

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Photography and Literature

When the photography was invented in 1840, literature warmly greeted it. Why? I think the ability of photographs to precisely describe what is in front of the camera caught the imagination of writers who felt less threatened by photography than painters did. Authors as diverse as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, John Ruskin and Virginia Woolf were early supporters of photography. Some writers quickly recognized photography's marketing potential: Whitman and Mark Twain used their photographic portraits for public relations.

To be sure, photography had enemies in literature. Perhaps the most famous was French poet Charles Baudelaire who repeatedly attacked photography, once warning photographers: "You will never become artists. All you are is mere copiers!"

Novelist Honore de Balzac was frightened by photography. He believed that all living bodies were made up of invisible layers of skin, and taking a photograph peeled away a layer. Thus, he thought, repeated exposures to a camera can eventually peel away all the layers that make up a person and kill them. But Balzac did pose for photographic portraits. Presumably his ample girth – equivalent to numerous layers – reassured him.

In fiction I have read, the most memorable observations about photography were in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the colourful character Melquiades sets up a primitive photo lab in the remote South American town of Macondo. The enchantment that the novel's protagonist Jose Buendia feels about photography turns into obsession as he tries to photograph God in order to prove His existence.

Over the years, many writers have been enchanted by photography's magic, becoming serious photographers themselves. Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*, was an enthusiastic and talented photographer. In recent times, the authors Eudora Welty, Allen Ginsberg, Michael Ondaatje and Bruce Chatwin have pursued photography seriously. Among photographers, Robert Adams and Wright Morris are established writers.

Writers and photographers often collaborate on projects, but memorable results are sparse. Poet Pablo Neruda and photographer Milton Rogovin made a haunting book of poems and photographs called



Tennyson photographed by Lewis Carroll

Windows that Open Inwards. Poet Langston Hughes and photographer Roy de Carava authored a lyrical book called *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* about life in Harlem. *Let us Now Praise Famous Men* is a classic by writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans. The book's subject is America's Great Depression.

The author Jack Kerouac in the preface to *The Americans*, a book of photographs by Robert Frank, famously said that "Frank sucked a sad poem right out of the heart of America onto film, taking rank among the tragic poets of the world."

Philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, John Berger and Susan Sontag have written intellectual discourses on photography. I find Barthes' *Camera Lucida* particularly engaging. Discussing a portrait of Napoleon's younger brother Jerome, Barthes expresses his absolute amazement that "I am looking at eyes that once looked at the Emperor." But he admits that others might not find this fascinating. "Life consists of these little touches of solitude," Barthes concedes.

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DULALI BEEL IN LALMONIRHAT

BNP men block water flow to croplands of Hindus

Cultivate fishes forcibly fencing the marshland mostly owned by Hindus; disregard UNO's order to remove the fence

S DILIP ROY, LALMONIRHAT

Over a hundred Hindu farmers at Falimari village of Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila are facing water shortage in cultivating crops, especially Aman paddy, in Dulali Beel (marsh), as some BNP men have illegally started fish farming in almost the entire water body blocking the free flow of water.

Most of the 800-bigha beel is owned by the Hindu farmers, who said the BNP men forcibly erected the fence in early June and were barring the Hindu people from entering their own land. Two bamboo fences have been put on the two ends of the beel.

The fish farmers, led by Bhelabari Union Parishad Chairman Mohammad Ali, also president of BNP's Aditmari upazila unit, has already violated an order of the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) to remove the bamboo fencing, locally known as bana, by July 25.

The order came after the farmers lodged a written complaint with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Lalmonirhat on June 10, saying that without their approval, Bhelabari UP Chairman Mohammad Ali and his brothers and BNP activists Babul Hossain, Shawkat Hossain, cousins Mizanur Rahman, Nizam Uddin and his nephew Rasel Miah had started farming fish in the beel blocking the water flow by erecting the bamboo fencing illegally.

The district administration sources said UNO Rezaul Alam Sarker visited the beel on July 10 and served notices on the fish farmers, asking them to remove the fencing by July 25.

As the order remains unimplemented, the Hindu farmers yesterday formed a human chain near their fields, demanding removal of the bana to ensure the free flow of water.

"We have been farming Aman and Boro paddy in our lands in the beel

every year, and the beel is being used as a free water body where all villagers fish openly," said a Hindu farmer, adding that nobody, even the land owners, was allowed to fish in the beel now.

Protap Chandra Roy, a farmer who owns 25 bighas of land in the beel, said they would not get a bumper production of crops due to the illegal fish project. "The BNP men didn't discuss the matter with us. We will never allow the fish project in our farm land," he said.

Another farmer, Sibindra Nath Roy, said, "We get a huge number of local fish species in this beel, and it is open to all villagers. We, the land owners, are dependent on the crops, especially paddy, we cultivate in the beel." Roy owns eight bighas of land in the beel.

Talking to The Daily Star, Bhelabari UP Chairman Mohammad Ali said he was not involved in the fish project, so

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Anti-clockwise from top, a Hindu farmer points to his land, which is being used illegally by some BNP men for fish farming in Dulali Beel of Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila. A bamboo fence erected by the BNP men, blocking the free flow of water to the nearby croplands. The Hindu farmers, who own most of the 800-bigha beel but are barred from using the part where the pisciculture is going on, form a human chain near their fields yesterday. Although the upazila nirbahi officer ordered the BNP men to remove the fence by July 25, they seem not to care at all. PHOTO: STAR

PATUAKHALI-KUAKATA
Ferry services
disrupted due
to tidal surge

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Patuakhali

Eid holidaymakers were stranded when services of all four ferries on the four rivers between Patuakhali and Kuakata were disrupted as gangways on the rivers went under water during a high tide.

The four ferries are: Lubekkhali Ferry on the Payra river, Kalapara Ferry on the Andharmanik river, Hajipur Ferry on the Sonatala river and Mohipur Ferry on the Shibbaria river.

Gangways were under water from 11:00am to 3:30pm. Afterwards services returned to normal. Visiting Hajipur ferry ghat, SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Schoolgirl 'beaten by tutor' dies in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A schoolgirl died on Thursday night twelve days after she had been beaten allegedly by her private tutor in Boalkhali upazila of Chittagong.

Bristi Das, 12, of Paschim Kodurkhil Koibortipara of Boalkhali Municipality, was a class V student of Paschim Kodurkhil Koibortolpara Government Primary School.

Bristi's father Asutosh Das filed a murder case with Boalkhali Police Station accusing Babla Dutta, 40, also a teacher of the school.

Bristi went to Babla's house at Uttar Buschi in Boalkhali around 9:00am on July 19 for taking lessons, according to the case statement.

During the class, the teacher beat her indiscriminately as she could not answer some questions, the statement said.

With bruises on different parts of her body, she had been suffering from fever since the incident, it added.

As her condition deteriorated Thursday evening, she was being taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, but on the way she died, the statement said.

Early yesterday, police sent the body to Chittagong Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

Morgue sources said the body was with bruises on the

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Two people die in fire in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were burnt to death in a fire which broke out in a two-storey hotel in Old Dhaka early yesterday.

The deceased were Saizuddin, 35, and Mohammad Sultan, 55.

The fire broke out on the first floor of Al Muslim Residential Hotel in Siddique Bazar at 3:15am, said Abdul Jalil, senior station officer of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters.

The second storey of the building was made of tin and had a wooden floor, he said, adding that the floor was burnt to ashes. Three firefighting units doused the flames after an effort of about three and a half hours.

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THE WAY THEY SEE IT



THE WAY WE SEE IT

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