

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Snail Kite and Snail, Pantanal, Brazil.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Snail Kite

Five years ago, I was looking for birds at a lake in Florida. The lake had a grid of piers for boat landing. I was walking along one when a reddish-brown bird, medium in size, flew by close to me and started circling above the water. Its head was facing down and its talons were outstretched. It was clearly hunting. I thought it was looking for fish and waited for action, camera ready. In a few moments it swooped down. But instead of fish, its talons pulled out a large snail from the water, about the size of an apple.

The bird then sat atop a pillar on another pier. A strong wind was blowing and it had trouble balancing, but holding the snail with its feet, it used its sharp, hook-shaped beak to pry out the flesh from inside the shell. While photographing I came close to it, but it was so engrossed that it paid me no attention. Checking the photographs later I found the name of this bird: a female Snail Kite.

Three years after this sighting, I was on a boat in the Pantanal, Brazil's massive wetland. We were cruising the wide Paraguay River, checking different channels and tributaries for birds and animals. Our guide took us into a long, narrow channel. At the far end, sitting on the bank, was a dark grey bird. It had just caught a snake which was still writhing. As we watched, it tried to swallow the snake but apparently the scales were too much. So it used its talons and beaks to skin it before devouring it. Our guide informed us the bird was a male Snail Kite. On another day we saw a Snail Kite fly off with a large snail it

had pulled out of a bush.

Snail Kites belong to the Kite group which are birds of prey belonging to one of three subfamilies of the large bird family Accipitridae. There are about twenty-five species of Kites. They are found all over the world, particularly in warmer lands. They are carnivorous birds, eating a wide variety of protein from mice to frogs to lizards to fish. Some kites are more avid hunters than others. For example, of the three species of Kites found in Bangladesh, two (Brahminy Kite and Black Kite) are lazy hunters, preferring to scavenge instead, while the smaller Black-winged Kite is a more active hunter.

The Snail Kite is a specialized hunter, preying mostly on large Apple Snails. But it will also take other prey as I saw in the Pantanal. At less than two feet long, its main features are its red eyes, its distinctive curved beak, and the white band on its tail. Male and female look different: the male is dark grey while the female is reddish-brown.

Globally, the IUCN considers Snail Kite as "Least Concern" because of its abundance in South America. However, in Florida, it is considered endangered and protected vigorously. It builds its nest on the ground in wetlands. People are not allowed to approach these nests. I know a photographer who was arrested and fined for approaching and disturbing the nest of a Snail Kite.

www.facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

'Rupali Guitar' needs attention

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

On a visit to Prabantak intersection in the port city last weekend, Chittagong University student Apu Saha became shocked to see the battered state of the sculpture Rupali Guitar, which had been installed in remembrance of the late and great musician Ayub Bachchu.

A layer of dust was covering the guitar while the surrounding fountain and garden were in a shabby state. Apu, a dedicated fan of Bachchu's music, was rightly angered to see the lack of maintenance done by the city corporation for upkeep of the sculpture.

This correspondent visited the spot later in the week to check on its condition. A security guard named Rajib, appointed by Script, a private organisation that is supposed to do maintenance work of the sculpture, said they have cleaned the installation about 15 days ago.

Asked why they were not cleaning it every day, he suggested to talk to his boss. Contacted, Enamul Hasan, director of Script, said they stopped cleaning the structure for the time being as works of road development were underway in the area. "We will clean it regularly once the construction work is completed," he said.

The Chattogram City Corporation inaugurated the Rupali Guitar sculpture at Prabantak intersection in the city of Chattogram, where Bachchu was born and brought up, just after a year of his death on

September 18, 2019. Bachchu passed away on October 18, 2018.

The sculpture is made of stainless steel. It is 18 feet high and the height of its base is four feet. The guitar contains six strings also made of steel bars. The whole project cost Tk three crore, said sources in CCC.

The then local CCC councillor (ward-15) Gias Uddin took the initiative to build the sculpture while the then CCC mayor AJM Nasir Uddin inaugurated it.

The sculpture and the surrounding fountain were made very eye-catching, but maintaining it in a bustling city where construction and pollution are omnipresent remains a difficult task. Asked, Gias Uddin said although he initiated the sculpture on behalf of CCC, he cannot oversee it as his tenure expired in March and CCC polls could not be held in time due to the pandemic.

"I am vying for the councillor post once again in the polls scheduled to be held on January 27. If elected, I will definitely take care of it," he said.

CCC executive engineer Farhad-ul-Alam said a deal was completed with the private organisation for maintenance. "Perhaps they are not performing their duty properly," he said.

Contacted, CCC Administrator Khorshed Alam Sujan said he would write to the organisation which is supposed to maintain the sculpture.



This Rupali Guitar sculpture at Prabantak intersection in the port city is hugely popular, but its upkeep remains irregular with construction happening nearby.

PHOTO: STAR

Want to clear 6 lakh cases from backlog this year

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The law ministry has planned to reduce backlog of at least six lakh cases from the existing 38 lakh cases pending with the courts across the country in 2021.

"We have held few meetings in the ministry in last two months and decided that we will try to reduce six lakh of the backlog cases in the year of 2021. We have made a plan and we have already started working to this effect," Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday.

Without disclosing the plan, he said the government will take necessary steps so that the cases are disposed of within the current year. The minister said the government had a similar plan last year but it was not implemented due to the ongoing pandemic.

According to a Supreme Court study report, a total of 36,84,728 cases were pending with all the courts till December 31, 2019 after 11,65,935 cases have been disposed of since January 1 to December 31, 2019.

The number of cases pending with the Appellate Division stood at 23,617 till December 31, 2019 after the apex court has disposed of total 6,303 cases that year.

The High Court has disposed of total 1,35,275 cases, and after the disposal 4,89,068 cases were pending with this court till December 31, 2019.

The lower courts had a backlog of total 31,72,043 cases after they had disposed of 10,24,357 cases till December 31, 2019, according to the SC statement.

The SC administration did not prepare a study report last year.

South Korea-bound students' visa conundrum

Korean govt still firm on travel restrictions for Bangladeshis

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Right after graduating in 2017, Hamim (not his real name) started submitting scholarship applications for master's programmes abroad. In the meantime, he kept working as a marketing officer for a private organisation.

Finally in March last year, he got a scholarship from a Korean university. But as luck would have it, he could not make it there in time for the semester's start. Covid-19 had already broken out, and travel restrictions meant the suspension of flights.

Even after flights resumed, Hamim still could not board a plane, as South Korean authorities suspended issuing new visas for Bangladeshis since June. Officials concerned said the suspension came after some people tested positive at South Korea despite carrying Covid-19 negative reports from Bangladesh.

All in all, 2020 has been a seriously frustrating year for Hamim, and this frustration is shared by over 200 Bangladeshi students who obtained scholarships for post-graduation and PhD programmes in different universities in South Korea.

Students have urged the government to take special initiatives to ensure they can join the next semester, beginning from March 2021. This is all the more urgent, the students said, because their scholarships might get cancelled if they fail to go to South Korea before the next semester.

They said they have been shuttling between various ministries and the embassy for the past two months to get South Korean visa. They also submitted memorandums to the ministries of foreign affairs, home and education, but none could say exactly when the doors will be open for them.

On June 23, South Korea stopped issuing new visas and strengthened entry restrictions for Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals following the testing debacle. Although issuing visas for Pakistanis resumed from October 26, Bangladesh is still on the list of suspended countries.

A total of 33 Bangladeshis who had previously-issued visa were found coronavirus positive after their arrival in South Korea. Some 28 visitors were reported positive in Korea till December 24, said South Korea's official Covid-19 related website.

The Korean embassy in a notice recently said, "The Korean government is of the position that it would consider lifting or relaxing visa restriction when the number of Covid-19 cases among Bangladeshi arrivals falls close to nil for a certain period."

However, the students pointed out that Bangladeshi citizens are not the only ones with such cases, as citizens of other countries have also tested positive in South Korea after producing Covid-19 negative reports. To ensure utmost safety, they proposed they would go into a 15-day quarantine in Bangladesh before their departure and complete another 15 days of quarantine after reaching South Korea, all at their own cost if needed.

In a reply to the students' memorandum, the Korean embassy on December 19 said, "To our regret, while we are making continuous efforts, so far the position of the [South] Korean government has not changed. It is mainly due to the continuing infection cases from Bangladeshi arrivals in South Korea, in addition to the Covid-19 situation in Bangladesh."

"South Korea is continuously facing difficulties to address the Covid-19 pandemic, with the recent 2nd and 3rd waves and continuing infections from foreign arrivals," the notice added.

Contacted, Khondker Mohammad Talha, DG (East Asia & Pacific Wing) of the foreign ministry, said, "There is a lot of interaction through our diplomatic channel for the students. But it all depends on the overall coronavirus situation."

He said the foreign minister has already talked to his counterpart in this regard.

"I have talked to the ambassador on December 19. We are trying to arrange at least one special flight for the students," he said on December 21.



A baby boy's curious face peaks out of his bright red cloak during a winter morning walk in his father's arms. They were out basking in the sunlight in the early hours of the first day of the new year at Tejkunipara in the capital.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Farida Yasmin first female president of Jatiya Press Club

Ilias Khan new GS

UNB, Dhaka

Farida Yasmin of the Daily Ittefaq made history by getting elected as the first female president of Jatiya Press Club on Thursday.

Ilias Khan of the daily Amar Desh was elected general secretary of the press club's management committee for the 2021-22 tenure.

Farida bagged 581 votes while her rival candidate Kamal Uddin Sabuj got 395 votes. Farida was the general secretary of the outgoing committee. Ilias secured 566 votes while Omar Farroque got 393 votes for the general secretary post.

Hasan Hafiz was elected senior vice president and Rezwanaul Haque Raza vice president. Other office bearers of the 17-member executive committee are -- joint secretaries Mainul Alam and M Ashraf Ali, and treasurer Shahed Chowdhury. The members are: Ayub Bhuiyan, Rezanur Rahman, Quazi Rownaq Hossain, Jahiduzzaman Farroque, Shahnaz Begum Poly, Syed Abdal Ahmed, Shahnaj Siddiqui Shoma, Banu Ranjan Chakraborty, Rahman Mostafiz and Bakhtiar Rana.

Road crashes kill 8

STAR REPORT

At least eight people were killed and 14 injured in road accidents across the country yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents and a news agency.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports, a bus-car head-on collision killed four people and injured another on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Belabo upazila. The accident occurred at Jongua around 5pm, said highway police.

Meanwhile, three people were killed and four injured in a collision between a bus and pickup on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway at Chiringa, reports our Cox's Bazar correspondent. Pickup driver Manik (26), Tarekul Islam Babu (22) died instantly while Mamta (28) on the way to a hospital, said police. The injured, who were in the bus, were taken to Chokoria Upazila Health Complex.

UNB from Sylhet adds, Mostofa (38) was killed and nine were injured in a head-on collision between a bus and a truck at Parganabazar.



আর এফ এল
হাউজওয়্যার

দেশের সাথে দশ-এর পথে

অর্থনৈতিক এই হাদিসের জন্যই আমাদের সকল প্রচেষ্টা।
আয়, বিসুদ ও ভালোবাসায় টানা দশবার দেশের
ব্যাঙ্কের স্বীকৃতি পাওয়ায় আমরা কৃতজ্ঞ। আমরা
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