

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Amazing Birds

We connect with birds in many ways. Their flight symbolizes freedom. Their colours and songs nourish our eyes and ears. Their postures, movement and interactions captivate us. They often perform seemingly impossible feats – such as catching an insect in flight – right in front of our eyes.

Behind the scenes, many elements work together to make birds so special and capable.

Birds are made of unique parts, most of them related to flight. Instead of forelegs or arms, they have wings which enable them to fly. Their bones are amazingly light and many are fused together for maximum strength. Their bodies are covered with feathers which assist flight while providing insulation and comfort not just for the bird but for chicks it incubates in its nest.

While each and every part of a bird's body is finely honed for its survival, not all birds use the same body parts in the same way. Here are some examples.

Wings: They empower flight, but do we know in how many different ways? At one extreme, wings of tiny hummingbirds beat up to 70 times per second for fast flight and hovering. At the other extreme, the albatross can stay aloft for a long time while scarcely beating its wings. Its giant wingspan – up to 11 feet across – help it soar and glide.

Senses: Birds of prey rely on their keen eyesight to hunt. Sitting high up, the Crested Serpent Eagle can see a snake or a frog a mile away. The kingfisher's eyes have built-in correction for refraction to help it spear a fish swimming underwater. Owls, possessing the best ears among birds, can hunt in total darkness using their sensitive and directional hearing.

Bill: Snipes use their long bill



Baya Weaver building nest.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

to dig into the ground and extract worms. Bee-eaters use their curved bills like airborne tweezers to snatch bees in flight. Puffins have scales inside their beaks so they can catch and hold several fish simultaneously. Darters use their sharp bill to spear fish underwater. Weaver birds, such as *Babui* (Baya Weaver), use their bills like sewing needles to weave their nests.

Tongue: The woodpecker's exceptionally long and thin tongue probes tree cavities and traps worms and larvae on its sticky surface. When retracted, it rolls in inside the bird's head. Geese have tongues with serrated edges, used for cutting grass for eating.

Feet: A falcon uses its feet to

strike the neck of another bird in flight and kill it. With these same feet it catches the carcass as it falls. A woodpecker can climb vertically along a tree trunk because of its specially designed feet, three toes forward, one back. A duck's webbed feet allow it to swim effortlessly. When a fish is caught by the talons of an osprey, a crocodile covering on the bottom of the bird's feet prevents the fish from slipping out.

So birds possess many unexpected tools. Is it any wonder that they continue to amaze and delight us?

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Rescue worker hit by truck on Bangabandhu Bridge dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A rescue worker was killed as a truck hit him while he was removing a broken-down truck from Bangabandhu Bridge in Tangail early yesterday.

The deceased – Abdul Kader (35) from the district's Bhuapur upazila – was a member of a rescue team working for China Communication and Construction Company, the contractor firm entrusted with maintenance of the bridge, said police.

Kazi Aiyubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station, told The Daily Star that a truck suddenly broke down near pillar no. 30 of the bridge and Kader along with others were clearing the spot.

At that time, a mini truck hit him around 1:30am, he said. Kader was immediately taken to Tangail General Hospital from where he was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said the OC.

The worker died just after he had been taken to an ambulance, he added.

Ehsanul Haque Pavel, executive engineer of site office on the bridge, said the mini truck driver managed to flee. They were trying to identify it through CCTV footage, he added.

Those who move to live

Amid lockdown, gypsy families stuck in Barishal pass dire times

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Shakil (25) and Samta (22) are a gypsy couple. Together with their child and two more families, the gypsy troupe of 11 travel from one area to another, never staying in one place for long. Locally known as "Jajabars", they earn their bread by collecting and selling valuable items lost in rivers, ponds, and canals.

However, due to the ongoing lockdown, their lives have ground to a halt. Not only are they finding it hard to carry out their vocation, they're also stuck at Barishal's Kasipur area, with nowhere to move to as public transportation is suspended.

Movement is a key part of the "Jajabar" identity; without it, the three gypsy families are passing their days in great anxiety.

Two months ago they came to Barishal in hopes of making a living for a couple of months, Shakil told this correspondent recently during a visit to the area.

As Barishal is a riverine area, the skilled gypsies could salvage a lot of valuables from its water, and the first few days went by comfortably. But as soon as the lockdown hit, the tide turned against them.

They now want to return to their community at Munshiganj's Munshir haat area, right beside the Padma. But with little money left, travel seems to be a distant dream, as they struggle to arrange for even a day's meal.

"We do not know what tomorrow is going to look like," Shakil said. "I only have a little money left. Under normal circumstances, we sometimes do labour work to get by. But the situation is so complicated now that even that's not possible anymore."

Along with the adults, the troupe consists of five children. With no way to feed even the children, all the families want now is to go back to Munshiganj. "I don't know when, I don't know how, but we just want to go back," Shakil could barely conceal his helplessness.

Fortunately, at least some respite is on its way for the gypsy families, as the local administration seems to have taken heed of their situation. Mosharef Hossain, Barishal Sadar UNO, said they are taking initiatives to deliver food to the families.

10-bed ICU to open at Ctg General Hospital

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Covid-19 positive patients in Chattogram in critical conditions are going to get ICU support from today, as a 10-bed ICU is all set to open at Chattogram General Hospital (CGH). The hospital received 10 ventilators and the same number of ICU beds from the government on April 7.

CGH is one of the two hospitals in Chattogram dedicated to treating Covid-19 patients, the other being Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID). A 100-bed isolation ward was opened in CGH for Covid-19 patients while a 50-bed isolation ward in BITID. However, none of the hospitals had ICU to support patients in critical stages.

"ICU support is essential for patients in a critical stage as in most cases, it was seen that the majority of Covid-19 patients died due to respiratory failure," said Dr Mamunur Rashid, an associate professor at BITID.

The first Covid-19 patient was admitted to CGH on April 2 while 25 such patients have been undergoing treatment at the hospital, said Dr Jamal Mostafa, focal person of Covid-19 treatment there. "So far, eight patients have been released after they got well," he added.

Dr Asim Kumar Nath, superintendent of CGH, said, "We're set to open the unit on Saturday. However, no patient in isolation is critical yet."

Contacted, Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services, said, "We have already posted 10 trained doctors to run the ICU." A group of nurses are also being trained in CMCH.

Hailing the initiative, SM Nazer Hissain, central vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said, "As the hospital has been dedicated to treating Covid-19 patients, the ICU would help save lives of critical patients in Chattogram."

Two knifed dead in Sitakunda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two friends were stabbed to death by unidentified miscreants early yesterday in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila, after they had an altercation on Wednesday.

Police were yet to arrest anyone in this connection till filing of this report.

The deceased, Md Shahin (25) and his friend Jahid (27), were agricultural workers and residents of Sitakunda municipality area, said police.

"On Wednesday, Shahin and Jahid locked into an altercation with a group of youths who blew cigarette smoke at their faces. All of them then got into a scuffle," said Officer-in-Charge (OC) Firoj Hossen Molla of Sitakunda Police Station, quoting witnesses.

The killers called the two friends out from their home early yesterday and stabbed them indiscriminately, the OC said.

Locals and family members rushed the critically injured duo to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where they succumbed to their injuries, he added.

Police were conducting drives in different spots to catch the killers, and a case was lodged in this connection. The bodies were sent to CMCH morgue for autopsy.

'I had to be here; this is where my son died'

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

The sky wore a gloomy look yesterday as if cautioning people to stay put. But a 60-year-old woman did not pay heed as she slowly but surely walked along the empty Dhaka-Aricha highway.

By the time Sharbanu reached her destination, it started to drizzle. In silence, she stood in front of a structure while drizzle turned into rain as if tears of sorrow have broken loose.

This was the place – the site of Rana Plaza – where Sharbanu lost her only son Billal Hossen on this day exactly seven years ago. And not a day goes by her heart does not feel the pain of losing him.

On April 24, 2013, at least 1,100 people were killed and over 2,500 were injured in the building collapse in Savar, considered one of the major industrial disasters in the country.

The day is observed with due solemnity every year with people from all walks of life gathering at the site to remember the victims. They place wreaths, hold rallies and meetings to mark the tragedy and demand proper compensation for survivors and punishment for

perpetrators.

This year, none of the above took place because of the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing shutdown across the country.

"I know about the virus, but I just couldn't stay home," said Sharbanu. "I had to be here, pray for my son and seek justice... this is where my son died... he was just 26."

She said Billal was the sole earner after her husband passed away. "I am passing my days in untold hardships ever since my son died in that tragic accident. But to see that the accused are yet to be punished is even more painful. I demand exemplary punishment of the Rana Plaza owner and other accused," said the resolute mother.

She also mentioned that she did get some compensation but had to spend all of it for her treatment. "I don't want compensation, I want justice," she told this correspondent.

REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS

In observance of the day, law enforcers from Savar Model Police Station, Ashulia Police Station and Dhaka Industrial Police-1 yesterday placed floral wreaths at a makeshift platform built in front of the site.



Like every year, 60-year-old Sharbanu stood by the makeshift memorial in tears yesterday, and remembered her only son she lost in the Rana Plaza building collapse.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



A cement-laden truck lies overturned on the Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital yesterday morning. The truck was going to Naogaon from Narayanganj when it lost control around dawn, according to a contractor involved. Witnesses said one person was injured in the accident.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

An emergency service in times of dire need

Rights group providing round-the-clock ambulance rides to patients free of cost

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

With a countrywide shutdown in place to contain the spread of novel coronavirus, there are only a handful of vehicles plying the roads these days. This unavailability of vehicles, however, can be a cause of concern for many, especially patients.

With that in mind, an organisation in Chattogram has come up with a free ambulance service to help carry people of the port city to treatment facilities in emergency.

"I read reports of people waiting for hours to transport their dear ones to hospitals. People have even died due to this non-availability of vehicles. It's tragic," Aminul Hoque Babu, president of Bangladesh Human Rights Commission, Chattogram Chapter, told this correspondent.

"From there, I came up with the idea to provide this round the clock free ambulance service," Aminul said. He said he is paying for the initiative out of his own pocket.

The service was inaugurated on April 20 by Chattogram city Mayor AJM Nasir Uddin. At present, they have one ambulance, providing the service; the organisation

plans to make it available across 41 wards of the city.

However, the service is not going to carry coronavirus patients. Aminul laments this, but considers it an inevitability due to resource constraint.

"Coronavirus positive patients require highly trained health workers to transport them to hospitals. But we don't have them onboard. If we are provided skilled workers, we can also carry those patients," he said.

Kaisar Hamid Rajib, a resident of Pahartoli area told The Daily Star that his prematurely born baby had been suffering from diarrhea since Sunday night. The family was desperately looking for vehicles to take the infant to Agrabad's Ma o Shishu Hospital, but in vain.

But then, as luck would have it, Rajib found the ambulance service's number from Facebook and called it up immediately. In no time, an ambulance arrived and took the family to the hospital. Following treatment, they returned by the same vehicle, with their baby safe and sound.

Residents in need of the service can call at 01617445544, 0171821815, 01712823721 and 01519702020.

CGIAR to support govt fight Covid-19

CITY DESK

CGIAR, a global partnership of international organisations involved in food security and research, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, will support Bangladesh government in mitigating risks to food systems by conducting crucial research, collecting and analysing data, developing food and nutrition security strategies, and advising on appropriate policies, said a press release.

CGIAR's collective strengths lie in their knowledge of the country's food systems, and ability to draw on insights and support from international networks.

CGIAR centres—including International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, International Food Policy Research Institute, WorldFish, and International Rice Research Institute -- have been working with government for decades.