

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Trees at Shatchori National Forest. PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Learning About Trees

Why learn about trees? For me, a tree is like a window into the working of nature, and by observing it I get insights into many of her secrets. For example, I can find out about the tree's life as well as various life-forms that depend on it: birds and bees, insects and caterpillars, butterflies and worms, lizards and squirrels. First, though, I must know what kind of tree it is.

But this can be hard. When in a place filled with trees – such as in a park, a forest or a village grove – we often become confused and overwhelmed when trying to identify them. They start looking alike and so we quickly give up on learning about them.

Here is the interesting thing. While the diversity of Bangladeshi flora is indeed rich, our tree species are very unevenly distributed. My educated guess is that just a handful of tree species constitute 90% of our trees. So the first step to learning and identifying our trees is to recognize two or three dozen common species.

What are they? It is easiest to think of them in terms of their function. For beauty we plant trees like *krishnachura*, *sonalu*, *shimul*, *kodom*, *babla*, *mandaar*, *palash*, *arjun*, *shishoo* and *jarul*. These trees can often be seen along roads and highways, inside parks, and around village homes. Many of them bring us colourful blooms in spring.

Among trees planted for hardwood the most common are acacia mangium, mahogany, teak, several other varieties of acacia and, to a lesser extent, eucalyptus. Note that most of these are non-native species carrying their original name with them. So if

you see a plot in a village with the same type of tree it is probably one of these species.

Then, of course, are the trees we plant for food. Most people recognize jackfruit, mango, lychee, *jaam*, coconut and supari trees. But how about *sofeda*, *golapjaam*, *kamranga*, *amlaki*, *bohera* or *koromcha*? They are easy to remember once someone points one out for you. For example, the leaves of *sofeda* radiate out like fingers, the *golapjaam*'s blossoms resemble fireworks.

Let us not forget those majestic trees that take a long time to grow but bring much beauty and grace into our lives. Among these are banyan, peepul, rain-tree and the *raj-koroi*. These trees appear to have no utilitarian purpose, but they play important roles in our ecosystem. For example, their roots prevent land erosion and their flowers and fruits feed countless birds and insects.

When I enter one of our national forests, I am immediately struck by the trees that I do not recognize. Even trees that I see in villages, such as *chhatim*, look different when they are so much older and larger. In addition, the forest species such as *chopalish*, wild *jaam*, *ludh*, and *hawal* look exotic and magnificent.

Once you learn to identify the tree species, you can quickly look up more information on it. How does it propagate? When does it flower? What lives in its leaves, branches and trunk? Is the wood useful? If you return to the tree over and over again, with some patient study and observation you will find nature opening up to you.

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Youth held for 'threats to Australian High Commission, Jaago'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A youth was arrested on Thursday for his alleged involvement in threatening the Australian High Commission in Dhaka and Jaago foundation.

The arrestee, Tausif Hossain Simanto, 28, a freelance photographer from Tangail, made the threats and demands of Tk 5 lakh to each places in separate emails on April 25 and 26, said Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The cyber crime unit of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTIC) unit of police made the arrest at the capital's Banashree area around 4:00pm on Thursday, he added.

Tausif is a BBA from Victoria University and used to work part-time for different e-commerce websites. The CTIC team seized a laptop, a cell phone and a router from his possession, he also said.

In the first email to the high commission, Tausif wrote that the ambassador was "under watch" and in the second mail he claimed that the high commission would come under bomb attack unless they electronically transferred

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Haor flashfloods caused Tk 5,081cr of damage

Says Haor Advocacy Platform

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The devastating early flashflood has damaged Tk 5,081 crore worth of rice, fish and fodder in seven haor districts in the north-eastern region according to government agencies, but actual loss is almost double, said Haor Advocacy Platform (HAP), a rights organization, in a bulletin on Thursday.

"Boro rice -- the main crop of this single-crop region has been hit the hardest. Rice in an estimated 371,381 hectares [of land] has been damaged," according to the bulletin.

The seven affected districts are Sylhet, Sunamganj, Netrokona, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, Kishorganj and Brahmanbaria.

The HAP bulletin said, "Improper maintenance of submersible embankments, heavy rain and drainage congestion, over-topping of the submersible embankment,

earlier than usual flashflood are among the reasons for such catastrophic damage. But, most importantly, lack of good governance is the main reason".

According to the rights body, over nine million people in the affected areas are suffering from scarcity of food. Farmers in the area are forced to sell their cattle at half price due to acute crisis of fodder. They cannot sell their lands either as there is no prospective land buyer there.

A condition without an alternative means of livelihood will force seasonal migration, the bulletin said, adding that the flashflood has caused unavailability of financial capital and agricultural input for farming. At least five years' time would be needed to recover the loss.

The HAP said respective district administrations have distributed 1,603 metric tonnes of rice and Tk 7,974,000 in cash

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A man, who is among around seven injured passengers, being taken to a nearby hospital as a laguna (a locally transformed passenger vehicle), inset, flipped onto its side while the driver was taking a right turn at a high speed at an intersection in the capital's Agargaon yesterday. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Three militant suspects held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday claimed to have detained three "Neo JMB" militant suspects.

Tamim Dari, 32, a former engineer of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, and his cohorts Mostofa Majumdar alias Shihab alias Hamza, 32, deputy assistant engineer of Power Grid Company of Bangladesh, and Kamrul Hasan alias Kajal alias Nuruddin, 26, were held in a bus on Jhitka-Gabtolli route in Savar outside the capital around 8:40pm on Thursday, said Rab.

They are the members of Sarowar-Tamim group of JMB, said Mufti Mahmud Khan, director of Rab's legal and media wing at a press briefing at its media center in Karwan Bazar yesterday.

Tamim Dari was a close associate and adviser of the outfit's chief Tamim Chowdhury, Mufti Mahmud claimed.

Teenage domestic help's body recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the body of a teenage domestic help from a hospital in the capital's Mohammadpur area yesterday.

The employer of Sonia, 13, claimed that she might have committed suicide by hanging herself as they rebuked her for having a love affair with a neighbour, said Jamal Uddin Mir, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station.

"We are investigating the matter," he said.

Land acquisition will devastate the poor

Mymensingh women's rally told

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The proposed acquisition of 4,366 acres of land for the new headquarters of Mymensingh division will render thousands of inhabitants homeless, said women from the area yesterday.

They said this at a rally at Joy Bangla Bazar in Mymensingh sadar protesting the government move under which vast tracts of farmland and households in char villages of Anandipur, Gobindapur, Ishwardia, Bhawanipur, Durgapur, Jelkhana and Laxmir Algi in the sadar upazila have been marked for acquisition.

The acquisition will devastate the livelihood of the residents who are mostly marginal farmers and sharecroppers, they said at the women's rally organised under the banner "Basatbhita Rokkhka Committee".

"We do not need such development that will devastate us," said a woman speaker.

The tension and uncertainty over the land acquisition is affecting the studies of hundreds of Higher Secondary

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Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) conducting renovation works in the West Agargaon canal, which include dredging and building of concrete canal linings. After implementation, the canal will drain more waste water and help prevent waterlogging in the area. But the way the works are being done involves risks as Wasa has not built a fence along the road to prevent accidents and erosion of the road, particularly during rains. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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