

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Approaching Storm, Sundarban.

PHOTO:
IHTISHAM KABIR

A Serene Beauty

To get to Sundarban Reserve Forest, one usually starts early in the morning from Khulna's Rupsha river by boat. As the day wears on, the urban sprawl of the Rupsha's banks gradually change to rural greenery. Houses, factories and godowns are replaced by village homes, trees and cropland. River traffic becomes lighter as smaller boats replace the larger ships.

Around early afternoon – depending on the tide – your boat takes a wide U-turn on the river. You notice that the land on your left has become an elongated wedge-shaped strip with water on both sides. This is the village of Bania Shanta, also known as Joymoni, a fishermen's village. You watch the village – with its small boats, children playing and women working on the verandas of their homes on stilts – until it recedes into the distance.

And then you are in the forest.

This is not immediately obvious because you are not surrounded by trees. The river is wide, and the trees on both sides are thinner and shorter than you would expect in a normal forest. This is a feature of mangrove forests, where trees must work extra hard to extract nutrition from the saline soil. There are, however, no houses, no people, and very few boats.

As you go deeper and deeper into Sundarban, its serene beauty captures you.

At first it is the little things. On the river, instead of the floating rubbish polluting urban rivers you find ever-changing tapestries of multicoloured leaves accompanied by an occasional black pod, a Sundari seed. The sky above you becomes infinitely big and wide. You spot an osprey – hunter of fish – flying off with a large catch. The

air feels fresh on your skin.

By the end of the day you are immersed in the forest, with your launch anchored at a suitable point. You board the small rowboat that was towed along and enter a narrow creek. A series of nypa palms with large leaves – red, yellow and green – lines one bank. Colourful kingfishers fish from branches extending over the water. A clawless otter crosses the canal, stops to look at your boat and scratches his nose before disappearing into the jungle.

At a curve the riverbank swells like a belly, white and pockmarked with protruding mangrove roots. A *shikra* – bird of prey – dives into the roots, picks a finger-sized mudskipper fish with its beaks, and flies off into the forest. A nervous red fiddler crab rushes into its hole.

Keeping your eyes on the muddy banks, you see the tracks of different animals – deer, otters, birds – that have crossed the water. Then you see a larger set of prints, a tiger's pug marks, much easier to find than a real tiger. Jim Corbett could tell the tiger's age, gender and size from its pug mark, but for you just seeing it, still fresh because the tide hasn't washed it away, is exciting.

Mesmerised by the forest, you try to imagine it changing with seasons. Summer brings heat, humidity, but also numerous flowers which draw the Sundarban honeybees. With monsoon's rains the forest's greens saturate even more. Autumn and winter mornings are often covered in fog.

And on a clear winter day like today it looks like paradise on earth.

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Maniruddin Yusuf's role in literature recalled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The translation of the Persian epic, Shahnameh, by Maniruddin Yusuf is a significant work, said speakers at a memorial discussion yesterday.

Alongside numerous translations from Persian and Urdu, Maniruddin also helped enrich Bangla literature both as a writer and a poet through his own writings, they said.

Maniruddin Yusuf Janmo Shato Barsho Jatiya Uddjan Parishad arranged the discussion at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in the capital, celebrating his birth centenary.

Addressing the discussion, Prof Emeritus Anisuzzaman said apart from knowledge in Bangla, Maniruddin was also enormously knowledgeable in Persian, Urdu and English languages.

His translation of Shahnameh in Bangla is a significant work while his original writing "Urdu Shahityer Itihas" is also a reliable work.

Yusuf enriched Bangla literature through translations of the works of Persian poets Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi and Mirza Ghalib, and poet Allama Iqbal of the subcontinent, he added.

"Hopefully, younger generation will know more about him," he said.

Maniruddin Yusuf was born on February 13, 1919 at his maternal grandparents' house in Kishoreganj. He died on February 11, 1987 in Dhaka.

His translation of Shahnameh was published in two volumes in 1977 and in 1979.

Fazle Rabbi, former director of Bangla Academy, said Maniruddin Yusuf started translation at a time when there was a scarcity of quality translators.

His daughter Fatema Jebunnesa said they will arrange different programmes throughout the year to mark her father's birth centenary to be celebrated in 2019.

NON-RESIDENT BANGLADESHIS

EC considers enrolment in the voter list

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) is planning on introducing a voter registration system for non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs).

Though the commission has not fixed any timeline for implementing the initiative, it expects that the voter enrolment process can be launched by this year in some countries.

With over one crore Bangladesh nationals now staying abroad, the EC plans to start the voter enrolment process initially in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia – the three countries where the largest number of Bangladeshi expatriates reside.

The EC is going to arrange a workshop on February 27 at Bangabandhu International Conference Center to receive suggestions and opinions from stakeholders, particularly the diplomats deployed in Bangladesh missions stationed in the countries that house a larger number of Bangladeshis.

After receiving suggestions, the EC will take final steps in this regard.

"We're trying our best to introduce a voter enrolment system for Bangladeshi expatriates in foreign countries as soon as possible. We've already worked out the technical issues," said Election

Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury.

The commission has taken the initiative to ease the sufferings of the expatriates who find it difficult to be enlisted as voters during their short visit in Bangladesh, he told the news agency.

Participating in dialogues with the EC last year, many political parties suggested that the EC should enlist expatriate Bangladeshis as voters, he said.

He said a workshop will be held on February 27 with around 100 participants including top diplomats from Bangladesh missions overseas, officials at the Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment ministry and other agencies concerned.

"We'll take our next steps and shape the modalities after getting suggestions at the workshop," said Shahadat Hossain.

Initially, the commission is preparing four technical teams for the KSA, two for the UAE and one for Malaysia to enrol expatriates as voters with the help of Bangladesh missions. The enrolment will be done in phases in other countries, EC officials said.

They said the voter registration process for the expatriates under a pilot project might start in March or April.

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MARKET IN FLAMES

A furniture market burning as a fire rips through it destroying at least 20 shops in Colonel Haat area of Chittagong city yesterday. The fire started around 9:00am, and five fire-fighting units worked for one and a half hours to bring the blaze under control. The origin of the fire and the loss it caused were not immediately known.

PHOTO: STAR

Motorbike crash amid fog kills two

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A motorcyclist and his co-rider were killed when the bike hit an electric pole near Rashidpur bridge on Jamalpur-Madarganj road in Jamalpur town early yesterday.

The deceased – Rajon, 27, son of Rehan Ali; and his neighbour Mukta, 26, daughter of Afsar Uddin – were from Rekhirpara village in Melandaha upazila.

They were returning to the village from a cultural programme in the town. Jamalpur municipality held the event, marking its 150th anniversary.

The accident occurred as Rajon lost control over the motorcycle apparently due to poor visibility amid fog, said Nasimul Islam, officer-in-charge of Jamalpur Sadar Police Station.

The bodies were sent to Jamalpur General Hospital for autopsies, said the OC.



Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor visits a stall of "Kibria International Print Fair-2017" on the premises of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University after inaugurating the three-day event on Thursday. The fair is named after Mohammad Kibria, a former professor of print-making at the faculty.

PHOTO: PID

4 held with firearms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

A team of joint forces arrested four people with 25 firearms and ammunition in Lama upazila of Bandarban early yesterday.

The arrestees are Thui Sa Mong Marma, 35, Oikyo Marma, 36, Saimong Marma, 34, and Mifong Marma.

Acting on a tip-off, the team comprising Rapid Action Battalion and Bangladesh Army conducted the drive in Oazapara area, said Col Miftah Uddin Ahmed, commanding officer of Rab-7.

He said 25 locally-made guns and 2,037 bullets were seized from their possession.

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 3

Bina immigrated to the United States with her family as a teenager and settled in Chicago, her nephew Sakif Ahmed told the newspaper.

Bina's death remains under investigation by the Park Ridge police, authorities said.

No place like it

FROM PAGE 3

the young writers.

Publishers, at times, find it risky to invest in a new writer as their works are unknown to the readers, they added.

Debutant novelist Niaz Mehedi's "Aowal Bhat Ghar" was launched at this year's fair from Batighar, a publishing house. "I think a good book will always attract publishers. Young writers should strive to keep writing better and better," he said.

He said aspiring writers should not focus on trying to replicate some theme that may have worked for others. They should try to come up with their own style of writing.

Once a writer is able to achieve that, his or her work will get the attention, he added.

Poet Kazi Jawad Murchid, whose poetry volume "Noroker Chilekothay" hit the fair this year, said, "We lack good books,

especially in the poetry section."

Camellia Rownak Othoi, another debutant, said, "I enjoy interacting with readers." Her novel, "Otindria", was published by Dari Koma publishing house.

"I started out writing on social media platforms... After a certain point, I felt I was ready to get published. The response is beyond anything I could have imagined," she said.

Novelist Harun Pasha, whose second novel "Teesta" was published at this year's festival, said writers should focus on the content if they want to produce writings that will stand the test of time.

A total of 2,076 books have hit the Ekushey book fair so far. Poetry volumes continue to dominate the genres. So far, 618 poetry books have been released, followed by 358 novels, 279 collections of stories, and 113 essays.

Karnaphuli tunnel's

FROM PAGE 3

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China in June 2014, an agreement for the tunnel project was signed between the communications ministries of the two countries.

In 2015, a commercial agreement was signed with a Chinese company nominated by the Chinese government to construct the tunnel on government to government (G2G) basis.

Quader also said the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) on November 24, 2015 approved the much-hyped multilane road tunnel project under the Karnaphuli River.

Besides, a loan agreement was also signed with the Chinese government and its first instalment, US \$141.16 million, has already been paid to the construction company, added Quader.

According to the officials concerned, the length of the tunnel will be 3.40 kilometres with an approach road of 4.89 kilometres alongside 800 metres of bridges linking the main city, port and western side of the Karnaphuli along with the heavy industry-prone eastern side of the river.

The tunnel is also considered essential because heavy siltation on the Karnaphuli river bed has been a main problem for proper functioning of the Chittagong Port and also for building new bridges. The tunnel will also create scopes for establishing newer industries on the eastern side of the river.

Replying to another query, Quader informed the House that the government has sought monetary assistance from development partners to construct the second Padma bridge at Aricha-Daulatdia point. But the government is yet to get any response from the development partners.