

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



A New Journey.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Leaving Home

In 1975, an opportunity for studying abroad came along. My Uncle and Aunt - Rafi Chacha and Nora Chachi - living in London were visiting us in Dhaka. Seeing my grades they offered to sponsor me for my science A-Levels, which were not offered in Dhaka then. I was only sixteen, but with my parents' blessings I said yes.

Next I had to find a college in London. My cousins Rumman and Romel sent me the form for Waltham Forest College where they studied. I returned it along with my grades and received an admission notification. Tuition was twenty five pounds the first year; the following year it jumped to seventy five.

I also had to procure a passport. I went to the Passport Office in Indira Road early one morning. The queue spilled into the field outside the office. I spent the entire day moving at snail's pace without even reaching the office building. Fifteen minutes before close, I left the line and confidently approached the building, explained to the guard that I had to see the Director, and headed upstairs. I quickly found his office, walked in, introduced myself, and explained my predicament to him. He was gracious and accepted my application, asking me to return after three days.

Passport in hand, I had to obtain a visa to enter the United Kingdom. This was problematic as you needed proof of hefty funds in the UK. My cousin and her husband (Ruhii Apa and late Dara Bhai) told me they had a friend in the British High Commission. Through him, I was granted a visa interview which went well until the officer asked me for the required Vaccination Certificate.

It was common practice to buy one and I had followed common practice. When I produced it, he asked to see the vaccination scar on my arm. I have never been so embarrassed in my life. A few days later, I returned after being properly vaccinated and picked up my stamped passport.

My parents stayed up late the night before my flight. In the morning they gave me two small notebooks. They had spent the night writing words of guidance for me. My mother's words carried more emotion than my father's but both emphasised habits for good health and avoiding vices.

On the big day, September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1975, two weeks after my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, my entire extended family came to the airport to see me off. My grandmother, uncles and aunts, cousins galore and of course my immediate family - we just about took over the departure area of the old Tejgaon Airport. Foreign travel was still a novelty and you did not return for a long time. My parents understood this and tried to hide their sadness at my departure. I thought I would return home after completing my A-Levels in two years, but they knew the truth: once you leave home there is no return.

Looking back, I have come to appreciate two things about leaving home. The first is the magnitude of the sacrifice of my parents, which I could only feel when my own children left home. The second is the number of people - specially my Uncle and Aunt - who generously extended a helping hand on my journey. I shall always be grateful to them.

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## DoE scraps clearance of 26 hospitals, 12 diagnostic centres

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CHATTOGRAM

The Department of Environment (DoE) in Chattogram has suspended environmental clearance certificates of 26 hospitals and 12 diagnostic centres for not having updated license from the Directorate General of Health Services.

The hospitals and diagnostic centres have been operating for the last two to four years without DGHS license, according to DoE.

Mohammad Nurullah Nuri, director of DoE Chattogram (Metro), told The Daily Star that they issued letters to all diagnostic centres and private hospitals asking them to appear at DoE with updated DGHS certificate to renew their Environment Clearance Certificate (ECC).

"We found many of them don't have any updated DGHS license. It creates scope for irregularities and malpractice. That's why we suspended their ECC", he added.

Contacted, Mohammad Sha Jaman, director of Organ Hospital -- one of the hospitals whose clearance was suspended -- told The Daily Star they applied for updating their license but it got stuck at DGHS.

Sheikh Fazle Rabbi, civil surgeon of Chattogram, told this newspaper sometimes the application filed by hospitals and diagnostic centres gets stuck at DGHS for many reasons.

During the pandemic, it was tough to inspect those hospitals and diagnostic centres, he added.

"We are working to prepare a list of hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centers whether they have updated their license or not by August 23. Then we will go for action against them", he added.

## 'A woman's right to choose'

HC questions why certain provisions of law on abortion should not be declared discriminatory

LAW DESK

The High Court Division of the Supreme Court issued a rule last week, asking why certain provisions of the penal code relating to abortion should not be declared discriminatory and contradictory to the constitution.

It issued the rule after hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Dr Syeda Nasrin, challenging the questionable provisions that criminalise abortion, on grounds of them being discriminatory and contrary to the fundamental rights, as enshrined in the constitution.

The petition stated that the constitution protects the rights to life, body, privacy, liberty and freedom of choice. Giving birth to a child and accepting motherhood constitutes a significant part of these rights.

However, the provisions expressly violate such fundamental rights, the petition argued.

The laws in question are Sections 312-316 of the Penal Code 1860, which reportedly go against Articles 27, 29, 31, 32, 38 and 42 of the constitution.

Whether the law can impose motherhood is a different issue, the petition clarified, but in civic sense, the law should not impose it, since carrying a

foetus should be a deliberate decision of the woman involved, it further said.

The provisions also curtail the choice of not giving birth to a child following torture or rape, it continued.

These specific provisions were enacted by the British, who changed their own laws in 1967, allowing abortion as a right all over England. But Bangladesh is still latching on to the colonial holdover, the petition added.

The petitioner said safe abortion is a woman's right, but the provisions force women to resort to illegal means for abortion, which tend to be unsafe and risky and lead to serious diseases including cancer.

A bench of two judges, Justice Tariqul-Hakim and Justice SM Kuddus Zaman, issued the rule, calling upon respondents to show cause as to why they believe otherwise.

Contacted, Dr Syeda opined that if the provisions change upon hearing of both parties, it will uphold the right to life, health, security and privacy of all women that the petition sought to represent.

She said it is not only about rights and freedoms, but also about addressing social evils such as rape and other forms of sexual violence.



Just across the Postogola Bridge on the outskirts of Dhaka, several of these multistoried residential structures with corrugated metal sheets for walls and a steel platform for a base can be found. While providing presumably affordable housing for mill workers in the area, these do not appear to be safe at all. The photo was taken a few days ago.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Municipal councillor held with 1.3kg heroin

Rab claims he's a top dealer of the drug in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, RAJSHAHI

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday arrested a municipality councillor with 1.3kg of heroin in Rajshahi.

The arrestee, Mofazzal Hossain, is a councillor of Godagari municipality, said a Rab-5 press release.

A Rab team from Mollapara camp caught him red-handed with the heroin in Mahishalbari area under the municipality at 8am, said the release.

Rab sources said Mofazzal Hossain is one of the top dealers of the contraband drug in the region.

He is an accused in a case filed over

repression on a woman as well, police sources said.

Filing of a drug related case against him was underway.

In another drive, Rab arrested three people with 628 bottles of Phensedyl in Battali area under Panchbibi Police Station in Joypurhat, the press release said.

Meanwhile in Chapainawabganj, a team of the elite force arrested a man with two foreign pistols, a gun, two magazines, ammunition and 1,045 yaba pills.

The arrest was made in Stationpara area under Rahonpur municipality around 5:30am, it added.

## 500 Indians leave through Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BENAPOLE

Five hundred Indian nationals who were stranded for nearly five months due to coronavirus outbreak left Bangladesh through Benapole land port between Thursday morning and yesterday noon. Twelve Bangladeshi citizens also returned home through the land port during this period.

Confirming the information, Benapole Immigration Officer-in-Charge Ahsan Habib said 233 Indians returned home on Thursday while 267 returned so far yesterday.

The Indian nationals who were stranded in the country started returning home on Thursday after maintaining some conditions imposed by the Indian government.

Four months and 23 days ago, Indian government issued restrictions on travelers, who use Benapole port, in order to contain coronavirus outbreak.

Last week, Benapole port authorities received a letter from India containing some conditions and guidelines for the stranded Indian citizens who want to return from Bangladesh.

## The man beyond the art

Murtaja Baseer was a keen collector of coins, stamps, bank notes, matchboxes

MANNAN MASHHUR ZARIF

Apart from being one of the most prominent modern painters of Bangladesh, it is common knowledge that Murtaja Baseer wore a hat with many feathers. He was not only an accomplished painter, noted novelist, and all in all, a socially conscious individual, but also a keen collector of coins, stamps, bank notes, and matchboxes.

It is his identity as a painter that surpasses all his other accomplishments, but it is perhaps his hobbies that kept him busy all his life, and gave him unmatched personal satisfaction. Baseer's stamp collection primarily focused on the issues of Great Britain and British India, and among his prized possessions was the scarce 25-rupee stamp of King Edward VII.

As a student of class nine, he was moved by communist ideology, and found a way to combine his love for philately and socialist beliefs by creating a unique collection of stamps on Lenin.

It was only on rare occasions that he would bring out his album and share his joy with fellow philatelists, but his collection kept growing until the last days of his life.

Young Baseer was fascinated with butterflies. In his study room, one could see a modest collection of the insects. He would study their morphology through magnifiers, and later in his artistic career, create a long series of artworks titled "Wings".

Whether they were abstract works or a simple expression of his amusement -- a childlike marvel at the beauty of butterflies -- he himself never clarified. The same is true for the series, "Epitaph for the Martyrs".

During the turbulent time of the Liberation War, Baseer was living in Paris. One day, he stumbled upon a piece of stone on the Parisian streets.

A person with a lifetime's fascination for pebbles, the marvellous shape of the rock inspired him to reinterpret his feelings against the oppression that was going on in his homeland.

Among all his hobbies, it is with all certainty his lifelong pursuit of studying medieval Bengal coins that lie in public prominence. He was a lifelong collector with a special interest in the Habsi Sultans of Bengal.

What piqued his interest in the slave dynasty of the Abyssinian rulers of this land remains unknown, but his devotion and



PHOTO COURTESY: GALLERI KAYA

"The Wing - 122", oil on canvas (2010). The series was inspired by Baseer's fascination with butterflies.

scholarly approach to this field is evident in the book that he penned on numismatics, 'Mudra O Shilalipir Alokey Banglar Habsi Sultan O Totkalin Shomaj'.

The advent of social media gave new life to the collector. His movement now restricted because of physical ailments, Baseer kept close ties with the collector community and was an active participant in online auctions that are now a novelty.

Apart from the stamps he collected throughout his life, or the pursuit of numismatic treasures of Bengal, he took up collecting banknotes of various countries and philately, the hobby of accumulating matchboxes.

Murtaja Baseer was a reclusive collector. He was not seen in stamp exhibitions, his attendance did not grace get-togethers of collectors of the city, but Baseer's passion for all things collectible was well known in circles, be it autograph enthusiasts, or collectors of historical memorabilia.

As the nation mourns the sad demise of the artist Murtaja Baseer, the collector community grieves the loss of a fellow enthusiast.



With heavy rain combined with the abominable drainage system in certain parts of Chattogram city, the low-lying Bakalia Toktar Pol area has been submerged for the last two weeks or so. Residents of the area, human and animals alike, have had to manoeuvre filthy and mucky water on a daily basis. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

