

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Swimming Capybaras.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

The Pantanal

Imagine a *Haor* bigger than Bangladesh. It fills with water during the rains and empties in dry season. This is the Pantanal, one of the world's great wilderness areas. It is a wetland in Brazil's Mato Grosso state that extends into Bolivia and Paraguay. Covering between 54,000 and 75,000 square miles, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized for its ecological diversity.

The Pantanal boasts 390 bird species alongside an array of mammals, reptiles and fish. Pantanal's trees, while not monumental in the scale of the Amazon rainforest, make up in beauty and variety. They adopt various techniques - including hosting waterproof termite nests - to survive submersion half the year.

After a late-night landing at Cuiaba, gateway city to the Pantanal, our safari tour leaves the following morning headed for Pouso Alegre. The road is a flat, well-maintained highway with a view of distant mountains, some in Bolivia 250 kilometers away. The soil is red. The roadside trees are mostly unfamiliar but there is mango, guava and stretches of planted teak. Blooming mango trees disappoint me as I was hoping to sample the fruit here. Fenced off cattle ranches remind me that Mato Grosso has twenty-seven million heads of cattle and three million people. Humans are sparse: Brazil's 208 million people live in an area larger than the continental United States.

After passing the small town of Pocone we enter the famed Transpantaneira Highway - dotted by iconic wooden bridges - that crosses the wetland.

The first part of my tour is based out of a family ranch (or fazenda) which occupies 7000 acres. The affable fifth generation owner of Piuval Lodge is Louis Vicente, whose family traces its roots back to Portugal and England. He has worked to create a rich wildlife

experience for visitors. Indeed, in three days, I see Capybara, Giant Ant-eaters, numerous Crocodiles (called Caimans here), Crab-eating Foxes, Capuchin and Howler Monkeys, a curious arboreal Porcupine, a giant Tapir weighing three hundred kilograms, Raccoons, Barking Deer, Marmosets, as well as the glittering eyes of a jungle cat at night that was either a Jaguar or a Puma. Horses are also raised in the ranch.

While the animal encounters are impressive, it is the birds, including the exquisite but endangered Hyacinth Macaw and the playful Toco Toucan, which take my breath away.

From Pouso Alegre we travel to a different Pantanal location, the Taiaima reserve, to look for Jaguars. We stop during our four hour drive whenever we see extraordinary birds such as the Red and Green Macaw. After a longish stretch on unpaved road, we reach Hotel Baiazinha on the bank of the Paraguay river. Henceforth all explorations are by boat. Both morning and afternoon, our speedboat cruises the river and its tributaries searching for wildlife. We spot five Jaguars in the first two days. On the third day a cold front moves in and frustrates out Jaguar search.

On the river we spot several groups of Giant Otters. Raised sandbars in the river host hundreds of Terns, Skimmers, Plovers and other birds which breed, raise chicks, fish, and play overhead. The Kingfishers, however, are not nearly as colourful as the ones in Sundarban.

Our hotel appears to be the only establishment for many kilometres on either bank. Besides a few tourists, some fishermen ply the river. One of them reels in a massive catfish, almost the size of a man, and releases it.

The Pantanal may be Brazil's best kept secret but its memories linger long after my visit

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Immediately implement students' logical demands

Rights organisations and activists urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of civil society and rights organisations yesterday expressed solidarity with the ongoing student protest and demanded for bringing an end to the anarchy prevailing in the transport sector.

They called upon the government to immediately implement all the logical demands made by the students of schools and colleges.

"Human rights of people are trampled through road accidents which have to stop," said chairman of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Kazi Reazul

Hoque in a statement.

He said everyone has the right to safe movement but roads have turned into death traps due to authorities' negligence to duty and corruption of some officials in providing licence, fitness certificate, route permit, and registration of motorised vehicles. A section of dishonest bus owners are providing unfit vehicles to drivers, ignoring the law, Reazul said.

NHRC urged the government to stop corruption, misuse of power, and all kinds of irregularities in the transport sector.

Speaking at a human chain

organised by road safety campaign Nirapad Sarak Chai in front of Jatiya Press Club, its founder Ilias Kanchan said the government, as per its promise, should implement the demands of agitating students without delay.

"If every [government] department starts working from Sunday then I would request you [students] to return home," he said, adding, "If required, all of us will take to the streets again in future."

He urged the students to remain calm while demonstrating on roads and also requested them not to vandalise vehicles.

Kanchan, however, said that the government is planning to place the proposed "Road Transport Act" at the next cabinet meeting without considering some key issues on road safety.

Meanwhile, eminent columnist Syed Abul Maksud yesterday said that accepting the demands of protesting students and implementation of those are not the same.

He came up with the remark while addressing a human chain in front of National Museum in the capital, organised by a number of social and rights organisations.

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People from all walks of life join a citizens' rally in front of the Bangladesh National Museum, demanding road safety and exemplary punishment of culprits behind road accidents. Inset, Ilias Kanchan, founder of Nirapad Sarak Chai movement, speaks at a human chain pressing the same demands in front of Jatiya Press Club.

PHOTO: STAR

Call for a safe place for youth

500 join BYLC run

CITY DESK

Some 500 people yesterday participated in a 5km run at Hatirjheel to promote good health, fitness and positivity among the young generation putting forward the demand for safe spaces for them.

Enduring early morning rain, runners of different ages joined the event, organised by Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, observing this year's UN International Youth Day's theme "Safe Spaces for Youth", said a press release.

By bringing people together to run through part of the city, BYLC hopes to draw attention to youth's right to physical as well as intellectual safe spaces, where they are able to engage in recreational activities, participate in decision-making processes, and express themselves freely.

Speaking as the chief guest, Youth and Sports Secretary Md Ashadul Islam said his ministry is committed to working with young people to help improve

their health, livelihood and safety.

Speaking about the event, Founder and President of BYLC Ejah Ahmad said it is imperative that the youth have the space and opportunities to stay healthy, safe and active.

"We also wanted to bring focus to this year's UN International Youth Day's theme of Safe Space for Youth as cities in Bangladesh have become

increasingly dangerous for young people," he said, adding that the event was dedicated to the students who met untimely deaths due to road accidents and to those who are fighting for better road safety.

The run was organised with support from Praava Health, Elite Force and Paragon Group.



Participants at the starting line of the 5km run at Hatirjheel. PHOTO: COLLECTED

HC orders closure of 340 illegal sawmills in Pabna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has directed authorities concerned of the government to immediately stop operations of 340 illegal sawmills running in different areas of Pabna, and to submit a report to the court.

The directive was issued to director general of department of environment (DoE), divisional and district forest officers in Pabna and its deputy commissioner, asking them to submit the report within 60 days of receiving the order.

The HC bench of Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Md Ashraf Kamal passed the order on July 24, after hearing a writ petition filed by Lawyers Society for Law, a rights organisation, following a report published on The Daily Star the same day.

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'I just want my son back'

Pleads father of quota reform leader Moshur at human chain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The air was heavy with grief.

Family members of detained quota reform activists stood in silence for a while in front of Jatiya Press Club. It was around 4:00pm, the sky overhead was cloudy.

Saleha Begum, mother of detained quota reformist Rashed, a Dhaka University student, could not hold back her tears any longer.

"Dear prime minister, I beg for my son's release. He did nothing wrong. He just wanted a job," said a wailing Saleha.

"You are a mother too. You can understand the pain of another mother. My son is just a student. I supported him by working as a domestic help. He is getting sick in jail," she said.

Saleha was speaking at a human chain formed in front of the Jatiya Press Club, organised by Juba Oikya Prokriya, an associate organisation of Jatiya Oikya Prokriya (national unity process).

Her son, Muhammad Rashed Khan, joint convener of quota reformists' platform

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'Students seek a safe Bangladesh, not a digital one'

Says Moudud Ahmed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed yesterday said others will also take to the streets soon, like students are doing at the moment, to vent their anger against the government's misdeeds.

"Our students are saying they want to see a safe Bangladesh, not Awami League's digital one," the BNP leader said.

Speaking at a discussion organised by Labour Party at the National Press Club in Dhaka, the former law minister said the agitating students do not have confidence in the government's assurance of meeting their nine-point demand.

He praised the students for carrying out a peaceful movement, maintaining discipline. "A student stopped my car today (Friday), and asked my driver to show the papers. After checking all the papers they said alright, and asked the driver to keep the papers at all times. I was surprised, and felt encouraged and proud," he said.

Moudud said, "Why are students doing this? They are engaging in these tasks as the government has failed to run the country properly."

"People are fuming due to rampant corruption and misrule; they will vent and express their frustration. Just wait and see," he added.

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