

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Bazas of the World



From left: Black Baza, Kalenga, Bangladesh; Jerdon's Baza, Bandarban, Bangladesh; Pacific Baza, Darwin, Australia.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

In late 2019, while visiting Bandarban with friends, I saw a medium sized brown bird perched on a distant tree. It looked like a bird of prey. After looking through my binoculars for a few seconds, I saw a crest of upright feathers on its head. Instantly I knew it was a Baza, or "Baaj Pakhi" of my childhood.

Bazas are small to medium birds of prey distinguished by their crest. They belong to the group Accipitridae. They can be found in Asia, Africa and Australia. Dwellers of the forest, they are harder to spot than raptors of open spaces.

There are five species of Bazas in the world. In Bangladesh you can find two of them: Jerdon's Baza year-round and Black Baza in winter.

The first Baza I saw was in Madagascar. The Madagascar Baza, a locally endemic bird, can be found in the Spiny Desert, an unusual forest growing in the desert in the island's south. Trekking through this unearthly

landscape, we spotted a stocky bird of prey sitting atop a tall cactus stalk. It had probably started its hunting day and was too focused on finding quarry to take much notice of us, but it took great pains to stretch and exercise its wings in several positions in preparation for action that lay ahead.

During a trip to Australia two years later, in a forest near Darwin, I saw a Pacific Baza. It is a beautiful blue-grey bird with yellow eyes. Brown and orange bars run across its white breast. With a single feather crest on its head, it looked trim and elegant. It sat on its perch for a long while before flying off to a different perch.

But I was yet to see a Baza in Bangladesh. That was about to change.

First I spotted that solitary Jerdon's Baza in Bandarban. Some hours later on that day we saw another circling overhead in a mixed flock. Two months later I saw this magnificent creature again, perched on a tea garden shade tree. As I watched, it dove

to catch a large worm from a lower branch and devoured it at a leisurely pace, allowing me some photographs. I saw another deep inside Satchori's forest the next month. It was a splendid bird to observe, ferocious looking and much larger than the other Bazas I have seen.

For me the Black Baza was the hardest to find. It is a beautiful black bird, with a broad white band across its breast and a white pattern on its upperparts. I saw it in flight several times from the tower at Satchori, but always far. Some weeks ago, with the help of my guide Rahim, I found it perched in a tree in Kalenga forest. They have been known to congregate in large numbers, often by a stream. That is a sight I wait to behold.

The African Baza found in southern Africa remains the only Baza I am yet to see.

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Bearing witness to atrocities

Genocide-torture museum in Khulna strives to preserve history of 1971 Liberation War

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

"Very often I visit this museum to go back in time, looking at evidence of the Liberation War and reminiscing the days of freedom fighters," said Bidhan Golder, a freedom fighter and native of Khulna's Batiaghata upazila. "I had a good relationship with Madhab Chandra's family. When I come here, I can feel his soul."

Madhab Chandra was a fellow villager of Bidhan. In May 1972, Madhab, Sourav Golder and 23 more from the village were brutally killed in Batiaghata's Badamtala massacre, Bidhan said. Their blood-stained clothes bear witness to that day. Madhav had some money in his pocket, which were stained with blood, becoming a reminder of the moment bullets pierced his body. His family donated all these items to the museum.

The "1971: Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum" in Khulna city has collected and archived evidence of the bloodbath this country witnessed throughout nine months of the Liberation War.

During a visit, a black telephone was seen in a gallery on the museum's second floor. The phone used to be at Kabir Manzil, the house of Humayun Kabir, one of the Liberation War organisers, and the house was the headquarters of Mujib's forces in Khulna. The phone number "4926" was used to communicate news, instructions and tactics needed in the war. Kabir's son Sohail Akter handed the phone over to the museum in 2017.

Three sons of Sekandar Ali Serniabat were martyred in 1971. In 1975, Bangabandhu gave Serniabat a cheque worth Tk 3,000 from the PM's Relief Fund, but the father did not withdraw it, keeping it as the last memory of the martyred children. A certificate of gratitude and cheque worth Tk 2,000 was also sent by Bangabandhu to the son of martyr Jatindral Roy.

All the cheques and certificates are well-preserved and displayed inside glass boxes at the museum.

Rare memorabilia and images of genocide and torture are displayed at the museum, including 9,000 photographs and 30 oil paintings in 10

galleries, as well as some 9,400 books on the war. Over 250 audio-visual CDs are also enriching the collection.

Historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon inaugurated the museum on May 17, 2014 at a rented house at Moilapota. The museum shifted to its own 21-decimal land, on a two-storey house in 2015. The new premises opened to visitors on March 26, 2016. It then shifted to a temporary premise at Sonadanga, while a new six-storey building is being built on their designated land.

The archive has recorded over 11,356 spots where killings took

chairperson of its trustee board. "The museum's aim is to educate people about the genocide committed by the Pakistan army in association with their local collaborators."

Under the museum, two post-graduate certificate courses on the Liberation War and genocide are conducted every year. The museum has organised six "Martyrs Memorial" lectures, and five national and four international seminars. It runs through a trust, and in 2017, a "Research Center on Genocide-Torture and Liberation War" was set up under it.



Visitors at "1971: Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum" in Khulna city. This museum has a rich collection of books, photographs, paintings and artifacts that testify to the genocide of unarmed Bangalees by the Pakistan army during the Liberation War.

PHOTO: STAR

place, 654 mass-killing grounds, 846 mass graves and 958 torture cells in 28 districts, said Rokonzaman Bablu, deputy curator of the museum.

"On average, 20-25 visitors, mostly students, would visit the archive, but now, it has come down to 10-15 due to the pandemic," he added.

The museum is the first of its kind not only in Bangladesh but also in South Asia. It's fitting that it was opened in Khulna, which witnessed some of the worst atrocities in 1971 -- including the Chuknagar mass killings, said Prof Mamoon, also

Shankar Kumar Mallick, one of the trustee board's 11 members, said this is the first genocide museum in South Asia. Genocide is an important aspect of the Liberation War, because the war started with genocide. The issue of that genocide has largely been ignored in discussions. PM Sheikh Hasina and the cultural minister are playing key roles to run the museum, said Mallick.

The museum is open daily from 10am to 6pm, except Mondays. On Fridays, it remains open from 3pm to 7pm. The entrance fee to the museum is Tk 5.

Whale carcass washes ashore in Cox's Bazar

STAR REPORT

A whale carcass washed ashore at Himchhari beach in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The dead marine mammal is around 30 feet long and is assumed to have weighed five tonnes.

Humayun Kabir, divisional forest officer (DFO) of Cox's Bazar (South), told The Daily Star that tide washed the whale ashore at Himchhari beach in the morning.

"We have asked for veterinary surgeon from wildlife and nature conservation division to determine the cause of death," he added.

The species of the whale is yet to be known, he added.

Md Amin Al Parvez, additional deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar District Administration, told this newspaper from the spot that they were trying to know how it died and take necessary steps to conserve it if experts can determine its conservation value.

Man killed in landslide near bank of Halda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A youth was killed in a landslide yesterday while razing a part of the Halda river bank in Fatikchhari upazila of Chattogram.

The incident occurred around 9:30am at Akkulia village along the river in Suyabil union.

The deceased -- identified as Md Sakel (20) -- was from Suyabil union, said police.

"Sakel died after a chunk of soil fell on him as he was loading soil on a truck from the Halda river bank," Sheikh Abdullah, officer-in-charge of Bhujpur Police Station, told The Daily Star.

They recovered the body from the spot and sent it to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for autopsy, he said.

A group of unscrupulous people have been razing the bank of Halda river for months which is wreaking havoc on the waterbody, said officials.

Walls of JU come alive with colours



A visit to JU may transport you to space, or make you feel at one with legendary characters of Bangla literature. Walls around campus have been transformed into pieces of art by students of the university, enhancing the appeal of their naturally beautiful compound.

PHOTO: COURTESY

MD ASADUZZ ZAMAN

Jahangirnagar University (JU) is serene and eye-catching as it is. Surrounded by mother nature, its greenery, open fields, and water bodies are bound to leave one feeling rejuvenated.

But on top of all this, the university now boasts a fresh new attraction: murals.

Always a staple of the campus, JU's murals have been taken to a whole new level by its students in recent years. The art presents a sublime feel that almost makes the images come alive in 3-D. The subject matter is so relevant that the spectator forms an instant connection.

As much as they impress the audience, they communicate tales and emotions through visual semantics, and both students and outsiders lap it up, lining up to take photographs in front of the stunning murals.

JU now has around 40 of these murals drawn across the walls of its Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), Jucus and faculty buildings, dormitories, passenger sheds and transport areas. Some of them are based on movies and cartoons, while others address ongoing sociopolitical issues.

Most of the murals have been painted by a crop of JU's fine arts students, usually Abdullah Mamur and his team that consists of Aporno Adikary Sikto, Abir Arya, Mouning Thing Law and Farzad Dihan. Sometimes, students from other departments also join them.

The students and their works



PHOTO: COURTESY

have not only made JU a treat to the eyes, but are getting sincere praise in the virtual sphere. Just a few days ago, one of their works went viral on social media, gaining plaudits even from outside the country.

The students' take on the famous animated film "Song of the Sea", painted on the walls of TSC, suddenly was all the rage on Facebook a couple of days ago. It was even shared by Tom Moore, the Irish film-maker who directed the movie.

"It's one of the greatest experiences of my life," Abdullah Mamur told this correspondent recently. It was beyond his expectation that his team's work would reach Tom Moore himself.

Another artwork at TSC, based on the fan-favourite Japanese animated movie "My Neighbor Totoro" also got appreciated across the board on social media.

"When I first came to the

university [in early 2013], I was saddened to see how almost every wall of the campus was taken over by posters by political organisations, coaching centres, or some other kind of advertisement," Mamur recalled. "It was especially striking because of the natural beauty surrounding JU. The walls seemed to stick out like sore thumbs."

This pushed Mamur to take action. "Soon, I was talking with Sikto, trying to figure out what to do," he said.

Their first mural was self-funded, painted on the walls of the passenger shed at Chourangi. However, due to a shortage of funds, they were forced to halt their work after the first few.

"Luckily, we got some donors, especially ex-JU students and well-wishers of the university, who came forward to pay for the paint," Mamur said. "Soon, more artists started joining us. I feel great to have lived through it all."

A hairy business!

Women in Mymensingh villages find income making wigs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'singh

In the villages of Mymensingh's Muktagachha upazila, a rather unusual profession has bloomed in the last few years: making wigs. What started out as some women trying to create an extra source of income, spread across the community, bringing many into the work.

Although cut human hair was once thought to be useless or even hazardous, it is now being used to make wigs, and around 400 young to elderly women in the upazila are involved in this practice.

The wigs made in Muktagachha are sold in different supermarkets in the city and exported to a number of countries, sources said.

However, all is not good. The money they get from this work does not match the women's efforts, according to them. But despite that, many who are financially strained are choosing this work.

Sharifa Begum, who took the initiative to make this a bona fide profession in Joyda village, said she first took lessons on making wigs from her sister-in-law Yasmin Akter of adjacent Nimuria village four years ago.

Primarily, it was quite hard to weave strands of hair on the special type of cloth, but it has become easy after practising for the last four years, said 30-year-old Sharifa.

Now she takes orders from another sister-in-law Rokeya Begum of Mondolsen village. Sharifa, a mother of two children, said they get Tk 350-600 for every wig, depending on size and quality. The price is not satisfactory, and a good sized product needs three to four days to complete, she said.

Noorjahan Akter, a first-year Alim student at a local madrasa, said she has been involved in the profession as part-time work for the last two years to support her poor family.

Earlier, she used to get Tk 1,000 on average per month, but now it's Tk 3,000. Still the income does not sync up with the amount of hard work it takes to make wigs, said Noorjahan.

"My father Nurul Islam is an auto-

rickshaw driver, and it's difficult for him to run the four-member family. I've been supporting them by making wigs."

Sumi Akter, a Secondary School Certificate examinee, said she has been working for the last two years to support her father, a vegetable vendor.

Eighth-grader Nurun Nahar said she started making wigs since last month to support her four-member family, as her father died recently.

Rina Akter, a 22-year-old mother of one, said her husband is a day labourer, and to support her family, she has been making wigs for the last three years.

The workers said they can make them at home, while also doing household chores. It is a welcome income source for them, as they have no opportunity to work outside their homes.

The work is not popular yet, but many women are coming to learn the job and tackle poverty, they said.

Workers said the hair and other essentials for making wigs comes from one Mizanur Rahman Sujon, a middleman.

Talking to this correspondent, Sujon said he has engaged some 250 women in this work in Muktagachha and Trishal of Mymensingh, and Manikganj.

Sujon said the wigs are sold at different shopping malls of Dhaka. They are also exported to different countries including India, Pakistan, Australia and Indonesia.

Asked about the price of wigs in national and international markets and whether it is matching the workers' payment, Sujon avoided the questions.

The demand for wigs is increasing in and outside the country, and it could be a profession for hundreds of women, if reasonable remuneration is given to the workers, said Sarwar Islam Ripon, a local journalist.

Abdullah Al Mansur, upazila nirbahi officer of Muktagachha, said making wigs could be made into a cottage industry, if departments concerned provide necessary support to the poor workers.

This business also has significant export potential, the UNO said.



Around 400 women in Muktagachha upazila are involved in making wigs, for which they get Tk 350-600 each. The wigs are sold in different supermarkets in the city and exported to different countries.

PHOTO: STAR