

Passengers remain hostage to cab drivers at ZIA

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Ashfaq Hossain heaved a sigh of relief as he got into the taxicab. Soaking wet from the downpour, Hossain was a bit surprised with his sudden stroke of luck as the very first taxi he tried agreed to take him without any haggling. Getting a taxicab in Dhaka city can always be a daunting

task especially for those arriving at the airport at an ungodly hour. Hossain was returning home from abroad last month. As Hossain glanced back over his shoulder towards the arrival lounge of Zia International Airport (ZIA) where an edgy crowd was still looking for transportation in the heavy downpour, he considered himself

quite lucky to have stumbled upon one of the honest taxi drivers in the city. Hossain's feeling of contentment was short-lived as only a couple of minutes later, the driver demanded Tk 500 for the trip from the airport to Fargate. "The car belongs to the [airport] counter service. If you do not wish to pay, then you

have to get off," the driver told him with a straight face. Even though the usual taxi fare from the airport to Fargate would be around Tk 100, the heavy rainstorm left Hossain with no choice but to agree and pay the outrageous fare. "I tried to reason with him, but I was told that the taxi

belonged to the airport authorities or something and they have a fixed fare policy. Besides, I was too tired to argue with him and agreed to pay the fare," said Hossain. After he reached his destination, the driver did not even give him any receipt or any other official document showing that the driver had accepted the payment, Hossain added.

The taxicab Hossain got on carried the name Premium Passenger Service on it and was one of the few hundred taxicabs permitted to operate from the ZIA under the supervision of the airport authorities.

This 'premium service' has been in operation at ZIA since the 1980s. Under this scheme, no commercial transportation vehicle can operate at ZIA without the authorization from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

"It is for the convenience of the passengers at the airport," said a CAAB official adding, "Since all the vehicles and their drivers are listed in our database, their passengers can feel safe and secure. They can travel without any fear of being conned," he said.

Though it sounds like a good idea, the taxicab service has turned into more of a nuisance for the passengers over the years.

A number of CAAB officials also admitted that passengers have numerous complaints and grievances against the cab drivers.

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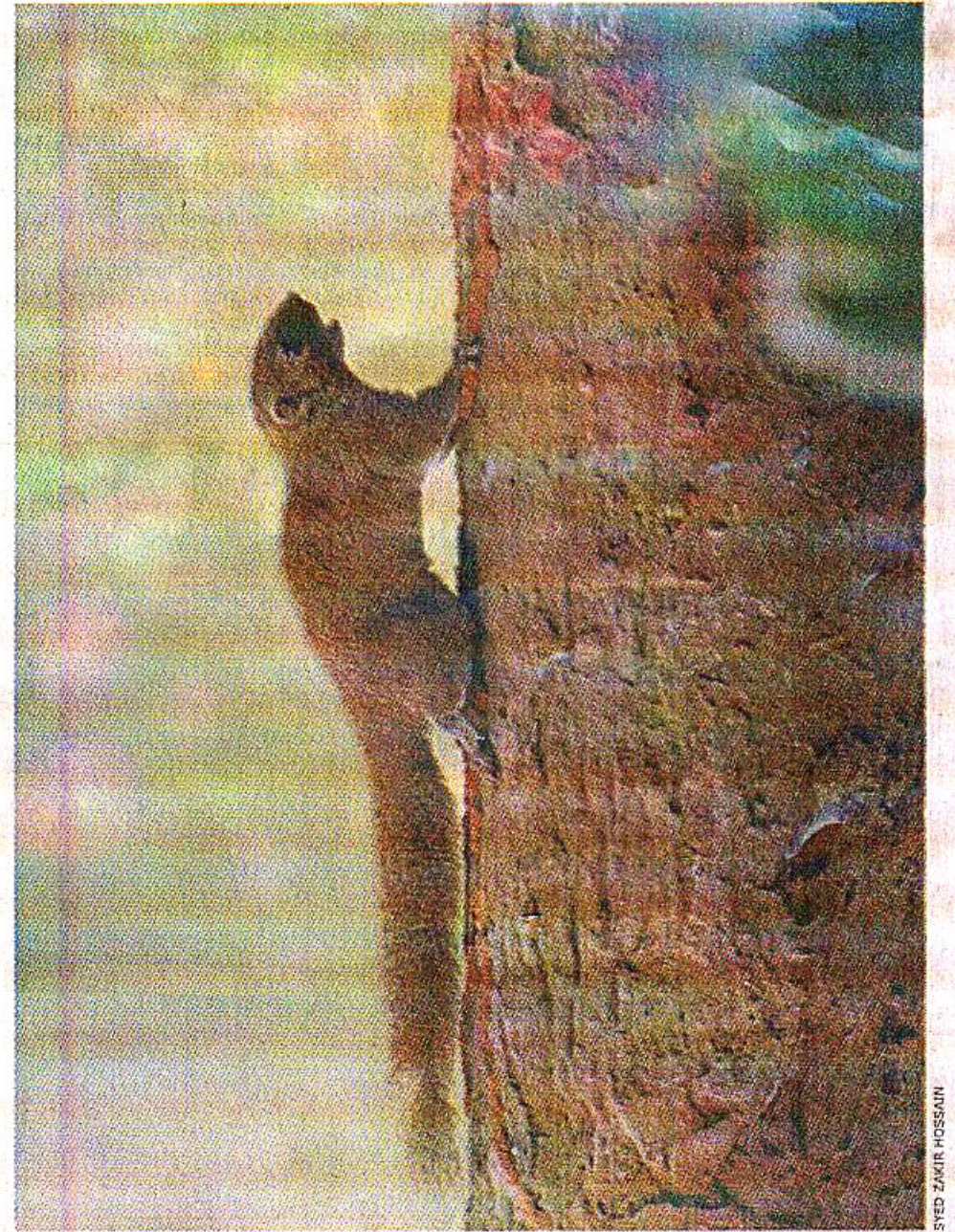


Common scene

An incoming passenger surrounded and hassled by some cab drivers' men at ZIA.

ANISUR RAHMAN

FREE INSIDE ZOO



It was a different scene. A squirrel was scurrying up a tree while most other inmates at Dhaka Zoo remain captive in cages. Having a taste of freedom the rodent was moving around in a happy-go-lucky mood. The photo was taken last week.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"I had committed myself to bringing those back home safely. But I am shocked that such an unpleasant incident has occurred even before sending them."

-- Ayub Quadri
Former Cultural Adviser

Told reporters days before he stepped down after two Paris-bound 1,500-year-old terracotta Vishnu statues were stolen from the airport from the custody of the Air France Authority, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"The way the acting ambassador of France reacted to the protest against sending of the artefacts is condemnable. We did not expect such remark from a man of such position and from such a country enriched with culture and heritage."

-- Shamsuzzaman Khan
Former director general of the National Museum

Told a reporter reacting to the remarks of the acting French envoy after the two artefacts were stolen, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"But now I am in confusion what the government actually wants to say by using such words respectful and acceptable."

-- Prof Tajmeri S Islam
Acting president of Dhaka University Teachers Association (Duta)

Told reporters after Duta accused the government of breaking promises by saying the detained teachers and students would be released through 'respectful and acceptable' process, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"What is the utility of forming the 6th wage board for three or four newspapers?"

-- Mainul Hossain
Law Adviser

Told reporters posing query how many newspapers implemented 40 percent dearness allowance in interim award before the publication of the new wage board, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"You have to design your project according to the atmosphere. You don't complain about the atmosphere saying that nothing is possible here."

-- Iqbal Z Quadri
An NRB and founder of GrameenPhone

Said in an interview with The Daily Star, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas

Winter sets in, guests yet to arrive

Most of city's roosting spots are still dull with poor number of migratory birds

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Bird enthusiasts are disappointed as migratory birds are yet to arrive in their usual flock in the city lakes and water bodies despite the advent of winter.

The usual scene of 'feathery friends' diving and dabbling in the water has been changing for the last few years. The number of winter guests and domestic birds has decreased sharply depriving the bird enthusiasts of their chirping and twittering.

Migratory birds usually start flying in from mid November and stay until March, sometimes April. Flocks of these birds provide entertainment to thousands of jaded Dhaka dwellers swarming the lakes to enjoy the splendour.

Bird enthusiasts organise bird watching festival while families organise day trips. But this year such activities are yet to start due to absence of migratory birds.

Experts say too much human interference in the roosting grounds and destruction of water bodies in and around the city are the main reasons for the situation.

Dhaka city offers several roosting places for migratory birds. Lakes at Dhaka Zoo, Botanical Garden, Mirpur Ceramics, Pilkhana, several water bodies on the Jahangirnagar University campus and in Savar Cantonment area, and the other water bodies around the city are their very favourite retreat areas.

The birds use the lakes of the city for roosting during the day and wander around at night in the swamps, paddy fields and nearby riverbed in search of food.

According to a survey conducted by Nature Conservation Committee, only 200 gadwall ducks were seen in the zoo lake this year while last year the number was around 4,000 of seven species.

Ceramics lake authorities told Star City that right before Eid they witnessed several flocks of guest birds but by the end of December most of them disappeared.

Even though most birds usually arrive in the Jahangirnagar University lakes by November, they have arrived late in December this year but the number is much less compared to last year's. Around 200 lesser whistling teal were spotted so far on the campus.

However, this year Savar Cantonment Lake seems more popular among birds. The lake witnessed a fairly good number of visitors.

As many as 162 species of waterfowl are found in Bangladesh, of them 46 are local and the remaining 116 are migratory. Several local species also travel across the country during winter.

These birds flying in from the Himalayas, Ladakh and far away

places like Siberia, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe move to relatively warm swampy lands in Bangladesh to escape the freezing cold and in search of food such as snails, weed and tiny fish.

Food for these migratory birds are abundant during this time of the year in the marshlands like Hakaluki, Hyle and Tangar haor in greater Sylhet, the swamps in the coastal Nijhum Dweep and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

A number of these species use Bangladesh as a stopover en route to countries in Southeast Asia.

The experience in the haor area is however the opposite, experts say. Around 2 lakh migratory birds have been spot-

ted in the Hakaluki haor alone.

Sajahan Sarder, secretary general, Nature Conservation Committee, said, "The number of migratory birds is falling rapidly every year as the water bodies are subject to urban and industrial encroachment. Wetlands that birds love so much are shrinking because of this."

"The water bodies around the city are extremely polluted. There is no monitoring of water conditions in the city. The level of water pollution is upsetting for the birds or any other living creature," he added.

Industrial waste dumping seriously polluted the water bodies around the city damaging the flora and fauna. "Birds depend on the wetlands for

food. When they cannot find food there, they will definitely go to somewhere else," Sajahan said.

He said NCC has conducted surveillance in and around the city and they have reason to believe that poaching continues in the water bodies at night.

Bushes used by the birds are also decreasing every year, he added.

Most birds coming to the city are whistling waterfowls. Naming a few, pintail duck, gadwall, widgeon, gargany, green-winged teal etc are common. Shoveller has almost stopped coming to the city, experts say.

Local species that usually come to the city during winter include comb duck, night

heron, grey heron, bronze winged jakana and common moorhen.

Bird expert Dr Ronald Halder said, "Roosting grounds are seriously disturbed by humans. These birds are extremely sensitive. In our country people are not sensitive enough to respect their [birds] privacy."

"Wildlife creatures love serenity, which is hard to find in the city," he added.

Only 10 to 12 types of guest birds like to float on the lake water while the others are known as migratory tree-birds who dwell in the tree around the water bodies but they search food in the same manner.

Dr Md Anwarul Islam, professor of Zoology, University of

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Few birds arrived at the Dhaka Zoo Lake although the winter has set in.

STAR PHOTO