

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Pond heron in breeding plumage.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

The Breeding Season

When I was in Hakaluki Haor last February, I witnessed a strange spectacle. A small bird shot up skyward from the bush covering the dry haor. Reaching perhaps a hundred feet, it started flying in circles while emitting a loud and distinct call - *sweet-sweet-sweet*... After several minutes of this apparently aimless and loud activity, it exhausted itself and dropped to the ground like a rock. A few minutes later it shot up again and the cycle repeated. What I saw was the mating ritual of the bird. The Bengal Bush Lark inhabits our open grasslands, scrub bushes and haors, feeding on small insects and seeds, jumping from bush to bush or foraging in the ground, and generally maintaining a low profile, the boring grey colours of its small six-inch frame camouflaging it well against raptors and prey alike. But it was spring, time to breed. It had thrown caution to the wind in its urge to reproduce. Next to survival, breeding and reproduction is probably the strongest instinct of all living beings. After winter's cold, it is breeding time for many birds and animals which start searching for mates - sometimes using elaborate and unusual props and procedures. Like humans dressing up to go to a social function or a ball, many birds change plumage during breeding. Our ubiquitous Pond Heron (Kani Boga) normally wears grey and white feathers to help it hide in plain sight while looking for fish. Its camouflage is effective. I have missed it many times at the edge of a paddy field or a pond, only to be surprised by the sudden

white flash of its wings as it took flight when I came uncomfortably close. However, during breeding season, its boring plumage turns into a pretty maroon colour. The male Peacock's spread-out fan is perhaps the best known mating prop of the avian world. The Peacock's fan is made of feathers that grow out of the bird's back. The numerous "eyes" of the feathers, each resembling a bright blue iris, are designed to exploit a simple truth of the animal world: eyes are universal icons. For animals with vision, whether they are birds, insects, mammals or fish, eyes can simultaneously attract and frighten. It is these "eyes" that draw female peacocks to males. Incidentally, some male butterflies also use eye patterns in their wings to attract females through a courtship "dance." In their short lifespan (adult butterflies live for about four weeks), females mate once, while males may mate several times. Many other animals also engage in interesting mating behaviour. In his book *Desert Solitaire*, author Edward Abbey describes the mating dance of two gopher snakes: "...they wind and unwind about each other in undulant, graceful, perpetual motion, moving slowly across a dome of sandstone. Invisible but tangible as music is the passion which joins them..." But then the snakes discover Abbey is watching. Giving him a shocked and accusing glare they disengage and run away. Thus the breeding season shows the ingenuity that animals practice while trying to preserve their lineage. www.facebook.com/tangents.ikabir

Govt did not show 'due respect' to ABM Musa

Commemorative event told
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists, civil society members and politicians yesterday criticised the government for not showing "due respect" to veteran journalist ABM Musa after his death. They condemned the ruling government for not providing guard of honour to the intrepid journalist for his contributions to the birth of an independent Bangladesh through audacious journalism during the Liberation War. They made the comments at a reminiscence programme organised by the Nagorik Oikya in the city's Jatiya Press Club, with its Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna in the chair. It will be hard to find a person like Musa to speak boldly for the country's

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Bug takes over Home Economics College

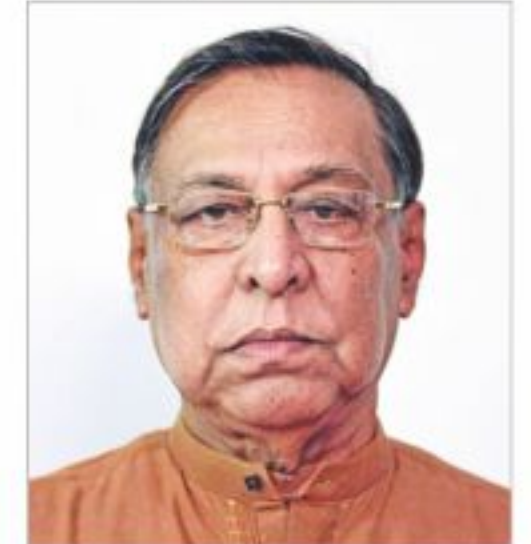
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Large colonies of a foreign bug have spread throughout the Home Economics College campus in the capital, creating panic among students and teachers. The small, sap-sucking pest officially known as mealybug pervaded classrooms, labs, department offices, and dormitories-it is everywhere. Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid visited the campus on Thursday and gave instructions to the authorities concerned to contain the infestation. Following his inspection, the college administration extended an ongoing vacation till April 26 to eliminate the insects in the meantime. Thousands of herds of mealybugs looking like tiny cotton balls were spotted along the corridors, on trees, drains and ground. Contacting the insect causes itching on skin, leading to infection. "We are scared of seeing hundreds of thousands of bugs all throughout the campus. We can't sit in the departments," said Iffat Ara Nargis, principal of the college. She said the college went on summer vacation on April 3 and was due to open Sunday, but the authorities concerned advised them to vacate the institution before they started the drive.

The ministries of agriculture, health, and education and experts from Dhaka University, Bangladesh Agricultural University, and Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University will work to remove the insects from the campus, she told The Daily Star. Students said for the last few days, hundreds of thousands of bugs had scrolled down to the ground from trees. Masuma Aktar Poly, a final-year resident student of home management, said they were forced to keep windows and doors of the dormitories shut all the time and use mosquito net at night. Already experts from the three universities have visited the campus several times. Dr Md Razzab Ali, professor of entomology at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, said the bug was very harmful for crop and fruit production, but it was not detrimental to humans. "We are doing research on the bug for the last few years," he said. It is very difficult to kill the adult bugs, as they remain alive for two to three days even under water, he added. Mealybugs scroll down trees from April to May to lay eggs and diapause under the soil between May and December before crawling up the plants again, he told The

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Qulkhwani of Manzur Anam today



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The qulkhwani of Manzur Anam, the fourth son of eminent politician and litterateur Abul Mansur Ahmad, will be held today after Maghrib prayers at Masjid-ut-Taqwa on Road No-12/A in the capital's Dhanmondi. Relatives, friends and well-wishers have been requested to attend the qulkhwani. Manzur, also elder brother of Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, died on

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The mealybug-infested corridor along the auditorium of the capital's Home Economics College last evening. The insect has pervaded the campus recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



Guests release balloons in the air in the capital's Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh marking the 44th founding anniversary of the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad yesterday. The theme of this year's celebration was "There is no alternative to professional skills for the 21st century challenges".

PHOTO: STAR

Mahila Parishad celebrates 44th founding anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad celebrated their 44th founding anniversary yesterday at the hall room of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, which was filled from corner to corner with women who have been advocating women's rights at grassroots level. Each had a fascinating story to tell about how they were raising their voices to further women's rights in their localities. Sumi Akhter, hailing from Arichpur in Tongi, had decided that she had enough after her husband left her and married another woman.

"I got affiliated with Bangladesh Mahila Parishad as a way of protest. I built a new life by becoming a teacher at a school for working women. Most of my students are either bus helpers or workers at steel spoon factories. I am also a successful single mother of a six year old daughter," said Sumi. The theme for this year's celebration was "There is no alternative to professional skills for the 21st century challenges". "We have still not managed to build up such life-skills among all our women," said Maleka Banu, general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. Country-representative of UN Women, a United Nations women body, Christine Susan Hunter, and President of BMP Ayesha Khanam also spoke at the event.

PATIENT'S DEATH AT BIRDEM Family again demands punishment for docs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Family members and relatives of Sirajul Islam, who died on Sunday for alleged negligence of doctors at the capital's Birdem General Hospital, yesterday formed a human chain, demanding punishment to those responsible for the death. "If the doctors responsible are not brought to book, the incidents of patients dying without proper treatment will continue to increase," Farhana Nasrinn, daughter of the deceased, told the protest programme in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club. She also accused Birdem doctors of carrying out the propaganda that her relatives assaulted three physicians. Nasrinn, who lost her mother and father in the space of 24 days, fell unconscious at one stage of her speech and was treated in the medical room of the press club. Expressing solidarity with the family, Jatiya Press Club Employees Union President Rafiqul Islam urged intervention of the prime minister and the health minister to dispense "justice" to the deceased's family. Kazi Aref Foundation President Kazi Masud and Mehendiganj Society in Dhaka President Abdul Barek also spoke at the programme joined by some 300 people. The relatives alleged that doctors did not respond to their call at 4:00pm

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US to fund for strengthening civil society

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (DRL) of the United States has announced to allocate US \$600,000 for implementation of two projects to promote democracy, human rights and strengthen civil society in Bangladesh. The DRL invited interested organisations to submit proposals outlining programme concepts and capacity to manage projects targeting two key areas--strengthening civil society (\$300,000) and empowering youth leaders (\$300,000). According to a public notice issued in Washington DC on Thursday, the DRL's objective is to increase peaceful civic participation in Bangladesh, and the bureau seeks proposals for programmes that focus on strengthening civil society organisations' monitoring, accountability, and oversight

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Hawker beaten to death by criminals in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A hawker, who was given a beating by unknown criminals Thursday night, died at Birampur Upazila Health Complex in Dinajpur yesterday morning. The deceased was identified as Md Bikram Mia, 60, son of late Alimuddin of Gangadaspur village in the upazila. Police said some unidentified criminals had beaten him near his residence in the village around 9:30pm on Thursday, leaving him injured critically. His family members

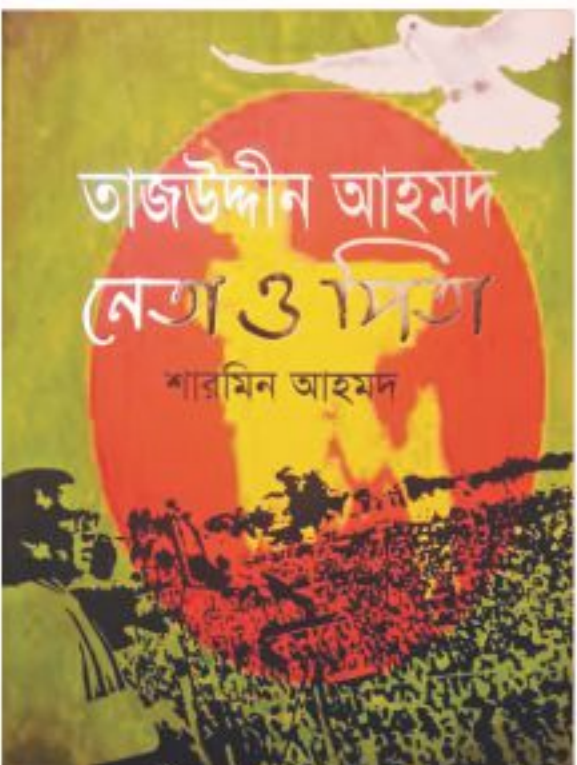
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Politicians' only will to grab power unfortunate

Says Dr Kamal at launching of book on Tajuddin Ahmad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Politicians nowadays believe ascending to power is the only success in their political career, which is really unfortunate, said eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday. "In fact, it is sheer disrespect to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Tajuddin Ahmad who never gave up their principles to the lure of power," he said. He said this at a book launching ceremony at the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in capital. Tajuddin's daughter Sharmin Ahmad wrote the book



Book titled 'Tajuddin Ahmad: Neta o Pita' launched, yesterday.

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