

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



It takes little to make a child happy.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Childhood Pleasures (and Terrors)

Small things bring pleasure to children, but insignificant things can also terrify them. In my case, the pleasure came from the tangible physical world, but my fears were often rooted in the imaginary.

When I was seven, my father took on extra work for several weeks. Most days, after attending office all day, he came home briefly and left to work on a real estate deal with his friends. When he returned at night, I always looked at his hands, half-expecting a treat. But they were empty.

One night as he entered I noticed he had his hands behind his back. I was expecting empty hands again, but then he said, "Look!" and brought out a large bag of candies.

He must have enjoyed my utter delight because from that day he brought gifts for me whenever he had those night meetings. My favourites were comic books from the Classics Illustrated series. They were abridged classic stories – including *The Jungle Book* and *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* – recounted in child-friendly graphical style.

My mother's parental home was only ten minutes away by rickshaw. She and I often visited there in the afternoon. Several families lived in the same compound and I always looked forward to joining the kids in neighbourhood games. The best part about these trips, however, was to see my mother happy and relaxed in the environment she had grown up in.

Our home had numerous trees. Some produced intensely fragrant flowers. A short tree, called *Kathli Chapa*, was within reach and I raided it often. The *Nageshwar* flowers, however, bloomed high on the tall tree. I had to wait for a strong wind or storm to drop these flowers. When I smell a *Nageshwar* flower today, it returns me to childhood. But *Kathli Chapa* seems to have

disappeared (or become very rare.)

My childhood was not all pleasure, however.

On the farthest corner of our sprawling backyard was the outhouse. Surrounded by tall trees, it had no electricity. The worst time to visit the outhouse was on a stormy night: rain pouring, winds gusting and branches rattling. While a household staff waited outside I climbed the stairs to the chamber, lantern in one hand, umbrella in the other. Once inside, *bhoot* (ghost) stories haunted me. I pictured a gigantic *bhoot* with bloodshot eyes waiting outside, two incredibly long and skinny legs resting on two different trees, keeping watch over the area, ready to snatch me with its equally long hands as I emerged. This outhouse was the reason I hated the bouts of diarrhoea that plagued my childhood.

Another source of childhood fear was the *chheledhora* or child kidnapper. The adult narrative, designed to keep children from straying, went like this: "If you step outside the house alone, the *chheledhora* will grab you, tie you in a sack, and take you away. You will never be found again." This did not stop me from stepping out, but I watched my back whenever I did, whether visiting friends in the neighbourhood or swimming in the pond across the street.

More real than the *chheledhora* was the *pagol*, a mad man or woman with unkempt appearance who roamed the streets, shouted incoherently, sometimes threw stones and always came knocking at our gate. The sight of a *pagol* sent me scrambling for safety. Only in adulthood was I able to overcome my fear and start feeling sympathy for *pagols*.

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## Woman found dead after councillor lets her rapist walk free

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A rape victim was found dead in her room in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila early on Thursday, an hour after the local municipal councillor let her rapist walk free instead of handing him over to police.

The body of Sakhina Begum (35) was sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

The rapist, Mofizul Islam, has been on the run, while police arrested councillor Lutfar Rahman of Kakonhat municipality and two of his associates -- Akbar Ali and Merajul Islam, said Khairul Islam, officer-in-charge of Godagari Police Station.

Sakhina had been living with her two children in Rajshahi while her husband was residing in Chattogram for his job.

At around 1am on Thursday, Mofizul burst into her house and raped her. When she cried for help, locals caught Mofizul. They took Mofizul to Lutfar Rahman, the OC said, quoting the victim's father.

Rahman and his aides blamed the woman, and released Mofizul Islam as an innocent man. At 2am, locals found Sakhina hanging with a rope from the ceiling fan in her room and informed police. Police responded and investigated the matter, OC Khairul added.

At 3pm on Thursday, police arrested the ward councillor and his men. Sakhina's father Muntaj Ali filed a case with Godagari Police Station, accusing the four men of rape and provoking her death.

## SHER-E-BANGLA MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL

## Burn unit, psychiatry ward remain closed for months

SUSHANTA GHOSH

The only burn unit in Barishal division at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) has been closed for five months. Not only that, the only psychiatry ward of the hospital has been closed for around a year.

After the death of the burn unit's head of department Dr MA Azad, the department was shut down due to shortage of personnel.

However, the hospital authorities said they have been treating fire victims in other departments, especially the medicine ward. On the other hand, when the only doctor at the psychiatric department retired, the unit gradually closed down.

SBMCH began its journey in 1968 as the first and prime medical college hospital in the South region with just 160 seats.

Currently it is a 1,000-bed hospital with an additional 150-bed Covid-19 unit. Yet there remains a crisis of doctors.

There are 224 posts for doctors, but only 97 of those have been filled. As a result, multiple units including the burn unit and psychiatry unit have remained closed.

Dr Moniruzzaman Shahin said the burn unit started in March 2015 with posts for eight doctors and 16 nurses, but even then the required number of personnel weren't present. Last April, the department head passed away hence the unit was closed.

"Dr Tapan Kumar Saha of the psychiatry unit has retired a year ago so that hasn't been functional either," he added, "We have written to the authorities for appointment of doctors in the vacant positions but there hasn't been any progress yet."

Lincoln Dutta, a nurse at SBMCH, said many patients have to go to Dhaka for better treatment of burn injuries.

Prashanta Halder (53) of West Mollapara road at Ratnapur union under Agailjhara Upazila was injured after a gas cylinder explosion last Tuesday but he could not get proper treatment at SBMCH due to the absence of a functioning burn unit.

He received primary treatment at the Upazila Health Complex and later on his relatives prepared to take him to Dhaka.

The absence of a burn unit can be fatal for emergency patients with burn injuries in Barishal. Travelling is difficult amid the pandemic and it is likely that many patients cannot be taken to Dhaka on time.

Sah Sajeda, convener of Socheton Nagorik Committee, demanded that the burn unit of the hospital be made operational immediately because of the aforementioned reasons.

SBMCH Director Dr Bakir Hossain also cited Dr MA Azad's death as the reason behind the unit's closure and said he too is writing to the government authorities for appointment of more doctors, but progress is slow.



This is not just a truck transporting wooden boards; it very well might be a bringer of potential injuries and fatalities. The steep angle of the tied up boards, the workers sitting on top, the flimsy ropes -- all could be reasons for a terrible accident. One small slip and the men could fall off and get hit by the fast-moving vehicles on Shah Amanat Bridge in Chattogram. A board sliding off could slam into one of the many cars behind. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Five workers burnt at Tongi steel mill fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Five workers of a steel mill in Gazipur's Tongi suffered burn injuries yesterday, while melting iron bars.

The incident took place around 4am at SS Steel Mills Ltd. The workers were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) following the incident, said Inspector Bachchu Mia, in-charge of DMCH Police Outpost.

The injured are Mozammel (22), Dulal (25), Niloy (25), Ripon (30), and Azahar (26).

Among them, Mozammel sustained 90 percent burns, while Dulal, Niloy and Ripon sustained 50 percent, the inspector said. Azahar went home after receiving primary treatment, but condition of the others were critical as of filing this report last evening.

Other workers of the mill rushed the injured to Tongi Ahsanullah Master General Hospital, from where they were later shifted, said family members of the injured.

Contacted, Mizanur Rahman, firefighter of Tongi Fire Service and Civil Defence, said fire service was not informed about the situation. Emdadul Hosen, officer-in-charge of Tongi West Police Station, said police filed a general diary to enquire if the mill ensured proper safety measures for workers.

A police team was sent there to inspect, and if anybody files a complaint, police will take steps, he said.

## 5 jailed for selling piranha, catfish

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion and Fisheries Department, in a joint-drive, seized a huge amount of piranha and African catfish from the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday.

Rab Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam also jailed five fish traders from one month to three months. "The traders tell customers that the banned fishes are kind of Rupchanda, and are widely sold at hotels or restaurants," Sarwoer told reporters.

Farming and selling of piranha has been banned in Bangladesh since 2008 as it is considered as a threat to indigenous aquatic life.

With its sharp teeth and voracious appetite for meat, the small freshwater fish of South American origin is a dangerous predator when attacking any animal in a group. A fisheries official said farming, selling and storing piranha and African catfish are punishable offences under the Protection and Conservation of Fish Act.

Rab conducted yesterday's drive based on the information that chemicals are being used on fish at the market.

## New appellate judges pay respects to Bangabandhu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two newly appointed judges of the Appellate Division of Supreme Court -- Justice Tariq-ul-Hakim and Justice Obaidul Hassan -- yesterday paid homage to Bangabandhu by placing wreaths at his grave in Gopalganj's Tungipara upazila.

They also offered prayers at his mausoleum, seeking eternal peace for the departed souls of Bangabandhu, Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib and other martyrs of the August 15, 1975 massacre, an SC source said.

President Md Abdul Hamid on September 2 appointed the two as judges of the Appellate Division by promoting them from the High Court.

The number of apex court judges stands at eight now.

## Two construction workers die after fall from building

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two construction workers died after the scaffolding collapsed while they were working on the fourth floor of an under-construction building in Dhaka's Bashundhara Residential Area yesterday morning.

The deceased are Asadul Islam (25) of Rajshahi and Khairul Islam (20) of Chapainawabganj. Both lived at the construction site.

Around 10am, the scaffolding collapsed as the rope somehow tore off. The two were critically injured after the fall.

Both were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared them dead, said Bachchu Mia, inspector of DMCH Police Outpost.

The bodies were kept at the hospital morgue for autopsy.

## The good, the bad, the ugly of distance learning

SANIA AAMAN, Star Lifestyle

One of the key changes wrought into the fabric of our lives after the coronavirus outbreak has been regarding education and the prevailing systems of education.

With forced social isolation and a desperate switch to distance learning set to bring about a paradigm shift in our education systems, it is imperative that we take a look at the various effects this transition might have on all parties involved, especially students' learning and health.

During regular times, the typical day for a student is filled with routine lessons and tests. But besides that, young children and even older students look forward to seeing their friends and peers.

Online classes largely deprive them of these interactions. One of their top criticisms against online learning is that "it is not as enjoyable".

"I miss talking to my friends," said a fifth-grader, terming it her least favourite thing about online classes.

Teachers, however, have a different set of challenges than just making learning more enjoyable. Without the help of all the communication and body language cues that can be employed in a physical setting, holding a student's attention can be difficult.

On top of this, many students and their families maybe stressed out from the pandemic situation, which makes imparting effective lessons a whole different ballgame.

Another important aspect that affects students and teachers is the additional screen time.

Generally, it is advised that children's screen time be limited to one or a maximum of two hours a day, depending on their age and the content being consumed.

Concerns about this have been raised the world over. India's state of Karnataka even banned online classes for children up

to standard five, taking into consideration experts' warnings.

Also, as physical activities are severely restricted, many students are also struggling with staying healthy.

"I do school classes till the afternoon, and then coaching classes in the evening, all online. That's a lot of hours spent in the same spot, with little to no real break. I have not played outside in months. I have gained weight, and don't feel very fit," said an 11th grader.

For parents, online classes are a good thing, albeit with complications. It keeps children engaged and actively learning. But the burden of managing timings, websites, apps and passwords can be quite tiresome.

"My son is a very active child, but he normally doesn't study on his own, so I have to supervise his online classes. It is very worrying how he ends up spending a lot of time on the computer due to online classes and leisure activities," a private university teacher said.

"It gets overwhelming to do my own job and then monitor the classes of my two children," she added.

Even though distance learning promises a lot of conveniences, these accounts show that it doesn't come without its own problems. Given that online learning is set to play a more significant role in what is becoming the new normal, it may be time for educators, health experts, and policy makers to come up with a comprehensive guideline on how to go on about it, with detailed discourse on class cycle duration, timings, level of work and progress assessments, and most importantly, consideration for students' mental and physical capacities.

(Names of the interviewees have been withheld upon requests for privacy)

## Germany gives €2m for Bangladesh's Covid-19 response

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Germany has provided the International Organization for Migration with two million euros to support the UN migration agency's Covid-19 response in Bangladesh.

With support from the German Federal Foreign Office, IOM will expand the provision of essential health services to Rohingya refugees and vulnerable members of the host community, said a press release yesterday.

Besides, IOM will extend support to the Bangladesh government to build capacity at points of entry in Cox's Bazar to identify, screen, and refer ill travellers, the release said.

"We are glad to further support IOM's Covid-19 response in Bangladesh.

Expanding the provision of essential health services to Rohingya refugees and vulnerable members of the host community in Cox's Bazar is essential to prevent a further spread of the virus and to treat and educate people accordingly," said Peter Fahrenholtz, German ambassador to Bangladesh.

"We are grateful to the government of Germany for their support that enables us to continue providing emergency health support to vulnerable communities, especially the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar who are almost entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance," said Giorgi Gigauri, IOM's chief of mission in Bangladesh.

The release said the generous funding will enable IOM, among other initiatives, to establish three isolation and treatment centers, repurpose 100 mid-term shelters for quarantine and isolation of mild cases, and support the cash-for-work programme to build the resilience of affected families in the Rohingya camps and settlements.

Since March, IOM has constructed three severe acute respiratory infection isolation and treatment centers for patients with Covid-19 with a total capacity of 215 beds, it further said.