

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

An Old Friend

While rummaging through a storage box the other day, I found an old friend, a book called *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White.

I learned more about writing from this book than from any other and was delighted to find my misplaced treasure.

The book has an unusual background. Almost a century ago, Strunk was a professor at Cornell University where he taught an English writing course using a thin book he had written and published privately. In 1919, E. B. White took this course as a student. It left a deep impression. White went on to become a famous writer (*Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*.) But he never forgot Strunk and his book.

In 1959, the publisher Macmillan asked White to revise Strunk's book for publication and widespread distribution. White dusted off Strunk's original book, edited it, and added a new chapter called "An Approach to Style."

The resulting book has sold over ten million copies worldwide.

My copy is two decades old, its binding frayed and its pages yellow. Instead of the new book smell, it has that pungent odour that books in the tropics wear after a few years. Although it is dog-eared from use, it remains unmarked. There is a reason: I find every word of the book valuable. So much wisdom is packed into its eighty four pages that it is impossible to highlight one section or one phrase over another.

What does it teach about writing? In Strunk's words:

"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts."

Consider, for example, Rule 17: "Omit needless words." How sweet life would be without needless words! Speeches would become interesting and audiences would actually listen. Powerpoint slide presentations would inform instead of bore. Best of all, most politicians would fall silent.

Rule 16 is about being specific instead of vague: "Use definite, specific, concrete language." As example, one should write "It rained every day for a week" instead of "A period of unfavourable weather set in."

The authors encourage bold, direct writing. Rule 14 says "Use the active voice." Thus, the phrase "I shall always remember my first visit to Boston" is



PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Needed or needless words?

better than "My first visit to Boston will always be remembered by me," because the passive sounds wishy-washy. Rule 15, "Put statements in positive form," reinforces directness. Instead of "He was not very often on time," we write "He usually came late."

The book's last essay has White discussing writing style. After providing examples from Hemingway to Whitman, he summarizes thus: "the approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity." A helpful list of rules follows.

Grammar books are often dull. But thanks to Strunk's vigour and White's sophistication, *The Elements of Style* is a joy to read. And re-read.

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Nazrul's birth anniversary observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a vow to fight inequality and injustice, socio-cultural and political organisations of the country yesterday observed the 113th birth anniversary of rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Wreath laying, discussion, and cultural events, among others, marked the day.

The birth anniversary celebration began with offering of flowers at the grave of the national poet at Dhaka University Central Mosque premises in the morning.

Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad, family members of the poet, and different organisations placed wreaths in remembrance and honour of Nazrul.

DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddiqui along with Pro Vice-Chancellor Harun-or-Rashid, and teachers, students and employees also placed wreaths at his grave.

On the occasion, Faculty of Business Studies of Bangladesh University of Professionals organised a discussion and cultural programme on its campus. Similar programmes were organised by Bangladesh National Awami Party (NAP) and Subornogram Foundation.

Bangladesh Jubo Maitree, Biswa Bangalee Sammelan, and Zia Sena Asia Chinnamul Manobadiker Bastobayon Foundation also placed flowers at the grave of the poet.

Free grammar books next yr

WASIM BIN HABIB

Apart from distributing free textbooks to primary and secondary level students, the government will give out two supplementary books for free to the students of class VI to IX from next year, officials have said.

The students will no longer have to buy English Grammar & Composition and Bangla Byakaran (Bengali grammar), which they read as English and Bangla second papers.

"We think distribution of the grammar books will come to the aid of rural students, who cannot afford purchase of these books", Prof Mostofa Kamal Uddin, chairman of The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), told The Daily Star.

"We wanted to distribute these books for free this year but could not do due to some problems".

For free distribution, the NCTB will have to print around 1.50 crore copies of these two grammar books, and it has already initiated the work to this end, the board officials said.

They said the printing of these two books would cost Tk 35 to 40 crore. The expenses will come from the fund the government has allocated for printing and distributing of around 27 crore copies of textbooks for primary to secondary level students, they added.

The textbook board, however, will not distribute another supplementary book, Rapid Reader, for free, which is mainly referred to at renowned institutions in the capital.

The NCTB officials believe that free distribution of these books will also put a stop to the illegal business of some unscrupulous printers, who sell unapproved books by taking the advantage of laxness in monitoring.

Every year the NCTB prepares a list of supplementary books written by different authors. An expert committee, Independent Technical Evaluation Committee (ITEC), and its three evaluation committees then examine and scrutinise the contents of the books.

If ITEC gives the go-ahead, the board approves the books and fixes their prices for sale.

Despite the government's prohibition on the unapproved books, unscrupulous publishers coax the school authorities and their governing bodies into buying those books by offering them money. It happens every year, as the government lacks a proper monitoring mechanism.

In 2010, the government banned unapproved 25 supplementary books on grounds that they had been substandard and had distorted history. It has approved 23 supplementary books on the three subjects for the current academic session.

"Even though the government approved 23 books this year, at least hundreds of substandard grammar books are available in the market", said a high official of NCTB, preferring anonymity. These supplementary books will no longer be of use, once the government start distributing the books at free of cost, he said.

\$9m US grant for climate fund announced

UNB, Dhaka

The US government, through USAID, announced an initial obligation of \$9 million to support the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund.

The announcement was made at the environment and forests ministry on Thursday, said a US embassy press release.

A total of \$13 million US grant to the fund for four years was promised by US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton during her recent visit to Bangladesh.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena, and USAID Bangladesh Mission Director Richard Greene represented the US government at the event.

Environment Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud and World Bank Country Director Ellen A Goldstein were also present.

BCL man shot dead in clash

UNB, Comilla

An activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) was shot dead during a clash between two rival groups of criminals in Sadar South upazila yesterday evening.

The deceased was identified as Russell, a BCL activist who was the prime accused in Nurul Islam Apple murder case. Apple was stabbed to death in front of the college for protesting stalking of his wife on July 25 last year.

Local sources said the two groups of criminals locked into a clash at Sambakshi at about 6:30 pm over establishing supremacy.

The rival criminals shot and hacked Russell during the melee.

He was taken to Comilla Medical College Hospital where doctors announced him dead at about 7:45 pm.

Victim's family alleged that the criminals belonging to Rezaul group killed Russell.

Make public vested property list

Rights groups urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a press conference yesterday urged the government to make available the vested properties under 'Ka' and 'Kha' groups after the notification of gazette so that the people could get the benefit of Vested Property Return (amendment) Act 2011.

They also requested the government to increase the timeframe for lodging appeals at the tribunal to 150 days from 90 days considering the delay in gazette notification.

Lands which are under the possession of the government are listed as 'Ka' group while the others under common people's possession are categorised as 'Kha'.

Addressing a press conference, Advocate Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad, claimed that the people were not able to get the gazetted copy of the 'Ka' list 'though the land ministry demands that the list has been notified'.

The press meet was held at the Jatiya Press Club where Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori; Kamal Lohani, president of Movement for Resistance of the Vested Property Act; and Sara Hossain, honorary director, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust, were also present.

Rana also requested the government to amend the shortcomings of section 26 of the act in the upcoming session of parliament.

He also urged the government to handover the responsibility of carrying out the appeal tribunal proceedings to district judges for every district for the next two years to "ensure that the dispute over land finishes smoothly".

He suggested that the lists be published in the land ministry's website as well as of Bangladesh Government (BG) Press immediately after gazette notification.

General Secretary of Movement for Resistance of the Vested Property Act Subrata Chowdhury told this correspondent that the amount of land in the 'Ka' list is about two lakh acres while six lakh acres were possessed by the common people.

70pc tax in tobacco products demanded

BSS, Dhaka

Anti Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA), a platform of journalists, yesterday demanded imposition of 70 per cent supplementary tax in retail price of all tobacco products in the coming budget.

Addressing a press conference at a city hotel here, anti-tobacco campaigners of the ATMA said the increased tax would help cut consumption of 1,360 crore sticks of cigarettes.

Simultaneously, they said, the government can earn over Tk 1,500 crore as additional revenue from tobacco industry if 70 per cent supplementary tax is imposed.

ATMA convenor Ruhul Amin Rushd read out a paper focusing on the present trend of tobacco production, its use and taxation.



Family members lay flowers at the grave of poet Kazi Nazrul Islam at Dhaka University Central Mosque premises on the occasion of his 113th anniversary of birth yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Four Tahrir men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested four members of banned militant organisation Hizb-ut-Tahrir, including its regional commander, in Shibganj upazila early yesterday.

They are regional commander of Hizb-ut-Tahrir Omar Faruk, 25, of Ghorapakhia of the upazila, Mehedi Hasan, 20, son of Amirul Islam of Sabek Lavanga, and Monirul Islam, 33, and Tohrul Islam alias Babu, 31, of Shibganj.

Acting on a tip off, Rab members were laying in wait at around 1:00am at Ranihati Bazar. When they were in a secret meeting preparing to distribute books and leaflets, the elite force men caught them red-handed, Rab sources said. Rab also seized the books and leaflets.

Rab handed them over to Shibganj police.

Give Indian citizenship to Bangladeshi refugees

Communist Party of India (M) writes to Manmohan

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has urged its government to amend the Citizenship Act, to provide Indian citizenship to a large number of refugees from Bangladesh.

It also said there had been a consensus in this regard in Indian Parliament nine years ago.

In a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, CPI(M) General Secretary Prakash Karat referred to "the citizenship problems of the large number of refugees from erstwhile East Bengal, and then even after the formation of Bangladesh, who had to flee their country in particular historic circumstances over which they had no control".

He said their situation was "different from those who have come to India due to economic reasons".

Karat quoted Singh's speech in Parliament as the then Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha when BJP-led NDA government had brought the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2003.

"With regard to the treatment of refugees after the partition of our country, the minorities in countries like Bangladesh have faced persecution.

"And it is our moral obligation that if circumstances force people, these unfortunate people, to seek refuge in our country, approach to granting citizenship to these unfortunate persons should be more liberal," Singh was quoted as saying by Karat.

The CPI(M) leader also quoted the then deputy prime minister L K Advani as saying "what the Leader of Opposition has said, I am fully in agreement with the views expressed".

Karat said the issue of amending the Citizenship Act was still pending even after a decade and, in the meanwhile, "the insecurity felt by the refugees is heightened and illegal migrants were facing the constant threat of deportation".

He urged the prime minister to take urgent steps to amend the law, and bring relief to these "unfortunate families living across India".



WEATHER TODAY

Heat wave may continue

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore and Kushtia in 24 hours till 6:00pm today.

Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country, Met office said. Mild to moderate heat wave is sweeping over Khulna divisions and the regions of Rajshahi, Pabna, Faridpur, Madaripur, Potuakhalhi, Noakhali and Chandpur and it may continue.

Day and night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country. The highest maximum temperature is likely to be 39-40 degree Celsius and lowest minimum temperature may be 21-22 degree Celsius.

The sun sets in the capital today at 6:39pm and rises tomorrow at 5:12am.

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	36.0	25.3	78	65
Chittagong	33.2	27.5	80	81
Rajshahi	40.5	28.5	72	65
Khulna	37.6	28.5	78	71
Barisal	35.9	28.2	76	73
Sylhet	34.4	25.0	81	71
Cox's Bazar	35.0	28.2	70	73