

## SATCHARI, REMA-KALENGA Illegal logging continues at reserved forests

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

A vested syndicate has long been engaged in illegal tree felling in the Satchari and Rema-Kalenga reserved forests in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj, putting the biodiversity of the protected areas at serious risk.

The 1,795 hectare Satchari forest and the 17.96 square-kilometre Rema-Kalenga forest contain a wide range of valuable trees and serve as natural habitats for diverse wildlife species.

In recent times, the activities of the syndicate have intensified. Locals and environmentalists fear the forests could be completely ravaged without immediate and effective intervention.

According to Forest Department sources, on December 17, an organised group entered a forest area at night and illegally felled three large teak trees. Following the incident, the department issued a show-cause notice to forest guard Suman Biswas for negligence of duty.

Locals said such large-scale tree felling would not have been possible without direct or indirect involvement of forest personnel.

On December 23, a joint drive by the Forest Department and Rab seized a truckload of illegally logged timber in the Shayestaganj Notun Bridge area around 8:00pm and arrested five people. A case was later filed with Shayestaganj Police Station in this connection.

The accused were sent to jail following court proceedings. Earlier, on the night of December 11, four forest guards exchanged gunfire with a gang of 50-60 tree smugglers as they attempted to fell teak trees in the Nischintapur area of the Kalenga Beat. Due to a shortage of manpower, the forest guards were forced to retreat. The smugglers fled after Border Guard Bangladesh personnel arrived at the scene.

Nizamul Haque, a resident of the Satchari forest area, said valuable teak trees continue to be stolen while the forest authorities have yet to address the root causes of timber smuggling.

Rema-Kalenga deputy ranger AbdulHadi said protecting such a vast forest area with limited manpower remains a major challenge.

Satchari Beat Officer Anwar Hossain said the Forest Department is making all possible efforts to recover the stolen teak trees.

He also said a show-cause notice has been issued to forest guard Sumon Biswas and that the matter is under investigation.



Two fishermen sew fishing nets beside a road in the Charmonai area of Barishal, preparing to catch fish in nearby waterbodies. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## RANGPUR CITY

# 6 years on, children's hospital still unopened

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Although the infrastructure was completed six years ago, Rangpur Children's Hospital has yet to open. Built on 1.65 acres of land in the Puratan Hospital area of Rangpur city at a cost of Tk 31.08 crore, the hospital has remained unused.

Sabina Begum, an NGO worker from the Munshipara area, said she went to Rangpur Medical College Hospital about a month ago with her six-year-old son, Sizan Islam. After seeing the unhealthy and overcrowded condition of the children's ward, she returned without admitting him and later sought treatment at a private clinic. "Spending such a huge amount of

money to build a hospital and then leaving it unused is unfortunate. If it were opened, quality treatment for children could be ensured at a lower cost," she said.

Shamsur Ali of Gangachara



echoed her.

"Despite seeing the children's hospital built before our eyes, it has not been opened, and we are suffering every day," he said.

Executive engineer of the Health Engineering Department, Moni Kumar Sharma, said construction of the three-storey hospital building began on February 6, 2018, and was completed on November 19, 2019. It was handed over to Civil Surgeon's office on March 8, 2020.

Rangpur Civil Surgeon Dr Shahin Sultana said after completion, the hospital was temporarily used as an isolation centre during the pandemic. Several letters were sent to the health ministry seeking the supply of necessary equipment and furniture, as well as the recruitment of doctors, nurses and other staff to make the hospital fully operational.

"I am still in regular contact with the ministry regarding this matter."

## Khaleda, a daughter

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Golap recalled that his mother, late Doulatun Rahman, had served as headmistress of Dinajpur Government Girls' High School during Khaleda Zia's student years.

"She was friendly, maintained warm relations with everyone, and always showed deep respect for her elders," Shamim said.

He also recounted a memorable incident from later years. "After she became prime minister, my mother -- then serving as a district education officer -- visited the Ministry of Education in Dhaka on official work. When the education minister informed Khaleda Zia of her arrival, she immediately asked that my mother be brought to her office. Upon seeing her former head teacher, Khaleda Zia stood up from her chair and warmly welcomed her."

Advocate Shamim said

his mother cherished the gesture and often spoke of it fondly until she died in 2011.

Khaleda Zia's maternal cousin, Abu Taher, also shared his memories. "She was affectionate towards relatives and always listened to everyone," he said.

Former Dinajpur mayor Syed Jahangir Alam, who submitted his nomination papers for Dinajpur-3 constituency from BNP on party instructions as an alternative candidate to the BNP chairperson, recalled his long association with her.

"I have countless memories with our leader over my 43-year political career," he said. "She always asked about my family and affectionately called me 'Pagla'."

Khaleda Zia last visited Dinajpur on September 22, 2012, when she addressed a public rally at Gor-e-Shaheed Maidan.

## Access to safe

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drinking water in all major public places in Bangladesh within the next one year.

These places include railway stations, bus terminals, train stations, launch terminals, airports, raw food markets, rural markets, shopping malls, government hospitals, all public educational institutions, places of religious worship, dedicated venues in coastal saline areas where water is scarce, water-critical areas declared under the Water Act, citizens living in remote mountainous communities, and all court and bar associations of Bangladesh.

The HC also said the rule regarding this issue shall remain in force as a continuing order and will come up for order on February 27.

The government has been directed to submit an affidavit stating the progress made in implementation.

## NEIR rollout triggers

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been deregistered, while the remaining 10 lakh are in the process of deactivation.

Second, a large number of handsets were found to be registered under the same IMEI numbers, leading the system to block new connections using those IMEIs. He said the problems would be resolved shortly.

Shahed Alam, chief corporate officer of Robi Axiata, said some customers experienced network access issues after the NEIR launch. "We are working closely with the BTRC and the NEIR technology partner to identify the causes and resolve the issues as quickly as possible," he said.

Gazi Towhid Ahmed, head of corporate communications at Banglalink, said despite earlier confirmation from the BTRC that handsets connected before December 31, 2025 would not be affected from January 1, 2026, unexpected disconnections occurred.

**NEIR SHOWS EXCESS HANDSETS**

Many users also reported seeing an unusually large number of handsets linked to their NIDs.

One such user, Biplab Rahul, said 212 handsets, or IMEIs, appeared to be registered under his NID, although he currently uses only two phones.

In a Facebook post, Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser on telecom and ICT, said authorities had received more than three billion datasets from mobile operators, as both historical and current data were uploaded. As the system currently shows the migration date as the present date, many users are seeing inflated numbers of SIMs or handsets linked to their NIDs, he said.

Taiyeb said the BTRC and mobile operators are jointly working to resolve the issue and that fresh instructions have been issued to conduct another round of Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing on the NEIR system.

He further noted that the allowable number of

SIMs per NID in Bangladesh was initially set at 20, later reduced to 15 and is now being lowered to 10. As a result, historical mapping naturally shows a higher number of handsets against many NIDs.

The system, he said, would help raise public awareness by allowing individuals to see how many SIMs and devices were used under their NID, which is important for identifying potential financial crimes linked to mobile banking or online gambling. Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday sent 45 people to jail in a case filed over the attack and vandalism at the BTRC building that took place on Thursday over the implementation of the NEIR system.

Earlier in the day, Muhammad Ashrafuzzaman Jahed, assistant director of the Legal and Licensing Division of BTRC, filed a case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station under sections 15(3) and 25D of the Special Powers Act, accusing 54 people. Moreover, 500 to 600 unidentified persons were also accused in the case.

## Inqilab Moncho

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a public campaign ahead of the elections to inform voters whom they should and should not support.

He said the platform would reach out to "pro-Bangladesh" political and cultural organisations today and tomorrow to seek solidarity in demanding justice for Hadi's killing.

He also said on January 7, demonstrations would be held in front of Bangladesh High Commissions in at least 100 countries, demanding justice for Hadi. The blockade programme began last Friday. On Monday night, protesters temporarily withdrew from the intersection and shifted to an online campaign due to a cold wave.

The programme was later postponed following the death and funeral of BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia.

## Country gets

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According to ministry sources, efforts to formulate a national urban policy began in 2004, but disputes between the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, along with pressure from vested interest groups, delayed approval for years.

Even under the current interim government, several attempts failed before final approval was granted. The policy has been drafted since 2022 with support from UNDP and funding from the United Kingdom.

The policy notes that urbanisation is now the main driver of Bangladesh's economic growth. While 32 percent of the population lives in urban areas, they contribute more than 60 percent to national production.

The urban population currently exceeds 5.5 crore and is growing at an annual rate of 3 percent. Unplanned urbanisation has put severe pressure on the environment, biodiversity, and civic infrastructure, making housing, water supply, waste management, and climate risks major challenges.

The policy aims to address these challenges and ensure sustainable and well-planned urban development.

Meanwhile, the Advisory Council also decided to reduce duties, advance tax, and VAT on mobile phone imports and local production from 61.80 percent to 43 percent.

Shafiqul Alam said the government has decided to keep NID services under the Election Commission for now, reversing an earlier plan to transfer them to a proposed Civil Registration Commission, which has yet to be formed.

At the same meeting, the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Ordinance-2025 was placed before the Advisory Council, but was not approved.

## Neighbourly ties will improve in due course

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Minister Narendra Modi to BNP acting chairman and Khaleda's eldest son, Tarique Rahman.

Jaishankar expressed confidence that Khaleda's vision and values will guide the development of the Dhaka-Delhi partnership.

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma were, among others, present at the meeting.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Riaz Hamidullah, who also attended the meeting, said a brief discussion was held on how to advance bilateral ties based on shared interests, pragmatism and mutual interdependence.

On Tuesday, Modi expressed deep sorrow at

the death of Khaleda.

On Friday, responding to a question during a weekly briefing, Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), said India supports free, fair and inclusive elections in Bangladesh, and that the return of Tarique from London should be seen in that context.

In response to another question, the MEA spokesperson said India's position on Bangladesh has been clear and consistent throughout.

On December 26, New Delhi said it wants close and friendly relations with the people of Bangladesh, rooted in the Liberation War and strengthened through various development initiatives and people-to-people exchanges.

## Charge sheet by Jan 7: DB

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the Paltan area on December 12 while campaigning for the upcoming national election. He died on December 18 while undergoing treatment in Singapore.

On December 14, Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber filed an attempted murder case with Paltan Model Police Station against Faisal and several unnamed individuals, which later turned into a murder case.

The case was subsequently transferred to the DB.

Following the death of Hadi, the platform has been demonstrating, demanding justice for the murder.

Amid the protests on December 28, Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the charge sheet in the Hadi murder case would be submitted within 10 days, by January 7, 2026.

A day later, the DMP said key accused Faisal and

his associate Alamgir fled to India via the Haluaghat border. However, the Indian authorities later rejected the claims.

Meanwhile, a video clip of Faisal, who has been on the run since the shooting, has surfaced on Facebook. In the video, he claims that he was not involved in the murder and that he was in Dubai, not India.

When asked, DB chief Shafikul said, "Criminals say many things to save themselves. The investigation will continue in its own way."

According to DB sources, following the shooting of Hadi, law enforcement authorities conducted drives in various areas and arrested 11 individuals, including the parents of the accused Faisal, his wife, and "girlfriend". The arms used in the attack were also recovered. Among the arrestees, six have given confessional statements under section 164 of the CrPC, while the court recorded statements of four witnesses.