

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Trees with interlocked roots, Sundarban.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Secrets of Trees

Recently I started reading *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben, a German forester who spent several decades managing old trees in European forests. The book has many startling observations and claims: for example, trees communicate with each other, they raise alarms and work cooperatively, and they single out certain weak trees for special attention and care.

Perhaps many of the findings of the book are well-known to botanists, but for the layman used to looking at trees as mostly static and dumb, they are revealing.

One reason we miss events in the lives of other beings in our world is that they occupy a different time scale than humans. On one extreme are creatures whose lives go by very fast. For example, birds such as bee-eaters can snatch, flip and swallow a flying insect so swiftly that, for more people, it is impossible to discern this action with naked eye. Only with a very fast sequence taken with a high-speed camera can you see the truth.

Trees fall on the other extreme. Many of their actions are so slow compared to our familiar time scale we are accustomed to that we miss them.

Wohlleben's contribution is to interpret these slow events showing the deliberate actions of the trees. Reading the book, I was reminded of behaviour patterns I had encountered in trees.

Sundarban came to mind for several reasons. Trees of Sundarban – which must surely form many communities of trees as described in the book – have to cope with an environment made adverse by saline water, submersion by tides and storms blowing in from the Bay.

Take, for example, the photograph above. I took it in Sundarban in 2018. Unable to understand what is happening there, I asked Dr.

Mahmood Hussain, a professor of Botany at Khulna University, who explained it to me. These trees have shallow roots and easily toppled by storms. In order to help each other withstand storms, roots of nearby trees have interlocked so they gain strength from each other.

When I was in the Amazon forest, I noticed that the canopy was so thick that sunlight hardly penetrated into the forest ground. How do saplings grow then, I asked my guide. He said that upon reaching a height of five or six feet, they stay put, simply waiting their turn – perhaps for decades. Eventually and inevitably a nearby adult tree falls because of lightning, disease, storm or old age, opening up sunlight to the patient juvenile. At that point it starts growing again.

But you don't have to go to Amazonia to witness the wisdom of trees. The Candle Bush (*Dad Mordon*), which grows in abundance on our roadsides and disturbed ground, is an example. Certain caterpillars eat its leaves. To discourage them, the plant produces nectar in its yellow, candle-shaped flowers, attracting ants. These ants, in turn, attack the caterpillars and keep them away. If you see such a bush next to the road, take a closer look – you are likely to see a line of ants in its yellow flowers.

Wohlleben's observations go well beyond the adaptations that trees make to survive. He presents trees as beings with memory, emotions and intelligence. But he also points out that the kinds of sophisticated behaviour he observed are seen in forests where trees have grown naturally. When trees are planted in a forest, their roots are already irreversibly damaged, and they are less likely to show interesting behaviour.

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PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL, TITU DAS, SHEIKH NASIR

Colours bloomed across the country yesterday to mark the twin celebrations of Valentine's Day and Pahela Falgun. Clockwise from left, in Tangail, a mother affectionately looks at her daughter, all dolled up for the day. A group of friends freestyle dancing at Barishal Government Women's College. What's a celebration without a group selfie? Youngsters pose for a photo at a programme in Sylhet Central Shaheed Minar premise.



Patient 'tortured to death' at Savar rehab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A patient of a drug rehabilitation centre in Savar died after he had been tortured there, alleged the victim's family.

Jahangir Mia (30) from Savar's Bank Colony was admitted to nearby "New Ador" on Thursday, his brother Manik told The Daily Star.

"Around noon today [yesterday], the rehab centre managing director Ariful Islam Jewel told me that my brother was taken to Enam Medical College Hospital following sickness," said Manik.

"When we arrived at the hospital, we heard that Zahangir died," he added.

Dr Merazur Rehan, emergency medical officer of the hospital, said Zahangir was brought dead.

Manik said, "We found multiple injury marks on the body."

Jahangir was beaten to death hours after he was admitted to the rehabilitation centre, alleged Manik. "I will file a murder case against the rehab centre officials," he said.

The body bore injury marks on different parts including face, head and neck, said Moniruzzaman, sub-inspector of Savar Model Police Station. "He [Jahangir] might have died at night," said the SI.

"Primarily we suspect he was tortured to death," said Officer-in-Charge AFM Sayeed of the police station.

Police sent the body to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical

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For the love of birds

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Love has many definitions; it can be expressed in many ways, it can be felt for many things. This is why Valentine's Day, the day of love, is celebrated in so many different ways.

For a group of Sylhet Agriculture University (SAU) youths, expressing their love for birds was the way to celebrate the day.

With the slogan, "Pakhi Bachao, Paribesh Bachao (Save Birds, Save the Environment)", the youths dedicated the day facilitating living spaces for birds at the university campus and surrounding areas. They did this by setting clay pots on trees where birds can build nests with ease.

The event, titled "Love for Birds", was organised by Pradhikar, an animal rights organisation of the university.

According to Pradhikar, rapid

urbanisation around the university area has put severe pressure on avian habitats. As concrete encroaches, birds of all species are left with little inhabitable space.

The organisation has been hosting the event for the last couple of years. Along with birds, the programme also expresses Pradhikar's affection for all living animals of the planet.

Ahmed Rafi, president of Pradhikar, said, "Deforestation has become a major threat to all living animals of the planet. Birds are directly affected by it. It is our responsibility to help birds survive in nature for the betterment of our ecosystem."

"This event is a symbolic gesture to raise awareness among people so that our avian friends don't face extinction as a result of our wrongdoings," he added.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Pedalling for charity

Cyclist, on a solo bike ride from Vietnam to UK, passes through Bangladesh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Hannah Kern, a 25-year-old woman from England, is on a solo charity bike ride from Hanoi to London to raise awareness and funds for four charities.

Titled "Hannah's Happiness Project", the bike ride started on April 2019 in Vietnam, and it recently took her through Bangladesh.

Kern entered Bangladesh through Tamabil border in Sylhet on February 3. On a Facebook post detailing her time in the country, she mentions, "When planning my route through Bangladesh, many people told me that the rivers throughout the country have a wonderful and impressive travel network that I must experience. This helped me to decide on a route where I would cross the Meghna River from Chandpur to Barisal, the home

of a great cyclist community."

She explained why she is a "happiness activist". "I believe that the best and most powerful strength of an individual is the ability to make someone smile. I also believe that we must start asking why there are issues in our world related to animal rights, human rights, climate change etc," she said.

Speaking with this correspondent on Thursday, she said she hopes to encourage people to join this happiness movement.

She has already passed through Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and India, crossing 8,000 kilometres. "The people of this country have been helpful and kind. Everywhere, they have given me shelter, advice, and support," she said.

"I hope my journey through Bangladesh inspires others to visit this beautiful country," Kern added.

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Hanna Kern, who's on a solo bike trip to raise funds for charity, with Lal Sobuj Society, a group of local cyclists, roam across Barishal on their trusted mode of transport. This photo was taken from Charaicha in the district's Sadar upazila on Wednesday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

RU professor sues colleague over assault

RU CORRESPONDENT

A Rajshahi University teacher filed an attempted murder case on Thursday night against his colleague after the latter allegedly assaulted him.

Prof Ali Asgar of RU's crop science and technology department filed the case with Motihar Police Station against Prof Khairul Islam of the same department, said SM Masud Parvez, officer-in-charge of the police station.

"I was standing beside the dean's office when Prof Khairul came and hit me without saying anything. As a result, I fell on the floor and fainted," said Prof Ali.

However, Prof Khairul denied the allegation, claiming that he did not even touch him.

Both teachers had filed two general diaries against each other over another dispute with the police station in November last year.

THREE CONSTITUENCIES

Seven collect BNP forms for by-polls

UNB, Dhaka

Seven aspirants yesterday collected BNP's nomination forms to contest the upcoming by-polls to three constituencies.

Party leaders Rabiul Islam Robi collected the form for contesting the Dhaka-10 by-election, while Kazi Muniruzzaman, Monirul Haque, Kazi Khairuzzaman Shipon for Bagerhat-4 and Mainul Hasan Sadik, Rafiqul Islam and Mizanur Rahman Sarker for Gaibandha-3 by-polls.

The by-elections will be held on March 21 as per the schedule announced by the Election Commission on February 6.



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