

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Masked Finfoot, our avian treasure.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Avian Tourism

In recent years, while travelling abroad for bird photography, I have become an avian tourist. The idea is this. Suppose you are a devoted birder who wants to see the Yellow-headed Picathartes, a bizarre looking rare bird found in western Africa. You decide to fly to Ghana looking for it. But you will need a guide, someone who knows where to find the Picathartes. You will also need to rent a car, make bookings in hotels, etc. Before long you have planned an expedition and your friends join in.

Or, suppose you are a bird photographer, looking for lots of photogenic bird action in one place that you can approach and photograph. You decide to go to Australia, where there are many such places. This time you join a birding tour organized by a tour company which takes tourists to the right places so they can photograph to their hearts' content.

These are examples of avian tourism, a service that provides guiding and logistics for global birdwatchers. Every year a large number of avian tourists travel all over the globe looking for birds. They are usually affluent folks willing to spend money to find what they are looking for.

Unfortunately Bangladesh rarely falls in their list of destinations. This is despite the fact that our avian bounty compares favourably with countries that attract avian tourists.

Is avian tourism feasible here? Falling under two bird flyways, Bangladesh is extraordinarily rich in birdlife. The number of bird species seen here exceeds 700. This includes some rare and special birds that would be attractive to foreign birders, including Masked Finfoots, Pallas's Fish Eagles, Black-capped Kingfishers, Brown-winged Kingfishers, Indian Skimmers, and Mangrove Pittas.

In addition, what appears commonplace to Bangladeshis may be exotic to foreign travellers.

I have encountered foreign birders who were thrilled to see our Kalem (Purple Swamphen) and Machanga (Common Kingfisher) which are easily found here.

What are three or four places in Bangladesh suitable for the avian tourist?

First would be Sundarban. Inside this magnificent forest, it is possible to see exotic birds all year. Tourism in Sundarban has developed in recent years using launches where people sleep overnight, so why not use this?

Second would be the Haors - either Tanguar Haor, or Hail Haor/Baikka Beel. Hail Haor is about 3-3.5 hours from Dhaka. Tanguar is a longer travel distance but has many more birds in winter.

Third would be Satchori or another reserve forest. Satchori is three hours drive from Dhaka and has, in recent years, become popular among our local bird photographers for its varied birds. Lawacherra is also in the same region and also offers the Hoolock Gibbon. For a more immersive experience tourists can try Rema Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the few primary forests left in Bangladesh.

Fourth would be Rajshahi and chars of the Padma. In recent years they have yielded phenomenal birding.

Inside Dhaka, avian tourists could visit the National Botanical Garden and the adjacent Zoo as well as the fields of Purbachol. Between them, these sites can offer perhaps 200 bird species.

I would argue we have the basic birdlife necessary for avian tourism. However, providing a satisfactory tourism service has other requirements - such as English-speaking guides, minimum hassles, and a pleasant overall experience. If these can be ensured, Bangladesh can become a destination for avian tourism.

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'Middle-class, poor hit hard by tax burden'

Eminent citizens call for reforming budgetary system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's budget is dependent on value-added tax (VAT) that directly affects the middle-income and poor groups, said eminent citizens at a post-budget discussion yesterday.

They also said the government is increasing purview of this indirect tax instead of taking steps to build capacity of revenue officials to increase direct tax collection.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), an organisation working for good governance, held the event at Jatiya Press Club.

The discussants also viewed that the rich and poor buy products at the same price and have to pay the same amount of VAT.

While presenting a keynote paper, economist Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir said, "Statistics shows that 68 percent people who have the capacity to pay tax are out of tax net."

Tax burden is increasing on the middle-class and poor, he said. "VAT collection was Tk 23,078 crore in 2009-10 fiscal and the target in the budget for incoming fiscal year is estimated at Tk 1,10,555 crore" he added.

Titumir said the government must find out how measures can be taken based on individual income. "Dependence on VAT will create more discrimination," he added.

The education and health sectors are neglected in the proposed budget. Out-of-pocket expenditure for healthcare in Bangladesh is more than other South Asian countries, he said. Also, farmers are not getting a fair price for their production.

Professor Anu Muhammad said the government had

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BABIES STOLEN FROM HOSPITAL

Two get life term under human trafficking act

BISHAKHA DEVNATH

In a rare precedence, two people of an organised ring involved in stealing infants have been found guilty in court and handed down the highest punishment - life imprisonment - under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012.

"Due to legal and systematic limitations", the court said, the other two members of the gang could not be proved guilty.

Those facing life imprisonment are: Jhorna Begum, who was caught in 2006 with two newborns, and Manik, husband of a staffer at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The other two are: Matin, who had worked as a guard at the hospital for four decades, and Shila, Manik's wife who has been on the run ever since the existence of the gang was revealed with Jhorna in police custody.

Jhorna was caught with a 10-12 day old baby boy in January 2006 when Khilgaon police were on the lookout for another baby. They later found out that she had left a baby girl in a rented room in Rampura.

Though none of the babies was the one police were looking for, Jhorna having two babies of nearly the same age gave rise to

suspicion, and the law enforcers filed a case as complainant.

Extensive interrogations in police custody brought to the fore the activities of the gang who helped Jhorna obtain the infants in exchange of money.

In her confessional statement, Jhorna said she had gone to DMCH to adopt a child and there, a nurse advised her to go to the social service office. While leaving the hospital, she learnt from Matin that she could get a child for money and the exchanged mobile numbers.

On December 31, 2005, Matin told Jhorna to go to the hospital where she was introduced to Shila. As per agreement made that day, Shila and her husband Manik handed her a baby boy at Fatulla in Narayanganj for Tk 12,000.

Three days later, Matin again called her to say she could have another baby if she was interested. She went to DMCH to get introduced to another female staffer whose name she could not recall during the submission of her statement. That female staffer gave her the baby girl.

Jhorna paid Tk 10,000 for the girl, of which Tk 4,000 went to the female hospital staffer.

Manik confessed to being involved in

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PHOTO OF THE DAY

AMRAN HOSSAIN



Participants at a yoga session in Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, marking fifth International Day of Yoga. The Indian High Commission in Dhaka organised the event, where around 7,000 people including politicians, celebrities, fitness enthusiasts, students and members of sports and yoga associations turned up. Indian High Commissioner Riva Ganguly Das delivered the welcome remarks at the event, where Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen was also present.

Govt not interfering in judicial process

Law minister says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the government is not interfering in the functions of the judiciary as well as other independent institutions. "The judiciary is now functioning quite independently. It should be independent for the sake of people's development. All constitutional bodies, including the judiciary, will remain independent during the Sheikh Hasina-led government," he said.

He was talking to reporters after attending a programme organised by Dhaka-based Kasba Association at Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh in Kakrail. The association accorded felicitation to Anisul Huq on the occasion.

On BNP's allegation that the government is influencing the judiciary

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Vitamin A+ campaign today

Over 2 crore children to be given the capsule

BSS, Dhaka

The Vitamin A plus campaign will be observed across the country today, with an aim to feed all children, aged between six months and five years, Vitamin A capsules under the nationwide event.

Health workers and volunteers will feed the capsules to around 2.2 crore children at 1.20 lakh permanent and 20,000 mobile centres, to be remained open from 8am to 4pm.

Mobile centres will be set up at bus stops, airports and launch terminals and other transport points. At least two trained volunteers will work at each centre.

Around 25 lakh children aged between six and 11 months will be given one blue vitamin A capsule each, while around 1.95 crore aged between 12 and

59 months would be given red ones.

Parents are requested make sure that children are fed Vitamin A capsules on a full stomach. Also, they should not be given the vitamin forcibly or while crying. Children below six months or more than five years or with any kind of illness should not be administered the capsule.

According to officials, the rate of children's night-blindness in the country has come down below one percent following the regular distribution of vitamin A capsules.

Giving children vitamin A capsule not only keeps them safe from night-blindness, but also enhances their immune system, keep their eyesight perfect, bring down child mortality rate and ensure their natural growth, they added.

DHAKA TODAY

ART EXHIBITION

When I Grow Up  
Organiser: Amnesty International  
Venue: EMK Center, Dhanmondi 27  
Time: 9am

FESTIVAL

Bangladesh International Theatre Festival  
Organiser: Ministry of Cultural Affairs  
Venue: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Segun Bagicha Road  
Time: 7pm

POP CULTURE CONVENTION

Animecon Dhaka 2019  
Organiser: Animecon Dhaka  
Venue: Mirpur Convention Centre, Mirpur 2  
Time: 11am

LECTURE

Introductory Lecture Series on American Play and Playwrights  
Organiser: EMK Center  
Venue: EMK Center, Dhanmondi 27  
Time: 3pm



Although traffic congestion has become way too common in Dhaka, the experience becomes unbearable in the scorching heat. As mercury continues to rise, the number of vendors selling bottled water has also increased. The photo was taken in Shahbagh yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Area-based education a necessity in the city, experts say

UNB, Dhaka

Working parents in Dhaka typically start their day in a rush of activity, enough to send anyone's blood pressure soaring. Probably, the most time-consuming of all is also the most essential - dropping their children at school, after which it is a battle to get to their own offices on time amid severe gridlock.

This everyday picture of struggle would have been different if children could be enrolled in schools that serve specific areas, located at walking distance from students' homes.

Experts emphasised "area-based education" in cities and urged the government to increase the budgetary allocation in this regard. They recommended the system in Dhaka and other metropolitan cities to ease traffic jam and make the lives of

children and their guardians easier.

One of the challenges in implementing an area-based education system would be to ensure that irrespective of where they may be located, a certain standard is maintained throughout.

Tania Akter, a resident of Old Dhaka, said, "I had to quit my job to make time for dropping off my daughters at school."

Her daughters are third and fourth graders at Ideal School and College in Motijheel. "I have to take them to school from Old Dhaka regularly. I worked for a private company and could not manage to drop them off at school and reach office on time," she added.

The mother said, "If the government takes initiatives to launch area-based education that would be a great help for me."

Mohammad Abu Awal Hossain

from Keraniganj said he drops off his sixth grader daughter Asma at Azimpur Government Girls School and College every day.

"I enrolled my daughter here due to the absence of better schools in Keraniganj area. We face various problems on the way to school and back home daily. I would appreciate if the authorities introduced area-based schools."

According to 2018 data from Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Statistics (BANBEIS), there are 572 government and private secondary schools in Dhaka. Of them, 164 schools are public and the rest are private where 4,75,042 are considered regular students.

Renowned educationist Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said, "We must not tag schools as

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