

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Silverbill Munia working on Baya Weaver's nest.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

The Weaver and the Munia

I love watching Baya Weaver (*Babui*) birds in their nests. They are ferociously energetic and constantly bringing nesting materials, building and upgrading their nests or chasing each other. Recently I had the opportunity to watch them in action after many months and got a surprise.

This was next to a fishpond in Hail Haor, Moulvi Bazar where several coconut trees supported the weaver's nests which hung from their fronds. Years ago, I had photographed Baya Weaver nests hanging from *shupari* trees, but coconut trees being shorter placed the birds closer to my camera. They have brown striped bodies similar in size and shape to the House Sparrow, but males have distinctive yellow crowns on their head. The weavers went about their construction business while chasing away suitors for their mate. Some tended to newly fledged chicks. They paid me scant attention as I watched with delight.

Then I noticed something unusual. On the side of a palm, several fronds had broken off and dangled from the trunk. A series of older Baya nests hung from these fronds. They looked untended and worn out. However, they were connected to each other making an awkward vertical string of nests which I have never seen before.

As I watched a bird flew to the bottom of one of these nests. It was an Indian Silverbill Munia! About the same size as a Baya Weaver, this munia looks brown from the top and white from below. Its broad and flat bill, distinctively silver, is used for extracting seeds from grass. (This is an important difference from the weaver whose sharper beak enables it to catch insects.) On its beak the munia had brought a long stalk of green grass. It

perched from the vertical wall of the nest for a few seconds, scanning the surroundings. Still holding the grass it entered the nest through the opening in the bottom. After a few more seconds it flew out swiftly without the grass.

A few minutes later the munia returned. Again it perched on the nest wall. This time it had dried grass which it threaded into the nest with its beak. Then it was off again. The next trip it brought green grass, and this time I noticed the seeds hanging from the stalk. Like before, it went into the nest with the grass and flew out swiftly.

I realized that the munias were nesting in old, discarded Baya Weaver nests. Perhaps a storm had broken off the fronds and the weavers had lost interest in the nests they had built on them. The green grass the munias brought had seeds attached to them to feed the hatchlings inside the nest. But they also had to maintain the old nests, which they did with the dried stalks.

What struck me most was the difference in energy between the weavers and the munias. The weavers worked frantically without a break. The munias were slower paced and took many breaks: playing with each other, perching to rest and taking their time. While walking away, I saw a munia relaxing on a wire hanging over the field where it plucked its grass. It flew away to the grass field when it saw me. I know that birds don't have human emotions but I could swear this one was embarrassed at being caught idle!

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Urban, new poor remain unaddressed

Says study on govt social protection programmes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Millions of urban and new poor caused by the pandemic remain unaddressed by the government's social protection programmes. At least 41 percent of these people have shifted to lower pay jobs and eight percent are still unemployed, reveals a study conducted by Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

According to the study, earning uncertainty among informal sector workers, most of whom live in the cities, has exacerbated during the pandemic. Moreover, the poor urban residents have been hit hard by 98 percent increase in non-food expenditures such as rent, transportation, healthcare and utilities.

As a result, debt as proportion of annual income has doubled in the last one year and savings have been depleted drastically (11 percent in urban and 24 percent in rural) creating 24.5 million new poor as of March, 2021.

These alarming facts were shared in a webinar titled "COVID Impact and Social Protection Challenges: Urban and the New Poor" organised by PPRC in partnership with BIGD on Thursday night.

According to Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman, PPRC and keynote presenter of the webinar, "The Covid-19 crisis did not trigger any expansion in social protection allocations in the new budget. The social protection responses were mostly financed through repurposing existing allocations rather than additional new financing."

Asif Saleh, executive director, Brac Bangladesh, said, "The government had announced to support five million poor people through USD 148.81 million unconditional cash transfer. Eventually, they identified around 3.7 million

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Khulna residents unfazed by lockdown



Even though Khulna city is under lockdown, many streets and alleys remain full of people.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

On the fourth day of the weeklong lockdown, droves of Khulna city residents gathered and crowded at kitchen markets, ignoring health guidelines amid an increasingly worsening situation.

In the last couple of weeks, Khulna has become the worst Covid-affected district in the country. The numbers of deaths and positive cases have been spiralling. Three Covid hospitals in Khulna, including

Khulna Medical College Hospital, have patients either above capacity or almost at capacity.

Visiting different areas yesterday, including Dakbangla intersection, Rupsha Ghat and Moylapota intersection, this correspondent saw a number of private vehicles plying the road.

Traffic in the city, however, was relatively low.

Office-going people have been seen

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Every day, Arju and Mukta, the mother daughter duo, roam the streets of Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar on a rickshaw, carrying their homemade meals in tiffin boxes. Throughout the day, they sell the meals to shopkeepers nearby for Tk 40 each, and the customers love it, as the alternative is having meals for Tk 70-80 at hotels. This works out for Arju and Mukta too, as they can support their family with the income. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

COVID-19 FALLOUT

Barishal Shital Pati weavers in a bind

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

There's a group of artisans in Barishal who have been making their living weaving Shital Pati -- mats made out of cane -- for hundreds of years. In fact, there are entire villages, like Helencha village in Bakerganj upazila, where several dozens of households are devoted to the craft.

In the era of the lockdown, these weaver families are now living in terrible danger.

At least thirty houses from the village earn their livelihoods making and selling the mats. But due to the persistence of the pandemic, demand is down to an unbelievable level, and the families now feel like they're stranded.

The Shital Pati, weaved together with strips of a green cane locally known as "Paitra", is typically known as a family-oriented craft, where everyone from the household including adolescents participate.

Local artisans said they usually buy

the raw material for Tk 7,000, with which they can make at least 22 Shital Patis.

The mat is of high value to Bangladeshi culture, and is held as a cultural symbol across many other nations. So much so in fact, that the Pati was announced as a cultural heritage during the 12th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage meeting, held in Jeju Island, South Korea, in 2017.

In Barishal's Patikar Para, many see the craft as their destiny, as the local children do not imagine growing up with access to higher education. This demonstrates the extent to which the village is dependent on the production of the mats.

Sandhya Rani Dey, a weaver from the village, said the Shital Pati made by them used to sell according to categories of length, design etc, with a typical six feet by seven feet and six inches going for Tk 800 to Tk 1,600.

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PHOTO: TITU DAS

Although weaving hasn't stopped, artisans say sales have dropped to nearly half amid the pandemic, making it extremely difficult for them to run their families.

4 held with fake stamps worth Tk 20cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have arrested four members of a gang which produced counterfeit revenue stamps and non-judicial stamps and then circulated those in the market to cash a hefty amount of money.

A team of detective branch (DB) of police conducted drives in Dhaka and Narayanganj on Thursday and yesterday and seized stamps worth around Tk 20 crore along with stamp-making devices and chemicals from a factory in Jatrabari's Matuail, said AKM Hafiz Akter, additional commissioner of DB, at a press briefing at DMP Media Centre yesterday.

The arrestees are -- Abu Yusuf alias Parvez alias Rana, Atiar Rahman Sabuj, Nasir Uddin and Nurul Islam alias Sohel.

Police said the gang had been producing various types of counterfeit revenue stamps, non-judicial stamps and trade licences of city corporation for a long time in their factory in Matuail.

The detectives seized 13.40 counterfeit revenue stamps worth Tk 20.2 crore, 480 fake court fees worth Tk 1.94 lakh, Tk 3.60 crore in cash, 11 seals of Bangladesh Post Office and Bangladesh Bank, stamp-making devices and chemicals, and cheque books of three private banks.

A case was filed against the arrestees with Motijheel Police Station in this connection.

The official said the fraudsters had been running the business on a limited scale from 2017 to 2019 using computers and printers. Afterwards, they set up a secret printing house in Matuail in 2019 and started it on a large scale.

Police are trying to find out about other members of the gang.

BEATING OUR OWN SCORES

February - May 2021

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ON TIME

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The Prominence | South Khulshi (CTG)

Accolade | Wari

AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Enclave | Dhanmondi

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Shopnochura | Diabari

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