

# Ancient tamarind tree, a community's pride

RABIUL HASAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Long ago in Chapainawabganj, potentially during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, whether by gravity's force or human hand a humble tamarind seed met the soil. Half a millennium later, that majestic tree which sprouted and grew in Surola village in Nachole upazila still bears fruit. It is likely the country's oldest tamarind tree.

"The tree hasn't changed in generations," says a local elderly woman, Kusum Begum. "My mother saw it in the same condition."

"From April every year, hundreds of cranes arrive," notes another local, Soshthi Chandra Pramanik, 65. "They build nests in the tamarind tree and raise chicks there. Only when the chicks are sufficiently mature do the parent cranes fly away. Parrots and owls also find safety in the tree. Nobody in this area hunts birds."

Kalpani Rani who also lives nearby is in the habit of sweeping under the tree every day to keep the area tidy. She collects its leaves. "The tree and the birds are like my children," she says, though she's not the only one in the locality to tend the tree.

Five centuries is a long journey. The Mughal Empire would reach its zenith and fall; the British would arrive; the years of East Pakistan would end. Since 1971 the tamarind tree has been gracing the roadside fifteen kilometres from the district town in a liberated Bangladesh, symbolically, on public land.

Five centuries is a long journey, but the story of the tamarind is much longer. Believed to be a species endemic to tropical Africa, the tamarind was first introduced to South Asia many thousands of years ago. Its tasty fruit and useful wood encouraged people to let it flourish, so much so that the tamarind is often considered a native species. Indeed the English word stems from the Arabic "tamar Hind", meaning "Indian date".

It's not only political upheaval the tree has witnessed. It has weathered each season through drought and rain. Forty-five years ago the tree's largest boughs succumbed to a storm, but the tree lives.

Villagers are proud of their ancient tree. They say there was once the farmhouse of a landlord in the village, and it may have been the zamindar Kunja Mohon Mitra who had a Kali temple positioned under the tree's branches. Hindus, including indigenous people, still worship Kali there; other visitors in significant numbers arrive from afar to see the tree.

Perhaps it's an attribute of fondness that it tends to extend dates. Locals will readily report that the tree is six or seven hundred years old. But according to department of agricultural extension officials, carbon dating has suggested the tree is five hundred years old. "Regardless of its precise age, this tree is ancient," the officials note. "It has social, biological, ecological and economic importance."

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4



The 500-year-old tamarind tree in Surola village in Chapainawabganj's Nachole upazila. Inset, a district administration signboard, put up nearby, describes the long past of the tamarind tree, which is probably the oldest of its kind in the country.

PHOTO: STAR

# Engine room explosion leaves 5 hurt in oil tanker

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least five crew members of an oil tanker were injured in a blast inside its engine room when the vessel was unloading at the Jamuna Oil Company Ltd depot on the Kirtankhola river last night.

Faruk Hossain, assistant director of Barisal fire service station, said six fire engines rushed to the spot in Bandh Road area of Barisal city after getting the call around 8:35pm and 25 firemen extinguished the flames around 11:20pm.

The injured crew members of MT Anchorage were sent to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

The vessel was carrying around nine lakh litres of petrol and diesel from Chittagong to Barisal depot.

The engine room was damaged and a hole had developed in its hull. The unloading of fuel continued with help of another vessel to prevent spill, Faruk said.

The explosion probably happened due to accumulation of gas in the engine room, Faruk added.

# Suspension on Farooki's Doob

FROM PAGE 16

Development Corporation (BFDC) suspended its no-objection certificate (NOC) to the film, just a day after issuing it.

The film's script was reviewed and cleared by the BFDC committee for reviewing scripts of joint venture films last year on March 8, after which the film went to production. The completed film was submitted to the committee again for review, which was screened by the committee on February 12, and a no-objection certificate was issued on February 15. However, Shaon wrote to the Bangladesh Film Censor Board (BFCB) on February 13, raising concerns about the film being made based on some incidents on Humayun Ahmed's life which could portray him in bad light, asking the censor board to review it for such instances and take action.

On February 16, just a day after issuing the NOC, the BFDC suspended it, based on a letter in this regard from the information ministry.

"What I have found from various reports is that the film's story does not reflect Humayun Ahmed's life, rather its story is based on some rumours spread by 'yellow journalists' after his death," Shaon told The Daily Star. "I have raised those concerns in my letter."

Farooki, meanwhile, said he would take the matter to court, saying there

was no basis for the suspension. "The committee that saw it had no objections about it. Then why was it suspended a day after it was cleared, and with no reasons provided?"

Although Shaon's complaint was raised to the Chairman of the Censor Board, the film had not even reached their jurisdiction. The film would go to the censor board after the BFDC committee for reviewing scripts of joint venture films cleared it, according to Munshi Jalal Uddin, secretary of the board.

Tapan Kumar Ghosh, the managing director of the BFDC, could not be reached for comments.

However, when contacted, M Aiub Ali, director (Production) of the BFDC, told The Daily Star the information ministry had requested for another review of the film, and suspend the NOC until then.

He, however, said the ministry did not raise any specific issue with the film that caused the suspension. The BFDC letter suspending the NOC also did not cite any grounds for the suspension.

M Aiub Ali also said the initial NOC was given on the basis of the information ministry's recommendation. The committee sent its report of the screening to the ministry, who gave thumbs-up for the NOC. Then on February 16 the ministry sent another letter asking for a review of the film, which is why

the NOC was suspended.

But when contacted, Martuza Ahammad, secretary of the information ministry, said he had no knowledge of the matter. "I am telling you I don't know anything about this matter, okay? Talk to the BFDC about it."

Manzurur Rahman, additional secretary (admin) of the ministry of information declined to comment on the matter, and the ministry's public relations officer was unreachable.

Shahin Ara Begum, deputy secretary (Film) of the ministry and also a member of the joint venture film review committee, said the ministry did not send a letter to suspend the NOC.

"It's not true that the ministry issued a letter to suspend it. The ministry received a complaint, and forwarded it to the BFDC asking it to review the complaint," she told The Daily Star. She, however, said she "could not remember" what the complaint specifically was or who it was from.

Bangladeshi cinema has been making waves in the Asian and international circuit over the last few years with a number of recognitions at major film festivals. Such a big project with an international star hitting a roadblock will certainly dent that growing reputation, but more importantly, such a quagmire surrounding is quite disheartening for film lovers of the country.

# Russia seeks

FROM PAGE 16

Ukraine crisis and Russia's alleged meddling in Trump's election.

On the campaign trail, Trump repeatedly praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and voiced his willingness to work with him in fighting terrorism.

But in the face of growing heat over its links to Moscow, Trump's administration appears to be backing off the warmer words used earlier for the former Cold War foe.

Exasperated and worried by Trump's calling into question long-standing foreign policy assumptions, European leaders have warned Washington not to take transatlantic ties for granted.

On a European roadshow this week, Trump's lieutenants have sought to reassure jittery allies that the administration will hold fast to existing foreign policies, including maintaining sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

Hours before Lavrov addressed the Munich Security Conference, Pence told the same forum that the United States will stay loyal to its old friends.

"The United States is and will always be your greatest ally. Be assured that President Trump and our people are truly devoted to our transatlantic union," Pence said.

The US would also not relent in pushing Russia to honour the Minsk ceasefire with Ukraine, he said.

"The United States will continue to hold Russia accountable, even as we

search for new common ground, which as you know, President Trump believes can be found," the vice-president said.

At Nato headquarters in Brussels on Thursday, Defence Secretary James Mattis said Russia must first "prove itself" and respect international law before there could be any improvement in relations strained by Moscow's Ukraine intervention and annexation of Crimea.

Mattis also said the transatlantic bond was "as strong as I've ever seen it", and emphasised that America remained "rock solid" in its support of Article 5 - Nato's core "one for all, all for one" collective defence pledge.

Likewise, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson indicated he would take a tough line in his dealings with Russia.

Following his first meeting with Lavrov in Bonn on Thursday, Tillerson said the US would cooperate with Moscow but only when doing so "will benefit the American people".

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has been a key player in mediating talks between Ukraine and Russia, said it was "regrettable" that Europe had not managed to reach a stable relationship with Russia over the last 25 years.

"I will not give up on finding a way for better relations with Russia despite our different views on many questions," she said, championing international cooperation rather than a policy of isolationism.

# Meat pricier as cattle market lessee overcharges

Allege meat traders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Beef and mutton in the capital would have been less expensive if the meat traders who buy the animals from the lone permanent cattle market at Gabtoli were not "overcharged" by the market lessee.

Demanding an end to the practice, the traders enforced a six day strike in the city that ended yesterday. Today, they are scheduled to meet the commerce minister to resolve the issue.

Robiul Alam, secretary general of Bangladesh Meat Merchant Association, claimed that city dwellers could buy beef at Tk 300 a kg instead of the current Tk 450-500 had there been no overcharging and some other issues. Mutton would have been Tk 500 per kg instead of Tk 800, he added.

Contacted, Sanwar Hossain, manager of the lessee, Lutfar Rahman, refuted the allegation. He said they were not taking any extra.

Robiul announced that the traders would resume the sale of red meat in the markets today.

"We have a meeting with Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed at 11:00am and another one with Dhaka North City Corporation at 2:00pm," he said, adding that they were hopeful that the authorities would accept their demands.

Based on the outcomes of the meetings, they would announce their next course of action at a press conference at their Gabtoli office around

# Over 1,000 city malls at fire risk

FROM PAGE 1

The basic fire safety facilities and installations include fire detection and alarm systems, extinguishers, hose reels with water connection, safe refuge assembly space, trained in-house fire fighting team, fire escape route, accessible road and reservoir with adequate water reserve, said Major Shakil.

With the exception of just one, all 88 malls and markets in Jatrabari, Jurain, Shyampur and Keraniganj were found extremely risky.

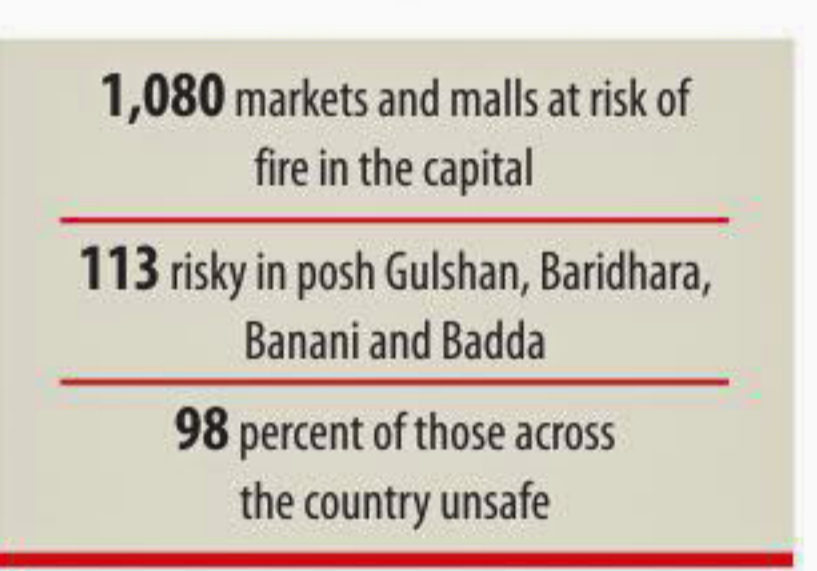
Only two of 104 in Paltan, Fulbaria, Gulistan, Nawabpur, Bailey Road, Bangshal, Shantinagar and Kakrail were found to have adequate safety measures and all but three out of 76 in Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur,

Kalabagan and Farmgate were found risky and extremely risky.

The fire department divides Dhaka into 11 zones but in six of the zones, all shopping malls and markets, a total of 648, lacked fire-safety provisions, according to the inspection findings.

The areas where no shopping malls and markets is safe include Mirpur, Pallabi, Sheorapara, Kazipara, Rokeya Sarani, Bhashantek, Darussalam, Tejgaon, Eskaton, Moghbazar, Karwan Bazar, Uttara, Savar, Ashulia and Aminbazar, Demra, Jatrabari, Rampura, Khilgaon, Bashabo, Mirpur Road, Nilkhet, Chalkbazar, Swarighat, Mogoltuli, and Elephant Road.

In Khilkhet, Dhaka Cantonment, Kafrul and Joarsahara, the situation was a bit better with 35 of 91 having



satisfactory fire safety provisions.

As to why the fire department did not take legal actions against the errant mall and market owners, Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said the department does not have magistrates of its own.

"As a result, we cannot carry out enforcement drives as required," he

said, adding, "Every time, we have to wait for availability of magistrates from district administration and police force for a drive."

According to official records, in December 2015, the fire department formally requested all relevant authorities, including the city corporations, to make sure that commercial establishments maintain mandatory fire-safety provisions and obtain fire-safety licence.

It made a similar request to all district magistrates again in October for mobile court drives to ensure fire-safety in commercial establishments.

In August last year, the department issued a public notice in newspapers calling for installation of the required fire-safety equipment and provisions

as per Bangladesh National Building Code and offered all sorts of support.

"But to our disappointment the response to the repeated alarm calls has been nothing mentionable," said Brig Gen Ali.

About the January Gulshan market fire, he said lack of fire-fighting equipment and other provisions, stocks of highly flammable materials, and delayed call to the fire fighters aggravated the situation.

In late June, five people, including two women, died and over 100 others were injured in a deadly fire at the 15-storey Tropical Alauddin Tower Shopping Complex in Uttara.

The fire department inspection in January this year still found the mall extremely risky.

# Support Rohingya relocation

FROM PAGE 1

have taken refuge in Cox's Bazar camps since October last year after being persecuted by the Myanmar military.

Hasina during the meeting reiterated her government's "zero tolerance" policy against terrorism and militancy.

She mentioned that her government was working to set up 100 special economic zones to speed up industrialisation as well as to establish hi-tech parks. She said German companies could take the advantage of the project and set up new businesses there.

She apprised the German chancellor of the country's various achievements, particularly in the areas of education, poverty reduction, gender parity and women empowerment.

Recalling with deep gratitude the contributions and support of Germany

during the Liberation War in 1971, Hasina said Germany is a time-tested friend of Bangladesh.

She invited Merkel to visit Bangladesh. The German leader said she would visit Dhaka at a mutually convenient time.

The chancellor welcomed the PM to Germany and highly appreciated Bangladesh's socio-economic progress achieved by Hasina's government.

Merkel hoped that the existing trade relations between the two countries would be strengthened further in future.

After the meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two countries on implementation of the e-passport project to upgrade Bangladesh's current machine readable passport.

The two sides also inked a Joint

Declaration of Intent to conduct a bilateral political exchange on counter terrorism issues.

Hasina was scheduled to leave Munich for Dhaka via Abu Dhabi by an Etihad Airways flight at 9:45pm (German time) yesterday.

'CREATE GLOBAL FUND FOR WATER SECURITY' Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday renewed her call to the world leaders to create a global fund for water security, reports BSS.

She said scarcity of safe and fresh water was becoming acute due to climate change. "Global attention should be given to the efficient use of water and its effective governance," she told a panel discussion on "Climate Security: Good COP, Bad Cops".

The event was organised on the side-

lines of the 53rd Munich Security Conference.

Hasina said climate change causes security concerns, by adding pressure on resources and it may also result in instability, violence and conflicts, which ultimately could jeopardise global security.

"Climate change is a global issue and its solution should also be global... It requires combined, concerted and coherent actions."

About climate-induced migration, the premier said millions are forced to move, internally and internationally, because of climate change. "This has direct bearings on social and economic resources, resulting in new security concerns."

In this regard, she cited the 2016 Global Risk Report and said it suggests that forced migration and climate change

are the biggest risks to global economy.

She said the Paris Agreement has been a reflection of political solidarity of the world leaders in securing people and planet from the threats of climate change.

"Though the outcome of Marrakech Conference was not much encouraging, the spirit generated in Paris can't be lost," she said.

Briefing reporters after the panel discussion, Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haq said the prime minister in the meeting stressed the need for addressing three issues -- food security, water security and forced displacement -- to ensure overall security of mankind.

She called for compliance of the commitment agreed by the major economies to provide necessary financial support to the vulnerable countries to address the impacts of climate change.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5