

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Muhuri, Feni.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Grey-headed FISH EAGLE

The Grey-headed Fish Eagle, which lives all year in Bangladesh, is the most common of our four fish eagles and found all over the country. (Our other three fish-eating raptors are the Pallas's Fish Eagle, the Osprey and the White-bellied Sea Eagle; they arrive here during winter and are more localized.)

It is a distinctive bird, not easy to confuse with others and identified by three main features. Its legs are covered in white feathers, its body is brown and its head is a pale grey. About the size of our *cheels*, it reaches thirty inches and weighs up to three kilograms. In flight, you can see its white tail rounded out by a black band. Its beak is small for an eagle, but its talons make up for that.

I first saw the Grey-headed Fish Eagle years ago in Baikka Beel Wildlife Sanctuary, but after that first look, I had trouble finding it again. About a year ago, I was in Hail Haor when I spotted a largish bird sitting at the edge of a fishpond. At first I thought it was a Pallas's Fish Eagle but the white leg feathers puzzled me. As I looked it flew up and perched on a branch perhaps twenty feet above the water.

I observed it while it scanned the water. A few minutes later it made its move. It dived down and straightened out just above the water, legs stretched out in front, talons open. For a split second it flew horizontally like this. Then it effortlessly dipped its outstretched claws into the water, pulling out a Tilapia. Holding the fish with its talons, it flew off to a tree far

away, presumably to eat in privacy.

The entire operation took perhaps a second or two. If I had glanced away, I would have missed it.

Some weeks later I saw the same bird perched on the same tree but this time it did not dive. Instead, it stared at me and I noticed a curious behaviour. It lowered its head while retracting its neck, so it looked like the head was looking out from its upper chest, as if it was shrugging.

More recently I saw the several Grey-headed Fish Eagles in Muhuri Lake, Feni. Here, a dam built on the river Muhuri before it flows into the ocean has created a lake where birds congregate in winter. Several fish ponds dot the area. The eagles were perched on trees around one such pond, keeping a sharp eye on the water, often flying in to trees close to water's edge for a better look.

It was also here that I got a closer look at the four formidable talons which emerge from the thick skin of its toes. Three face forward and the largest one, called the hallux, faces the rear. They are curved with sharp points. The eagle uses all talons for catching prey. Once caught, the front talons hold the kill in place while the rear talon is used like a dagger to thrust into the prey, and, together with the beak, to dismember it.

Indeed, the Grey-headed Fish Eagle is a fine example of the avian treasures of Bangladesh.

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MIRPUR-11

DNCC eviction drive continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) yesterday conducted their drive against illegal structures to widen the road at Mirpur section-11. DNCC will construct a 2km long road there for better connectivity with the airport.

DNCC demolished around 150 shops on Thursday and resumed their drive at 10am yesterday. It continued till 5pm.

Though DNCC is demolishing shops and houses across 900 metres of the road, they did not demolish a few seven to nine-storied buildings. DNCC faced obstruction from locals on the first day of their drive on Thursday.

Md Sadaqat Khan Fakku, acting president of Mirpur-11 New Society Market, complained that three bihari camps were demolished. He said they did not get any notice before the drive and it was conducted violating a Chamber Judge Court order.

Mohammad Rabin, salesman of a shop, mentioned he got married just six months ago. "I don't know how I will manage the costs of a new family now that I have lost my job due to the eviction," he said.

Akash Robi Das, who operated a shoe shop at a rented structure for the last 20 years, said he doesn't know how and where he will store his inventory. "I am a victim of this 'development', I did not know the shop was built illegally."

About the complaint of violating the injunction order, Executive Magistrate Tajwar Akram Sakapi Ibne Sazzad said they are not demolishing the structures or shops which are under the injunction.

Election campaign peaks in port city

AL, BNP mayoral candidates to unveil manifestos today

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

With Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) polls knocking at the door, the election campaigns are reaching their peak.

As polls day is on January 27, candidates will have to end their campaigns by January 25 midnight, said Mohammad Hasanuzzaman, returning officer of CCC polls.

Both Awami League (AL) and BNP mayoral candidates are trying their best to win over voters. During campaigns, they were seen requesting voters to choose them, offering a bunch of pledges to develop the city.

Both candidates are going to announce their election manifestos today.

AL mayoral candidate Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, in his manifesto, will focus on making a smart city, with all modern amenities, said AL sources.

Rezaul will keep CCC non-partisan and focus on flourishing the city's tourism potentials, they said.

Contacted, Rezaul said making a smart city will be his prime focus. "The remaining

pledges would be elaborated in the manifesto."

Meanwhile, BNP mayoral candidate Shahadat Hossain, in his manifesto, will focus on making the city picturesque, with all modern facilities for tourism, and address housing problems for marginal income groups, said BNP sources.

He will develop the city in a planned manner, consulting with eminent citizens and experts of respective fields, they said.

Contacted, Shahadat told The Daily Star that he will be loyal to his pledges, if elected mayor. "I am going to announce my election manifesto tomorrow [Saturday], where I will elaborate on my plans about the city and pledges for residents."

Both candidates pledged to address the city's longstanding problems, including waterlogging, keep CCC corruption-free and emphasise coordination between CCC and service organisations during development work, sources said.

Seven candidates are vying for the mayoral post in CCC. All other candidates were also seen busy, going to the doors of voters in different areas with their pledges.



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

STRANDED... Technology has passed the age of typewriters. As computers and smartphones have become popular, there's little reason left to pay a typist anymore. Sitting right beside printshop hubs, some of them pass their days uncertain. Some have already accepted that this is it. Too old to switch craft, they pass their days accepting a life of bare survival. This photo was taken from Chattogram's Agrabad area recently.

Solution at a standstill

By-pass road planned to prevent accidents non-existent even after a decade

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Goods-laden trucks rushing to cross Sylhet city through the busy Amberkhana intersection continue to claim lives, with two persons being killed in two separate accidents last week.

"Although there is no formal data, as many incidents go unreported, five died and many were injured in road accidents at the intersection in the last three months. Such incidents are continuing. If trucks drive through the intersection, people will keep suffering," said Abdul Karim Kim, coordinator of Sankhubdha Nagorik Andolon.

Authorities were supposed to resolve this issue a decade ago by building a by-pass road for trucks. But after spending crores of taka, the project was suddenly halted. The trucks, however, continued their reckless practice.

The question locals ask after each death is "why do authorities not come up with a concrete solution for this severe problem?"

Barring trucks from entering the city was planned back in 2006. The solution was to construct the bypass road for them.

To reach the national highway via Amberkhana, truckers need to drive 11.2 kilometres from Sylhet Airport bypass point to Temukhi Bridge at Kumargaon.

Construction of the 12km bypass road from Airport to Kumargaon via Badaghat area started in August 4, 2010, with a budget of Tk 45 crore. But after spending 27.5 crore till 2014, the construction came to a halt for unknown reasons.

According to Roads and Highways Department in Sylhet, a proposal for a four-lane road was forwarded to the ministry in 2016.

To assess the proposal, a team led by Md Zakir Hossain, additional secretary (planning) of Roads and Highways Division of the ministry -- visited the road on August 8 last year and submitted a report on August 17, recommending a two-lane road.

As Sylhet residents criticised the

recommendation, the ministry is now planning a four-lane road, RHD officials confirmed.

SCC Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury said, "RHD has been playing with the issue since 2006. They couldn't even complete construction of the two-lane bypass and are now planning for a four-lane. There's a road, Dhopagul to Haripur via Sahebbazar, which can be used as an alternative by upgrading it. I will be sending the proposal to the ministry soon."

Faruque Mahmud Chowdhury -- president of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik, Sylhet chapter -- said, "Until the bypass road is ready, trucks should be allowed in the city after 11pm, and should remain within speed limit of 20 km per hour."

Ritesh Barua, executive engineer of RHD in Sylhet, said, "The ministry forwarded us the design of a four-lane bypass road, and we're working to prepare a Detailed Project Plan now. We will submit it soon. Once the DPP is approved,

we'll start constructing the bypass."

The Amberkhana intersection for decades has only provided narrow access for vehicles, due to four illegal auto-rickshaw stands, uncontrolled parking and hawkers occupying parts of road. In addition to the problem, hundreds of goods-laden trucks from two upazilas are bound to use this intersection to cross the city to reach the national highway.

These trucks are permitted only to enter the city area after 8pm. As they have to wait hours before crossing the city, they start rushing and cause accidents often.

In the last 14 years, Amberkhana intersection has been expanded by nearly double its original width, but traffic flow and other issues grew even more. To resolve the narrow access, SCC and Sylhet Metropolitan Police's traffic section are now looking for new solutions.

Faisal Mahmud, deputy commissioner (traffic) of SMP, said, "A new instruction of 'no drop and pick-up' within 100 metres of the

intersection will be imposed soon."

However, SMP was not sure what it can do about the auto-rickshaw stands.

The mayor added, "We are now planning for a designated parking zone and looking for a suitable solution for the illegal auto-rickshaw stands."

While citizens blame rushing trucks for accidents and deaths, they also included lack of awareness while driving motorcycles and crossing or walking by the road as a cause of death.

Faruque said, "Motorcycle riders are reckless nowadays. The number of unpermitted auto-rickshaws is quite large, and violation of traffic rules is going up. Stern implementation of road transport laws can help raise awareness."

Mayor Ariful also called for strict implementation of the new Road Transport Act 2018, and SMP Deputy Commissioner (traffic) Faisal Mahmud agreed with his position.



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Trucks keep on driving recklessly through Sylhet city's Amberkhana intersection, while the incomplete Airport-Badaghat-Kumargaon bypass road remains incomplete for years, inset. These photos were taken last week.



Two new fruit varieties get registered

Rajshahi Fruit Research Centre scientists to expand cultivation of Aam-14 and Falsa-1



PHOTO: COLLECTED

BARI Aam-14's deep red hue stands out against green leaves, while Falsa, the small fruit that resembles berries, is being recognised as a local fruit for the first time.

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Rajshahi Fruit Research Centre, a wing of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), has added two new varieties to Bangladesh fruits.

One is a colourful mango variety -- BARI Aam-14. Originated in Saudi Arabia, the variety has been introduced in Bangladesh following required research processes.

The other is the local Falsa variety -- BARI Falsa-1. Scientifically known as *Grewia asiatica*, Falsa belongs to the berry family. Its small trees grow across the country and it has been recognised as a local fruit for the first time.

National Seed Board signed the certificates of the two fruit varieties. They were registered on December 31 last year and the certificates reached Rajshahi early this week, the research centre's Principal Scientific Officer Dr Alim Uddin said.

With these two, Fruit Research Centre has added a total of nine varieties of fruits in the country, he said, the country now boasts of 92 varieties of 36 kinds of fruits.

"We are proud and delighted. We believe these fruits will be popular among farmers and people for their taste, nutrient values and commercial potential," he said.

In 2010, Golam Mortuza, a BARI scientist,

took a branch of a mango tree to the research centre. He collected the branch from Saudi Arabia while working on mangoes there. From that branch, scientists of the centre grew ten plants through grafting. Only one of those plants survived. It helped the researchers grow a total five mother plants in ten years, Dr Alim was describing.

These five mother trees of BARI Aam-14 bear fruits at end of July every year. Fruits become a vibrant maroon colour at its ripe stage. Each of these oblong shaped mangoes weigh around 569 grammes. Of its mass, 75.35 percent are edible and it contains 22.83 percent sugar content. It has a potential of producing 14 tonnes of mangoes per hectars of land.

The Falsa variety was selected from a 20 year old tree of the centre.

"This fruit is grown almost everywhere in the country, but it was never recognised. But it has the potential," Alim says.

Falsa trees regularly bear fruits in May and June. This small round shaped fruits weigh around 0.66 grammes and become purple at the ripe stage.

This sweet and sour fruit has 24 percent sugar content and each of the trees bear 20kg of the fruit in a year.

"We will now work for extension of the fruits' cultivation," Dr Alim Uddin said.