

Migratory writers flock to the fair

MATHEWS CHIRAN



Ekushey book fair has become a symbol of our national identity. The overwhelming presence of not just literary enthusiasts but also writers, poets and publishers at Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan speaks volumes about the love for books in our hearts.

And for that love of anything and everything Bangla, geographical boundaries seem to fade away during this month of February when expatriate writers from across the globe fly hundreds of miles to present their new offerings to readers. "As soon as you enter the book fair premises, you feel like this is where you belong. The hassle of flying such long hours vanishes right away," said Salma Bani, an expatriate writer from Canada.

Salma is the winner of Syed Waliullah Literary Award-2018. Previously known as Bangla Academy Expatriate Writers' Award, this award is given to writers living abroad in recognition of their contribution



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The book fair saw a bustling day yesterday, as last-minute shoppers thronged the premises on its last weekend.

to Bangla literature.

Salma's noted works include "Nindito Uttoron" and "Bhangari". Nindito Uttoron is about strains and thrills of immigrant life while Bhangari is on slum dwellers.

She said she visits her motherland every year and of course, her visits revolve around the book fair. "During my visit, I also try to come up with the plot for my next book," she said smilingly. "I am planning to write on Rohingya refugees this year."

Being an expat writer can be challenging too.

"Publishing a book requires a lot of attention and commitment as one needs to stay in touch with a publisher throughout the process. When you're living abroad, that process is not so smooth," she mentioned.

Besides, managing time remains an issue for expatriate writers as well, Salma said.

Publishers are also upbeat about printing books of expatriate writers. Humayun Kabir of Charulipi Prokashon, said, "We are always welcoming of writers living abroad. They

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'Scope created for plundering by Awami syndicate'

BNP on power tariff hike

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday alleged that the government has raised the power tariff to create a scope for the "ruling-party syndicate to plunder public money".

"The government is raising the prices of power, gas and water as per its whim to cut into public pockets ignoring the request and arguments of people, and consumer rights or business organisations. They've raised the power price for the benefit of the Awami syndicate," said the party's senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

Speaking at a press conference at BNP's Nayapaltn central office, he further said, "Plundering public money is the only reason behind the hike in power tariffs at both retail and wholesale levels, amid the oil price slump in global market in the wake of coronavirus outbreak. Awami syndicate will loot around Tk 2,000 crore a year from the pockets of consumers through the power price hike."

On Thursday, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) announced to increase the power tariff on a weighted average by 5.3 percent at retail and 8.4 percent at wholesale levels.

The new tariff will come into effect on March 1, said newly-appointed BERC Chairman Md Abdul Jalil, while announcing the decision on Thursday at the Commission's auditorium.

This is the ninth time Awami League government has increased the power tariffs in a decade.

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TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Hair-crested Drongo, Satchori National Park.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Drongo

I was watching a flock of Cattle Egrets trailing behind cows grazing in the Hao's swampy land. One of them - a juvenile lacking confidence - had caught a small fish in its beak. Before it could swallow the fish a Black Drongo (*Fingey*) flew in and buzzed the poor bird. Several Egrets came to the aid of the young bird, but the Drongo shooed them away and repeatedly buzzed its target to steal the fish. At one point the hassled Egret dropped the fish. The Drongo dove to snatch it but the Egret was quicker and reclaimed it. The persistent Drongo continued harrasing the Egret. Eventually the Egret dropped the catch again; this time the Drongo snatched it and flew away.

One of our commonest birds, the Black Drongo is sometimes called "king of birds" in our villages. It is ferocious and aggressive, often attacking birds several times its size.

It belongs to the Drongo family, Dicuridae, that has twenty-nine bird species seen in Asia, Africa and Australia. They are well-known for their aggression and their ability to mimic the call of other birds which they use to great advantage. They are black or grey, with forked tails and upright stance when perched. What they lack in colour they make up in attitude and ferocity.

The Black Drongo is one of six species of Drongos seen in Bangladesh. Each has its distinction. The most spectacular is probably the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo. It sports a crest of feathers on its head and its tail feathers include two extra long feathers at either end. These feathers are shaped like tennis rackets that trail behind it in flight.

The Bronzed Drongo, shiny blue-black in its back, it smaller but emanates a ferocious energy.

Perhaps our most exquisite Drongo is the Hair-crested Drongo. The edges of its tail curl inward, but its good looks come from a patchwork of blue-black feathers on its breast and back. When the sun strikes it at the right angle, these feathers shine like fine intricate jewellery.

The flight of the Drongo is adapted for hunting. While in flight it can switch directions swiftly to chase insects or flies in any direction. It can also hover while tracking prey. Those of us who grew up playing in neighbourhood fields must have seen Black Drongos feasting on termites on those special occasions when thousands of termites take to flight at twilight.

My most memorable Drongo encounter took place in a Purbachol field. I was watching a bush, waiting for a small bird to emerge from it. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a Black Drongo hopping in another bush to my far left. I did not turn my head to look at it as I did not want to miss the small bird. Still looking peripherally, I saw the Drongo fly up and perch on an electrical wire. Something was amiss. I turned my head to look at it and was stunned to see it holding a Garden Lizard - caught from the bush - in its claws.

A minute or two later, after it had pecked at the Lizard many times, the Drongo must have relaxed its claws because the Lizard fell out of its clutch.

The bird was unperturbed. In one fluid, effortless motion, it left its perch, swooped down, caught the Lizard in air, returned to its original position and resumed pecking as if nothing had happened.

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Traffic remained halted near House Building intersection in Uttara yesterday morning, after a gas line leaked, reportedly due to ongoing construction work on the road. The situation was brought to normalcy later in the day after workers fixed the leak.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'Stay alert to prevent attack on minorities'

Islamic leader urges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An Islamic cleric yesterday urged people to maintain harmony in the country and remain alert to prevent any kind of attacks on minority communities, amid the recent spate of violence in India.

"Our Muslim brothers, we believe in harmony, not in sectarianism... We will not hurt any non-Muslims living in the country. We live peacefully here and we will maintain harmony," Nur Hossain Kasemi, president of Dhaka city unit of Hefazat-e-Islam, said yesterday during a protest programme in the city.

Different Islamic groups, under the banner of "like-minded Islamic parties"...

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College admission applications to be online-only this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is set to introduce a fully online application system for enrollment into higher secondary colleges and madrasas.

Until last year, students seeking enrollment in 11th-grade were able to apply for admission into colleges online and through SMS.

"We will no longer keep SMS-based system for application seekers. There will be only online-based application," Inter-Education Board Coordination sub-committee chief Prof Ziaul Haque said yesterday.

He said that the coordination committee has finalised admission policy for 11th-grade in colleges and madrasas. Education Minister Dipu Moni presided over a meeting on the draft policy on Thursday.

The new policy will see admission confirmation fees rise to Tk 135 from Tk 130, said Ziaul, also chairman of Dhaka education board.

The board proposed to introduce an online application system for admission, in a bid to cut down costs and complications relating to the SMS system, he said.

Students can apply to a maximum of 10 colleges or madrasas, with a fee of Tk 150, said officials. The application process will run from May 10-20 in the first phase. They will be scrutinised between May 27-31 and the result of first phase of application will be published on June 8.

The second round of applications will be taken from June 17-20, and its outcome will be published on June 20.

The third phase will run between June 23 and 25, the results of which will be out on Jun 25.

SSC and equivalent exams will be completed by March 12 this year, with more than 2 million students taking part.

Elderly woman killed in fire at Mohammadpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A paralysed elderly woman was burnt to death on her bed after a fire swept through her house in Mohammadpur yesterday.

The deceased is Mabia Begum (60), a resident of Banshbari Mandir Goli area near Mohammadpur Bus Stand.

The fire broke out on the third floor of the seven-storied building around 9:15am. Fire officials rushed to the spot upon information, but locals had doused the blaze before they reached, said Ashraf Islam, station officer of local fire station.

Mabia was bedridden for long time, and family members had fitted two electronic medical devices to her bed for treatment. The fire might have originated from a short-circuit in the devices, fire officials and family members said.

As fire and smoke engulfed the flat, family members ran to safety but the woman died on her bed, Ashraf said.

Mabia's brother Mohammad Wasim said the devices were used for therapeutic purposes, as per doctors' recommendation.

"... We could not enter the room to rescue her due to heavy smoke and fire," he added.



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Department of Law

North South University

Bashundhara, Dhaka 1229

Tel: +880 2 55668200, Ext: 2150, 1062 Email: chair.law@northsouth.edu

Helpline: 01614271717 (Graduate Office) Web: www.northsouth.edu



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