

TANGENTS BY IHTISHAM KABIR BITTERNS

The first word that comes to mind when I think of bitterns is "shy." Although I have seen all three species of bitterns found in Bangladesh, it has never been easy. They hide inside foliage, camouflage exceedingly well and fly away quickly when I approached.

Bitterns belong to the heron family Ardeidae. Around the world there are fifteen species of bitterns divided into two genera. The genus *Botaurus* contains larger bitterns such as the American Bittern made immortal by John James Audobon's painting. The genus *Ixobrychus* contains the smaller bitterns. (A third genus, *Ziberychus*, has only the Zigzag Heron.)

Bitterns inhabit marshy areas, wetlands and edges of water bodies. They nest in reeds and aqueous plants and eat frogs, insects, reptiles and fish.

The bitterns of Bangladesh - Cinnamon Bittern, Yellow Bittern and Black Bittern - live here year-round. They share our wetlands with many other herons, egrets, storks and waders. All three belong to the genus *Ixobrychus*.

I saw the Cinnamon Bittern years ago while driving from Sylhet to Kanaighat. The fields on both sides of the road were drenched with the green that comes in monsoon. From the car, I saw a flash of rusty red colour on a bush and stopped for a closer look.

As I took some photographs of the smallest bird about the size of a *Kani Boga*, it stared back at me fearlessly. It remains the only fearless bittern I have encountered. Over time I have seen many more Cinnamon Bitterns, but they were quick flashes. Usually they stay hidden in rice paddies. If I am walking by and inadvertently come too close, they take off swiftly.

The Yellow Bittern is about the same size as its reddish cousin. I



Black Bittern, Hail Haor, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

have seen it numerous times in Purbachol usually near ponds. It flies past quickly but on two occasions I saw it perched high on a bamboo. Its yellow and brown pattern blended with yellow bamboo leaves, affording it a near-perfect camouflage.

Watching it while it was perched I noticed a distinct behaviour of this bird. While relaxed, its neck was fully retracted. But when alerted, its head shot up atop a very long neck, like a periscope.

The real challenge of bitterns, for me, has been the Black Bittern. I saw it in a fishpond in Hail Haor. I was looking for a small bird that had flown into a jumble of aqueous shrubs at water's edge when suddenly a large dark bird flew out from there. I was able to

take some quick photographs and later confirmed it to be a Black Bittern.

That remains my only Black Bittern sighting. Another time, when I was sure I had found it, further examination of the photograph revealed that it was a sub-adult Little Heron that looked quite close to a Black Bittern.

In my overseas birding trips I have never seen a bittern. That makes sense, because birding during these trips is often rushed, and to see the skulky bitterns one needs supreme good luck or lots of time.

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

ALCOHOL POISONING DB arrests one over 3 deaths

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police yesterday arrested a man in connection with the death of three staffers of a media organisation, who died due to alcohol poisoning following their trip to a resort in Gazipur.

Police's Gazipur Detective Branch (DB) arrested Zahid Mridha (42), from the capital's Nikunja area yesterday on charges of supplying liquor to the office retreat, said AKM Zahirul Islam, superintendent of police (Crime) at a press briefing at Gazipur's SP office.

On January 31 and February 1, three staffers of a media organisation died after several were hospitalised from allegedly consuming adulterated alcohol.

ILLEGAL BRICK KILNS IN CTG SC clears way to shut them down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court has upheld until its further order a High Court directive that asked the government to shut down all illegal brick kilns, having no valid license, in Chattogram.

Chamber judge of the Appellate Division Justice Md Nuruzzaman on Thursday refused to stay the HC order.

The apex court's chamber judge, however, sent the appeal -- filed by 18 owners of total 23 brick kilns challenging the HC order -- to its full bench and set August 29 for hearing on it.

Following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), the HC on December 14 last year directed authorities concerned to shut down illegal brick kilns in Chattogram in a week, in order to save the environment.

The HC also asked authorities to find out those involved in damaging farmland

and hills, burning woods and polluting environment by running illegal brick kilns, and to submit a list of their names and addresses to this court.

The court also issued a rule asking the government to explain why its inaction to shut down the illegal brick kilns should not be declared illegal.

Eighteen owners of 23 brick kilns in Chattogram recently filed an appeal with the Appellate Division challenging the HC directives and seeking stay on the directives.

During hearing of the appeal, Mahmuda Begum, a lawyer for the brick kiln owners, told the SC hundreds of people work in their kilns. If these are shut down, the workers will become unemployed.

Writ petitioner's lawyer Manzil Murshid opposed the appeal, saying no brick kiln without license can run according to the Brick Preparation and Field Setup [Control] Act), 2013.



Being put on a wheelchair didn't become an obstacle for Chattogram's Md Shukkur. Instead, it was fashioned as a mobile shopfront for Tk 18,000, which Shukkur now uses to ferry snacks across the city. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO PRABIR DAS

Dhaka observing Myanmar army's approach cautiously

Foreign Minister says on Rohingya repatriation

BSS, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abndul Momen said that Bangladesh is cautiously gauging Myanmar army's intentions about the remaining Rohingya population at Rakhine province, as reports suggest the Myanmar military is taking a reconciliation approach.

"It's welcoming," he said in an exclusive interview with BSS as reports coming from other side of the border said regional military commanders yesterday visited the Rohingya community for the third consecutive day.

Momen said Dhaka decided to "approach directly" the new Myanmar government to resume talks over repatriation, with China's mediation under a tripartite negotiation.

The recent coup in Myanmar forced the postponement of a tripartite working group meeting on February 4 and Dhaka could not communicate with Naypyidaw.

According to the information a regional army commander in Rakhine pledged that the military would solve all problems of the Rohingya crisis step by step and hold Aung Sun Suu Kyi's NLD government responsible.

It was also reported that Myanmar military officials in Rakhine indicated that existing

restrictions on Rohingya movements would be eased shortly. Officials in Dhaka said the information gathered through diplomatic and other channels substantiated the reports.

The foreign minister said Myanmar's new military regime was exposed to international criticism, a situation which could prompt them to repatriate Rohingyas from Bangladesh to lighten pressure particularly from the western world.

But, he said, it was "too early to comment" whether the Myanmar military's positive gesture was truly indicative of a softened attitude towards the Rohingyas.

Momen recalled two previous times when Rohingyas were forced to flee their homes in the 70s and 90s. Many were repatriated in 1978 and 1992, when Myanmar was under military rule. "The last two repatriations took place when military was in state power in Myanmar. [So] I am optimistic," he said.

He expected the existing bilateral agreements regarding Rohingya repatriation would remain valid since the instruments were signed between two governments.

Bangladesh has provided the neighbours biometric data of 8,30,000 Rohingyas while Myanmar have verified only 42,000 of them.

LAW DESK

Recently, at least 25 people were injured in separate clashes between workers and police in Kushtia and Narayanganj. Of them, five Bidi (hand-rolled cigarette) workers sustained bullet injuries, as police opened fire on them. The clash took place when the workers were demonstrating demanding their due wages.

This incident is part of a pattern. Internationally, Bangladesh has, over a period, been called out for handling protests and lawful strikes with mass dismissals, and excessive and unjustified use of force.

Bangladesh has undertaken international obligations to ensure safety and protection of workers. However, more often, its responses to protests, demonstrations and strikes run counter to such pledges.

In 2019, Human Rights Watch (HRW) interviewed eight individuals who witnessed actions like police violence in connection with workers' demonstrations and dismissed workers. They reviewed lists of fired workers and dismissal notices and

found out how Bangladesh routinely resorts to mass dismissals and violence to curb protests.

HRW deputy Asia director had earlier said, "It's grotesque to imagine police raiding homes and indiscriminately shooting rubber bullets, but that is exactly what Bangladesh authorities have resorted to."

While the right to strike is not absolute in international law, and may be subject to certain restrictions, the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association "made it clear that [the right to strike] is a right, which workers, and their organisations (trade unions, federations and confederations) are entitled to enjoy."

The committee further noted that any restriction on the right to strike "should not be excessive", and that the "legitimate exercise of the right to strike should not entail prejudicial penalties of any sort, which would imply acts of anti-union discrimination".

Any penalty handed down for participating in an illegal strike should be proportionate to the offence, according to international human

rights standards. In a 2019 newspaper article, HRW thoroughly discussed the measures Bangladesh regularly adopts against protests and demonstrations and underscored their inconsistency with the human rights standards.

HRW considers dismissal for exercising the right to strike a disproportionate disciplinary sanction, more so, because the ILO considers sanctions for participating in strikes acceptable only when national law itself is consistent with international standards on freedom of association.

The ILO committee responsible for interpreting the application of the international labour standards, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, has stated that "sanctions for strike action, including dismissals, should be possible only where strike prohibitions are in conformity with the principles of freedom of association".

The committee has repeatedly held Bangladesh Labour Act in violation of ILO conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Three killed as truck hits auto-rickshaw in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three people were killed and five injured after a truck hit a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Chattogram city's Rahattarpur area on Thursday night.

Ahid Mia (30), Abdul Mannan (40) and Sahid Maji (55) succumbed to their injuries an hour after they were admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, said Md Hamid, assistant sub-inspector of CMCH police outpost.

Md Lokman, brother-in-law of Mannan, told The Daily Star the three worked as labourers at Chaktai Shutki Palli. They were returning from work.

"On information, we rushed to the spot and took them to CMCH," he said.

Ruhul Sabuj, officer-in-charge of Bakalia Police Station, said the injured were undergoing treatment at the hospital.



Even in the age of contemporary digital graphic design, Mohammad Javed and his hand-made tin designs -- a vocation stretching three generations -- keep thriving in Puran Dhaka. This photo was taken from Nazimuddin Road recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

It ensured Kishore, Mushtaq cannot speak truth to power

Say protesters demanding their immediate release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A collective of students, teachers, and general public convened at Shahbagh yesterday to mark nine months since the incarceration of writer Mushtaq Ahmed and cartoonist Ahmed Kishore, both of whom had been imprisoned under the Digital Security Act.

They had been arrested last year for creating political cartoons commenting on the pandemic, and for sharing those on social media. The speakers demanded their immediate release.

"The country is going through a crisis because of Digital Security Act. This Act was formed to make sure that people like Kishore and Mushtaq do not speak truth to power," said Bangladesh Chhatra Federation's central committee president, Golam Mustafa.

"This is not for the safety of the general public, but for the safety of the government, so that the government can retain their power. This government does not take the opinion of the general public," said Mustafa.

"As a cartoonist, Kishore wrote about corruption. You cannot silence our voices by arresting people under the DSA. Words will flow, the pen will go on," he added.

Criminals are being let loose while innocent people rot in prison, speakers said.

Bail is a legal right that all citizens have, as long as they will not obstruct the investigation process after getting bail. The state party has routinely insisted that Kishore and Mushtaq do not deserve bail, said the speakers.

To obstruct bail, the state party has continued to defame characters of Kishore and Mushtaq in court, they added.

Last year on May 6, Mushtaq and Kishore were charged with "knowingly posting rumours against the Father of the Nation, the Liberation War and the coronavirus pandemic to negatively affect the nation's image and to create confusion among the public through social media and to cause the law and order situation to deteriorate."

Bangladesh Chhatra Odhakar Songrokkhon Parishad's DU unit president Binyamin Mollah said, "We need to question who it is that is clamping down on the editors of the biggest media organisations."

"When this act was passed, the general public had protested it. People speaking against the government are being arrested now," said Parbatya Chattagram Pahari Chhatra Parishad's member Amal Tripura.

Imtiaz Ahmed Kajol from Kishoreganj said, "I was locked up in Kishoreganj jail for 10 months. My only crime was speaking up. The local politicians prosecuted me."