Fire sweeps through some tin-shed houses near a temple in Askar Dighi's Paschim Par area of Chittagong city yesterday evening. The cause of the fire, which left a person dead, could not be known immediately.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Rehiring scheme was a failure

Says Malaysian Employers Federation about undocumented migrant workers

STAR REPORT

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) has said the country's rehiring programme for the undocumented migrant workers was a failure as a large number of them were not given work permits.

Work permits were issued only to 450,000 out of 828,861 applicants under the rehiring programme, MEF Executive Director Shamsudin Bardan said.

The authorities didn't achieve the "target" as a lot of applications were rejected, either for not completing medical checkups, not providing biometric data or for not having passports, he said.

Shamsudin added that those who had their applications rejected were now left with no more avenues to gain legal employment, Kuala Lumpur-based news portal Malaysiakini reported on Wednesday.

The rehiring programme had begun in February 2016 and ended on June 30 this year. Also, the amnesty programme, which allowed the undocumented workers to return home by

paying a fine worth Tk 8,000 each, ended on August 30.

According to officials at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, some one million Bangladeshis now live in Malaysia. Around half of them are undocumented.

Most of the irregular Bangladeshi migrants applied for regularisation under the rehiring programme, but many of them complained that they didn't get work permits despite spending hefty sums.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone a few days ago, some migrants said they were passing days in panic, with some staying in jungles overnight, to avoid arrest as the Malaysian immigration department launched a crackdown on illegal migrants on August 31.

According to the immigration department, over 30,000 undocumented migrants, including some 6,000 Bangladeshis, have been detained since January 1.

Shamsudin also expressed concern that legal migrant workers would be

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

Into hilsa mystery

FROM PAGE 1

molecular biology department at Dhaka University, who led the research, disclosed the matter to The Daily Star recently.

"The genome contains all the heredity information of any living being encoded in the molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA. Genome sequencing, therefore, means reading all the secrets of the life of a particular species written in its DNA," said Prof Haseena, who was also a key Bangladeshi researcher of Jute genome sequencing.

This would give scientists some deeper insights into what kind of proteins make up the body structure that helps hilsa to live in fresh and sea water ecosystems, she said, adding that each biological and genetic character of a living being is connected to DNA or RNA (ribonucleic acid) codes.

"It also could in future be used to know how and when sex change occurs in this fish, since most of the larger hilsa caught in the rivers are female," Prof Haseena noted.

"Now people know what changes in certain hormones drive salmons to come to the river from the sea. But we did not know much this for hilsa. This will help us to know that," Prof Niamul said.

Also, it will help researchers know why the taste of hilsa from one region is different from those in another region.

HOW SCIENTISTS CAME TOGETHER

Bangladeshi scientists working in three continents worked together to decode the genome.

The idea first came to the mind of Bangladesh-origin biotechnologist Mong Sano Marma, a former student of Dhaka University who now works at a US-based molecular technology firm.

"Mong is working on genome decoding at his company. He thought that it would be great if he could decode the genome of hilsa as it is our national pride," said Prof Haseena.

As the genome sequencing would be costly in his company, he approached his neighbour Dr Peter Ianakiev, a polish national, who heads Hera

dataset," she added.

The DNA samples along with the RNA from different organs of the collected fish were sent to the lab in the USA on January 11 this year.

"It was not possible for Peter to decode seven DNA samples as he was giving the service free of cost. In order to have a reference dataset to start with, it was decided to sequence Padma hilsa and RNA sequencing of both Padma and deep sea," said Prof Haseena.

The team discovered that the genetic history of hilsa fish is written by about one billion letters (base pair – chemical units) and contains about 30,000 genes.

Given the data size, a super computer was needed for analysis.

The bioinformatic or computer-based analysis of the huge data was done by AKM Abdul Baten, a Bangladesh-origin Bioinformatician who used to work at the Southern Cross University in Australia.

Baten had access to a super computer and he helped in getting the DNA data analysed. As he later moved to New Zealand, it was not possible for him to

humanity of persecution and/or other inhumane acts."

An independent UN fact-finding mission in August concluded that Myanmar's military last year carried out mass killings and gang rapes of Muslim Rohingya with "genocidal intent" and the commander-in-chief and five generals should be prosecuted for orchestrating the gravest crimes

under law.

About 700,000 Rohingya fled the crackdown and most are now living in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Myanmar has denied committing atrocities against the Rohingya, saying its military carried out justifiable actions against militants. It has so far signalled it does not intend to cooperate with the international court.

ICC has the jurisdiction

FROM PAGE 1

Bensouda had asked judges for a formal opinion on the matter, as it was not clear under international law. However, yesterday's ruling was potentially more expansive than experts had foreseen.

Judges said: "The court may also exercise its jurisdiction with regard to any other crime set out in article 5 of the statute, such as the crimes against

Haseena Khan

Peter Ianakiev

Abdul Baten

Niamul Naser

Riazul Islam

Hilsa production has increased in recent years after imposing ban on catching brood hilsa and jatka (hilsa fry). Still, the most popular fish of the country that contributes around 12 percent of fish protein in Bangladesh are at risk of extinction as most of the rivers in the country are polluted and drying up.

In 2016-17, hilsa production stood at 4.96 lakh tonnes, up from just 2 lakh tonnes in 2002-03, according to the fisheries department.

The ban on hilsa fishing is placed during what traditional knowledge considers it to be their breeding period, as the period could not yet be ascertained scientifically.

Prof M Niamul Naser of DU's zoology department, who is also on the research team, said, "But now the genome sequence is going to help scientists to know about the life secrets, habitat preference and diseases of the fish. Also, its enzyme (coded by genes) would help us know about their food habit accurately at their life stages," he added.

"We only know about some parasite of hilsa, but do not know anything about its diseases," he said.

There have been many international researches about salmon, which also come to river from the sea.

Bioscience, a contract research organisation in the US, that does next-generation sequencing.

Peter helped Mong to do the sequencing at his laboratory for free.

Mong first tried to do the sequence collecting hilsa samples from US shops. But it was in vain.

Other members of the research team are: Prof Mohammad Riazul Islam, Lecturer Farhana Tasnim Chowdhury, and young researchers Avizit Das, Oly Ahmed, Julia Nasrin, Tasnim Ehsan and Rifath Nehleen of the biochemistry and molecular biology department at DU.

Prof Niamul, who has long researched hilsa, helped the team to collect hilsa samples from seven different habitats -- deep sea, Meghna estuary, Padma-Meghna estuary, Jamuna, Brahmaputra, upper Padma and Hakaluki Haor.

The project began on September 10 last year and the samples were collected by September 22.

The team employed the most reliable methods of sample collection, advanced DNA preparation and sequencing techniques, Prof Haseena said.

"It required a year-long communications, detailed planning and coordination among scientists living in three continents, and weeks of work using powerful computers to interpret a large

analyse the RNA data further.

The DNA sequencing ended on March 1 this year while the DNA assembly ended just last month.

Prof Haseena said they were now analysing RNA data at the Molecular Biology Lab of DU using the computer facilities of Bangladesh Research and Education Network (BdREN) as no labs at the DU has that facility.

After the RNA analysis, the researchers would able to know which genes function in the two different conditions -- sea and fresh waters.

BANGLADESH TO GET HILSA PATENT

Last year, Bangladesh got the geographical indication (GI) right of hilsa. With the genome decoding, the country can now apply for the patent registration.

This is why the researchers have not published their findings yet.

Asked whether they would go for publication, Prof Haseena said the data had to be submitted at the website of GenBank sequence database first.

"They would give an accession number and then an international forum would publish it."

With the completion of the genome sequencing of hilsa by her own scientists, Bangladesh can also apply for registration for the intellectual property rights, she added.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1

The rejoinder argues that the BRT scheme was the first of its kind in the country and it was a complex project and denied that institutional inexperience and unplanned urbanisation were causes for delays.

OUR REPLY

Our report was based on information obtained from Project Director Sanaul Haque himself during an interview, official website information, background information, official documents, ground investigations and opinions of relevant experts.

Sanaul Haque has been duly quoted in the report with adequate response on how the cost escalated and why the project suffered delays and the clarification provided in the rejoinder is repletion of what has been written in the report.

The rejoinder does not contradict any specific information provided in the report. It is solely concerned over what the impact of the report would be but it does not specify what "false impression" the report would create, why and how.

Implementation process of this section of the BRT began in early 2011. Officially, this BRT service was supposed to be in place in four years by December 2016. The deadline was first extended until December this year and yet another revision of deadline until mid-2020 is underway.

Roads and Highways Department prepared its final feasibility report and preliminary design in May 2011. It means, people have already waited for nearly eight years for this mass transportation service and it still looks far from reality.

We stand by our report.

'Amoral' Trump

FROM PAGE 20

claimed that White House staff were constantly battling to rein in the president's worst impulses.

Meanwhile, Trump's top lieutenants yesterday scrambled to deny authorship of the explosive op-ed article.

Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats stepped forward, one after another, with their own version of the same message: "Not me."

Moving to squelch internet speculation, Pence's spokesman said the vice president did not write the article.

"The Vice President puts his name on his Op-eds. The @nytimes should be ashamed and so should the person who wrote the false, illogical, and gutless op-ed," Agen wrote on Twitter.

"Our office is above such amateur acts."

News of the letter caught up with Pompeo in New Delhi, where he was traveling with US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Pompeo denied writing the article, calling the Times' decision to publish "sad" and "disturbing."

The Times acknowledged the "rare step" of publishing an anonymous editorial but said the official's job would be jeopardised if they were identified, and that the paper knew who had written the piece.

"We believe publishing this essay anonymously is the only way to deliver an important perspective to our readers," it wrote.

The official piece described a "two-track" presidency in which Trump says one thing and his staff consciously does another, for example with regard to what he called the president's "preference for autocrats and dictators."

Staff actively worked to insulate themselves from Trump's "impetuous, adversarial, petty and ineffective" leadership style, the writer said.

"The root of the problem is the president's amorality," the official said. "That is why many Trump appointees have vowed to do what we can to preserve our democratic institutions while thwarting Mr Trump's more misguided impulses until he is out of

office."

Trump lashed out at the author and at the "dishonest" Times.

"They don't like Donald Trump and I don't like them," Trump said. "So if the failing New York Times has an anonymous editorial, can you believe it, an anonymous -- meaning gutless - a gutless editorial -- we're doing a great job."

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders branded the piece "pathetic, reckless, and selfish" and condemned the Times for publishing it.

"Nearly 62 million people voted for President Donald J. Trump in 2016," said Sanders. "None of them voted for a gutless, anonymous source to the failing New York Times."

Trump later questioned whether the writer of the op-ed actually existed, saying that if they did, their identity "must" be revealed.

"Does the so-called 'Senior Administration Official' really exist, or is it just the Failing New York Times with another phony source? If the GUTLESS anonymous person does indeed exist, the Times must, for National Security purposes, turn him/her over to government at once!" Trump tweeted.

The unsigned piece appeared to reinforce the claims made in the new book by investigative journalist Bob Woodward, which describes a virtual cabal of high-minded White House and cabinet officials scheming to prevent Trump from taking decisions damaging to the US economy and national security.

The writer of the Times op-ed suggests that dissent and resistance inside Trump's White House are even deeper than Woodward described.

The official said that early on in the administration, some officials quietly discussed invoking the 25th amendment of the US Constitution, which allows the removal of a president judged unable to perform his duties.

"But no one wanted to precipitate a constitutional crisis. So we will do what we can to steer the administration in the right direction until -- one way or another -- it's over."

Omnivorous shark

FROM PAGE 20

"Until now, most people thought that sea grass consumption was incidental when these sharks were hunting for crabs, etc. that live in the sea grass beds," study co-author Samantha Leigh, an expert in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California, Irvine, told AFP.

Leigh and a team found, however, that sea grass can form up to 62 percent of the bonnethead diet, alongside their preferred meal of crustaceans and molluscs.

"Bonnethead sharks are not only consuming copious amount of sea grass but they are actually capable of digesting and assimilating sea grass nutrients, making them clear omnivores," the researchers wrote in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

"This is the first species of shark ever to be shown to have an omnivorous digestive strategy."

Over the course of three weeks, the team conducted a series of lab-based trials in which they fed bonnethead sharks a diet of 90 per-

cent sea grass and 10 percent squid.

They then analysed how much of the nutrients the animals digested, and how much they excreted.

Not all carnivores can digest plant material efficiently, but sharks fed the sea grass-heavy diet all gained weight, the team found.

The animals were found to be as good at digesting fibre and organic matter as young green sea turtles -- a species that transforms from eating an omnivorous diet in youth to committed vegetarianism in adulthood.

An Irrawaddy Dolphin is being released in a lake inside the Rangpur Zoo on Wednesday. Mistaking it for a big fish, local fishermen caught the six-foot aquatic mammal, weighing about 120kgs, in the Dharla river in Kurigram's Rajarhat on Tuesday. On information, the upazila nirbahi officer of Rajarhat rescued the dolphin and sent it to the zoo authorities, who named it Irabati.

PHOTO: COLLECTED