



Brown-winged kingfisher.

PHOTO:
IHTISHAM KABIR

KINGFISHER

Two years ago, while visiting Sundarban, I spotted a kingfisher high on top of a gewa tree on the beach. It descended swiftly to the water fifty feet away, dived, caught a small fish, and flew to another perch – all in less than five seconds.

I was astonished. How could it see the fish from so far away? Researching, I discovered that kingfishers have unusual eyes that allow them to detect movement up to three hundred feet away and see beneath six feet of water, even through glare. The bird has two foveae in each eye. They work together, allowing for extremely sharp vision in the air and accurate estimation of the depth of prey in water. (The fovea is that part of the eye responsible for our clearest, sharpest vision – each human eye has one fovea.)

But the kingfisher's eyes cannot move much in their socket, which is why it constantly moves its head up and down, to and fro.

Bangladesh has a dozen species of kingfishers. Of these, black-capped, brown-winged, collared, common, pied, and white-throated kingfishers are more common; others are less so. To my knowledge, the best place to watch a variety of kingfishers is Sundarban, which hosts nine species. You can see several easily during a trip there. If you take an early-morning ride on a small boat, you might spot a brown-winged kingfisher playing "catch me if you can" with the boat as it flits from branch to branch at water's edge, always maintaining a safe distance from the boat.

But you don't have to go to Sundarban to see our kingfishers – they can be seen around many water bodies, including Dhaka's lakes. With a flash of electric blue contrasting with

orange or red, these birds dive into the water to catch their prey, then fly low over the water before finding a perch to sit.

The kingfisher family originated in the tropical forests of South-East and East Asia and spread to other places. There are eighty six species worldwide. They can be found mostly in the tropics – with a few species in colder regions – and come in a wide range of colours and sizes. The smallest kingfisher weighs eight grams while the largest is five hundred grams.

Fish is not the only diet of kingfishers. Several species live in dry land, far from water, and eat insects. Their bodies have adapted: for example, Australian earthworm-eating kingfishers have short, conical bills. Kingfishers living near water supplement fish with insects and smaller aquatic animals. The pied kingfisher is special. While most kingfishers must sit on a perch to scan for food, thus limiting their hunting range over water, the pied kingfisher has the ability to hover – and scan – at one spot over water for many seconds. This greatly extends its hunting range over water.

Like all birds, kingfishers have a very high metabolism and most of their time is spent looking for food. For example, the common kingfisher eats 60% of its body weight every day. But whether hunting or simply flying, kingfishers are a treat for our eyes.

(Dear reader: you are invited to the launch of my second photobook *Chasing Paradise: Birds and Flowers of Bangladesh* at Dhaka Hay Festival, 14 November, 3-4pm at Bangla Academy grounds.)

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Govt to appoint 10 new SC judges

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The government will appoint at least 10 new judges to the Supreme Court's (SC) High Court (HC) and Appellate Division and regularise six additional HC judges after getting recommendations from Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain.

Some post have become vacant in the last 17 months when seven HC judges retired and three were promoted to the Appellate Division. In the Appellate Division which has 11 posts, two judges had also retired.

Another senior HC judge, Justice ATM Fazle Kabir, now heading the three-member International Crimes Tribunal-1, will retire on December 1.

The law ministry and SC sources stated that minister-level discussions were taking place in this connection. However, they could not specifically say when the government would urge the chief justice to make the recommendations.

The chief justice usually suggests the names upon an "unofficial request" from the government and the president then appoints them, said the sources.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed recently told The Daily Star that the government will not request the chief justice to

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FAILURE TO PROTECT PABNA HINDUS

Abu Sayeed blames Tuku

Journalist Abed Khan says attackers belong to AL, BNP and Jamaat; one more held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Former state minister for information Abu Sayeed yesterday accused State Minister for Home Shamsul Hoque Tuku and police for not taking immediate steps to protect Hindus in Bonogram of Pabna's Santhia upazila.

On November 2, over 100 Hindu houses in Sahapara and Ghoshpara were torched, vandalised and looted after some unidentified people in Bonogram Bazar distributed photocopies of, what they said, a "Facebook page" where one Rajib Saha maligned Prophet Mohammad (pbuh).

The Hindu schoolboy was framed by extortionists, mostly belonging to the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, after his businessman father Babul Saha refused to pay them.

Meanwhile, police arrested a man, accused of instigating the

attack, in connection with a case police filed on the night of the attack under the information and communication technology act.

Amimul Ehsan, 40, arrested at Sujanagar upazila's Bhojanipur village, confessed in preliminary interrogation spreading the photocopies, Assistant Superintendent of Police Abu Bakar Siddique in Pabna informed The Daily Star.

The total number of arrests now stands at 11 centring three cases, one filed by Babul and the two by police.

Earlier yesterday, journalist Abed Khan, addressing a press briefing in Pabna Press Club, stated that the attackers belonged to the Awami League, BNP and Jamaat and the attack was not an isolated one but the same as the ones perpetrated on minorities around the country.

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Prothom Alo celebrates 15th founding anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amidst an exuberant gathering of a myriad of professionals and eminent civil society members, Bangla daily Prothom Alo celebrated its 15th founding anniversary in the capital's Hotel Sonargaon last night.

From around 6:00pm, the venue brightened up with the lively presence of ministers, lawmakers, diplomats, political leaders, top government and private organisation officials, educationalists, lawyers, businesspeople, women leaders, cultural activists, sportspersons and media personalities.

Among the foreign guests were eminent Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar and US journalist Lawrence Lifschultz.

The key theme of this year's celebration was "Bangladesh will not lose track",

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A section of the guests attending the 15th founding anniversary celebrations of Bangla daily Prothom Alo at Hotel Sonargaon in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO:
PROTHOM ALO

LONDON-DHAKA TOUR Pedalling 15,000km for 20 orphans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

How far can a person go to change the lives of 20 orphan boys?

For Luke Barton and Tom Smith, it is from London's Brick Lane to Dhaka. But here's the twist: the adventure-hungry duo crossed almost half of Europe and Asia, a whopping 15,000 kilometres or so, on bicycles.

The two-wheeled attempt was aimed at raising awareness on collecting funds to make a positive difference in the lives of the 20 children living in Noor E Farid Nasrine Academy in Comilla.

Arriving in Bangladesh on November 4 after a gruelling five-month-long journey, the duo met the press in the capital's La Vinci Hotel yesterday.

Neither of them are professional cyclists – Luke works for an engineering company and Tom for a web development firm.

But that does not make them your average Joe. The feat of crossing at least 13 countries, pushing their bodies to the maximum while travelling through extreme temperatures and varying terrains, is a testament to that.

"We crossed countries like Hungary, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belgium, Georgia, France,

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Dhaka happy to be declared aid eligible by MCC

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka is pleased as Bangladesh has been declared eligible to receive aid from Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) of USA.

In the recently released MCC scorecard 2014, Bangladesh passed in 11 out of 20 indicators, and did fairly well in the remaining ones, said a foreign ministry press release on Thursday.

It said corruption control and gender are among the indicators that Bangladesh passed.

No talks if hartal continues: MKA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No dialogue or discussion can be held if the opposition alliance continues with its destructive and undemocratic agitation for formation of a polls-time government, said Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir yesterday.

He said at least 18 people have been killed in the recent hartals enforced by the BNP-led 18-party alliance. Those who enforced the hartals violated the rights of the victims, and so it is the government's responsibility to bring the enforcers under trial, he added.

The minister was speaking to reporters after attending a discussion at Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital. The discussion was held on the occasion of the institute's 43rd founding anniversary.

Mohiuddin said it is not possible to sit with BNP-Jamaat as they are destroying people's lives and properties through hartals and attacking minority communities.

He claimed that the opposition's hartals were unsuccessful as the public did not support their agitation programme.

Refuting allegations that law enforcers harassed common people during hartals, the minister said law enforcers performed their duty to maintain law and order.



(From left) Film director Monsur Ali, cyclist Tom Smith, Managing Director of Noor-E-Farid Nasrine Academy Mishal Karim, cyclist Luke Barton and Managing Director of bGlobal Samuel D Bretzfield at a press conference in the capital's La Vinci Hotel yesterday. Tom and Luke have cycled 15,000km from London to Dhaka for the orphans living in Noor-E-Farid Nasrine Academy.

PHOTO: STAR

Join all-party govt for people's sake

Dipu Moni urges opposition at White Plus-SGHS debate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 18-party opposition alliance, for the sake of the people, should be a part of the all-party government to hold the upcoming national election in a free and fair manner, said Foreign Minister Dipu Moni yesterday.

She was addressing the closing ceremony of White Plus-SGHS Sixth National Debate Competition 2013 as chief guest at St Gregory's High School (SGHS) in the capital.

Gregorian Debating Club of SGHS organised the competition where 16 teams in junior level (classes V to VII), 32 teams in school level (classes VIII to X) and 20 teams in club level (colleges and universities) took part.

SGHS clinched the title of champion in junior and school levels while Motijheel Government Boys High School and Motijheel Ideal School and College won the runners up prize.

In the club level, Jahangirnagar University won the champions prize while Stamford University became the runners up. Dipu Moni distributed the prizes among the winners.

Poet Asad Chowdhury and SGHS Headmaster Brother Prodip Placid Gomez also spoke.

Six pseudo-kidnappers held in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion arrested a gang of six people in the capital's Mirpur on Thursday night for masquerading as different people to gain information about missing persons and then demanding ransom from their family members.

The arrestees are Mohammad Shahadat Hossain Bapari, 28, the leader, Mohiuddin Khan alias Mahi, 24, an illegal Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) operator, Mithun Sarker, 23, Suruz Sheikh alias Shamim, 22, Mazharul Islam alias Hiru, 30 and Mizanur Rahman, 39, a software expert.

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