

TANGENTS
BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Buyer at Boi Mela 2011.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

First Book

I took this photo at the Ekushey Boi Mela (Book Fair) as the boy walked away from a bookstall with his loot of books, purchased by his mother.

When I look at his face I see myself several decades ago celebrating a new book.

I started reading Bangla books long before English books, thanks to the larger-than-life adventures of Kuasha, Bonohur and Bomkesh. But my father disliked detective stories and so I had to exercise discretion when reading these books.

Abbu liked the classics, but to his credit, he realized that I could not swallow them whole. Thus, the "comics" versions of Doctor Jekyll, Mr Hyde, and Captain Nemo held me spellbound. However, Wells' *War of the Worlds* was disappointing: somehow I misunderstood its famous ending. Years later, though, I thoroughly enjoyed reading it whole.

Translations played a big part. A serialized *Les Miserables* appeared every Sunday in the newspaper. I waited all week for its new instalment. A Bangla translation of *Treasure Island* was nail-biting.

One of my earliest books was *Abol Tabol*, the classic collection of nonsense rhymes by Sukumar Ray. It was a gift from a family friend, and I still love to recite from it. The character Gongoram, a prospective bridegroom who failed school exams nineteen times before quitting, became our household icon for a dimwit. The book is celebrated for its illustrations, but finding them *fuzzy* and boring I added my own right into the pages.

Transitioning from Bangla to English was a challenge. Pages full of English text looked formidable. Enid Blyton liberated me from this fear. The grand adventures of fighter pilot Biggles followed swiftly.

Shakespeare had no part in my childhood. An early encounter with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* bored me. Shakespeare's intense scrutiny of human nature and foibles is best enjoyed by adults anyways, as I was to discover later. Tagore, on the other hand, charmed me early through his songs.

My hometown Sylhet had two sizable bookstores and visiting them in the company of my parents, uncles or aunts was always cause for celebration. Birthdays and report-card days were particularly auspicious for my reading habit.

Today's children have many more reading options at their disposal. Authors such as Muhammad Zafar Iqbal turn out fun and imaginative fiction for youngsters. Just about every classic of world literature is available in Bangla. Impressive new series such as Harry Potter, Eragon and Twilight appear routinely. Then there is the Boi Mela. (Where was it when I was growing up?)

Yet I have a nagging doubt that few children today enjoy books as much as I enjoyed Blyton, Biggles or Bomkesh. Their time seems devoured by a draconian load of studies, shuttling between schools and coaching centers, often through interminable traffic jams. Mobile phones, FaceBook, iPods and television compete for whatever free time remains.

Indeed, many forces today are aligned against reading. But seeing a child like this gives me hope for the future of the written word.

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Four more vessels made in Ctg

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Western Marine Shipyard (WMS), a local shipbuilding company, handed over two vessels to the government and two others to a German company here yesterday.

EMS Wave and EMS Tide, the third pair of 12 ice-class cargo vessels wanted by Germany's Grona Shipping GmbH by 2012, were handed over to the company's Managing Director Abbe Prins.

Each of the vessels was built at a cost of Tk 100 crore and has a capacity of carrying 5,200 tonnes of weight safely.

The WMS also handed over PV Rakkhi, a pilot vessel, to the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) and Bir Sreshtho Ruhul Amin, a Ro Ro ferry, to BIWTC. The 60-metre long ferry can carry 27 trucks, 340 passengers, and 27 crewmembers.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan was the chief guest at the vessel delivery ceremony held on the newly built Ro Ro Ferry anchored at

CPA Marine Workshop Ghat in Agrabad.

He said the government is keen to promote shipbuilding as a major exporting industry.

BIWTC Chairman Golam Mostafa Kamal said the state-owned corporation for the first time is collecting an international quality ferry built by a local shipbuilder.

Rolf Dieter Reinhard, deputy head of mission of the German Embassy in Bangladesh, said German ship owners are now among the largest customers of Bangladesh shipping industries.

Shipbuilding is the key industry in the German economy, said Rolf, adding, "I think the German shipping and shipbuilding industry, therefore, have a lot to offer to Bangladeshi shipbuilders."

Grona Shipping Managing Director Abbe Prins said more German buyers would come to Bangladesh with more orders in the coming years as the country's shipbuilding sector has already earned a good name.

Ex-teacher killed in clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A former schoolteacher was killed as rivals attacked him at Mozahati village in Phulpur upazila yesterday.

The victim is Noor Uddin, 60, a retired teacher of a high school in Tarakanda.

Police said Noor Uddin had a chronic dispute over a piece of land with his neighbour Kashem Ali in Mozahati.

As Noor went to cultivate the land yesterday morning, Kashem and his men equipped with sharp weapons attacked him, triggering a clash that left six persons, including Noor injured. Noor died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

A case was lodged with Tarakanda Police Station. Police arrested Kashem Ali, his son Maizul Islam, and daughter Farzana Begum.

Stop graft in using funds: Matia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury here yesterday urged ruling party men to stop misappropriating funds from programmes like Test Relief and Kabikha (food for work programme).

"We should keep in mind that TR, Kabikha and other such funds which are allotted for vulnerable people come from the taxpayer's pockets. We have to stop the tendency of using these funds for the welfare of the party activists," said Matia.

She was speaking at a meeting organised by Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) for the government agricultural officials of Rajshahi division at the conference room of Pabna Deputy Commissioner's Office.

Matia asked the agriculture officials to ensure the best service and use of government money for the benefit of farmers.

DAE Director General Md Habibur Rahman chaired the meeting where lawmakers Samsur Rahman Sarif Dilu of Pabna 4 constituency and Golam Faruk Prince of Pabna 4 constituency and Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation Chairman Dr Nazmul Islam spoke.



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WEATHER TODAY

Light rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over all the seven divisions in next 24 hours till 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

The sun sets in the capital today at 6:43pm and rises tomorrow at 5:27am.

Country's highest temperature 35.6 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 25.2 degree at Sayedpur.

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	34.6	28.5	63	60
Chittagong	32.0	27.3	73	83
Rajshahi	35.5	27.5	81	73
Rangpur	29.5	26.4	92	83
Khulna	35.0	27.5	77	68
Barisal	34.5	27.0	70	77
Sylhet	32.0	26.8	96	81
Cox's Bazar	33.5	26.2	73	78

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