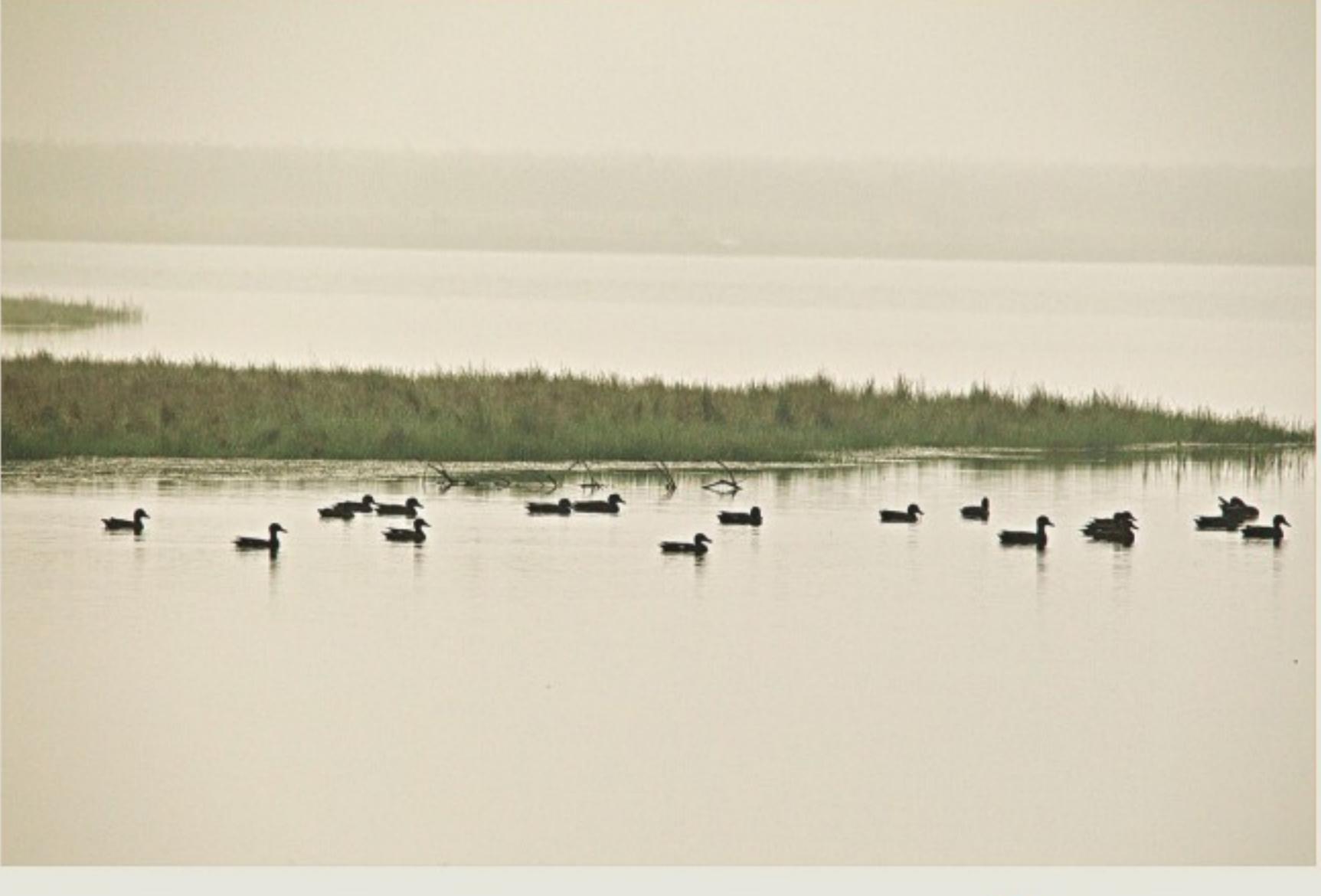


## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Ducks at Hakaluki Haor.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Counting Birds in Hakaluki

When I first heard about the water-bird census, I thought "Counting birds? What an impossible task!" Yet every year, the water-birds at selected wetlands of Bangladesh are painstakingly counted by our dedicated birders. The data gives us insight into the state of our environment and connects us to a broader global picture. For example, it tells us about species that might be growing or declining in numbers.

The wetlands in Bangladesh that are counted include Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, Tangar Haor, Jahangirnagar University and the coastal belt.

Hakaluki is the largest haor in Bangladesh. In Moulvi Bazar district, it consists of numerous beels (lakes) large and small. Its winter area of forty-four square kilometres quadruples during monsoon. For census purposes, the massive haor was divided into six sections which three teams covered in two days.

Thus it was that I found myself at Hakaluki early one winter's morning with a group of Bangladesh Bird Club volunteers led by eminent birder and naturalist Enam Ul Haque. The cold Haor light was suffused by the thin fog that lingered under the overcast sky. When the sun finally broke through the clouds, it was a sight to behold.

We started at Tekuni Beel and made our way around nine beels during the day. Wherever we saw one or more birds on the water, a counter counted them with a telescope. Members of each species were counted separately and the data was recorded. Other birds dependent on the water-birds - for example, raptors such as Harriers and Eagles - were also counted.

To be a counter one must be able to identify the species from afar. You can tell by the outline, by the way they float, by the size and of course colour.

Standing on ground that goes fifteen feet underwater in monsoon I observed a variety of foliage around me. Lippita plants with delicate lavender flowers and scented leaves surrounded us. Among the other plants was Bengal Wild Rose, a variety that can survive underwater.

The Haor's fields are good grazing grounds for cows and water-buffaloes. Some were brought from a long distance, their rakhals camping here the duration of winter. Sometimes flocks of Cattle Egret followed the cattle feeding on insects stirred up by the hooves.

Occasionally, a Bengal Bush Lark shot up high from the bush and flew in circles singing loudly. Once its song ended, it dropped like a stone back to the bush.

After the census was completed, Haque said the team counted 23041 water-birds belonging to sixty species in forty-two beels. Gadwalls were the most populous at 3,162. Among rare birds, a Baer's Pochard, two Painted Storks, three Glossy Ibis and seven Falcated Ducks were seen. The most birds - 1982 - were seen at Pingla Beel.

While the census of our other wetlands revealed higher bird populations this year, the Hakaluki population was much less than normal. Reasons for the decline are unclear, but the discovery of many dead birds by the volunteers may offer a clue. Possible poisoning by poachers could have driven away many birds in addition to killing others.

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## Students getting interested in science

Says Prof Jamilur; hopes Bangladeshi scientists will win Nobel Prize by 2030

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Vice Chancellor of University of Asia Pacific Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury yesterday hoped that Bangladeshi scientists would achieve Nobel Prize in science by 2030, as students were getting interested in science gradually.

"I had some dreams centring around Math Olympiad. Some of my dreams have come true. I believe someone from these participants would achieve Nobel Prize in science," he told the "12th Bangladesh National Math-Olympiad and Dutch-Bangla Bank-Prothom Alo National Math-Utshab-2014" in the capital's Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School.

Some 1,055 participants who were selected from 22 regions of the country took part in the national round that will end today. Earlier, some 25,000 students under primary, junior, secondary and higher secondary categories contested in the regional rounds between January 17 and February 1.

After a brief inaugural ceremony on the Saint Joseph premises, the students sat for an hour-and-a-half long exam to solve 10 problems.

Munir Hasan, general secretary of Bangladesh



Guests and young participants release colourful balloons to inaugurate the "12th Bangladesh National Math-Olympiad and Dutch-Bangla Bank-Prothom Alo National Math-Utshab-2014" in the capital's Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Saarc ministers meet Feb 20

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Saarc Council of Ministers will extensively discuss ways and means to streamline, rationalise, and restructure various mechanisms in its 25th meeting session in the Maldives on February 20.

Official sources said the meeting would be a comprehensive study of the region. Talks are also likely to focus on enhancing connectivity among the Saarc countries, including a ferry service among the Maldives, India and Sri Lanka and a trial run of a container train among Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

In the meeting, Nepal may propose a tentative date between November and December 2014 for the next Saarc Summit, while the ministers are expected to discuss appointment of the next secretary general. The summit was supposed to take place in 2013 but was postponed due to political turmoil in the Maldives and Nepal.

The Council of Ministers is comprised of foreign ministers of the eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

The council's meeting will be preceded by the meeting of the Saarc Programming Officers on February 17 and that of the Foreign Secretaries on February 18-19.

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## Govt on shaky ground

Says BNP Acting Secretary General Fakhrul demanding fresh election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the ruling Awami League's ministers and lawmakers were bragging that they would remain in power for five years because they knew well that they did not have "any ground under their feet".

"None in the past could remain in power even for five months after holding a farcical and voterless election. And the ministers and MPs know this very well. That's why they are shouting in various ways that they will not step down before five years," Fakhrul told a discussion, "Language Movement and Maulana Bhasani", at the capital's

Jatiya Press Club.

Bhasani Memorial Sangsads organised the programme.

Fakhrul said the entire world had been protesting the January 5 farcical election, saying it was not acceptable. Even five percent of voters did not cast their ballots, he said. "That's why they [international community] are talking about holding a fresh and inclusive election soon."

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has also called upon the government to hold a free, fair and participatory election very soon, he added.

Paying his tribute to Maulana Bhasani, Fakhrul said the AL did not

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

CITY

## It's wrong for USA to call for mid-term poll

Says Muhith; estimates size of next budget at Tk 2.5 lakh crore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The United States and Europeans are doing wrong by calling for a mid-term election in Bangladesh, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said yesterday.

He said the Westerners were doing this after being fed "wrong ideas" by the BNP and because of the party's "lobbying".

"We had invited the BNP to join the polls but they didn't respond. It's their responsibility," he told journalists after inaugurating the 28MW Shahajahanullah power plant in the suburban Kumargaon area of Sylhet city, which started

supplying electricity to the Rural Electrification Board (REB).

The veteran minister also asked people not to come with the "boogies" demands like the restoration of the caretaker government system.

"The BNP failed to join the polls due to their internal foul play. Now they have to pay for that."

Terming the present government constitutional and lawful, he said the people had voted them to power for five years.

NEXT BUDGET

The finance minister said the size of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



As people celebrate Valentine's Day, a large weekend crowd spills over into the Amar Ekushey Granthamela premises at Suhrawardy Udyana in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Save biodiversity in Hakaluki Haor

Greens demand at human chain

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Hundreds of residents of the vicinity of Hakaluki Haor formed a human chain yesterday demanding that the government takes immediate steps against poachers, overfishing and sound pollution from motor boats to protect the biodiversity of the Ecologically Critical Area.

Comparing Bangladesh Bird Club's survey in 2011 to that conducted on February 10-11 this year, they said the number of birds, local and migratory, at the water body fell by 64 percent and now there were around 23,000 of 20 species.

The programme was organised by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's Sylhet unit

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## Valentine's Day sees lovers converge

DU CORRESPONDENT



Amar Ekushey Granthamela 2014 took on a new ambience as hundreds of people, especially youths, turned up with their loved ones in colourful attires, mostly sarees and panjabis, and with flowers in hand celebrating Valentine's Day yesterday.

Many visitors, including the elderly and children, were seen celebrating the weekend by taking pictures to keep the memories alive.

Salespersons said most visitors were opting to buy love stories and poems for their beloved and so those were high in demand compared to other books.

Hawkers selling flowers and food shops erected along with the road before the venues also spent busy hours.

A children's music competition was held in the morning and in the afternoon a seminar on Haji Muhammad Mohsin was held with Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique in chair. Yesterday, 196 new books arrived.

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## Dhaka BCL leader missing for 16 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Family members of a local leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League in the capital, who has been missing for the last 16 days, have sought law enforcers' help to find him.

Tanveer Hasan Anjan, organising secretary of Bhatara thana unit Chhatra League, went to Uttara

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