

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



View from the observation tower.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

At Lalakhal

North of Sylhet close to the border with India, several rivers flow south from the Khasia-Jaintia Hills to the Bangladesh plains, washing down minerals, boulders, pebbles and stones from the hills. One such river is the Shari, whose water is a breathtaking blue. Just after flowing into Bangladesh, the Shari passes through a beautiful area called Lalakhal.

At Lalakhal, one bank of the Shari has tea gardens while a Border Guard camp and the Nazimgarh Wilderness Resort are on the opposite bank. The river sees much commercial activity: stones of all sizes are collected by boat and supplied to the nation's construction industry. But the water remains blue all the way downstream.

To get to Lalakhal, you travel thirty kilometres from Sylhet on the Tamabil highway. Near Jaintia, where there is a half-sunken old house in the middle of the road, you turn right into a smaller road which takes you through picturesque countryside. Vegetable fields with lonely scarecrows watching over them dot the strip of land between road and river. Soon you are running parallel to the river watching the misty blue hills rising in the distant horizon.

Nazimgarh Wilderness Resort is at the end of this road. I chose to drive there; one could also take a boat from Shari Ghat (on the Tamabil highway) and cruise for 45 minutes. The recently completed resort sits atop a hill surrounded by lush greenery. Its forty rooms are decorated tastefully with a tropical theme. The highlight is an extraordinary tree-top suite where you can look out your window

during the rainy season and watch a mountain stream flowing fifty feet under your feet. From the resort's observation tower I was able to enjoy a 360-degree view of the surroundings including the beautiful river.

Downhill from the Resort - on the riverbank - is the River Queen restaurant and a tent-resort called Nazimgarh Nature Park.

It was early morning when I arrived for my boat ride. Riverine activity was slow at this hour. As I waited for my boat a sprightly black and white bird flew low across the river and landed on the stony bank. The white wagtail (*choto khanjan*) impatiently searched for worms on the bank before taking off across the river again.

My boat travelled up the river, getting close to Zero Point - where Bangladesh ends and India begins - before turning around. The blue river, distant hills and greenery made for an enchanting trip. During my return I took a break to explore Lalakhal Tea Garden. After walking uphill from the ghat I found myself face-to-face with an ancient banyan tree. Nearby, a silk cotton (*shimul*) tree had bloomed early much to the excitement of a group of chestnut-tailed starlings (*kath-shalik*) which busily ate nectar from its crimson flowers.

I left Lalakhal with the distinct impression of having found a special place which will become a popular destination for domestic and foreign tourists in coming days. Moreover, I realise that Lalakhal is more than a place: it is a sublime state of mind.

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Jamaat-Shibir carry out countrywide mayhem

STAR REPORT

The marauding activists of Jamaat-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir and some other Islamist parties clashed with police and pro-ruling party people across the country before and after Juma prayers yesterday, resulting in a large number of casualties and arrests.

The Islamists vandalised and torched Gonojagoron Mancha and Shaheed Minar as they protested the Shahbagh movement, which is to demand death penalty for war criminals.

Apart from deaths, scores of people, including police and journalists, were injured in the violence, report our district correspondents.

The Jamaat-Shibir men tore the national flag and fought with police at Shapath Chattar in Chandpur town. The violence lasting over an hour left 20 injured, including eight policemen.

Police said several thousand BNP and Jamaat activists with Islamists attacked them suddenly.

In Gaibandha town, two unidentified persons were killed and 45 others wounded as Jamaat-Shibir activists under the Hefazat-e-Islam banner clashed with police.

The security force fired tear gas and gunshots at the rowdies, leaving the two dead.

Among the injured were seven policemen. The law enforcers opened fire after more than 3,000 Islamists vandalised the Gonojagoron Mancha and 15 shops and pelted stones at them.

A madrasa teacher named Abdus Salam was beaten dead allegedly by Bangladesh Chhatra League and Awami League activists during violence in Jhenidah town.

A journalist and four people were injured. Police said hundreds of Islamists brought out a procession demanding punishment for the Shahbagh bloggers.

In Kurigram, Jamaat sympathisers brought out processions in three upazilas under the "Tauhidi Janata" banner and ransacked Ulipur upazila AL office.

Police fired 17 rubber bullets and arrested four Jamaat-Shibir men.

Different Islamist parties led by Jamaat-Shibir vandalised and torched the Gonojagoron Mancha at Shatmatha in Bogra town and clashed with police, leaving at least 50 agitators and nine policemen injured. Police rounded up 16 attackers.

Protesting the attack on the Gonojagoron Mancha, the anti-war criminal campaigners demanded withdrawal of the district's deputy commissioner (DC) and superintendent of police (SP) by Saturday.

Jamaat-Shibir men attacked the Shaheed Minar and vandalised the Gonojagoron Mancha in Feni town. Police arrested two persons.

Jamaat-Shibir activists and the supporters of 12 like-minded Islamist parties also blocked the Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Mahipal area and vandalised some vehicles.

At the district town's Dhalia Bazar, at least five were injured as Jamaat-Shibir men clashed with Chhatra League and Jubo League activists.

Meanwhile, some unidentified miscreants vandalised a branch of Islami Bank in the college road area.

In Moulvibazar, Islamists burnt the "Gonojagoron Mancha" banners and copies of some newspapers, including the daily Prothom Alo. Their clashes with police left five injured. About 10 activists of the Islamist political parties were arrested.

When police fired on a procession against the Shahbagh movement, a Shibir activist received bullet injury in Joypurhat.

In Pabna, Jamaat men vandalised the Gonojagoron Mancha and ransacked the district AL office. When police tried to stop them, they started to clash, leaving at least 10 injured.

The Jamaat men also barricaded the Dhaka-Pabna highway for one hour.

At least 35, including three policemen, were injured in the clashes in Pataukhali sadar and Galachipa upazilas. Police arrested five attackers in the district town and seven more in Galachipa.



An effigy of war crimes suspect and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee at Shahbagh intersection where anti-war criminal campaigners returned yesterday, in less than 24 hours after the announcement that the continuous vigil there had wound up.

PHOTO: STAR

Three-day security wares fair begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To promote general awareness on safety and security issues, a three-day fair on security equipment and service providers began yesterday.

Dr Abdul Matin Patwari, former vice chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, inaugurated the fair, "The 1st Global Security Conference and Expo-13", organised by Deflog Security Systems Limited in the capital's Bangladesh Army Stadium.

Bangladesh Fire Brigade and Civil Defence, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters

Association, Bangladesh Taekwondo Federation, and Elite Force are participating in the fair among other security equipment and service providers.

Windstar Resources displayed a newly launched "Intelligent and Smart Home Management System" which creates a security web all over a building to avoid theft and other accidents.

Addressing the fair, Deflog Security Systems Limited Managing Director Maj (retd) Amen Ahmed Afsary said, "We want to introduce the latest and modern security and safety equipment and systems because security is the most important tool to achieve peace."

NEWS IN brief

Bangladeshi Harvard students for death penalty for war criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Activists of Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee and some students of Harvard University yesterday staged a demonstration in front of the university in the United States demanding capital punishment for war criminals.

Amid freezing cold, they stood there for about two hours holding placards with slogans expressing solidarity with the mass movement in Shahbagh. Scientist Sajed Kamal, son of litterateur Sufia

Girl dies in stampede in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A girl died in a stampede while begging at Jurain graveyard in the capital yesterday afternoon.

The victim was Lipi, 11, daughter of Jasmine of Mirbagh in South Keraniganj in Dhaka.

Locals said Lipi was begging standing on a wall and fell from it, right in the path of a crowd exiting the graveyard.

She was declared dead at Dhaka Medical

Smuggled silver recovered, 2 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The Detective Branch of police recovered around 34kg of smuggled silver and arrested two alleged smugglers from Bheramara in Kushtia on Thursday night.

The arrested, identified as Shahinur Rahman, 40, and Zakir Hossain, 24, are from Kolaroa upazila in Satkhira district.

Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, superintendent of police in Kushtia, said a team from the police recovered the silver worth about Tk 60 lakh from a pickup van at Lalon Shah Bridge Toll Plaza and arrested them.

Man shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A gang of muggers killed a jewellery shop employee and snatched away some gold ornaments and money from him at Tamakpatti in Muktagachha upazila of Mymensingh on Thursday night.

Ujjal Debnath, 35, worked at "Ma Rajeswari Jewellery" at Darichariani Bazar in the upazila headquarters.

Muktagachha police said the motorcycle-riding gang shot Ujjal in the abdomen near his residence. Ujjal was declared dead at Mymensingh

Swarupkathi mayoral by-election today

A CORRESPONDENT

The mayoral by-election to Swarupkathi (Nesarabad) Municipality in Pirojpur will be held today. Six candidates will vie for the mayor post.

Some 11,795 voters will cast their vote in the by-election.

The post remains vacant since the death of former mayor Md Delwar Hossain Faruk on

Prof Mosharraf Hossain passes away

BSS, Dhaka



Prof Mosharraf Hossain, a legendary economist

and an icon of the economics department of Dhaka University, passed away in the capital's Square Hospital around 12:30am yesterday due to old age complications. He was 83.

He will be buried at Mirpur Intellectuals' Graveyard after namaz-e-janaza at the DU central mosque after Zohr prayers today.

One of the founders of Bangabandhu Parishad, Prof Mosharraf was a member of the Planning Commission of the Mujibnagar government and a member of the First Planning Commission of independent Bangladesh.

He obtained post graduation from DU and Manchester University and received PhD in economics from the University of London.

Prof Mosharraf was involved in researches at the United Nations Research Institute in Social Development, WFP, UNFAO, UNDP and World Institute of Development Economics Research.

MILK VITA MD to advise action about illegal staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fate of 76 Milk Vita employees appointed illegally by the management committee and trade union leaders will be decided on recommendations from the state-run dairy company's managing director.

State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak asked for the recommendations on Monday when he met the Milk Vita authorities and the Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) of Bangladesh Milk Producers' Cooperative Union, which owns the Milk Vita dairy brand.

The Milk Vita managing director, Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, said it would take him a week to review the issue and make recommendations. "I will strive for a solution as per law and rules in consideration of proper functioning of the company preventing anomalies and corruption."

The state minister said the government would publish a white paper on Milk Vita corruption, according to a meeting source. The prime minister expressed her great concern after seeing a Daily Star report on the corruption. Nanak was quoted as saying at the meeting.

Meanwhile, the January salaries of all staff and officers of Milk Vita earlier stopped by the CBA to save the job of 76 employees have been ready for disbursement following the minister's meeting.

Earlier, the trade unions of the dairy forced the accounts section not to prepare salary bills to create pressure so that the 76 illegal employees get paid too.

The 12-member Milk Vita management committee and the CBA appointed those employees without authority on January 9 apparently through an underhand deal.

The CBA thugs affiliated with ruling party assaulted a Milk Vita manager on January 19 for conveying a government order for canceling the illegal appointments.

According to official documents, Milk Vita Management Committee Chairman Hasib Khan Tarun unilaterally issued appointment letters to the 76 employees without legal authority.

Tarun attended Monday's meeting alongside CBA President Jahanagir Alam Maznu, among others.