

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

My first pond.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR.

# Places From Our Childhood

SOMETIMES I run into people who have lived in the same small town all their lives. When I was younger, they did not impress me, but lately I feel a touch of jealousy. There is much to be said for living close to one's roots.

I have lived in three continents, but my roots lie in Sylhet where I grew up. Visits to my childhood town evoke a mix of emotions: joy laced with nostalgia. My childhood home, once called Shawkat House, survives under a new owner's name although one part has made way for a high-rise. I get butterflies in my stomach whenever I pass that house as childhood memories come rushing.

Crossing the house, I invariably look across the road to check that the old pond is still there. I learned to swim here – with the wrong breathing technique, it turns out, but nevertheless well enough to survive marine disasters. That same pond was also where I went pearl-diving, collecting buckets full of oysters. Most pearls were small, but one day I found a decent-sized gem that my mother placed in a ring and, years later, gave my wife.

Next to the pond, another abode of my memories, the police station, stands unchanged. As a child, my natural unease around policemen had led to an unforgettable incident. When I was about six or seven, I decided I was done with school. My mother was out of town and I took advantage of her absence, skipping school for several days. My grandmother tried to warn me, but to no avail. In desperation she called the police station and asked a sergeant to show his face at our door. I panicked when he appeared and asked me if any boy from this house was playing truant.

That was the last time I skipped school, and the episode left a deep mark.

Rain figures prominently in my memories of Sylhet, which receives twice the average annual rainfall of Dhaka. The tin roof of our Assam style bungalow amplified the sound of rain. After heavy downpours, the drains that channelled rainwater out of our house would roar with rushing water. The owls living in a cavity in our *krishnachura* tree stayed put while the crows, *shaliks*, *fingeys* and cuckoos shivered miserably in the rain.

During my childhood, trips out of town were rare. Today, better mobility and improved roads enable me to visit remote places easily and frequently. Jaflong, once the favourite picnic spot, has been overwhelmed by stone business. But several hard-to-reach places have opened up, including Lalakhal, Pantomai, Ratargul, Bisnakandi and of course the *haors* – those broad, shallow depressions which dry in winter and flood during monsoon.

Often, creative people – writers, artists, photographers – draw nourishment from their roots. It is hard to precisely define the result, but their work has a sense of confidence and understanding of the subject. I have seen and felt it, for example, in the plays of Tennessee Williams, the photographs of Sally Mann, or the work of others who have a strong sense of belonging to a place. Every time I visit Sylhet, the photographer in me feels inspired. And so I eagerly look forward to examining the pictures whenever I visit the place of my childhood.

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TAQI MURDER

# Impunity encourages criminality

## Speakers tell roundtable in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The culture of impunity coupled with state patronisation of perpetrators is encouraging criminal activities like killing and sexual harassment in Bangladesh, discussants told a function yesterday.

A coordinated movement must be launched across the country against these criminal activities as well as the government inaction and negligence in trying the perpetrators, they viewed.

The roundtable, "State reluctance to try the killers of Taqi", was organised by Santras Nirmul Taqi Mancha, a platform seeking justice over the killing of Tanwir Mohammed Taqi, in the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

Taqi, 17-year-old high school graduate and son of cultural activist Rafiur Rabbi of Narayanganj, was found dead on the banks of the Shitalakkhya on March 8, 2013 two days after he went missing.

Prof Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said the culture of impunity has grown due to the unhealthy political culture.

People are not safe as the state is not performing its duties. The country is gradually becoming unsuitable for human habitat, he viewed.

"The state does not work for people. The state is not a friend of the people. That is why people like Taqi are not safe here," Serajul added.

"So, it is our duty to strengthen the movement to change the state with the aim to make it people-friendly," he opined.

Eminent cultural personality Kamal Lohani urged all to join hands for strengthening the movement against injustice, repression and criminal activities.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) Adviser Manjurul Ahsan Khan said the rule of law was absent and so a coordinated movement was very crucial for ensuring public safety.

Veteran left politician Ajoy Roy suggested holding rallies demanding trial of the killers of Taqi and of writers and freethinkers.

CPB President Mujahidul Islam Selim said an alternative political force out of the two major political parties must emerge to change the situation.

Noted economist Prof Anu Mohammad said the ruling party was stigmatising the spirit of the Liberation War by safeguarding criminals. "The Santras Nirmul Taqi Mancha has emerged as a symbol of protest across the country...our duty is to continue the movement," Anu added.

Rafiur Rabbi demanded immediate completion of the trial of the killers of Taqi as well as of journalist couple Sagar-Runi, writer Avijit Roy and other freethinkers.

Santras Nirmul Taqi Mancha Member Secretary Halim Azad moderated the programme while other academicians, politicians, social workers and right activists also spoke.

# Shab-e-Meraj today

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Shab-e-Meraj will be observed today across the country with due respect and religious fervour.

Muslims every year on the 27th of the Arabic month of Rajab observe the Shab-e-Meraj, the night Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) embarked on a special journey to meet Allah. Different Islamic organisations will arrange special prayers and milad mahfils at mosques and at other places to seek blessings of Allah.

The Muslim devotees offer special prayers all night at mosques and homes to seek blessings of Allah for welfare of the entire nation and the Muslim Ummah.

# City contractor grabs part of Uttara Lake

HELEMUL ALAM

While the government has taken a plan to develop Uttara Lake at the cost of Tk 35 crore, a city corporation contractor has been filling earth in the water body for the last two weeks.

The earth dumped has created an around 750 sq ft ground off the bank along Sonargaon Janapath in Uttara Sector 11, where bricks were piled up with a signboard announcing that these are for sale.

The signboard reading, "Ekhan nijashwa kholar (RBM) it (brick) bikri kora hoy," was put up by Towhidul Islam, a contractor of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), who is selling the bricks.

He is carrying out a Tk 5 crore repair and development work on Sonargaon Janapath.

Towhidul, however, denied the allegation of encroachment, and said the earth was dumped for fixing the alignment of the 120 feet wide road, and that it might have created a few square feet of extra ground.

He also kept around 70 drums of tar, meant for the road work, on the grabbed land.

Asked about the signboard, he avoided a direct answer and said the place would be cleared after finishing the road work in the next two months.

Prof Asad Ullah Khan, convener of environment affairs of Uttara Association, said the lake measured 5km long even in 2004, but it was reduced to 3.81km now due to grabbing over the years.

Nazrul Islam, executive engineer of DNCC's zone-1, said the lake was under the custody of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), so it would have to take action.

Chairman of Rajuk GM Jainal Abedin Bhuiya said the authority would conduct an eviction drive shortly under the Uttara Lake

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

# Two farmers killed in lightning

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Two farmers were killed and another three injured in lightning strikes at Beldia in Sreepur of Gazipur yesterday.

The deceased were Noso Uddin, 60, and Sofir Uddin 35, while the injured Shahjahan, 35, Ahmed Ali, 45, and Rajab Ali, 35.

They were taken to New Life Diabetes Centre and Sreepur Upazila Health Complex.

Sharmin Zerin, physician of the health complex, said at that time the five were having lunch in the field they were working on.

Construction waste being dumped into Uttara Lake in the capital Wednesday. Inset, a signboard erected by a city corporation contractor, Towhidul Islam, on the newly created ground announces the sale of bricks, not in picture, piled up nearby.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Kidnapped boy found dead

## Two arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Police yesterday dug up the body of a 12-year-old boy, 19 days after he was kidnapped on his way back home from school, from mud near a poultry farm in his Jogiibanpur village in Noakhali following information gleaned from two arrested villagers.

Ibrahim Khalil Masum was kidnapped on April 26 and his father Md Abdul Kader received a phone call 10 days later demanding Tk 5 lakh as ransom, Sonaimuri Police Station Officer-in-Charge Haniful Islam told The Daily Star.

Tracking the number, police first arrested Sakib, 28, from Chawkbazar in the capital and then, as per his information, Osman Gani, believed to be aged around 30 years, he said.

Osman admitted killing and burying the class V student, he added. Further details were not available.

# No need to change cellphone numbers

## BTRC formulates guideline so that one can change mobile phone operators without changing numbers

UNB, Dhaka

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has already prepared a guideline to introduce a system that will allow mobile telecom customers to change operators without changing their numbers, and is likely to hire a third party to implement it.

The Mobile Number Portability System (MNPS) will be implemented as soon as the authorities concerned give the green signal, BTRC Secretary Md Sarwar Alam told the news agency.

Mahmud Hossain, chief corporate officer of Grameenphone, said, "We have nothing to say if the BTRC implements the MNPS through a third party."

The commission should consult mobile telecom operators to install the service, or else it may create problems for the customers, he added.

Mahatab Uddin Ahmed, the chief operating officer of Robi, said they would support the decision of the BTRC, but launching the MNPS within six months is not possible.

BTRC sources said on June 13, 2013, it ordered the operators to build a consortium to make the service available within seven months but they did not respond to the proposal rather requested it to discuss the issue with them.

# PM to visit C'nawabganj today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to visit Chapainawabganj today.

Hasina will inaugurate seven development projects, including the second Mohananda Bridge, and lay foundation stones to four others in the district.

In the afternoon, she will address a rally in the town.

Other development projects to be inaugurated are: a youth training centre; sub-station of Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture; an eye hospital of Jatiya Andho Kallayan Samity; a new building of Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir College; and a new building of Fire Service and Civil Defence Station.

She will inaugurate the construction works of upgrading the 100-bed Chapainawabganj Adhunik Sadar Hospital to a 250-bed hospital; repairing the Kansa-t-Rohonpur-Bholahat road; a project to protect Alatali area from erosion by the Padma "Alatali Area Rakkha Prokolpo"; and a 100MW power station project.

The 546.60m long bridge with 2,400m approach roads on both sides cost Tk 49.79 crore. LGED constructed the bridge.



A woman from Munshiganj waits to get her child treated at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) in the capital yesterday. With a rise in temperature, the hospital has seen an increasing number of patients, both child and elderly, for the last one week, said doctors and staff.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN