

Our Hero, The Sundarbans

As told by an Environmental Science student

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The moment I hear the name *Sundarbans*, the image of a lush green mangrove forest and a Royal Bengal Tiger majestically taking a stroll flashes before my eyes. The name itself is enough to elicit in us a combined feeling of thrill and pride which stem from the fact that the Sundarbans is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a Ramsar site and the largest mangrove forest in the world.

And as for students like me who are studying the environment, the name evokes veneration and profound gratitude. After all, just like a mother sacrificing herself to protect her child, this forest protects the millions of Bengalis living in the coastal districts from the onslaught of violent cyclones and tidal surges which ravage our country almost every year, the most recent of which is the super cyclone Amphan.

Due to its unique geographical setting, Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. In coastal areas, deadly cyclones are accompanied by tidal surges which can reach a height of several metres.

But the Sundarbans, like the fortified wall of a castle, stands between our western coastal districts and the Bay of



PHOTO: STAR

Bengal as the sole form of defence against these cyclones. This natural barrier not only reduces the intensity of the cyclones via surface roughness but also weakens the tidal surges through the dissipation of wave energy due to the unique structures of its mangrove vegetation. The mangroves also minimise the saline water intrusion and reduce the risk of coastal erosion by trapping and stabilising the soil sediments. Recent studies also suggest that

mangroves enhance vertical land development through sedimentation processes.

Apart from disaster protection, the Sundarbans is the largest carbon sink (absorbing more carbon dioxide than it emits) in Bangladesh and plays a role of utmost importance in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. It is the home to a treasure trove of unique wildlife, including a few globally endangered species and is the source of livelihood for thousands of

people in the coastal districts.

Upon exploring the Sundarbans as a part of my field study, I was grief-stricken after witnessing how uncontrolled human intervention had led to its over-exploitation and mass deforestation.

Right now, what our precious mangrove forest needs is the time to heal herself as she was badly damaged by the super cyclonic storm Amphan.

There is no alternative to the Sundarbans. Sustainable consumption and minimal human intervention is the only way to save our beloved mangrove, our silent guardian.

References

1. Neumann, C.J. (1993). *Global overview. Chapter 1, Global guide to tropical cyclone forecasting*. WMO, Geneva.
2. Fritz, H.M. and Blount, C., *PROTECTION FROM CYCLONES. Coastal protection in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami: What role for forests and trees?*

H. Rainak Khan Real has stopped searching for the elixir of eternal youth, instead he has begun searching for the potion that can slow down the time. Send him clues at rainakkhan-real@gmail.com

The dos and don'ts of feeding stray animals

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Stray animals that primarily depend on garbage waste and leftover food from restaurants for their meals go hungry everyday as the coronavirus crisis continues and Dhaka city comes to a standstill. As the pandemic progresses, even people who would feed strays on a daily basis have stopped coming out of their houses. On the other end of the spectrum, many are being harassed while feeding strays as rumours circulate that dogs can spread the virus.

Contrary to popular belief, the World Health Organisation (WHO) cleared the air when they announced in March, "At present there is no evidence that companion animals/pets such as dogs or cats can be infected with the new coronavirus." According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States, the risk of animals spreading the virus to humans, though it exists, is very low.

While new discoveries are being made everyday regarding animals' relationship in regards to the novel coronavirus, armed with the proper equipment, it is deemed safe enough to come into contact with animals — not only because animals might spread the disease to humans, but because there is a higher risk of humans spreading the disease to animals.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

First and foremost, you'll need a pair of gloves. Even if you won't be touching the animals, when you're stepping outside your house, you are likely to come into contact with other surfaces that may carry the virus. If you do not have gloves to use, carry hand sanitizer with you. Try to avoid contact with the animal by throwing the food on

the floor but make sure to sanitise if you do come into contact. Try not to leave food rotting on the streets as this can increase the risks of contamination.

Secondly, make sure you carry a mask with you. While it is unlikely that you will contract the virus from an animal's breath, you may get it from pedestrians, which is

why it's important to wear a mask. When feeding the animals, it is best to do it in areas where the risk of running into other people is relatively low.

When feeding strays, dry food such as biscuits are very affordable options. Though it is usually advised not to give dogs sugary treats, light sugary may be a good source of energy for animals that go hours (or days) without eating. Other options may include boiled vegetables, which will give them the nutrition they require. While onion, garlic and pepper are deemed harmful for cats and dogs, they tend to eat other vegetables, such as carrots, corn and chopped greens. Avoid giving them table scraps and stale food since this will likely make them sick.

If you are unable to get out of the house yourself, you can always help out by donating money to charitable organisations — even donating as little as 35 taka can help a dog that might have otherwise gone hungry.

Reference

The Independent (April 17, 2020). Coronavirus: can your dog or cat get covid-19 and can you catch it from your pet?

Fariha enjoys binge-watching movies in the dark vicinity of her bedroom. Strike up a conversation with her at fariha.safa@gmail.com