

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Agile Wallaby, Kakadu National Park, Australia.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Surprises Down Under

Her variety of wildlife has drawn me to Australia twice in the past year. Along with impressive birds and animals, I experienced several surprises Down Under.

Australia and her inhabitants today, in many ways, remind me of my first encounter with America in 1977. An easygoing attitude belies considerable practical ingenuity. There is an informal directness, a propensity for humour coupled with an irreverence borne of a frontier spirit.

One immediately sees it in the language. Australians generously allot nicknames often ending with a "y" or "ie". Thus, a "tinny" is an open aluminium boat, a "mozzie" is a mosquito, a "barbie" is a barbecue, a "blowie" is a blow fly, a "tradie" is a tradesman... you get the idea!

My search took me to many wild places and everywhere I was surprised by the Australian love for the outdoors. It was hot and yet most people had no problem trekking (or, in one case, waiting to see crocodiles) in the heat. I found tents or campers unexpectedly in the middle of nowhere and encountered many hikers, birders, fishermen, boaters and other outdoorsmen, always ready to chit chat.

The creature that impressed me most was the Crocodile. I had no idea of the menace they pose in Australia. One has to be extremely cautious of going into any water body – pond, creek, river, waterfall – because Crocodiles may be lurking. Even a small isolated pond could harbour Crocodiles that had arrived with a flood.

Water Buffalos and Camels were introduced to Australia years ago. Several untamed generations later, both species have gone wild. Roaming Buffalos are extremely dangerous and attack people. The Camels are found

in the desert center of the country. Kangaroos and their younger versions, Wallabies, turned out to be very shy when I saw them. I also saw Tree Kangaroos, Mouse Kangaroos as well as the Platypus which I wrote about in an earlier column.

I learned there are over 500 species of Eucalyptus trees (called gum trees) in Australia. They fit in very well in the environment; thus I found many birds in them. Unfortunately the Eucalyptus (along with Mahogany and Acacia) in Bangladesh are devoid of birds.

Perhaps because of their irreverent attitude, Australians are not hero worshippers. One exception is Ned Kelly, a sort of Robin Hood figure from the 1800s who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. Curiously, the novel "Ned Kelly and the Gang" by Peter Carey is the only novel I've read without commas. It won him the Booker Prize.

I saw an example of Aussie ingenuity in the East Alligator river which divides Kakadu National Park from Arnhem Land, an area owned by the Aborigines. Instead of a bridge across the river, they have paved a road hugging the bottom. When tides move in, water movement is so ferocious that a bridge would not last long. Instead, the Australians "ford" the river in their cars and the road does not require as much maintenance as a bridge would.

A sweet surprise came at dinner one night. I ordered a dessert called "Sticky Dates" expecting a concoction made from dates – instead I was treated to a delicious dark cake oozing with caramel syrup. It reminded me that one should expect the unexpected in the land that brought us the boomerang!

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SEXUAL ABUSE OF RU STUDENT

Bithika Banik removed from provost's post

RU CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Rajshahi University (RU) have removed the provost of Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Hall, Dr Bithika Banik, said an office order signed by Registrar Prof MA Bari yesterday evening.

The office order said for the bigger interest of the university, Dr Banik was removed from her post.

It also said, Anjuman Ara, an associate professor of marketing department and a senior house tutor of the hall, will replace Bithika with immediate effect.

While talking to The Daily Star, the registrar said, "We took the decision after holding an emergency meeting with the

provosts' council, teachers' association and administrative officials today [Friday]."

On Thursday, several hundred students demonstrated on the campus, protesting sexual abuse of a peer at the house of Dr Banik on Wednesday night.

They demanded removal of Dr Banik as "her negligence in duty" led to the student being abused by her brother Shyamol Banik. Later, they postponed their protest after RU Vice Chancellor Prof Abdus Sobhan assured them of the removal.

In an instant reaction of the removal, SM Tomal, a fourth year student of English department, said, "Removal of the provost was one of our demands. As it has been

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

With expansive fields of "kash phool" dancing in the breeze and beautiful azure sky speckled with cottony clouds turning into a kaleidoscope of pink, orange and gold during sunset -- autumn is here and so is the time to welcome Goddess Durga!

Like elsewhere in the country, Sylhet city is buzzing with activity in preparation for the Sharadiya (autumnal) Durga Utsab. This year's puja will be held on October 4-8.

In autumn, Durga, the goddess of power, visits her father's home on earth.

The festival ends with the celebration of Bijaya Dashami when the goddess leaves earth for heaven.

With the biggest religious festival of Bengali Hindu community just a few days away, artisans, organisers and instrumentalists are passing busy days to welcome the goddess.

In Sylhet division, around 2,600 mandaps (worship pavilions) have been set up, including 66 in the city.

Rajat Kanti Gupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Puja Uddhapan Parishad in Sylhet city, said, "The Hindu community in Sylhet has taken adequate preparations for the celebration of Durga Puja. We have also taken security measures in every mandap."

Meanwhile, artisans are working extra hours to meet the demand. Visiting several studios at Lamabazar, Mirajangal and Dariapara areas in the city this week, this correspondent saw that they were putting finishing touches to idols.

Artisans said though idol-making process is lengthy, they have finished almost all works and are now decorating the idols with colours, clothing and ornaments.

There was a sense of joy and pride among them, since the entire process of creating an idol -- from clay to ornamentation -- not just requires devotion and diligence, it has also been passed down from generation to generation.

Ballabh Narayan Mrit Shilpalaya in Dariapara has been making Durga idols for over four generations. Now, brothers Nandalal Paul and Dulal Paul run the business.

Though extremely busy, they made some time for this correspondent, and said usually it costs around Tk 30,000 to one lakh to create a full set of idols. A complete set has Durga, Lakshmi,

Saraswati, Kartik, Ganesh and Ashur along with their carriers -- lion, owl, swan, rat, peacock and ox.

Besides artisans, percussion instrument makers are also busy at work in Chowhatta and Kadamtali areas. Makers of these instruments -- dhol, dhak (big drum), mridanga (a two-faced drum played with hands), khol, dholok, dugi, khamok, naal, tabla and khonjori -- an integral part of the puja, are busy trying to meet their orders.

Kirtan (devotional songs) performers or kirtaniyas, who perform at different temples during the puja, are thronging the workshops to repair their old and damaged instruments.

With makers working, kirtaniyas testing their instruments and singing a song or two -- the ambience is not only vibrant, but also lifting mood of passers-by.

To make sure that the festival is held peacefully with due religious fervour, law enforcers have

also beefed-up security.

Contacted, Aminul Islam, additional superintendent of police in Sylhet, said, "We have already taken preparation to ensure security at all mandaps. Police and ansar members will be posted there from two days before the festival."

"We have also instructed each puja committee to take necessary steps. No vehicles will be allowed near the mandaps. Rab, Armed Police Battalion, detectives and special branch will also be deployed to ensure security," he added.

On September 24, a meeting was held at the office of the deputy commissioner in this regard, where all authorities concerned were present.

In the meeting, Mir Mahbubur Rahman, acting DC of Sylhet, said, "Sylhet is a land of communal harmony and Durga Puja is being celebrated here peacefully for centuries. We have taken all necessary preparations... We believe that no untoward incident will take place during the festival."



An artisan working on a set of idols in Dariapara area of Sylhet city. With Durga Puja less than a week away, artisans around the country are busy giving finishing touches to the idols. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

RECRUITMENT TEST AT PUST Woman forced out of exam hall despite having admit card

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A female job seeker -- deemed "unfit for the post" -- was forced out from the admission hall at Pabna University of Science & Technology (PUST) yesterday morning, even though the university authorities issued her admit card for the recruitment test.

Sabina Yesmin, of village Bagutia in Chowhali upazila of Sirajganj, stayed on the campus till completion of the examination at 12pm.

The incident occurred during the teacher recruitment test for Department of Urban and Regional Planning.

"I applied for the post of lecturer at Department of Urban and Regional Planning of PUST. The university authorities issued an admit card, so I came to take the test. I was allowed to enter the examination hall and received my paper but all of a sudden, two teachers approached me and said I was not fit for the post. They forced me out of the exam hall," Sabina told journalists. "If I'm not fit for the post, why did they [university authorities] issue an admit card?" Sabina asked, alleging the authorities of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

BNP'S DIVISIONAL GATHERING IN RAJSHAHI Uncertainty looms over tomorrow's rally

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Despite adequate preparations, uncertainty looms large over BNP's divisional rally in Rajshahi -- to be held tomorrow -- as the authorities have denied their request for the venue.

BNP leaders yesterday alleged that their arrangements are further being affected since law enforcers are arresting their leaders and activists ahead of the rally.

Police officials acknowledged arresting "some BNP men" from different districts, but following "prior warrants".

BNP leaders also alleged that transport owners have threatened to hold a strike on the day of the rally.

The party leaders, however, vowed to hold the rally tomorrow. The decision was taken at a meeting at BNP office in the city on Thursday, chaired by city unit President Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul.

"The authorities cannot keep us away from exercising our political rights," Ruhul Kuddus Talukder, BNP divisional organising secretary, told this correspondent yesterday. "Our senior leaders are trying to get permission for a venue by contacting top leaders of the ruling party."

He said the rally is important for them as they want to establish democratic practices in the country as well as free their chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Early this month, local leaders sought permission from Rajshahi Deputy Commissioner Hamidul Islam for using the field of Haji Muhammad Mohsin Government High School. Known as Madrasa Maidan, the field is widely used for holding political gatherings.

They also sought security clearance from Rajshahi Metropolitan Police. On Thursday, Hamidul denied BNP's request while RMP is yet to respond,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'Mugger' bullet-hit in shootout with police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An alleged mugger was bullet-hit in a shootout with police in port city's Tigerpass area early yesterday.

The injured, Md Raju (26) was admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), said police. He is a resident of Motijharna area of Lalkhan Bazar. After the gunfight, police recovered a light gun and two rounds of bullets from the spot.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Pranab Chowdhury of Khulshi Police Station said the gunfight happened at Balur Math in Tigerpass around 12:30am when police went to the area to arrest muggers, on information.

"Raju is a mugger and is accused in four cases filed over murder, robbery and drug peddling," added the OC.

OC Pranab said upon receiving information that a group of muggers have gathered there, police personnel went to arrest them.

Sensing presence of law enforcers, the muggers opened fire and threw brickbats targeting police -- forcing them to retaliate,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Devotees offer prayers to Buddha at Nirbanpur Ban Bihar in Suvolong area of Rangamati yesterday.

PHOTO: ANVIL CHAKMA



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