

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Black Rhinos, Lake Nakuru, Kenya.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

RHINO

Last week I wrote about the book *African Silences* by Peter Matthiessen recounting a series of trips he made in Africa in search of birds and wildlife. Along with other animals, the book taught me about the White Rhino.

Among all land mammals in the world, the rhino is second only to the elephant in size. There are five species of rhinos in the world. They are White Rhino, Black Rhino, One-horned Rhino, Javan Rhino and Sumatran Rhino. The White Rhino is the largest, weighing in at around 6000 pounds. (In comparison, the African Elephant weighs up to 15000 pounds.) Rhinos are herbivores, living on grass and leaves. Although large, they are fast and can exceed 30 miles/hour during a charge. They are clad in a thick, protective skin up to 2 inches thick. Man is their only predator; they are killed for their horns used for medicinal purpose. Their name comes from their unique appearance: “Rhinoceros” is derived from a Greek word meaning “nose-horned.”

Matthiessen observes that the White Rhino had two subspecies: Northern White Rhino and Southern White Rhino. The Northern subspecies has become extinct, largely due to wholesale slaughter by humans. For example, in the years following the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Simba rebels slaughtered 90% of the White Rhinos there for the purpose of selling their horns. The proceeds were used to buy more weapons. Subsequent efforts to save the subspecies came to naught.

The Southern White Rhino can be easily seen in South Africa.

The moniker “White” is a misnomer – the animals are not really white. It apparently comes from the word “weit”, an Afrikaner word meaning “wide”, called so because of their wide mouths. English settlers

misheard the name.

The Black Rhino (not really black, but named as a counterpoint to the White Rhino!) is found in Kenya, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. I saw it in Kenya's Lake Nakuru National park which has the world's largest concentration of them: one hundred and fifty. In the early morning light two rhinos were grazing in a meadow. At one point they faced each other and nuzzled their large horns. It was touching to see the show of affection among these two giants.

The Javan Rhino is the rarest rhino, critically endangered, with around seventy-two left in the wild. They are the smallest of the rhinos but still formidable at 3000-5000 pounds. All surviving members live in Ujong Kulon National Park in Java.

The Sumatran Rhino is also critically endangered. It is estimated that less than a hundred live in the wild.

One rhino differs in appearance than all the others. While the rest have two horns, the Greater One Horned Rhino, living in India and Nepal, sports just one. Its story is in stark contrast to the Northern White Rhino. Once close to extinction, efforts to save it succeeded and today it numbers over three thousand, the majority in Kaziranga and Chitwan parks in India and Nepal respectively.

In Bangladesh, there are records of rhinos from the late 1880s and early 1900s. For example, Sundarban was home to a subspecies of the Javan Rhino. However, this subspecies, *Rhinoceros sondaicus inermis*, has become extinct. At other times Bangladesh also had the Greater One-horned Rhino and the Sumatran Rhino.

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4 held for storing Covid-19 test kits

They also sold safety gears at high prices, say police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four people from Bangla Motor area in the capital on Thursday night on charges of storing coronavirus testing kits and other equipment used in combating the virus and selling those at hiked prices.

The arrestees are Anwar Hossain, Amit Basak, Shoayeb, and Shuvo.

SM Shamim, senior assistant commissioner of Ramna (zone) police, said they were discharging their duties at Moghbazar when a man approached and complained to them that some traders took Tk 30,000 for 20 masks when the actual price is Tk 3,600.

Shamim said they later conducted a raid at a private institution at Jahura Tower around 9pm on the day and arrested the four along with 275 Covid-19 testing kits, 9,050 normal and 100 N95 masks, 198 personal protective equipment and some other items.

The testing kits should not be in the possession of any individual or private organisation, Shamim said.

In primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they stored the items to sell later at hiked prices. A case was filed with Shahbagh Police Station under the Special Powers Act in this regard.

SPECIAL AMNESTY FOR UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN KUWAIT 4,300 Bangladeshis set to return

JAMIL MAHMUD

More than 4,300 undocumented Bangladeshi migrant workers are waiting to be repatriated from Kuwait, after they applied under a special amnesty declared by the Gulf country to reduce migrant population amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The workers, many of whom live in coronavirus-hit areas of Kuwait, will be repatriated depending on flight clearance from Dhaka, said an official at Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait on Thursday.

Their expenses -- airfare, food and accommodation -- during repatriation will be borne by Kuwait government, said the Bangladesh mission there.

As per the amnesty, undocumented workers will be able to return home without any fine and will be eligible to re-enter the Gulf country through legal channels in the future.

However, the decision for repatriation has put “pressure” on the Bangladesh government amid the coronavirus crisis and feared economic aftershock.

To ensure institutional quarantine of repatriated citizens, the government is setting up quarantine centres for 4,000 persons in Dhaka and nearby districts.

Among some two lakh Bangladeshis in Kuwait, about 25,000 are estimated to be undocumented.

Kuwait has reported 1,658 positive coronavirus cases and five fatalities till yesterday evening.

Besides Kuwait, some labour-receiving countries recently asked Bangladesh to take back undocumented workers. Foreign Minister Abdul Momen on April 5 told media that four to five countries have reached out to Bangladesh in this regard.

He said although not a lot of countries are making this request, it has put pressure on the government at this critical moment.

Talking with this newspaper, an official at Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait said after the Bangladeshi workers applied, Kuwait authorities prepared necessary documents for quick repatriation.

Seeking anonymity, he said since Kuwait authorities will bear all expenses, they are ready to send the workers back home within a couple of days.

“It now depends on the time required for flight clearance,” he told this newspaper on Monday.

Kuwait has also asked the Philippines, India, Egypt, and Sri Lanka to take back their undocumented workers under the amnesty, which started on April 1 and will continue throughout the month.

The Philippines has already repatriated more than 600 undocumented workers from Kuwait, according to media reports.

Md Anisuzzaman, acting labour welfare counsellor at Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait, said Kuwait authorities started receiving applications from Bangladeshi workers on April 11. Many of them are from labour camps in Mahbouda and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, places that are under a two-week lockdown since April 6, said Anisuzzaman, also head of chancery at the Bangladesh mission.

He said due to the lockdown, Kuwait government has undertaken unprecedented precautionary measures to run the amnesty programme.

Application deadline for Bangladeshi workers ended on April 15. On Thursday, Anisuzzaman said a few more days are required to finish pending work.

Docked on to uncertainty

With passengers hard to come by, Buriganga boatmen stare at bleak days

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Sadek Ali, a boatman who plies his trade on the Buriganga, took loans from his relatives to send his only son to Brunei two months ago. This, he hoped, would bring his family better days, and finally allow him to retire from after a 20-year long career.

But all his dreams hit a roadblock with the coronavirus pandemic setting in on the world.

“I hoped things would be alright, but everything has stalled everywhere. My son is unable to send me any money. There's no food on the table,” he said, sitting at the capital's Shashanghat area in Shyambazar. “I have no choice but to take up the oar again.”

The loan, worth Tk 2.5 lakh, has become a headache for Sadek. In something of a double whammy, not only does he have to provide for his family again, but also pay back the lenders, who have started pressuring him, as they too are feeling the heat of the shutdown.

And it's not like getting his boat out to the water and putting in some hard labour is going to take care of all of this. As the shutdown continues, passengers are hard to come by, and daily income of boatmen around the area have come down by at least 70 percent, according to some accounts.

Boatman Md Kamal said, “We used to earn Tk 1,000 or above on a regular day. Now, it has come down to Tk 300 or less.”

Kamal has to pay Tk 75 to rent the boat and Tk 85 to local influential persons, he claimed.

Though the number of passengers has reduced drastically, the charge remains the same, he said. He is the sole bread-earner of his family in



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

These boats, which used to carry hundreds of passengers every day, are just gathering dust.

Barishal. He rows his boat to send his two sons to college. “My family is going to starve if I stop rowing,” Kamal said in a grim tone.

Nearby, sexagenarian Siddique Mia could be seen loudly calling for passers-by to get on his boat. “In the last 20 years, I saw hartals and blockades. But this situation is far worse,” he said.

Even during hartals, many people used to come out bearing the risk, he said. “How do I feed my family? Passengers are nowhere to be found and I don't have any other skill,” he added.

Even though road connectivity has improved

over the years and water of the Buriganga turned pitch black from indiscriminate pollution, the appeal of the boat service never diminished.

Before the shutdown, the ghats were crowded with passengers from all walks of life, especially during the morning and evening.

Visiting the Shyambazar Kheyaghat recently, this correspondent found nearly 20 boats anchored, with boatmen shouting, “Opar, opar [other side]” to attract passengers. With perspective, they almost sound like pleas for this difficult period to pass onto the other side.

VOCATIONAL, MADRASA, ENGLISH VERSION

No TV classes for 2.8m schoolgoers yet

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

About 2.8 million students of madrasas, technical and vocational institutions, and English version are deprived of television education although their peers in general stream are receiving lessons to recover losses during the shutdown.

Educationists said if the situation continues, these students will fall behind their peers.

Officials of the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) and Directorate of Madrasa Education (DME) said they are preparing to air classes through Sangsad Bangladesh Television.

DTE Director Jahangir Alam said TV classes may begin tomorrow.

Directorate of Secondary and

Higher Education (DSHE) started TV education on Sangsad TV on March 29. DSHE officials said a total of about 90 lakh students are currently enrolled in sixth to tenth grades at schools across the country.

Officials at Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) said they started airing classes on April 9 for about 1.63 crore students of 90,000 lakh primary schools and kindergartens.

On March 16, the government shut all educational institutions till March 31, which was eventually extended till April 25.

This means these will remain closed till May 31 for Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr, if the government does not cancel or shorten the vacations.

Bangladesh Madrasa Shikkhak Samity general secretary Delwar Hossain said many students asked them about TV lessons.

There are about 13.53 lakh students at Dakhil or secondary level madrasas; 8.16 lakh at 7,196 Ebtedayee or primary level madrasa and 3.5 lakh at independent Ebtedayee madrasas, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics.

DME Deputy Director Jahangir Alam said they are now recording classes for sixth to tenth grades.

Dohar's Joypara Government Technical School and College Principal Haripada Chandra Paul said students are incurring irreparable academic loss.

There are some three lakh SSC (vocational) and Dakhil (vocational) students at some 3,000 institutions, said DTE Director Jahangir.

He said they are planning to air three classes on three trades for vocational students, and would air classes on all trades in order.

Shahan Ara Begum, principal of Ideal School and College, Motijheel, wanted introduction of classes for English version students on TV. “We are working to start online classes for Bangla and English versions' students,” she said.

Education officials say there are some two lakh English version students at schools across the country.

‘Don't push them back at sea’

Fortify Rights urges Malaysia to conduct rescue missions for adrift boats carrying Rohingyas

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Fortify Rights yesterday called on Malaysia not to push back the ships of Rohingyas adrift at sea, and to deploy urgently search and rescue missions for such boats and ensure their safe disembarkation.

The statement comes a day after the Bangladesh Coast Guard rescued 396 Rohingya from a boat that departed Bangladesh for Malaysia two months ago.

Malaysian authorities reportedly forced the boat back out to sea; the refugees were adrift for weeks, and up to 60 died.

Rohingyas told the Myanmar-based right body that at least two other ships were adrift at sea between Bangladesh and Malaysia.

A police official in southern Thailand told Reuters that five boats carrying Rohingyas had been spotted off the coast

of Satun province late on Monday.

It was not possible to independently confirm the remarks.

“Sending an ill-equipped ship of refugees out to sea is unlawful and a death sentence,” said Matthew Smith, chief executive officer of Fortify Rights.

“The Malaysian government should investigate who ordered this Rohingya ship back out to sea and urgently authorize search and rescue missions for any additional boats in distress. Covid-19 is no excuse to send refugees to death at sea.”

The statement said on April 16, Malaysian authorities forced another boat of more than 200 Rohingyas back to sea.

In 2015, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia had also pushed boats of thousands of Rohingya refugees out to sea.

542 foreign nationals leave Dhaka for home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 542 Canadian and Australian citizens, who were stranded in Bangladesh following outbreak of Covid-19, left Dhaka for their respective countries by separate chartered flights from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Of them, 257 were Canadian citizens and 285 were Australians, sources at the airport said.

A special flight of Qatar Airways left for Toronto at around 10pm on Thursday, said an official of Aviation Security (AVSEC) at Dhaka airport.

Besides, a total of 285 Australian citizens left Dhaka by a chartered flight of Sri Lankan Air at around 9:30pm.

That flight, while coming in, brought back 30 stranded Bangladeshi nationals from Sri Lanka, a spokesperson of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh said.

The Canadian and Australian High Commissions in Dhaka, with help of the Bangladesh government, chartered the flights for their citizens, mostly expatriate Bangladeshis, who opted to go back home amid the pandemic.

On Tuesday, 214 Canadian citizens first left Dhaka for Toronto by a chartered flight of Qatar Airways.

Earlier, citizens of USA, Japan, Malaysia, Bhutan and various European countries also left Dhaka by chartered flights.

Regular air communication to and from Dhaka has remained suspended with all countries except for China since the middle of March, to contain spread of Covid-19.



PHOTO: SNEETH NASIR

More than a month into the first coronavirus case of the country, people in Sylhet are still coming out to the streets, defying social distancing measures. As they keep plying roads and marketplaces en masse, the possibility of the Covid-19 virus' spread increases dramatically. This photo was taken from Bandar Bazar area.

April 30 set as ‘final deadline’ for hajj reg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The religious affairs ministry has extended the deadline for registration of intended hajjis till April 30, says a notice.

Due to a lack of response from people wishing to participate in this year's hajj, the ministry earlier extended the deadline for registration thrice.

The ministry said this is the final time they are extending the deadline. The previous deadline was April 16.

Registration began on March 2 and was supposed to end on March 15, before it was extended till March 25.

Earlier, the ministry and Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB) said pilgrims will get back their money if they fail to perform hajj due to the spread of coronavirus.

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, hajj aspirants are unsure whether hajj will be held at all this year. Hajj flights are scheduled to start from June 23.

On April 1, the Saudi government urged different countries to delay making hajj plans due to the pandemic.

The Bangladesh government on February 24 approved three hajj packages. Hajjis will have to pay Tk 4.25 lakh for package-1 and Tk 3.60 lakh for package-2 under government management, which are Tk 6,500 and Tk 16,000 more than the corresponding packages of the previous year.

With affordability in mind, the government has also introduced package-3 for the first time, which hajjis can avail at a cost of Tk 3.15 lakh.