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**'Action will be taken against corrupt judges'**



**Senior US gen warns of looming war with China**



**Tsitsipas in way of Djokovic's historic 22nd**



**Paint makers hit by dollar shortage**

## Reserve forest defiled, defying court order

SIFAYET ULLAH

A tea company is digging a lake in the middle of a reserve forest in Fatikhkhari, Chattogram, in what environmentalists say is a crime that's causing irreparable damage to the environment.

Also, by felling hundreds of trees in the Ramgarh-Sitakunda reserved forest, the company, Halda Valley, is violating a court order to maintain status quo on the land.

On December 29, 2022, the Forest Department sued four employees of Halda at the Forest Court in Chattogram.

The complaint said Halda authorities were digging the land for the man-made lake on 135 acres of land in the Badurkhal area of the reserve forest in violation of a status quo order, according to the case statement.

The status quo order prevents parties involved in affecting change until the matter at hand is resolved. A man-made lake of 600 feet in length and 60 feet in width has been excavated, the complaint added.

During a visit to the area in December, this correspondent found an excavator by the side of the lake and large piles of logs on the banks.

A mid-level employee of the company, who requested to be unnamed for fear of losing his job, said the area was covered by a lush green forest. He said he often saw wild cats, foxes and many other animals in the place.

"None of them can be seen there anymore. I felt bad for them. I hope they fled when they started using the heavy machinery to clear the area," he said.

Mozammel Hoque Shah Chowdhury, divisional



forest officer (Chattogram north), said the company was ruthlessly encroaching on the forest lands and obstructing reforestation efforts by the department.

The 72 square kilometre Ramgarh Sitakunda reserve forest is one of the oldest and richest protected forests in the country. It is home to 25 species of mammals, 123 species of birds, eight species of reptiles and 25 species of trees, according to data from the Forest Department.

Disputes between the Forest Department and Halda began in 2003 when the Chattogram district administration leased out 1,052 acres of land to the company, mentioning it on documents as khas land.

The Forest Department officials say 134 acres of the leased-out land belonged to the reserved forest. They filed a case with a Chattogram court, seeking an amendment to the land record, saying that the land was mistakenly recorded as khas in the Bangladesh Survey (BS).

In June 2016, a court issued a status quo order on the disputed property.

According to data from the Forest Department, the land in question was recorded as forest in the Revisional Survey 1927-28.

The Calcutta gazette issued in 1893 by the then Assam-Bengal Forest Department also recorded it as forestland, said the documents.

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From left ... Fahad Ifaz, co-founder and CEO of iFarmer; Hosne Ara Jasmine, senior vice president of BJIT Group; Moynul Haque Siddiqui, chairman of Fiber@Home; Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, minister for industries; Azmal Haque Azim, director of Digicon Technologies Limited; Sadia Haque, CEO and co-founder of ShareTrip Limited; and Reem Shamsuddoha, daughter of late Luna Shamsuddoha, founder of the Dohatec, pose for a photo at The Daily Star ICT Awards ceremony at Le Meridien in the capital yesterday. Two individuals and four IT firms were awarded for their outstanding contributions to the ICT sector in Bangladesh. PHOTO: STAR

## Tech trailblazers feted

Speakers at The Daily Star ICT Awards ceremony urge stakeholders to do more so that the sector hits \$20b in exports by 2031

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four companies and two individuals were recognised at the seventh edition of The Daily Star ICT Awards yesterday for their outstanding roles in taking the sector forward.

Luna Shamsuddoha, founder of software firm Dohatec New Media, was posthumously awarded the ICT Pioneer Award, and Moynul Haque Siddiqui, chairman of Fiber@Home, was recognised as the ICT Business Person of the Year at the event organised in association with Brac Bank, Daffodil International University, and Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services.

Digicon Technologies won the ICT Solution Provider of the Year in the local market focus category and BJIT Group in the international market focus category.

Online travel aggregator ShareTrip got the Digital Commerce of the Year award and agro-tech platform iFarmer start-up of the year.

Siddiqui, Reem Shamsuddoha, daughter of Luna Shamsuddoha; Sadia Haque, co-founder of ShareTrip; Fahad Ifaz, chief executive officer of iFarmer; Hosna Ara Jasmine, BJIT's head of

finance; and Azmal Haque Azim, director of Digicon Technologies, received the awards from Industries Minister Nurul Majid Humayun at the ceremony held at Le Meridien Dhaka, the hospitality partner for the event.

"Bangladesh made a lot of progress in

A lot of initiatives were taken to develop the ICT sector, but Bangladesh could not reach its destination, said Sabur Khan, chairman of Daffodil International University.

For instance, the duties and value-added tax were withdrawn for IT products

companies, said BASIS President Russell T Ahmed, adding that 350 members of the association are exporting IT services.

If the local ICT companies are given adequate support, the sector's export target can be achieved.

"We should do an analysis of the targets we have already missed. We need to set a comprehensive and consolidated approach for our new targets," he said, adding that by 2031, the sector's exports would hit \$20 billion.

The ICT industry is constantly evolving and growing, and it is important to recognise and honour those who have made significant strides in this field, said Selim RF Hussain, managing director and CEO of Brac Bank.

This is also an exciting time for financial institutions, as they have significantly upgraded themselves with their digital-first strategies to serve the customers.

The adoption of digital banking channels; implementation of digital onboarding processes (eKYC); use of advanced analytics; development of digital products and services; and automation of back-office processes are taking place with significant momentum in the sector.

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**"Bangladesh made a lot of progress in ICT, but it is still lagging behind. There is a gap between policy and implementation in the sector. We must work together to fill up the gap."**

Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun Industries minister

ICT, but it is still lagging," Humayun said.

There is a gap between policy and implementation in the sector, which needs to be sorted out in consultation with the industry's stakeholders.

"We must work together to bridge the gap. I assure you from the government that we will work together," Humayun added.

25 years ago.

"Still, the country could not reach the destination. We tried to find the destination but we failed," he said, adding that those who are contributing to taking the sector forward must be recognised and feted.

Every single government digital and IT project was implemented by the local

## It's a 'death march' for the BNP

Says Quader about the party's 4-day agitation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming the BNP's four-day programme a death march, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the opposition party would face "political death" in the next general election.

"The BNP's road marches have become backward marches. I would say they are now on a march towards their death. They will certainly face political death in the next national polls, and be defeated," he added.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, made the remarks while addressing a rally in the capital's Uttara to protest the BNP's "terrorism and anarchy".

Dhaka city north unit of the ruling party organised the rally, where warm clothes were also distributed among the cold-hit people.

Hundreds of leaders and activists of AL and its associate bodies joined the programme.

Meanwhile, as part of its four-day

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BNP leaders and activists march through Uttara Badda in the capital yesterday to press home their 10-point demand, including a general election under a non-party caretaker government. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Quit now or there will be no escape

BNP warns govt during 'silent march'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At its "silent march" yesterday, the BNP once again asked the government to step down without wasting time.

Issuing a note of warning, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said if the ruling Awami League does not resign from office, its leaders will not be able to manage an escape route.

He made the remarks before inaugurating the march to press home their 10-point demand, including a general election under a non-party caretaker government.

As part of the BNP's four-day programme, its leaders and activists yesterday marched from the capital's Badda to Malibagh, around a four-kilometre journey.

The party took an hour and half to complete the march, which started around 2:30pm in front of Badda's Suvastu Nazir Valley market.

"We have initiated a new type of movement. We will compel the government to step down by waging a movement against its tyranny," Fakhrul said.

In a message to the government, he said, "Don't waste time. Hand over power to a caretaker government to pave the way for people to exercise their voting rights."

Thousands of leaders and activists of the BNP and its associate bodies took part in the programme, carrying banners, national and party flags, festoons and portraits of the party's top leaders.

Fakhrul asked the party people to march peacefully

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