

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Belal releases the Kalem he saved.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Saving the Kalem

It happened just after we emerged from the bushes to face a small crescent-shaped lagoon. A thin layer of winter fog covered the shallow water. Grass and bushes grew around the rim. Perhaps fifty Purple Swampheens (*Kalem*) - gorgeous birds that were venerated by ancient Romans - played in the lagoon and its banks. They probed the mud and grass for food and sometimes sparred with each other, often flying short distances to claim empty patches.

Our guide Belal was scanning the site. Suddenly he became agitated. "Oh no, that one is trapped!" He pointed to an area about fifty feet to our right at the far edge of the lagoon where a *Kalem* was hopping from one branch to another. Looking carefully, we realized its feet were caught in a twine that tethered it like a leash as it tried mightily to fly away.

Belal immediately ran to the bird. He caught its wings and, grabbing its feet, gently untangled them from the twine. He brought the bird to us before releasing it.

As he walked back to us, I looked at the glorious expanse of water that lay beyond the lagoon. Tanguar Haor, a Ramsar wetland of global importance, is located in Sunamganj. It encompasses almost 100 square kilometres. (A Haor is a saucer-shaped depression in the land that fills up in monsoon and partially empties in winter.) A place of breathtaking natural beauty year-round, it is a magnet for birders because of the thousands of migratory birds - mostly ducks - that descend here in winter.

Our group of four had arrived here two days earlier from Sylhet. First a microbus had brought us to Sulemanpur, where we had boarded the basic but functional houseboat *Rupaboi*, our home for the next two nights. After an hour's cruising, it had

anchored at Golapara village inside the Haor.

Using the *Rupaboi* as base, we were exploring the Haor - which comprises of numerous smaller *Beels* or lakes - using smaller row boats. Waves upon waves of ducks and water birds cavorted in the waters of Tanguar. We found the most birds in Laichamara *Beel*, but the Haor also had strips of higher land with vegetation, and the canals running between them offered a chance to see birds closer.

That morning, rowing down one of these canals, we had come ashore for a look and walked across the strip to the lagoon when we discovered the trapped *Kalem*.

After Belal had brought the *Kalem* to us, he gently held it, firmly grasping its feet. Every few seconds it flapped its iridescent blue wings, trying to escape. I got a close look at its impossibly long thin toes which enable it to walk on water by tiptoeing across large leaves of Water Lily or Lotus.

Next I examined the trap. An innocuous looking jumble of twine, Belal explained it was hand-crafted and designed to entrap those long-toed feet. The chicken-sized bird was probably trapped by local villagers for their own consumption.

Belal set the bird free and it immediately flew into a dense part of the bush, disappearing instantly. Next he collected some dry twigs, built a small tepee, started a fire and set the trap aflame. We ended our morning adventure by watching it reduce to ashes.

(Tanguar Haor is out of the way but worth the effort. For information on the houseboat see www.facebook.com/Rupaboi).

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Piling up medical waste discarded thoughtlessly at landfills in city corporation areas pose serious threat to public health. Divisional cities, excluding the capital, have around 1,380 healthcare establishments -- public and private -- that produce over 20 tonnes of medical waste every day. To draw attention to this alarming issue, The Daily Star is highlighting medical waste management in major cities across the country. In this instalment, we look at medical waste management in Narayanganj city.

Flagrant defiance behind toxicity

Two N'ganj govt hospitals ignoring incineration service

SANAD SAHA, N'ganj

With proper disposal of medical waste being a significant issue considering public health and environment, two major government hospitals in Narayanganj are ignoring incineration service provided by an NGO.

Moreover, the hospitals are at loggerheads with the city corporation over responsibility of removing garbage from their compounds.

Authorities of the 300-bed hospital and 100-bed General Hospital say removal and disposal are not their concerns. It is Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC) that has to do it.

When asked why they are not taking service from PRISM Bangladesh Foundation - entrusted with incinerating medical waste, authorities of the hospitals said they are already paying tax to NCC to manage garbage. So, another group should not be paid for the

same purpose, they said.

On the other hand, NCC says disposing of general waste is its responsibility; healthcare facilities themselves are compelled to incinerate their medical waste.

Amid the disagreement, wastes -- medical and regular -- are not even relocated from the hospitals' premises properly.

During a recent visit to the 100-bed hospital in Nitaiganj and the 300-bed one in Khanpur, this correspondent found all sorts of garbage left scattered on and outside the premises.

Malodour was coming from stale garbage mixed with bandages, used medicine, syringes and so on.

Talking to The Daily Star, hospitals' authorities alleged that the city corporation does not remove those on time. NCC workers said they mostly found those in an unsorted form. Those have to be segregated, they added.

At the 300-bed hospital, plastic objects are kept in blue, syringes

in yellow and infectious items in red containers at every ward, said a nurse of male medicine ward.

At the end of a day, cleaners pile those together on a dumping ground on its premises, he said wishing not to be named.

Tulshi Das, one of its cleaners, said there is no spots to dump those separately. "We know it is harmful. But, what do we do when there is no designated place?" she said.

Ansar Ali, another cleaner, said around 5-7kg of medical waste and 30-40kg of general waste are produced at the hospital on a daily basis.

Just around one year ago, harmful objects were "traditionally" burnt in pits and amputated body parts and blood were dumped in a dug up hole, he said. Later, the city corporation took those away, said the cleaner.

Now, the process cannot be followed as the hole and pits have been destroyed because of a project work to upgrade the hospital to a 500-bed one, said the worker.

He alleged that NCC trucks transport the garbage sporadically. "Sometimes they come only after phone calls and do not clear the premises properly. As a result, some garbage are left behind."

Dr Abu Zaher, superintendent of the 300-bed hospital, said, "Once the upgradation project is finished, we will look into proper garbage management."

On the other hand, Asaduzzaman, resident medical officer of the 100-bed hospital, said, "There has been no garbage on the premises for several days. Now, wastes are kept outside. From there, NCC workers take those to Shahidpur landfill."

This correspondent found medical waste on a road within 50 yards of the hospital.

Asaduzzaman said medical and general wastes are segregated at every ward, but as the hospital has no disposal plant, those are dumped together. "However, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



PHOTO: SANAD SAHA



MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

A woman scavenges medical waste dumped inside the 300-bed hospital compound in Khanpur. Inset, city corporation workers move garbage mixed with clinical waste left on a road, 50 yards off the 100-bed hospital in Nitaiganj. The photos were taken recently.



Used plastic bottles of drinking water are put in bags bound to a rickshaw, on their way to a farmhouse, where they will be filled with milk and delivered all across the city. This may seem like an appreciable case of plastic reuse, but the hygiene of it all has to come into question. The photo was taken from Chattogram city's CRB area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hospital brings light of hope to patients

BSS, Dhaka

Asha Akhtar Akhi, a resident of Kaliakair upazila of Gazipur, burned her esophagus after drinking a toilet bowl cleaner a year ago. After rushing her from one hospital to another, Akhi's family got her admitted to Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Memorial KPJ Specialized Hospital in Gazipur.

At the hospital, physicians replaced her esophagus with her colon (colonic interposition). A total of six patches were done on her stomach. The operation was successfully performed by the hospital's Medical Director Dr Razeed Hassan and Dr JMH Quasar Alam.

After a long period of treatment, Akhi is now living happily in her in-laws' house.

"Our neighbours and relatives were very surprised when they saw Akhi doing well again, as none had thought she would be able to come

back. We wanted to get her admitted to other hospitals, but Dr Razeed of the specialised hospital assured us that this facility can treat her well," Akhi's father Md Afaz Uddin told BSS.

When Akhi's family was not able to bear her treatment cost, hospital authorities placed the matter before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who directed them to provide all essential financial support to the patient.

Akhi's father was very grateful for this. "Our prime minister is very kind-hearted. Not only has she established such a modern hospital in our area, but she has also decided to provide financial support for the poor. I pray by heart that she lives long," he said.

His satisfaction went deeper. "Not only is the service good, the hospital's doctors are very caring and loving too," Afaz said.

Named after Bangabandhu's wife Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib, the

250-bed world class hospital has been serving people like Akhi since its inception in 2013, becoming something of a light of hope to the people living in Gazipur and adjoining areas.

"Every day, we receive a huge number of patients from all over the country, including Gazipur, Savar, Dhaka, Manikganj and Tangail," in-charge and Assistant Manager of Business Development Services Abul Hasan told BSS.

Established at Kashimpur union under Kaliakair upazila in Gazipur by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust, the state-of-the-art facility is being operated by Kumpulan Perubatan Johor (KPJ) Healthcare Berhad, a renowned Malaysian private healthcare organisation.

KPJ Healthcare Berhad currently

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

5 held over drug peddling

1,480 bottles of Phensedyl, 4,625 litres of locally-brewed liquor seized in Kishoreganj, M'singh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'singh

Rab in separate drives early yesterday arrested five alleged drug peddlers in possession of Phensedyl and locally brewed alcohol in Kishoreganj and Mymensingh.

In Kishoreganj, Rab arrested two with Phensedyl from Natal in Bhairab upazila. The arrestees are Belal Ahmed (50), and Yeasin Ahmed Milon (25) from Zakiganj upazila of Sylhet.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team, led by Additional Superintendent of Police Rofiuddin Mohammad Jobayer, conducted a drive at the area around 2:30am and stopped a Dhaka-bound truck, said Md Tafiqul Alam, assistant superintendent of police of Rab-14 in Mymensingh.

The team seized a truck carrying 1,480 bottles of Phensedyl, and Tk 5,900 in cash,

Rab sources said. The bottles were kept in 10 sacks and are worth around Tk 45 lakh, said the official.

Later, Rab handed over the arrestees to Bhairab Police Station on the same day.

In Mymensingh city, Rab arrested three with locally brewed alcohol from Station Road area, informed the official.

The arrestees are Monir Sikder (34), Hira Chandra Shil (35) and Masud Quraishy (20), all hailing from different areas of Mymensingh town.

Rab raided the area around 12:30am and seized 4,625 litres of locally brewed alcohol from their possession. They were handed over to Kotwali Police Station on the same day.

Separate cases were lodged with the respective police stations.

Nat'l judicial academy to be set up at Shibchar Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Plans to set up a national judicial academy at Shibchar upazila in Madaripur is underway, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

"The judiciary is independent now. To institutionalise this independence, training for judges are essential. A national judicial academy will be set up under the directive of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," the minister said.

He said this while talking to reporters after visiting potential locations for the academy around Shibchar.

Among others, Jatiya Sangsad's chief whip and Madaripur-1 lawmaker Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury Liton and Faridpur-1 MP Monjur Hossain Bulbul were present.

The minister said the government will also set up a "Chouki Adalat" (court) at Shibchar in order to ensure general people can access justice.

Later on, the minister attended a view exchange programme organised by Faridpur's Bhanga Upazila Bar Association as chief guest.

'Finding error in everything is BNP's bad habit'

Says Hasan Mahmud at Pabna AL meeting

UNB, Pabna

Finding errors in everything has turned into a bad habit of BNP, said Awami League Joint General Secretary Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday.

He made the remarks at Pabna Government Edward College while speaking at a meeting of grassroots Awami League workers, suggesting BNP to "come out of the habit."

Addressing the workers, Hasan Mahmud said, "Many leaders changed their stance when AL was in danger. There are many intruders in the party."

He also said that those who entered the party seeking favours will not get any post, while being rich will also not guarantee being made leaders of the party.

Asked about low voter turnout in the recently-held Dhaka city elections, Mahmud, also the information minister, said BNP spread confusion over EVM and participated in the city polls as a part of their movement which created fear among voters.

"BNP made mistake in polls calculation," he added.

AL's Pabna district unit Senior Vice-President and Pabna Zila Parishad Chairman Rezaul Rahim Lal presided over the meeting where local AL leaders were present.

Elections to the Dhaka south and north city corporations were held on February 1. The turnout was less than 20 percent in 709 centres, shows Election Commission data on all 2,468 centres.