

Balaka Storks, Airport

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There is a continuing political project that seeks to force religion into our political life. Its mainstream manifestation patiently infiltrates institutions. The more extreme factions carry out public attacks and confrontations around catalyst issues (e.g., Humayun Azad, Udichi, Shamsur Rahman). This keeps us distracted from the long-term infiltration strategy.

When old enemies flee, new targets are invented. In the 1960s, the Pakistan regime asked why Bengalis celebrated Rabindranath Tagore. "Wasn't he a Hindu poet?" An assault on cultural motifs-- baul music, folk theater, cinema, pohela boishakh-- is an old/new weapon for this "Islamist" project. We put "Islamist" in quotes because this is not about religious philosophy, but rather fear politics that manipulates people's religious sentiment.

Contrast the two latest media events: dismantling of Baul statue at ZIA airport, and this week's attempted dismembering of Balaka Stork Statue in Motijheel. One happened in mid-day, but there are only two press photos of the crowd (and officials) pulling statues down. Balaka was near midnight, but many newspapers carried images of those still-standing structures. Flash-light at midnight illuminating the storks, poor birds!

Zaid Islam and I arrived after some attackers had been arrested. The press photographers had deadlines, they had snapped and left. The police were still on guard. As we took photos of battered legs and pulverized plaster, one police officer came up.

"Which newspaper are you with?"

