northern districts.

Leaf blight is a fungal disease, locally known as 'patamora rog'. If immediate steps are not taken, leaves of the affected plants crumple, turn blackish, and die shortly, said Arshed Ali, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Thakurgaon.

"The disease appeared due to cold and foggy weather and fluctuation in temperature between day and night. To check the disease, we are suggesting farmers to spray on their potato fields two gram of Mencozeb or Metalexyl medicine mixed with one litre of water once a week," he said.

He claimed that the situation is still under control.

During a recent visit to Yakubpur, Farabari, Chameshwari, Balia and Rahimanpur villages under Thakurgaon Sadar upazila and Moidandighi, Sipaipara and Sakoa villages in Boda upazila of Panchagarh district, this correspondent saw many late blight affected potato fields.

Frequent use of medicine adds to the production cost, said several

farmers, who were seen spraying medicine to save the crop.

"I cultivated potato on two bighas (one bigha = .3306 acres) of land, spending about Tk 60 thousand, but a portion of the plants got damaged by the disease. As per suggestion of experts, I sprayed medicine on the field to save the remaining crop," said Koileshwar

Barman, 35, of Yakubpur village.

He had also incurred loss of Tk 45,000 by cultivating early variety of potato as the seeds rotted after 20/25 days of sowing seeds, he said, adding that many other early potato growers of the area faced the same this season.

This season 23,080 hectares of land has been

brought under potato cultivation against the target of 21,800 hectares in Thakurgaon while in Panchagarh, the cultivation area is 8,680 hectares of land against the target of 9,505 hectares.

The DAE had set production targets of 4.38 lakh 370 tonnes and 1.80 lakh 773 tonnes of potato in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts



PHOTO: STAR

A potato field affected by late blight disease at Yakubpur village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

AL office torched in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Unidentified criminals torched an Awami League (AL) office at Chandmuhaz Bazar in Gokul union of Bogra Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Ali Reza Toton, president of the Gokul union unit of AL, said the criminals tied up the night guard Dholu Mia and entered the office by breaking open the door. They set fire to the furniture and other things and took away the colour-TV set of the office, he added.

Hearing screams of the night guard, locals rushed to the office, put out the fire and rescued the night guard, Toton further said.

Contacted, Shabbir Ahmed Sarfaraj, assistant superintendent of police (A Circle) of Bogra, said they are investigating the matter and trying to arrest the culprits.

BANDARBAN SADAR HOSPITAL Lone ambulance lies unrepaired for a year

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

The only ambulance of Bandarban Sadar Hospital has been lying unrepaired for the last year as many of its parts have been damaged, causing patients suffering, particularly during emergencies.

Hospital sources said the government allotted the ambulance and a driver for the hospital around fourteen years ago. The ambulance used to transport around 60 patients a month, hospital sources said.

"Around 50,000 people of the upazila, mostly from poor families, totally depend on that hospital. Patients have to suffer when they are referred to Chittagong Medical College Hospital in an emergency," said Kyaw

Shwe Hla, chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC).

"We informed the civil surgeon's office about the problem several times but they are yet to resolve it," said Prabir Chandra Banik, a resident medical officer of the hospital.

The government rate for using an ambulance is between Tk 3,000 and Tk 3,300 for travelling to Chittagong from Bandarban, while private hospitals charge up to Tk 7,500, hospital sources said.

The government ambulance service is free for pregnant women.

Among others, one Tapon Kanti Barua recently struggled to take his wife, who suffered a heart attack, to Chittagong Medical College Hospital because there was no ambulance

service.

Dr Anup Dewan, civil surgeon of the hospital, said the entire health care service is facing problems due to unavailability of an ambulance, and their is no immediate solution.

Ambulances of the fire service unit and Bandarban Municipality have also been out of service for a long time as they are also damaged, officials of the two departments said.

Contacted, Ranodir Datto, the station master of Bandarban fire service unit, said "The only ambulance of the department has been out of service for a long time, and if any fire fighter is critically injured during his work it will be tough for us to carry him to a hospital."



PHOTO: STAR

Secretary of the Ministry of Land Mesbaul Alam hands over the manually prepared map of 36 former Indian enclaves in Panchagarh district to the Director General of Land Record and Survey Directorate Abdul Jalil at a programme held at the deputy commissioner's office yesterday.

Digital survey in ex-enclaves of Panchagarh starts today

Primary survey map handed over to land directorate DG

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Land Secretary Mesbaul Alam yesterday handed over the manually prepared map based on the primary land survey of erstwhile 36 enclaves in Panchagarh district to the director general of Land Record Directorate, prior to the digital survey of the lands starting today.

A total of 11,932.74 acres of land with the ownership of 25,373 people were recorded in the 36 erstwhile enclaves during the first phase of the land survey conducted from October 15 to November 15 last year, speakers said at a programme held on the occasion at the deputy commissioner's office yesterday.

The second phase of the

survey, to be conducted digitally, will be completed within July this year, they said.

The aim of the survey is to officially hand over land ownership to the people of the former enclaves after determination of possession and examination of land documents, they added.

The district administration had formed three com-

mittees headed by the UNOs concerned to conduct land survey in the 36 former enclaves in Panchagarh Sadar, Boda and Debiganj upazilas.

A total of 18 teams conducted land survey simultaneously in all 111 former Indian enclaves in Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat districts, sources said.

Jubo League leader found murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

A Jubo League leader was found murdered at Naikathi village under Rajapur upazila of the district on Monday.

The deceased is Mohsin Jamader, 45, organising secretary of Jubo League ward unit committee of Sauria union and son of late Motaleb Jamader of the village, said Harun ur Rahsid, officer-in-charge (OC) of Rajapur Police Station.

Mohsin had an illicit relationship with Maksuda, a widow of his village, said a neighbour of Mohsin.

Being informed, police went to the village, recovered the body from Maksuda's house and arrested her, the OC said, adding that Mohsin might have been murdered as two daughters of Maksuda and their husbands did not like the relationship.

"After taking sleeping pills, Mohsin came to my house at night and died after sometime," Maksuda said.

The body was sent to Jhalakathi Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.



PHOTO: STAR

The lone ambulance of Bandarban Sadar Hospital has remained inoperative due to lack of repair for the last one year.