

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Cotton Pygmy Geese, Baikka Beel.

PHOTO:
IHTISHAM KABIR

Baikka Beel

Baikka Beel is a large, shallow lake at the southern end of the wetland Hail Haor. It is located midway between Srimongol and Molvi Bazar. The haor, whose 4000 hectares swell to 14000 in monsoon, is vast, but Baikka Beel covers only 170 hectares. It was set up as a permanent wetland sanctuary in 2003. Fishing is banned in the beel and its healthy fish population encourages winter birds to congregate here every year. It is perhaps the closest thing to a real bird sanctuary in Bangladesh.

Just over a three-hour drive from Dhaka, Baikka Beel is popular among nature lovers and scientists. The former enjoy and learn about the workings of nature, while the latter conduct research in the life sciences, particularly ornithology. The sanctuary has two watchtowers. Climbing these, visitors can observe numerous birds going about their activities without unduly disturbing them. Boating is also possible at certain times, though approaching and disturbing birds is discouraged.

Conservation in Baikka Beel has yielded positive results as both bird and fish biodiversity has increased here over the years. For example, in 2013, 160 species of birds were counted in Baikka Beel. Today, that number has increased to 194, a result of vegetation growth attracting more birds and extensive field work by scientists (including using mist-nets for bird ringing) revealing more species. Similarly, fish species have increased from 98 in 2013 to 106 today.

I have been going to Baikka Beel since 2005 and on a recent visit it was as magical as I remembered from my first visit here. I walked through a garden of *koroch* trees to the second watchtower. Climbing it, I watched as flocks upon flocks of ducks – Pintails, Whistling Ducks, Teals, Gadwalls, etc – flew over the water body. Groups of brilliant blue Purple Swampheens flew

back and forth between the lake's shore and the trees. Several raptors circled overhead looking for prey. These included Pallas's Fish Eagle and Eastern Marsh-Harrier. I felt I was in nature's playground.

But all is not well at Baikka Beel. Speaking later with Dr. Paul Thompson, scientist and development expert, who had worked with the original MACH project that created the sanctuary, I learned of the difficulties. Paul mentioned that Baikka Beel, managed and run entirely by the local community through their organization Barangina RMO which depends on funds generated from an endowment. In recent years the generated income has fallen behind inflation. Thus, basic costs of guards and upkeep are not fully covered.

A conversation with eminent birder Enam Ul Haque confirmed the issues faced by the sanctuary. Enam said that the sanctuary needs support to keep going. This support should be in both technical and financial areas. Technically, for example, it is important for the staff to identify and know more about the birds. Financial support will cover the costs of maintaining the sanctuary. In addition, the Barangina organization needs moral support to deal with continued threats of poaching.

Paul and Enam mentioned Friends of Baikka Beel, an effort about to start that will shore up support to help Baikka. This "Friends of..." is a common model that is used in many countries to help preserve important places. The "friends" take initiatives to raise funds, train guides and volunteers and raise awareness of the project.

Setting up of Friends of Baikka Beel is ongoing, but as you can see the sanctuary is a treasure worth saving. Please watch this space for future news about Friends of Baikka Beel.

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Allocating posts alone can't ensure women's empowerment

Mahila Parishad president says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) President Ayesha Khanam yesterday demanded that the government empower women through providing them opportunities to work and exercise their power, instead of assigning them only in certain posts.

"Allocating posts alone cannot ensure women's empowerment. Women should have the actual power to work. Not just postings, we want real empowerment – irrespective of religious and ethnic identities," she said.

The noted women's rights activist made the remarks at BMP's national council meeting at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) in the capital.

Bangladesh is going to be a middle-income country soon. Women have a significant contribution in the achievement, but their contributions are not recognised properly, said Ayesha.

The BMP president urged the government to create a balance in power distribution and ensure gender equality.

Referring to the recent incidents of rape, she said, "Beyond being a physical attack, rape is being used as a tool to suppress women's advancement."

If women keep moving forward and civil society provides support, no one can resist their advancement, she added.

Swedish Ambassador Charlotta Schlyter, UN Women Bangladesh Country Representative Shoko Ishikawa, and BMP General Secretary Maleka Banu, among others, also spoke at the council, that ends today.

Hartal: From pro to anti-people

Book on strikes over the last seven decades launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the last seven decades, as many as 2,230 nationwide and regional hartals were enforced in the country, according to a book launched in the capital yesterday.

Of the strikes, 611 were enforced nationwide and 1,619 regionally from 1947 to 2017, says the book titled "Saat Doshoker Hartal O Bangladesher Rajnaiti" (Strikes in seven decades and politics of Bangladesh) by journalist Ajoy Dasgupta.

The book published by Bangla Academy also claims that at least 655 people died, about 25,000 sustained injuries and about 17,000 were arrested during the strikes.

For the book, Ajay Dasgupta, deputy editor of the Bangla daily Samakal, compiled newspaper reports of the last seven decades. According to the book, 1,550 hartals were called centring political issues, 86 centring economic issues, 323 centring regional issues, and 264 for others.

Speaking at the launching programme held at Bangla Academy yesterday, National Professor Anisuzzaman said the book will be an invaluable source for researchers of Bangladeshi politics, economy and history.

Eminent political scientist Rounaq Jahan

HARTAL OVER THE YEARS

PERIOD	NUMBER OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL HARTALS
August 14, 1947 to March 25, 1971	84
November-December 1971	6
January 1, 1972 to August 14, 1975	22
August 15, 1975 to March 23, 1982	59
March 24, 1982 to December 6, 1990	328
December 7, 1990 to March 30, 1996	416
March 31, 1996 to July 15, 2001	334
October 10 2001 to October 28, 2006	321
January 1, 2009 to December 2017	660

said that the book has created scope for introspection and discussion on why hartals between 1947 and 1971 were more effective as well as how many and to what extent hartals were spontaneous after the Pakistan period.

"Why is public support for hartal on the wane?" asked Rounaq, a Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh and visiting scholar at Columbia University, USA.

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Popular folk-fusion band Joler Gaan performs at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, on the opening evening of Pran Premium Ghee-Anandadhara Pitha Festival. Other performances of the evening included songs by Baul Shaheen, magic show by Haroon Shah and a dance presentation by Turongomi School of Dance. The festival ends today.

PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Commonwealth secy general lauds Hasina

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland has praised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for development innovation, "the SDG-Tracker", and championing women's empowerment.

"Commonwealth under its innovation hub has placed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's social innovation initiative of designing and creating 'the SDG-Tracker' as a best practice for realising Agenda 2030," she said while receiving newly-appointed Bangladesh High Commissioner to UK Saida Muna Tasneem at the Marlborough

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A celebration of high-flyers

Edexcel High Achievers' Award handed to students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

High-performing English medium students were given "Edexcel High Achievers' Award 2018" at a ceremony in the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC) yesterday.

Some 572 students of international General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) O-level and 80 international A-level students were awarded for their performances, while 37 students who achieved world's highest marks in different subjects were also recognised.

These students have achieved a minimum of seven A grades and above in O-level, and four A grades and above in A-level examinations.

"I feel good. But it's not everything. I have to widen my sight to future achievements. I want to pursue higher studies in neurology... I want to work for my nation," Sinthia Ahammed of Changes in

Narayanganj told The Daily Star. She scored the most A*s (11 A*s out of 12 subjects) in the 2018 O-levels in the country.

"I never imagined that I would achieve world's highest marks. I want to do something for the people, for the country. I want to find solutions to national problems," said Mohammad Latif Mozammel of Academia in Dhaka, who secured seven A*s.

Speaking as chief guest, Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury Nowfel said, "Your achievements are a matter of pride for all of us. It shows that the teaching skills of O-level and A-level in Bangladesh have improved to international standards."

"We have commendable higher education system now in Bangladesh," he said, adding, "Of course, you [awardees] can go abroad for higher studies. [But] I hope most

of you [students] will pursue higher studies in Bangladesh."

He urged the students to work for the welfare of the country.

Speaking as special guest, Kanbar Hossein Bor, British deputy high commissioner in Dhaka, said, "The young people of this country... and all of you here today are living testament that you are the future of Bangladesh... You are actually global achievers."

The award-giving ceremony also featured a cultural show.

Andrew Newton, deputy director of British Council Bangladesh; Ben Greshon, international portfolio manager of Pearson UK; Harish Doraiswamy, vice president of Pearson Schools and Qualification in South Asia; and Saidur Rahman, country manager of Pearson Bangladesh, also spoke on the occasion.

'Autocracy in the name of dev'

Claims Prof Anu Muhammad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent economist Prof Anu Muhammad termed the December 30 election "farical", and alleged that the ruling Awami League is continuing its "autocratic and fascist" rule in the name of development.

"Ayub Khan termed his tenure 'the decade of development' but the 1969 mass upsurge is a good example of what awaits such an autocratic ruler," he said.

The Jahangirnagar University teacher

made the remarks at a discussion organised by Ganasamhati Andolon at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in Dhaka, marking 50th anniversary of the mass upsurge.

"There is no point of holding elections to upazila, Ducusu and Jucusu, if the government plans to do same as it did with the December 30 polls," he alleged.

Journalist Nurul Kabir, editor of the English daily New Age,

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BNP's decision to boycott upazila polls 'suicidal'

Quader says

BSS, Gazipur

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday described BNP's announcement of boycotting the upcoming local government polls as "suicidal" for the party.

"After the defeat in the national election, BNP is in a big crisis. The party has taken a suicidal decision by announcing it will not take part in the upcoming election," he told newsmen after visiting the construction works of Konabari flyover in Gazipur.

"It is up to BNP whether the party will join the upcoming Dhaka North City Corporation and upazila parishad polls. If they don't take part in the elections, they will suffer in the long run," he said.

The minister was hopeful that the construction works of Chandra and Konabari flyovers in the district will end by April next and ease vehicular movement from Joydebpur to Elenga.

"The construction of rail over-bridges at Latifpur under Kaliakair upazila and Dherua in Tangail district has been completed. Hopefully, we can open Konabari, Chandra flyovers and Latifpur, Dherua rail over-bridges before next Ramadan," he said.

Deputy Commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police Azad Miah and Superintending Engineer, Dhaka (circle office) Md Sabuj Uddin Khan were present on the occasion, among others.

Later, the minister also visited Kashimpur Central Jail-1 in the district.



Except for Friday, everyday from 6am to 8am French Road in Old Dhaka's Nayabazar buzzes with activity. People, mostly women, throng makeshift stalls set up by hawkers along the road to buy clothes and accessories. This two-hour market is also a place for gathering of friends and neighbours, who after offering prayers or dropping off their children to school, indulge in chitchat and shopping. The photos were taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Man dies under train

Family says he had gone missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahbub Alam, a sub-registrar of a Mirpur Land Record Office, died after being hit by a train near Airport Rail Station area in the capital yesterday morning.

However, family of the 48-year old said he had been missing since the previous night, and suspected that he might have been murdered.

Nazrul Islam, a sub-inspector of Airport Railway Police Outpost, told The Daily Star that the man was hit by the Panchagarh-Dhaka Ekota Express around 9:40am. The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Morgue for autopsy.

Abu Zafar, brother of the deceased, said Mahbub's driver dropped him off in the area around at 8:30pm on Thursday. Contacted around 10pm, Mahbub said he would be home soon. Since then, his phone was switched off, Zafar said, adding the family searched for him in the area all night.

Yesterday morning, Zafar called his brother's phone from the Airport Police Station; someone picked up the call and told him Mahbub had died. Zafar alleged there were injury marks on the body, but could not say if Mahbub had any enemies.

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