

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Crested Serpent Eagle with snake, Moulvi Bazar, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Crested Serpent Eagle

I was walking downhill along a narrow plantation trail in Moulvi Bazar when my eyes caught movement in the *Kodom* tree abutting a pond at the end of the trail. I could not see clearly past the large leaves and had to descend a few more steps before discerning a large bird. It had perched on a fat horizontal branch. Hanging from its talons was a long yellow snake, a checkered keelback. The non-venomous snake was probably fresh off the pond as it was still writhing. As I watched, the bird flew off with the snake dangling from its claws. It landed atop a tree a few hundred feet away.

I rapidly made my way there in a roundabout way so as not to frighten the bird. By the time I found it, the bird had decapitated the snake. After several seconds holding onto the snake, it took off again and I could not follow it this time due to the terrain. It left many questions unanswered. Did it swallow the snake whole? Did it skin it first? Or was it taking it to its nest for its chicks?

The bird was a Crested Serpent Eagle. It is possibly the commonest eagle of Bangladesh, found in forests, village groves, plantations and sometimes on roadside pylons in rural areas. At thirty inches long, it is larger than our kites. Under its black head, its body is dark brown and dotted with white spots. Bright yellow eyes look out sharply from its face. If it flies overhead, a broad white band running along the edge of its wings and tail is prominent. Juvenile birds are black

and white with a salt-and-pepper head.

Crested Serpent Eagles have three noteworthy features. First, they have superb eyesight. Perched on a high spot they can spot prey on the ground half a mile away. Second, they have tough thick skin covering their legs. When they catch a snake, its fangs cannot easily bite through this skin. Third, they have a bushy crest of feathers running ear to ear around the top of their neck. This crest is normally flat, but when erect the bird looks majestic, reminiscent of the crest of a Harpy Eagle.

Other than non-venomous snakes, these birds also eat frogs, lizards, smaller birds, fish, large insects and larvae. They occasionally take venomous snakes, but even with the hardened leg skin, it is a risky proposition for them.

In Bangladesh, I have seen the most Crested Serpent Eagles in Sundarban. Early morning, when travelling down a canal in a small boat, it is likely to be perched high on a *Sundari* or *Keora* tree, scanning the ground for food. Most birds of prey are shy, but this eagle is less so than others.

Globally, the Crested Serpent Eagle is found in a broad range of tropical Asia, starting from India and stretching east to Indonesia and southern China. The species overall is not considered endangered, although certain of its subspecies (races) are.

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All too relaxed!

Lax monitoring; more crowds at kitchen markets

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Although yesterday was Friday, and almost all the government and private offices were closed, a significant number of people were seen on the streets and kitchen markets in the capital.

A good number of private vehicles, CNG-run auto-rickshaws, goods-laden covered vans and trucks were plying the roads of the capital.

Meanwhile, devotees thronged mosques to attend the second Juma prayers of Ramadan.

Moreover, the announcement that shops and malls will reopen from April 25 also gave a sense of relaxation to the city's people.

"Markets may remain open from 10am to 5pm everyday from April 25," read a Cabinet Division notice.

Yesterday, the situation was starkly different from even last week's situation, when police were reluctant to spare even frontline workers during vehicle checks.

But they have since relaxed their grip on the situation, allowing more vehicles to pass through, unchecked.

Talking to this correspondent,

auto-rickshaw driver Jafar Ali said in the last few days, many auto-rickshaws from outside Dhaka have entered the capital because of the increasing demand, as public transports remain banned.

Upon visiting some key intersections in the capital's Shyamoli, Asad Gate, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Dhanmondi, Bijoy Sarani, Farmgate, Paltan and Motijheel areas, this correspondent found moderate traffic congestion on the streets.

In Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Paltan and Motijheel, some street vendors had set up shops.

They said they have been incurring losses by remaining shut ahead of the Eid.

The city's kitchen markets were more crowded than any other day, because of the weekend.

People, especially office-goers, got enough time to stock up on their groceries.

Visiting the Town Hall Bazar in Mohammadpur, around 100 private cars belonging to buyers were seen parked in front of the kitchen market around 11:45am.

Traders at the kitchen markets

said there were large crowds in the morning.

People opted to visit markets before 12:30pm, as the shopping time would end at 3:00pm, with a break for Juma prayers, they added.

Many shops besides groceries and pharmacies could be seen operating their businesses, though with shutters half-closed. Like other days, the alleys also remained crowded with people.

Meanwhile, for the second Juma prayers of Ramadan yesterday, several mosques in Mohammadpur, Panthapath, Kalabagan and Farmgate areas did not follow the religious affairs ministry's instructions regarding health guidelines.

Following the devotees, there was a significant gathering of aid-seekers outside the mosques too.

With Covid-19 cases continuing to rise alarmingly from mid-March, the government imposed a nationwide "lockdown" for one week from April 5.

Later, a week-long "stricter lockdown" was declared from April 14, which has been extended till April 28.

Shazneen's 23rd death anniversary observed quietly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 23rd death anniversary of Shazneen Tasnim Rahman was observed yesterday.

On April 23, 1998,

15-year-old Shazneen -- a grade-IX student of Scholastica School -- was brutally murdered at her home in the capital's Gulshan.

She was daughter of late Latifur Rahman, former chairman of Transcom Group, and Shahnaz Rahman, present chairman of the group.

Shazneen was among four siblings. Her elder sister Simeen Rahman is the group chief executive officer of Transcom Ltd.

More than 19 years after the shocking incident, the convict in the Shazneen rape and murder case, Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, was hanged at Kashimpur High Security Prison in Gazipur in 2017.

A Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression delivered the verdict on September 2, 2003, sentencing six accused to death for the rape and murder.



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A road in port city's Wasa intersection is crammed with sellers and buyers as they flout health safety rules. Violation of lockdown restrictions continues amid the surge in coronavirus infections. This photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

BANSHKHALI PLANT KILLINGS

Demand for justice gets louder

DU CORRESPONDENT

A panel of noted rights activists have demanded judicial investigation over the killing of workers at the SS I Power Plant at Chattogram's Banshkhalia on April 17.

Speaking at a webinar yesterday, they also sought compensation for the deceased workers' families and said they will submit a protest paper over the killings by police fire at the Chinese embassy.

The power plant where the incident took place is a joint venture involving S Alam Group and a Chinese company.

Prof Anu Muhammad, noted economist and member secretary of the national committee to protect oil, gas, mineral resources, power and ports; Dhaka University Prof Tanzimuddin Khan; Gana Samhati Andolan chief co-ordinator Zonayed Saki, among others, placed the demands while speaking at the webinar organised by Life and Nature Safeguard Platform (LNSP).

Meanwhile, a group of left-leaning student organisation members held a rally in front of Shahbagh's National Museum simultaneously, demanding that the police who fired at the workers be brought to justice.

They placed some additional demands, including the withdrawal of false cases filed against workers, prosecution of police personnel involved in the incident and compensation for the families of the deceased workers.

On April 17, police fired on a group of SS I Power Plant workers who were protesting in demand of their unpaid wages and better working conditions.

Till yesterday, police have confirmed six deaths.

2 of a family killed in wall collapse

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two members of a family were killed and two children were injured in a wall collapse in Nandail upazila of Mymensingh yesterday.

The deceased -- Abdur Rahman (70), and his daughter-in-law Sauda Akter (20) -- were from Madhya Banshati.

Rahman's grandchildren Rabbi (12) and Ruhana (8) were taken to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Quoting family, police said the wall of a concrete water tank, built at their home a week ago, collapsed on them when the tank was filled with water through a pump.

11 of 2 families hurt in N'ganj gas explosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

At least 11 people of two families suffered burn injuries after a gas explosion at a building in Paschim Talla area of Narayanganj Sadar upazila yesterday.

Six of the injured were sent to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka as their conditions were critical.

There might be a leak in gas connection or the residents did not turn off the stoves before going to sleep on Thursday night, said fire service officials.

That's why gas accumulated in the rooms. When dwellers tried to turn on the stove, it exploded around 6am.

"The gas explosion occurred in a flat on the second floor of the building. The victims were rushed to Narayanganj General Hospital at first," said Abdullah Al Arefin, assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Narayanganj.

Five of the victims suffered 50 percent burn injuries, he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, local administration sealed off the building as it was severely damaged due to the explosion.

A seven-member probe body headed by an additional district magistrate has been formed to investigate the incident.

"The probe body includes officers from local administration, fire service, police and Titas gas. The committee has been asked to submit a report within seven working days. Necessary legal action will be taken on the basis of the report," said Mustain Billah, deputy commissioner of Narayanganj.

Locals said the building was constructed around 8 years ago. One Al-Amin owns the building, which is yet to be completed. There are 12 flats in it where 13 families reside. Two families shared a flat where the explosion occurred.

Visiting the spot, it was seen that a portion of wall of the building collapsed due to the explosion. Window glasses and doors were also smashed while furniture and clothes were burnt to ashes.

"I was walking early in the morning. Suddenly I heard a bang and the building started to shake. Then, I saw fire," said Arman Hossain, resident of another flat in the building.



A portion of a wall of the building collapsed due to the gas explosion. PHOTO: STAR



Dr Hameeda Hossain gets lifetime award

CITY DESK

Dr Hameeda Hossain has been announced the recipient of the Bangladesh Development Initiative's (BDI) Lifetime Achievement Award-2021, said a BDI press release.

BDI is a non-partisan research and advocacy group of independent scholars based in the US. Established in 2012, the award is designed to honour outstanding individuals or organisations who have contributed to understanding the challenges and the ideals that have led to Bangladesh's development.

Dr Hossain studied literature and history as an undergraduate at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, USA. She received her doctorate in history from Oxford University in the UK.

She began her professional life as an editor with Oxford University Press in Karachi. She helped co-found the English language political monthly magazine, Forum, in the then East Pakistan in 1967.

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Brac starts antigen test from today

Service will initiate with 16 booths in Dhaka, Ctg



An antigen testing booth of Brac. PHOTO: COLLECTED

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac will launch antigen-based Covid-19 rapid testing for suspected patients to get results within a comparatively shorter period of time from today.

The programme will run under the overall supervision of DGHS, said a press release of the development organisation. The service will initiate primarily with 16 booths -- 15 in Dhaka and one in Chattogram.

Brac has been collecting samples to detect coronavirus through RT-PCR test by installing testing booths in different parts of the country since March 2020. It is now adding the rapid antigen test to the existing facilities.

The plan to expand this activity has come amid the new surge in Covid-19 cases. The rapid antigen test facility will gradually expand to Brac's 32 testing booths in Dhaka and four in Chattogram, according to the Health, Nutrition and Population Programme (HNPP) of Brac.

The booths will remain open from 9am to 12 noon from Saturday to Thursday. Each of the booths will be able to collect and analyse 150 samples a day, according to the press release.

Currently, RT-PCR tests are followed in Bangladesh for the majority of the samples, which takes at least 24 hours or more to get the results. But, an antigen test will deliver the result within 30 minutes, which, Brac expects, will add pace to the government's Covid-19 testing operations.

To get the test via Brac booth, a person must take an online appointment at coronatest.brac.net.