

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

The Birds of Heaven

Fifty thousand people travel every winter to Hokkaido, the northernmost Japanese island. Landing in the small airport at Kushiro, they head to the north-eastern part of the island and brave subzero temperatures and lashing cold winds – all to see a bird. But it is not just any bird. The Red-crowned Crane, white and black with a red spot on its head, is exquisitely beautiful, and its gracious movements on the snow captivate our imagination.

Cranes are large birds with long legs and necks. Due to their size, grace and primeval appeal, they have a special place in many cultures. There are fifteen species of cranes in the world, living on all continents except South America and Antarctica. In Bangladesh we had the Saurus Crane (*sharosh*) as late as my childhood, but it has been extirpated.

Due to excessive hunting, Red-crowned Cranes were thought to have vanished from Japan. But in 1924 a small flock was discovered in a wetland in Hokkaido. To save it from extinction, the bird was declared a national monument by the Ministry of Culture. Since then, Hokkaido's farmers have fed and nurtured them, and today their population in Japan is around 2000. (Red-crowned Cranes are also found in other parts of Asia.)

Each crane has its own territory among the rivers and lakes of Hokkaido, but in winter, when the waters freeze, they move around looking for food. Farmers in the island feed them at several sanctuaries created for them to help them through the winter. The cranes congregate at these spots, to the delight of birders and bird photographers.

Pairs of Red-crowned Cranes mate for life and females lay two eggs every year. For one month, males incubate the eggs during the day and females during the night. Young cranes grow their iconic red crown after one year and reach adulthood when four or five. They live an average of 25 years.

As I watch a large group of cranes on a snow field at the Tancho Crane Sanctuary, ordinary



Red-crowned Crane Couple, Hokkaido.

PHOTO BY: IHTISHAM KABIR

avian movements such as preening are punctuated by flashes of exhilarating beauty and bursts of excitement. The beautiful moments arise from two events. The first is when the birds land, braking at the last minute by spreading their wings, arching them back after touchdown and taking a bow like a dancer. The second beautiful sequence occurs when a couple performs its courtship dance. They point their long beaks towards the heavens in unison, going around each other, the male strutting and flicking its wing feathers. Excitement comes when they jostle and fight, elders sometimes chasing brown-necked

juveniles. Between these moments of beauty and excitement – landing, dancing and fighting last a second or two – they stand around, preen their feathers, or stab into the snow with their pale green beaks searching for food.

When the snow in the wetlands and rivers of Hokkaido melts in spring, the cranes return to their homes near the water to build nests. And the enthusiasts who came to witness their special moments go home with their hearts filled with splendid joy.

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MOSQUITO ERADICATION

Mayor Atiquel pledges 'crash programmes'

BSS, Dhaka

Mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) Atiquel Islam yesterday said "crash programmes" will be conducted for mosquito eradication and cleanliness in the city.

"We will launch crash programmes for mosquito eradication from the city, and clean up the drainage system ahead of the monsoon season... Concerned authorities along with councillors will try their level best in combating the mosquito menace," he said while speaking at a discussion on "Mosquito Eradication and Cleanliness Programmes" at DNCC market in the city's Mohakhali area.

Regarding mosquito eradication, Mayor Atiquel also said, "We will provide all-out support to DNCC workers in this regard, as we understand the difficulties of the workers, but they have to discharge their duties with utmost sincerity."

Warning officials and employees of the DNCC, he said, "I will make surprise visits. At that time, immediate action will be taken against anyone who is found negligent of their responsibility."

DNCC Chief Executive Officer Abdul Hye, Secretary Rabindra Sri Barua, Chief Health Officer Brig Gen Zakir Hossain, and ward councillors were present on the occasion.

SHYAMOLI SLUM
Eviction drive leaves dwellers under open sky

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They had a roof over their head just a day ago, but around a hundred residents of Shyamoli slum are now under the open sky, as law enforcers on Thursday demolished around 500 shanties in the area in a daylong drive, defying a High Court order.

Many slum dwellers, who failed to find shelter due to the sudden eviction, are still staying at the site.

"We tried all daylong but did not find any place to go, even after frantic efforts," said Mohammad Israfil, 45, who used to run a roadside tea stall in Shyamoli.

He said they do not have any home at their village, nor any relative to live with, for which he along with his wife and two children are staying here.

However, many others who could manage a shelter at their relatives' or village homes left the place after the eviction, selling possessions which they could recover from the rubble.

The 1.25-acre land of Shyamoli No. 2 slum, which had been occupied illegally since 1962, had been cleared on Thursday in the drive, said Imrul Hassan, an executive magistrate of Dhaka District who led the eviction drive.

This land has been allotted to copyright division of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs a few years ago, he added.

Although the magistrate claimed that the slum dwellers were given repeated notices in the last one year, slum dwellers said they did not move their valuables, assuming that the eviction would not take place due to the stay order of HC.

Zakirul Islam, 48, a rickshaw-puller who had been living in the slum for the last 18 years, said he got married at the slum around 12 years back, and was now leaving the place along with his wife to a relative's home in Tangail.

Though Zakir's parents had their own house in Pirojganj of Rangpur, they had to sell it due to poverty, and move to Dhaka, he said.

"The HC had stayed the eviction drive at the slum following a writ petition filed by Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) on April 9, 2017," said Advocate Shahinuzzaman, a lawyer of the rights organisation.

"After the period of the stay ended, the HC extended its order for another six months on February 6 this year," he also said.

"We will inform the court about this eviction," the lawyer added.



Residents of the Shyamoli slum stand amid the rubble yesterday, the morning after the eviction ended. Some of them were seen trying to retrieve their valuables from the debris.

PHOTO: SHAHEEN MOLLAH

'South Asian govts have failed to ensure rights of minorities'

Prof Muchkund Dubey says at Jagannath University conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Governments in South Asian countries have failed to ensure the rights of religious and ethnic minority groups, said Prof Muchkund Dubey, former foreign secretary of India yesterday.

"The governments in power have failed to recognise the rights [of religious and ethnic minorities], and take measures to redress their rights," he said, referring to Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh among other South Asian Countries.

Dubey was speaking at the inaugural session of the two-day long international conference titled "State and Society in South Asia: A Historical Perspective", organised at Jagannath University.

Jagannath University (JNU) and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies jointly organised the conference.

In his keynote speech, Dubey observed many governments of South Asian countries made delayed response to issues of religious and ethnic minorities.

"In many cases it was too late to even be able to deal with the problem," he added.

Dubey, also president of Council for Social Development in New Delhi, said that freedom of expression, right to dissent, non-suppression of diversities, upholding human dignity, ensuring human rights and special care to the rights of minorities are the essence of democracy.

"But South Asian countries have significantly deviated from that essence of democracy," he said.

Regarding establishing secularism, Dubey said, "Most of the South Asian countries subscribe to secularism in their constitution. But partial factors were introduced during the course

of implementation as in the case of Bangladesh, which has once again reverted back to secularism in a very steady fashion."

Soon after the Liberation War, Dubey -- as an UN employee -- came to Bangladesh to prepare a report on the requirement of technical cooperation for rehabilitation and development.

"In the report I quoted Bangladesh, among all South Asian countries, having the best chance of progress in development," he said.

One reason was cultural and linguistic homogeneity which none of the other countries [in the region] have. Secondly, sacrifice makes people proud and motivates them to move ahead.

"Today, Bangladesh is ahead of most of the countries in South Asia, including India, on many indices of social development like gender parity, maternal mortality rate etc," he added.

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GAS PRICE HIKE PROPOSAL

Govt must back off: BNP

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday said it would take to the streets if the government implements the "illegal" proposal for hiking gas tariffs.

"The government is out to increase the gas tariffs again to inflict sufferings on common people. An unjustified proposal was made to hike the gas prices by 103 percent only to plunder public money," said BNP senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

Speaking at a press conference at BNP's Nayapaltan central office, he also said the government's move to raise the gas tariffs is "illegal" and "inhuman".

"We must like to clearly say the government must back off from its anti-people move to hike the gas prices. Otherwise, we'll take to the streets with strong programmes to realise our demands," the BNP leader said.

Mentioning that gas prices were raised six times over the last 10 years, he said the go-

vernment's latest move to raise the tariffs is illogical, since fuel prices are stable in the international market.

Rizvi said common people will be affected badly if gas tariffs are hiked. "It'll also hamper production in mills and factories and increase unemployment."

He said transport fares will go up if the gas prices are increased. "It'll ultimately increase people's cost of living."

The BNP leader also renewed their party's demand for ensuring better treatment for their ailing party chief Khaleda Zia and her release from jail.

Last week, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) held a four-day long public hearing on proposals for raising gas prices.

During the hearing, Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd, Sundarban Gas Company Ltd, Bakhrabad Gas Distribution Company, and Jalalabad Gas Distribution Company placed identical proposals for increasing gas tariffs.



The 14th instalment of the Dhaka Motor Show kicked off yesterday at the International Convention City Bashundhara. The three-day event, organised by CEMS Global, focuses on the local automotive industry, segmented into three parts: automotive, commercial and motorbikes, and features some of the biggest names in the sector.

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Family support is paramount

High-achieving women share experience

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They all achieved leading positions in different sectors -- from business to journalism -- through dedication, grit and creativity, which was not easy for them as women in a mostly male-dominated society. But one common condition made it possible for all of them: support from their families.

A number of high-achieving women shared their journey to success yesterday, at a discussion titled "Encouraging and Influencing Young Minds to Dream" held at the CA Bhaban on International Women's Day (March 8).

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) organised the event marking International Women's Day (March 8).

Working in a male-dominated sector -- transport -- was not easy for Malika Malik Quadir, managing director of Shohro.com, a major player in digitising the transportation industry in Bangladesh.

Hard work and dedication are important to achieve trust in business, while family environment is more important for continuation, said the Harvard graduate.

Jatka Protection Week begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

This year's Jatka Protection Week, a ban on fishing young hilsa that are smaller than 10 inches in length, begins today with an aim to boost production of the national fish.

To observe the week, the Department of Fisheries will organise various programmes including rallies, workshops and discussions till March 22 in order to raise awareness among people, especially fishermen and traders.

State Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Ashraf Ali Khan Khasru came up with the announcements at a press briefing held at Matsya Bhaban in Dhaka yesterday.

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