

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



The Colosseum: tiered seating (back); remains of the stage (middle); underground greenrooms under the stage (front.) PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Rome Again

Last week I wrote about birding in Rome. Of course I saw other things during my recent trip. The fortunes of Rome rose and fell over the centuries. Ancient Rome started growing around 200 B.C. and became an empire that declined by 500 A.D. The Dark Ages followed. Then the Renaissance lasted from about 1400-1700 A.D. Modern Rome became the capital of Italy in 1871. For the engineer in me, the most interesting parts are the creations of the ancient Roman Empire. A story about Florence will illustrate Rome's engineering largesse. During the Renaissance, roughly a thousand years after the collapse of the Roman Empire, city-states in Italy grew wealthy from trading. Florence was one such place. It decided to build something commensurate with its new status. So there was a design competition. The winning design, by Filippo Brunelleschi, was for a large dome over the Cathedral of Florence. There was only one problem: no one knew how to build this dome. It took Florentine engineers over a hundred years to figure out how to build it. But the ancient Romans had built domes a thousand years earlier. One stands out in particular: the spectacular Pantheon in Rome. I am awestruck by its beauty every time I enter it, feeling like I have entered the chamber of a spaceship. No wonder it inspired many - including the Florentine architects. It turns out that the ancient Romans had used concrete to build the Pantheon's dome. But concrete was forgotten during the Dark Ages, so Florence's engineers, ignorant of it, had to essentially re-invent the wheel. The philosophical and aesthetic works of the ancient Romans might not be comparable to Greek or Renaissance art. But in practical, everyday things, their contributions were unparalleled. Even today, their

innovations in engineering and the law are in use. Take, for example, the aqueduct. Rome during its peak had a million people who needed water, sewage and roads. There was plenty of water flowing in the surrounding hills, but how to supply to the city? The aqueduct, a very long water pipe made of stone, concrete or brick, was the answer. Aqueducts were made with a precise downward slope over many kilometres so gravity moved the water. Most aqueducts were underground, but some were overground. Some aqueducts are still in use today. When you are ruling a vast empire, roads are important. Romans excelled at building roads. Their roads were straight. Even today, the Via Appia (or Appian Way), connecting Rome to Brindisi, is the longest straight road in Europe at 62 kilometres. The genius of Romans was their pragmatism. Although brutality was commonplace, Roman citizens could vote and had rule of law. Slaves could attain freedom and citizenship. Rome's ruling oligarchy was shrewd enough to involve the masses in political process and provided services and entertainment. Thus we have the stadium called the Colosseum, built over 2000 years ago. It could hold up to 80,000 spectators divided into several levels. Engineering was cutting-edge. For example, I saw liberal use of iron bolts to support columns and walls. The cheapest tickets were for standing-room galleries on the top. Royalty and aristocrats sat close to the stage. Greenrooms were under the stage which had trapdoors to access them. Events included gladiator contests, animal hunts and even executions. Wandering in the city, I easily understood why Rome is called The Eternal City. facebook.com/tangents.ikabir

Media should give voice to the voiceless

Asia media conference told

Journalists from across Asia yesterday said media should give voice to the voiceless while reporting emergencies and crisis, instead of taking side of governments. "Journalism is a vehicle for change... Our role is to give voice to the voiceless," said Brian John Thomson, editor in chief of Australia's SBS World News, on the first day of the two-day Asia Media Conference titled "Reporting humanitarian emergencies and crisis". The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) organised the conference in a hotel in the capital in partnership with the Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB). Journalists, from over 10 countries of Asia and Australia, shared their experiences of reporting -- of wars in Syria or Iraq, Jammu and Kashmir, earthquake in Nepal or migrant crisis in the Bay of Bengal.

Another run over by ambulance at DMCH dies

A man, who suffered injuries when an ambulance ran over four people inside Dhaka Medical College Hospital seven days ago, died yesterday. Ramjan Ali, 30, a mason, died at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital around 2:00am, said Bachchu Mia, sub-inspector of DMCH police outpost. He had been unconscious since the accident, said his wife Safi Begum. With the latest, the death toll in the incident

Catching Hilsa in Pabna, Bhola Sixteen fishermen jailed, 17 arrested

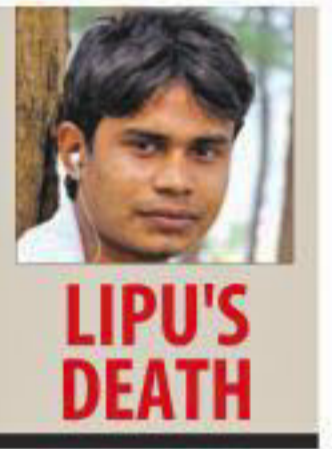
A mobile court jailed 16 fishermen for one year each in Sujanagar upazila of Pabna on the charge of catching hilsa from the river Padma yesterday during the ongoing ban period. With this, some 34 fishermen of the upazila were convicted in a week for defying the 22-day government ban starting on October 12. Sujanagar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Shakhawat Hossain, who led the mobile court, said the drives were conducted at different points -- including Char Sujanagar, Maniknagar, Satbaria and Najirganj. It also seized 100kg of hilsa and 30,000 metres of nets, used for catching the fish, worth Tk 4 lakh from their possession, he said. The nets were burnt instantly and the fishes were distributed among the orphans. Meanwhile, the fishermen in the area are presently suffering due to a lack of aid from the government, the fishermen said.



The bamboo pole in the open manhole warning oncoming vehicles not only is a signal for danger, but also is a symbol of the authorities' perpetual disregard for safety. It already has caused a few mishaps, and it is only a matter of time before a tragedy would befall the travellers. The photo was taken in Town Hall area in Mohammadpur yesterday. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Like a sudden storm

Within three years, he would be a post-graduate and then do what thousands of university graduates like him would do -- lifting the family out of poverty. It was also the dream of the family of Motaleb Hossain Lipu, a second-year student of mass communication and journalism at Rajshahi University. But it was all shattered due to his sudden mysterious death. The 22-year-old was found dead in a gutter beside the three-storey Nawab Abdul Latif Hall of the university on Thursday morning. Police suspect that it was a murder. Lipu was the eldest child of Badar Uddin, a truck driver. He went to the campus two days ago on Tuesday and was supposed to go home after finishing his exam. When his body reached Mokimpur village in Harinakundu upazila, Jhenidah, Lipu's mother Hosne Ara and father fell unconscious, and his two siblings, a younger brother and sister, were too shocked to speak. "I thought Lipu would establish himself in a few days," said the wailing father. Lipu's namaz-e-janaza was held on RU campus yesterday. Later he was taken to his village and buried there. Amir Jafar, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said, "We see it as a murder. It was committed in cold blood. We can confirm it after investigation." Quoting the autopsy report, he said Lipu was hit in the head and pushed off from a higher place. Bashir Mollah, an uncle of Lipu, filed a murder case with Motihar Police Station in Rajshahi yesterday, against unknown people.



GOVT SCHEME IN SYLHET, SUNAMGANJ Anomalies in low-cost rice distribution

Even though the initiative to provide cheap rice for the ultra poor is a noble one, some unscrupulous dealers and businessmen in Sylhet city and Sunamganj are tainting the government scheme by selling and purchasing rice in black market and stockpiling them. On September 7, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formally inaugurated a "Food-Friendly Programme" at Chilmari upazila in Kurigram. Under the programme, selected poor who have special cards would get 30kg rice a month from ration dealers during September-November and March-April at Tk 10 per kg. But many dealers and businessmen are misusing the government initiative and using it for their own benefit, claim residents of the areas. In Sylhet Sadar upazila, police on Thursday recovered 4,350kg rice of the government project from a warehouse of one Abdul Wadud, a local businessman, at Bateshwar Bazar, said Sajjadul Alam, assistant commissioner of Shahporan Police Station. He said Wadud purchased the rice from different dealers. Wadud is on the run, he added. In Chhatak upazila of Sunamganj, the upazila administration cancelled dealerships of two traders for selling rice to well-off people. The dealers are Abdul Kader Mollah and Azizur Rahman of Khurma union, said Arifuzzaman, UNO of Chhatak upazila. "Their dealerships were cancelled after

Missing boy found killed

A Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam candidate, who went missing on Thursday night, was found dead partially submerged in a pond at Kamalpur in Bakshiganj upazila of Jamalpur yesterday. Abu Rayhan, 17, adopted son of Bachchu Miah of village Dhanua, went out after getting a call on Thursday night and did not return. Later, locals found his semi-submerged body in the pond, some one kilometer away from the deceased's house, said Bakshiganj police. Some six months ago, Bachchu willed some of his properties to Rayhan. Police primarily suspected that Bachchu's relatives might have killed Rayhan for his father's property, which they could inherit if he did not have any heir. After an autopsy, Jamalpur General Hospital morgue sources said Rayhan was strangled.

Abducted physician freed after 3 weeks

A physician was released Wednesday night around three weeks after he had been abducted from the capital's Pallabi. Riad Nasser Chowdhury, an emergency medical officer at Islami Bank Hospital in Pallabi, was left on a highway near Dhaka around 10:00pm, his brother Medhad Nasser Chowdhury told The Daily Star. They informed police immediately after Riad had reached their Pallabi residence, he said, "He was very weak and sleepy." On Thursday, detectives took him to a Dhaka court where he gave his deposition, Medhad said, adding that Riad was later handed over to the family. "My brother is now undergoing treatment." Riad was picked up by three to four persons in a microbus near Purobi Cinema on September 29, Pallabi police quoted witnesses as saying. The microbus was later identified through a CCTV footage showing the incident, said Officer-in-Charge Dadon Fakir. They, however, failed to identify the criminals, he added. Quoting his brother, Medhad said he was pushed into the vehicle blindfolded with his hands and legs being tied up. After a long way, Riad was taken to a building where his eyes, hands and legs were opened, he said. There his brother fell asleep soon after having rice and vegetables, Medhad said, "Possibly the food was drugged." "Criminals used to torture him by kicking. They used to awake him and serve food." The culprits, who did not demand any ransom, did not disclose the reason behind the abduction. Medhad filed an abduction case with Pallabi Police Station against four persons. Presently, detectives are looking into the case.

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