

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Luna, Chaklapunji Tea Garden, 1984.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

A Force of Nature

My cousin Dr. Luna Vishwanath (née Quader) passed away on June 6th. With her went a big part of my childhood. This is her story.

Born into an illuminated family (her father was founder principal of Central Law College; her maternal grandmother was the first Muslim woman politician of Bangladesh) Luna studied medicine at Dhaka Medical College before going to the United Kingdom for further studies.

She did her post graduate work in Scotland and became the first female Bangladeshi surgeon to pass all the examinations required to become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. Specializing in breast cancer surgery she became a sought after consultant surgeon in the UK. Eventually she and her husband, orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Mayasandra Vishwanath (Vish), chose to continue their work at Birmingham City Hospital.

At Birmingham Luna led her team to pioneer day case surgery for breast cancer patients. This enabled the patient to go home on the same day as the surgery. It ensured that patients received the best and most efficient care. The idea was so successful that it was adopted in hospitals across the UK. It also saved the National Health Service 22 million pounds annually.

In 2009 Luna was diagnosed with pulmonary hypertension, a rare and deadly disease. Fighting it, she kept seeing patients and performed surgeries with the aid of oxygen. Following her ill-health retirement, she set up office at home and became her own best physician, meticulously tracking symptoms and test results and carefully choosing evidence based medicines and procedures. Her will-power and discipline enabled her to live much longer than the disease's life expectancy.

Through her darkest days she never stopped being anchor and guide for her family and her siblings. Illness could not rob her of her generosity.

She always responded to calls for help from anyone in her wide circle of relatives and friend.

Soon after her diagnosis, Luna and Vish made a list of countries to visit. In a few years they visited numerous countries, criss-crossing the globe from north to south and east to west. Travelling was not easy as she had to carry her oxygen supply. Nonetheless they made wonderful memories and shared them through photographs spanning Angkor Wat, Iguazu Falls, Mount Fuji, Kruger safari, Icelandic geyser, Amazonian forest and many other attractions.

Among my cousins, Luna was closest in age. When I was growing up in Sylhet she was the big-city connection in Dhaka. She kept me updated on the happening things: TV shows such as The Fugitive and Dangerman, Apollo 11 astronauts visiting Dhaka, bell-bottom pants and detective books. In my imagination she was glamorous and stylish but face to face she always turned out to be smiling, very approachable and unflinchingly direct.

These qualities held her in good stead later when, through her skills, talent and charisma, she impressed even the toughest old school British surgeons and broke into their male-dominated world.

My visits with Luna during her illness were filled with joyful reminiscing. Her cheerful demeanour and calm acceptance of her disease amazed me. During pauses in conversation I found myself wondering how the bubbly girl I once knew had miraculously transformed into this graceful yet formidable force of nature.

Luna is survived by her husband, daughter, mother, three siblings and countless admirers and grateful souls. (I acknowledge the help of Dr. Veena Vishwanath, Luna's daughter, in writing this article.)

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VACCINATION RESUMES IN CTG

Frontliners, CMCH registrants to get priority

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

It's good news for vaccine-seekers of Chattogram, as 91,200 doses of Sinopharm vaccine have reached the port city yesterday.

As a result, the Covid-19 vaccination programme is going to resume from today, according to the authorities concerned.

Dr Sheikh Fazle Rabbi, civil surgeon of Chattogram, received the vaccines from the government.

The vaccines were later taken to the EPI central store in the city.

Initially, the programme will be operated only from Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

On the flip side, not everyone will get the chance to get vaccinated right away, as doctors, nurses, healthcare staffers, and students of medical colleges, nursing colleges and medical technology will be prioritised, Dr Rabbi said.

In addition, those who registered for the second dose mentioning CMCH as their preferred centre, but are yet to receive their doses, will also get priority, the civil surgeon told The Daily Star yesterday.

Contacted, CMCH director Brig Gen SM Humayun Kabir said they have made a list of 26 medical students to be vaccinated on the first day.

This means that thousands of people who are yet to receive their second dose after registering at the 18 other centres in the city and 14 centres in upazilas will have to wait for their turn.

Naturally, the decision to favour priority groups did not make them happy.

Talking to this correspondent, they demanded that the authority change the decision so that vaccine-seekers across the district get equal opportunity.

vaccine aspirants.

"We have just received 91,200 doses this time around, whereas in the first phase, a total of 453,760 people were given the first dose," he said.



The consignment of 91,200 doses of Sinopharm vaccines was stored at the EPI central storage system in the city.

"I registered for my first dose two months ago. I've been eagerly waiting for fresh vaccines to arrive, but now I get to know that I am not in the priority group simply because I've registered for Chattogram General Hospital centre," said Zakaria Imtiaz (60).

"I fail to understand how this is fair," he remarked.

Asked, Civil Surgeon Dr Rabbi said they had to make the decision as they received fewer vaccines relative to

"But vaccine-seekers should not be worried, as the government assured it will immediately send in more vaccines, allowing us to vaccinate all in phases," the official said.

Meanwhile, the positivity rate at the port city was 19.28 percent yesterday.

It was 14.44 percent on Thursday, 16.53 percent on Wednesday, 16.89 percent on Tuesday, and 24.59 percent on Monday, according to the officials.



Shahida Zahir passes away

CITY DESK

Shahida Zahir (Ratna) passed away on Sunday (June 13) at her residence.

She was buried at the Azimpur graveyard in the capital.

Shahida Zahir left behind her son, Shams Munir, and two sisters, Marina Rahman and Roxana Azam, as immediate family.

She was the wife of renowned Barrister late Dr Md Zahir and daughter of late Halimur Rahman and Tahera Khatun.

Shahida Zahir completed her Masters from Dhaka University in English literature and HSC from Holy Cross College. She was also an English teacher.

Family members have requested all to pray for the departed soul.



This pickup van turned sideways on the Dhaka-Aricha highway near Savar Bazar bus stand on Thursday night. Locals said the accident occurred due to there being no safety barriers around a road development works spot. Fortunately, no casualties have been reported, though risks persisted as of yesterday morning as the vehicle was left lying without any protection, leaving it prone to tumbling over.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

6 held with meth, yaba in Uttara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) claimed to have arrested six drug peddlers with crystal meth, also known as ice, from Dhaka's Uttara area yesterday.

Rab's Legal and Media Wing Director Commander Khandaker Al Moin said they increased surveillance and initiated an investigation after learning from sources that a gang were trying to set up a "meth lab" to make adulterated ice and other drugs.

A team of Rab-3 conducted a drive from Thursday evening till dawn yesterday in Uttara and detained six drug peddlers including the alleged kingpin Md Tawfiq Hossain (35).

The other arrestees are Md Jamirul Chowdhury (37), Md Arafat Abedin (35), Md Rakib Basar Khan (30), Md Saiful Islam (28), and Md Khaled Iqbal (35), said Al Moin.

Rab also seized ice, yaba tablets, foreign alcohol, marijuana, 13 foreign weapons, replica weapons and large quantities of laboratory equipment from their possession, he said.

"The racket has been involved in yaba trading for nearly 10 years. They are now turning their focus on methamphetamine, ice and 'cocktail drug' which have high demand among youths of rich families," said the Rab official.

The meth lab was originally run with the help of arrested Arafat Abedin and some of his associates, said Rab in a press release.

The arrested accused are part of an organised syndicate. Tawfiq is the founder and coordinator of the business and there are 10-15 more people involved, according to Rab.

The Rab official said Tawfiq is the kingpin of the racket while Zubain and Khaled have been financing it. They have been running a yaba peddling ring for over 10 years and have started meth trading around two years ago.

According to Rab, Zubain came to the country after completing BBA from a private university in London.

Tawfiq and Khaled completed their BBA and MBA from private universities. Rudra, an HSC dropout, used to run the lab as a chemist.

During interrogation, they provided specific information about some more syndicates and the people involved, said the Rab official.

Rab will continue its operation to find other drug peddlers, added the press release.

Legal action is being taken against the arrestees, said Al Moin.

'We want more skilled workers from Bangladesh'

Says Saudi ambassador at meeting with Baira members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saudi Arabia has urged Bangladesh to send more skilled migrant workers to the Kingdom, as there are "ample job opportunities" for foreign workers in its various sectors.

Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh Essa Yousef Essa Alduhailan said this in a meeting at his office in Dhaka with a three-member delegate of the immediate-past executive committee of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) on Thursday.

The ambassador also emphasised on importance of Bangladesh to the Kingdom, especially in the labour recruitment sector.

The ambassador paid special attention on labour recruitment from Bangladesh since it is an important area for both countries, said Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, former secretary general of Baira, who attended the meeting.

The issue of enlisting Bangladeshi recruiting agencies to send workers was also discussed, he said. Baira's immediate-past president Benjir Ahmed and vice president Mohammad Abdul Hye attended the meeting.

Luck drying up for dried fish traders

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Two months into the second wave of Covid-19 in the country, shutki (dried fish) traders and producers of Rangpur division are yet to recover from the losses they incurred during the first wave of the pandemic.

Since March last year, many of them have lost their investments, others have left the business altogether, and those who are still powering through are only doing so out of sheer will, with little to show for their efforts.

Rangpur is home to three large wholesale markets for dried fish. They are at Saidpur Bus terminal area of Nilphamari, Teesta Bazar in Lalmonirhat Sadar, and Ghagatparais in Rangpur city.

Shutki traders from these markets have reportedly suffered losses worth around Tk 4

crore since the virus first hit last year.

During a recent visit to Ghagatpara dried fish wholesale market in Rangpur's RK road, this correspondent found the once-busy market relatively quiet, with most of the shops shut and only a few buyers roaming around.

Seasonal sales of the market used to stand around Tk 6 crore every year. But reaching that target remains a far cry in these trying times, said traders.

They said dried fish season begins every December and runs till August. This is when both production and business peak. But at the tail end of this year's season, the traders can only count their losses and hope the next one goes well.

Besides local demand, these nine months used to see a lot of demand from abroad.

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Traders at Lalmonirhat Sadar's Teesta Bazar passing their times idly, sorting again dried fish that have been sorted before. Despite a good fishing season, they are still counting losses due to the lack of customers.

PHOTO: STAR

NEWS IN brief

Bangladesh nominated FAO member from Asia region

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has been nominated as the member of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) from the Asia region for three years from 2022.

The country has also been chosen as a member of the credential committee of FAO, according to a press release issued by the agricultural ministry yesterday.

The decisions were taken during the 42nd ongoing conference of FAO. The conference, being held virtually this year due to Covid-19 pandemic, began on June 14 and ended yesterday.

500 JCD activists sued in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'singh

Police yesterday filed two cases against some 500 leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) for their alleged attack on law enforcers centring a rally in Mymensingh city's Kalibari area on Thursday.

Marking the death anniversary of BNP president Ziaur Rahman, JCD organised the rally on the day.

Police, however, said JCD activists started throwing brick bats at law enforcers when a police team asked them to stop the meeting as it was organised defying health guidelines.

OC Firoz Talukder of Kotwali police said they arrested eight persons.

Meanwhile, BNP at a press conference said police attacked on their rally to foil the event and filed "false" cases against JCD activists.

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