

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

### Tree Shrew

It was a bright, sunny morning in early March. Reaching Satchori National Park, I discovered my guide Rahim had not arrived. So I decided to wander along the road outside the park. With dense foliage on both sides, this stretch often yielded good birds. Today, however, the pickings were slim. Even my old standby – a Plum-headed Parrot couple nesting in a roadside tree's cavity – was empty. It would be another month before their eggs hatched and mom became busy feeding her chick.

Returning to my rendezvous spot I found Rahim waiting for me. I threw a water bottle into my backpack and, lugging my camera gear, we walked to the park entrance. Our destination was the watchtower, about half a kilometer down a concrete path through the forest. As we crossed a culvert running over a stream (the name Satchori means Seven Streams) I kept searching the trees for birds, but spotted nothing.

As we continued our trek, we both saw a small creature sitting on the raised guard-wall on the right of the path. Sitting up on its hind legs, it was eating something off its fore legs. I thought it was a squirrel and not even try to photograph it. But Rahim stopped dead on his tracks. "It's just a squirrel," I told him. "No, sir, it looks different. The head is long and pointed. Perhaps it is a Tree Shrew," he said. That's when I raised my camera. It was remarkably free of fear at our approach as I took some photographs. After a few seconds it jumped from the wall and disappeared into the forest floor. We went off to the tower to look for birds. The little animal was forgotten.

A few days later, I was looking at Dr. Monirul Khan's *Photographic Guide to the Wildlife of Bangladesh* when I ran into a photograph of this animal. (By the way - this



Northern Tree Shrew, Satchori National Park, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

book by Dr. Khan, winner of the Bangabandhu Award for Wildlife Conservation, is a treasure trove of our wildlife and birds.)

According to the book, it was a Northern Tree Shrew, also known as *Gecho Chhucho* in Bangla. Its tail is bushy, but less so than the squirrel's. Its body is 20cm long; the tail is another 20cm. It is not a rodent, but looks in between a squirrel and a rat. Like a squirrel, it holds its food in its forepaws while eating. It is usually silent and spends much time on the ground. Its ears are interesting: large and with unique ear flaps. Feeding mainly on fruits and insects, it breeds year round. In Bangladesh it is found in the forests of Sylhet, Chittagong and Madhupur.

Globally, there are 19 species

of Tree Shrews that comprise the order Scandentia. Their family is called Tupaiaidae; our Northern Tree Shrew's Latin name is *Tupaia belangeri*. The word Tupaia comes from the Malay word Tupai meaning squirrel or small animals resembling squirrels. The Tree Shrew was first described by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1821. The Northern Tree Shrew can be found in a handful of countries to the East and Southeast of Bangladesh.

Our time in the watchtower was amply rewarded with birds. But it is the Northern Tree Shrew that I will remember most from that day at Satchori.

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow ihtishamkabar on Instagram.

## Uncertainty looms over school exams

MOHIDDUN ALAMGIR

After the postponement of HSC exams for an indefinite period, uncertainty now looms over annual final exams at English-medium schools as well as half-yearly exams of Bangla medium primary and secondary schools.

Due to the school shutdown enforced to contain Covid-19 transmission, educators are unable to complete lesson plans, give class tests and make other preparations for education of school kids.

The government has introduced TV education through Sangsad Bangladesh Television for students of sixth to 10th grades, to minimise the loss, but many students remain out of coverage of the programme.

Until yesterday, there was no TV education for primary education, while not every secondary school student has a television set at their home.

According to the annual academic calendar of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), half-yearly exams at Bangla medium schools are expected to start on April 15 and complete on April 23. The directorate oversees over 1 lakh primary schools, madrasas, and kindergartens, which have over 1.74 crore students.

"We could not complete lessons. Exams can take place only after lessons are completed. If the situation is not normal, how we can hold exams?" said Md Fasiullah, director general of DPE.

In an effort to stem the spread of the virus, all educational institutions were ordered shut from March 17 to 31, which was later extended to April 11.

Across the country, some 3.68 crore students at educational institutions and over a million teachers and other school personnel are now confined to their homes.

Top DSHE officials said that there is a strong possibility that the government will extend the closure till April 25. And in that case, schools and colleges will remain off till May 31 for the Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr vacation.

Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education's (DSHE) academic calendar says the half-yearly and pre-test for SSC exams are scheduled to begin on June 13 and complete on June 25.

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## Skipping meals to survive the shutdown

The grim reality in Rajshahi city slums

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

It was a depressing Tuesday for Kanchan. For breakfast she had leftover rice from the previous night, and did not eat a single morsel till dusk. She then prepared a meal for that night and the next day, calculating and measuring so she has enough food for the days to come.

The elderly woman residing in a slum of Rajshahi city's Bhadra area, who could barely remember her age, would have managed three meals on a regular day by selling scraps she picks up around the city roads.

But due to the shutdown, she cannot go out into the streets and so, must skip meals.

"I've been doing this for the last three days, after my rice stock started shrinking," Kanchan said. "When there'll be nothing left in a day or two, I'll have to starve for the whole day."

Kanchan, her neighbours, and those living in other slums had not received any government food support till Wednesday, six days since local administration began distributing daily essentials among those who are outside government safety-net programmes.

Those who had been deprived include 150 families of Bhadra slum, 35 families of Balia slum, and 400 families of Rabidas and Horizon communities living in two slums of Daspuke area.

Upen Rabidas, vice president of Rabidas community development committee, said the slums of Bhadra and Daspuke are major ones in the city. Slum dwellers, who usually have different means of earning money, have no work during the shutdown.

Kohinur, a resident of Balia slum, said authorities overlooked the slum dwellers while distributing 90 tonnes of rice and Tk 50,000 cash allocated by the government.

They were also ignored while the corporation completed distributing 100 tonnes of rice, which were bought through donations, among 20,000 people, she added.

Contacted, Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Chief Executive Officer Sharifuddin said they somehow unintentionally missed the slums, and they would be included during later phases of food distribution.

He said the corporation will be providing food support to most of the city's one lakh ultra-poor people in three phases.

After this discussion, authorities, an NGO and army carried out some distribution efforts in the three slums on Thursday, but many are still deprived of relief materials.

According to 2014 data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the city has at least 105 slums, where 39,077 people of 10,202 families live.

Seventy per cent of slum dwellers were not brought under government safety-net programmes, while 80 per cent of them have no idea about the programmes at all, said Shahidul Islam, regional coordinator of Bangladesh Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, quoting one of their research.

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## Khaleda doing well but concerned over Covid-19 situation, says her doctor

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who is currently receiving treatment at her Gulshan residence, is doing well but worried about the prevailing coronavirus situation in the country.

Dr AZM Zahid Hossain, a member of the BNP chairperson's personal physician team, said, "Her health condition is now stable but she needs advanced treatment for a long time to fully recover from her illness."

He said they are giving the 75-year-old BNP chief necessary treatment under the supervision of her daughter-in-law Dr Zubaida Rahman.

Zahid said Dr Zubaida is overseeing her treatment from London.

On March 25, Khaleda was released from jail for six months upon an executive order, considering her age and humanitarian grounds.

The government passed the executive order on two conditions -- that she receives treatment at her Gulshan residence, and does not leave the country.

Khaleda was sent to Old Dhaka Central Jail after she had been sentenced to five

years' imprisonment by a special court in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case on February 8, 2018.

Another team member of Khaleda's personal physicians, wishing anonymity, said Khaleda is unable to walk, and is suffering from pain in the joints of her hands and legs. "She has been given therapy to relieve her pains. Her diabetes condition still not under control. She has some other physical problems for which she needs treatment for a long time."

He said although the BNP chief is ill, she now feels comfortable at the homely environment.

The doctor said Khaleda is passing her time by reading newspapers and books.

He said she is worried about the spread of coronavirus across the world, including in Bangladesh. "She's concerned over the plight of poor people as many of them now have no source of income due to the shutdown of economic activity. She also wanted to know from doctors when the country may be freed from the virus. She looks upset over the rise in the coronavirus cases in the country."

RAFIL ISLAM

The life of visually-impaired Nizamul was already quite difficult, as his meagre income from his roadside insecticide shop in the city's Bhasantek could barely provide for his wife and three children.

But then, the country was hit by the novel coronavirus, that has forced authorities to enforce a countrywide shutdown, blocking the source of income for many like him.

While relief distribution schemes are in place to ease their sufferings, it is often hard for people with disabilities like Nizamul to elbow others in a crowd of desperate people to reach the aid during.

"I have not received any help yet. I have no savings... I don't know how I will survive with my family in the days ahead," the forty-year-old man told The Daily Star.

A number of disabled and disadvantaged persons told this newspaper they want the authorities to have special attention to them, as they cannot move freely amid

## Their struggle is double

Persons with disabilities find it hard to avail relief, draw authorities' attention for special arrangements



This woman, who lives near the High Court area, had to travel to Kakrail on her wheelchair to get some food assistance. The photo was taken in front of Matsya Bhaban on Thursday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

the shutdown and race with others who are also struggling to make ends meet.

Nizamul says he knows the risks of going out, and has the fear of being infected by Covid-19 virus.

appeared and urged me to go back home... I returned with empty hands," he said.

Another disabled person, Tuhin Mia, who is the general secretary of Disable Development Society, said his organisation has 155 members. "All of them are poor, and as far as I know none of them received any aid."

He, however said that he heard some people with disabilities, who are homeless, received some aid.

"As my office is located in Mirpur, I met the local councillor four to five days ago for aid, but he said there is no special arrangement for persons with disabilities... Then I called the mayor, who asked me to give a list to his personal secretary," he said, adding the PS asked him to hand over the list by Sunday.

Physically challenged Billal Hossain from Bogura said people with physical disabilities are highly vulnerable during natural disasters or national crises. The risk to this group is greater due to the effect of their impairments.

"Many of the group cannot

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## Patients their priority

Two Kishoreganj doctors provide free consultation over phone

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two doctors in Kishoreganj are providing free medical service over mobile phones amid the ongoing coronavirus situation.

Dr Deen Mohammad and Dr Md Ataur Rahman mentioned their cellphone numbers on their Facebook accounts so that patients can contact them.

Deen Mohammad has been practicing in the town privately since he retired from Directorate General of Health Services as a director in 2014, said the physician.

Ataur Rahman is an assistant professor of medicine at Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College and Hospital, Kishoreganj.

Deen Mohammad said he started the free service in the first week of March. "Currently, I am responding to around 20 calls daily," he said.

Dr Ataur said he is providing the service considering that many do not dare to go to hospital amid fear of being afflicted with Covid-19.

Mohammad Rubel from Kishoreganj's Karimganj said he called Dr Ataur on March 23 and got suggestion on medication for dysentery, fever and cold.

Mithila Debnath, a university student, said she sent SMS to Dr Ataur for her ailing mother who was suffering from cough a week ago, and the doctor replied immediately.

Sohrab Hossain from Hossainpur upazila said he phoned Dr Deen Mohammad to seek suggestion for his three-year-old grandson who was suffering from fever and cough. "After medication, he is now doing well," he added.

Similarly, Abdul Momen thanked the doctor as his child got cured from fever and cold related problems.

AVOIDING COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

## Law ministry still undecided on 3,000 prisoners' release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The law ministry is yet to give any decision about the release of 3,000 prisoners from jail on bail as the relevant proposal did not reach the ministry.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday, "My office has not received the proposal about the release... I will give my opinion after examining the proposal and the legal procedure."

Asked what will be the law ministry's suggestion about the prisoners' release, the minister refused to comment.

Jail authorities recently sent a proposal to the home ministry about release of 3,000 prisoners -- including those under trial and jail for bailable offences -- to avoid risk of coronavirus transmission in the prisons.

The home minister reportedly said the matter was being discussed.

Meanwhile, some legal experts including Attorney General Mahbub Alam told this newspaper on April 1 that the government might release the prisoners -- who were and might be sentenced to jail for a short period of time -- to prevent potential spread of coronavirus.

**করোনাভাইরাস মোকাবিলায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনার পরামর্শ**

- অতি প্রয়োজন না হলে ঘরের বাইরে বের হবেন না।
- বাইরে বের হলে মানুষের ভিড় এড়িয়ে চলুন।
- যারা করোনাভাইরাস-আক্রান্ত দেশ থেকে ফিরেছেন, তারা ১৪ দিন সম্পূর্ণ আলাদা থাকুন।
- ঘনঘন সাবান-পানি দিয়ে হাত ধুতে হবে।
- হাঁচি-কাশি দিতে হলে রুমাল বা টিস্যু পেপার দিয়ে নাক-মুখ ঢেকে নিন।
- যেখানে-সেখানে কফ-খুঁথু ফেলবেন না।
- করমর্দন বা কোলাকুলি থেকে বিরত থাকুন।
- মুসলমান ভাইয়েরা ঘরেই নামাজ আদায় করুন।
- অন্যান্য ধর্মাবলম্বীরাও ঘরে বসে প্রার্থনা করুন।
- পরিবার, পাড়াপ্রতিবেশি এবং দেশের মানুষের জীবন রক্ষার্থে এসব পরামর্শ মেনে চলা প্রয়োজন।
- স্বাস্থ্যবিধি মেনে চলুন।
- ভালো থাকুন, সুস্থ থাকুন, নিরাপদ থাকুন।

মিটি-৭১১