

That wild elephant tranquillised

Preparations on to bring it to Bangabandhu Safari Park

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

The wild elephant which entered Bangladesh from India on June 27 was tranquillised in Sarishabari upazila of Jamalpur yesterday.

Sayed Hossain, veterinary surgeon of the forest department's wildlife division, tranquillised the animal with a metal dart around 2:00pm in Koyra village.

When the animal was tranquillised, it started jumping madly and fell into a pond at one stage.

Later, members of the elephant rescue team with the help of locals took the animal to a field from the pond. The animal first regained consciousness around 3:00pm and it was again administered medicine to make it unconscious, said Khalilur Rahman, forest official of Sarishabari.

The elephant recovered consciousness again around 6:00pm. The animal was being treated, he said.

The place where the elephant was is about one kilometre away from the

Kamrabad road, the forest official added.

"We are now planning on how to bring the elephant to the road. It will take time to bring the elephant there," said Sayeed, who is in the 17-member elephant rescue team of Bangladesh forest department.

"After taking it to the road, the animal will be lifted onto a truck by a crane to carry it to Bangabandhu Safari Park [in Gazipur]," he added.

A joint rescue team comprising forest and veterinary officials from Bangladesh and India started the rescue operation on August 4. But they did not get a suitable place to tranquillise the animal.

After a meeting with high officials of Bangladesh forest department, a three-member elephant rescue team of Assam's forest department left Dhaka on August 9, said forest officials.

The Bangladeshi team had been following the animal to tranquillise it since August 7.

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The wild elephant that came from India on June 27 was tranquillised at Koyra village in Jamalpur's Sarishabari upazila yesterday. The animal had got separated from its herd in Assam and entered Kurigram, floating with the currents of the Brahmaputra.

PHOTO: ABM AMINUL ISLAM

18,000 businesses

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lines of the establishments.

Most of these businesses -- restaurants, hotels, guesthouses and various retailers -- are in Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani and Uttara. The number of guesthouses and hotels would be about 500, according to an estimate of a hotel and restaurant owners' association.

They all face closure unless they relocate to commercial areas.

However, businesses asked why government agencies, such as the city corporations, utility service providers and VAT offices, issued them trade licences, supplied electricity and provided other services at commercial rates when they were not allowed to do business in residential areas in the first place.

Some questioned Rajuk's silence when the business establishments started running in its residential neighborhoods.

"It was the duty of the government authorities to stop the opening of any commercial entities at the very beginning. People may have a tendency to violate rules but there are authorities to enforce the law," said an in-charge of a store near Gulshan-1 intersection, wishing to remain unnamed. "A huge number of people will lose their jobs."

The reaction came a day after a Rajuk mobile court closed a couple of retailers on Gulshan South Avenue for failure to produce permits for commercial activities.

"This will be a burden on the enterprise as the overall income will decline. Sales at other showrooms will not pick up even if all of us worked there," said Nani Gopal Bhowmik, store in-charge of Shatarupa Department Store Gulshan outlet.

He said the outlet on Gulshan South Avenue had an average daily sale of Tk 40,000.

In the face of Rajuk drive, some businesses went to the High Court seeking stay orders against the eviction notices.

Rajuk said its drive had nothing to do with the July 1 Gulshan siege and the security concerns that followed.

Instead, the crackdown is the result of the government's previous decisions, including the one made by the cabinet on April 4, taken in the face of mushrooming commercial establishments in residential areas.

The city corporation authorities issued 3.5 lakh trade licences and a large chunk of the businesses operate in residential areas, according to data from the DNCC and the DSCC.

Prior to the cabinet decision, Rajuk had launched a drive in January against buildings in Uttara, Dhanmondi, Gulshan and Banani areas using their designated parking space for other purposes.

Rajuk has listed over 2,000 illegal structures in residential areas, mainly in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Uttara and Dhanmondi. The list is not complete, said Rajuk Chairman M Bazlul Karim Chaudhury.

Helal Uddin, former president of

Dhaka City Shop Owners Association, welcomed the authorities' move to force commercial establishments out of residential areas.

Helal, also director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said, "It must be stopped. Once it is done, no one will think of running business in residential areas in future."

But he said the government should give at least six months for the businesses that have trade licences to relocate.

Rajuk should be held accountable as well, as these businesses have grown under the regulator's watch, Helal said.

Saif Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Hotel and Guest House Owners Association, said Rajuk itself had flouted rules and turned Gulshan into a commercial area like Motijheel.

A hotel owner, wishing to remain unnamed, said a number of banks have headquarters in Gulshan instead of Motijheel. Many apparel buying houses have offices in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara areas.

The hotel owner said many foreigners, who prefer budget deals, would be in trouble if small hotels and boutiques were shut down.

The hotelier said commercial establishments were not supposed to be in residential areas, but questioned: "Why did utility agencies provide me with connections at commercial rates? Why have they given me everything to run the business? How would I know that my business here is illegal?"

"It will be unwise to close the businesses overnight because a lot of investment, jobs and bank loans are involved in the hotel and restaurant sector."

There are 500 hotel, guesthouses and restaurants in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara areas with nearly Tk 5,000 crore in investments, according to Hotel, Guest House and Restaurant Owners Association of Bangladesh.

"Before relocation, demolition of these establishments will not only affect investment and jobs, but also affect loan repayments and government revenue collection," said MH Rahman, an adviser to the association.

Fahmida Khatun, a resident of Gulshan-2, said the infiltration of commercial establishments in residential areas not only increases pressure on utility services but also compromises security.

"I do not think the policy of relocating businesses from residential areas is bad. But it should be done gradually so that livelihoods of so many people are not threatened," she said.

She said security should be the highest priority but it was also necessary to consider the needs of groceries and of foreigners who in general prefer eating out to cooking at home.

The Rajuk chairman said knocking down of illegal establishment was a continuous effort of the city developer.

"We have not given any permission for non-residential buildings in residen-

tial areas ... It is clearly defined which one is residential and which one is commercial area. If anyone builds a non-residential building in a residential area, Rajuk will not take that responsibility," he said.

As to why Rajuk did not take action when such establishments sprouted, he said it was true that Rajuk had weaknesses.

"It may be that Rajuk should have taken action. But it is also the question of abiding by the law. Those who have done this have done knowingly. They did not come to us at that time," he said.

He admitted that it was not right for other agencies to give utility connections without examining the occupancy certificates from Rajuk or issue trade licences.

"It is true that we have a number of deviations. But will these continue? We should stop it and all should cooperate so that we can," he said.

Bazlul said Rajuk nearly a month ago placed proposals to declare some of the roads in Gulshan and Uttara as commercial areas. "Discussion is on at the policy level. We may consider more [areas] in future," he said.

Asked if businesses, especially the small ones, would be given time to relocate, he said Rajuk would go by the law.

Desco Managing Director Md Shahid Sarwar said Desco launched a drive in November-December last year against those using electricity for commercial purposes but had a residential plan.

"We now ask building users for occupancy certificates issued by Rajuk as we see many non-residential establishments such as hotels, restaurants in residential areas," said Shahid.

As to why Desco provided connections for commercial purposes in residential buildings, he said it had initially given connections to residential establishments but imposed commercial tariff after finding out that the structures were used for commercial purposes.

If Desco moves to disconnect power supply, a section of users will go to court seeking stay orders, he said.

As to why Desco did not cut the lines for violation of rules or did not ask for occupancy certificates before imposing commercial tariff, Shahid said many of the connections were given when the now-defunct Dhaka Electric Supply Authority was responsible for issuing the connections.

"Now we are not giving such connections." Besides, it was the duty of Rajuk to look into how such commercial activities went on, he said.

ATM Shamsul Huda, president of Gulshan Society, said what was happening in Gulshan, Banani and parts of Baridhara was complex.

"As a society we want to see residential area as residential area. This is our prime goal so that residents can live peacefully. It is also the goal of Rajuk. But the problem arises when various contradictions exist," he said.

"I cannot understand how they could go to heaven as they [terrorists and militants] are killing people, creating unrest, defying the Holy Quran and the directives of our Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH)," she said.

The PM called upon the Alem-Ulema to find out ways to bring back

Worries, uncertainty

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They, however, said shifting those institutions, which have a lot of stakeholders and been operating in the area for long, would be a mammoth task, and it would require time.

Meanwhile, the government move aimed at the relocation has created much anxiety among the guardians and teachers who said they would be in deep trouble if the schools, colleges, and universities are shifted from Dhanmondi.

"What would we do if my children's school is shifted? And where should the school go in this already packed city?" said Sejuti Rahman, a mother of two sons studying at the Maple Leaf International School.

Her husband's office is in Banani but they have been living in a rented flat in Dhanmondi since 2008 only because of their children's education.

"If the school is relocated, we'll have to change our home, and it will be a great hassle," she said.

Reaz Uddin, a local, said, "Like Rome was not built in a day, Dhanmondi residential area did not turn into a commercial area overnight."

"Successive governments either allowed or ignored the issue when commercial entities as well as hospitals and educational institutions sprang up to meet the demand of the burgeoning population in the area," he said.

"Now this new decision of the government to uproot these institutions would simply throw thousand of children's academic life into uncertainty," said Reaz, who has a son studying at a school running in the area since 1972.

Maksudur Rahman, who lives on Road 8/A in Dhanmondi, said, "I don't know why trade licences were given to the institutions which are in this residential area. I am not sure how the schools would be able to relocate in such a short time." The government should reconsider the matter, he added.

A senior teacher of Dhanmondi Tutorial, an English-medium school, said, "Where would we relocate our institution to? It is an educational institution, not a shop that could be kept closed for a month and then relocated to another place."

"It is quite difficult to shift such a school all of a sudden," he said.

Currently, some 1,300 students are studying at three branches of the school, he added.

Abul Quasem Haider, founder chairman of Eastern University, said it would not be possible for the institutions to shift to another place in just seven days. The university on Road-3 in Dhanmondi got the DSCC notice on July 19.

He said they were building their permanent campus and would be able to go there in a year.

According to a Rajuk official, when Dhanmondi started its journey as a planned residential area in late 1950s, it had only three schools.

But over the decades, Dhanmondi has evolved into an affluent residential area, having a huge number of residents, schools, colleges, and private universities and these have eventually damaged the residential character of the area, said the official.

In 2012, the High Court (HC) declared illegal all commercial operations in Dhanmondi following a writ petition by the Dhanmondi Residential Welfare Association.

The court also directed the authorities to remove such institutions from the area.

It, however, exempted the commercial establishments at Mirpur Road, Satmasjid Road, Dhanmondi-2 and Dhanmondi-27 from its order as they had already been declared as commercial areas.

On this August 1, the Supreme Court upheld the HC verdict. However, the full text of the verdict has not been released yet.

On Tuesday, MA Matin Chowdhury, general secretary of Dhanmondi Residential Welfare Association, said the commercial entities would have to shift their businesses on their own.

More than 300 commercial establishments are now operating in Dhanmondi residential area and of them, 56 are schools and some 8 to 10 are colleges and universities, he told The Daily Star.

These institutions have around 40,000 students, Matin said.

"Our lawyer will serve notices to them giving specific time for relocation. If they do not shift within the given time, we will file a petition seeking action against them on charge of contempt of court," he added.

On April 7, LGRD and Cooperatives

Minister Khandker Mosharrar Hossain at a press briefing said any commercial entity in the government-approved residential areas is illegal and they must go within six months from April 4 as per a cabinet decision.

The minister termed educational institutions both "service oriented and commercial entities" and said measures would be taken based on the opinions of the locals.

Mostafa Kamal, chief revenue officer of the DSCC, said they started serving notices to the illegal commercial establishments in Dhanmondi residential area after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

"It is a continuous process and we will serve notice to all of them. We have given a specific timeframe, and if they do not relocate by that time, actions would be taken as per the law," he told The Daily Star.

Asked, he said many of the institutions got trade licences due to a "fault in the system".

Visiting the area, this newspaper saw that signboards of some of the schools there had already been removed. A few other schools were shifting their campuses.

On Monday, the Maple Leaf International School was shifting one of its campuses from Road 11/A in Dhanmondi as per the SC verdict.

Ali Karam Reza, principal of the school, said they received a notice from the DSCC on August 4.

"It is the students who will face the problem in the long run. Where would such a huge number of students go?" he said.

The school has over 5,000 students and 400 teachers at its 12 campuses, he said.

"The notice gave us just seven days for relocation. Is it possible to do such a thing in seven days?" said the principal, adding that they would obey the SC order.

He, however, said the English Medium School Owners Forum would discuss the matter and take further decision.

GM Nizam Uddin, secretary general of the Bangladesh English Medium School Association, said the association members held a meeting recently, and decided to seek time from the government for the relocation.

Priyobhashinee recognised

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Priyobhashinee as she gave her reaction to The Daily Star.

"Any kind of recognition brings happiness and so I am happy. This recognition means a lot to me."

Priyobhashinee also expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haq for giving her the honour.

Before her, 122 women were honoured as freedom fighters by the government in phases.

The government for the first time in October last year recognised 41 Biranganas as freedom fighters.

Over 200 applications from Biranganas are now under scrutiny of Jatiya Muktiyoddha Council, the central platform of freedom fighters. The government will give them the status of freedom fighter in phases once the scrutiny is done.

At least 1.62 lakh women were raped, and another 1.31 lakh Hindu women went missing during the Liberation War, according to the War Crimes Facts and Findings Committee led by Dr M Hassan. The Hindu women are believed to have been raped and killed in the Pakistani army camps.

The process of recognising the

Biranganas as freedom fighters began following a High Court order in January 2014.

The court asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to upgrade the social status of the war heroines and to give them the state honour and facilities like freedom fighters.

Once recognised, the Biranganas will receive the benefits that freedom fighters are entitled to -- a monthly allowance of Tk 8,000 and special quotas in the government jobs and many more benefits for their children and grandchildren.

Strengthen anti-militancy awareness

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created among the countrymen and it's very much essential to strengthen this spirit against terrorism and militancy," she said.

Country's Alem-Ulema could play a very important role to this end through preaching Islam and its true lessons among common people, said the PM.

Hasina was delivering her speech at a conference titled "Terrorism and Militancy in Islam's Outlook and Our Steps" organised by Bangladesh Jamiatul Ulama at Krishibid Institution in the capital.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Religious Affairs Minister Motiur Rahman and Bangladesh Jamiatul Ulama President and Khatib of historic Sholakia Eidgah in Kishoreganj Moulana Farid Uddin Masud spoke on the occasion.

Earlier, Moulana Farid handed over to the PM a copy of the "Fatwa" against terrorism and militancy bearing the signatures of around one lakh Alems, including 10,000 female Alems.

Quoting various verses from the Holy Quran, Hasina said it could not be the lesson of Islam that anyone

would go to heaven and get "Hur Pori" through killing innocent people here.

She also mentioned that those who unleash terrorism and bring disasters are defying the message of Islam.

"I cannot understand how they could go to heaven as they [terrorists and militants] are killing people, creating unrest, defying the Holy Quran and the directives of our Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH)," she said.

The PM called upon the Alem-Ulema to find out ways to bring back

the wrongdoers to the right path. "You'll have to think and take right measures so that everyone gets right lessons of our religion."

Urging the Alem-Ulema to extensively take part in the countrywide committees being formed against terrorism and militancy, she said, "Please, create awareness among common people that the path of terrorism, militancy and killings is a wrong and unjust path and surely not the path of Islam."

Hasina said although she had earlier formed a commission to work

out the curriculum for Qawmi Madrasa, but unfortunately there has not been any consensus over it.

She said since attacks are being unleashed against the holy religion, there is an urgent need to get united and fix the curriculum for the Qawmi Madrasa with the united efforts of all.

The premier also suggested the religious affairs minister to expedite the process, adding that the number of commission members could be increased to accomplish the task.

The PM said once the curriculum is

finalised for Qawmi Madrasa, their students will be able to study in Arabic Universities and could also find better job opportunities both at home and abroad.

It is not at all acceptable to anyone that this holy religion will be maligned due to the unruly and inhuman acts of some people, she said.

The prime minister said her government has already taken a decision to build a mosque and Islamic cultural education centre in every upazila and district so that no one could misguide people by misinterpreting Islam.