

# The Daily Star

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## **People close to ruling party control fishing**

**Speakers tell roundtable; observe this deprives genuine fishermen of access to water bodies**

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Participants at a roundtable titled “Strengthening Governance in Wetland and Water Bodies Management Policies” at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. Photo: Star

Engagement of too many government agencies in the wetland management and flawed policies are depriving fishermen of access to the country’s water bodies or jalmahals, speakers said at a roundtable yesterday.

In most cases, people with close links to the ruling party are forming fake fishermen's associations and winning the lease of the jalmahals for fishing, they added.

The Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), Brac University and the Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project of the Department of Fisheries jointly organised the discussion,

“Strengthening Governance in Wetland and Water Bodies Management Policies” at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Government and non-government officials, researchers, policy makers, officials from development partners, and fishermen participated in the discussion, which was moderated by Brac University Vice Chancellor Prof Ainun Nishat.

The word “mahal” means a source of earning revenue, but now it is time to change the approach of revenue collection from a water body and assume the approach of wetland biodiversity conservation, the speakers said.

The traditional fishermen care about brood fish and do not want to destroy the fish species from a water body, but the non-fishermen who get the lease of those wetlands do not bother about conservation of brood fish and catch them till the end of the lease period, they said.

In his keynote speech, SM Gubair Bin Arafat, research associate at the IGS, showed that at least six ministries and several other departments under those ministries were somehow involved with the wetland management, which is making things complicated. In India or Sri Lanka, a single authority deals with the water bodies, he said.

Now, there are around 28,000 water bodies comprising haor, baor, beel, canal, pond and river, which are selected as jalmahal.

ATM Nasir Mia, deputy secretary to the land ministry, said the government allocated water bodies under the policy, “Jal Jar Jola Tar” (those who have the net have the water body).

“But in reality, close aides of local lawmakers get the lease, not the genuine traditional fishermen,” said Fani Bhushan Malo, secretary general of Bangladesh Matsyajibi Samity. Without recommendations of local lawmakers, nobody gets the lease, he said.

Dr Rizwan Khair, director of the IGS, delivered the welcome speech.