

# TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Moon during eclipse (photo by Opu.)  
Inset: Shanto (l) and Opu (r)

PHOTO:  
IHTISHAM KABIR

## Inquiring Minds

I first heard about Anushandhitsu Chokro ("Circle of Inquiring Minds", henceforth abbreviated as Achokro) from Dr. Dipen Bhattacharya, who teaches physics and astronomy at California's Riverside Community College. Dipen is also a research professor at University of California Riverside, author of two science fiction novels, a climate-change activist and an avid outdoorsman. He and five others founded this science club in 1975.

Achokro has over 600 members throughout Bangladesh. Their activities in astronomy, physics, chemistry and agriculture are distinguished by a hands-on approach at rural grass-roots level. Their shoe-string budget is provided by members.

Among Achokro's astronomical accomplishments are collection of the largest meteorite to fall in Bangladesh (handed to museum authorities for safekeeping), construction of a refracting telescope (8"), weighs a ton, uses a rare Zeiss lens, and the 2009 solar eclipse camp in Panchagarh attended by 20,000 people.

On June 15, when a lunar eclipse is scheduled to take place, I visit Achokro's eclipse observation camp at Bhashani Planetarium. Lunar eclipses happen when the earth blocks sun's rays from reaching the moon. The moon is gradually swallowed by darkness, lighting up after it emerges from the earth's shadow. For tonight's celestial show, Achokro hosts twelve camps nationwide including Sylhet, Patharghata, Bandorban, and Barisal.

When I arrive at twilight, I meet Opu and Shanto, two young Achokro members. Opu, a pilot in training, organises the camp. Shanto, an engineering student, is their astronomy expert. I also meet Shahjahan Mridha

Benu, a senior member who kept the club going through its dark days.

The observation camp is humming. The field is dotted with colourful tents (for rain.) Two telescopes sit on tripods for observing and photographing the eclipse. An antenna is receiving radio waves from the sky and feeding them to a laptop. Although the eclipse is six hours away, about fifty people are already here waiting with anticipation.

The antenna is a two-element Yagi antenna, designed by Opu and made from local materials by several members. It listens to radio signals from the centre of the Milky Way galaxy. This information is continuously fed to a laptop and eventually shared with astronomers around the world.

What did they expect to observe during the lunar eclipse? "Much information can be derived from watching the eclipse. For example, the speed of the shadow over the moon tells us about the speed of the earth's revolution. Shadows also reveal information about lunar craters," Opu tells me.

I suppose one could read this up in astronomy books. But does that even come close to the real thing?

After the equipment is set up, the twilight sky darkens ominously and it starts raining. The members quickly stow the equipment in the tents until it clears. Later at night, when the eclipse takes place, it drizzles lightly. That does not deter the 1500 people who observe this memorable event together, chalking up one more victory for popular science in Bangladesh.

For more on Achokro, see their website at [www.achokro.org](http://www.achokro.org), [www.facebook.com/tangents.ikabir](http://www.facebook.com/tangents.ikabir)

### PROTEST RALLY FOR RUMANA

## Call to shift case under Speedy Trial Tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Academics, human and women's rights activists, media personalities, cultural activists and students in a protest rally yesterday demanded exemplary punishment of Hasan Sayeed Sumon to avoid repetition of any forms of violence against women.

Hasan brutally attacked and pushed his fingers into the eyes of his wife Rumana Manzur, an assistant professor of Department of International Relations at Dhaka University (DU), causing permanent blindness.

Addressing the rally organised by a platform formed to press justice for Rumana on Central Shaheed Minar premises in the city, they expressed solidarity with Rumana and called upon the government to stop such violence by enacting a proper law.

"When a female teacher of Dhaka University faces such atrocity, it is understandable what kind of repression common women face," said Prof Akmal Hossain, convener of the platform titled "Rumana Manzurer Jonno Naybichar Mancha".

Prof Akmal demanded shifting the case filed by Rumana's father Manzur Hossain to Speedy Trial Tribunal.

Meanwhile, Manzur yesterday filed a general diary with police seeking protection for Rumana and his family as Hasan's father

suddenly arrived and entered Rumana's cabin at LabAid Hospital on Thursday without permission.

He also tried to enter Manzur's Dhanmondi residence, said Rashed Maqsood, Rumana's cousin.

Police has now ensured security at the hospital, said family sources.

"In fact, Rumana has been practically murdered as nothing is left when the eyesight of a teacher is taken away," said DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique at the rally.

"Eye specialists in India were stunned at the severity of injury in Rumana's eyes. No surgery or transplantation is available to regain her eyesight," said Manzur.

Prof Gitiara Nasreen, chairperson of DU mass communication and journalism department, moderated the rally.

DU teachers Prof Harun-or-Rashid, Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed, Prof Sadrul Amin, Prof Amena Mohsin, Prof Delwar Hossain, Prof Saiful Islam Khan, Prof Sadeka Halim, Prof Meghna Guha Thakurta, Assistant Professor Tanzim Uddin Khan, Prof Mafizur Rahman and Assistant Professor Zobaida Nasreen were present.

Badruddin Omar of Jatiya Mukti Council, women's rights activists Shireen Akhter and Rokeya Kabir, and media personality Sara Zaker were also present.



Manzur Hossain, father of Rumana Manzur, who lost her eyesight when her husband brutally attacked and pushed his fingers into her eyes, speaks at a protest rally organised by Rumana Manzurer Jonno Naybichar Mancha on Central Shaheed Minar premises in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## NEWS IN brief

### City Al leader dies in road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An Awami League (AL) leader was killed and two others injured in a road accident in Natore yesterday.

The deceased is Mohammad Ali, president of AL ward number 18 under Dhaka City Corporation.

Police said Ali's car skidded off the road and hit a roadside tree at Razzaker More on Dhaka-Rajshahi Highway in Boraigram upazila around 5:30pm.

Locals admitted them to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Ali dead.

### Shaheed Nizam's family receives his DU certificates

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) authorities yesterday handed over honours and masters' degree certificates of Shaheed Khaza Nizam Uddin Bhuiyan, Bir Uttam, to his family yesterday.

Vice-chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique handed over the certificates to Col (retd) Mostafa Kamal Uddin Bhuiyan, elder brother of Nizam Uddin, at his office on the campus.

Khaza Nizam Uddin obtained honours and masters' degrees from DU in 1969 and 1970 respectively. He embraced martyrdom while fighting for the country in Sylhet on September 4, 1971.

### 'Talk to India to solve water crisis'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a rally yesterday urged the government to initiate diplomatic talks with India to ensure free flow of water from upstream to resolve water crisis on the basis of mutual cooperation.

Speaking at the rally organised by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) in front of Jatiya Press Club in the city, they also demanded removal of Teesta and Farakka dams immediately to protect the rivers.

BAPA General Secretary Dr Abdul Matin and Joint Secretary Shahjahan Mridha spoke at the rally.

### Octogenarian stabbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An octogenarian was stabbed and critically injured by miscreants over a trifling matter at Kutipara of Pura Bhausia in Munshiganj on Thursday night.

The victim Keramat Ali Bepari, 80, was gossiping when one Ibrahim Pathan exchanged hot talks with him at a tea stall in Lantarbari area. Later, a group of miscreants led by Ibrahim swooped on his house and stabbed him with sharp weapons.

### CARETAKER ISSUE

## Political consensus stressed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The major political parties will have to reach consensus over the caretaker government system issue to avoid confrontations, speakers at a debate programme said yesterday.

ATN Bangla organised Cambrian University Campus Parliament Debate at Bashundhara City in the city.

In the quarterfinal yesterday, the opposition party North South University reached the semi-final beating the ruling party United International University.

Eminent jurist Shaheen Malik and BNP leader Rafiqul Islam Mia spoke at the event presided over by Debate for Democracy Chairman Hasan Ahmed Kiron.

## Hasina for translating poet Nazrul's works

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday laid emphasis on the translation of national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's works in all popular languages to spread his creation across the globe.

"The government would extend all possible support in this regard," he said while inaugurating the two-day Nazrul International Conference at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city.

The conference was organised to observe the 90th anniversary of the poem "Bidrohi", the most famous creation of the poet.

Nazrul Institute and the cultural ministry jointly organised the event with scholars and delegations from USA, Netherlands, China and India taking part.

Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad and State Minister for Cultural Affairs Promod Mankin also spoke at the inaugural function, chaired by Nazrul Institute trustee board chairman Prof Rafiqul Islam.

Winston F Langley from USA delivered the Nazrul Memorial speech.

Sheikh Hasina handed over Nazrul Award

to national professor Kabir Chowdhury and eminent singer Nilima Das for their contribution in spreading Nazrul's creations.

Prof Kabir Chowdhury was given the award for his outstanding contribution in introducing poet Nazrul Islam across the world through translating his works into English and singer Nilima Das for her contribution to 'Nazrul Sangeet'.

Hasina also put emphasis on presenting Nazrul's literature before the working class people especially the new generation in a way they could easily understand.

Paying rich tribute to the memory of poet Nazrul Islam, the prime minister said there were ideological and philosophical similarities between poet Nazrul Islam and Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Both of them used to dream of an oppression-free Bangladesh where everybody will live in peace and tranquility.

She said the dream of poet Nazrul Islam resounded through Bangabandhu who during his entire life struggled with the spirit of rebellion and did not bow his head to any authoritarian ruler.

### ARREST FOR FORGERY UK hails Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UK government has hailed Bangladesh for arresting eight members of a document forgery gang in Sylhet on June 18.

Officers of Special Branch of police raided a printing company in Sylhet and captured the offenders, a British High Commission release said on Thursday.

Huge numbers of stolen Bangladesh and British passports, counterfeit UK visas and over 150 immigration stamps of several countries including the UK were seized.

A joint effort between the UK Border Agency, Bangladesh Police and the US Embassy in Dhaka made the arrests possible.

It says, police were acting on intelligence which originated from a UK Border Agency officer after detecting a forged visa. The law enforcers are probing the incident.

"We will not tolerate abuse of the UK's immigration controls and this operation shows what we can achieve through close and effective cooperation with the Bangladesh authorities and other countries to tackle this fraud," said Chris Dix, regional director of UK Border Agency.

## Experts suggest rail bridge

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The government slapped restrictions on load and speed of trains following detection of cracks on the bridge in 2006. Since then successive governments have failed to fix the cracks, compromising the 100 years lifespan of the Tk 4000 crore bridge built by South Korean Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co Ltd.

The Bangabandhu Bridge connects the northern region with the capital. According to its present capacity, 22 trains pass through it in 24 hours.

But there is an increasing demand for running more passenger and freight trains. Passengers often travel standing in compartments due to limited seating capacity, noted BR officials.

The speed limit for trains had been 40 kilometres per hour in the original design, which was reduced to 20 km/h for passenger trains, and 16 km/h for freight trains.

While crossing the bridge, a train cannot haul two locomotives and freight trains must have empty containers in between loaded ones.

Last year the government turned down an Indian proposal to allow their wagons through the bridge due

to restrictions, sources in Bridges Division said.

Special safety check for trains before boarding the bridge also eats up 15 to 20 minutes for each train, meaning increased travel time.

"The limiting factors, especially the compulsory speed restriction and safety checks, have reduced the bridge's sectional capacity," said a senior BR official.

The sectional capacity indicates the number of trains that can run in 24 hours on a section of railway track.

Regional connectivity through the proposed Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) and transit with India, Nepal and Bhutan will create huge traffic potential for railway, pointed out experts.

The TAR is a project to create an integrated freight railway network across Europe and Asia.

But the country will not be able to capitalise on the opportunity without a dedicated railway bridge on the Jamuna, since rail corridors and transit routes are supposed to use the Bangabandhu Bridge, added the experts.

"Lifespan of the bridge will reduce significantly as the delay in repair resulted in more cracks while expanding the existing ones.

It also lacks proper maintenance," said Khan Mahmud Amanat, a professor of civil engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

He insisted an exclusive rail bridge is needed not only for domestic and international trains, but also for saving the lifespan of the Bangabandhu Bridge.

BR sources said there is a pressing demand for running an intercity train on Rangpur-Dhaka route while people of Lalmonirhat demanded one more intercity train from the capital.

Passengers of Khulna, Bogra, Santabar, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh are also making similar demands.

Chief Engineer of the Bridges Division Md Abdul Wadud said the government has a plan to construct two railway bridges -- one parallel to Bangabandhu Bridge and the other connecting Phulchhari and Bahadurabad Ghat in Jamalpur.

The plan is at a very preliminary stage and the ministries concerned are making moves in this regard, he added.

Experts, however, hinted the Phulchhari-Bahadurabad Ghat route will not be viable.

### Obituary

BSS, Dhaka

Journalist and former student leader Matiur Rahman Bachchu passed away due to heart attack in Pabna on Thursday night. He was 66.

He fell sick while attending a function arranged to observe Nazrul birth anniversary at local Press Club. Doctors declared him dead around 8:30pm. He left behind his wife, two daughters. During 1960s, he was a central leader of the then East Pakistan Students Union, and Rajshahi University Central Students Union.

### Nazrul Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nazrul Islam, former secretary of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of Ministry of Planning, passed away at a hospital in Brussels of Belgium on Wednesday at the age of 78, says a press release.

### Abul Kalam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mohammad Abul Kalam, a corporal of Bangladesh Military Contingent at Operation Kuwait Punargathan, passed away due to heart attack yesterday in Kuwait, says an ISPR press release.



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