

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Little Spiderhunters, Satchori, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Spiderhunter

I saw my first Spiderhunter five years ago. I was looking for birds inside Satchori National Park in Habiganj. Although my guide and I had started early, we had scored few birds. It was close to noon and, knowing that birds are harder to find during mid-day, we decided to head out of the forest. With the sun directly overhead, the light inside the forest became dappled – mostly dark with spots of bright rounded patches where the sunlight broke through the foliage. The plants grew thick and tall on both sides of the trail and we kept scanning inside the forest for possible finds.

Suddenly we heard a sustained loud monotonous bird call, *which-which-which-which*, and presently saw fast movement on a rather thin branch of a medium-sized tree, a few yards into the forest. We stopped for a better look. There were two small birds with enormously long bills. They appeared to be playing with each other. After a few seconds, however, it became clear they were hunting as a team, searching and probing leaves and branches for insects, each covering a different direction. Darting from light to dark areas they were like a mirage and extremely difficult to photograph. One of them hovered in front of a flower while it probed inside with its bill. Then, for a brief moment, they sat on a thin branch and almost faced each other before resuming their search.

These were Little Spiderhunters, one of two types of Spiderhunters found in Bangladesh. Plainly coloured with olive upperparts and yellow underparts, their eyes have a pale, broken ring around them and their short brown tail has a thin white band. They are over 6 inches long, weigh about half an ounce with a bill that is 1.5 inches long. Year-round residents of Bangladesh, they dwell

in the forests and areas of dense vegetation, particularly in Sylhet and Chittagong regions. They feed on nectar, insects and – as their name suggests – spiders, often extracting them from the centre of their webs. To drink nectar, they insert their bills inside flower and use their tubular tongue to sip like a straw. Fine serrations on the edge of their bills help them catch and hold spiders and smaller insects. Their global range runs through South, East and Southeast Asia.

The Streaked Spiderhunter, the other species seen in Bangladesh, is harder to find. It is seen almost exclusively in the forests of Chittagong area.

Worldwide there are thirteen species of Spiderhunters. They belong to the same family, Nectariniidae, as our Sunbirds. But unlike Sunbirds, whose males and females differ substantially in appearance, the male and female Spiderhunters look alike. Other than the outsized bill, Spiderhunters are less distinctive looking than Sunbirds.

In my experience, Spiderhunters spend their time inside the forest, where they hunt while making their loud noise. Occasionally they do emerge from the darkness. I was able to see the bird once from the watchtower at Satchori. It was a treat, watching its long bill gleaming in the sunlight as it hovered around a bunch of wildflowers growing on a vine while maneuvering itself into acrobatic positions so it could reach inside the flowers. But it lasted only for a few seconds after which it disappeared once again into the depths of the forest.

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'Turned away by 3 hospitals'

Says family of deceased Sylhet businessman

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

A 55-year-old businessman died yesterday from breathing complexities and chest pain, after allegedly being denied treatment at three different hospitals in Sylhet.

The deceased was proprietor of an electronics store in the city.

"He had breathing complexity since last night. We took him to Al Haramain Hospital around 6 in the morning but they turned us away. We then reached North East Medical College Hospital, who did the same," said his brother.

"Desperate, we went to Sylhet Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital [the dedicated hospital for Covid-19 patients] but found one was there. Finally, we reached Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, where the duty doctor declared him dead around 7:30am," he said.

This was not the first such incident in Sylhet. On June 1, a 63-year-old woman died on ambulance after being turned away by six private hospitals. On May 31, a 70-year-old woman from Sreemangal of Moulvibazar died after being turned away by seven private hospitals in the city.

WHAT THE HOSPITALS SAY

Dr Sushanto Kumar Mahapatro, resident medical officer of Sylhet Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital, said, "I checked CCTV footage of our hospital's entrance and found one ambulance came to the gate, stayed for a couple of minutes, and left."

"I heard that they alleged that the gate

was closed and someone turned them away saying everyone's asleep. These are false accusations," he said.

Dr Nahian Chowdhury, assistant director of Al Haramain Hospital, said, "The patient is our regular outdoor patient and they were hiding his medical history. He came to our hospital a couple of days ago with Covid-19 like symptoms and was advised by our doctors for testing."

"They brought him to the hospital again with severe breathing complexities, but we don't have any ICU facility in the isolation centre for suspected cases. We had to turn him away since we cannot place him in the regular ICU unit with other patients as we suspected he was infected with Covid-19 days before," he said.

Dr Nazmul Islam, director of North East Medical College Hospital, said, "I was on duty in the morning and admitted patients no matter what symptoms they had, as we have started dedicated service for Covid-19 patients. So far I have been informed that no patient had been turned away by us. We will still look into the matter."

WHAT GOVT OFFICIAL SAYS

Dr Anisur Rahman, assistant director of Sylhet Divisional Health Office, said, "We have warned all hospitals after such incidents took place earlier. Unfortunately, we cannot proceed without any written complaint."

He urged people to come forward whenever they are faced with such incidents.

168 killed in road crashes during Eid

Says Jatri Kalyan Samity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 168 people were killed and 283 injured in 149 road crashes across the country in 13 days while travelling during the Eid-ul-Fitr festival, according to Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity.

Besides, the passengers' welfare platform said, at least 17 people died and 45 went missing in six waterways-related accidents in between May 19 and May 31. No casualties were reported in one train-related accident during the time, the organisation said.

The organisation prepared the report collating data from media reports. The organisation's Secretary General Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury presented the statistics at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium yesterday.

As per government directives, most public and private offices were closed and public transport service remained suspended from March 26 to May 30 to control the transmission of Covid-19 in the country.

But many people left Dhaka before Eid in private and other vehicles, ignoring authorities' "stay home" advice, posing a serious risk of getting infected.

At least 273 people were killed and 849 injured in 232 road accidents across the country during the same period last year, according to the organisation.

The organisation said motorcycles were involved in the highest 35.78 percent road crashes, while truck, pickup, lorry and covered vans were involved in 28.98 percent, private car, microbus in 12.07 percent, illegal three-wheelers in 6.28 percent and bus in 0.97 percent.

Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, assistant professor of Accident Research Institute of Buet, among other was present at the press briefing.



AWARENESS... Opu, a man with a rare birth defect called Amelia that causes deformed limbs, used to beg for alms near Moghbazar, but for the last two months, has been stuck at home due to the pandemic. However, he says he has been fortunate enough to receive support from the solvent of society. As he plays ludo with his children to pass the time outside his slum residence near Moghbazar Wireless Gate area, he makes sure they are all wearing masks.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Prof Dr Naseem K Rahman no more

CITY DESK

Prof Dr Naseem K Rahman, a physicist of international repute, passed away on Sunday in Treviso, Italy.

Born in 1943, he was chairperson at physics department of Trieste University in Italy. His academic career led him to be involved with St Gregory's High School and College, Notre Dame College and Dhaka University. He obtained his PhD in the US. His publications include "Photons, Continuum States and Molecules" and "Universality and Diversity in Science".

He left behind his daughter Michelle Rahman, granddaughter Victoria, and family and friends in five continents to mourn his death.



MISAPPROPRIATION OF COVID-19 RELIEF

87 public reps suspended so far

RASHIDUL HASAN

The government has so far suspended 87 public representatives for alleged corruption in relief distribution among the poor during Covid-19 pandemic.

Of them, 29 are UP chairmen, 52 UP members, one zila parishad member, four municipality councillors and one upazila parishad vice-chairman, said LGRD ministry Public Relations Officer Mahmudul Hasan.

Most of them belong to the ruling Awami League, ministry sources said.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, AL senior presidium member Abdur Razzaque said, "We thought people would not be involved in corruption during this critical time... As we saw that several people belonging to our party did so, the party must take

punitive actions against them," said Razzaque, also agriculture minister.

The LGRD ministry on Thursday suspended Rafiqul Islam Malai, chairman of Muriak Union Parishad in Habiganj, over irregularities and nepotism in preparing list for money disbursement through mobile banking, said the ministry.

In another case, Shafiqul Islam Taskir, a member of ward-9 of Rajiura Union Parishad in Habiganj, was suspended for embezzling rice meant for selling to the poor at Tk 10 per kg.

Ruling party high-ups on several occasions warned of stern action against those involved in such activities, but so far, no exemplary action has been taken.

On Tuesday, the ministry suspended a municipal councillor,

four UP chairmen and six members over irregularities in cash and relief distribution, and absence at offices.

The UP chairmen are Md Anwarul Haque of Singpur in Nikli upazila and Hazi Md Kajal Bhuiyan of Halimpur under Bajitpur upazila in Kishoreganj, and Md Shahnewaz of Baliatioli under sadar upazila and Humayun Kabir of Noltana of Barguna.

The suspended councillor is Solaiman Babul of ward-6 in Boalkhali municipality of Chattogram.

In the notice, the ministry has also asked the suspended public representatives to explain within 10 days through respective deputy commissioners as to why they should not be removed permanently from their posts.

Govt control over Ctg pvt hospitals demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government has to take control of private hospitals with adequate ICU, ventilator, and centralised oxygen facilities in Chattogram, to deal with the increasing number of coronavirus patients, demanded a civil platform yesterday.

Participants of a human chain by "Action against Corona" in front of Chattogram Press Club also called on the government to bear patients' treatment costs.

Talking to The Daily Star, the platform's chief coordinator Dr Susanto Barua alleged that hospitals leave patients untreated, and helpless people are struggling to get seats at healthcare institutions. Under the circumstances, the government should come forward to take over the hospitals, he said.

Apart from this, testing capacity has to be increased at all levels -- including upazila and union -- to reduce people's suffering, demanded the participants.

Tavir Hossen, Advocate Amir Abbas and Bisumoy Dev, associate coordinators of the platform, were present at the human chain, among others.

Special train for a special fruit

Railways offering parcel service to transport mango at discounted rate

ANWAR ALI, RAJSHAHI

Mango is special.

With growers eyeing bumper yield and profit while buyers thronging markets to purchase these sweet delights, every year the "king of fruits" remains one of the best attractions of summer.

But this time around, amid the coronavirus scare, things are different. Mango growers had been suffering due to lack of transportation and buyers.

To ease growers' woes, the government has initiated a train service -- "Mango Special" -- to transport agricultural products, including mango.

The train began its journey on the route between Chapainawabganj and Dhaka yesterday at a reduced rate, said railway officials.

"We introduced the train for easing farmers' problems of transporting mango this season," said Md Nasir Uddin, railway's divisional transportation officer. The rates for booking parcels for the train was reduced to highest Tk 1.30 per kg from normal rate of Tk 3 a kg.

Both farmers and traders can use the



Workers load the summer fruit in a compartment of the train "Mango Special", which began its journey from Chapainawabganj to Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

facility, he said.

On the first day yesterday, around 1.64 tonnes of mango were booked from Chapainawabganj and six tonnes from Rajshahi, but each of the five coaches attached to the new train has the capacity of transporting at least 45 tonnes.

Appreciating the move, mango growers said this new train would reduce their sufferings, as they do not

have to book at different courier services at exorbitant prices any more.

Most growers refrained from attending to their orchards this year as they were anxious about how they would market their products. Besides, the weather was not favourable this year as rain occurred during flowering and fruiting periods, hampering production. Moreover, mango trees suffered two

storms this year including the cyclone Amphan that caused dropping of around 10 percent of the fruit.

Amid the situation, introduction of this new train is a sigh of relief for growers. "I consider this special train a blessing," said Anwarul Haque, president of Rajshahi Safe Mango Producers' Association. "The process of booking is easier and the fruits will face lesser damage on train than on trucks."

Growers will be able to save money on transportation cost too, he said. He said transportation of a kg of mango in train would require not more than Tk 2 including expenditures for porters whereas they used to spend more than Tk 16 for booking mango with courier services and Tk 6 in private trucks.

Starting from Chapainawabganj, the train would stop at different stations for loading the fruit. Other than Amnura, Rohonpur, Sitalai, Rajshahi, Sardaha road, Arani Abdulpur, the train will stop at Sirajganj, Tangail, Mirjapur, Mouchak, Joydevpur, Tangi, and Airport stations before reaching Kamalapur in the capital. Starting from Chapainawabganj at

4pm, the train will reach Rajshahi at 5:20pm and Dhaka at 1am. It will then start from Dhaka at 2:15am and reach Chapainawabganj at 10am.

But the train will continue to carry other goods including agricultural products round the year until further notice, said railway official Nasir Uddin. "We named the train after mango as a homage to the region, which is known for the summer fruit," he said.

Against a capacity of 22 trains, at least 34 trains ply the routes of Western zone in normal times. Movement of the "Mango Special" has become possible as many trains are suspended over coronavirus situation.

Meanwhile, Directorate of Posts introduced a service called "Krishak Bandhu Dak Seba" from June 2 to transport mango to Dhaka free of cost.

The service is meant for only mango growers, said Md Shafiqul Alam, post master general of Rajshahi division. Only growers can transport at least 5 tonnes of mango free of cost daily from Puthia, Charghat, Bagha upazilas of Rajshahi under the service, he said.

COVID-19 Ctg-16 MP, family test positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Lawmaker Mostafizur Rahman of Chattogram-16 has tested positive for Covid-19, along with a number of members of his family.

The affected include the lawmaker's wife, three daughters, one son-in-law, grandchild, his personal secretary and three domestic helps.

Their reports came positive on June 2, said AKM Mostafizur Rahman Russel, personal secretary of the lawmaker.

"All members of the family, including myself, have tested positive for Covid-19. My boss and others are in isolation and in good health", he told this newspaper.