

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Ice fishing in Hokkaido.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

STUNNING Hokkaido

Hokkaido is the northernmost of Japan's four large islands. It has many specialties: fresh dairy products, chocolate, seafood, an icy cold winter, stunning natural beauty and a variety of wildlife. For birders, Red-crowned Cranes playing in Hokkaido's snow is among the world's great avian spectacles.

I had wanted to visit Hokkaido to watch the cranes and when I discovered that my school friend Niaz and his wife Lisa had the same wish, we teamed up. Planning the trip took time as we had to find a guide. A self-driving trip is risky due to the winter road conditions. Besides, birding tours require knowledge of local birding spots. We were kindly referred to Tetsuji Hidaka, with a car, who knew the birding and wildlife spots, spoke English, and owned a beautiful lodge in northern Hokkaido where we stayed.

On our first day Tetsuji took us to two crane sanctuaries where the birds congregated. We joined many other photographers to photograph them.

But cranes were just the beginning. Over the next few days we saw large birds such as Steller's Sea Eagles, which migrate here during winter from Russia, and White-tailed Eagles, which live here all year. Wearing snow shoes we hiked in knee-deep soft snow, looking for owls. We found a pretty Ural Owl in a cavity in an oak tree. We saw a tiny pygmy woodpecker, tits, bulbuls, jays, thrushes and finches in the forest.

There were ducks in the ocean. The cold-weather ducks are not seen in our country and included the exquisite Harlequin and Goldeneye ducks. The Whooper Swans had an unearthly beauty, white-on-white against the snow.

However, birds were not the only attraction. The island has a large population of Sika Deer. Over the

week we encountered them in many places. They were shy in places where hunting was allowed, less so where hunting was banned. Older males sported magnificent antlers. But their plain brown colour was drab compared to Spotted Deer of Sundarban.

There was also the Red Fox with a luxurious thick fur, more handsome than our Golden Jackal, found trotting in the snow. The first one we spotted ran away. Later, we saw one close by that fixed us with a frank stare, observing us just as intently as we were observing it.

In the cold waters of the Okhotsk Sea we saw a group of Sea Otters. While we shivered in the cold wind, the otters frolicked in the water as if it were a warm swimming pool.

Several Spotted Seals also showed up in the water, floating with their eyes closed and soaking in the warmth of the sun.

During the entire week, I saw only one insect in Hokkaido - a small spiderlike creature in the snow. I saw no mosquitoes, roaches, flies or other bugs.

Although Hokkaido is sparsely populated (67 persons per square kilometre), we saw many people come from other parts of Japan to enjoy the region's natural bounties and snow sports. In the long narrow Notsuke peninsula with ocean on one side and an unbroken stretch of ice on the other, ice-fishermen drilled holes in the ice covering a lake to catch fish from water underneath using fishing lines. They pitched tents on the snow to stay the night. I was told that if you came here at dawn on a very cold day and watch the sun rise over the ice, it looked square.

They had photographs to prove it! [facebook.com/ikabirphotographs](https://www.facebook.com/ikabirphotographs) or follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

Air pollution choking Barishal

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

The air quality in Barishal city has gone far beyond the acceptable level as a government agency has been inactive for around eight years to stop toxic gas-emitting vehicles -- the major pollutant.

Official measurements show pollution level has increased continually during the period.

The Department of Environment (DoE) monitored air quality every year in January, except for 2014 [when the monitoring was done in August], in Rupatoli and Nathullabad -- the worst polluted areas.

It found lead and all kinds of toxic gases including carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide in the air.

Muntasir Rahman, an assistant biochemist of DoE, said vehicles are the main anthropogenic factor in air pollution.

Apart from this, industrial smog, brick kilns and dust from construction sites are causing air pollution in the city, said Abdul Halim, director of DoE, Barishal.

According to globally-accepted Air Quality Index (AQI), air quality level of 0-50 microgram (µg) per cubic metre (m<sup>3</sup>) is considered good, 51-100 moderate and 101-150 unhealthy.

Muntasir said 200 µg/m<sup>3</sup> is tolerable for human health.

But pollution level in both the bus terminal areas has exceeded the tolerable level since 2011, when the DoE stopped taking actions against liable vehicles.

On February 1 the same year, at least 50 people -- including five policemen and a journalist -- were injured in a clash between ruling party-backed road transport workers and law enforcers over a DoE mobile court drive.

When asked about the inaction, a DoE official, wishing anonymity,

told The Daily Star that they did not receive enough assistance from law enforcers after the clash.

However, Nasiruddin Mallik, assistant commissioner and media wing spokesperson of Barishal Metropolitan Police, who was posted two years ago, said there was no such example in his tenure that DoE did not get help on demand.

DoE Director Abdul Halim said their efforts are on to curb air pollution and they are continuing drives against illegal brick kilns

Nathullabad is located in the city's western part while Rupatoli on the southern side. Residents are exposed to air pollution as they have to traverse the areas on a regular basis.

Lipika Begum of Natun Bazar area takes her sixth-grader daughter Karishma to nearby Kashiipur School and College regularly. "It's unsafe and unhealthy to cross Nathullabad bus stand amid smoke," said the 35-year-old.

Around 13 government establishments -- including hospital and educational institutions -- are in

situation worsens while crossing the bus stand area."

Lung diseases like asthma, bronchitis and respiratory problems are caused by air pollution, which has taken an alarming turn, said Civil Surgeon Dr Monwar Hossain.

On an average, 500 lung patients are admitted to Sher-e-Bangla hospital annually, said Associate Professor Dr Siddikur Rahman. "The figure used to be much lower before at this major public hospital."



PHOTO: TITU DAS

A schoolboy walks along a road amid black smoke near Nathullabad bus terminal. The photo was taken recently.

LEVEL OF AIR POLLUTION (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )		
SOURCE: DoE		
Year	Nathullabad	Rupatoli
2011	196.28	188.2
2012	216.44	209.22
2013	241.24	231.38
2014	230.75	210.25
2015	286.14	277.18
2016	288.38	283.33
2017	295.24	286.16
2018	412.24	388.26

and factories.

Debasish Biswas, an assistant director of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), said, "Sometimes, we conduct mobile court drives but it is not adequate."

Around 20 percent of buses and 30 percent of three-wheelers contribute to the pollution, he added.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH

More than five lakh people are currently living in the city, according to the public relations section of Barishal City Corporation.

those areas. Patients are the worst sufferers as they and their attendants have to travel through the areas.

Anwara Begum, 46, living in Rupatoli area, regularly takes a family member to nearby Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital for treatment. "We sometimes get stuck in traffic jam at Rupatoli amid polluted air, which is quite harmful to the patient."

Akkas Hossain, 84, from the same area, said he has to get treatment at the hospital due to respiratory problems. "Often times, my

WHAT GREEN ACTIVISTS SAY

A clash should not be an excuse to refrain from taking actions against vehicles emitting toxic gas, said Lincon Bayen, divisional coordinator, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.

"They [DoE officials] should inform the higher authorities of the current situation," he said.

Shuvankar Chakrabarty, secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon's Barishal chapter, said if anyone is unable to serve people, he or she should not be in government service.



Rokia Afzal Rahman inaugurates SME Products Fair at MIDAS Convention Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

MIDAS holding SME Product Fair in Dhaka

CITY DESK

A three-day SME Products Fair-2019, organised by MIDAS Financing Limited (MFL), began in Dhaka yesterday, says a press release.

The fair is being held at MIDAS Convention Centre, House-5, (12th floor), Road-16, Dhanmondi.

Rokia Afzal Rahman, chairman of the company, inaugurated the event, which will continue from 10am to 8pm each day.

In her speech, Rokia Afzal mentioned that SME sector has been receiving special support from MFL for many years. The company is committed to extend its support to the small and medium enterprises (SME), especially women entrepreneurs.

This fair is designed with an objective to provide better service and expand the SME as well as create new entrepreneurs so that they can achieve their goals.

Around 49 organisations are participating in the event with their traditional, unique and popular products.

Dr Abdul Malik, Dr Harun-ur Rashid receive lifetime awards

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

National Professor and cardiologist Brig (ret'd) Abdul Malik, and kidney specialist Prof Harun-ur Rashid were given lifetime achievement awards yesterday for their contributions to health service.

Sahera-Hasan Memorial Trust accorded the reception to them, marking 20 years of Sahera-Hasan Memorial Hospital.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Chairman of the Hospital Trust Prof Dr Rowshan Ara Begum handed over crests to them at the award ceremony on the hospital premises.

As Dr Abdul Malik was ill, his daughter Dr Fazilatun Nesa Malik and son-in-law Dr Khondaker Abdul Awal Rizvi received the crest on his behalf.

Dr Rowshan Ara Begum and her siblings established Sahera-Hasan Memorial Hospital 20 years ago named after their parents -- Mir Hasan Ali and Sahera Khatun -- to provide treatment to the disadvantaged.

Several doctors at the hospital dedicated themselves to the welfare of patients.

Young at 71

Rajshahi man wants to shape a healthy society through bodybuilding

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Humans are destined to age and then pass away. Nevertheless, life smiles on some who find the key to being healthy even at an advanced age.

Rajshahi's AKM Matlubul Hoq Tipu is one such individual. Age may have turned his hair and beard white, but the father of two adult sons boasts a fit, muscled body.

"I'm 71 and healthier than many of my age," the retired government official says.

He has been bodybuilding for the last 56 years, barely missing a day, and his exemplary health has inspired many.

Matlubul achieved accolades in bodybuilding competitions and coached at several gyms. Eventually, he set up his own

gym at his house in the city's Kajihata area in 2000. His sons later revamped it and named it "Muscle Care Gym".

Sitting at the gym, Matlubul told The Daily Star that staying healthy is not the only reason he works out.

"I also teach exercises to all my students," he said.

Inspired by his sportsman father, Matlubul developed a strong interest in fitness in his childhood. During class nine at

"When I was younger I could bend iron rods with my neck."  
-- Matlubul Hoq

Loknath School in 1963, he became friends with classmate Moklesur Rahman. Moklesur's physical fitness impressed him.

"I wanted to have a body like his," he said. Moklesur took him to a gym where he started working out.

By the end of his college life in 1970, he won medals in short put, discus throw and hammer throw -- all games of strength.

In 1971, he took firearms training and spied for the freedom fighters.

After obtaining his BSc degree, he pursued a career at Rajshahi Education Board in 1974. After serving 25 years, he retired from his post of deputy comptroller in 1999.

He never quit exercising though, and won the fifth spot at the "Mr Bangladesh" competition in 1989.

His strength has decreased with age, but he can still use most of the gym equipment, he said. "When I was younger I could bend iron rods with my neck."

Besides bodybuilding, he plays the flute

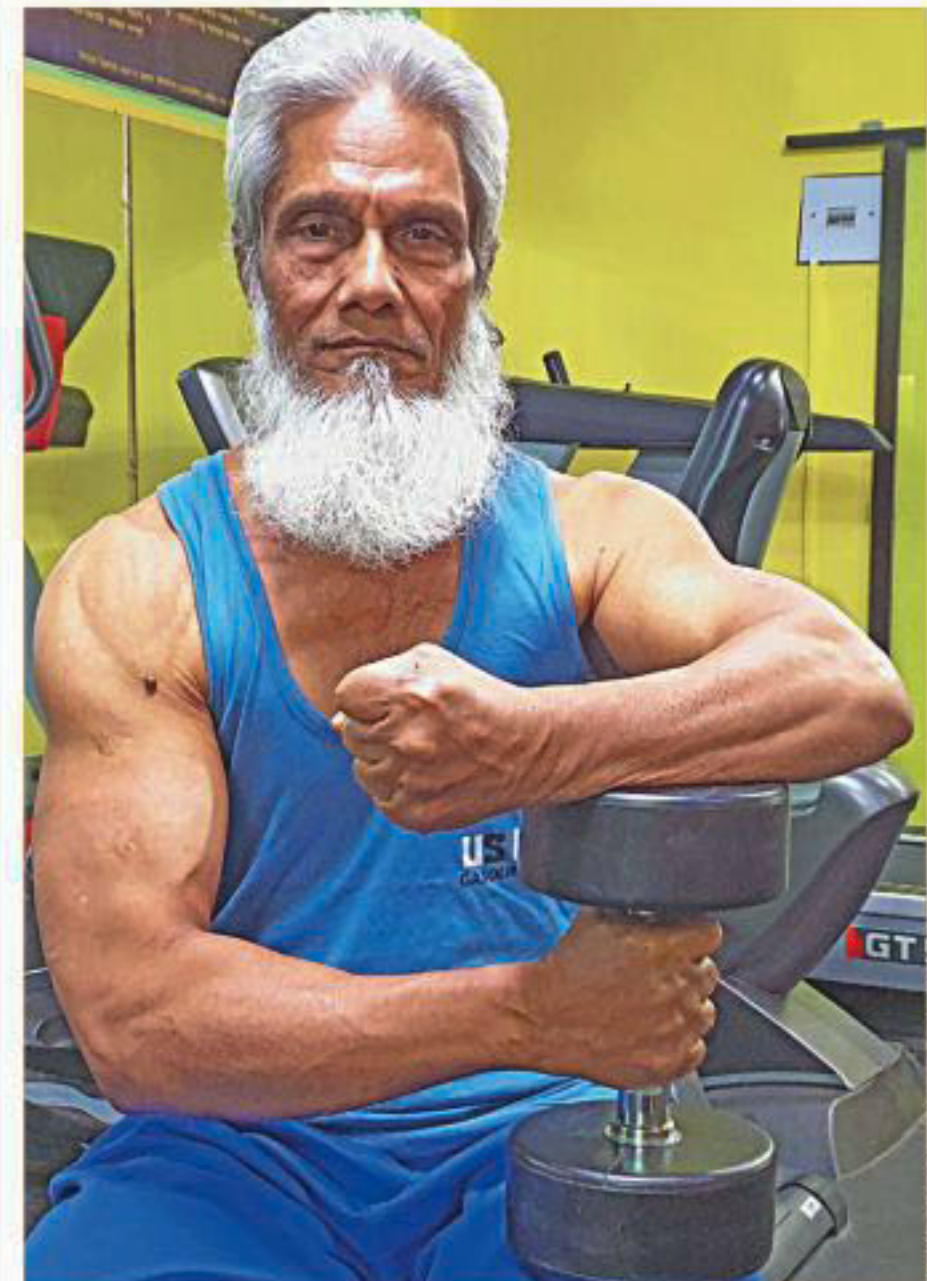


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