

YESTERDAY'S
TEMPERATURESDHAKA
H 32.9 | L 26.6MYMENSINGH
H 31.7 | L 26.0CHITTAGONG
H 33.2 | L 25.5SYLHET
H 34.0 | L 26.6RAJSHAHI
H 34.3 | L 26.3RANGPUR
H 32.7 | L 26.5KHULNA
H 32.0 | L 26.0BARISAL
H 32.0 | L 25.8COX'S BAZAR
H 31.6 | L 23.8

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely to occur at a few places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions till 6:00pm today, reports UNB quoting Met Office. The sun sets in the capital today at 6:10pm and rises tomorrow at 5:42am.

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Kalenga forest today.

PHOTO:
IHTISHAM KABIRMOUNTFORT
in Sylhet

Recently I wrote about the visionary and influential English conservationist Guy Mountfort's visit to Sundarban in 1967. Mountfort, the founder of World Wildlife Fund, wrote a book called *The Vanishing Jungle* about his expedition to wilderness areas of erstwhile Pakistan. At the time of writing that column, I worked off a photocopy of one chapter of the book, but recently I obtained the book itself, elegantly bound in cloth with a golden tiger on the cover.

In the book, in addition to Sundarban, Mountfort devotes a chapter to his visit to the jungles of Sylhet. As with the Sundarban chapter, I read it eagerly, mentally comparing my experiences today in Sylhet's wilderness with that of the foreigner fifty years ago.

Some parts of his description ring true today. Copious bird species in Sylhet's forests were different than he had seen elsewhere in the country, which he attributed to the terrain being closer to the high rain forests of Assam. Thus, for example, he saw five types of Bulbul and three new (for him) species of Flycatchers during his first hour at a forest guest house in Moulvi Bazar.

Other parts sound like a long-ago fairy tale. He observes a Giant Fig tree at the entrance to a forest, counting no less than fifteen Lineated Barbets, a dozen Blue-Throated Barbets and eighty Green Pigeons feasting on its fruits. Although I have seen all these fruit-eating birds on fig and banyan trees, I have never seen such large numbers: perhaps a dozen pigeons, and one or two barbets at best.

But his description of what happened next made me jealous. As he watches, a Shikra (bird of prey) alights on the tree. Within a few minutes it snatches a plump Lineated Barbet in its

claws. All the other birds take off with a roar of wings. The Shikra plucks and eats the Barbet as a trail of its sad green feathers floats to the ground.

This would be a rare or impossible sight today. Our bird population has thinned considerably. Our raptors have perhaps become more secretive, seldom eating their prey in the open. And large trees like that Wild Fig have become rare.

I was surprised to discover that this was not Mountfort's first visit to Sylhet. During the Second World War, while serving in the British Army, he had driven through Sylhet to fight in the Burma campaign in Assam.

What saddened him was that, during the War (1944-ish), he had seen one unbroken forest range covering the Sylhet area and stretching through Assam all the way to the Chinese border. But by the time he returned in 1967, that forest was virtually gone. Mountfort was shocked at the way the ancient trees had been decimated to make room for paddy fields and tea garden expansion.

Luckily, he found one patch still standing - a remnant of the forest he had seen in 1944. The two days he and his team spent in this patch comprised their "most fascinating period" of the entire two-month expedition to wilderness areas of erstwhile Pakistan. This forest remains mostly intact today, despite slow but persistent encroachment. I am talking about Kalenga, one of very few areas of primary forests in Bangladesh. Visitors to the Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary in Habiganj today can get a taste of the paradise we once had and lost.

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'We have evidence of
what they've done'

Home minister says about arrested BNP men

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday denied BNP's allegation of arresting its leaders and activists arbitrarily, saying that members of law enforcement agencies do not just arrest any innocent person.

He came up with the remarks while replying to a query from reporters after addressing the triennial conference of

Bangladesh Chhatra Jubo Oikya Parishad -- a wing of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad -- at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) auditorium in the city.

The Home Minister urged BNP to prove that its arrested leaders and activists are not offenders. "We have evidence of what they've done... Even video footage in this regard," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Bullet-hit body of man
accused in 18 cases found

Wife claims he was picked up by law enforcers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police claimed to have recovered the bullet-hit body of a man from Bhuleshor Netartek forest area of Kapasia in Gazipur early yesterday.

The deceased Jasim Uddin Iqbal, 36, was a resident of Chandra area of Kaliakoir. Originally from Kishoreganj, he moved to the area around 15 years ago and worked in a shoe factory. OC Rafiqul Islam of Kaliakoir Police Station said there were 18 cases filed under forest act and two arrest warrants issued against Jasim.

Locals claim he became a police source a couple of years ago. Police denies the claim.

Locals also said Jasim had evaded arrest

due to his relationship with Gazipur police. He built around 100 tin-roofed houses on a forest land and rented them out. He even built a mosque in the area.

His wife Happy Akhtar Chhaya claimed a sub-inspector (SI) of Mouchak police outpost in Kaliakoir called her husband out on Thursday afternoon.

The SI, Saiful Islam, who was acquainted with her husband, called Jasim to show his new car, Chhaya claimed. SI Rezaul Karim of detective branch (DB) was with Saiful at that time, she added.

She further told The Daily Star that she spoke to SI Saiful over the phone twice that night, and offered "whatever they want" to speak to her husband.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'Muri-chanachur',
tea-coffee in OT!Mobile court fines 3 private
hospitals in Dhanmondi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court on Thursday fined three private hospitals in Dhaka's Dhanmondi area a total of Tk 27 lakh for using outdated reagents and surgical items, and other irregularities -- some of them eyebrow-raising.

The hospitals are: Panorama Hospital Ltd, Anwer Khan Modern Hospital Ltd, and Dhanmondi General and Kidney Hospital Ltd.

"In Panorama Hospital, we found muri (puffed rice), chanachur, sugar, tea, coffee, raw shrimp and sweetmeat at its operation theatre, which is unbelievable!" Executive Magistrate Sarower Alam told The Daily Star. He led the daylong mobile court of Rab-2 in association with Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) and Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



A Laguna zooms right past the Police Headquarters at Fulbaria yesterday although the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner, through a press conference on Tuesday, announced the ban of the four-wheelers on major roads. The directive was defied the day before as well.

No large-scale migration into
India taking place: BGB chief

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Border Guards Bangladesh yesterday said there was no large-scale migration of people into India as people of Bangladesh now "enjoy a very good quality of life" and the few who cross the border do so due to their old cultural and family ties.

BGB DG Maj Gen Shafeenul Islam said this while talking to media after the end of five days of biannual talks with his Indian counterpart KK Sharma, at the BSF's Chhawla camp on Delhi's border with Haryana.

He said BGB has intercepted about 100 such illegal trespassers at the border in the last six months.

"There is no large-scale infiltration from Bangladesh. As you know that the development curve in Bangladesh... we are having a GDP growth of 7.1 percent and the people enjoy a very good quality life now in Bangladesh. So, there is hardly any migration in an organised way or on a large scale," Shafeenul said at the press conference.

The BGB DG said the people of Bangladesh who are mostly crossing illegally is because of cultural ties and relations that they have across the bor-

der. "Many of their relatives are there (India) and they are visiting in that connection. But they come back after visiting their friends and family. We have found out that this is mostly the case," Shafeenul said.

The Border Security Force (BSF) DG, on his part, said they have apprehended a total of 1,522 illegal Bangladeshi migrants this year till now and they were subsequently handed over to the local police. Of them, 166 were inadvertent trespassers while some were victims of human trafficking, Sharma added.

He said BSF is "sensitising" its troops to differentiate between trafficking victims and perpetrators of the crime.

The BGB chief said the number of killings of Bangladeshi nationals at the hands of BSF along the 4,096km border has come down.

"Bangladesh has more concern about the border killings and this is mostly happening with those who were associated with cattle smuggling. Having understood that, both the forces have worked together on this front... we were able to take down (the figure of border killing) to only one," Maj Gen Shafeenul said.

"We have agreed to take it down to zero level. We are alert at the border so that it (cattle smuggling) does not take place. We also want this to completely stop at the border and are closely working with BSF," he said.

Both the border guard chiefs said incidents of cattle smuggling across this border have gone down over the years.

The biannual BGB-BSF meeting decided to open five more "crime free" zones along the border along the lines of the one that was launched in March in West Bengal.

A crime-free zone is a selected border location that is clear of illegal, anti-social and criminal activities by integrating the efforts of BSF and BGB, with assistance from the district administration, NGOs and border population of both the countries, a BSF officer explained.

Sharma said BSF uses non-lethal weapons at the border "with utmost restraint and minimum possible force is used even in the face of dangerous assaults by armed criminals."

Acknowledging the cooperation extended by BGB and other security agencies of Bangladesh to cope

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

AL facilitating
communalism
and militancy

Says Sammilita Samajik Andolon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sammilita Samajik Andolon (SSA), a citizens' platform, yesterday said the ruling party is facilitating communalism and militancy in different ways ahead of upcoming national election, which will eventually damage the country.

Different kinds of apprehension and uncertainty have reportedly been created in the mind of countrymen centering the parliamentary election, SSA said in a meeting held at its Shahbagh office in Dhaka.

SSA leaders demanded of the political parties to refrain from giving nomination to looters, black money owners, terrorists and musclemen and to declare anti-liberation forces, bigots and militants disqualified for the election, an SSA press release said.

The SSA said at the meeting that deterioration of law

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Where this truck stands apparently used to be part of the second channel of the Buriganga, but the land gradually rose from the riverbed after indiscriminate dumping of waste. This truck of Dhaka South City Corporation was seen disposing of garbage directly into the channel yesterday, beside the embankment at Nurbagh, Kamrangirchar.

PHOTO: PALLAB KHAN

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