

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

WEAVERS

Weaver birds are nature's engineers. They build intricate nests from vegetable material such as grass, leaves and palm fronds. Most weaver birds are found in Africa with a few in South Asia and Australia. They belong to the Ploceidae family of birds which has over 120 species.

In Bangladesh we have three species of weaver birds: Baya Weavers, Black-breasted Weavers and Streaked Weavers. Of these, Baya Weavers are easiest to find. If you wander around the countryside in monsoon you can spot their nests hanging from Coconut or *Shupari* trees. Black-breasted Weavers are somewhat more difficult to find. It helps if you know where to look for them – for example, from other birders. Streaked Weavers are the rarest of our weaver birds and incredibly difficult to find. All three are about the size of a House Sparrow.

Starting in late spring, male Baya Weavers start building their nests which hang from high supports such as palm fronds. They use their sharp beaks to strip long threads from the fronds and tall grass and weave them together into a nest. Using their saliva as glue, they make distinctive, elongated nests 1-3 feet tall with openings either below or on the side. The male works hard to make the nicest possible nest and uses it to entice a suitable female to mate with. It also works very fast, sometimes finishing a nest in one or two days. The end result is functional and tidy.

Black-breasted weaver nests are also nicely constructed. They build them close to the ground, usually in the middle of tall grass. Being within easy reach of many predators, they choose well-hidden spots, so these nests are not readily visible like the nests of Baya Weavers.

Not all weaver nests are neat



Baya (left) and Black-breasted Weavers, Keraniganj.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

and tidy. In southern Madagascar I saw nests of Sakalava Weavers. They were huge, sometimes spreading over several trees. A dozen birds were working on the nest simultaneously. These weaver birds look similar to our Baya Weavers with the males sporting a yellow crest. Another weaver I saw in Madagascar was the Nelicorina Weaver, which is more solitary. I saw its nests hanging from branches overhanging a canal in the forest. They were round, a little smaller than a football, and made from vegetation threads that were coarser than the threads used by Baya Weavers.

Sociable Weavers are found in southern Africa. They are well-known for their large nests, which they build as much as

ten meters high and which can contain hundreds of individual nest chambers – just like a large apartment building. These nests are a far cry from the Baya Weaver's nest and look more like a large pile of hay. Sometimes large snakes raid these nests for eggs or chicks.

For me, the best part about weaver birds is watching them build a nest. All around us, nature performs many miracles that we miss, either because they happen too fast, or too slow, or we don't understand them. Watching weavers at work, I find, is an easy and satisfying way to appreciate nature's wonders.

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BAR COUNCIL

Written test of 5 centres cancelled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

MURDER OF 11-YEAR-OLD IN MIRPUR

Prime accused held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prime accused in the murder of 11-year-old Shammun Islam, in Dhaka's Mirpur area a week ago, was arrested early yesterday.

A team of detectives arrested Mahfuzur Rahman Roni (38) from Chandpur-Laxmipur bordering area around 4:30am, said Manas Kumar Podder, deputy commissioner (DB Mirpur division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Shammun, a fourth grader at a local school, went missing on December 17 while he was playing near his house in Mirpur-6 area.

That very night, his mother Roksana Begum got a call from an unknown person who demanded Tk 5 lakh as ransom for his release. Roksana gave Tk 60,000 to the miscreants through a mobile money transfer company in several phases but the kidnappers killed the boy.

Police found him dead at a 14-storey building in Mirpur-10 on December 19, two days after he was kidnapped.

Roksana filed a murder case accusing five persons for abduction and murder of Shammun with Mirpur Model Police Station.

Police earlier arrested four accused from different areas of the capital in connection with the abduction and murder.

The arrestees are -- Nur Alam Proloy, Yusuf Newaz, Khairul Islam and Mahfuzur Rahman.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bar Council on Thursday decided to cancel the written test of the advocateship candidates, held at five centres on December 19, as some of them went berserk at those centres, preventing others from taking the test and burning their answer scripts.

The centres are: Mohammadpur Mohila College, Mohammadpur Kendriya College, BCSIR School, Govt Mohammadpur Model School and Dhaka Mohanagar Mohila College.

The council decided to uphold the written test for the candidates held at four other centres on the same day.



Street lamps are being installed from the port city's Alkoron Mor all the way to the City Gate. To facilitate this, holes have been dug by breaking down road dividers across the route. However, the dangerously scattered debris and protruding rods are posing a threat to public safety. This photo was taken on Thursday from Alkoron Mor.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A comforting day for canines

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The stray dogs at Chattogram's Sadarghat area had a different kind of day yesterday.

Dewormed, vaccinated, fed, and even dressed up, it almost felt like their pampering had no end.

All thanks to a few kind-hearted individuals. The initiative was spearheaded by Dr Ferdoushe Akter Dipti, a thana livestock officer at Doublemooring.

"Every day on my way to work, I see the dogs, distressed and neglected. Even in the coldest mornings, they're out wandering around for food, trembling from the cold. On top of this, some people attack them for nothing," she told this correspondent.

Dr Ferdoushe intervened out of empathy.

"Initially, the plan was to just vaccinate them, so that locals aren't afraid of them."

Informed of the plans, her office -- the Thana Livestock Office at Doublemooring -- agreed to provide logistical support. Still, it was near impossible for Dr Ferdoushe alone to go to the area with the vaccines, gather the



After some initial moments of suspicion, the dogs cosied up, realising that the volunteers were there to look out for them.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Keep dorms open during exams

Demand RU students

ARAFAT RAHMAN, RU

Students of Rajshahi University (RU) have urged authorities to reopen dormitories ensuring health guidelines, during the honours and master's final examinations, which are scheduled to start from January 2.

The clamour for reopening dorms has been growing amid students, in the wake of the authority's decision to hold exams without reopening residential halls, citing the pandemic.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, students termed the university's decision illogical. They said a majority of students -- particularly those from far-flung areas of the country -- cannot afford to pay rent for off-campus accommodation. It will be an extra burden for their families during the pandemic.

Suborno, a student of 2015-16 session, said, "We can't rent a house or mess for just one month, as landlords demand security deposit. So, most of us must stay at a friend's or relative's place, which can be risky during the pandemic."

Some students, however, opposed the demand, saying students need to prioritise their necessities. They should sit for the exams by any means to avoid session jam and start their career.

Leaders of student organisations also demanded halls be reopened on a limited scale.

Mehedee Hasan Mishu, organising secretary of BCL RU unit, said the decision to keep halls closed is against students' interests.

Mohabbat Hossain Milon, general secretary of Chhatra Federation, said authorities may open halls only for examinees by ensuring health precautions.

Prof Lutfor Rahman, student advisor (additional exams) at RU, said, "We were instructed by UGC to take exams, while keeping halls closed. If we open them during exams, students from different areas of the country will come to campus and stay together, which may cause an outbreak."

CITY

Snake venom worth Tk 75cr seized in Dhaka Six arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion seized snake venom worth Tk 75 crore and arrested six persons from Dakshinkhan area in the capital on Thursday afternoon.

The arrestees were identified as Masud Rana (24), Sofir Uddin Sanu (50), Tamjidul Islam Monir (34), Alamgir Hossain (26), Firoza Begum (57) and Asma Begum (42).

The six, supposedly members of an international snake venom smuggling racket, were arrested while they were gathering in Gulbar Munsi Sarani area around 3:30pm, said Abdullah Al Mamun, assistant director (media) of Rab-2.

After searching a bag one of them was carrying officials found the snake venom kept in glass jars.

The value of the venom is worth around Tk 75 crore, added the assistant director.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they used to collect the venom from different areas to supply to a specific ring, the officials said. Filing of a case is underway in this regard, they added.

According to different law enforcement agencies, the smugglers were using Bangladesh as a route to smuggle the venom into Indonesia and Malaysia and some other countries.

On November 25, Criminal Investigation Department of police seized snake venom worth Tk 9 crore and arrested two smugglers from Gazipur.

Snake venom is used in Asian traditional medicine.

'Once drivers, they now hijack buses to conduct robbery'

7 members of robber gang held

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

They were drivers by profession and used to work in public transport.

But in the last 10 years, they were arrested and sent to prison for petty crimes such as theft and domestic violence.

And it was in the prison they got acquainted, formed a group and started conducting robbery in the capital and nearby districts.

Police's detective branch (DB) yesterday claimed to have arrested seven members of this robber gang.

The arrestees were identified as Md Fakrul Kabir Shanto, ringleader of the group, and his associates -- Md Rafiq, Md Riaz, Md Rasel, Md Shahjahan, Harun Or Rashid and Md Humayun Kabir, according to law enforcers.

Police arrested the seven from Gabtoli, Mohammadpur and Mirpur areas of Dhaka and Savar during a special drive on Wednesday. Anich Uddin Bahadur, additional deputy commissioner of DB police, who led the drive, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Police also recovered 10 cellphones, Tk 6,000, three knives, three machetes and two walkie-talkies from their possession, said the official.

The additional deputy commissioner said these robbers sometimes posed as law enforcement officials for looting valuables from people, and the walkie-talkies were used to deceive them.

Ringleader Shanto is wanted in at least 15 cases including arms and robbery, filed with different police stations while Riaz is wanted in couple of cases filed with Ashulia Police Station, added ADC Anich Shahadat Hossain of DB (Tejgaon division) police.

According to police, arrestee Rafiq is wanted in three similar cases, filed with Ashulia and Sirajganj police stations while Riaz is wanted in couple of cases filed with Ashulia Police Station, added ADC Anich Shahadat Hossain.

For conducting a robbery, they mainly targeted day-night buses, which started journey from different districts and reached

the capital past midnight, according to detectives.

Once a bus dropped off passengers, the gang took control of the vehicle by confining the staff members and then conducted robbery with the bus till the morning.

They mostly took passengers inside the bus and looted their valuables at gun point, said detectives.

The gang's latest target was a bus of AK Travels.

According to the first information report filed by bus supervisor Abu Hurayra with Adabor Police Station, the vehicle, starting its journey from Satkhira with passengers, reached Dhaka around 1am on December 19.

They dropped off all passengers and parked the bus in Shyamoli area to have food at an eatery.

When they returned to the bus around 2:30am, some 10 to 15 people entered the vehicle and took their money and phones at knifepoint, read the first information report.

The robbers then tied and blindfolded the bus supervisor, driver Abdur Rashid and helper Saiful Islam, and kept them at the back of the vehicle.

One of the robbers drove the bus and another posing as the supervisor took in passengers to loot valuables from them, according to the FIR.

Around dawn, the robbers left the bus abandoned, keeping passengers and staffers tied inside.

One of the passengers managed to untie his hands and free the others.

There were around 15 passengers blindfolded inside the vehicle, including a uniformed police officer.

Robbers also took away his walkie-talkie.

While investigating the case, detectives managed to arrest the seven but some six to eight are still on the run, said ADC Anich Uddin.

"We are conducting drives to arrest the absconding members of the gang," he added.

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Stand by cold-hit people

Quader urges AL leaders, activists

Bss, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday called upon the party leaders and workers to stand by cold-hit people.

People of lower-income group have been suffering immensely as a cold wave is sweeping over in different parts of the country including the northern region.