

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

## SHIKRA

Shikra is a bird of prey found all over Bangladesh in forests, village groves, orchards and tea gardens. It is a handsome bird, the size of a large pigeon, with a fine bluish-grey back. Its underside is white with thin horizontal orange stripes running through it. It has the sharp, hooked beak seen in many raptors. Younger Shikras have yellow eyes which turn to deep orange as they age. The female Shikra is larger than the male by up to 20%. Outside Bangladesh, it is found in a wide band stretching from Africa through southern parts of Asia.

Since it can be trained to hunt, Shikras were once used for falconry in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, its name comes from *Shikari*, the word for hunter in North Indian languages. Shikras were easier to train than, for example, Peregrine Falcons. Female Shikras, being larger, could hunt Quails, Partridges, and even birds larger than itself such as young Peacocks.

Today's wild Shikras prey on a wide variety of food, from small birds, lizards, snakes and insects to rodents and small chicken at poultry farms.

I saw my first Shikra in Sundarban in 2008. It was a quick flash – I only caught a glimpse as it took off swiftly from its perch. Since then, I have seen dozens of them over the years, mostly in Sundarban but also in tea gardens, national forests and open places such as Purbachol. Nonetheless the sight of a Shikra – its trim profile, delicate colour, fast wingbeats and piercing eyes – never fails to thrill me.

Most of the time I see it perched high up, patiently scanning for a prey with alert eyes. In Sundarban it often perches on branches overhanging creeks and canals and as my boat approaches, it takes off with its typical flight pattern – a burst of quick flaps of its wings



Shikra, Sundarban, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

followed by a glide.

It was in Sundarban that my most memorable Shikra encounter took place. We were on a boat in a creek, watching a Shikra perched on a *Keora* branch. On both banks, wide swathes of mud criss-crossed with pointed mangrove roots, were exposed by the low tide. As I watched, the bird exploded into action, diving into the mud with eyes flashing and yellow talons outstretched. In a fraction of a second it snatched a mudskipper fish from between spikes of *Keora* roots and, turning away from us, flew away quickly while holding the kill in its talons, to be consumed in privacy.

Shikras live year-round in Bangladesh and mate in spring,

laying three or four eggs in a large, untidy nest made from twigs. The eggs hatch after 30-35 days of incubation (mostly by the mother.) At two months, the fledglings are ready to fly the coop. Before they can do this they must learn not just to fly but also to catch their meals.

The Shikra belongs to the bird group (genus) called Accipiter. Its relatives in this group include the Sparrowhawk, the Goshawk and the smaller Besra which is also seen in our forests, albeit much less frequently. When you are outside Dhaka – among trees or in Sundarban – keep an eye open for this exciting bird.

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

## Together they march for democracy

Women take to streets demanding repeal of repressive laws

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women from different strata of life brought out a procession in the capital yesterday, demanding that the government create an environment for democratic practices in the society to uphold dignity and rights of women.

At the "Women's March for Democracy", they said it is not possible to ensure justice for women without a democratic state and system. The procession was organised under the banner of International Women's Day Committee.

It started from Shaheed Noor Hossain Chattar and ended at Suhrawardy Udyan, according to a declaration paper provided during the

procession. The platform comprises 50 bodies including organisations, alliances, networks and forums working on rights issues, it said.

The event also marked International Women's Day 2021, celebrated on March 8.

Saying freedom of voices of dissent and tolerant mentalities are imperative for democracy, the platform members demanded state initiative to create democratic culture.

Democracy has to be established in the governing system while democratic values must spread everywhere through education and cultural activities, it said.

The platform members demanded

repeal of all "repressive" laws including the Digital Security Act, terming DSA "undemocratic" and a threat to every woman.

Besides, it demanded amendment of all "discriminatory" laws regarding women in line with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Demonstrators at the march stressed decentralisation of the government to make way for women's participation in the governing system. Besides, they demanded increasing the number of judges and tribunals to reduce backlog of rape and repression cases.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

A man sits inside a moshari, posing to be killing mosquitoes even inside the net, while others gather behind him in a human chain. Bharatiya Parishad (Renters' Association) yesterday staged this unique demonstration in front of Jatiya Press Club, condemning the Dhaka city mayors' lacklustre efforts in tackling the mosquito menace.

## 5 killed, 6 injured in road accidents



Two people died after a bus hit an easy bike in Jashore yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## STAR REPORT

Five people were killed and six injured in road accidents in two districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Jashore, two people were killed and five injured as a bus collided with an easy bike on Dhaka-Khulna highway in Abhaynagar upazila.

One of the deceased is easy bike driver Shahid Morol (40) from the upazila. Identity of the other deceased could not be known yet.

Four of the injured are Babul, Rohidul, Ramzan and Ali Rahman. They hail from Chapainawabganj.

Noapara Fire Service and Civil Defence members admitted them to Khulna Medical College Hospital.

The bus driver and his assistant fled the scene after the accident, said police.

In Panchagarh, two people were killed and another was injured as a tractor pulling an excavator fell into a roadside ditch at Kamalapur village in Sadar upazila.

The deceased were identified as excavator operator Muktar Hossain (25) from Duoshuo village, and tractor driver Abdur Rahman (35) from Goalkari village in Thakurgaon.

Firefighters took the victims to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital where doctors declared Muktar and Abdur Rahman dead. The injured – Sukumar Roy (22) from Palashbari in the upazila – was transferred to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital, said fire service officials.

Meanwhile, Abdus Salam (7), son of Abir Hossain, was killed as a microbus ran him over on Buraburi-Shanbahan road at Nawapara village in Tentulia upazila, said police.

## FAKE, SUBSTANDARD COSMETICS

## 3 Keraniganj factories fined Tk 13.75 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has raided three factories in Dhaka's Keraniganj area and destroyed fake and substandard cosmetics worth Tk 10 lakh.

During the drive on Thursday night, the court also fined the factories Tk 13.75 lakh, a press release of Rab-2, signed by Md Abdullah Al Mamun, assistant superintendent of police and Rab's assistant director (media), said yesterday.

The elite force also seized some machines used for making these fake products.

The court led by Rab's senior executive magistrate Md Sarwoer Alam in association with Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution conducted the drive in Keraniganj's Atibazar. It added.

The factories were producing the cosmetics with expired raw materials and used labels of known brand names to sell their fake and substandard products. They were also making these products without BSTI permission.

Rab will continue such drives in future, the release said.

## EKUSHEY BOIMELA

## Doubt and despair haunt preparations

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

There's already an exception to this year's Ekushey Boimela. Held forever in February, the beloved book fair had to be shifted to the second half of March this time around, due to the unceasing pandemic.

Slated for March 18, the Boimela will run till April 14 this year. While this represents an opportunity to recover some lost revenues, publishers' enthusiasm for the fair is noticeably low this time.

During a normal February, publishers' activity in Banglabazar – the premier publishing hub of the country – reach fever pitch surrounding the book fair. This energy also seeped out to surrounding areas that house hundreds of printing and binding presses. It used to be a busy time for cover artists and load-workers too.

But almost none of that can be seen now. Does it mean there's no new book hitting the shelves this year?

"We aren't even half as busy as before," responded Tuhin, a publisher of renowned Pearl Publications. "When paying staff salaries has become burdensome, how can we print lots of new books? At best we will publish 10-12."

There's an additional set of worries troubling publishers like him. Readers accustomed to visiting the fair in February may not be as willing to go there now, that too amid the danger of the pandemic. Then there's the forecast of early-summer rainfall. All in all, publishers just can't help but feel stressed over whether their investments will yield any returns.

Publishers are instead relying

on older publications, they told this correspondent. A publisher from Banglabazar, on condition of anonymity, said, "We are doing this year's fair because our backs are against the wall. We don't have the capacity to print new books. The best we can hope for is that the old ones get sold."

Banglabazar's Mannan Market hosts the most shops for creative books. Visiting the market, this correspondent found publishers and staffers preparing for the coming fair at a languid pace.

Monirul Haque, executive editor of Academic and Creative Publishers Association of Bangladesh and publisher of Anannya Prakashon, said, "That the fair is being held this year is a positive news for us. We haven't had a very good year. But we don't know how the fair will turn out, so there's that element of anxiety."

This anxiety is at its peak among the smaller publishers of Banglabazar, who make up the majority of publishers in the area. These smaller houses are averaging no more than two to three new publications this year.

DEPENDENT SECTORS IN DISARRAY

Over the years, the publishing industry of Banglabazar has given rise to numerous printing presses in surrounding areas. In regular times, their machines ran day and night a month before the Boimela. But owners said they are not faring very well this year.

"I have never seen this little business in my professional career," lamented Jewel, owner of Nandini Chapakhana. "The entire sector is gripped by depression."



Though limited in scope, publishers are still preparing for Ekushey Boimela to the best of their abilities. This photo was taken from Banglabazar's Anannya publishers yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## MUJIB BORSHO CELEBRATIONS

## Themes for 10-day festivity selected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is progressing with preparations for the 10-day programme, to be hosted at the capital's National Parade Square, to mark the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of the country's independence.

The programme will be attended by heads of state and governments of different countries.

The government has already selected themes for each day of the programme, said Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, chief coordinator of the Birth Centenary Celebration National Implementation Committee.

The gala celebrations will begin on March 17 and end on March 26.

The themes are "Bhengeche Duwar Eshecho Jatirmoy" (March 17), "Mohakaler Tarjoni" (March 18), "Jatokal Robe Padma Jamuna" (March 19), Tarunner Alokshikha (March 20), Dhanshastupe Jiboner Gaan (March 21), Banglar Mati Amar Mati (March 22), Narimukti, Samya o Swadhinata (March 23), Shanti-Mukti o Manabatar Agradut (March 24), Ganahatyar Kalarotri o Aloker Abhijatra (March 25) and Swadhinatar Panchash Bochor o Agragatir Subarnarekha (March 26).

He said this at a press briefing at International Mother Language Institute yesterday.

The events will be attended by Indian PM Narendra Modi, Sri Lankan PM Mahinda Rajapaksa, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Nepali President Biddya Devi Bhandari and PM of Bhutan Lotay Tshering, said Dr Naser.

## Four held over kidnapping bank official in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police early yesterday claimed to have arrested four members of an abduction gang for kidnapping a bank official and extorting Tk 2 lakh in port city's Rahattar Pul area.

Police said they also seized a makeshift gun and two knives from gang leader Shahid Alam Ledu (30), Jahangir Alam (30), Raihan (28) and Gias Uddin (29).

Ruhul Amin Sabuj, officer-in-charge (OC) of Bakalia Police Station, said the kidnapping took place on March 5, after victim Shamim Hasan, senior officer at Shahjalal Islami Bank's Halishahar branch, went to visit someone.

A client of Shamim gave him a woman's phone number in February, and after getting acquainted with her over phone, the banker went to Rahattar Pul in the evening of March 5, upon her request, he said.

At Rahattar Pul, she asked Shamim to take arrestee Raihan's assistance to find her address. Later, six gang members joined Raihan, held Shamim hostage and demanded Tk 2 lakh, the OC said.

OC Ruhul said the gang members threatened the banker with sharp weapons. At one point, Shamim phoned his younger brother and asked him to send money through a mobile financial service.

"The kidnapers took the money in several phases and later freed Shamim," he said.

Shamim later lodged a case with Bakalia Police Station. Police then started investigation and identified the criminals through CCTV footage.

"Police are trying to arrest the other gang members in this connection," he added.