

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Jarul flowers at Shatchori.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Strange Summer

Winter and spring comprise our best birding season. Shatchori National Park in Habiganj is no exception to this rule, yet I am here on a summer's morning. I do not expect the avian bounty of winter, but I still hope to see a few birds. And I want to see the forest in summertime.

Birds might be gone, but the forest is very much alive. After I enter the park, I hear sounds of many insects interspersed with numerous bird calls. Butterflies are out in full regalia. They flutter right and left and distract me from birds. Nonetheless, some are magnificent. I chase a few, but they are constantly moving and the ones that sit still usually have tattered wings. Butterflies have short lives, and at the end of a few weeks their wings start coming apart.

I make my way to the watchtower. Most of spring's flowers are gone, but along the way I see tiny orange-coloured inedible fruits, called micromellum, which are the smallest of the seventy-eight citrus species that grow in Sylhet region. Further up the trail, a vine has bloomed with white flowers. A crimson sunbird, looking like it dipped in red paint, flits from flower to flower eating the nectar.

From the top of the watchtower I see a large assembly of *jarul* flower in the distance. If you take a close look at just one, *jarul* is not particularly beautiful or elegant. But an entire *jarul* bloom can be breathtaking. The watchtower affords such a view.

Looking toward the horizon from high above, I am struck by the variety of the green that envelopes the forest. I was actually expecting a parched, dry forest in the peak of summer. Instead, there is dark and light green; reddish,

yellowish and bluish green; dull and lively green; sparse and dense green. The premature, heavy rainfall has allowed the trees to essentially skip summer's dryness. They went straight from spring's colour show to monsoon's verdant riches. Nice, but it also feels strange.

Not too many birds are around, but when I am waiting at the top, a loud *chik-chik* call starts up nearby. I squint for a few seconds looking for it before I see it, a small speck shooting from left to right, about twenty feet from me. It perches and I point my binoculars at it. It is a pale-billed flowerpecker, at three inches the smallest bird in Bangladesh, half the size of a *chorui* – a drab bird, mostly grey. Its boisterous *chik-chik* makes up for its size, and presently its mate joins and they zip away chasing each other.

To the north of the tower past the butterfly garden, among many magnificent trees stands a tall *chapalish*, a native of the Sylhet hills. Hundreds of fruits dangle from this tree: the edible *cham kathal*, coloured and structured like a small jackfruit but sour. This morning a pair of gorgeous orange-breasted green pigeons fly in from far away and land on the tree. They move from branch to branch checking the fruits before deciding to launch into another long flight.

Perhaps the fruits are not ripe enough. The sky which has looked ominous all morning now darkens with a real threat of rain. I descend the stairs and hasten back to my car. I have enjoyed the forest's beauty, but I can't help feeling uneasy how this summer is turning out.

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## KCC Polls: OC closed for negligence in duty

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Labonchora Police Station in Khulna, was closed by Khulna Metropolitan Police on Wednesday, for negligence in duty at polling centres during the Khulna City Corporation election.

On election day, local ward leaders of Awami League entered the Labonchora government primary school and ward 31 councilor office centres, and rigged votes.

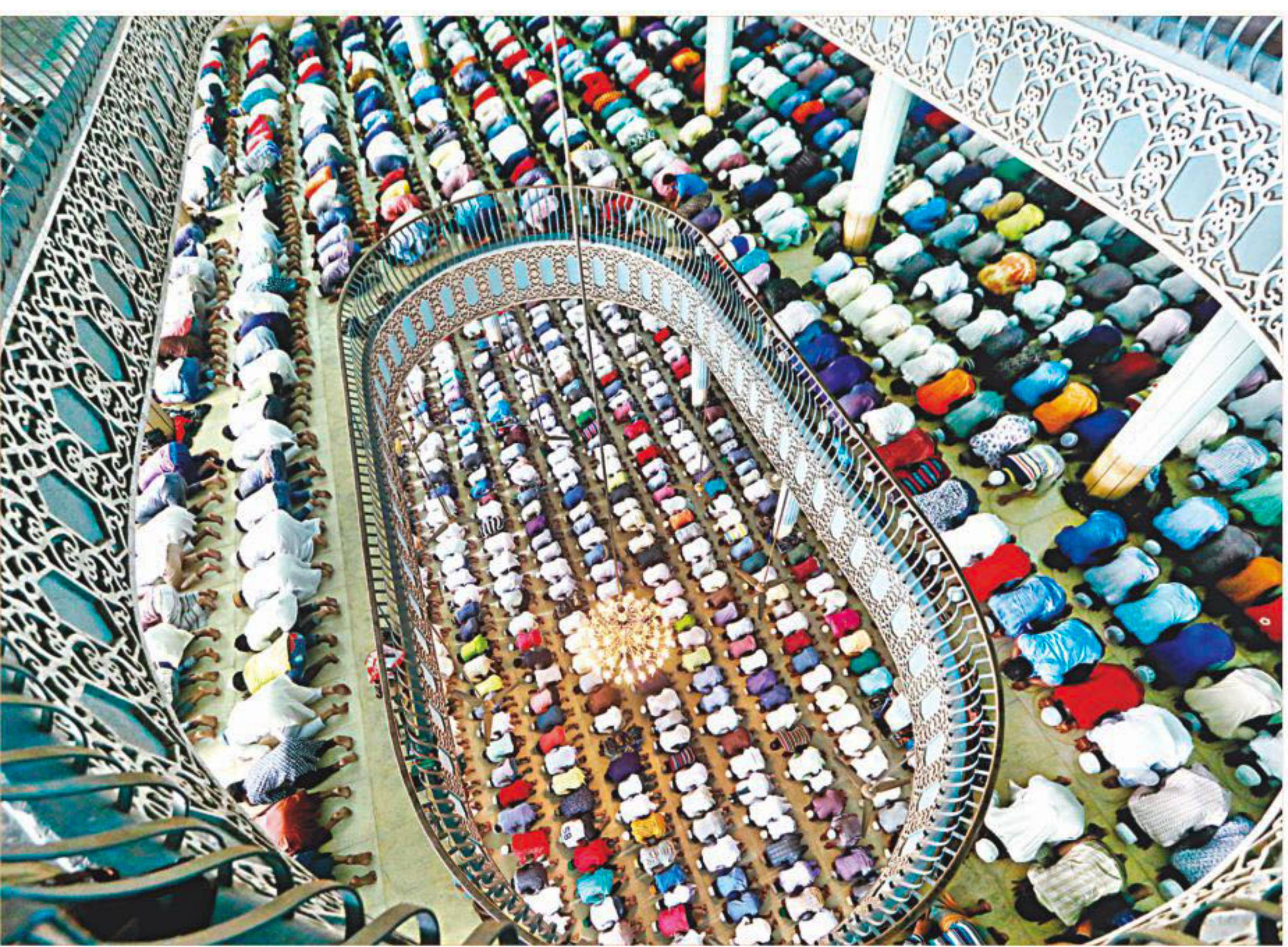
Independent ward councilor candidate Arif Hossain Mithu complained to the Presiding Officer. The PO then asked help from local police, but the OC did not take any action. Later, the Election Commission

stopped vote taking at the two centres.

"KMP closed Shafiqul Islam to Khulna Police Lines as he didn't take action against vote rigging," said Sonali Sen, additional deputy police commissioner of KMP.

Mithu and Jahangir Hossain Helal, another independent councilor candidate of ward 31, alleged to this correspondent that Asaduzzaman Rashel, general secretary of city unit AL and councilor candidate of the ward, led the vote rigging.

Contacted, Rashel flatly denied the allegation. "Other candidates got more votes than me in other centres. If there was vote rigging, this would not have happened."



Thousands of Muslims attend Juma prayers at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in the capital yesterday, on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

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## Chawkbazar: The original iftar market in Dhaka

HELEMUL ALAM

Ahmed Daian, a resident of Banani, usually purchases iftar items from shops near his home, but for a change this year, he decided to break fast with Ramadhan-specials of Chawkbazar.

The dental surgeon at a private clinic in Banani saw the Chawkbazar iftar bazar on TV, and it made him curious enough to want to check it out on the first day of Ramadan.

"Traditional items like Boro Baper Polay Khay, shahi jalipi or shahi pratha from this market are really interesting," he said.

Though the turnout was huge, he

enjoyed the experience, said Daian, who was excited to share the items with his family members.

"Boro Baper Polay Khay" is a mixture of chickpeas, minced meat, potatoes, brains, chira, egg, chicken, spices and ghee.

## WHAT'S FORIFTAR

KM Firoz and Nazmun Nahar, residents of Mohammadpur, are not new to this iftar market; they have Chawkbazar-specials at least once during every Ramadan.

"This has become a trend for us

over the last 15 years," said Firoz.

This iftar market is quite old; in fact, locals claim this market started on a small scale in the British period. The largest of its kind, it attracts thousands of people from all over the country.

Mishiat Ullah, who came with his daughter Israt Jahan and wife Salma Akhtar from Konabari of Matuail, said whenever they get the opportunity to come here and buy some of the food items, they do.

The specials are unique both in taste and appearance. More than 200 makeshift shops sell items, of which meat dishes are very popular. Some

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



When Ramadan begins, Chawkbazar becomes one of the busiest places in the city. This market offers a tantalising mix of meat dishes, some of which have Mughal roots, according to locals. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Govt silent on protecting the Sundarbans

Say green activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's silence over conservation of the Sundarbans has encouraged industrial activities surrounding the largest mangrove forest and posed danger to its ecosystem, environmental activists said yesterday.

They also said the government has not yet followed Unesco World Heritage Committee's recommendation of conducting a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) in the area before building large-scale infrastructural development near the natural heritage site.

National Committee to Save the Sundarbans, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolok (BAPA) and Waterkeepers Bangladesh arranged the briefing at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the capital.

They informed the media about latest state of the Sundarbans and criticised the government's silence over the longstanding issue.

Unesco has made it clear that no large-scale industrial or infrastructural development should be allowed in the vicinity of the Sundarbans before Bangladesh carried

out an SEA for its south-west region.

On July 9, 2017, briefing the media about the outcome of the Krakow session in Poland, Prime Minister's Energy Affairs Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said the government would continue building the Rampal power plant and do an SEA as per Unesco's request.

Addressing yesterday's briefing, rights activist Sultana Kamal said the government, during the Krakow session, had agreed to follow the Unesco resolution. But now it intends to go ahead with the Rampal power plant project, she said.

She also said that during her recent visit to Switzerland and France she met some officials of the heritage committee, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and Ramsar Convention treaty.

"It [the forest] is facing extreme danger at present. We should realise what will happen once the operation of Rampal power plant project begins," she added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## Ensure safety of minorities

Puja Udjapan Parishad urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad (BPUP) yesterday once again urged the government to ensure safety of minority communities with the national election ahead, saying they had been victims of violence before and after elections in the past.

Addressing a biennial conference at Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital, BPUP leaders also called upon the government to recover the lands of minorities from grabbers.

Sharing their experience, the leaders said miscreants used to threaten them not to cast vote.

Members of minority communities were also threatened with eviction, they said, demanding punishment for the culprits who were involved in the killings of minorities during past elections.

Speaking at the programme, Advocate Rana Dasgupta said, "We [minorities] want safety of our lives."

He said that the Vested Property Return Act was enacted to return the properties to their original owners. But unfortunately it could not.

He also demanded the recovery of 20 bighas of lands of Dhakeshwari National Temple.

Seeking safety during the election for the minorities, Joint convener of the Conference Preparation Committee Manju Dhaar said when election comes, it brings panic to the minorities.



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Govt trying to keep Khaleda away from election

Alleges Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday alleged that the government is trying to promptly dispose of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's appeal to keep her away from the national elections.

"Unprecedented incidents are happening under this government...there's no instance of giving direction by the Supreme Court to settle any appeal within three to four months," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

He came up with the remark while unveiling the cover of a musical CD on Khaleda Zia at BNP's Nayapaltan office in the capital.

On Wednesday, the Appellate Division upheld the High Court order that had granted bail to Khaleda in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division also issued an order to dispose of Khaleda's appeal petition challenging the lower court's verdict by July 31.

Fakhrul alleged that the government is working to take the case to the final stage in a hurry. It is unfortunate that the highest court is giving such an order, he added. The judiciary is the last resort for repressed people, but the government is now trying to use it for political gain, he alleged.

He alleged that Khaleda cannot walk out of jail despite getting bail from the Supreme Court as she is the main opponent of the government.

Fakhrul also alleged that the government rigged votes and barred people from going to polling stations during Tuesday's Khulna City Corporation election.

He urged the party leaders and activists to get ready for waging a movement for the "restoration" of people's voting rights and democracy.