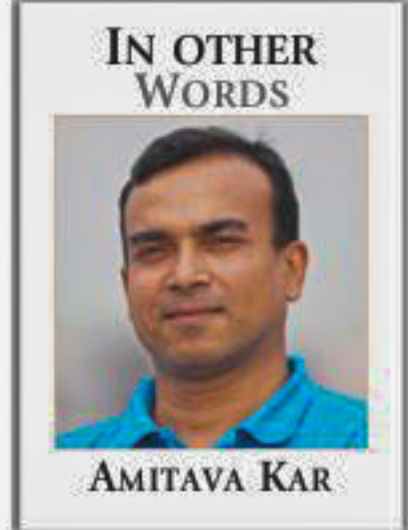


# Tourism gone wild



IN OTHER WORDS  
AMITAVA KAR

**M**ISMANAGEMENT, lack of a strategy and enforcement of law are killing tourism in Bangladesh. For example the natural forest of Jaflong is disappearing rapidly due to dumping of stone illegally excavated from the Dawki and Sari rivers by a group of

profit mongering traders. No wonder tourism in this scenic hill station, home to subtropical mountains, rainforests, tea gardens and the Khasia ethnic group is on the decline.

Jaflong is not the only place where such man-made problems are impeding the growth of tourism. In Kuakata, the panoramic sea beach in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, a man set up a bunch of sea-facing stores and leased them out to businesses for a hefty fee. How can this happen in a society governed by law? Who wants to go to a beach to be greeted by a series of ugly looking, shoddily constructed low-lying structures? Will you want to go to forest to see a pile of stones instead of flora and fauna and listen to the sound of stone crushing instead of the murmur of a river or a bird singing?

The land on which these shops were erected or the rivers from which stones were excavated belong to the republic, not individuals who put a price tag on everything from a mountain to a river. To these purveyors of bottom-line thinking these are mere items on a spread sheet. They are not concerned about the disastrous impacts of destroying nature. The local administration has occasionally seized stone crushing equipment but it is not known if anyone has been punished. Forest department complain that it does not have enough manpower to keep an eye on such illegal activities. That may be true. But the harsh reality is that illegal excavation of stone or sand often takes place, allegedly, with the blessings of locally influential people.

Despite all these constraints—inadequate and poor quality public transports, extended travel time, high-priced but low quality accommodation, lack of recreational facilities—the number of domestic tourists has gone up significantly over the years, now estimated to be about eight million annually. During the long holidays of Eid al Azha alone at least one million people reportedly journeyed to various destinations around the country. What kind of services do they receive for the money they spend? Then there's the issue of safety. The government has introduced the Tourist Police. But reports of harassment of tourists in destinations around the country are not uncommon in the media.



Jadukata River, Sunamganj.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

What if the tourists decided that the best way to dodge all these problems is to head elsewhere? In a way, they already are. During the Eid ul Azha an estimated 1-1.5 lakh people went abroad to spend their holiday. Nowadays, people who can afford to spend more than 50,000 Taka prefer to go to countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Nepal. Tour operators of these countries offer attractive package deals. We are losing out to them.

Why can't tour operators in this country offer similar deals? "They basically have no role to play," according to Major (Retd) Sk Abu Mahadi, managing director of an eco-tourism company. "People like to plan their tours themselves. They do not want to pay extra to tour operators. And why should they? What extra values can we offer? What kind of facilities are there for recreational activities? For example, there is only one safari park close to Cox's bazaar which is 28 kilometres away in Dulhazari. How many good restaurants, cafes and entertainment centres are there?"

Lack of regulation remains an issue. Taufiq Uddin Ahmed, president of Tour Operators

Association of Bangladesh (TOAB) said that hotels jack up their rates in the peak season making their job harder. "In many countries tour operators can buy duty-free or low-duty cars. We do not have that opportunity here," he added.

Parjatan Corporation is the public agency responsible for implementation of tourism projects undertaken by the government. It has built hotels and motels across the country. Many guests, however, give them poor marks for their services. Aparup Chowdhury PhD, the Chairman of Parjatan Corporation said, "We have many limitations. Our buildings are old and our furniture outdated. We have tried to redecorate with used furniture. But can that compete with the amenities provided by luxury hotels?"

Bangladesh Tourism Board, the other tourism-related arm of the government, is responsible for promotional activities, product identification and development, training, awareness building and branding. Taufiq Uddin Ahmed, president of TOAB complained that it does not even have brochures for all the tourist

destinations of Bangladesh.

Everyone has their grievances. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, CEO of Bangladesh Tourism Board said, "Despite having a budgetary constraint, we publish materials on attractive destinations and themes on a regular basis. We also promote our activities on local TV channels and social media."

All these are major challenges and demand a well defined strategy. Then there is another aspect to mass tourism. What if tourists killed tourism in Bangladesh? In many places including the Sundarbans, people go, cook, eat, and play music on loudspeakers and leave behind huge amount of garbage without the slightest care for environment or local communities.

If tourism has to be sustainable, both the authorities and the tourists will have to be more responsible. Community-based tourism is the only way. It is our constitutional duty to protect and conserve the environment and biodiversity.

The writer is a member of the Editorial Team at The Daily Star.

## 95TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF DR. AHMED SHARIF

# Remembering a towering scholar

**NEHAL KARIM**

**D**R. Ahmed Sharif was a misunderstood personality in the socio-cultural life of our time. He was a towering scholar, researcher of Bangla literature and a forerunner of free thought movements in Bangladesh. A man with a deep sense of dignity who was a true non-conformist, a former chairman and professor of the Bangla Department, University of Dhaka, Dr. Ahmed Sharif's life can be divided into two broad lines - his literary and intellectual side, and his socio-cultural and philosophical side.

Dr. Ahmed Sharif, who hailed from Patiya, Chittagong, obtained his Masters in Bangla Literature from Dhaka University in 1933, and Ph.D. degree in the same subject in 1967. From 1945 to 1949, he taught at Laksham Nawab Faizunnessa College and later at Feni College. In 1950, he joined as Research Assistant in the Bangla Department, University of Dhaka and retired as Chairman and Professor in 1983. During his teaching life in the university, he was elected as a member of the university senate, as well as member for the university

syndicate, alongside being nominated as the president of the Teachers Association, and the University Teachers Club. Till date, Dr. Sharif is the only person to be elected as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts for three consecutive terms. After his retirement from the Dhaka University, he was offered the opportunity to join the University of Chittagong as the first "Kazi Nazrul Islam Professor", where he served for two years from 1984 to 1986.

He was the recipient of many honours and awards for his outstanding contributions in the field of medieval Bangla literature and contemporary socio-cultural-political essay. Amongst his several awards, the most notable are the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 1968, the Bangladesh Women Writers Association Literary Award in 1980, the Alakta Literary Council Award in 1989, and the Ekushe Padak in 1991. A major recognition came from the Rabindra Bharati University in India, which conferred upon him the Doctor of Literature in 1995 for his outstanding contribution to Bangla literature. Apart from this, he was associated with 37 different



Dr. Ahmed Sharif

progressive and left-oriented socio-cultural and intellectual organisations.

In his lifetime, he was the lone authority on ancient and medieval Bangla literature, the

discussions of which he enriched with many original contributions. He was the author of more than 100-research publications on history, philosophy, and socio-cultural and contemporary political issues. He single handedly edited 46 manuscripts of ancient and medieval Bangla literature, while a number of others were in joint collaboration. Two volumes of his *Bangali O Bangla Sahitya* (Bengali and Literature of Bengal), published between 1978 to 1983, are considered to be masterpieces by sub-continental scholars. It may be mentioned here that during his lifetime he wrote more than 34,611 pages while his handwritten pages stand at 13,844 pages in print. However, he never cared much for publicity or appreciation of his massive scholarly works. During his lifetime, a large section of the so-called liberal democrats and secular intellectuals of the country continuously denied his scholarly contribution and attempted to suppress his free thoughts. In fact, even after his death, they continue to do the same till date but no one has ever questioned his intellectual honesty.

However, many believe that one of his major 'achievements' was that he, unlike many of his contemporary scholars and academicians, had been able to extract the hatred and enmity of reactionary forces through the bold expression of his views and ideals. The late scholar was universally regarded for his ability to say "no" to various material temptations. His dignity and self respect never permitted him to be submissive to power. Among his Dhaka University colleagues, he was just an impractical man, a cynic seized with radical ideas who was never "clever" enough to work for his own mundane interests, as he never took any undue advantage of his scholarship position and influence to become wealthy, famous and powerful. The educated but often ignorant people of Bangladesh are not aware of this misunderstood person who played a vital role to provoke our ideas to make us conscious of our conscience.

The writer is Professor and Chairman, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka.  
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*The late scholar was universally regarded for his ability to say "no" to various material temptations. His dignity and self respect never permitted him to be submissive to power.*

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**MARIE CURIE**  
POLISH AND NATURALIZED-FRENCH PHYSICIST AND CHEMIST.

*Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Plants
- Soak up the sun
- Benefit
- Egyptian city
- Mouth setting
- English county
- Tick off
- Plucker's need
- Enlightened
- Last letter, in London
- Without break
- Avenue liners
- Empty talk
- Three, in Torino
- Misplaced
- Critic
- Be decisive
- Like a cardinal
- Asian entertainers
- de la Cite
- As expected
- Reunion attendee
- Big bombs
- Jabbed

**DOWN**

- "Sexy" Beatles girl
- Carry too far
- Canes' cousins
- Plop down
- Founded
- Tennis great Arthur
- Bar items
- First name of Lakers fame
- Spanish speakers
- Bookish group
- Unite
- Accomplishment
- Historic times
- Prepares to drive
- Types a password
- Police order
- Lingerie item
- Bank worker
- 28 Heart's place
- Monopoly cards
- Takes to court
- Simple denials

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

T	H	A	R	M	A	T	E	S
R	A	Z	O	R	A	L	I	S
U	N	T	I	E	Y	E	N	T
M	O	E	C	R	I	C	K	E
P	I	C	K	E	T	L	E	E
I	D	E	A	E	M	S		
M	A	N	E	R	E	D	S	
F	A	N	D	A	B	S		
A	N	D	T	I	C	K	E	T
T	H	I	C	K	E	T	E	A
C	O	R	A	L	E	R	A	S
A	L	O	N	E	R	U	N	E
T	E	N	S	E	B	U	D	S