

A haven for hoolock gibbons

Around 50 endangered primates thrive in Lawachara forest



MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Lawachara National Park, a protected forest spanning 1,250 hectares in Moulvibazar district, is home to rich biodiversity and is one of the last remaining strongholds of the critically endangered hoolock gibbons in the country.

In 1996, the government officially declared Lawachara forest a national park under the Wildlife Act of 1974, recognising its immense ecological value.

The forest currently hosts 460 species of flora and fauna, including 167 species of plants, four amphibians, six reptiles, 246 birds, and 20 mammals.

The park has garnered international attention for the critically endangered primates thriving there, particularly the hoolock gibbons.

Once widespread in the country's natural forests, the hoolock gibbon population plummeted by around 80 percent, from over 3,000 to approximately 400, due to deforestation

and habitat loss over the past 30 years, according to Forest Department sources.

A recent study by researchers from Jagannath University found that 13 hoolock gibbon families, comprising approximately 48 primates, are currently thriving in the forest. More hoolock gibbon families have been identified in the adjacent Kalachara and Chautali forests.

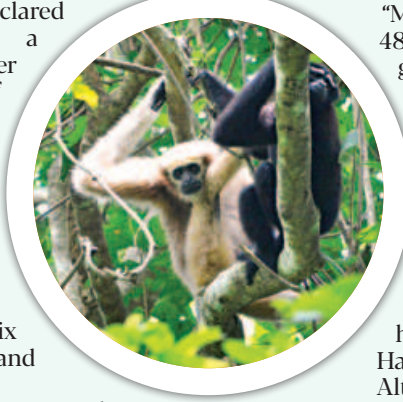


PHOTO: SABIT HASAN

"My latest survey found 48 primates from 13 gibbon families in the Lawachara forest.

Still, there is room for more gibbons to thrive in Lawachara. Proper habitat management initiatives are urgent for gibbons in this semi-evergreen habitat," said Sabit Hasan, a researcher.

Although the population density of gibbons in Lawachara is higher than in other forests, their habitat is still facing anthropogenic pressure from habitat destruction, he added.

"Hoolock gibbons closely resemble monkeys but are distinguished by their tailless bodies, long limbs, and striking

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

CTG DOUBLE MURDER

Two including shooter arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested two individuals, including the shooter seen firing a gun in CCTV footage, in connection with Sunday night's double murder in Bakalia, Chattogram.

The arrestees, Md Belal and Manik, were held from Bahaddarhat in the city and from Fatikchhari upazila respectively, said police.

"Belal, wearing a cream-coloured T-shirt, was seen firing at the private car. We have identified several others involved and are working to arrest them," said Mozammel Haque, inspector (investigation) of Bakalia Police Station.

Police will seek a 10-day remand for them, he added.

Itekhar Uddin, officer-in-charge of the police station, said efforts are underway to recover the firearms used in the attack.

According to a police officer, Manik acted as a middleman, linking contract killers from Fatikchhari with another group. Investigators said a group of five to six professional hitmen, along with others, executed the attack.

Thirteen criminals on six motorbikes carried out the targeted killing, but their intended target, Sarwar Hossain Babla – a known criminal from the Bayezid Bostami area – managed to escape. The shooting was part of a battle for supremacy in Bayezid Bostami and surrounding areas and an act of revenge for the arrest of another top criminal, Sazzad Hossain, alias Choto Sazzad.

Investigators believe the attack was orchestrated by Sazzad Ali Khan, alias Shibir Sazzad, another top criminal from Bayezid Bostami who is currently abroad.

In the early hours of Sunday, just before Eid-ul-Fitr, two men were shot dead by men on motorbikes chasing a private car along Bakalia Access Road. The driver, Bakhtiar Hossain Manik, 28, and Abdullah Al Rifat were killed in the attack.

Police said the shootout spanned nearly three kilometres.

Man dies two weeks after being shot in clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man died while undergoing treatment at a hospital in Chattogram yesterday. He had been shot during a clash between Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal members over hanging an Eid banner in Chattogram city's GEC area on March 21.

Jihadur Rahman Jihad died at the ICU of Metropolitan Hospital at 7:00am, said Khulshi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Aftab Hossain.

"Police conducted the inquest report and sent the body to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for autopsy," said the OC.

Police said the clash on March 21 erupted between supporters of Shah Alam, joint convener of Chattogram City unit BNP, and supporters of Mir Helal, BNP's central assistant organising secretary, in the Debar Par area of Kushum Bag.

During the clash, Jihad sustained two bullet wounds.

Police have arrested three people in connection with the incident so far, and a case has been filed.

Youth stabbed to death in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A teenage boy was stabbed to death allegedly over prior feud in Dakshin Raghavpur Colony area of Pabna Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The deceased Md Arafat, 18, son of Md Omor Ali of the area, had a longstanding enmity with a local group of youths.

Over the rivalry, a group of youths attacked and stabbed Arafat on Wednesday night, leaving him critically injured, said Md Abdus Salam, officer-in-charge of Pabna Sadar Police Station.

He was taken to Pabna General Hospital where doctors declared him dead. The body has been kept at the hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC also said.

"Police are trying to arrest the culprits while filing of a case in this connection is underway," he added.

Meanwhile, agitated locals later vandalised the house of one Shahid Member in the area.

Illegal stone extraction ravages Patgram rivers

Defying ban, syndicates continue the illegal practice in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Ignoring a government ban, organised groups are allegedly extracting stones from the Dharla, Saniajan, and Singimari rivers, causing severe environmental damage in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila.

Despite drives by the local administration to curb the illegal activity, syndicates remain active in at least 30 villages, alleged locals.

Extractors are lifting stones along with large amounts of sand, which they pile up to obstruct the rivers' channels. In addition to the river areas, unscrupulous businesspeople have expanded their operations into nearby arable lands.

The local administration has expressed concern that a significant portion of Patgram upazila is at risk of a major landslide, as mechanical extractors, including dredgers, are lifting stones from the rivers and adjacent areas at depths of over 100 metres, creating hollow spaces underground.



"The district and upazila administrations conduct regular drives against them, but somehow they continue their activities with political backing," said UNO Jillur Rahman of Patgram.

Citing an example, he said although 50 stone-extracting dredgers were destroyed during several drives last month, some



unscrupulous people continued operations at night.

Lalmonirhat Water Development Board Executive Engineer Shunil Kumar said stone extraction should not be carried out without assessing the soil structure. "The three rivers in Patgram are nearly dead due to illegal stone extraction," he added.

Patgram Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ashrafuzzaman Sarker said police had lodged four cases against illegal extractors in the past month.

"Illegal stone extraction from the rivers is the main problem in Patgram. Dodging strict vigilance, syndicate members continue extracting stones at night," he said.

Locals alleged that whichever political party comes to power, its members take control of stone extraction from the rivers.

The syndicates, they claimed, always manage to gain the support of ruling party figures to continue their illegal business.

Without political backing, no one would dare to extract stones, they said. Fearing the influence and ruthlessness of the extractors, locals avoid protesting and instead demand strict action to stop the illegal activity immediately.

Asked why the illegal practice could not be stopped, Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner and District River Protection Committee President H M Raqib Hayder said most individuals involved in illegal stone extraction had direct or indirect political affiliations.

"They are accustomed to making huge sums through illegal extraction. We have decided to take stern action to protect the environment and the rivers," he said.



PHOTO: TITU DAS

Outrage as BCC imposes entry fee at children's park

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Barishal City Corporation (BCC) has introduced a Tk 10 entry fee for Green City Park, a popular children's park in the city, sparking widespread dissatisfaction among residents.

The sudden imposition of the ticket system ahead of Eid has drawn sharp criticism, though BCC authorities claim the revenue will be used for maintenance and development.

According to BCC sources, Barishal has seven children's parks: Swadhinata Park at Amtala Mor, Green City Park in Bell's Park, Planet World Children's Park adjacent to Bell's Park, Shaheed Shukur Gofur Park in Amanatganj, Shaheed Sukanto Babu Children's Park near the TV Clinic, and Shaheed Kanchan Udayan on Kalibari Road. Another recently constructed park, Muktiyoddha Shahanara Parvin Park on CNB Road, was demolished on August 5 following public outrage.

Among these, only Planet World Children's Park has been leased out, while the others remained free for children. However, from Eid day, BCC introduced an entry fee at Green City Park, located near Bell's Park.

Arif Kazi, a resident of Bangla Bazar, said, "I came here with my child, and for the first time, I had to buy a ticket. If BCC implements this system across all parks, it will severely impact underprivileged children. We demand the immediate withdrawal of this decision."

Pankaj Roy Chowdhury, president of Khelaghor's Barishal district committee, said, "Providing entertainment for children is the city's responsibility, not a commercial venture. We hope this ticket system will be revoked."

Gazi Zahid Hossain, convener of Sachton Nagorik Committee, echoed him.

Nurul Islam, an inspector from BCC's haat and bazar division, said the ticket system was enforced from March 31 (Eid day). "Two public toilets have been built, and the rides have been repaired. The funds generated from ticket sales will be used for ongoing maintenance and cleanliness," he said, adding that 1,500 tickets were sold on Eid day alone.

1 dead, 2 missing as boat capsizes in Jamuna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A boat carrying around 40 farmers capsized in the Jamuna river in Jamalpur's Islampur upazila yesterday morning, leaving one person dead and two others missing. The deceased is Billal Mondal, 40, of Kulkandi Madhyapara in the upazila.

The incident took place around 11:00am at the Kulkandi ferry ghat, said Majharul Islam, station officer of Islampur Fire Station.

"The farmers were on their way to Charkulkandi to work in fields. The boat sank midway while crossing the river from Kulkandi Zero Point ferry ghat. While most of them managed to swim ashore, three went missing," Majharul said.

A diver team of the fire service started a rescue operation around 11:30am and recovered Billal's body. Search for the other two missing farmers is ongoing.



Artists performing at an event in Rangamati Cultural Institute. In anticipation of the Biju-Sangrai-Boishu-Bishu-Bihu festival, a key cultural celebration for the indigenous communities of the hill tracts, the seven-day Biju festival kicked off yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR