

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Pied Avocets, Padma River.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

BIRDING in the Padma

In recent years, *chars* of the Padma river in Rajshahi have become popular for birding particularly during winter. They have been in my wish list but my plans never materialized for one reason or another. So I was delighted when an opportunity came along to spend a day birding the Padma.

And so on a Friday night, my friend Niaz and I were on Platform 1 of Dhaka Airport train station, waiting for the Padma Express train to Rajshahi. The train was broad gauge with wide and comfortable compartments. We slept through the night in our bunkbeds and arrived at Rajshahi early morning.

After refreshing ourselves in the facilities of the spacious waiting room, we ate a breakfast of omelette, paratha and chapati at the station's restaurant and headed out. First we went to visit the bird ringing camp by the river, the subject of Tangents last week. Then we took a rickshaw to a ghat in the riverbank to meet our pre-arranged boatman.

The morning was spent exploring *chars* on the left (downstream) side of Rajshahi. We found Sandpipers, Ruddy Shelducks, Plovers, Grey Herons and a host of gulls. In one *char* we saw a flock of thousands of Barn Swallows moving about energetically. A large flock of Pied Avocets – delightful birds with upturned beaks that spend their time probing the mud for food – flew around our boat. But we had no luck finding the Black-necked Stork, one of our target birds.

At mid-day, we turned around and returned to our starting point. Then we explored the Padma upstream. Landing on a large *char*, we walked across hard dried clay covered by scrub. Hiding in the bushes were Indian Thick-Knees with their large bulbous eyes which scampered to avoid us and then flew off. On another *char*, we

walked inland a kilometer approaching a *beel*. As we stepped near a bush, four reddish birds, hiding in plain sight, shot out at great speed. They were Quails, uncommon to see and difficult to photograph. Two large flocks of Black-winged Stilts and Spotted Redshanks rested in the *beel*. The flying Stilts with their long red legs looked like ballerinas in the air.

I found these *chars* to be different from the *chars* around Nijhum Dwip near the Bay of Bengal. Here they were firm and sandy, as opposed to the deep, gelatinous mud in *chars* down south.

That evening we joined a group of birders, including members of the Rajshahi Bird Club, to search for a Scops Owl which was known to inhabit trees in an area. This was another of our target birds. After repeated scanning of all the trees in that area with flashlights, we eventually found the owl. It did not reciprocate the pleasure we felt at the meeting.

Because of the richness of the bird population in uninhabited Rajshahi *chars*, Bangladesh Bird Club has proposed creating a bird sanctuary there. If implemented, this would be a milestone for conservation in Bangladesh, to be enjoyed by generations henceforth.

Practicalities: Trains are the best option if you decide to go birding to Rajshahi, as flights arrive late in the day and you lose precious morning hours. Some boatmen know the birding spots better than others; it pays to do some advance research. When getting on the boat for the whole day, bring lots of drinking water and food to sustain you. Wear sun hats, comfortable shoes and sunglasses if you need them. Bring your camera!

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

AL awaits a big victory: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Claiming that their party is much ahead of BNP on all counts, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the ruling party will register a massive win in the forthcoming general election.

He made the remarks while addressing a press conference at the AL president's Dhanmondi political office in the morning.

Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, claimed that BNP is making "delusional allegations" about secretaries and police officials.

He said no mechanism will work unless people are with them.

About the murder of BNP nomination seeker and Jashore BNP Vice President Abu Bakar Abu after he came to Dhaka to collect a party nomination form, the AL leader said their party was in no way involved in the incident.

"The incident might have happened due to BNP's internal conflict. Awami League doesn't want to keep BNP away from the election in any way," he said.

About the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the general election, he said EVMs will not be used all over Bangladesh and cited the Sylhet City Corporation election was held using EMVs, which they lost.

Cast your vote even if it requires conflict: Moudud

UNB, Dhaka

BNP senior leader Moudud Ahmed yesterday urged the leaders and activists of the party and alliances to get ready for a difficult struggle on election day.

"It's our last chance and the last test. You'll have to cast your votes... if necessary by engaging in conflict. That means you'll have to go to voting centres and cast your votes by resisting those who will obstruct you. We have no other choice," he said.

Speaking at a discussion, the BNP leader said, "Your victory is certain if you can go to polling stations along with voters of the 'sheaf of paddy' by putting up counter-resistance against those who will try to stop you."

Nagorik Odhikar Andolon, a pro-BNP platform, arranged the programme at Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka, marking BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman's 54th birthday.

Moudud, a BNP standing committee member, said the government has become desperate to win the election by any means as its intelligence reports suggest that "the ruling party has no chance to come out successful as BNP and its allies are in the race."

"The government's blueprints and evil designs will fall apart with the wave of people in favour of the 'sheaf of paddy,'" the BNP leader said.

He came down hard on the Election Commission (EC) for its "failure" to ensure a level-playing field, and said the commission has turned into a "toothless organisation of the ruling party".

Moudud said their party leaders and activists are arrested regularly while many of them cannot stay at home due to harassment by police, even after the announcement of the election schedule.

"The prime minister promised to stop it, but hundreds of our leaders and activists are being arrested every day," he claimed. He said no official of the civil and police administrations has so far been transferred as the government and the EC are working with the same goal to ensure the victory of Awami League.

He said the prime minister held a meeting with returning officers recently, but the commission did not register its protest against it.

Moudud warned that Bangladesh will turn into a "failed state" if the EC fails to hold a fair election this time.

Preserving heritage

Garos celebrate Wangala in Dhaka

MATHEWS CHIRAN

At the break of dawn yesterday, a group of youths gathered in front of a field in the capital. Wearing "dakmanda" and "daksharee" (colourful attires made from raw cotton fabric traditionally worn like sarong), they offered prayers for a bountiful harvest.

The boys and girls also sang religious songs and welcomed guests with flowers.

Soon, the atmosphere became festive. There were children running around and smiling constantly under the watchful eyes of their parents, who were engaged in conversations among themselves.

It's an age-old tradition, and the festival, "Wangala", is still being observed by the Garo community. People of the community, who call themselves "Mandi", believe such traditions help them remain together and uphold their values.

The festival is celebrated in between September and December. Yesterday, hundreds of Garo celebrated Wangala at Dhaka North City Corporation field in Banani.

On the day of Wangala, Garos offer their crops to "Misi Saljong" (who blesses them with harvest), and "Tatara" (believed to be the creator of earth) and "Sushumi"



Garo children in traditional attire and ornaments showcase their cultural exclusivity in a dance performance at Wangala, the largest festival of the indigenous community, at Banani playground in Dhaka yesterday.

(who cures diseases and bestows them with wealth).

According to tradition, Garos consume crops only after dedicating it to the divinity.

The first part of the festival fea-

tured "Rugala" (puja and other religious formalities of offering crops to the gods), where the "Khamal" (chief priest) prays and implores the gods to receive the crops.

"Wangala was first celebrated in

Dhaka in 1992. Since then, it has been observed around this time," said Anitya Mankin, nokma (chief) of Dhaka Wangala Celebrating Committee-2018.

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ATROCITIES AGAINST ROHINGYAS UNSC should form int'l tribunal, says Malaysian FM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysia wants the UN Security Council to set up an international tribunal with a special mandate to try those accused of genocide against Rohingyas in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

During a parliamentary session on Thursday, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said the International Criminal Court (ICC) has initiated an investigation into the atrocities against Rohingyas.

"In this regard, Malaysia is of the view that the United Nations Security Council should also refer the Rohingya issue to the international judicial process, including the setting up of an international tribunal with a special mandate," he told the Dewan Rakyat [lower house of the Malaysian parliament], reports Bernama, state news agency of Malaysia.

Some 750,000 Rohingya fled brutal military campaign since August last year and took shelter in Bangladesh, joining some 300,000 others who had fled earlier waves of violence in Myanmar. They have been denied citizenship

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Every inch of land counts

Says BIP referring to rapid urbanisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) yesterday demanded that the political parties include planning and development issues in the manifestoes for the upcoming national election.

The organisation also called for preparing a master plan on land usage for the whole country to stop unplanned urbanisation and protect agricultural land.

"Currently 30 percent of people live in urban areas; it will rise to 50 percent by 2040. Therefore, proper

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