

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



St. Anthony's Statue

PHOTO:  
IHTISHAM KABIR

St. Anthony's Festival

Several years ago, I was bicycling with friends through the serene village paths of Kaligonj when we unexpectedly found ourselves in a large field filled with people. The place was Panjora, about 25 km from Dhaka, and it was St. Anthony's Festival, a religious observance of Catholic Christians that takes place every February.

Last week on February 3rd, I revisited the festival to photograph it. As I arrived, people were converging from all directions to the field, which was covered with a giant pink and blue *shamiana*.

Prayers are a big part of this solemn event which includes speeches and sermons by dignitaries including a Vatican representative. Many people bring *manti* - offerings for the Saint for realisation of their wishes and prayers (*manot*) Pigeons, cattle and money are common *manti*.

At the end of formalities, Brothers and Sisters give sweets to the devotees, signifying communion. Pigeons are ceremonially released to symbolise peace on earth.

Wandering through the crowd, I see a pretty woman posing for the camera of a smartly dressed man standing a few feet away. He introduces himself as Tony Rosario from Dhaka.

"I have come here for twenty years," says Tony.

"What did you pray for?" I ask.

"For my daughter's well-being," he replies.

The woman joins us. She is Ratna, Tony's wife. Her prayers were also for Anushka, their daughter, who attends the Bacha school.

Nearby, five young women - Cinda, Nita, Jemma, Anondi and Choiti - are chatting merrily when I take their photograph. They live nearby and attend

college. "For our studies," they say in unison when I ask them about their prayers.

Sisters Supina and Bridget are here from Tejgaon, Dhaka. Their prayer was for world peace. Missing the other Sisters who live with them but were unable to come, Supina and Bridget had offered a prayer for them.

Later, Father Proshanto Rebeiro, in charge of Nagori Catholic Church, tells me about the origin of this event.

In the 1700s, the son of a Hindu zaminder was kidnapped by Mogh pirates. While in captivity he dreamed about St. Anthony of Padua. He converted to Christianity and, after his release, started preaching in this area, calling himself Anthony.

Another local story from approximately the same time involves a statue that miraculously disappeared and reappeared at a different place. The statue was of St. Anthony.

Devotees started coming here, possibly as early as two centuries ago, to show their devotion and offer their prayers.

Father Proshanto, for example, remembers coming here as a child with his mother.

Over time, the event grew large and elaborate. This year approximately 40000 people attended, possibly making it the largest gathering of Christians in Bangladesh.

I asked Father Proshanto about special memories from the Festival. "What touched me most is the effort by the people, many walking for miles in the early morning cold, to show their devotion. I found this enlightening."

As I left, I thought about these devotees and wished for the fulfilment of their prayers.

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BOAT CAPSIZE IN SURMA

Four bodies recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Four bodies were recovered yesterday from the river Surma in Sunamganj district where a boat capsized on Thursday.

The victims are Abdul Motaleb, 60, of Amanipur village in Jamalganj, Laily Akter, 35, of Boali village in Netrokona, her two-year-old son Mazharul, and Abdul Wajed Miah, 55, of Gobindasree village in Netrokona.

Quoting Laily's relatives, police said three of her children are still missing.

The engine-run boat carrying around 15 passengers capsized in the river near Rampur village of Jamalganj upazila.

One of the survivors, Khijir Miah, said around eight people managed to swim ashore on Thursday while others remained missing.

The bodies were recovered from inside the sunken boat, said Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Dharmapasha Police Station.

Brokerage

staff found dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered the body of an official of a brokerage house from the city's Khilkhet rail lines.

Masud Parvez, 33, was an official of Razzaq Brokerage House at Uttara and a resident of Khilkhet.

His relatives suspect that Masud was murdered.

Jahidur Rahman, a relative of the deceased, said Masud had been missing since Thursday evening.

Anarkoli Zerin, wife of Masud, contacted him at 6:41pm. Masud said he was at Khilkhet bus stand. But, after that, he could not be reached over his mobile phone, Jahid said.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for an autopsy.



Valeria A Taylor, founder and coordinator of Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), pushes a physically challenged person forward during a road trip, a fund-raising event, at Gulshan Park in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

B Chy for dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

As the country is heading towards a "deep crisis", ruling Awami League and opposition parties should immediately launch dialogue on important national issues before outside pressure starts to come, Bikalpadhara chairman Prof A Q M B a d r u d d o z a Chowdhury said yesterday.

If they do not, the people would suffer extremely due to the increasing rift between the two major parties, he said while sharing his views with journalists at Sylhet Press Club.

Badruddoza, also an ex-president, said the Awami League-led government should understand that its achievements are fading due to unpardonable failures in the economy and terrorism, corruption, and border issues.

The collapse in the share market and failure in the said areas would prominently influence the next polls, he said.

He also pointed out that the responsible persons in the government, especially the ministers and advisers, should not make irresponsible comments regarding share market, road accidents or border issues.

The senior politician suggested the Speaker for taking steps to ensure presence of all parties in parliament.

Shun politics of saying no: Qamrul

BSS, Dhaka

State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam yesterday called upon the main opposition BNP to come out from the politics of 'saying no' and join the parliament to make it the centre for resolving all sorts of problems.

Referring to some recent remarks of saying no to newly constructed Election Commission by BNP leaders, he said, "Leave the politics of saying no to any positive initiative of the government aimed at helping to create a congenial political atmosphere."

"Come to the parliament to discuss any issue leaving issuance of threats to topple the government. Awami League does not fear of movements, as it emerges through struggles and movements," he said while speaking at a discussion titled "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina: International Mother Language Day".

Bangladesh Muktiyudho Prajanmo and BIDSS organised the discussion marking the day at Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

Dhaka rally to show no trust in govt: Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said countrymen will make the March 12 rally a success to show that they have no confidence on the government.

"Neither in an unconstitutional way nor through a coup but with the help of people, we will inform the government that countrymen have no confidence in it.

"So you (government) should quit power," he said while addressing a council of Tejgaon unit Jatiyatabadi Mahila Dal.

Accusing ministers of threatening to foil the rally, he warned the government of dire consequences if it tries to obstruct the programme.

Meanwhile at a discussion in Jatiya Press Club, party standing committee member Moudud Ahmed, over the new Election Commission's formation, said, "No election commission was formed in such an unconstitutional way."

**PROBE BODY TO VISIT SPOT**

The citizens' probe committee formed by BNP will visit Chandpur and Laxmipur on February 17 and Feb 18 to investigate the four deaths due to "police firing" on the party's mass procession on January 29.

The decision was taken in the first meeting of the five-member committee led by Supreme Court Bar Association President Khandker Mahbub Hossain at his office yesterday.



The rescued two-foot-long gharial, a critically endangered reptile, which was caught from the Padma river and about to be sold off by a fisherman at Bheramra in Kushtia on Thursday. It was released in the river later on the day.

PHOTO: STAR

NEWS IN

brief

Fire guts Jaijaidin printing presses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire gutted some printing presses and papers in the building housing the Bangla daily Jaijaidin in the city's Tejgaon Industrial area yesterday.

Fire brigade sources said they and the daily's staff doused the flames, originating from an electric short circuit on the ground floor of the three-storied building at 6:25pm, in around an hour.

The daily's officials said today's issue would be published.

Bomb attack wounds six

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Six people were wounded in a bomb attack by drug peddlers in Shankarpur area in the town yesterday. Locals said a gang of drug peddlers led by ringleader Ali alias Bere Ali brought two to three sacks containing phensidyl bottles to hide them in the area.

When locals protested this, an altercation ensued between the two sides and at one stage, the drug peddlers hurled bombs at the people, leaving the six injured.

50 injured in attack over road construction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Around 50 people were injured as Shyampur villagers in Baniachang upazila of Habiganj district were attacked by over 2,000 residents of adjoining villages yesterday over a dispute regarding the construction of a road.

Traffic on Habiganj-Nabiganj road remained suspended for around two hours as the attackers vandalised around 40 establishments and six vehicles.

Sources said Shyampur villagers disagreed with Pukra Upazila Parishad Chairman Anwar Hossain over the route of the road, adjacent to the village, from Mura Abda to Balikhil Bazar.

As Shyampur villagers engaged in an altercation with the chairman when the construction began yesterday, armed residents of neighbouring Mura Abda, Doulatpur, Pukra, Pashchim Pukra and Sikondarpur villages, adjoining the road, attacked.

Six arrested for cheating

BSS, Rajshahi

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested six members of an alleged cheating gang, including a fake army major and Rab member from a restaurant at Shaheb Bazar in the city last night, Rab sources said.

They are Saiful Islam, Abdul Malek, Abdul Mazid, Jahurul Islam, Sarwar Hossain, and Jafar Ali.

On a tip-off, a team of the elite force raided the restaurant at around 10:00pm and arrested them.

According to the sources, the cheaters were taking Tk 10 lakh from a man in exchange of giving a precious magnetic coin at Hotel Aristocrat.

Rab men also seized Tk 2.76 lakh, 10 mobile phone sets, 12 bank cheques and two motorcycles from their possessions.

Along with the seized goods, the arrested persons were handed over to Boalia Police Station. A case was filed in this connection.

Shajahan, Abul Hossain CCB president, secy gen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mohammed Shajahan and Abul Hossain were elected president and secretary general of Consular Corps in Bangladesh (CCB) at its fourth annual general meeting (AGM).

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Shaher Mohammad, diplomats and ambassadors of different countries were present at the AGM that was held recently at a city hotel, said a press release.

The other elected members are AKM Shahidul Islam as Immediate Past President, Muhammad Nurul Islam as Vice President, Asif A Chowdhury as Vice president, Shakhawat Hossain as treasurer and Nasreen Fatema Awal, Kazi Shamsul Haque, M Rafiqul Islam, Reshadur Rahman and Syed Kader Iqbal as honourable members.



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky over the country in 24 hours till 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during midnight till morning, Met Office said.

Day and night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

Mild cold wave is sweeping over Rangpur division and the regions of Rajshahi and Pabna and it may continue.

Slight fall in night temperature is expected over Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions and it may remain nearly unchanged elsewhere over the country.

**The sun sets in the capital today at 5:51pm and rises tomorrow at 6:34am.**

Country's highest temperature 29.5 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sitakundu and lowest 08.4 degrees at Rajshahi.

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

City/Town	Temperature Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max:	Min:	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	24.2	15.4	43	31
Chittagong	27.8	17.8	72	49
Rajshahi	24.3	08.4	45	47
Rangpur	22.0	09.6	58	54
Khulna	24.5	14.5	44	57
Barisal	25.6	13.6	49	56
Sylhet	28.3	14.5	74	54
Cox's Bazar	28.0	19.0	91	62