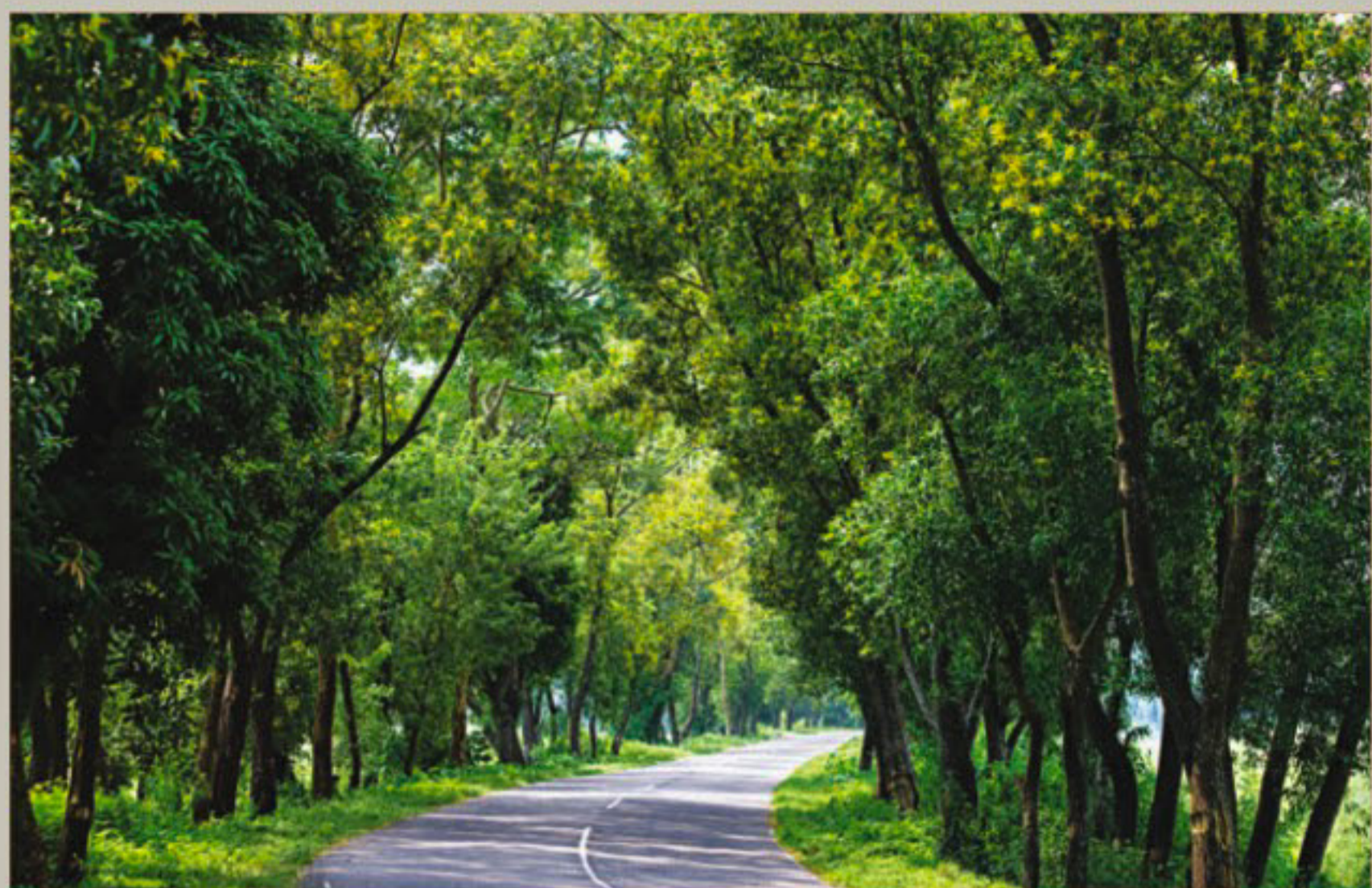


TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Acacias blooming on the Sylhet-Fenchuganj road.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Autumn? Really?

I spent four years in the American northeast where seasons arrived with a bang, not a whimper. Sandwiched between the sunny comfort of summer and the coming harshness of winter, autumn evoked bittersweet emotions. While enjoying these last warm days of the year, one constantly looked over one's shoulder to see if the cold had arrived.

"Fall Colours" was the best part of those autumns. Green leaves of deciduous trees turned bright red or yellow - and many shades in between - before falling. The sumptuous colours of a northern forest in autumn are not easily forgotten.

In Bangladesh, autumn is different. The period between monsoon and winter is divided into two seasons: Shorot and Hemonto. While it is easy to know when monsoon, summer, spring or winter is here, the arrival of autumn is subtle. For me, this makes for a confusing season. This year is worse because nature herself appears confused.

For example, consider our expectations of autumn. Supposedly, the dark skies of Borsha yield to brilliant white clouds against a blue sky; nights and early mornings turn noticeably cooler; sunlight becomes crisp and clear; and Shephali, the favourite flower of Shorot, washes the earth with its delicate scent.

But we are well into Hemonto autumn is three-quarters over - and what has happened? The rains drag on. Rain or not, the sky looks like a coating of mud was applied to it. A mind-numbing haze has driven out any clarity the light might have held.

And Shephali? In my last five years

living here, I can count on one hand the number of Shephali trees I have seen. Has it become a dying breed?

But let's not write off autumn in our haste to get to winter. Autumn's gifts make up in substance what they lack in show.

Luckily for our stomachs, the farmers were not confused like I was. They have finished planting autumn's rice crop Amon. While waiting for the rice harvest, they turn their attention to growing vegetables. The rice should ripen in another month, bringing good cheer to villagers. (Indeed, where would we be without our farmers?)

Autumn brings its own fruits: *jambura*, *kotbel*, *amloki*, *jolpai* and *aamra*. They lack the sweetness of summer's fruits, but so what? Flavourful and loaded with vitamin C, they lend themselves well to childhood favourites such as *chatnis*, *achars*, *bhortas* and *toks*.

But for me the best part of autumn are its flowers, particularly acacia and *chhatim*.

An acacia's small yellow flowers, 2-3 inches in diameter and several inches long, cover the entire tree. From a distance, the mix of yellow and green is spectacular.

The *chhatim* - with its pretty, star-shaped leaves - wears its white flowers like a bridal gown. It attracts numerous admirers: wasps, bees, butterflies, crickets and dragonflies, which devote themselves to the reproduction of the tree's next generation.

In the countryside, both have bloomed in abundance, proving that autumn is unquestionably here. Really!

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Khaleda to address rally tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will address a public rally in front of the party's central office tomorrow as part of its programme to observe "National Revolution and Solidarity Day".

Khandaker Delwar Hossain, the party's secretary general, said they applied for Paltan Maidan or Muktagong to hold the rally but police did not approve.

He was addressing a press briefing at BNP's central office in the city last evening.

Finally, he got permission to hold the rally in front of the party's central office in Nayapaltan following a meeting between police commissioner and a team of the opposition leaders, he said.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farooque, Abul Khayer Bhuiyan, MP, Shahiduddin Chowdhury, MP, and BNP's city unit leader Abdus Salam were in the team.

BNP observes November 7 as national revolution and solidarity day remembering the release of its founder from imprisonment in 1975.

Smiling Sun signs deal with Space Race

METRO DESK

USAID Smiling Sun Franchise Program (SSFP) signed an agreement with Space Race Bangladesh Limited to provide access to infotainment and newsfeed options to the customers visiting the Smiling Sun clinics.

The signing ceremony was held at SSFP headquarters on October 31.

Shahzreh Huq, chairperson of Space Race and Juan Carlos Negrette, chief of party of SSFP, jointly signed tripartite agreements with NGO executive committee members representing BAMANEH, CWFD, PSTC, and Swanirvar Bangladesh, said a press release.

Under the agreement, Space Race will provide Smiling Sun customers access to newsfeed, entertainment, and targeted health educational campaigns via a Display Solutions Unit (DSU) at the waiting rooms of Smiling Sun clinics. In return, a portion of the advertisement revenue generated by Space Race will be utilised by SSFP to cover operational expenses of its network of 323 clinics that are operated by a consortium of 28 reputed NGO's across Bangladesh.

SSFP and Space Race aim to install DSU's at 100 Smiling Sun clinics by December and at 270 clinics by September next year.

Speaking at the function, Shahzreh said she is happy as the revenue to be generated from this initiative would help the poor get better health services from the clinics. She wished a grand success for the strategic partnership.

Carlos thanked all for their valuable contribution in this initiative.

Women entrepreneurs worst victims of corruption: Study

UNB, Dhaka

Although the government is promoting country's commercial sector, particularly trade and business, for the greater development of the nation, women entrepreneurs become the worst victims of corruption while expanding their business.

As women entrepreneurs are highly dependant on SME credit and have limited access to information and resources, low entrepreneurship skills and significant social barriers, they have to face different forms of corruption in continuing their businesses.

This was said in a study titled 'The impact of corruption on women entrepreneurs', conducted by Bangladesh Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI) with financial assistance from USAID and Prograti, an NGO.

The study was carried out in six divisions -- Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet -- with the study team interviewing more than 300 women entrepreneurs this year.

The study said corruption is a common phenomenon here pervading all sectors and women entrepreneurs have also been badly affected due to corruption.

Bangladesh slid one step in the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ranked 12th this year from last year's 13th.

Most of the women entrepreneurs fall victims of corruption as early as in getting trade licenses to start their business, the

study said.

According to the study, about 37 percent women entrepreneurs have experienced corruption while applying for a trade licence, 60 percent were asked to pay a bribe and 10 percent paid to get the trade licence.

The study pinpointed that trade license officers are often the sources of corruption. Micro entrepreneurs are the most vulnerable and submitting the application for trade license is the most problematic due to corruption, the study added.

The study says that the tax department is a major source of corruption.

Obtaining the Tax Identification Number (TIN) form is the greatest challenge for women entrepreneurs, it says.

About 30 percent entrepreneurs have become victims of corruption in obtaining the TIN with around 47 percent asked to pay bribe, it says.

For expanding their business, the women entrepreneurs need to get bank loan and a large number of enterprises experience the greatest difficulty in getting loans.

Loan officers and bank managers are the primary source of corruption, it alleged.

According to the study, some 20 percent women entrepreneurs become victims of corruption in applying for bank loans with 37 percent asked to pay bribes.

Of those with experience in applying for bank loans, over 68 percent reported delays in starting and expanding business

while 65 percent spoke of being rejected due to non-payment of bribe.

The study also reveals that women entrepreneurs face various forms of challenges with payment of electricity bills being the most problematic for them.

More than 24 percent entrepreneurs reported having experienced corruption in utility payment as in most of cases they were required to pay more than the billed amount.

BWCCI President Selima Ahmed told the news agency that the study found out the "real scenario" on how the women entrepreneurs in the country have become victims of corruption.

The government should announce a 'Women Entrepreneurs Development Policy' to encourage women entrepreneurs, she said, adding that a specific budgetary allocation is needed for their development.

Selima stressed the need for setting up women-dedicated desks at all banks to avert any challenge and problem in getting bank loan and paying utility bills.

She said although the Bangladesh Bank issued a circular that earmarked Tk 120 crore to be disbursed as loan to the women entrepreneurs, only 35 percent of the amount has been released so far.

She urged the government to fully implement the circular of Bangladesh Bank to encourage the country's women entrepreneurs as well as in expanding their trade and business.

One killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An elderly person was chopped to death at Tobolpur village of Sadar upazila early hours of yesterday.

The victim is identified as Md. Shajahan (50), son of late Hassem Ali of the village.

OC of Pabna Sadar Police Station Md Mohosin said the criminals chopped him near a pond of the village.

Police recovered the body from the spot and sent to Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Obituary

METRO DESK



Rashiduzzaman Angur, a former footballer, passed away yesterday morning

due to heart and kidney complications at a city hospital. He was 63, says a press release.

Angur, also a former official of Power Development Board, was laid to rest at Kalsi graveyard in Mirpur.

He left behind his wife, two sons, a daughter, and countless well-wishers to mourn his death.



PHOTO: STAR

Remnants of a fighter aircraft of the Second World War, salvaged from the seabed of the Bay of Bengal, could be seen left lying at the Ghat 15 in Patenga of Chittagong yesterday.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Final decision by this yr: Badsha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The government and parliament have taken steps for finalising decisions on the constitutional recognition of indigenous people within this year, lawmaker Fazle Hossain Badsha told a discussion in Rajshahi yesterday.

He said a parliamentary caucus has been formed early this year to look after the affairs of indigenous people. The caucus will hand over proposals for the recognition to the special committee for bringing necessary changes to the constitution within this month.

"The government assured the caucus of solving the problem within this year. The caucus is also considering placing a bill in the parliament in this regard", the MP and a member of the caucus said in the discussion held at Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industries auditorium.

Jatiya Adivasi Parishad (JAP) and Kapaeng Foundation (KF) jointly organised the discussion styled "Constitutional recognition of the indigenous people".

JAP President Anil Marandi who chaired the discussion said JAP will start a signature collection campaign across the country on November 7, demanding reinstatement of the constitution of 1972 with the indigenous people recognised in it.

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PHOTO: COURTESY

Smiling Sun Franchise Program has signed an agreement with Space Race Bangladesh Limited recently to provide access to infotainment and newsfeed options to the customers visiting the smiling sun clinics.

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