

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Papuan Frogmouth, Australia.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

FROGMOUTHS and Nightjars

In far north Queensland, Australia, there is a rainforest called Wet Tropics. Meandering through this forest is the Daintree River. Two years ago, I was on a boat on the Daintree with several others, looking for birds the area is famous for.

Our boat cruised close to the eastern edge of the wide river. At one point, Mark, our birding guide, motioned to the boatman to slow down and approach the bank. He then pointed to a tree on the bank. The tree had sparse leaves, so the bird should have stood out. I stared intently but could see nothing until I noticed a bump at the Y intersection of two main branches. A strange looking bird had just about blended in perfectly with the bare branches. It had camouflaged so well because its plumage was the exact same colour as the bark.

The bird was a Papuan Frogmouth. It had a bulbous bill, no neck between its head and its body, red eyes and a creamy eyebrow. It was almost two feet long, and the closest I could think of was the Large-tailed Nightjar I had seen in Bangladesh.

Indeed, Frogmouths and Nightjars are birds that belong to an order of birds called Caprimulgiformes. They are distinguished by wide mouths, almost no neck and large eyes. Other birds in this order include Oilbirds, Hawk-nightjars and the fantastic looking Potoos. Most of these birds are nocturnal and live on insects.

Another characteristic of these birds is their superb camouflage.

Take the Large-tailed Nightjar, for example. I was once at a friend's

country home in Gazipur, standing next to a grove of trees, camera in hand, looking for birds, when a staff pointed to a tree close to me: "Sir did you see that one?" It was only six feet from me, perched on a horizontal branch, yet I had missed it due to its camouflage. The Large-tailed Nightjar was asleep – it was daytime after all – and our waving and clapping would not wake it up. After taking several photographs, I came very close expecting it to fly, but it ignored me. It was only when I lightly brushed my fingers on the trunk of the tree that it woke up with a start – from the softest vibration – and noisily flew away, its wings almost touching my face. Those were my early days of birding; today I would not disturb a bird like that.

Bangladesh has four other Nightjar species, but they are rare and have eluded me. The Savannah Nightjar can be found in Chapai Nawabganj. The Indian and Grey Nightjars are found in our forests. The Great-eared Nightjar was seen in Mirpur Botanical Garden. The only other bird from Caprimulgiformes order found in Bangladesh is the Hodgson's Frogmouth, an extremely rare find.

The rest of Caprimulgiformes are not seen in Bangladesh and most are hard to find even in their native lands. Among them, the Oilbird deserves a special mention because it is the only bird I know of whose chick, at one point during its growth, weighs more than the adult.

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Man claims wife died by suicide, family suspects murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mystery shrouds the death of a woman, who was found hanging in a house in Dhaka's Nikunja area yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Rafika Ruma Ety (26). Hailing from Bogura, she used to live on a ground-floor flat with her husband and son.

Her husband claimed that she hanged herself following a dispute over a trivial matter the night before, while the woman's family suspected that she was killed and then hanged.

Ety's husband Jamal Hossain also said following the altercation, she wanted to go out of the house in anger but he intercepted her.

"Later, we went to bed. Around 3:30am, I suddenly woke up and could not find her. Then I went to the balcony and saw her hanging from the iron bar with a scarf," he claimed.

She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared her dead.

Ety's brother Humayun Kabir said his sister was very strong mentally and she cannot have killed herself as she liked to take on any kind of problem as a challenge.

"Her husband says she hanged herself, but how were her knees touching the ground?" he questioned. "They had some family problems. We suspect that she was killed," he alleged.

Preparing an inquest report, Sub-inspector Abdus Samad of Khilkhet Police Station said there were no signs of external injuries on the body. However, a half crescent-shaped mark was found on her neck, he added.

The body was kept at the hospital mortuary for an autopsy, to determine the cause of death.

HELD IN RAPE CASE

Four children handed over to their parents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four children from Bakerganj in Barishal, who were arrested in a rape case, have been handed over to their parents yesterday after they were released from Jashore Children Development Centre in line with a High Court directive issued on Thursday night.

"Officer-in-charge of Bakerganj Police Station informed me at 8:30am today over phone that the four children were handed over to their parents. They were carried in a microbus with proper police protection. Local administration of Jashore has made the arrangement," said Supreme Court spokesperson Mohammad Saifur Rahman.

At 9:30pm on Thursday, two High Court judges operated a bench and directed Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Daman Tribunal of Barishal to instantly grant bail to the four, arrested on October 6 in a case filed on charges of raping a six-year-old at Bakerganj.

In a suomoto (voluntary) order, the HC directed the authorities to release the children – 10 to 12 years of age – from the custody of Children Development Centre at Pulerhat in Jashore on bail and hand them over to their guardians that night.

The OC was ordered to submit a report to the SC special officer in this regard.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Mohi Uddin

Shamim came up with the order following a report broadcast on a private television channel on the incident of arresting the children and inhumanly taking them to the centre, following rejection of their bail prayer. Court sources said the HC judges ordered Senior Judicial Magistrate of Barishal Enayet Ullah, who rejected the petitions, to appear before the bench on Sunday to place his explanation.

The HC bench also ordered the OC to appear before the bench along with the children and their guardians tomorrow and asked the registrar of Barishal Medical College Hospital to submit a medical report of the victim child. The HC will also hold a hearing on the issue tomorrow.

The tribunal granted bail to the children immediately after receiving the HC order.

The incident took place on October 4. According to the case statement, the four boys raped the girl in the pretext of playing. The victim disclosed the matter to her mother after she fell sick on Oct 6. Her father filed the case the same day.

Bakerganj police arrested them on October 7 and produced them to the court of senior judicial magistrate Enayet Ullah the same day. He rejected their bail petitions and ordered police to send them to the development centre.



The laughing face of a youth emerging from a pile of jute for this photograph was captured at the banks of Barishal's Arial Kha river. The golden fibre is brought to the port at Arjikalikapur village on trawlers, from where they're taken to warehouses by workers for Tk 500 per trip. This photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

DURGA PUJA IN BARISHAL AMID PANDEMIC

Idol artisans stare at losses

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Idol artisans in Barishal are not getting expected price ahead of Durga Puja amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The sculptors said even though prices of raw materials increased, their fees reduced as many puja mandap committees are offering low prices this year.

Many, however, said they are grateful that they are still getting some orders given the situation. Due to the pandemic, the festival will be celebrated on a limited scale this year.

Durga Puja, one of the biggest religious festivals of the Hindu community, will be held from October 22 to 26.

Organisers said 617 mandaps will be set up in Barishal – 42 in the city and 575 outside the city. Preparations are going on in full swing.

Last year, Durga Puja was held at 41 mandaps in the city and 570 mandaps outside.

Swapan Kar, organising secretary of Mahanagar Puja Udjapan Parishad, said number of mandaps increased this year.

Idol makers, however, said that did not make any good impact on their income, rather it went down at least 10 percent.

Rupak Pal working at Bhatikhana Puja Mandap said many are preferring small-size idols as they cannot afford the big ones. "This time, I took order for a

package of idols at Tk 20,000 which was Tk 60,000 last year," he said.

He said last year he got orders for five such packages. "So far, it's only one this year."

The sculptor said a Durga idol without paint generally costs Tk 5,000. This time, it needs more than Tk 6,000 due to price hike in raw materials, he said.

Despite the setback, these artisans continue to work and eagerly await the festival as bulk of their income comes from it, said Bishweswar Paul, adviser to Barishal Mritshilpi Sammelon o Sammanana, an organisation for clay artisan community in the southern region.

Tapan Pal, a clay artisan working for the city's Tiakhali Durga Mandap, said costs of straw, paint, other materials and labour went up by 10-20 percent but their fees did not.

Still, he said, they are in a way fortunate that they are getting orders amid this pandemic. "I thought I would not get any order as many were reluctant to celebrate puja properly this time," said Tapan. "It's still better than nothing."

Suranjit Dutta Litu, general secretary of Mahanagar Puja Udjapan Parishad, said they imposed a ban on lighting and music through loudspeaker this year. Health guidelines – including social distancing – will also be maintained strictly, he said.

DSHE issues guideline for using social media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) has asked all government college teachers and students to refrain from making and sharing posts, uploading photos, audios and videos on social media sites that might tarnish the image of the government or the nation.

On top of this, it also asked them to refrain from liking, commenting or sharing anything that might degrade the image of the government or the nation, according to a directive on social media sites of DSHE.

The directorate sent the guidelines to principals of all government colleges on Thursday evening. The directive also asked the principals to keep an eye on the social media activities of students and teachers so that no untoward and anti-law activities can take place there.

In the directive, DSHE has also asked not to make any comments regarding any nationally important persons, institutions, and others that can demean them.

The guideline also barred teachers and students from publishing any documents or information that can go against the national unity and spirit or hurt religious sentiment.

BNP announces candidates for Dhaka-18, Sirajganj-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday announced SM Jahangir as its candidate for Dhaka-18 by-elections, and Selim Reza for Sirajganj-1 by-polls.

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, BNP's secretary general, made the announcement at a press briefing at party chairperson's Gulshan office.

The party has observed that that both by-polls and parliamentary elections make no difference; no voting takes place, only candidacies are announced, he said.

Fakhru said people might then question why the party is joining the polls. "We believe in democracy. We believe that election is the only way to shift power peacefully."

Fakhru said his party does not want to give any space to the "fascist" government. "That's why we are participating in the election. We believe that if Election Commission works properly, results would project the people's verdict."

The by-elections will be held on November 12. As per schedule, the deadline for nomination submission is October 13. They will be scrutinised on October 15. October 22 has been set as the last date for candidacy withdrawal.

The Sirajganj-1 seat fell vacant following death of Awami League presidium member and former health minister Mohammad Nasim on June 13 and Dhaka-18 fell vacant after death of former home minister Sahara Khatun on July 9.

A women-only hostel where safety comes first



At Bidyanondo's women-only hostel "Bashonti Nibash", guests are provided with their own bunk bed in the form of medium-sized capsules.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

FAISAL BIN IQBAL, from SHOUT

The state of gender relations in Bangladesh stands at such a precarious position that the lived experience of all women, across any strata, is filled with fear, anxiety, and even paranoia. The outrage currently gripping the country over rape and gender-based violence is an indictment that the problem is very real. However, life does not stop, and in spite of their utter discomfort, many women have to travel alone, while some need to stay the night, away from the safety of their families.

In such cases, accommodation in expensive hotels is hard to afford for many, and cheap hotels may not also suffice due to inadequate security measures.

Taking these issues into consideration, Bidyanondo Foundation has established "Bashonti Nibash" in March. Inaugurated on Women's Day, this women-only hostel is located in Pallabi, Mirpur, with continuous CCTV surveillance, and other security measures. A night's stay costs Tk 199.

The hostel provides affordable accommodation to women, and includes contemporary requirements like Wi-Fi, air-conditioning, laundry services and a computer zone. It does not allow a prolonged stay, although under special circumstances, it allows guests to stay a maximum of seven days.

For students staying for one night, the same package is offered only at Tk 1 for the first night, and Tk 199 per night from the second night onwards.

"Our volunteers have to travel a lot for work," says Rakhima Khatun, a volunteer of the foundation who manages Bashonti Nibash. "During one such trip, a volunteer and her husband checked into a cheap hotel for the night, where they fell victim to harassment by a few local miscreants."

"The issue was later brought up by the volunteer in a conversation with our founder, who pledged to establish an affordable and safe hostel for women. That's how our journey began," she said.

Rakhima said, "The premises are under CCTV surveillance, and no men are allowed to enter the hostel. Volunteers are present to help the guests settle in. Besides, we have notified the local police station of how we operate, and if needed, we can always seek help from them."

Currently, the hostel can accommodate up to 36 guests. Each guest is provided with their own bunk bed in the form of medium-sized capsules. They also have private shower and bathroom facilities, with a small dining area as well.

"I came to know about the hostel from a friend," said Jyotika Khisa Joyi, a college student visiting from Khagrachhari. "The best part about this place is that girls can stay here alone without fear, and that too for such a low cost," adds Joyi.

Farjana Zabin Dola, visiting the capital from Kushtia for medical purposes, said, "The current situation regarding women's safety in our country is distressing. But with the security facilities at this hostel, parents can feel assured to let their daughters stay here."



An artisan working on an idol of Durga.

PHOTO: TITU DAS