

**Editor (The Daily Star)**

Mahtuz Anam

**Editor (Star Weekend)**

(Dilshad) Elita Karim

**Staff Writers**

Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan

Fayeka Zabeen Siddiqua

Naziba Basher

Apurba Jahangir

Nilima Jahan

**Columnist**

Osama Rahman

**Staff Photographer**

Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo

**Graphics & Illustrations**

Manan Morshed

**Make-up**

Md Saiful Islam

**Production**

Shamim Chowdhury

**Published by the Editor from**

Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon

Industrial Area, Dhaka on behalf

of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel

C.A., Dhaka-1000.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

**"The world isn't just the way it is. It is how we understand it, no? And in understanding something, we bring something to it, no? Doesn't that make life a story?" – Yann Martel, *Life of Pi***

**SNAPSHOT**

**MAILBOX**

thestarmagazine@gmail.com



**MARRYING OFF TOO EARLY?**

A law drafted more than two years ago, stating that a girl at the age of 15 will be able to marry as a man-in-law with the consent of her parents, will hold its ground in the midst of major criticism. Turn to pages 8-9 to read thoughts and opinions on this draft law.

**And The City Stopped Moving**

Dhaka city and traffic jams have become synonymous these days. Intense traffic has gripped the entire city. One can never say how long it will take to reach one place from another. Frequent repairing works of utility lines, construction of flyovers, constructions of the Metro-rail network and piled up construction material on the roadside are mostly responsible for this traffic jam. However, in recent weeks we have witnessed a whole new factor of gridlock that completely stopped the city. It was the anniversary celebration of the ruling party's student wing. Law enforcers blocked many important roads of the city so that these students can move freely with their processions and motorcade. It was simply hilarious. And all these unrestrained festivities went on at the cost of the sufferings of millions of Dhakaites like us. I would like to thank Elita Karim for nicely highlighting these issues in her article titled "And the City Stopped Moving" published in Star Weekend on 13th January, 2017

Zonaed Imran  
Banaree, Dhaka

**End Persecution of the Rohingya**

At present, the Rohingya Muslims are often said to be the world's most persecuted people who have been facing the final stages of genocide. They have been made victims of gang rape, torture, eviction, arson attacks, and mass murder since Myanmar military started crackdown on the Rohingyas in October, 2016.

According to International Organisation for Migration (IOM), around 21,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh in the past two months. The UN estimated that at least 30,000 Rohingyas have been displaced by the recent violence. It is completely inhumane and unacceptable. In this regard, the Myanmar government must stop the bloody crackdown on the Rohingyas and rehabilitate them on their land ensuring their security. As a neighbouring state and also as an economic and political partner, Bangladesh has a responsibility to resolve the Rohingya crisis. And so, we should start bilateral discussions with Myanmar and other neighbouring countries. Alongside, the international community should exert pressure on Myanmar to bring an end to the oppression of the Rohingyas.

Toufik Ahmed  
Department of International Relations  
University of Rajshahi

**NCTB's Textbook Blunder**

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board has been publishing textbook for primary and secondary school students since Bangladesh's liberation. Once upon a time NCTB published textbooks that were adorned with beautiful paintings of veteran artists like Hashem Khan and Murtoza Bashir. Those books, full of splendid artworks and stories, poems, articles with strong moral values used to teach students how to live in peace, harmony and with discipline. On the other hand, currently NCTB is publishing four colour textbooks printed in high quality paper but the content value of the textbooks has decreased immensely. We are appalled by the fact that our children have been learning false information through the books published by our own government. The government must take immediate steps to withdraw these textbooks full of errors and misprints.

Abraar Khan  
Banani, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR LIFE

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

**INTERVIEW**

Bangladesh becomes the destination for hundreds of bird species every winter. Birds from the remotest corners of the world such as Siberia, Mongolia, and the Tibetan plateau come to Bangladesh to enjoy the country's temperate winter and to feed from the bounty of fish in the shallow rivers and canals. Many of these migratory birds are very rare and critically endangered due to the alarming rate of habitat destruction and poaching in Bangladesh. Renowned ornithologist Enam Ul Haque talks with the Star Weekend on the conservation of migratory birds.

**How many bird species migrate to Bangladesh every winter?**

Around 300 bird species migrate to Bangladesh every winter. Many of these birds are actually born here during the winter months. For example, Pallas's Fish Eagle breeds in Bangladesh, leave the country in spring and come back in the beginning of every winter. So, most of these birds are not actually "guest birds" rather they originate from this land. Bangladesh's forests and wetlands become their home and an indispensable source of food from October till the beginning of March.

**In Bangladesh, where can we find the largest concentration of migratory birds?**

We find the largest concentration of migratory birds in the Haor (large wetlands in the north-eastern part of Bangladesh) areas. Eight to ten years ago, around 4 to 5 hundred thousand migratory birds could be seen in big haors such as Hakaluki or Tanguar Haor but the number is decreasing. Last year, we counted only around 1 hundred thousand birds in these wetlands. However, only 80 species of migratory birds are aquatic. Many of us synonymise migratory birds with aquatic birds because migratory water birds are more visible. But, the rest 220 species of migratory birds live in the forests and bushes.

**What is the reason behind such a sharp decline in the number of migratory birds in Bangladesh?**

The main reason is habitat destruction and poaching. Natural wetlands are being covered to make way for farmlands and new human settlements. Even the existing rivers and wetlands are so over harvested that very little food remain for the birds and their chicks. People do not even spare slugs, snails and reeds. They collect these valuable components of aquatic ecosystem to produce poultry and cattle feed. Poaching is also a very big threat.



**PROTECTING THE IMPERILLED MIGRATORY BIRDS**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH ENAM UL HAQUE**

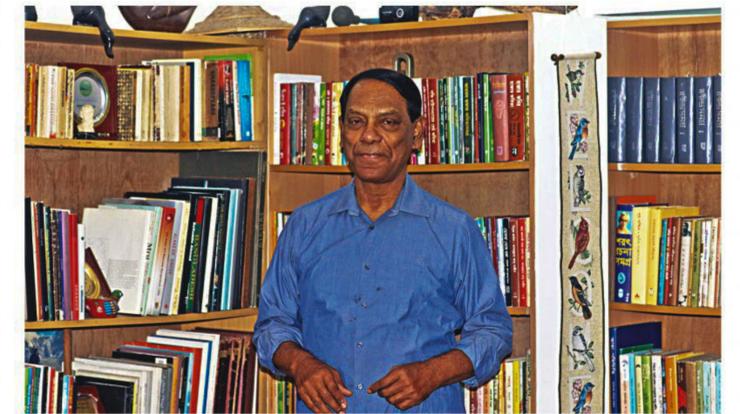
MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

We should keep in mind that migratory birds are more vulnerable than other bird species. Many of these birds perish on their long journey to and from Bangladesh. Then in Bangladesh, they also suffer from shrinking supply of food and nesting places. Again, they are hunted and slaughtered in large numbers for their meat. As a result, the number of migratory birds in Bangladesh is decreasing day by day which is very harmful for the riverine and wetland ecosystem of our country.

**How do you count such large number of birds every year?**

We have a team of trained ornithologists in the Bangladesh Bird Club for this rigorous task. We travel to the wetlands and spend weeks throughout the months of December and January to observe the migratory birds from a safe distance. We have to head count each of them. We also take note of the flying birds and diversity of their species. Then, by comparing the data of several censuses we get an average number of birds. To count the forest birds, we trek along the same forest paths for several years and identify the species by careful observation



Enam Ul Haque

and by recording their sounds. We also ring the birds and set satellite transmitters to collect detailed data about their migration root, feeding and breeding habits.

**What are the existing conservation efforts in Bangladesh to protect the migratory birds?**

Bangladesh has a very strong and effective law to protect the migratory birds and the wildlife as well. However, these laws are hardly enforced. Very few people in the rural areas are aware of the importance of protecting the migratory birds. Even our civil society is not that vocal about this important conservation issue. Nonetheless, the hopeful thing even

in this disappointing situation is young people are coming forward. Bird watching clubs have been formed in different districts to watch, photograph and collect data about migratory birds. I hope that their efforts will sustain and our people will be more conscious about protecting the nature and wildlife.

Ornithologist Enam Ul Haque has been working for bird conservation since 1990. He is the founder of Bangladesh Bird Club and also the National Coordinator of Bangladesh for Asian Waterbird Census since 2000. He has written many articles on birds including the Encyclopedia of Flora and Fauna of Bangladesh, published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. He is also the lead assessor of the Red List of Bangladesh Volume 3: Birds published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in 2015. He is an avid traveler, nature photographer and the founder of Bangla Mountaineering and Trekking Club.

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