

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



A Moulai in action.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Honey Hunting in Sundarban

Spring brings flowers to Sundarban. First to arrive are the flowers of Kholsha plants. Then Possur trees bloom. Finally the Goran trees' flowers appear. Many other plants also bloom - such as the beautiful purple Hargoza flowers - but these three flowers are special. They have nectar that bees collect.

Thus it is that every year over two hundred tons of honey (and a smaller amount of beeswax) is collected from the wild beehives of Sundarban. Since it is a reserve forest, honey-collection from the forest is by government permit. The honey hunting season officially opens on April 1.

The honey-hunters of Sundarban are called Moulais. Last week I joined a group of Moulais in their hunt for honey. This trip, offered by Bengal Tours, gave me an opportunity to see this activity up close.

We attended the formal inauguration in Burigoalini village along with Moulais and other villagers. Local leaders, honey experts and government officials spoke on forest- and honey-related matters. For example, sustainable collection of honey was emphasised. A Forest Department officer then handed passes to Moulais. Finally prayers were offered for their protection while in the forest.

A few hours later, our small boat came ashore on the forest. Stepping through deep mud, sticky and slippery, we followed the Moulais. Hetal and Hargoza plants, which looked so pretty from the boat, now placed thorns in our way. Low branches obstructed our progress. The tourists wore netting over their faces for protection; Moulais covered themselves with gamchas.

The Moulais were in form. This was their territory and they moved with easy speed. Preparing for the assault, they chopped Golpata leaves and tied them into bunches called Karu. These

would be set on fire to create smoke which disperses the bees.

When we found a hive, a Moulai silently and cautiously climbed to a position to cut it. The swarm of bees covering the hive came alive forming a menacing cloud. While bee stings are not fatal, multiple stings of these giant bees can cause much pain, swelling, fever and diarrhoea. But the Karu worked like magic: bees flew away after buzzing angrily. The Moulai then sliced off parts of the hive and placed them in the collection basket, being careful to leave enough for re-generation. We left quickly before the bees returned for vengeance.

We retraced our steps through the mud to the boat. On-board, I broke off a piece of honeycomb containing honey. It tasted clean and refreshing, different from store-bought honey.

Then we were off to the next cutting. This one was harder. The ground was softer and more slippery, and the shoes dug in. We had to cross several streams. In one of them I mis-placed my leg and sunk to my hips in mud, which was fine, sticky and ash-coloured. Before the trip ended we had witnessed four cuttings.

I tried to imagine the tough life of the Moulais. During the season each collects perhaps 400 kg of honey per person, fetching around 40,000 to 60,000 taka. The rest of the time they fish or farm. While tigers are on their mind, their biggest threat, as their leader pointed out, is robbers who kidnap for ransom.

We made it without encountering tigers, being stung by bees or attacked by robbers. As for my few scratches of Hargoza thorns, I hung on to them as precious souvenirs of my adventure until they slowly faded. The memories however remained etched in my mind.

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2,640kg of jatka seized in 2 dists

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Coast Guard has seized about 2,640kg of jatka (young hilsa) in separate drives in Chandpur and Munshiganj.

On information, coastguards conducted a drive at a passenger launch "MV Farhan" in the river Meghna in Chandpur on Thursday night and seized 1,800kg of jatka worth over Tk 5.4 lakh, said Chandpur Station Commander Sub Lt Hasanur Rahman.

He said they distributed the jatka among the poor in the locality but could not arrest anyone.

In Munshiganj, another coastguard team seized 800kg of jatka from a launch "MV Dhulia" in the river Dhaleshwari yesterday morning, while they were being carried to Dhaka from the southern part of the country, said Lt Commander Sayed M Kashed.

Yet another team of coastguards seized 40kg of jatka and banned currents nets worth Tk 28 lakh from the river Padma in the district and arrested nine fishermen, said the officer, adding that all the 840kg of jatka were worth Tk 2.52 lakh.

7-yr-old girl 'raped by tenth-grader' in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A seven-year-old school-girl was allegedly raped by a 15-year-old tenth-grader in Benapole of Jessore on Thursday.

Police arrested the rapist, who is a neighbour of the girl, at night on the day following a complaint filed by the victim's father with Benapole Port Police Station, said Sub-inspector Moniruzaman.

The boy violated the girl in his house while she was returning home from her school in the afternoon, said the SI, adding that the boy confessed to the crime.

UNION PARISHAD POLLS 2016

One killed in AL factional clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A man was killed and at least 10 others injured when followers of two Union Parishad chairmen aspirants of the Awami League clashed in Jhenidah sadar upazila yesterday.

Akamat Meer, 51, of Soyael village in Padmakar Union, succumbed to his injuries one hour after the fighting.

Four of the injured -- Amjad Meer, Yeakub Hossain Mee, Jiarul Islam and Rezaul Islam -- were admitted to Jhenidah General Hospital, while Jiarul was referred to Dhaka as his condition is critical, said Dr Shahnewaj Kashem of the hospital.

The deceased belonged to the group of incumbent chairman of Padmakar Union and AL president of the union Bikash Chandra Biswas. His rival is AL general secretary of the union Nizamul Goni Litu.

The clash ensued from an altercation between their followers over who of the two would seek party nomination to run in the UP election slated for May 4, said Officer-in-Charge of Jhenidah Sadar Police Station Hasan Hafizur Rahman.

Police rushed in and fired four blank shots to take control of the situation, he said.

3 foreign firms offer aircraft to Biman for hajj flights

UNB, Dhaka

National flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines has received offers from three companies to supply one wide-bodied aircraft for carrying pilgrims to Saudi Arabia during the upcoming hajj, a senior Biman official involved in the process told the news agency over telephone.

The official said Biman decided to take the aircraft on lease for three months and it is hard to get a greater response in such a short period. But, the official would not disclose the names of the respondents.

He said the "proposal open committee" of the state run airliner after their work will submit the proposals to the Techno Finance sub-committee, which is also known as the evaluation committee.

The committee, after reviewing, will submit recommendations to the Biman Board. "The Board will take the final decision," the Biman official said. The national flag carrier will take the aircraft on Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance and Insurance (ACMI) lease, which is also called wet lease, and it must fly 750 block hours.

The Biman official said they have decided to take the aircraft on a lease to operate hajj flights in a smooth manner.

"We can operate the Hajj flights with our own aircraft, but for that we have to suspend some of our existing routes," he said.



Pillars block one end of Holy Lane in the capital's Shyamoli. House owners on the lane made the road off-limits to all types of vehicle for "safety of the residents," but they did not take the consent of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC). An engineer of DNCC said the lane connecting Ring Road with Mirpur Road was used by people to take a short cut which eventually helped reduce the traffic jam. The photo was taken last month. PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Dhaka city lane illegally made off-limits to vehicles

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

A 90-yard stretch of a road, in the capital's Shyamoli, has been illegally made off-limits to all types of vehicles.

Holy Lane connects Ring Road near Shyamoli Cinema Hall in the capital with Mirpur Road and is important for people seeking to take a short cut between the roads.

The opening of the lane, on the Ring Road side, is protected by a bamboo bar and a guard is there to control the traffic.

On the bamboo bar a signboard is

put up reading "the road is prohibited for rickshaws and motorcycles, directed by Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC)".

Meanwhile on the Mirpur Road side, Holy Lane is permanently blocked by erecting concrete and iron pillars, leaving narrow space in between for human movement.

"The road is blocked for vehicles from outside for the safety of the residents in the area," councillor of ward-30 of DNCC Abul Hasem Hasu told The Daily Star.

"The house owners on the lane have

applied for restricting vehicular movement for their safety, and I forwarded it to the mayor for his consideration. But they haven't yet given permission," he said.

Asked, then how the owners have restricted vehicular movement before getting any permission, the councillor said they have been doing it for two to three months on an experimental basis.

However, a number of rickshaw-pullers told this correspondent that the road has been blocked for over six months.

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Tairunnesa wailing over the coffin of her son, Nazim Uddin Samad, which reached home in Bianibazar of Sylhet yesterday. Samad, a law student of Jagannath University, was killed on Sunday. Inset, a faction of Gonojagoron Mancha in a procession in the capital's Shahbagh demanding proper investigations into all the murders, including of Nazim and Tonu. PHOTO: STAR

JUSTICE FOR TONU Govt's failure will cause recurrence

Demonstrators tell solidarity rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds will suffer the fate of Comilla Victoria Government College student Sohagi Jahan Tonu if the government fails to try her killers, justice seekers said yesterday.

If justice is not delivered, many Tonus will be found lying on the streets in pieces, said Imran Habib Bhuiyan, president of Chhatra Front.

He was addressing a solidarity rally protesting the "ill-effects" to suppress killings, rapes, and lootings.

A faction of Gonojagoron Mancha organised the rally in front of the National Museum at the capital's Shahbagh.

"We've seen the ridiculous autopsy report which says there is no evidence of rape, and the cause of death was not found. Maybe in the next autopsy report, we would see nothing had happened!" said Habib, adding dramas were staged every day to suppress killings.

Sculptor Bhaskar Rasha said a panicky situation was prevailing in the country. "Those who are telling the truth are either being termed lunatic or facing incidents like forced disappearances."

Engineer Shampa Basu, general secretary of Samajtantrik Mahila Forum, said the government claimed that it was showing zero tolerance to militancy and women were empowered. "But we have seen people are being killed by militants and women are being raped in buses or murdered," she said. Because of the culture of impunity, protests have been held at different parts of the country, she said.

Imran H Sarker, spokesperson of a faction of Gonojagoron Mancha, said, "When we have been raising our voice for justice for Tonu, we saw the killing of a student of Jagannath University and the killings in Banshkhali."

"These took places one after another as there had been no trial of the incidents of the last one and a half years," he said. He added that the effort to suppress the incidents was creating the scope for culture of impunity.



Youth killed in Ctg over establishing supremacy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A fish seller who was "hacked and shot" by "rivals" in Sahebpara area of Chittagong city on Thursday night, died on the way to a hospital in the capital early yesterday.

The deceased was Mohammad Idris, 28.

Idris and six others, Jahangir Majhi, Hanif, Alam, Sujjan, Sharif and Joyal, were injured by the alleged attack of some people in the area, claimed Mohammad Jabbar, Idris's father.

The attackers also blasted several cocktails to create panic, he added.

They were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, said police and relatives, adding, as Idris's condition deteriorated, he was being taken to Dhaka but he succumbed to his injuries around 4:00am.

There has been a long-standing "enmity" between two groups over establishing supremacy in the area and Idris was associated with one of them, said Morjina Akter, officer-in-charge of Sadarghat Police Station.

Drive is on to nab the attackers, she added.

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