The ancient tradition of Chalanbeel, turtles or tortoises, is disappearing day by day

The historical Chalanbeel region of Bangladesh is well-known to the people of the whole country as a storehouse of grain and fish. Bangladesh is an agricultural country, 80% of the people of this country depend on agriculture for their only livelihood. Agriculture is the main driving force of the overall development of Bangladesh.

The 9 Upazilas of Chalanbeel are Tarash, Ullapara, Shahjadpur, Faridpur, Bhangura, Chatmohar, Gurudaspur, Singra and Atrai. From ancient times to the end of the 20th century, a large number of turtles or tortoises were seen in this area.

There is a law in the country but the law is not enforced, so turtles or tortoises are disappearing from this area day by day. The elders of the area say that turtles help a lot in increasing the fertility of agricultural land. Despite the imposition of a law in 2012 to prevent the killing and poaching of turtles, the illegal hunting, sale and trafficking of turtles have not stopped. As a result, this reptile is on the verge of extinction.

This animal is on the verge of extinction due to some unscrupulous turtle hunters in the area and abroad who are violating the law by hunting and selling turtles. Despite the ban, it was found that the reason for illegal hunting of turtles is being found. Turtles are being hunted due to the high demand for turtle meat in the domestic and international markets. There are some small ethnic groups in the country who are very fond of turtle meat. In addition, since the price of

this meat is very high in the international market, a group of unscrupulous traders are hunting turtles freely. The price of turtles is determined according to their weight. In various markets of Chalanbeel, a turtle weighing three to three and a half kilograms costs four thousand to four and a half thousand taka.

In addition, its price is even higher in the international market. During the rainy season, turtles usually stay in large water bodies, ponds or rivers in the Chalanbeel area. When the monsoon water recedes, the turtles stay in various ponds in the area during the dry season. Some unscrupulous turtle hunters hunt them from there and sell the turtle meat to various places in the capital and foreign restaurants.

In addition, there is another gang that illegally buys whole turtles or just the meat from hunters and smuggles them out of the country through various border routes and airports. According to the country's intelligence sources, turtles are not only smuggled abroad from Bangladesh. Turtles also come to Bangladesh from neighboring India. For several years, Bangladesh has been used as a transit point for turtles smuggled to India.

They are then sent to countries like China, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, Hong Kong and Malaysia. In these countries, there is a demand for turtle meat as food, as well as the use of turtle bones in making medicine. In our country, the practice of eating turtle meat can be observed among Hindus.

Although the number is small, followers of other religions besides Muslims also eat turtle meat. Earlier, turtles were exported from our country to different countries, and that trend still continues. Currently, almost every species of turtle in the country is endangered, and some of them are becoming more endangered. In this way, the number of turtles is decreasing at an alarming rate. The country's forest department and the international organization for nature

conservation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), conduct assessments of these animals.

The government formulates laws based on the assessments of international non-governmental organizations. According to the relevant laws of our country, hunting, collecting, and importing and exporting turtles is prohibited. When we contacted Tarash Upazila Animal Resources Officer Dr. Md. Aminul Islam directly in this regard, he said with great sincerity that turtles are hunted, sold, and smuggled for food. The sad thing is that when we punish someone according to the law, the convicted person gets released and gets involved in the same crime again. He told this reporter that it is possible to stop turtle killing or hunting if the general public in the area is aware.

Mirza Abdur Rob Bulbul