

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Green-billed Malkoha at Satchori National Park.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Green-billed Malkoha

In 2016, while working on a book of photographs of birds of Bangladesh, I visited Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary several times looking for birds that I had not found elsewhere. It was during one of these trips that I saw my first Green-billed Malkoha. Trying to photograph it was a frustrating experience. It was often hidden behind branches with only parts of its body showing as it moved from branch to branch. Eventually it moved to a tree which had shed its leaves and I caught it whole on camera, including its long, dark-grey tail with large white spots in it.

Its name notwithstanding, the polka-dot tail and the bright red patch around its eyes are the striking features of the Green-billed Malkoha. And the bill? It is a weak green, not particularly remarkable. At 20-25 inches long and weighing around four ounces, the bird is larger than a crow. From above, it is dark grey with a greenish sheen, oily green wings and a long tail. Its habitat is primary and secondary forests, cultivated areas, scrub and village groves. It lives on insects it gleans from the trees, such as large caterpillars, crickets and grasshoppers. It will also eat small lizards and eggs of other birds. While looking for food, it perches and often contorts its body into awkward directions as it searches behind leaves. It makes its way through the foliage, checking all

possibilities, creeping like a squirrel, before making a hop – or gliding – into the next tree.

Known as *Phoenicophaeus tristis*, the bird belongs to the Cuckoo family. Its range is South and Southeast Asia. There are nine species of Malkoha in the world: all of them are restricted to tropical Asia, and only the green-billed one is seen in Bangladesh. The name "Malkoha" is derived from Sinhala meaning "flower cuckoo."

Since that day in Rema-Kalenga, I have observed Green-billed Malkohas many times. Once I got past the difficulty of photographing them, I found them fun to watch because of their distinctive behaviour. For example, one afternoon in a village grove in Purbachol, I observed one for several minutes. It was crawling along the branches, performing its usual search. At one point it turned upside down, head hidden behind the leaves, its tall tail straight up. It remained in this ridiculous position for a while before it decided to right itself.

But the best view I had was from the tower in Satchori National Park where it flew in and landed on top of a tree crown. It stayed there for a minute or two, surveying the immediate vicinity. Along with others at the tower, I was able to observe it in all its glory before it decided to fly off.

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3 killed in N'ganj septic tank blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A pregnant woman and two children were killed and six others injured in a septic tank explosion in Narayanganj's Bandar upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased are Laboni Aktar (28), and Jisan (12) and Masnun (8), sons of Khorsheed Alam, said Abdulllah Al Arefin, assistant director of Narayanganj Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The tank, under a five-storey building, exploded around 6am due to a lack of maintenance, the fire service official said.

The two children were sleeping in a room on the ground floor above the septic tank. The room's walls collapsed on the duo following the explosion and they died on the spot, Abdulllah added. In the meantime, the tin-shed house next to the building, where Laboni lived, also collapsed and injured her severely.

Laboni was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared her dead, said Rafikul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station.

The injured were admitted to the Bandar Upazila Health Complex for treatment, the OC added. Police and fire service officials were conducting further inquiries into the explosion, he said.

10,000 kindergarten teachers in Barishal unpaid for months

Educators struggling amid Covid-19 shutdown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Teachers of kindergarten schools in Barishal have appealed to the government for financial support so that they are able to tackle the hardship they are facing due to Covid-19 pandemic.

In this regard, they submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner on May 3 through email, said Abdus Sobahan Bachchu, secretary general of Barishal Kindergarten Forum. The organisation includes teachers and founders of 350 such pre-schools in the division.

Due to the ongoing nationwide shutdown they had to close their educational institutions, he said, adding that as a result the teachers are struggling to survive.

Although the schools are not registered with the government, those play a significant role in the education sector, Bachchu said.

"Teachers are not getting salaries for around two months while the authorities are struggling to pay rent for school accommodations. The situation will worsen if the shutdown continues till September," he added.

Shefali Baroi (55), principal and founder of Merryan Child School on the city's Circular Road in College Row area, said, "Amid the coronavirus

outbreak and the subsequent shutdown, guardians are also not able to pay tuition fees, which is the only source of money to run such a school."

"Every month, I have to spend over Tk 2 lakh for rent of a three-storey school building, its utility bills, and salaries of 18 teachers and other staff," she said. "It's not possible for me to bear that without any source of income."

Das Gupta Asis Kumar, adviser of Bangladesh Shikkhakam Samity, Barishal unit, urged the government for financial support.

Mosharraf Hossain, principal of Popular Academy in Charfashon area, said even though he wanted to, he cannot pay the teachers.

A teacher, who used to get Tk 5,500 from Nuria Kindergarten in Barishal city's Alekanda, said she is struggling to cope with the situation as her salary is pending.

Around 10,000 teachers are serving more than 1,000 kindergartens in the division where nearly one lakh students are receiving education, said Anowarul Haque, president of Barishal Kindergarten Forum.

Contacted, Barishal Deputy Commissioner SM Ajair Rahman told The Daily Star on Thursday that he received the memorandum. "We will send it to the ministry concerned soon," he said.

A hospital on wheels

Mobile health centre serving non-Covid-19 patients in Cox's Bazar

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

To render medicare to non-Covid-19 patients living in remote areas, Cox's Bazar district administration has initiated a mobile hospital service.

The campaign kicked off on April 26. Under the initiative, a vehicle equipped with medical facilities tours one specific area of the district, serving people from 10am to 1pm, said authorities.

The mobile hospital has brought huge relief for patients without Covid-19 symptoms, as they are finding it harder and harder to access medicare during the pandemic. The programme separates people who are suspected of being Covid-19 and sends them to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital for treatment.

Abdur Rahman, a resident of Kolatoli village of Cox's Bazar told The Daily Star that he had been suffering from abdomen pain but could not consult any physician as most of them are avoiding



A girl getting medicine from a physician at the mobile hospital while others await their turn.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

chambers during the pandemic.

"The mobile hospital has been a blessing for me. After days of agonising pain, I received medicine from the mobile hospital," he said.

Md Kamal Hossen, deputy

commissioner of Cox's Bazar, said, "The mobile hospital has two doctors and a few volunteers. The hospital prescribes people and provides free primary drugs to those who need it. When any

suspected case of Covid-19 appears, they are sent to Sadar hospital for specialised treatment," he added.

He said there is a standby ambulance accompanying the mobile hospital to carry coronavirus-suspected patients to Sadar hospital.

The initiative aims to ensure primary treatment for women, children, and the elderly who are facing problems as coronavirus is taking up most focus from the healthcare sector these days.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) has promised to lend a hand to this initiative. Dr Mahbubur Rahman, general secretary of BMA, Cox's Bazar district chapter, told The Daily Star, "It is a great initiative for non-Covid-19 patients, who were denied treatment due to the contagious nature of the virus."

"We have promised to support the initiative with human resources. We have asked the district administration for a need assessment," he said.

NUSRAT JAHAN RAFI MURDER

Case hearing delayed for coronavirus

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Though a High Court bench was ready to hold hearing on the sensational Feni madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi murder case, it cannot start the proceedings as the court functions are closed due to ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

The HC bench led by Justice Soumendra Sarker could have begun hearing of the death reference and appeals in the case in last week of March as Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain earlier assigned it for hearing and disposing of the matters. Deputy Attorney General Bashir Ahmed told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said the bench may start the case hearing immediately after it will reopen following the ongoing closure.

"At least, six months' time will be needed for the High Court for

finishing hearing and disposing of the matters after it will start the hearing," DAG Bashir Ahmed said.

The trial court had finished the trial proceedings of the case within a recorded short period of time as the government had given priority and necessary measures including completion of investigation and producing witnesses before the court for quick delivery of justice for the case.

After the case's death reference reached the HC, the chief justice ordered the office concerned to prepare the case's paper book as soon as possible, SC sources said.

After the paper book was prepared in February this year, the chief justice assigned the HC bench led by Justice Soumendra Sarker for hearing and disposing of the death reference and appeals.

Attorney General Mahbubey

Alam told this correspondent earlier that his office will conduct the case on behalf of the state before the HC bench after it includes the matter in its cause list and fixes a date for hearing.

Nusrat, a 19-year-old madrasa student in Feni, lost her battle for life on April 10 last year, four days after she was set afire.

She was sexually harassed by the then madrasa principal Siraj Ud Doula, on March 27 last year.

Her mother filed a case against Siraj, who was later sacked, arrested and sent to jail.

A Feni court on October 24 last year handed down death sentence to all 16 accused, including Siraj Ud Doula and two expelled local Awami League leaders, over the murder, an incident that shocked the nation.

The accused burnt Nusrat

by pouring kerosene on her in a planned way, and they deserve exemplary and harshest punishment, the trial court said while delivering the judgement in a packed courtroom.

The documents of the murder case reached the HC on October 29 last year, as a death reference to examine the trial court verdict.

If a lower court sentences any person to death in a case, its judgement is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence.

The case documents and judgement reach as death reference to the HC from the lower court in seven days after the latter delivers the verdict.

Later on, convicts including Siraj Ud Doula filed separate appeals with the HC, seeking acquittal of the charges.

Mango harvest begins May 15

Rajshahi DC issues notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Harvesting of mango is set to begin this year on May 15, through plucking of Guti varieties of the fruit.

Rajshahi's deputy commissioner Hamidul Haque signed a notice in this regard on Thursday, fixing the dates for harvesting different varieties of mangoes.

Harvest of Gopalbhog mangoes will commence on May 20, while Laxmanbhog, Laukna and Ranipasand varieties will start on May 25.

The sweetest varieties of mango – like Khirsapat and Himsagar – will start coming to markets on May 28, while Langra will begin on June 6.

Harvest of Fazli and Amrapali will start on June 15.

The Ashwina and BARI Mango-4 varieties can be harvested from July 10, according to the notice.

Struggling to stay afloat

Delay in human resource export, inadequate financial support leave returnee female migrant workers in the lurch

JAMIL MAHMUD

Lipi Akter started processing her migration to Saudi Arabia in early March, expecting financial solvency there will help her raise her children back home.

She had earlier spent two years in the Gulf country as a domestic worker and returned home in August last year.

But her second attempt saw hardly any progress in about two months, thanks to a pause in human resource export over the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The delay has put her into further economic hardship, as she already was in debt.

"I did not see this coming," said Lipi (37), a mother of three.

As Bangladesh went on shutdown from March 26 to contain coronavirus infections, many returnee female migrant workers found themselves without income opportunities.

This came as an added challenge to their lives, as many female migrant workers rely on their own income. According to the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, of around 97,430 female workers went abroad last year, 30 percent were either divorced or widows.

Lipi, who hails from Manikganj's Harirampur, said her husband Ismail, an electrician, seldom cared for her and their three children. He married another woman and now lives with the second wife in the capital.

As a result, she has to meet educational expenses of one of her two daughters, alongside meeting daily expenses and house rent.

She said she borrowed about Tk 60,000 from two local NGOs in Harirampur after returning home, in order to support the family.

"I thought I would run the family for a few months and then depart to Saudi Arabia," she added.

Lipi married off her elder daughter in 2017 while she also has a school dropout son aged 14.

Sheikh Rumana, general secretary of Bangladeshi Ovibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA), said they are in contact with several returnee female migrant workers in Manikganj, Dhaka, Sylhet and Habiganj districts who are facing hardship.

Rumana said her organisation recently prepared two separate lists comprising about 600 returnee female migrant workers of different districts who are in need of financial support.

Female migrant workers have contributed to the country's economy

through sending remittance. Now, no one is there to look after them, Rumana said.

One such returnee is Dahlia Akther of Jatrabari. She returned from Saudi Arabia in August, 2019 after allegedly being tortured by her Saudi employer.

Coming back to home, Dahlia was not accepted well by her husband.

She along with five other Saudi returnee females had been running a catering service in Dhaka's Dakhkhinkhan area to be self-dependent.

Dahlia said they had to close the catering service on March 23 because the offices and marketplaces where they were supplying food items have shut down after the outbreak.

She said the situation has put her and other women in economic hardship, as they do not have alternative income opportunities.

Many female migrant workers who returned home in the past two to three years had been involved in small scale economic activities, said Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme.

Now, they are facing an economic downturn due to the shutdown, said Shariful.

The Brac official said at least 10,000 female migrant workers have returned home from different countries, mostly from Saudi Arabia, in the past four to five years.

Shariful also said female migrant workers including those returned home recently have contacted them over phone and narrated their sufferings.

"Many of them are running out of money," he added.

According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, some 5.5 lakh female migrant workers went overseas between 2015 and 2019. Majority of them went to eight Middle East countries including Saudi Arabia.

Shoaib Ahmad Khan, director of Wage Earners' Welfare Board, said they usually support female migrant workers when they return home "unexpectedly".

Asked about government steps to bailout female migrant workers amid current economic downturn, he said the welfare board is preparing lists of those migrant workers who have returned home recently.

"You will know if there is any support initiative taken for them," he told this newspaper by phone.

The WEWB official said the expatriates' welfare ministry has allocated about Tk 7.75 crore for Bangladeshis who are facing food crisis aboard.