

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Feathers

I recently finished the novel *Where Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. Set in the 1960s, the story is about a girl, Kya, who grows up alone in the marshes of North Carolina after being abandoned by her family. She is fiercely independent and survives by selling mussels at a local store. Her passion is nature and she is a devoted student of all forms of life on the marsh that surrounds her. However, due to unpleasant encounters with townsfolk when she was a child, she avoids human contact and social interaction.

When Kya is fourteen, a boy who also grew up around the marshes with his family becomes smitten with her and tries to gain her attention. He does this by giving her gifts. Kya will not meet any person, so he leaves the gifts at the stump of a tree where she finds them the next day. The gifts delight her and eventually the boy becomes a friend and teaches her to read and write.

What were these gifts? Feathers! The first was a feather that sits over the eye of a Great Blue Heron and looks like an eyebrow. Then came the tail feather of an exotic Tropicbird. A Wild Turkey feather followed. All these feathers were difficult to acquire. The boy knew that Kya was aware of their significance and they would mean something special to her.

Today, we do not look twice at feathers, but during history many cultures have considered them desirable, even precious. The white feathers of the *Boro Bok*, Great Egret, were used as ornament and decorations, so much so that millions of them were wiped out from Florida by plume hunters. A similar fate befell the White-throated Kingfisher – *Shadagola Machranga* – in India and China where they were caught with nets for their beautiful blue feathers.

Today, down feathers of ducks and geese, notably the Eider Duck, are sought after for filling jackets and



Ruby-cheeked sunbird with iridescent feathers.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

quills.

Feathers are perhaps the most amazing part of birds. They have a complex, streamlined structure than function in all aspects of avian lives: flying, of course, but also attracting a mate, staying warm, keeping predators away and raising chicks.

Birds understand this utility very well. That is why they spend a good deal of time preening their feathers. This means cleaning away dirt and grime. They also align the thin barbs of the feathers in Velcro-like interlocking fashion. In flight, the feather then offers resistance to the wind creating lift. Some birds apply oil to their feather for keeping water away. All of this must be done frequently as feathers are heavily used every day.

My favourite feathers are those of a (male) sunbird. These small

feathers have iridescence, that is, viewed from different angles they reflect light of different colours. Iridescence is the result of tiny structures in feathers that act like prisms, as Owens points out in the book.

Owens is an accomplished zoologist. Several decades ago, fresh out of college, she and her husband Mark spent seven years studying life in the Kalahari Desert, often under harsh conditions. Their written work went on to become classics of natural history.

In this novel, she has used her intimate knowledge of the natural world, such as feathers of different birds, with a compelling storyline to create a magnificent work.

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

MAN KILLED IN CCC POLLS VIOLENCE

Case being shifted to PBI to 'avoid political pressure'

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

The murder case of Md Alauddin, who was shot dead during violence between two councillor candidates of Chattogram City Corporation polls on January 27, is going to be shifted from Government Railway Police (GRP) Chattogram Station to Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), "to tackle political pressure".

Police sources said a ruling party's member of parliament and influential member of the parliamentary standing committee on railway ministry is trying to put pressure on railway police to halt the investigation.

A senior official of railway police told this newspaper that the case is going to be handed over to PBI's Chattogram metro unit to avoid political pressure and bring the killers to book through a fair investigation.

None of the nine accused in the murder case have been arrested, and the firearm used during the killing has not been recovered. According to the case statement, supporters of councillor Wasim Uddin Chowdhury

shot day labourer Alauddin (26) dead in front of Ambagan-Jhawtola UCEF Technical School on election day.

Victim's sister Jahanara Begum, alleged that Nasir, a supporter of Wasim, had threatened and asked her along with her relatives to vote for Nasir's candidate. If they did not, he threatened to harm the family.

On election day, Alauddin went to the nearby railway track to have breakfast. Nasir waylaid Alauddin in front of the school, which was a polling centre, and shot Alauddin. After firing his gun, another accused, Joj Mia, hit Alauddin with a sharp weapon, according to the case statement. He was declared dead at Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

Wasim later became councillor of Ward-13.

Seeking anonymity, a police official of GRP said, "As the incident occurred on the railway track, the case was lodged with Chattogram Railway Police Station on January 27. When police started investigating, an influential political leader tried to

mount pressure on investigators to wrap up the investigation and submit the final report. Later, we shared the matter with our senior officials."

A source of Railway Police Chattogram HQ said senior officials have already communicated with PBI officials to shift the case.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Qamrul Hassan of Railway Police's Chattogram district brushed aside the reported political pressure and said, "Investigation of the case is underway, and we are shifting the case to PBI for fair and unbiased investigation. Other than that, there is no reason."

Contacted, Naima Sultana, superintendent of police of PBI Chattogram metro unit, said, "If they [GRP] believed that PBI can investigate the case in a fair manner, then PBI will do it after getting the official letter."

Councillor Wasim acknowledged that all the accused are local ruling party leaders and workers. "I personally want an unbiased investigation in this connection, as the case was lodged for political revenge," he added.



At Shyamoli's 250-bed TB Hospital, family members accompanying vaccine recipients were seen sounding words of encouragement and photographing the experience last Thursday. One such smartphone photographer said not only is this a record, but once uploaded to social media, it can also raise awareness and influence others to sign up for vaccination.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Ten killed in road accidents

Six die in Bogura alone



PHOTO: COLLECTED

A mangled auto-rickshaw beside Dhaka-Bogura highway. Four people were killed as a bus hit it from behind in Sherpur upazila of Bogura yesterday morning.

STAR REPORT

At least ten people were killed and three injured in road accidents in three districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Bogura, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver and three of its passengers were killed after a bus hit the vehicle from behind on Dhaka-Bogura highway in Sherpur upazila around 5:30am, said highway police.

The accident happened in front of Majhira check-post.

The deceased are Shaha Jamal (40), the auto-rickshaw driver; Harej Uddin (40); Suday Kumar Mohonta; and Kalidas (70). Of them, three died on the spot and another on the way to a hospital, said Baniul Anam, traffic inspector of Sherpur Highway Police Camp. Police handed the bodies over to the families.

Although such auto-rickshaws are banned on highways, they keep on plying, resulting in frequent accidents. Locals alleged that these vehicles mostly run from 5am to 8am.

However, Inspector Anam said, "In the morning, auto-rickshaws refill gas from filling stations beside highways. At that time, drivers may take some passengers on request."

Meanwhile, two people died after a Bogura-bound truck hit a battery-run auto-rickshaw from behind on Bogura-Naogaon regional highway in Dupchanchia upazila.

The accident occurred in Tishigari area around 2pm, said OC Hasan Ali of Dupchanchia Police Station.

Auto-rickshaw driver Robiul Islam Rasel (35), and Muktar Hossain (37) died instantly, he said.

In Jhenidah, three persons were killed and two injured in a road accident on Kaliganj-Kotchandpur road in Patbila area yesterday afternoon.

The deceased are Soubhik Biswas (28), Sohel Hossain (27) and Akram Hossain (40).

The accident occurred when a motorbike hit another oncoming motorcycle while overtaking a bus, said Sheikh Mamunur Rashid, officer of Kaliganj Fire Station. At that time, another bike hit the two vehicles, he said quoting witnesses.

Soubhik died on the spot while Sohel and Akram in a hospital.

In Faridpur, a woman was killed and a rickshaw-puller injured as a truck hit the rickshaw on Dhaka-Khulna highway in Sadar upazila. The deceased is Naziran Begum (58) of Joykail village in Saltha upazila.

The accident occurred around 10:15am in Gangabordi area when the truck ran over the rickshaw carrying the woman, said Karimpur Highway Police Station OC Md Shajalal, quoting witnesses.

Naziran died on the spot. The rickshaw-puller was admitted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital. Police seized the truck but the driver fled the scene, the OC said.

A barter of books

People flock to Rabindra Sarobar to exchange literature with fellow readers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A sea of books remained on the ground, from young-adult fiction to short stories, under the shade of tall trees at the capital's Rabindra Sarobar, welcoming an equally large sea of avid readers.

The scenario might remind one of Amar Ekushey book fair. However, on this occasion, to get new books money would not cut it. Only by giving away books from one's personal collection could they get books from the huge collection in front of them.

Boi Bondhu, a group that strives to promote reading, yesterday organised the book-exchange festival "Boi Bondhu'r Sath Boi Binimoy Utshab".

The rules were simple: donate books and take an equal number of them from the collection. There were three counters for donation, and after donating, each person received a receipt, mentioning the number of books given away. The donor could then choose the books of their choice, after showing the receipt.

Arifur Rahman, a student of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, donated nine books and had so far taken Deyal by Humayun Ahmed and Kiriti Samagra by Nihar Ranjan Gupta. He was focused on choosing more books.

"This experience is unique. I've never exchanged books before anywhere. This saves money for students, and at the same time, helps in getting new books," he said.

Sadia Akhter, a 10th-grader at YWCA School in Dhaka, came with her friend Nushairun-Noor, after coming across the event on Facebook.

Sadia donated four books and collected two: Ami Topu and Niyan, both written by Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, and Joutho Ekakitto by Manju Sarkar.

"We've been here since 12pm and now it's 3pm. We're still trying to find books of our choice. Many students like us are coming here. It feels great to see the festivity and gathering," said an elated Sadia.

The daylong event started at 10am and was scheduled to continue till 6pm. Although there were 70 volunteers, they had trouble dealing with the big crowd, which mostly comprised of students.

"We never expected such a crowd. From morning till afternoon, the people were moving like bees. We are, of course, happy to see the students," said volunteer Sahadat Hossain Shourav, a private university student.

Boi Bondhu is brainchild of Mohiuddin Toha, who started the initiative on his own by transforming a bus into library in 2018. So far, they have installed 56 libraries, he said.

"Our team has set up libraries at many places for free. We've never arranged a book-exchange event before... We aimed to exchange 1,000 books, but within the afternoon, we'd crossed 5,000," Toha said.



The capital's Rabindra Sarobar was buzzing with book lovers yesterday, as they were contemplating which books to take home from the huge collection in front of them. Inset, volunteers were overwhelmed by the huge response and were trying their best to help everyone.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'All I could think of was protecting our mother tongue'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Language veteran Mohammad Ali Akanda is 93 now.

When the Language Movement got underway in erstwhile East Pakistan, Akanda was a still a student of Dhaka University.

As the wave of protests shook the capital, he could not keep himself from being swept by its promise.

"At a meeting in the campus in the first week of February, we were asked to return to our localities and organise," Akanda told this correspondent recently.

A resident of Mymensingh, he went back home immediately, and started to gear up along with some friends -- Elias Uddin, Abu Bakar Siddique, Abul Khorshed Khan, Abdul Wahab Master, Monir Uddin, Abdul Salam Sarker, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and more.

Soon enough, they were running campaigns to get students and people of the district on the same page.

But then the movement hit its peak, and Akanda had to return to Dhaka. After a tumultuous couple of days, he got arrested.

Fortunately, he was released on bail after three days, as final examination was scheduled to start in March.

The stories are 69 years old now, and they must have been dulled by the many years Akanda has lived.

But as he retold them to this correspondent, they felt as fresh as a tale from yesterday. "I can still feel that thrill," Akanda said with his eyes gleaming.

Now a reputed school teacher, writer and researcher, he lives at his Durua village home in Chandipasha union of Nandail upazila in Mymensingh. He's become a well-respected figure across the district, owing to both his outstanding contribution in the Language Movement and achievements that followed it.

After graduating from Dhaka University, he joined Mohan Chand High School as an assistant teacher in 1954, working there all the way till 1963.

He later joined Nandail's Chandipasha High School and went on to retire in 1991.

With his credentials and connections, Akanda could have easily gone for the safety of a government job, but he said he made a conscious choice by going for teaching.

"He was an ideal teacher in all respects," chimed 80-year-old Liberation War veteran Abdus Salam Bhuiyan, Bir Pratik.

Now happily retired, Akanda lives with his 80-year-old wife Monjila Khatun, and they are taken care of by their children.

One of his sons, retired army personnel Shafiqur Rahman Akanda, said he and his siblings are proud of their father.

"We feel proud when people praise our father for his contributions [to the Language Movement]," he said.

For his contributions and writings, Akanda was honoured by the Islamic Foundation, HR Foundation, and Sheba Foundation.

On this year's Ekushey February, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture in Mymensingh honoured Akanda at a ceremony held at its auditorium.

"Akanda is a great soul. I think he deserves the Ekushey Padak," said Arbinda Pal, a teacher at the Nandail's Samurta Jahan Mohila Degree College.

But Akanda didn't seem to care much for recognition -- his glorious past is reward enough for the almost-centenarian.

"I was young. I was vigorous. All I could think of was protecting the honour of our mother tongue from the tyrants' oppression," he said with a smile.

"I'm glad that I took that choice to be a part of the movement," he told this correspondent.



Mohammad Ali Akanda