

TANGENTS
BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Timeless rural Bengal.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Shilghat

It was during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 that I came to know and love rural Bengal. As political tensions escalated in March, we left Dhaka for our family home in Sylhet. Situated in the northern part of town, our house faced the Lakkatura Hills two miles to the north. Some days after their genocidal attack in Dhaka on 25th March, Pakistani army moved towards Sylhet. Late one afternoon we saw the enemy soldiers descending the hills and approaching our neighbourhood. Scattered gunfire rang out. We were prepared. Our extended family – nine of us – got into my father’s Jeep, packed minimal clothing and food, and fled ahead of the attackers. At nightfall we took refuge at Dargah Mahalla along with others fleeing the city towards the villages. Our destination was Shilghat, my paternal grandmother’s ancestral village. It wasn’t very far, but access was difficult, offering protection against enemy incursions. The next day we started for Shilghat. We stopped in town for provisions and petrol. Mid-afternoon, as we were crossing Keane Bridge, two Pakistani fighter planes appeared over town and strafed indiscriminately, causing widespread panic. By nightfall we reached Dhaka Dokkhin village, spending the night at the house of a family friend. The following day, after negotiating several miles of rough unpaved roads with the Jeep, we arrived at Shilghat. Our relatives welcomed us and made us feel at home. I had never actually lived in a village in my ten years. Now here I was in village Bengal, uncertain when - or if - our lives would return to normal. Village life required adjustments. The biggest was dealing with the lack of electricity. We used kerosene lanterns at night. Outhouses posed no problems as I grew up with them. For

bathing there were two ponds. One was open for all; the other, earmarked for women, had curtains for privacy. A small, shallow river ran a quarter mile away. I bathed and swam there. We quickly settled into the rhythm of village life, waking early to make the most of daylight hours. Shahin Chacha, a cousin of my father about my age, was one of our hosts. He guided me exploring the village. Spring rolled into summer and the trees brimmed with jackfruits, mangoes, lychees and *kalojaam*. We celebrated ripening of enormous jackfruits by competing to see who could eat the most. Otherwise, food was a struggle. The adults – particularly my parents – never let us understand this struggle, but eggs and potatoes became staple. Next came the rains. Clouds travelling north from the Bay of Bengal hit the Khasi Hills to the north of Sylhet. They dump their rain on the Sylhet region where torrential rain can last for days. And so, after the season’s first extended downpour, the tiny river swelled tenfold. Crossing it against swift currents was a challenge. After turning back halfway on several occasions, I finally made it across. Reaching the other side I realized the current had carried me downstream a great distance. This was a nuisance: I had to walk upstream double the distance before my return swim. After four months in the village, my parents thought I should return to school. So in August we left Shilghat for Sylhet, then on to Dhaka where my school awaited. Enemy soldiers reached Shilghat a month later; our relatives were not harmed. Those days in Shilghat deeply enriched my life. They instilled in me a love for village Bengal.

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The nation’s voice is gagged now: Fakhrul BNP demands immediate revoke of Digital Security Act

BNP yesterday alleged that the government is using the Digital Security Act as a weapon to hang onto power. “Around 153 people were harassed by filing cases against them under the Digital Security Act from January to June 2020,” Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the party, told a virtual press conference from his residence. Fakhru claimed that analysing the allegations of the cases, one will find that those were filed for raising voice against ruling party plunderers, expressing political views and criticising the government. Demanding immediate scrapping of the law, the BNP leader alleged that action is being taken against journalists or persons who publish corruption and heinous acts of the ruling party men on social media or in print media. “The nation’s voice is gagged now in fear of facing cases under the Digital Security Act,” Fakhru said. Mentioning that BNP has been long saying this law is unconstitutional and a tool of the government to suppress voice of people, Fakhru alleged that the ruling party made the law only to cling to power.

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‘Tk 5 lakh for each murder’ Hitman for top criminal, four associates held

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

He started as a “shooter”, when he was 18 years old. His primary task was to kill those who refused to pay money to top-listed criminal Shahadat Hossain. For each “killing mission”, shooter Rafiqul Islam Rony used to charge around Tk 5 lakh. Whenever any such order came from Shahadat, who is believed to be hiding in India, Rony carried out the order without asking question. For each “mission”, he never took more than three associates with him. An accused of at least eight cases with different police stations in the capital’s Mirpur, Rony is also a life-term awarded convict in a murder case. Police’s Detective Branch (DB) disclosed the findings after arresting Rony and four others from the capital’s Bhasantek area on Thursday. The other arrestees are Monir Hossain Babu Alias Desperate Babu (34), Saiful Islam (35), Saheen Miah (39) and Sohel Rana (31). Police also seized a foreign-made pistol and four machetes from them.

The arrestees were produced before a Dhaka court, which put them on two-day remand each for interrogation, Shahadat Hossain Sumon, additional deputy commissioner of DB (Tejgaon division) police, told The Daily Star yesterday. Yesterday was first day of the remand. On December 12 of 2013, Rony and his friend Mohosin alias Killer Mohosin demanded Tk 50 lakh from a businessman of Mirpur 10 area for construction of a residential building. As he refused to pay the money, Rony and Mohosin allegedly killed the businessman’s son, said Md Rajon, complainant of the case and also a brother of the victim. The court later gave them life-term imprisonment but they had never been arrested, said police. On July 31, Mohosin was killed in a “shootout” with Rab. After that, Rony went into hiding, said ADC Sumon. “Arrestee Saiful and Sohel are close associates of Rony. They used to collect extortion money from different areas of Mirpur in name of top-criminal Shahadat and send it to him in India every month,” he said.

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Housewife ‘beaten dead’ in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A housewife was allegedly beaten to death by her husband over a family row in Dhaka’s Mirpur area yesterday morning. Deceased Rizia Akter (45), who used to live with her family, bore injury marks on her head and other parts of the body, sources claimed. She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared her dead. Victim’s son Md Joy told reporters at Dhaka Medical College Hospital that his parents locked in an altercation around 4am and at one stage, his father Jahir Uddin Babar beat his mother, leaving her critically injured. Sub-inspector Jahangir Hossain of Mirpur Police Station also said that Jahir hit his wife in the head with a flashlight. Law enforcers detained Jahir after the incident, he told this newspaper. Kalam Uddin, the elder brother of the victim, said the couple had three daughters and a son. “My sister never complained of family issues. I have no idea why he (Jahir) killed my sister,” Kalam said. Filing of a case was underway until filing of this report.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Demanding justice for mountaineer Reshma who was run over by a microbus in the capital last Friday, a group of cyclists yesterday rallied from Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban to Hatirjheel. They also demanded the arrest of the culprit driver, and bicycle lanes on city streets.



The hawkers’ market near the capital’s Baitul Muqarram mosque butles on a weekend afternoon, as scores of people crowd the street with no regard for social distancing. Many were also spotted wearing either no masks, or wearing them on their chin, which defeats its ultimate purpose.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

আজীয় শোক দিবস

তুমি
মুজিবুর
রহমান
চির
মেমর

এই শোক সইবার শক্তি
নেই আমাদের

হে মহাত্মা,
আমরা তোমায় স্মরণ করি
বিন্দু শ্রদ্ধায়

শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জলি

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