

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Painted Stork, Haryana.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Birding in Haryana

Last month, I travelled west of Kolkata in India for the first time, arriving at Gurgaon, Haryana, for a wedding. I found some time to go bird-watching.

I first tried the Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, about an hour from Gurgaon. Leaving the hotel at dawn, I arrived promptly at opening time only to find it closed. Due to reasons of bird flu, the authorities had decided to shut the Sanctuary to visitors for the week.

So here is the difference between visiting a museum and visiting a bird sanctuary. If the museum is closed, you are done. But sanctuary or not, birds are virtually everywhere, and so, undaunted, I decided to explore on my own and walked through several nearby villages which were surrounded by agricultural land. In the front yard of many farmhouses elderly people sat on rugs enjoying the morning sun while smoking a hookah. Children chirped on their way to school and farmers headed for the fields.

The main crops were mustard and wheat. The ground was dry and cisterns held water used for irrigation. The mustard fields were much less densely planted than they are in Bangladesh.

Among the birds in the fields were stonechats, prinias and black kites, similar to what I see in our mustard fields. However, behind the Sanctuary I saw three peacocks – gorgeous creatures that ran off as soon as they saw me.

The next morning I hired a birding guide. We first went to a pond about five kilometres from the Sanctuary. Ducks (teals, shovellers), black-winged stilts, a purple heron and white-breasted waterhens played there. The ducks were quick to fly off. The stilts were, however, friendly.

We then took a long walk through the fields, spotting a rich assortment of

birds along the way. Grey-backed shrikes were abundant. New to me were the desert wheatear, pied bushchat and Indian robin. My guide had promised to show me short-eared owls at the end of our three kilometre walk. The owls lived in a group of trees set in the middle of a mustard field, but today they were missing.

My disappointment turned to delight when, walking back, we encountered a herd of nilgai. These are a type of antelope, but the male looks like a blue-black cow. The female looks like a deer. The herd with one male and several females and calves was basking in the sun. I approached them gently but they still ran off, females and children in a rush, male at a more leisurely pace.

We also visited wetlands in Basai. Gurgaon is developing rapidly and this area was no exception. Large machines dug out the earth everywhere. Wide highways, some half-finished, crisscrossed the land which was dotted with high-rise apartment buildings. Yet, miraculously, there was enough of nature left for numerous birds.

Among the reeds, I saw warblers, shrikes and a shikra. Down the road stood two woolly-necked storks standing on a pile of dug-up earth. At the edge of a pond, a mixed flock of ibises and painted storks fished in shallow water. From a lake further afield, a large flock of gadwall ducks rose and flew in circles. Saurus cranes, I was told, were common, but today they eluded us.

It was beautiful to see the birds in this friendly land. But I felt heartache too, because many of the birds here – painted storks, peacocks, Saurus cranes – were once found in Bangladesh. Nevertheless it was a marvellous trip and I hope to return soon.

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NCC POLLS

EC not monitoring ROs' compliance with directives

PANKAG KARMAKAR

The Election Commission (EC) is not monitoring the implementation progress of directives it issued to Returning Officers (RO) for a fair Narayanganj City Corporation polls, slated for December 22.

It issued several directives in the last two weeks to keep vigil against electoral rule violations, use of muscle power and black money, maintain the law and order situation and create a congenial atmosphere so that voters are allured to polling stations.

Several EC officials said the EC showed severe negligence over the monitoring and shirked responsibilities, passing all duties onto the ROs.

"We have appointed Returning Officers to conduct the poll. They are solely respon-

sible for taking all measures for holding fair elections. We will definitely cooperate with them if they seek it and supervise their tasks," said an election commissioner on condition of anonymity.

EC officials think that ROs hold the rank of a deputy secretary. They say working in the same sphere make it difficult for ROs to act against ministers, members of parliament, political leaders and even senior government and police officials.

It was noticed in some previous elections that the EC did not infuse courage into the ROs and other election officers. Without it, they will not dare to enforce the law on VIPs and ruling party men.

This encourages elections officers to take the safe option of overlooking irregularities, SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Fishing cat gives birth at zoo

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

A fishing cat gave birth to two kittens at the zoo of Bangladesh Bonyo Prani Sheba Foundation in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar Wednesday.

The mother and kittens are in good condition, said Sajal Dev, director of the wild animal care foundation. Four years back the medium-sized wildcat was rescued by locals from the haiaor of Sreemangal, he added. He said the mother and

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Rights activist Advocate Sultana Kamal accompanied by others taking a look at paintings at an art exhibition "Nature and Life from Hills" in the capital's Drik Gallery yesterday. The exhibition, being held by Hill Artists' Group to showcase and promote ethnic minorities' culture, will continue until Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR

Vatican honoured Bangladesh

Says Cardinal Patrick D'Rozario

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Vatican has honoured Bangladesh by appointing the first ever cardinal from this country, said the newly-appointed Cardinal Patrick D'Rozario yesterday.

"We are happy and jubilant because the creator has blessed Bangladesh...", said the Bangladeshi cardinal while speaking at a reception accorded to him.

The world can learn anew Bangladesh's tradition of harmonious living of various faiths and ethnicities through him, the cardinal said.

The archdiocese of Dhaka organised the reception and a prayer service at the Saint Mary's Cathedral in the capital, says a press release. Pope Francis on November 19 appointed 17 new cardinals, including D'Rozario, elevating them to an elite body that advises and elects popes.



Patrick D'Rozario

Distortion of history needs to be stopped

Bangladesh History Assoc event told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Underscoring the need for objective research on history, Cultural Minister Asaduzzaman Noor yesterday said a section of new generation are being drawn into militancy owing partly to the distortion of history.

He was addressing the inauguration of golden jubilee celebration of Bangladesh History Association at Dhaka University (DU).

University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Abdul Mannan said historians should come up with objective history and wipe out its distortion. Prof Dr Dipesh Chakrabarty in his keynote speech said with the growth of liberal politics in South Asia during the colonial rule, identity politics began occupying central stage in the growth of political and cultural institutions.

Prof Dr Kunal Chakrabarti and Prof Dr Tanika Sarkar of Jawaharlal Nehru University; Prof Dr Richard Eaton of University of Arizona; Prof Dr Sonia Nishat Amin and Prof Dr Fakrul Alam of DU, and Prof Dr Swadhin Sen of Jahangirnagar University also addressed it.

Solma gets travel document finally

SUBRATA ACHARYA, Kolkata

Solma Begum, 39, of Sundarganj in Gaibandha, at last got her travel document from Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata after around 19 months of her staying at a shelter home in Hooghly of West Bengal.

"I came to India with Golapi Begum, my aunt, for treatment but she left me. I have been in the shelter home for 19 months but my heart is in Shorbananda village," said an emotional Solma.

The Daily Star also published two reports on her plight. Her process was delayed as the identification procedure took longer than expected. BM Jamal Hossain, counsellor (political) of the mission, yesterday handed over the travel documents to her. "We are hoping that she will be able to return home by this month," said Abhishek Mukherjee, executive director of the shelter home.



Honouring the month of victory, a fruit vendor placed a national flag on his rickshaw-van in the capital's Nayapaltan area yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Maksud Kamal Rahmat Ullah

Pro-AL blue panel sweeps Duta polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pro-ruling Awami League blue panel won all the 15 executive committee posts in the Dhaka University Teachers Association (Duta) election on Thursday, leading pro-BNP white panel and left-leaning pink panel to a debacle.

Blue panel's ASM Maksud Kamal and Rahmat Ullah were elected president and general secretary respectively.

"The university's infrastructural development in the last several years, administrative role in maintaining a congenial atmosphere, and selecting suitable candidates were among the factors behind our absolute victory," Maksud told The Daily Star.

Prof Kamal bagged 890 votes while his white panel rival Prof Serajul Islam 359 votes.

Prof Islam, also convener of the white panel, said in the last eight years the university's incumbent administration appointed about 700 teachers, most of whom voted for the blue panel.

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