

ELECTIONEERING IN COUNTRYSIDE

NILPHAMARI-1

Khaleda's sister seeks vote for paddy sheaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's elder sister Selima Islam has started election campaigning for paddy sheaf as her husband Dr Rafiqul Islam, former professor of Rajshahi University, is contesting in the national elections as BNP candidate from Juktfront alliance from Nilphamari-1 (Domar-Dimla) constituency.

"Your vote can restore democracy in the country and pave the way for release of imprisoned former premier Khaleda Zia. So please cast your vote for sheaf of paddy," emotional Selima urged voters while campaigning at different points in Domar municipality area and Gomnati union yesterday and the day before.

During the campaign, former public prosecutor Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, grandson of Selima, said Khaleda Zia is the youngest among three sisters and late politician Khurshid Zahan (Chocolate) was the eldest, while housewife Selima is the second.

Dr Rafiqul's eldest son Saiful Islam Duke was awarded two years' imprisonment in the August 21 grenade attack case and second son Shahrin Islam Tuhin left the country after he got 13 years' jail term in a case for financial irregularities, said Mizanur.

Dr Rafiqul and his wife have come into the limelight as it is now a crisis period for the party and family as well, he added

Selima along with her husband and a few supporters addressed roadside gatherings at Chikonmati Mor, Upazila Mor, Mollapara and Proshikapara in Domar municipality.

Selima's second son Shahrin Islam Tuhin usually contests from Nilphamari-1 constituency but as he is convicted and now living abroad, his father, despite his old age, has come forward to join the election.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's elder sister Selima Islam seeks vote for her husband Dr Rafiqul Islam, an MP contestant from Nilphamari-1 constituency, during an election campaign in Domar municipality area.

PHOTO: STAR

NAOGAON-1

A poor one among solvent contenders



Lawmaker aspirant Mangal Kisku talks to voters at Sirajpur village in Porsha upazila of Naogaon during an election campaign.

PHOTO: STAR

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

When most of the candidates are spending a huge amount to secure a win, Mangal Kisku from Santal community joined the national elections from Naogaon-1 (Porsha, Sapahar and Niamatpur) constituency with almost empty hand.

With a companion on the passenger seat, he drives a motorcycle to visit his constituency. He himself hangs his posters and distributes leaflets as he has lesser workforce than his competitors.

Kisku, a candidate of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) has, however, no hope of winning. He is also the convenor of Sapahar upazila unit of BSD.

"I am not well-known in my area as I have joined the race for the first time," Kisku said, adding that his competitors are more prominent faces in the local politics.

"My chances of winning as well as my financial abilities to compete are poor. Yet I am trying to reach as many voters as I can and earn their trust," he told this correspondent when he was found campaigning at Sirajpur village in Porsha upazila.

A man from Santal community, Subhas Tirki of Samra village in Niamatpur upazila said he does not know anyone by the name of Mangal Kisku taking

part in the election.

"If it is, it is a matter of our pride," he said.

In his affidavit submitted to the Election Commission, Kisku claimed that he is a self-taught person dependant on agriculture that fetches him Tk 2.20 lakh annual income while his net wealth is slightly above Tk 1 lakh.

In the affidavit, he said he will spend Tk 70,000, the cash he has in hand for his election expenditure, while his relatives will provide Tk 20,000 and he will borrow Tk 10,000 from others.

Kisku further said he bought the motorcycle and printed some posters and leaflets with the money he had in cash.

He said once he waged a movement against illegal occupiers of indigenous people's land at his village Modanshing Kurkutdanga in Sapahar upazila and took an oath for doing something for his people.

"Not only people of my community, I will fight for all the poor labourers, farmers and those who work hard for a peaceful living," Kisku said.

Kisku is one of the five candidates in the constituency. Others are -- Sadhan Chandra Majumder of Awami League, Salek Chowdhury of BNP, Akbar Ali of Jatiya Party and Mostafizur Rahman of Islami Andolon Bangladesh.

NETRAKONA-4

Three female candidates vying for MP post

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Voters in Netrakona-4 constituency (Madan, Mohanganj and Khaliyari upazilas) are witnessing a different scene as three out of the four candidates vying for the MP post are females.

Awami League (AL) backed Rebecca Momin, BNP's Tahmina Zaman Sraboni, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) candidate Joly Talukder and only male aspirant Mohammad Mofazzal Hossain of Islami Andolon Bangladesh are running their election campaign from the constituency.

Rebecca and Joly hail from Mohanganj upazila while Sraboni is from Madan upazila.

Rebecca Momin, wife of late AL law-maker and former food minister Abdul Momin, is looking for a third successive wins from the constituency. She was elected MP in the last two general elections.

Tahmina Zaman Sraboni, wife of former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, and Joly Talukder, a CPB central

leader and general secretary of Garments Trade Union Kendra, are contesting for their maiden success.

Although, both Rebecca and Sraboni have their own vote banks inherited from family politics, Joly is contesting the election race as a dedicated party leader.

BNP sources said as former minister Babar was a popular figure in local politics Sraboni may benefit from it.

Chhatra Union central committee Organising Secretary Joly, also a resident of Mollikipur village in Mohanganj's haor area, hopes to do well in the upcoming election as a major portion of the voters are haor people, mostly farmers and daily workers.

"If a congenial and peaceful election environment is ensured I am hopeful of success," Joly said.

Journalist Mohsin Miah in Khaliyari upazila said a tough fight is certain between AL and BNP candidates.

Competition between three female aspirants is an exceptional experience for local voters, said shopkeeper Ajoy Sarker of Mollikipur village.



Rebecca Momin



Tahmina Zaman



Joly Talukder

DINAJPUR-3

BNP struggling for candidate due to feud

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

With only a few days to go for the 11th parliamentary election, BNP is struggling to select a candidate for Dinaipur-3 (Sadar) constituency due to internal feud between two nominated contenders.

According to party sources, Syed Zahangir Alam, joint convener of district BNP and also mayor of Dinaipur Municipality, and Mofazzal Hossain Dulal, joint convener of district BNP and also former Sadar upazila parishad chairman, got party nomination to contest the election.

Both of them filed their nomination papers on November 28.

During a scrutiny on December 2, Returning Officer (RO) Md Mahmudul Alam, also deputy commissioner of Dinajpur, had declared nomination papers of Dulal valid, but rejected those of Zahangir as he is holding the mayor post.

Zahangir appealed to the High Court and got back his candidacy on the final day of withdrawal on December 9.

A total of 34 contenders are in the race,

the RO said.

BNP leaders and activists have been conducting the election campaign for the party nominated candidates in Dinajpur-3 constituency, defying the fear of arrests and harassment by law enforcers.

But everything fell silent yesterday after a High Court bench passed an order that candidates cannot take part in the 11th national election holding their mayoral posts.

Zahangir, however, said he is going to appeal against the order.

Seeking anonymity, many party leaders said there was a chance of hard contest in the constituency if Dulal got the candidacy. M Iqbalur Rahim, incumbent law-maker and contender of Awami League (AL) from Dinajpur-3 constituency, said it is good for him.

There was hardly any election campaign of BNP in Dinajpur-3 constituency yesterday.

Abdul Halim, former acting president of district BNP, said, "The party is in a better position in the district. If the election is fair, we will win by big margins."



M Iqbalur Rahim



Zahangir Alam



Mofazzal Hossain

MP Ushatan

Talukdar independent candidate in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Ushatan Talukdar, the incumbent lawmaker of Rangamati, is contesting the upcoming polls as an independent candidate with the electoral symbol 'lion'.

Ushatan, also vice-president of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), is the only candidate in Rangamati who has support from an ethnic party.

As leader of a regional political party, his manifesto also reflects some crucial demands of the hill people.

In his 10-point manifesto, announced on Saturday, Ushatan pledged to take a strong stand for full implementation of the Peace Accord of 1997, the most important demand of the ethnic people of Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT).

The manifesto says that, in spite of the Awami League (AL) government's promise, the peace accord is not being implemented fully and the CHT Regional Council Act and the three Hill District Councils Acts are still ineffective.

As the CHT Land Commission Act is not settled, insecurity and concern prevail among the ethnic people, the manifesto further says.

The manifesto also includes establishment of balanced and environment-friendly development, health care in remote areas, favourable ambience for businesses, initiatives to build a society free from communalism, fundamentalism and corruption, and special initiatives to stop violence against women.

A three-way ballot battle is expected in this constituency as the other candidates -- Dipankar Takuldar of AL and Moni Swapan Dewan of Bangladesh Nationalist Party -- are veteran politicians and from the ethnic community.



Ushatan Talukdar

Man, son-in-law

contestants in B'baria-2

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Failing to contest the upcoming election as a Mohajote candidate from Brahmanbaria-2 constituency (Sarail and Ashuganj upazilas), incumbent Jatiya Party (JP) MP Ziaul Huq Mridha is contesting the poll as an independent candidate.

On the other hand, Ziaul's son-in-law and JP central leader Rezaul Islam Bhuiyan got the ticket from Mohajote and is contesting the polls with the party symbol 'plough' against his father-in-law, who is contesting with the symbol 'lion'.

As a result, the constituency is going to witness a battle of in-laws.

Besides, as there is no Awami League backed candidate for the constituency, central Swachhasebak League leader Moin Uddin has appeared as an independent candidate to contest the polls.

Local people believe due to the infighting between the in-laws, the election race will now take place between independent candidate Moin Uddin and BNP-backed candidate and former state minister Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan.

Contacted, Humayun Kabir, member secretary of Sarail upazila unit JP, said he is supporting Ziaul as Rezaul, who is usually a candidate from Brahmanbaria-3 constituency, is an outsider here.

Ashuganj Jubo League Convenor Ziauddin Khandaker at a press conference recently said it is very irritating for them as Ziaul still claiming himself as a Mohajote candidate although he is contesting the polls with the symbol 'lion'.

Political elites in Sarail and Ashuganj upazilas Ashraf Uddin Montu, Nuruzzaman Laskar Topu and Shahin Sikder said contest between Ziaul as Rezaul has created confusion among local voters and they may now go for either independent candidate Moin or BNP-backed Abdus Sattar.

A total of 3 lakh and 35 thousand voters of 17 unions under Sarail and Ashuganj upazilas will cast their votes in the upcoming election scheduled for December 30, where Awami League has failed to bagged victory since 1973.

12 FFs

honoured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Benapole customs authority honoured 12 helpless freedom fighters on the occasion of Victory Day at Customs House auditorium yesterday.

Customs Commissioner Belal Hossain Chowdhury handed over the certificates and money to the freedom fighters.

Additional Commissioner of Customs Zakir Hossain presided over the meeting. The special guests were special sector expert World Bank Group Hossain Ferdous Sumi and Freedom Fighter Commander Shah Alam.

Customs officials and leaders of different organisations of the land port users were present at the festive celebration. They spoke on the significance of the Liberation War and role of freedom fighters.

TRAPPED CROCODILE IN PADMA

Rescue operation fails

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

After the daylong drive on Monday, the district forest department and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) failed to rescue a freshwater crocodile from the Padma river.

District administration and the forest department requested angry locals not to harm the crocodile.

The huge crocodile has taken shelter in a disconnected lagoon of the river at Komorpur point in Pabna Sadar upazila early of this month. This was the second freshwater crocodile seen in a river in the last 50 years as it was believed to be extinct from the country's rivers for a century, said experts.

Locals said since the water level has receded, the lagoon was disconnected from the main channel of the river.

Forest department and IUCN jointly tried to catch the crocodile using 300 feet wide and 35 to 40 feet deep net but they could not catch the crocodile, said Md Mahabubur Rahman, district forest officer.

There is no experience of rescuing such huge crocodile from the river, so the experts

are searching for new technology, Mahabubur said, adding that the crocodile is remaining in the deep part of the Padma.

Local people got angry as the crocodile has not been rescued in the last three weeks.

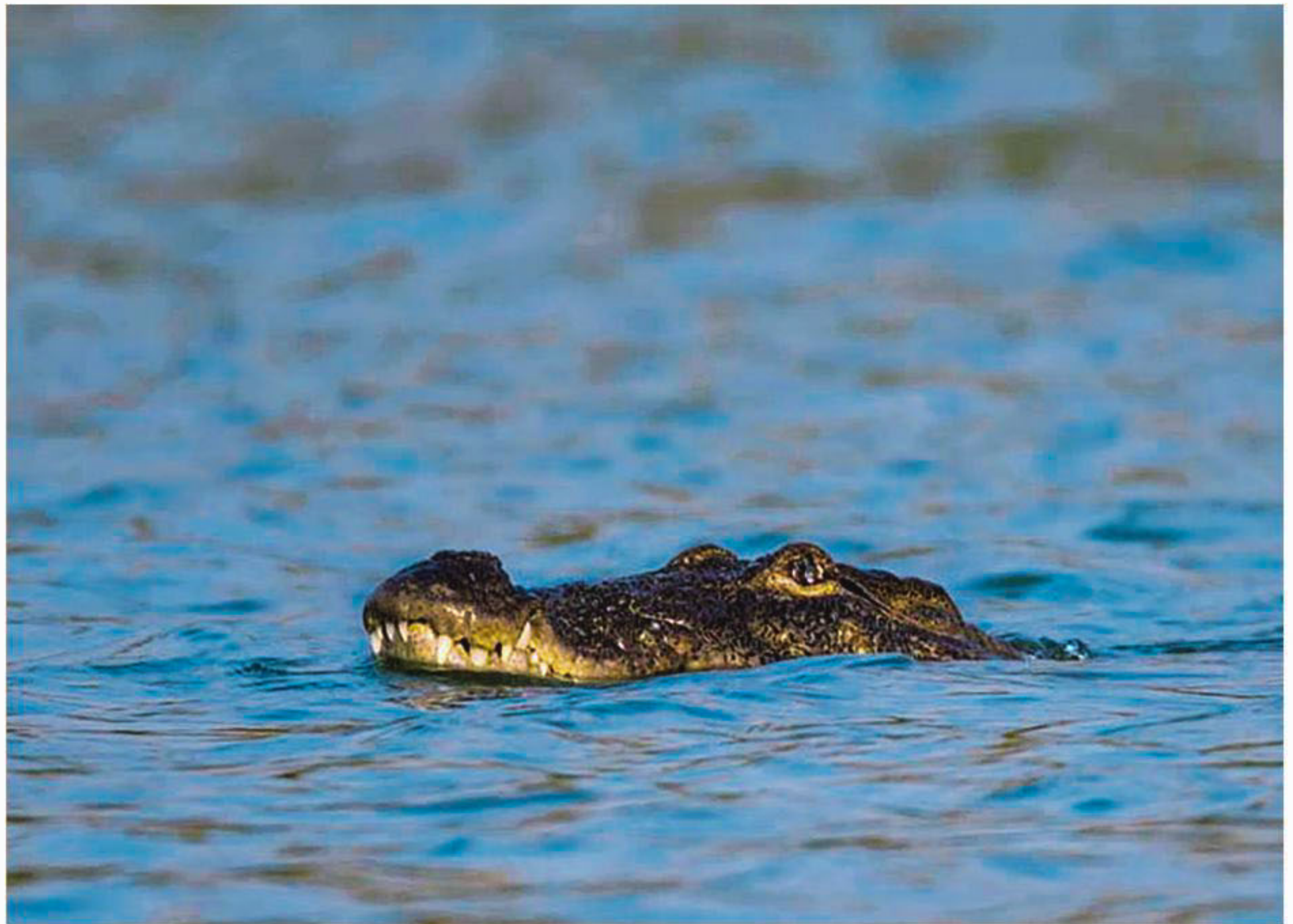
Padma's Char-Komorpur point is a big source of fish. Fishermen catch fish every year in winter but they have not been able to catch fish in the last few weeks, causing immense sufferings for ultra poor fishermen in the area, said Md Ali Hasan, chairman of Dogasi Union Parishad (UP).

Boatmen and fishermen have become jobless due to the fear of crocodile in the river, said the chairman.

The deputy commissioner, earlier, sent a letter to the UP chairman to protect the crocodile for the sake of nature.

The crocodile is not harmful for people. During winter, it does not eat so much. It does not move unnecessarily, so there is no reason to be afraid, said Sarwar Alam, senior scientific officer of IUCN, adding that they will conduct another rescue drive soon.

If they are able to rescue the crocodile, it will be taken to Bangabandhu Safari Park in Gazipur for regeneration of the variety, he said.



This rare freshwater crocodile trapped in a shallow part of the Padma faces danger, especially due to threat from unscrupulous people.

PHOTO: STAR