

TANGENTS
BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Coucal

When my father passed away twelve years ago, he left behind a plantation where, for forty years, he had grown many types of plants. These included trees he had collected from various places in Bangladesh as well as species local to Sylhet area - including Aual, Rita, Bonak, Jhaoa etc. After his death I set about documenting his life's work in photographs. I photographed his plants for several months, but realized that to make it a complete document I should include creatures his plants supported. And so I started chasing butterflies, lizards, spiders, insects and monkeys with my camera. From there it was a natural progression to birds.

Most of my early bird photos were of common ones such as Doel, Tuntuni, Shalik and Bulbul, though I often caught tantalizing glimpses of unknown birds in the trees. One day I saw a new bird, slightly smaller than a crow, rust coloured on top with black head and tail and red eyes. It was hopping from leaf to leaf, branch to branch, of a large bush, close to the ground, sort of creeping through the foliage, picking out insects to eat. Then it landed on the grass and foraged from the ground. When it saw me it flew - rather weakly I thought - to a low-hanging branch and stayed out of sight. By that time I had taken a picture which I used later to identify it as a Greater Coucal.

Most birders in Bangladesh have seen it many times, but for others its unusual colour arouses curiosity. Coucals are closely related to cuckoos. There are 26 species of Coucals in the world. Their global range extends through Southern and Eastern Asia and parts of Africa. Bangladesh has



Malagasy Coucal with Chameleon.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

two of these: Greater and Lesser Coucal (*Boro Kúbo* and *Bangla Kúbo* in Bangla.) At 32 cm., the Lesser Coucal is a full 10 cm. smaller than the Greater Coucal, and in my experience, much more elusive.

Our Coucals can be seen in light forests, grasslands, shrubs and bushes as well as tea plantations. They prefer to walk on the ground and forage rather than fly. They are likely to be out during early morning and twilight. During every trip to Sundarban that I have made, I have seen at least half a dozen Greater Coucals, close to the edge of the forest or foraging along the shore of the rivers.

My best Coucal experience was in

Madagascar. I was in Lake Alarobia in the capital Antanarivo where hundreds of ducks and other birds can be seen. The lake is surrounded by a dense wall of tall trees. As I was walking around the lake on a trail, I saw a Malagasy Coucal land on one of these trees, high up. I immediately took a picture. Seeing me, it took off quickly.

It was only later when I looked at the picture that I realized that the bird had caught a chameleon. The poor chameleon's camouflage had failed when the Coucal came looking!

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow ihtishamkabar on Instagram.

No need for curfew-like measures now

Says Rab chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite rising Covid-19 infections and deaths, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Director General Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun yesterday said there seems to be no need for a curfew-like situation.

"We are, however, implementing the system where necessary," he said, while addressing reporters through video conference from Rab headquarters.

Meanwhile, the government has allowed people to travel to village homes using personal vehicles ahead of Eid.

Asked about risks of the journey, DG Mamun said, "The government has taken the decision thinking about the people's welfare. The restriction on public transport has not been lifted, however."

Regarding Eid prayers, he said mosques will hold multiple jamaats, and detailed security plans were adopted, like separate exit and entry to ensure social distance.

The Rab DG also said no one can gather at entertainment centres this Eid.

It is unfair: Momen

Foreign minister laments cancellation of RMG product orders by Western brands

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Cancellation of readymade garment orders by Western brands is unfair, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen as he called upon expatriate Bangladeshis to stand against such actions.

"We seek support from the expatriate community for sensitising the societies about the unfair action by the brands," he told a video conference with Bangladeshis living in Ireland on Thursday.

Western brands have recently cancelled orders of Bangladesh's RMG products reportedly worth over \$3 billion. Also, there are reports of prices of products being slashed that's taking economic, health and social tolls across the globe, but developing countries face the brunt on a larger scale.

Bangladesh has been urging the brands as well as governments to honour the orders that they had placed.

Bangladesh is also facing major challenges of job creation at home as overseas jobs decline and several lakhs of Bangladeshi migrants could return home over the next months as the pandemic cripples the economy.

The foreign minister expressed gratitude to the Bangladeshi expatriate community for their support during the Covid-19 crisis.

He flagged that Bangladesh government has always worked for the benefits of Bangladeshis -- both in Bangladesh and abroad.

The foreign minister said the government is working to set up an embassy in Dublin.

Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladeshi high commissioner to the UK and accredited ambassador to Ireland, attended the videoconference.

BYLC ramps up online education programme

Offers free courses on new digital platform

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) had unveiled a new platform of its online learning academy, BYLCx, with 45 free courses making online learning more accessible to youth across Bangladesh.

The courses will be available on <http://x.bylc.org> till December 2021 as part of BYLC's response to Covid-19, says a press release.

It will offer students and young professionals self-paced learning opportunities on leadership and professional development skills, including data analytics, project development, communication, and more.

New content will focus on preparing youth for the post-pandemic world, emphasising the need to be tech-savvy, resilient, and adaptive.

In addition to its free digital courses, BYLC will continue supporting the youth of Bangladesh by offering its advanced blended (online and instructor-led) programmes at minimum cost on the platform, added the release.

Selected students under these programmes will also be offered career placement support. Moreover, BYLC will also be offering their signature Building Bridges through Leadership Training (BBLT) and BBLT Junior programmes online with added financial aid for students affected economically due to Covid-19.

Addl secretary dies from Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An additional secretary, who contracted Covid-19, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Taufiqul Alam, who was on post-retirement leave, breathed his last around 10am at the ICU of the Covid-19 unit, said DMCH Director Brig Gen AKM Nasir Uddin.

Taufiqul, who had served as secretary of the Information Commission, was first admitted to the ICU of DMCH's burn unit with Covid-19 earlier this month.

As his condition improved, he was later shifted to the cabin room but was taken to the ICU again, as his condition deteriorated few days ago, said hospital sources.

Bangladesh Administrative Service Association expressed their condolences over death of the administrative cadre official.

Earlier on April 6, another administrative cadre official, also a director of Anti-Corruption Commission, died from Covid-19.

195 Bangladeshis return from Canada

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 195 Bangladeshis stranded in Canada, due to the pandemic, returned to Dhaka yesterday by a special chartered flight of Qatar Airways.

"Carrying the passengers, the flight landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 7:41am," a duty-supervisor at HSIA told The Daily Star.

The flight departed from Toronto on Wednesday night (Canada time) and took one-hour technical stopover in Doha.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to Canada M Mizanur Rahman and Bangladesh Consul General in Toronto Nayem Uddin Ahmed saw off the passengers at Toronto international airport, Bangladesh High Commission in Canada said in a press release.

The travelling passengers include mostly Bangladeshi students studying in different colleges and universities in Canada, Bangladeshis who went there on tourist and business visas and some expatriate Bangladeshis.

Bangladesh foreign ministry in coordination with Bangladesh High Commission in Canada arranged the flight, following request of the stranded Bangladeshis.

Bangladesh extended ban on regular passenger flights across all countries except China till May 30.

The government so far repatriated stranded Bangladeshis from different countries -- including Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, India, USA, Australia, UK and South Korea.

No Eid joy for beauticians

Parlour sector hit hard by Covid-19; most staff who are from Garo community struggling to survive

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Bobita Dalboth was supposed to stay busy with customers during this time of the year. Pre-Eid is the most profitable time for beauticians like her. On the busiest days, clients would have to line up and wait for their turn to get some last minute grooming done.

The revenue from this pre-Eid bonanza is a major boost for both owner and staff. Every year, Bobita waits to get Eid bonus with which she used to pay off her loans and shop for her family. For her employer, the profits meant business growth.

Not this year. In her 10 years of working, this is the first time Bobita is out of a job. Her husband used to work as a private car driver, but he too is out of work, and now the couple doesn't know how to provide for their daughter and son, let alone celebrate the Eid.

She has already racked up two months of unpaid house rent, totaling Tk 16,000. The family



Beauticians in protective gear tend to a client at an otherwise empty parlour in the capital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

is now living on loans from acquaintances, which is only adding more stress for the future.

"I don't know how long I can survive in Dhaka. We might need to pack up and head for the village," said the Mohammadpur resident. "I was last paid for March. My employers said they will call me when business reopens. I was

supposed to get a bonus (around Tk 20,000) for Eid, but now there's nothing at all," she said.

The beauty parlour sector in Dhaka is full of stories like Bobita's. Most staff are members of the Garo community, working to support their families back home. They live mostly in Mohammadpur, Old Dhaka,

Farmgate and Nodda areas. The lack of income due to Covid-19 pandemic is putting the entire community in deep uncertainty.

Besides Bobita, this correspondent spoke to Topoti Ruram, a Garo beautician working in a parlour at Farmgate.

Out of work for two months, Topoti is now Tk 21,000 in debt for house rent at the grocery store.

"I thought I could clear the dues with Eid bonus; I don't know what to do," said Topoti.

The situation isn't any better for parlour owners. Besides a boost in income, sales during Eid helps them cover up losses round the year, which means the stoppage in business hurts doubly bad.

Arnika Chiran owns a beauty parlour in Uttara. Each month, she has to pay Tk 60,000 in rent and Tk 55,000 to her employees.

"I have three months' rent due. I was forced to send my beauticians back to villages. I gave them small amounts, but couldn't

pay salaries since April," she said. "This hurts more because we are all from the same community."

"I used to earn nearly Tk four to five lakh every Eid," she said.

Initiatives to help Garo beauticians during the crisis have been sparse. Manusher Jonno Foundation organised a crowdfunding initiative to help 500 Garo beauticians. Community leaders are trying to raise funds, but said it is not possible without the government's help.

Subhajit Sangma, Nokma (chief) of Dhaka Wangala Celebration Committee, said, "We are trying to help our community by crowd-funding as well as by through NGOs. But unless the government comes forward, it won't be possible for the Garo community to survive this crisis."

Various local cooperatives are selling food packages at a minimal price to lower-income Garo families. However, this will not suffice, he added.

A double struggle

Home ministry official afflicted by dengue and Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I'm trying to stay upbeat and move forward in the struggle of life with vigour. God help me win this battle," read a Facebook post by Sharif Mahmud Apu, public relations officer of the home ministry yesterday, after he was diagnosed with both dengue and the novel coronavirus.



"This time, I have to fight dengue and corona together. Only God knows what the consequences will be. But I'm not dejected. I have to live for my two children and the public who I serve," he wrote in the post.

Apu said he was infected with dengue a few days back, and then tested Covid-19 positive on top of it yesterday. He's now in home quarantine, spending his time bedridden and trying to shoulder the shock of his ailments, Apu told The Daily Star.

He went into isolation four days ago as he was feeling feverish. To be on the side of caution, he sent samples for Covid-19 test, which came out positive yesterday.

Apu said he was working in the corona cell of the home ministry even after being diagnosed with dengue.

"Other than office work, I also went out to provide relief in Burichang, Cumilla -- my village home. The coronavirus must have caught up amidst all of this," he said.

Apu is currently being treated at home as per doctors' advice. He has urged all to keep him in their prayers for quick recovery from both diseases.



AMBIDEXTROUS ... Sadia Begum holds her toddler in one arm and shows a pair of slippers to a customer at her shop with another. Since her husband lost his job due to the coronavirus pandemic, her small business in the capital's Tejgani Para is solely supporting the family of five, including two schoolgoers. Despite the sparse number of customers, Sadia opens her shop every day, and continues to balance her work and family like a champion. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Five mutation points found in coronavirus genome in the region

Researchers in Ctg find after sequencing patient samples

ARUN BIKASH DEY, CTG

Researchers have found five points of mutation in the genome structure of novel coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2) in Chattogram.

They came up with the findings after sequencing the virus's genome from patient samples collected from Chattogram city and different upazilas.

Researchers of Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU), Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) and Bangladesh Jute Research Institute have jointly sequenced the genome for the first time in Chattogram.

Contacted, Dr Zonaeed Siddiki, a pathology professor at CVASU and a research team member, said, "Genome of seven samples have been sequenced. We have found the genome structure to be similar to those found in Australia, Singapore, Russia and Middle Eastern countries."

"Mutations were observed in five points of the 30,000 genome base pairs, which means the virus in this region has mutated five times," he said.

Contacted, Prof Shakeel Ahmed, in-charge of BITID laboratory and also a member of the research team, said, "Genome sequencing is important to know the character of a virus, its nature and mode of operation."

"After observing mutations, researchers get an indication of how the virus alters itself in changing environments," he added.

"This process will also help produce a vaccine against the virus," he continued.

"If we find the virus structure in our country is similar to that in another country, the vaccine introduced in that country would also be effective here."