

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Getting ready to pull the Rath.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Rath and Rain

I spent my childhood in Sylhet where a torrential downpour can extend to days. But if monsoon made adults miserable, children had reasons to celebrate. The *Fotang*, a shooting toy fashioned from thin bamboo cylinders, appeared this season. It fired with a loud crack and the green spherical bullets - seeds, really - shot forth with great speed. Overflowing streams brought plenty of fish to be nailed with spears. Monsoon fruits, such as Lotkons and Lukluis, arrived with the rains.

For me, though, monsoon had another attraction: Rath. These chariots were part of Rath Jatra, the Hindu festival associated with a journey taken by Lord Jagannath. Pulled by devotees through the town's roads, the chariots were accompanied by joyous crowds. Every child was thrilled when one passed through the neighbourhood. They converged at Rikabi Bazar square for prayers. A big mela also took place.

I had a special fascination with the big wooden wheels of Rath. Perhaps I read too many stories, but watching them turn, my mind filled with visions of villains being squashed underneath them.

So that was the ideal Rath day: stomach aching from Lotkons, buying useless trinkets from the mela, shooting unsuspecting pedestrians with my *Fotang* and watching the Raths while visualising the vanquished villains. At night, shivering from being wet, my only prayer was not to wake up sick the next morning.

Fast forward a few decades to today's Dhaka. Monsoon has arrived with force. The city's initial delight at the rain has

turned into a collective groan. The sky is a permanent dark grey.

But there is a silver lining, because this is the season for Rath.

Indeed, when I arrive at the ISKCON temple in Swamibagh on July 3rd to watch Rath Jatra, I immediately see three chariots. They are 18-20 feet tall, decorated in bright colours, ready to make their way to Dhakeshwari temple.

I eagerly inspect the wheels. They are metallic and beautifully painted. But aren't they smaller than the imposing wooden wheels of my childhood? Then again, I am several feet taller now.

Two long, fat ropes emerge from either side of each Rath. Hundreds of adults and kids grip the ropes, ready to pull. The festive mood is a part of my memory. But the huge crowds and the loud music from big loudspeakers are not.

A man places chandan drops on peoples' foreheads for ten takas. But there are few vendors, and certainly no *Fotang*. It starts raining as the organisers are coordinating parade participants. That scarcely bothers the devotees but I have to take cover with my camera.

As the Raths move, crowds line their path. Volunteers sweep away dirt from the road ahead as the faithful bow down and touch the ground. Some groups in the parade dance jubilantly, others pray quietly. At the destination, Dhakeshwari temple, they are received with pomp and circumstance.

Even without Lotkons or *Fotangs*, I am grateful for having re-lived a childhood day of Rath and rain.

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GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM

Real time vehicle tracking by 2016

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anyone in the country would be able to plan their travelling routes and track their vehicles' location in real time from computers or mobile phones using Global Positioning System (GPS) by the end of 2016.

Officials of Survey of Bangladesh (SOB), the national mapping organisation under the defence ministry, explained this new technology at the four-day Digital Innovation Fair 2011 at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Novo Theatre in the city yesterday.

SOB is giving final touches to the digital three-dimension maps that would make the modern technology possible in Bangladesh, they said.

Combined with GPS, a satellite based navigation system already available in Bangladesh, the digital maps would also enable real time navigation, monitoring of land resources and assist in all kinds of development activities, they added.

The digital 3D map from SOB was the centre of much attention throughout the fair and received the award for the most popular government initiative among visitors.

Fourteen out of 200 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enabled initiatives from 89 government and private organisations being exhibited at the fair received awards for their innovation and functionality yesterday.

State Minister for Science and ICT Yeafesh Osman was present as the chief guest at the award giving ceremony with IT expert Sajeeb Ahmed Wazed and ICT Department Secretary Rafiqul Islam as special guests.

"The range of innovative services being shown in the fair proves that creative impulse of the nation has grown significantly over the years. This impulse would grow further and drive the country forward," said Yeafesh Osman.

Sajib said the government achieved a lot over the last two years to fulfil its dream of a digital Bangladesh and the innovative initiatives in the fair is a part of that success.

Judges at the fair awarded health and family planning ministry's Supply Chain Management System as the best e-governance initiative. The system keeps track of the stocks of family planning medicines and tools across the country through a computerised process.

Other initiatives which were awarded are an online insurance system from Jiban Bima Corporation, Zilla One-stop Service from Dhaka District Commissioner's office and teachers' digital content sharing blog from the education ministry.

The second Digital Innovation Fair being jointly organised by the Prime Minister's Office in association with Ministry of Science and ICT ends today.



PHOTO: STAR

Sangkhudho Nagorik Samaj forms a human chain in front of National Museum at Shahbagh in the city yesterday demanding withdrawal of cases filed against Limon Hossain, shot and maimed by Rapid Action Battalion on March 23.

NEWS IN brief

Foreign cigarettes, batteries seized at airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Airport Armed Police arrested two people with 216 cartons of foreign cigarettes, 10,000 pieces of wrist-watch batteries and some women's clothing from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday.

The arrestees Ismail Hossain from Shibchar of Madaripur and Mahiuddin from Bhola arrived on a flight of Pakistani Airlines, said police.

Inmate dies in Joypurhat jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

An inmate of Joypurhat jail died yesterday morning at Joypurhat Modern Hospital after he suffered a massive cardiac arrest Thursday night, according to the prison officials.

Deceased is Md Anwar Hossain, 55, of Paschim Matapur village of Joypurhat sadar upazila. The body was handed over to his family.

3 held in engineer murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police here on Thursday night arrested three people suspected of murdering an engineer of a state-run gas company in the city's Mazumderpara area on Tuesday night.

Victim Wasir Raza Chowdhury alias Razi, 37, a deputy manager of Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution Company, died after being severely beaten while trying to save his cousin from an attack by local criminals.

Protection of Limon, family demanded

DU CORRESPONDENT

Songkhudho Nagorik Samaj, a forum for human rights, from a human chain yesterday asked the government to stop extra-judicial killings.

They also demanded investigations into all extra-judicial killings and punishment to the persons responsible.

The forum formed the human chain in front of the city's National Museum protesting a Rab shootout that maimed Limon Hossain, a college student of Jhalakathi.

Different organisations, including Ain o Salish Kendra, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Samajtantrik Mahila Forum, expressed solidarity with the programme.

Representatives of the organisations demanded protection of Limon and his family and withdrawal of cases against the 16-year-old. They termed the filing of cases against Limon as conspiracy to label him as criminal.

Musical groups Samageet and Leela played songs and Jahangirnagar Theatre staged plays in protest of the shooting.

6 Kushtia editors sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Kumarkhali on Thursday filed a defamation case against six editors and publishers of three local daily newspapers in Kushtia, alleging publishing of false and fabricated news against him.

UNO Manikhar Rahman filed the case with the Chief Judicial Magistrate's court, Kushtia. Judge of the court took the case into cognisance and issued summons against the accused asking them to appear before the court on July 10. The court also fixed the same day to verify the complaint of defamation.

Meanwhile the sued journalists registered six separate General Diaries (GD) with Kushtia Sadar Police Station against the UNO on Thursday night, claiming that the UNO threatened them with dire consequences after they published the news items.

Sources said the six dailies published a series of articles against the UNO after a mobile court led by him on June 1 sentenced a schoolteacher to one year's imprisonment on charge of sexually harassing a student at Atiar Rahman Junior High School in Shelaidah, Kumarkhali.

The dailies in their reports claimed that the punishment of the teacher was not valid.

The journalists are the Dainik Ajker Alo editor and publisher Gazi Mahbub Rahman, acting editor Sohel Rana and executive editor Delwar Hossain; the Dainik Arshinagar editor and publisher Rasedul Islam Biplob; the Dainik Joyjatra editor and publisher Al Mamun Sagar and acting editor Hasibur Rahman Rizu.

Obituary

DU CORRESPONDENT

Abu Ahmad Abdullah, a former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, passed away at the city's Shamorita Hospital yesterday due to old age complications at the age of 67, says a press release.

He was an uncle of popular actress Subarna Mustafa.

His namaz-e-janaza was held in front of DU central mosque where his relatives, friends and well-wishers participated. He was buried at Mirpur Intellectual Graveyard yesterday.

BORDER TALKS END

Accord to share instant info on criminals, militants

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Border Security Force and Border Guards Bangladesh yesterday at a sector commander-level meeting agreed to share real time information to capture trans-border criminals and militants.

The two-day border co-ordination meeting ended yesterday at Tura in north-eastern Indian state of Meghalaya.

The BGB at the meeting raised many issues regarding killing of unarmed Bangladeshi nationals by BSF members, repatriation of convicted nationals, arrest of Bangladeshis by BSF, and

smuggling of various types of drugs including phensidyl, wine and cannabis from India to Bangladesh.

The BSF, however, denied killing any unarmed Bangladeshi national and said BSF personnel resort to preventative measures in self-defence only when somebody crosses the border at night with criminal intention.

The meeting discussed various issues concerning border management aiming to maintain cordial relations and mutual understanding to create an environment of peace on both sides of the border, an official statement said.

Tura sector DIG of BSF talked about Indian insurgents' activities in Bangladesh and stressed the need for more efforts from this end to capture them.

Besides trans-border crimes committed by Bangladeshis, prevention of smuggling of cattle, fake Indian currency notes and other items, poaching of Indian natural resources by Bangladeshis were also discussed.

The two border forces also spoke of confidence building measures and the proposed reopening of the Border Haat (market) at Kalaichar in West Garo Hills.

Missing govt staff found dead in Bay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

After searching for around 51 hours, the body of the missing assistant inspector of Department of Explosives, Chittagong who slipped and fell into the Bay while boarding a scrap ship on Wednesday morning was recovered here yesterday.

Bangladesh Coast Guard east zone recovered the floating body of AHM Nuruzzaman, 38, at outer anchorage of Chittagong port around 1:50pm, around one nautical mile from the accident spot, said Coast Guard Commanding Officer Lt Commander Mehedi Hasan.

The body was brought at jetty # 15 at Patenga where Nuruzzaman's father MA Hamid identified it and was then handed over to police, he said.

Officer-in-Charge Pradip Kumar Das of Patenga Police Station said they sent the body to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for autopsy and later would be sent to the victim's village home at Patherghata of Barguna.

Nuruzzaman was boarding the ship MT Mar Princess on a pre-scrapping inspection with a team of Chittagong Customs and the department when the accident occurred, said Chittagong Port Radio Control.



Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at many places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at few places over Rajshahi, Rangpur and Dhaka divisions in next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy falls are also likely at places over the country, Met Office said.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:50pm today and rises at 5:18am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 34.5 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sayedpur and lowest 24.0 degrees Celsius at Sylhet.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	33.8	24.5	78	73
Chittagong	31.0	26.0	75	79
Rajshahi	34.3	26.2	82	70
Rangpur	33.8	26.0	81	65
Khulna	33.3	25.4	80	86
Barisal	32.5	27.0	78	81
Sylhet	32.6	24.0	89	91
Cox's Bazar	32.1	25.5	86	79

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia visits injured opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farroque at United Hospital in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

