

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Bulbul chasing treepie.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Invasive Species

What do these have in common: fire ants, red-vented bulbuls, parrots, water hyacinth, asian carp, common mynas and Burmese pythons? Before answering, let me relate an incident from last winter. One morning I was watching birds in a field in Purbachol when I heard a commotion. Several red-vented bulbuls (*bulbuli*) were flying in circles over a mango tree raising a racket. Suddenly a larger bird, a rufous treepie (*harichacha*), emerged from the canopy and flew away swiftly. With stunning ferocity, a bulbul chased it. The treepie flew for its life.

The treepie had come too close to a bulbul's nest, and the bulbuls had responded.

The species listed above are some of this planet's most invasive species. This aggressive behaviour of red-vented bulbuls earns them a place in this list.

Invasive species are species of plants or animals that are not native to a particular location but have been introduced there by choice or accident. Sometimes people bring them to a new place (water hyacinth), sometimes they arrive in shipping containers (fire ants), and sometimes they are accidentally released from pet shops during burglaries (parrots). They may have evolved in a challenging native environment and acquired aggressive and predatory traits. In the new environment, which may be relatively benign, they use these traits to muscle out the native species and multiply quickly.

By spreading so quickly, they cause damage to the environment and the economy.

Our most notorious invasive species is the water hyacinth (*kochuripana*.) A native aquatic plant of South America, it was introduced to our part of the world as well as Africa. Legend says that the introducer was a German lady (the plant is called *germoni pona* in

some parts of Bangladesh) who brought it as an ornamental plant.

However, the water hyacinth grows profusely, creating dense mats that spread across the water, choking off water circulation and killing native plants and fish. It also provides a haven for mosquitoes to breed. A small patch of this plant can double in size in six days. Good intentions paved this road to hell.

Fortunately, in recent years I have noticed many farmers making compost with water hyacinth. Perhaps this will arrest or slow their spread.

In a way, the dense human population of Bangladesh helps keep many invasive species – particularly weeds and plants – in check. And unwelcome fish species are quickly eliminated by our legions of fishermen.

Some countries expend a lot of effort to keep invasive species at bay. A case in point is the fire ant which started migrating northward from South America and entered the US in the 1930s. It was causing great damage to crops and animals, so the US government bombed some south Florida locations in 1967 to stop them. The bombs were not made of explosives, but rather, a pesticide called mirex. Not only did the effort fail in stopping the fire ants' inexorable northward march, but mirex was found to be carcinogenic and persisted in the environment for decades.

Our common myna (*bhat shalik*) is another feared invasive species, particularly in Australia, where a determined effort to eradicate it using nets reduced its numbers dramatically. Note that the myna and the red-vented bulbul are not invasive to South Asia since they originate here. However they are listed among the world's most dangerous invasive species.

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House help 'raped, murdered'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A 14-year-old domestic help was strangled to death after being raped by her employer at Kumirhat in Sarpukur of Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila on Thursday night, alleged the victim's family.

Police recovered the body of Sonali Rani, daughter of Sorfullo Chandra Barmon and Gita Rano of Dakhkhin Gobdha village, from the upazila health complex on Thursday night and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy yesterday.

The employer, Krishno Chandra Roy, 42, an assistant teacher of Mahishkhicha School and College, went into hiding, said police.

According to Sorfullo, Sonali several times complained to him about being sexually abused by Krishno but when he wanted to take her away Krishno and his wife Shefali Rani, a nurse at the health complex, raised objections. Rather, the couple promised him to bear Sonali's marriage expenses.

Sorfullo, quoting residential medical officer at the health complex Adilur Rahman Adil, further claimed that Sonali was brought dead and her body bore several injury marks.

But Adil refused to make any comment until the submission of the autopsy report today.

On the other hand, Shefali claimed that Sonali committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling.

The victim's family also claimed that relatives of Krishno, who is an influential local, are threatening them over the phone so that they do not file any case in this regard.

Hefajat wants trial for May 5 deaths

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Hefajat-e Islam yesterday said the trials of "those who killed their leaders and activists" at the capital's Shapla Chattar on May 5, 2013 must be held someday.

They said this at a discussion and a doa mahfil at Jamia Madania Madrasa. Dhaka city unit of the Islamist group organised the programme in memory of the Hefajat men.

Nur Hossain Kasemi, convener of its Dhaka city unit, said, "Our movement will continue till the fulfilment of our 13-point demand. We cannot forget those who sacrificed their lives...on that day. Trials of the killings must be held some day Inshallah..."

Teenage girl gang raped in a school

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 15-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped by eight youths in a classroom of Purbo Jurain Adarsha High School in the capital.

The incident took place in the early hours of April 29, according to a case filed by the victim on May 1.

Court sources said one of the accused, Swapan, 35, security guard of the school, was arrested soon after the case was filed with Kadamtali Police Station.

Swapan in a confessional statement under section 164 before Metropolitan Magistrate Laskar Sohel Rana have confessed to his involvement in the crime, saying that he had helped the other seven accused enter the school premises in exchange for Tk 1,000, the sources added.

The seven other accused, including prime accused Shaon, 20, are still at large.

Around 6:00pm on April 28, Shaon waylaid the girl as she was returning home in Old Dhaka on a rickshaw after visiting a relative's house, said Kazi Wazed Ali, officer-in-charge of Kadamtali Police Station, quoting the FIR.

Shaon at this stage threatened the girl with dire consequences unless she got off the rickshaw and went with him inside the school nearby.

After she complied with his demand, the security guard, Swapan, confined her to a classroom on the first floor of the school.

Around one and a half hours past midnight, on April 29, Shaon came back and introduced the seven other youths -- Munna, Jalil, Swapan, Mishal, Masud, Sajib and Tanjil alias Tanju -- to her saying that they would all rape her.

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A sweltering struggle

HELEMUL ALAM

Nearly a hundred people were sweltering in the midday boiling heat, waiting in line for about an hour to enter Lalbagh Shahi Mosque.

Housewife Nahid Akhtar, fourth-grader Zidan Ahmed Sayem and the others have been out in the sun since 11:30am.

They did not get in the queue to say prayers at the mosque. Rather, their eager wait is for precious drinking water, without which their lives have turned upside down for over seven years now.

"We have been getting drinking water for my family from the mosque as the water, supplied by Wasa to home, has been really stinky," said Nahid who lives in Killarmor area.

Young boy Zidan of Dhaka Laboratory School has to shoulder the responsibility of fetching safe drinking water for the entire family by queuing up near the mosque.

"Since there's no other male member in my family and everybody else is busy with their work, I come to the mosque after I get off from school around 11:30am to collect the water," said Zidan.

Mohammad Shukkur of Islambagh said thousands of other residents of Lalbagh's Killarmor, Islambagh and Kazi Reaz Uddin Road have also been going through this same ordeal for the last seven or eight years.

They are yet to see any remedy



SMALL SHOULDERS, HEAVY BURDEN... A young boy, on his way back home, lifts up two heavy containers he filled up with drinking water for his family from Lalbagh Shahi Mosque in the capital on Thursday.

to their problem of getting filthy and unsafe drinking water with putrid stench. The complaints they made to the Dhaka Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority) over the years, have apparently fallen in deaf ears.

As most of the people in the neighbourhood cannot afford to buy expensive bottled water, the authorities of Lalbagh Shahi Mosque came to their rescue,

Shukkur said. The mosque authorities allow the locals get water from its taps for a total of three hours a day -- during the day from 12:00pm to 2:00pm and at night from 8:00pm to 9:00pm.

When contacted, Sujabot Ali, executive engineer of Wasa Zone 2, said, leaks in the worn out supply pipeline is the primary cause behind the water contamination in the area.

Replacement work of Wasa's water supply lines is currently going on and they will start replacing supply pipes in Lalbagh area this December. The water contamination problem in the area would be resolved once the work is completed, he hoped.

In the meantime, if any resident of the area files any written complaint with them, they would take necessary steps to solve it.



Razashon Khal, a drainage canal in Razashon area of Savar on the outskirts of the capital, has been choked with garbage and aquatic plants. Also, mindless encroachment on its banks and discharge of untreated waste from the nearby factories continue to narrow down the water body, resulting in waterlogging. Left, a factory has erected a boundary wall grabbing a large portion of the canal while the authorities concerned keep on turning a blind eye. Right, the area under the bridge has become a garbage destination for the locals. The photos were taken on Wednesday.



PHOTOS: AKLALUR RAHMAN AKASH

Ahsanullah teacher goes missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teacher of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology has been missing for one day till yesterday.

ABM Sohailul Doulah, assistant professor of the textile engineering department, did not return home after he had gone to the university on Thursday, said his brother Shaiquod Doulah. His mobile phone was also found switched off, he said, adding that the family has no idea about his whereabouts.

Shaiquod filed a general diary (GD) with Tejgaon

JOURNO SHIMUL KILLING

Shahzadpur mayor's brother charge sheeted in arms case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Police have submitted a charge sheet accusing Shahzadpur mayor's brother in a case filed for using illegal firearms during a clash that killed journalist Abdul Hakim Shimul in Sirajganj over two months ago.

The charge sheet was submitted to Shahzadpur Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court on Thursday, said Inspector Monirul Islam, also investigation officer of the case.

Following investigation, they came to know that the firearm carried by Habibul Haque Mintu, brother of Halimul Haque Miru, was used during the clash and the bullet that hit Shimul in the head was fired



Shimul

from the gun, said the IO.

Shimul, a correspondent of the Daily Samakal, was shot during the factional clash of Awami League near the mayor's house on February 2. He succumbed to his wounds on the way to Dhaka the following day.

His wife Nurunnahar Begum filed a murder case with Shahzadpur Police Station on the day, accusing 25 people, including the mayor and his brother.

The same day, police filed an arms case in connection with the incident.

Earlier on May 2, police submitted another charge sheet in the murder case, accusing 38 people, including Miru, Mintu and an AL leader Nasir Uddin.

Two die in Jessore lightning

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Two people were killed by lightning in separate incidents in Jhikargachha upazila of Jessore yesterday.

The deceased were Yunus Ali, 25, of Nischintopur village and Jasimuddin, 30, of Baisa village under the upazila.

Masud Karim, officer-in-charge of Jhikargachha Police Station, said lightning struck them while they were working in a paddy field during storm in the morning. They died on the spot.

FACTIONAL CLASH AT CU 3 BCL leaders held

CU CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday detained three leaders of Chittagong University (CU) unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

The three are -- CU unit BCL deputy relief and disaster secretary Niaz Uddin, assistant secretary Jahangir Rasel and library affairs secretary Abu Bakar Toha.

Police also seized a shutter gun from Niaz and Rasel's possession. The duo were detained from the university's gate-2 area around noon for keeping an illegal firearm in their possession, said OC Belal Uddin Jahangir of Hathazari Police Station.

"Meanwhile, Toha was arrested as he is an accused in three cases filed with the police station," the OC added.

Earlier, on Thursday night, police conducted a raid at six dormitories of the university following a factional clash on the campus that left eight BCL men injured.

During the raid police also arrested an outsider and seized 32 rounds of bullets, 35 machetes, two sacks of sticks and iron rods. Following the clash, BCL central executive committee on Thursday suspended all organisational activities of CU unit of BCL.

Judiciary not free now

Says Fakhru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday

alleged that the judiciary now cannot work independently "due to interference from the government".

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's May 10 unveiling of the party's "Vision 2030" guidelines would be held at a press conference, provided that they find a suitable venue for the programme, he also said.

Fakhru made the remarks while talking to reporters at a city hospital where he went to visit late BNP secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain's ailing wife Sahera Hossain. The 75-year-old wife of the deceased BNP leader has been on life support at Square Hospital since Monday with serious medical complications.

Regarding the independence of the judiciary, Fakhru said, "We've long been saying that the democratic institutions can't work independently in a country where democracy is absent. If the government creates pressure on the judiciary, it won't be able to work freely."

"From what the chief justice [SK Sinha] is saying now, it is clear that the judiciary cannot work independently as there's no democracy in the country

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