

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Mountain Gorilla, Bwindi, Uganda.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Re-Visiting Africa

Recently I started re-reading a book I first read three decades ago. *African Silences* chronicles writer/naturalist Peter Mathiessen's travels through Africa during the 1970s and 1980s looking for rare birds and wildlife. Covering three broad swaths of Western and Central Africa, the book is both exciting and gloomy. Having visited several African countries in recent years, I can readily connect with the book. I am excited when Mathiessen finds rare animals and birds, and saddened when he recounts the destruction wrought on the wildlife of the continent. The strong human element of the book – a hallmark of Mathiessen's work and one that attracted me in the first place – also resonates with me.

My first reading of this book – during the heady days of my youth when I found my stride in Silicon Valley and believed the world was mine to conquer – had left me unimpressed. Non-fiction attracted me, but since I was, at that time, not keen about observing wildlife, Mathiessen's descriptions of gorillas, elephants, rhinos and numerous birds did not particularly strike me. The only reason I finished it was because Mathiessen had autographed the book for me at a reading.

After several decades my interest in observing nature has greatly increased. So when I opened this book, I found myself drawn to several sections.

Take Mountain Gorillas, for instance. These rare and endangered creatures are seen in a mountainous area where three countries, Uganda, Rwanda and The Congo, meet. In 2014, I tracked them in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. After a brutal day of climbing slippery slopes which included falling countless times, I came face to face with a silverback and his troop – a memorable if anticlimactic moment. They appeared remarkably nonplussed

by the sudden appearance of about twenty-five humans who frantically photographed them with wide-eyed amazement for several minutes.

And what was it like for Mathiessen? He tracked the gorillas with a safari group in the Virunga mountains of The Congo, not too far from Bwindi. When the humans finally found the gorillas and they faced each other, "the apes are more relaxed than we are and also more discreet, since they do not stare rudely at our strange appearance; on the contrary they avert their gaze from the disorderly spectacle we represent [and concentrate on eating leaves.]" His group however had a bonus over mine. Its path crossed with that of nasty Sifa ants which bit "the hell out of the women and children," causing chaos and groans, to which the Gorillas gave nary a glance.

Mathiessen is a keen observer of birds. He writes about his quest for the elusive Congo Peacock, one of three peacock species of the world, which was first recorded in the 1930s. Little was known about this bird during the 1980s, but today we know as many as 9,000 exist in the world.

The author also documents with empathy the daily surprises and hiccups while travelling in Africa. Flat tires, broken down cars, collisions with domesticated animals, even the emergency landing of a small plane and the subsequent harassment by officials – Mathiessen covers them all with good humour. My own experiences with African drivers and cars can attest to this.

The book reminds me once again why Mathiessen was a great writer. Very few have been able to fuse observations about flora and fauna with stories of the human condition like him, effortlessly moving from one to the other.

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## 'Be wary of muggers'

Police instruct pharmacies, emergency suppliers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Police have instructed owners and workers of emergency supply products and pharmacies, who have government permission to stay open after sunset, to not allow customers to enter inside shops unless absolutely necessary.

Police also told shop owners to carry out financial transactions and deliver products from inside the shop and to keep their shop grilles closed if they have the option.

Sohel Rana, Assistant Inspector General (media and public relations) of Police Headquarters (PHQ), made the disclosure in a video message to media yesterday.

Bangladesh Police gave the instructions in light of mugging activities that were reported in different areas of Dhaka, including pharmacies, during the shutdown enforced, said officials.

Meanwhile, Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police on Thursday arrested four people from the capital's Dhanmondi, Lalbagh and Hajaribagh areas for their alleged involvement in a robbery at a flat in the capital's Kalabagan.

The arrestees are Md Hasan alias Jisan, Md Anwar Hossain, Md Abdul Alim and Md Likhon Sheikh.

Shamsul Arefin, additional deputy commissioner of DB, told media the arrestees looted gold ornaments, cash and a laptop after cutting grille of a flat on March

31.

A case was filed with Kalabagan Police Station regarding the incident on April 2 and police primarily identified two of the arrestees analysing CCTV footage, he said.

The arrestees in primary interrogation confessed their involvement in some other theft incidents, added Arefin.

AIG Sohel Rana said, "We gave the instructions to shop owners after we found the pattern of crime changing recently, and some mugging incidents were reported in some medicine shops."

Police have intensified their patrolling in wake of the mugging incidents said the AIG.

Sohel Rana further said, "Every member of the police force is standing by the people, going beyond their normal responsibilities and duties. People are also showing respect and love for the police force. We can see it while going through mass media and social media."

"All members of the police force are being encouraged by the love and respect. We want to say clearly that the attitude of service to the people will continue," he said in another video statement to media.

Earlier on Thursday, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mohammad Javed Patwary in a video message instructed all police unit chiefs to perform duty with utmost professionalism so that crime incidents do not rise during this extraordinary situation.

## CMP launches app to monitor home-quarantined persons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

To prevent the spread of coronavirus, Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) have launched a mobile app, aiming to monitor people who are in home quarantine after coming in contact with Covid-19 positive patients.

The mobile application, "Stay Home, Stay Safe", prepared by Inovace Technologies, was inaugurated by CMP Commissioner Md Mahabubor Rahman on Thursday evening at CMP Headquarters.

The officials said the app has geofencing technology, which will ensure the current location and status of home-quarantined people.

Apart from that, the app has a notification system and it will send notification and alert to both the home-quarantined and the web-based admin panel if they try to go outside of their designated areas.

At the same time, the admin panel will convey the information to the police stations or monitoring units concerned to take necessary steps in this regard.

CMP officials said police are now under huge pressure but their time will be saved along with ensuring proper monitoring through the app.

Police personnel will also be able to avoid close contact with the home-quarantined, ensuring their personal safety.

CMP Headquarters sources said primarily the app has been introduced under 16 police stations but it will be spread across the country. Currently, 41 home-quarantined persons are being monitored through the app.

Senior officials of CMP and Inovace Technologies were present at Thursday's programme.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

**LIFE FINDS A WAY ...** This tiny seedling rising through layers of solid concrete and asphalt bears a heartening testament of the indomitable force of life. At a time when fear of sickness and death have closed doors and pulled down shutters across the globe, mother nature is leaving her reminder to mankind that the fight for life is worth it. The photo was taken on Mirpur Road in front of Chandrima Super Market.

## Tough times for seasonal traders in Barishal

Suspension of Pahela Baishakh celebrations hits SMEs

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Usually, April is a busy month for Nantu Mia.

The 45-year-old tailor from Barishal not only remains occupied with orders, he also has to complete those before the deadline of Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla calendar.

Not just him, other traders too spend busy times during the period and eye good profit.

This year, however, the situation is different due to the countrywide shutdown and cancellation of the festival to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus, which is taking a toll on traders.

"I used to earn Tk 500-600 daily at this time every year. Now, I don't have enough money to buy essentials for my family," said Nantu Mia.

The stores at the city's Katpatty, Chawkbazar and Padmabaty are famous for their collections and discounts on dresses ahead of Pahela Baishakh, and hundreds flock to those ahead of the festival.

These days, the areas are wearing a deserted look.

Achol Fashions, a famous boutique in Katpatty, have been closed for 15 days. Its owner Bilkis Ahamed Lily said she is worried how she is going to pay rent.

Not just clothes traders, businesspersons of other traditional items are also hit hard. A small entrepreneur, Rebekha Sultana, said she had been making jute bags and craft items with a bank loan. "Now, it's not possible for me to pay the installment," she said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Banalta Murshida, president of Barishal Women Business Forum, demanded postponement of installment



PHOTO: TITU DAS

**With dropped shoulders, a woman makes clay toys at Mahar village in Uzirpur upazila. These are widely sold during Pahela Baishakh, but with the traditional fairs cancelled this year, artisans are staring at a huge loss.**

collection by banks for at least six months to support hundreds of small and medium enterprise (SME) traders.

According to Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), around 2,000 people are involved in making SME products in the city.

Mrinal Kanti Saha, owner of Swadeshi Bastralaya, said demand for dresses increases before Pahela Baishakh. "During this period, we sell more items than that of Eid and Puja festivals," he said.

But the traders are facing hardships, due to the present situation.

Tahira Siddika, an entrepreneur in C&B area, said last year she supplied over 50 dresses online. "But this year, almost all the orders have been cancelled," she said.

Debosree Sarker, owner of online-based design platform Bangalana, echoed her.

Saidur Rahman Rintu, director of the Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BCCI), said, "They [small entrepreneurs] need immediate government support."

BCCI sources said 3,000-odd people are engaged in clothes trading and there are over 500 tailors in the city.

Jalis Mahmud, deputy general manager of BSCIC in Barishal, said they provide training to SME traders. "Giving financial support to them is not our responsibility."

Contacted, Md Masudur Rahman, assistant general manager of SME Foundation under the Ministry of Industries, said, "We are looking into the crisis in this sector. We sent letters to all of our district offices. Once we receive their feedback, we will prepare a report to send to the ministry as early as possible."

There are 107,072 SME traders in Barishal district, he added.



## Nat'l Professor Sufia Ahmed laid to rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Professor Sufia Ahmed, who died of cardiac arrest on Thursday night, was laid to rest at Banani graveyard in the capital yesterday.

Sufia, also a Language Movement veteran, was buried at 10:30am in the grave of her husband Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, former adviser to a caretaker government and a prominent lawyer.

Sufia Ahmed (87) was a professor of Islamic History and Culture department at Dhaka University. She passed away at United Hospital around 8:50pm on Thursday, said Md Asaduzzaman, a senior member of Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed and Associates.

She left behind her son and daughter to mourn her death.

Prof Sufia Ahmed was one of the female forerunners to break the Section 144 on the Dhaka University campus on February 21, 1952.

She was awarded with Ekushey Padak in 2002 and Sufia Kamal Award in 2015. She served as the president of Bangladesh Itihash Parishad.

## Churches offer online Easter prayer services

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Christian Church authorities in Bangladesh are conducting online prayer services during the holy week ahead of Easter Sunday on April 12, after closing doors to the churches across the country to avoid any public gathering amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"Church authorities have instructed all Christians not to go to churches, in line with the government order. On Sundays, we are using Facebook Live for prayer service now," said Father Augustine Bulbul Rebeiro, director of Christian Communications Centre in Dhaka.

On Easter Sunday, authorities will conduct the prayer service via Facebook Live, as churches have been closed since March 22 following government directive, he said.

"Now we are towards the end of Lent [40-day fasting period] and will celebrate Easter Sunday on April 12. We call it a holy week and have frequent prayer services. So, we are doing it via Facebook," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Easter Sunday is celebrated in memory of what Christians believe to be the resurrection of Jesus Christ three days after his crucifixion.

Church authorities have also asked all to stay home and follow instructions to prevent transmission of Covid-19.

## BSRM hands over PPE to 8 hospitals in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BSRM, a leading steel manufacturer of the country, handed over 1,000 personal protection equipment (PPE) to eight hospitals in Chattogram recently.

The hospitals are – National Hospital, Parkview Hospital, Delta Health Care Chattogram, Max Hospital and Diagnostic, Chattogram Metropolitan Hospital, Surgiscope Hospital, Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and Chattogram General Hospital.

CMCH Director Brig Gen SM Humayun Kabir thanked BSRM Managing Director Aameer Ali Hussain for the generous support.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

RELIEF DISTRIBUTION  
Corruptors will not be spared: ACC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in a statement yesterday said it will bring to book culprits involved in misappropriating government relief meant for the needy.

"We have learned through the media and our own intelligence that some people are involved in irregularities and graft in distributing relief under the government's social safety net programme in this critical period," ACC said in the statement.

Amid the countrywide shutdown to control spread of Covid-19, the government has begun distributing food among the marginalised.

But, some locals are gobbling up the relief, according to media reports.

ACC has decided that its officials will closely monitor the relief distribution activities in coordination with the deputy commissioners of the districts.

"If anyone is found to have amassed wealth illegally through misappropriation of relief, stern legal action will be taken against them," said the ACC press release.

ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood said they have already given instruction to their officials in this regard. "We will not spare corruptors," the ACC chief said.