

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Asian openbill near Bhairab.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR.

Asian Openbill

SOME years ago, I was in Jahangirnagar University early one morning for birdwatching. The campus was enveloped in dense winter fog. I stopped at one of the lakes where I could hear the racket of whistling ducks but visibility was poor. As the fog slowly lifted, some trees beyond the lake gradually came into view. On the high branches of one of the trees was a group of black and white birds. The fog, the stark denuded branches of the trees, and the large, gangly birds made a primeval scene. At first I thought the birds were lesser adjutant storks (modontak) but then I noticed the distinctive gap between the top and bottom parts of their bills. These were asian openbills (anastomus oscitans), known as *shamukkhoh* in Bangla.

Since then, I have run into openbills many times. They are about 80 cm tall, and can weigh as much as 1.5 kilograms. Among the five types of storks in Bangladesh, this is the only one found in abundance and year-round. Globally they thrive over a large range from western India through Bangladesh all the way to Vietnam.

The long-legged bird, coloured black, grey and white, is usually seen in small flocks near water: shallow lakes, marshes and paddy fields. It roosts and breeds in large colonies and builds its nests at high tree branches. The openbill forages in shallow water by probing the ground with its bill looking for molluscs and small marine animals.

To me, the most interesting aspect of openbills is their bill. Since they live primarily on snails, it was long

thought that this gap enabled them to crush snails with their bill like a nutcracker. Considerable research was done to verify this. But it turns out that this gap is nonexistent in juvenile openbills and grows with age. Yet juveniles are also able to eat snails.

In fact, the openbill uses a different technique to eat snails. After crushing the snail with the tough bill, it holds it in place with the lower mandible while severing the body of the snail from its shell using its sharper upper mandible.

So its gap seems mysterious. However, the snail-eating habit endears the bird to farmers in Southeast Asian nations where it devours large numbers of apple snails. These snails are pests that damage crops.

Openbills are usually quiet, but during breeding season they make a clattering sound with their bill while courting a mate. The plumage of males and females is normally identical, but during breeding, the male plumage turns predominantly white.

Where can you find them? Besides Jahangirnagar University, I have seen them in several other places. On the road to Sylhet, just before reaching Bhairab, there is a large bridge. During winter I have seen openbill flocks on the banks of the river underneath. Once I saw a flock of hundreds high in the sky over Hail Haor, flying to destinations unknown. They can also be seen at the other haors and near water all year round.

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BNP to continue anti-govt movement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP will continue the anti-government movement to restore democracy in the country, party's standing committee member Moudud Ahmed told journalists ahead of a meeting to observe the 34th death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman at Gulshan office. Ziaur Rahman, who founded BNP in 1978, was assassinated by a group of disgruntled army officers at Chittagong Circuit House on May 30, 1981.

BNP leader Nazrul Islam Khan informed about the party's 15-day programme, beginning on May 27, chalked out to mark Zia's death anniversary.

KOLKATA-DHAKA-AGARTALA ROUTE

Another bus service with India mulled

May get go-ahead during Modi's visit; trial operation on Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil-Dauki-Shillong-Guwahati starts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and India are keen to introduce another cross-border bus service, on the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala route, for improving road communications between the two neighbours, officials said yesterday, hoping that a decision would be reached in this regard during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh early next month.

"Governments of both countries are seeing the issue of introducing a bus service on the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala route positively," Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader told reporters after inaugu-

rating the trial operation of the Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil-Dauki-Shillong-Guwahati bus service at Kamalapur bus depot of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC).

Stressing the need for sub-regional cooperation for economic growth, human resources development, creation of jobs, and elimination of poverty, he said an improved road network and transport system was the key to accelerate progress.

Talking to The Daily Star, BRTC Chairman Mizanur Rahman said, "If introduced, the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus service will promote trade and business."

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Marma youth murdered in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A Marma youth was killed by unidentified criminals in Tangtalya area of Laxmichhari upazila in Khagrachhari yesterday morning.

Aungshila Marma, 26, son of late Mongthuchai Marma of Shilachhari area in the upazila, used to make a living by carrying pillion passengers on a motorbike.

He came under attack when he dropped a female passenger in the area, Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Laxmichhari Police Station, quoted relatives as saying.

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The trial operation of the Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil-Dauki-Shillong-Guwahati bus service at Kamalapur bus depot of BRTC was inaugurated by, inset, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Mymensingh clash over land kills two

Two others killed in separate clashes

CITY DESK

Four people were killed and 14 others were injured in clashes over land disputes in Mymensingh and Moulvibazar Thursday and yesterday.

Two were killed and three others injured in Sheuly village of Mymensingh, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

The dead were Abdul Samad Khan, 54, of the village. Badrul Alam Khan, officer-in-charge of Pagla Police Station, said there was a longstanding dispute over a piece of land between neighbours Samad Khan and Liakat Mir.

An altercation broke out between the two groups yesterday which led to the clash. Samad was killed on the spot and four others were injured. Kalam died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH). Police arrested Liakat and his son Sajal Mir.

In Echal Beparipara village of the district, a teacher who had been injured in a land dispute clash died at MMCH on Thursday night.

The victim is Farhad Hossain, 38, a teacher of Nabinagar Dakhil Madrasa. Police said Farhad's uncle Abdur Rahman and some other men attacked Farhad on Tuesday as the two had a dispute over a piece of land.

Meanwhile, a man was killed and ten others were injured in a clash in Nowagaon village of Moulvibazar on Thursday, according to our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The deceased was Rajab Ali, 55, of the village. Police said neighbours -- Rajab Ali and Sadikur Rahman -- had a quarrel over a piece of land which led to the clash.

A case was filed and two people were arrested.

No ACC research yet to fight graft

UNB, Dhaka

As per its act, the Anti-Corruption Commission is supposed to fight corruption by identifying its underlying causes through conducting research, but it has never been able to practise it since its inception in 2004.

As outlined by the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004, the anti-graft body has a research cell, but in practice it has no work for lack of rules, officials said.

About the ACC functions, section 17 (f) of the ACC Act 2004 states that the commission may carry out research on

prevention of corruption and submit recommendations to the president over the actions to be taken on the basis of the research findings.

ACC Chairman M Badiuzzaman said, "I agree we cannot carry out extensive research on graft, but we have a plan to strengthen our research activities."

Executive director of the Transparency International Bangladesh Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the ACC could not conduct research since its inception, and there is no sign in sight to do so in near future. "Even the existing ACC officials are not capable of conducting research."



Relatives break down in tears at the death of loved ones as six people, including three of a family, were killed in a road accident when a truck rammed into a battery-run auto-rickshaw on Panchagarh-Tentulia highway at Charmile of Panchagarh yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Six killed as truck rams 3-wheeler in Panchagarh

3 others die in Munshiganj, Rangpur, Mymensingh

CITY DESK

Six people, including three of a family, were killed and two others injured after a truck rammed into a battery-run auto-rickshaw carrying them on Panchagarh-Tentulia highway at Charmile in Sadar upazila of Panchagarh, reports our Thakurgaon correspondent.

The dead were Amirul, 36, his wife Jesmin, 25, and daughter Orpi, 6, the auto-rickshaw driver Mostafizur, 35, Monirul, 15, of Jamuribari; and Mollika, 65, of Goalpara in the upazila.

Injured Tahmina Begum, 35, and her daughter Mohsina, 6, were taken to Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

Witnesses said the truck was being driven recklessly while the three-wheeler auto-rickshaw could not move due to sand and heaps of paddy kept on the road.

occurred around 10:40am.

They seized the truck but its driver and helper managed to escape.

Our Munshiganj correspondent reports, Fazlul Quayum, 33, a major of Bangladesh Army was killed and a lieutenant and a peon of Bangladesh Navy were injured as a car carrying them hit a tree beside Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Baluakandi of Gazaria upazila yesterday.

The injured -- Lt Mafiur Rahman, 27, and Giasuddin, 25 -- took first aid from a local health complex, Gazaria police said.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports, Bahadur Islam, 40, died as a truck hit his motorbike in Mithapukur's Payraband on Thursday afternoon.

Our Mymensingh correspondent adds, schoolboy Abu Taleb Talha, 7, son of Shamsur Rahman Mamun, was killed and four others were injured as a car hit a bicycle and later a rickshaw in Trishal yesterday.

Two die from electrocution

CITY DESK

Two persons died from electrocution in Pirojpur and Chittagong city in last two days.

In Pirojpur, Md Wares Ali Khan, 75, of Choto Kanua village, died from an electric shock that he received while switching on an electric motor at Bhandaria Central Mosque, said locals.

Meanwhile, Md Babul, 50, came in touch with an electric wire of instant power supply (IPS) in his Bishwa Colony residence in Akbar Shah thana in the port city and was declared dead at Chittagong Medical College Hospital yesterday.


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