

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Whydah, Uganda.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

A Tale of Tails

Some years ago I travelled to Uganda. From Kampala I went on a gorilla-tracking expedition to a remote region. When returning to the capital, I checked into a hotel in the countryside, went for a walk, and spotted a distinctive black bird. It had a very long tail. Back in the hotel I asked the owner about it. As first she was confused but as soon as I mentioned the tail she immediately identified it.

Birds have tails of all shapes and sizes that can serve many purposes. In the case of my whydah, I saw it during breeding season when males grow a tail longer than their bodies to attract mates. After breeding is over, they shed the long tail feathers.

Long, brilliantly colourful tails are the most famous attribute of the peacock. The family known as birds of paradise is also noted for its tails. Some of them are bright and vibrant; others can loop around into circles. For all these birds, males attract females with their tails; females look for males with healthy looking, bright tails so the offspring can be strong and healthy.

But mating is not the only reason for birds' tails. We usually associate wings of birds with flight, but we should remember that tails are also critical for flying. The bird uses its tail – which is basically a bunch of long, lightweight feathers controlled by muscles at their base – to steer its direction and pitch in flight. In fact, another name for tail feathers is *rectrice*, a word derived from the Latin word for helmsman.

While taking off, the tail adds to the wing's lift function. When perched,

birds often use the tail for balance. What about other uses of the tail? If you closely observe a woodpecker, such as the common red-and-yellow one, while it is travelling up and down a tree trunk, you will notice that it uses its tail, along with its feet, to brace itself against the trunk. This is particularly useful when it is hammering a hole in the tree. The feathers in a woodpecker's tail are extra-stiff to enable it to brace while vertically perched.

Snipes are birds of the fields that stay hidden. However, during breeding season, they circle overhead while making a drumming sound to attract a mate. For the longest time the source of the sound was a mystery but now we know it is the rattle of tail feathers beating against each other. Some male hummingbirds sing with their tails to attract a mate. They dive from great heights – in front of females – and pull up at the last minute with their tails spread out, making the sound.

A good tail to observe is our magpie-robin's (*dael*). It often makes short flights and if you observe its flight carefully, you will notice that just before landing its tail spreads out in a beautiful (and easily visible) black and white pattern. That's when the bird uses its tail as a braking system. By flaring out downwards and creating drag the tail helps the bird slow down for landing. Once perched, it uses its tail, often flicking it, to maintain balance. When taking off, it spreads its tail for steering and additional lift.

Indeed, the tail of a bird has many tales to tell.

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Nimtoli memories haunting still

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Today is June 3.

It might be just another day for most of the people, but for the residents of Old Dhaka's Nimtoli, the day is a reminder of the horror of a devastating fire on this night in 2010 that claimed 124 lives, mostly women and children, and injured more than 200.

Seven years have gone by, but some of the affected families are still haunted by the memory and unable to get back on their feet.

Abul Kasem and two of his brothers still live on the same land with their 14-member family, where they had three houses before.

But everything they had was burnt in the fire.

"This was our home," said Kasem pointing towards the makeshift houses on the

small piece of land. "We are surviving as if we live in a slum."

Though the family survived the tragedy, they have lost everything, he said.

"It would have been better if we had died," said Kasem, alleging that their families did not receive any aid after the fire incident since none of them died.

Kasem, a father of four daughters, recently lost his tea-stall too. "I could not maintain it as I had to repay the loan I took to take care of my family."

Kasem's elder brother Nasir, 50, who used to be a factory worker before, is unable to work now. "He became mentally ill," claimed Kasem. "Now, two of his sons are working to help the family survive."

Their 70-year-old mother lives with Bashir, 40

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Stand by Abdul Jabbar

Urge Kader Siddique while visiting ill singer at BSMMU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdul Jabbar with his spirited songs inspired freedom fighters and the nation during the country's Liberation War in 1971.

The artiste of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra also donated money, collected through singing at different concerts, to the Liberation War fund during the war.

Now, the eminent singer is undergoing treatment at

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Maheshkhali embankment, built by Chittagong Port Authority to protect the port city's Agrabad and Halishahar areas from tidal surge, has turned into a misery for the dwellers. Recent downpour, induced by cyclone Mora, has inundated many parts of the city. But the water cannot recede smoothly due to the embankment, creating waterlogging in the areas.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

CITY

PROPOSED BUDGET

Boost for digital projects

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The huge budgetary allocation for digitising the government's system and services will speed up the ongoing digitisation process, said the experts and sector leaders.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith has allocated Tk 11,641 crore for digitising public system and services for 2017-18. The allocation, which is 2.91 percent of the total budget, is 40.15 percent higher than that of the outgoing fiscal year.

Of the amount, Tk 9,242 crore was allocated specifically for 76 projects that will be implemented by different ministries and agencies on health, education, power, information and law enforcement. Of the projects, national ICT infrastructure development project Info-Sarkar (Info-government) gets highest allocation of Tk 1,306.22 crore, reads the budget document.

Shameem Ahsan, director of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said Tk 9,242 crore is not a matter of joke. "Allocating this huge amount of money

also means something extra," said Shameem, also the former president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

There are around one thousand ICT-related companies in the country and every company could roughly get work worth around Tk 10 crore, Shameem added.

However, requesting anonymity a top entrepreneur, said handsome allocation does not always mean that the service delivery process will become faster and easier.

The industry insiders and experts also hailed the government initiative to cut customs duty on 94 raw materials and accessories required to manufacture and assemble computer, laptop, tablet computer and mobile handset.

The tax structure will help the country turn into an exporter of digital accessories from an importing country, said Mustafa Jabbar, president of BASIS. At the same time, he also expressed satisfaction on withdrawal of VAT from locally developed software and imposition of

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Not for mobile handsets

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The government plans to deliver all digital services through mobile phone by 2021, but in reality, they have increased customs duty on mobile handsets in the four consecutive fiscal years including the proposed budget for 2017-18.

According to the country's seventh five-year plan, all e-governance services will be available on mobile platform. Finance Minister AMA Muhith in his budget presentation also reiterated the government's importance on digitisation.

But in the budget, 10 percent customs duty on import of mobile handsets

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Sewerage water mixed with flows from the Deb Dholakhal, in the right side of the photo, has kept a portion of Dania Road flooded for the last one month. Though a bad drainage system and the clogging of the major canal created the situation, it has not yet moved Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority into action. The photo was taken yesterday in Purba Dholakhal.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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