



When the sun dims down in the port city, the Chattogram port lights up in the sodium yellow of the many container ships coming in and out with goods -- signaling an array of hope and progress. This photo was taken recently in Barik Building Mor area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

HALDA no safe haven for dolphins

“We saw in our first autopsy report that the injuries were caused by a sharp propeller of mechanised boats. We requested authorities to ban mechanised boats in the river.”

Dr Manzoorul Kibria professor of zoology at Chittagong University and a prominent Halda researcher

SIFAYET ULLAH

A dolphin was found dead in the Halda river in Chattogram on July 21.

Experts suspected the mammal may have died after it got caught in a stray fishnet and suffocated to death.

Just a day before, another dead dolphin, around seven-feet long and weighing 90kg, washed up in the same area.

With this, at least 38 dolphins have been found dead in the river and its canals in the last four years, according to data from Halda River Research Laboratory of Chittagong University.

Researchers identified fishing nets, propellers of mechanised boats, decreasing water levels upstream due to sluice gates and dams, and industrial pollution as some of the main reasons behind the deaths.

Dr Manzoorul Kibria, professor of zoology at Chittagong University and a prominent Halda researcher, conducted the first autopsy of a dolphin in 2018.

“We saw in our first autopsy report that the injuries were caused by a sharp propeller of mechanised boats,” he said. “We requested authorities to ban mechanised boats in the river.”

Meanwhile, experts also said many of the dolphins were killed, but so far only a single case has been filed in this regard in 2020 by the forest department.

Mentionable, the department is in charge of protecting the dolphins.

The killing of dolphins is increasing every day due to a lack of identification of killers and impunity, said Prof Kibria.

Asked, Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury, divisional



forest officer of Chattogram Nature and Wildlife Conservation wing of the Forest Department, said, “We are not able to protect dolphins properly, due to a shortage of manpower.”

The forest department has undertaken a 10-year-long conservation plan from 2020 to 2030 to protect species that are declared endangered by the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) in 2015.

“We are working amid manpower shortage with the authorities concerned, stakeholders and communities to ensure that the plan is being properly followed,” the DFO added.

According to experts, the Ganges river dolphin was first discovered in 1801.

Named Shushuk in Bangla, it's an endemic aquatic mammal found only in the Indian subcontinent.

With a lifespan of 25 years on average, a dolphin takes nine to 10 years to mature, and it takes around two years for an adult dolphin to birth a calf. This means a dolphin can give birth to around five calves during its reproductive years at maximum.

According to IUCN, the Ganges river dolphin is endangered globally as well as in Bangladesh (IUCN Bangladesh, 2015).

The species is included in the First Schedule of Bangladesh Wildlife (Protection & Security) Act, 2012 to ensure a higher level of protection for their conservation.

Awareness is the key

Dr Manzoorul Kibria on stopping dolphin deaths



Despite taking various initiatives including an action plan and a protection committee, Halda river dolphins continue to perish. In the past week, three mammals were found dead. In a conversation with The Daily Star, Dr Manzoorul Kibria, a prominent Halda researcher and professor of zoology at Chittagong University, spoke about Halda's dwindling Ganges dolphin population, elaborating the scenario and suggesting steps for a way out.

The Halda researcher identified fishing nets, propellers of mechanised boats, decreasing water levels upstream due to sluice gates and dams, and industrial pollution as some of the main reasons.

Dolphins die from minor injuries when heavy mechanised boats or sand dredgers move in the river and hit the mammals. Dolphins have a thin layer of fat under their skin. An injury at this level can quickly lead to infection and kill the dolphin, he said.

Dolphins get entangled with fishing nets in rivers. If a dolphin is trapped underwater for 30 minutes in this state, it will suffocate and die, he added.

Dolphins are an integral part of the area's ecosystem, to the point that their conservation can benefit a wider range of aquatic and threatened species, including turtles, gharials and otters.

The species has been disappearing from the Halda at a worrying rate over the last few years. The reasons are entirely human-made. Most of the blame can be attributed to engine boats and unsustainable fishing practices.

Engine boats are the main cause, as they killed most dolphins by hitting them. Fishing nets come in second – dolphins get stuck in them and suffocate to death. Then there are hunters who kill dolphins for their fat.

Dr Kibria said, “The way to protect dolphins is to make people aware. Mechanised boats should be stopped in the river. The installation of nets in the river should be stopped.”

If the initiatives are not implemented properly, the endangered species will soon disappear from the Halda, he added.

The dire state of Ctg cinemas

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Once upon a time, Chattogram's cinema halls used to buzz with audience. The Eids were the most festive seasons for film lovers across all classes of the port city, which had as many as 35 cinemas that used to release Bangla films regularly.

However, the industry is on the verge of collapse due to audience crisis and the recent popularity of OTT platforms.

“Once, we would be left exhausted due to huge pressure of audience in the cinema halls. People



used to go crazy for one ticket. It's all history now,” said Abul Hossain, owner of Cinema Palace and Sugandha.

Only two cinema halls -- “Cinema Palace” in KC Dey Road area and “Sugandha” in Kazir Dewri area are now running in the port city despite a limited audience.

The owners and staff said the poor quality of films, lack of good actors, and OTT and satellite TV channels have destroyed the sector. The hit has been harder during the pandemic.

Popular “Almas” and “Dinar” cinema halls started their journey in 1965. They were shut down in December 2020. Both the halls operated under Bangladesh Freedom Fighters Welfare Trust. Purabi cinema hall was also shut down due to audience crisis.

Around 33 cinema halls were shut down and turned into high-rise buildings or markets, said cinema hall owners.

Shopping complex Mahal Market was built on Khurshid Mahal hall in Laldighi area, while Asian SR hotel replaced Uzala cinema hall on station road. Agrabad's Banani Cinema Hall has turned into Banani Complex, while New Market's Jalsa has turned into “Jalsa Market”.

“Piracy of Bangla films started the audience crisis in the hall. Later TV channels added more woes showing the films on the TV set. In the age of OTT platforms, audience have little incentive to leave their rooms and come to the halls,” said Abul Hossain, also president of Chattogram Film Display Association.

“Now we have running three shows each in two halls per day. We are currently running ‘Poran’ for the audience but the response is not good. We have increased our facilities to attract more audience,” he added.

A new look for CU shuttle train

NAIMUR RAHMAN

Chittagong University's (CU) main means of transport for thousands of students, the shuttle train – gets a fresh coat of paint in the form of graffiti.

Lukas Zeilinger, a Berlin artist, started painting the shuttle train last Thursday. The project was interrupted several times due to rain.

There is no fixed theme for the graffiti, although there are many influences of Bangladeshi culture -- seasonal flowers, the Bengal tiger and one coach has the Sundarbans written on it. However, the Bangladesh Railway logo and coach number were kept untouched.

The graffiti's funding has been borne by the artist himself, and the spray cans used for the painting are sponsored by “Molotow”, a paint company.

Lukas Zeilinger's style features vehicles as a medium for his art. He said while most people traditionally experience art in museums, by using vehicles as a medium, the art visits the people.

“It all started back in 2019. I taught in a slum school for a few months and a train was always passing through the place. That's when I came to the idea of doing it,” he told The Daily Star.

“I came here from Berlin to introduce



this art form, which Bangladesh isn't very seasoned with. The main idea of this graffiti is that we use the train as a moving canvas,” he added.

“The university shuttle is the perfect canvas for graffiti because I want to reach out mostly to young people,” he further added.

Arup Barua, a guest lecturer in CU's Dramatics department, took the initiative and worked as an associate on

the project. Arup said, “Lukas first visited our university in 2019 and he was thinking about what we can do. I approached him for our shuttle train. Then I convinced the university and railway authorities. We aimed to introduce students to graffiti art.”

Students were also excited to see this new change. Mritika, a third-year student, said,

“I hope the other parts of the campus will be also painted by our students. However, the authorities should also take steps to improve the overall shuttle experience.”

Adnan Hossain, a fourth-year student in the Chemistry department, said, “This is a happy moment for us, but the intolerable heat due to lack of fans inside the compartments might fade this feeling.”