

# Rampant felling of trees threatens Tanguar Haor

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Random cutting down of trees for firewood in and around Tanguar Haor, the 100km wetland in Sunamganj, is slowly destroying its ecosystem.

The area was declared a Ramsar Site, a wetland site designated of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, on January 20, 2000. Tanguar Haor is the second natural wildlife habitat in Bangladesh to be declared a Ramsar Site; the first is the Sundarbans.

The haor has also been declared an Ecologically Critical Area by the government in 1999 and it was to be protected by a committee, formed in 2003 by the district administration.

But over the years, the committee has apparently failed to protect the haor. Locals fish there and hunt birds without any permits and the place is flooded with tourists throughout the year.

However, indiscriminate cutting down of trees in the area has caused the most damage, environmentalists said.

During a recent visit to the haor, this correspondent found that a huge

number of trees had been cut down from the reserved areas, even from those adjacent to the watch towers built to protect the haor.

According to the administration and environment conservation sites, there are a good number of rare trees in the swamp forest. Hijol (*Barringtonia acutangula*) and Charach (*Pongamia pinnata*) are the main plants of the wetland which have little value as timber but are used as firewood.

Shofiqul Alam, convener of Sunamganj Paribesh Andolon, said locals cut down trees for firewood but the authorities have never been able to control it.

He claimed that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has worked for years here alongside the district administration to develop co-management of the haor to protect the wetland but have failed to do anything and the indiscriminate tree cutting has increased over the years.

Trees are important for the wetland as they are the source of food and shelter for birds. The natural beauty of the haor is also dependent on trees.

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Stumps of two felled trees at Tanguar Haor of Sunamganj are testimonies to rampant theft of trees there. Plants like Hizal and Karach had been abundant at the haor but their numbers have been dwindling as locals use trees as firewood, thanks to poor surveillance. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Accused 'admits' killing Uttara schoolboy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An accused in the sensational murder case of ninth-grader Adnan Kabir yesterday "confessed" to a Dhaka court that he along with some 18-20 members of Disco Group and some others hired by them killed the teenager.

They beat and stabbed Adnan to death to take revenge on him for attacking a member of Disco Group earlier, court sources told The Daily Star quoting accused Mehrab Hossain as saying.

Metropolitan Magistrate Amirul Haider Chowdhury recorded Mehrab's statement in the afternoon before sending the 15-year-old to jail.

Shahin Miah, sub-inspector of Uttara West Police Station, said they have so far arrested three suspects, including Mehrab, in connection

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## B'BARIA ATTACK Expelled AL leader remanded

A CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A Brahmanbaria court yesterday placed expelled local Awami League leader Suruj Ali, a key suspect who allegedly orchestrated the Nasiragar hate attacks on October 30 last year, on a two-day remand over the incident.

The court of Brahmanbaria Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Shafiqul Islam passed the order after the investigators produced him before the court seeking seven days' remand, said court sources.

Earlier on Monday, investigators produced him before a Brahmanbaria court seeking remand in a case filed for carrying out an attack on local Gour temple, but the court ordered to send him to jail due to lack of necessary documents, Brahmanbaria Court Inspector Mahbubur Rahman and the court sources said.

Detectives in Brahmanbaria arrested Suruj, who was terminated from the post of Chapartola union AL president for his alleged involvement in the October 30 hate attacks, from a house in Chapartola union of Nasiragar upazila around 8:15pm Sunday night.

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## Tigers look to show character on green top

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"Which one, is it the second wicket?" Taylor quipped before taking questions with a satisfied smile on his face. He was actually looking for a personal milestone.

Bangladesh pace bowler Taskin Ahmed also had a media session at the same place and the subject of a green top was understandably inspiring for him. After all, this type of wicket, if it stays like this for another 48 hours before the first Test on Thursday morning (4:00am Bangladesh time), is a pace bowler's dream; especially for someone who has grown up and honed his skill on those greyish sub-continent wickets.

But Taskin's excitement has little to do with the meagre returns for the Tigers in these conditions and especially on the very ground which is infamous for being very windy.

Bangladesh have previously played two Test matches here and duly lost

both games by an innings and some considerable runs. Akram Khan, now chairman of cricket operations of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, still recalls his experience of the 2001 Test, which he was a part of.

"We batted for just over a session in each innings and bowled for two days. It was tough for us at that time," Akram recalled.

His nephew, Tamim Iqbal, made his Test debut when Bangladesh made their second trip to New Zealand in 2008. Tamim had a brilliant debut in Dunedin, scoring half-centuries in both innings in a match Bangladesh lost by nine wickets. But the left-hander could not do that well in Wellington in the second Test and Bangladesh suffered yet another heavy innings defeat.

A more mature Tamim returns for a second shot at the Basin Reserve and while reflecting on his first trip here he recalled how strong the wind was at

that time.

"I was batting and suddenly the wind pushed me a couple of steps forward."

Tamim suffered a thumb injury in the third T20I on Sunday, and although there was no fracture, it was still swollen when he faced a few throwdowns in the nets yesterday. He also faced a few deliveries from the bowlers and there was still some pain. The team management will know for sure if Bangladesh's most accomplished Test batsman will play the first Test today. His likely opening partner Imrul Kayes, who appeared to damage his knee after running into a boundary board during the same match, has been cleared for the match.

And as far as the record is concerned this is the most challenging venue for Bangladesh, who scored 132 and 135 in 2001, before making 143 and 113 in 2008.

Of course Bangladesh have become more mature now. And they will have

almost the same batting line-up that performed very well on their last visit in 2010 for a one-off Test at Hamilton, where they took the game into the fifth day. Mahmudullah scored a brilliant 115 and Shakib Al Hasan hit 87 in a first-innings total of 408. Shakib then went on to score a brilliant 100 on the fifth day to give the Black Caps a bit of a fright.

But after a 6-0 defeat in the shorter formats, the biggest challenge for Bangladesh is for their batting to come to the party, especially their experienced top order which has failed to deliver both in the ODIs and T20Is.

Mushfiqur was right to say that Bangladesh's main challenge would be for the batsman to set the tone for the bowlers to fight.

"If we can put up enough runs on the board in both innings it will help our bowlers to defend. And it is very important for us to show that character," said the skipper.

## Delay, cost rise still major concern

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their implementation was also one of the reasons for delays and cost escalations of other projects.

Expansion of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, known as the economic lifeline of the country, into dual carriageway drastically reduced travel time between the capital and the Chittagong Port.

The highway facilitates smooth transport of export-import goods and has been a big boost for trade and economy.

Similarly, upgrading the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway and Chandra-Nabinagar and Ashulia-Chandra roads into dual carriageways has eased congestion.

However, people were not getting full benefits of the improved road network as the government failed to maintain discipline on the roads.

Haphazard parking, illegal occupation of roads, and reckless driving were hampering traffic flow.

Experts noted that five flyovers built in the capital is a piecemeal solution, not a coordinated one, and it would never solve the traffic problem. They feared that the city's traffic situation would further deteriorate.

After a couple of years of delay, the construction of the country's first Metro Rail, a 21km stretch between Uttara and Motijheel, is

now on. If finished by 2021, as scheduled, Metro Rail would help reduce city traffic.

The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project was taken up over five years ago for a faster bus service between Joydevpur and Sadarghat.

Recently, its construction work was inaugurated but the length of the BRT has been reduced. It would be between Joydevpur and Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

The Dhaka Elevated Expressway, a public private partnership project, appeared to be the most disappointing one.

The future of the 20km expressway, from the airport to Shanir Akhra, near the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, is still uncertain largely due to funding issues.

Construction of the much-talked about Padma Bridge, a top priority of the government, is going on in full swing and is scheduled to be completed at the end of next year. It will connect 21 southern districts to the capital.

The bridge will also boost export-import through the Mongla Port and economists predict one percent growth in the GDP because of this.

Work on the Karnaphuli tunnel project, approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) in late

2015, has begun and it is expected to be completed by 2019.

RAIL

Rail services slightly improved as the government bought a good number of locomotives, carriages, and wagons and built new lines. But the railway failed to implement some major projects.

The AL government launched a number of projects in 2009 and 2010 to improve the once-neglected rail sector under a 20-year Rail Master Plan in 2011.

A total of 43 projects are currently in the pipeline and progress of most of these is sluggish due to what the rail officials said fund crisis and shortage of manpower. They did not mention mismanagement and inefficiency in implementing projects.

In the last eight years, the government constructed 120km of new rail lines and upgraded 200km single-gauge line into dual-gauge and about 800km rail lines were mended.

Besides, some 50 locomotives and 500 wagons have been added to the fleet, helping introduce about 100 new passenger and freight trains.

Experts and rail officials said people would have to wait for years to get better rail services.

In July 2012, the government decided to build the third and fourth rail lines between Dhaka and

Joydevpur as the capacity of the existing two lines was used up. Hardly any progress was made in this regard.

The government now focuses on the construction of two new rail lines --one from Dhaka to Jessore via Mawa and Bhanga, and the other from Joydevpur to Payra Port via Dhaka, Mawa and Bhanga.

It signed two MoUs with a Chinese company and a British company.

On many occasions, the rail minister, officials and AL leaders said the government would build the Dhaka-Bhanga rail line via Mawa for inauguration in December 2018 along with the Padma Bridge.

However, it is almost certain that the rail line will not be ready for service when the bridge opens.

The construction of Dohazari-Ramu-Cox's Bazar and Ramu to Gundum, on the border with Myanmar, dual-gauge rail line project is stalled due to funding issues and land-acquisition related complications.

The project has been stalled since the Ecne approved it in July 2010.

Similarly, Khulna-Mongla rail line, and a new dual-gauge Dhaka-Narayanganj rail line saw only over 24 and three percent progress in the last two years.

## City commuters

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Apart from the public transport, the number of cars in the streets was fewer than that of the usual days.

Asked about the transport crisis, the operators said many of their vehicles were reserved for the rally participants.

Around 6,000 buses ply the city streets every day, according to the Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association.

Asked, its leaders could not tell the exact number of buses which were reserved for the AL men.

Commuters' suffering in this city is nothing new. They suffer almost every time there is a major political programme at any part of the city.

On January 4, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader expressed regret about public sufferings caused due to a Chhatra League rally.

However, the incident has repeated again.

Yesterday, hundreds of people were seen waiting for buses in Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Bangla Motor and Kataban areas.

At Bangla Motor, Mohammad Milon, who was looking for a ride to Sadarghat Launch Terminal, said, "I have been waiting for a bus for nearly an hour. Though a few of the buses came, I could not board them as I am carrying a lot of bags."

Many of yesterday's sufferers expressed their frustration in the social media.

Shafayat Ullah, a lawyer who also teaches law at a college, in his Facebook status wrote that he was stuck on the Khilgaon flyover while heading for his home in Gulshan from the High Court area.

"Finding the streets towards Moghbazar blocked, I took the Khilgaon flyover to reach Hatirjheel. Now I'm stuck on the Khilgaon flyover," he wrote, suggesting that the government should consider "declaring public holidays on important days like yesterday to ease public agony".

Syed Mostafa Tutul, a businessman who lives in Banani, told The Daily Star that he cancelled his meeting at an office in Motijheel area in fear of traffic gridlock.

Traffic was a nightmare for many people who were taking their relatives to hospitals by ambulances and other vehicles.

Asma and Shohag, a couple, while taking their newborn baby to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a CNG-run auto-rickshaw remained stuck on the Jatrabari flyover for over an hour.

"My baby has breathing problem. I am really worried about my baby's health," she told this correspondent on the flyover.

## HC yet to dispose of three rules

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Daily Star yesterday that he did not know the current status of the HC rules.

Advocate Manzill Murshid, who moved one of the writ petitions upon which the HC issued a rule, said that in the petition his clients prayed to the HC to direct the law enforcers to ensure proper protection of a detained accused taken along on a drive to recover arms.

The HC might give directives in line with the prayer made in the petition if it could hear the rule and give a judgment, he added.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, the lawyer said he would pray to the court for steps to hold hearing on the writ petition at a convenient time.

Manzill, also president of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh

(HRPB), had earlier said the government, political leaders and law enforcers should reach a consensus to stop extrajudicial killings in law enforcers' custody.

Following a writ petition filed by the HRPB, the HC bench of Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Justice Mamnoon Rahman on August 6, 2006 issued a rule upon the government, the police and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to explain in three weeks why they should not be directed to ensure protection of people kept in custody.

Killings in custody are taking place in the name of "crossfire" or "encounter" in violation of the rule of law and the constitution that guarantees security of people, the petition said.

It added that many people were killed in "crossfire" in different districts in 2005 and at the beginning of 2006.

During the hearing on the petition, Manzill told the HC that about 500 people had reportedly fallen victims to extrajudicial killings in Rapid Action Battalion's custody.

He also told this correspondent that the government replies to an HC rule when the court fixes a date for its hearing.

Khurshid Alam Khan, a Supreme Court lawyer and editor of Dhaka Law Reports, earlier told The Daily Star that the HC might have given some guidelines about protection of an accused in custody if the hearings were held.

The people would have known whether extrajudicial killings were really taking place or not had the government replied to the HC rules and if the hearings were held, he said.

Khurshid added the replies to the HC rules were not given due to lack of coordination between the attorney

general's office and the government.

On June 28, 2009, the HC issued a rule upon the government to explain within four weeks why extrajudicial killings in "crossfire" or "encounter" involving law enforcement agencies should not be declared illegal.

The court also asked the government to explain why departmental and punitive actions should not be taken against those responsible for such killings in custody, or elsewhere.

The HC bench of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Quamrul Islam Siddique issued the rule upon a writ petition filed jointly by three rights organisations -- Ain o Salish Kendra, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust and Karmojibi Nari.

Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain is now a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

The writ petition was filed with the HC, stating that at least 969 people were killed in custody, or in "crossfire" or in "encounter" involving law enforcement agencies across the country since 2004, in violation of the constitution and provisions of law.

Petitioners' lawyer barrister Saifur Rashid told The Daily Star yesterday that the HC bench did not hold hearing on the rule as the government had taken time from it, and later on the jurisdiction of the judges of the bench was changed by the then chief justice.

On November 16, 2009, the HC bench of Justice AFM Abdur Rahman and Justice Md Emdadul Haque Azad issued a suo moto rule asking the government to explain the extrajudicial killings within 48 hours.

The judges issued the rule after Lutfur Rahman Khalasi and his young

ger brother Khairul Haque Khalasi, who were operatives of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party, were killed in a "shootout" with Rab in Madaripur Sadar upazila.

In the rule, the court directed the government to explain why proper action should not be taken against Rab officials Major Wahiduzzaman and Lieutenant Hasan and their companions for the killing of Lutfur and Khairul in custody.

Besides, the court asked the Rab director general to give an explanation in this regard.

On December 9, 2009, the attorney general's office told the HC that no incident of extrajudicial killing took place under Rab custody in Madaripur.

After some days, the jurisdiction of the judges of the bench was reconstituted by the then chief justice.