

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Chabert's Vanga, Andasibe, Madagascar.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Madagascar's Treasures

In Madagascar, nine out of ten species of flora and fauna are endemic. That is, they are found in Madagascar and nowhere else. When looking through photographs from a trip in 2017, I am vividly reminded of this fact.

The fourth largest island in the world, Madagascar evolved several ecosystems and numerous species after breaking away from Africa approximately 160 million years ago. It would take years for a nature photographer to do justice to its wealth of flora and fauna.

A mountain range running north-south through its middle divides Madagascar into several climate zones: wet in the east, dry in the west and even drier in the south. Each zone offers its own special biodiversity.

We visited the eastern and southern ecosystems: the rainforest of Andasibe and the spiny forest in the deserts of the south. Driving several hours from the capital Antananarivo we reached Andasibe at nightfall. The magic started at breakfast the next morning. From the restaurant terrace we saw a Chabert's Vanga - a black and white bird with blue eye rings - hopping around on a tree.

When I see a new bird in a new country I try to place it in context. The bird's family has members in other countries and I can compare to similar species I've seen elsewhere. For example, when I saw a Violaceous Trogon in Brazil, I immediately noticed its profile and pose were similar to the Red-headed Trogon of the forests of Bangladesh, so the new bird was not completely alien.

Not so with this vanga! The entire vanga family is seen only in Madagascar, so this bird was alien to me. Other birds we found later were similarly strange - Asities, Couas, Ground-rollers and Fodys among them.

In addition to the unusual birds,

there were also the "almost but not quite" birds.

For example, down south we saw the *Doel* - Oriental Magpie Robin. But something was amiss: it was much smaller than our national bird. It turned out to be a separate species called Madagascar Magpie Robin. Our *Kani Boga* (Indian Pond Heron) is not found here but the Malagasy Pond Heron with a bright blue beak is rare and sought after by birders. And Common Kestrel, a small falcon seen in winter, has a Madagascar version. While the former is greyish with orange-brown wings, the latter is more reddish with shades of purple and orange on its wings.

Over a hundred species of gentle and friendly lemurs live on this island. The eighty species of snakes here are non-threatening: I was able to approach a resting boa within a few feet. There are numerous colourful chameleons and lizards. The only carnivore in Madagascar is the fossa, about the size of a large dog. It eats lemurs.

Plant life here is no less exciting. Madagascar grows the world's vanilla, the seed pod of an orchid that must be pollinated by hand. Of the eight species of baobabs in the world, six are endemic to Madagascar. These bottle-shaped trees are striking. They store water in the desert areas; their fruit is also edible. In addition to exotic plants, there were also familiarities such as *Krishnachura* and *Panthopadon* which originated here in Madagascar.

I would very much like to return to Madagascar in the future. However, that may be some time away as Madagascar today battles famine-like conditions caused by climate change and locusts. We wish them a quick recovery.

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In a first, DU holds test in all div cities

STAR REPORT

For the first time in its 100-year history, Dhaka University (DU) held its admission test across all eight divisions, including the capital, yesterday.

DU authorities said it was done to reduce the stress and cost of travelling for examinees, as well as minimise health safety concerns of the pandemic.

The one-and-a-half-hour test of "Ka" unit, designated for science group admission seekers for the undergraduate degree, began at 11am across all centres.

On average, 45 students vied for each seat, sources said.

The exams were held across 79 centres in Dhaka.

The venues outside Dhaka were Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, Khulna University, Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet, Barisal University, and Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur.

Speaking at a press briefing held at DU campus around 11:30am, VC Prof M Akhtaruzzaman said, "We have been in touch with vice-chancellors of all the universities [that hosted the test]. They've told us everything went



ADMISSION FOR 2020-21

"Ka" unit exams held in 79 centres in Dhaka, also 7 divisional cities

45 students vied for each seat

UNIT DATE

Kha	Today
Cha	Oct 9
Ga	Oct 22
Gha	Oct 23

smoothly."

"We have received no news of any untoward incident. We were informed the students maintained health guidelines too," DU Proctor AKM Golam Rabbani told reporters around 1pm at his office, after the test ended.

Meanwhile, many expressed satisfaction over the decision to decentralise the exam venues.

"Students from rural areas have benefited due to the decentralisation of exam centres," said Barishal University VC Dr Md Sadequul Arefin.

"There was less traffic on the road. We arrived at the venue much earlier than expected," said Mahfuza Rahman, an engineer from the capital's Mirpur area, who brought her sister to a centre at the DU campus.

Talking to our Rangpur correspondent, examinee Abdur Rahim, who came to Begum Rokeya University from Gaibandha, said, "If the exam was held in Dhaka, I would have had a much harder time with it.

This is way more comfortable."

Visiting the DU campus yesterday morning, our DU correspondent saw that a huge crowd of students and their guardians gathered at the campus hours before the exam began. Although most people were seen sporting masks, social distance could not be maintained in most places.

DU authorities also arranged special Covid tests at the university's medical centre, said Dr Sarwar Jahan Muktafi, chief medical officer of the medical centre.

"Health safety was our top priority," said Khulna University School of Fine Arts Dean Professor Monirul Islam.

A total of 3,24,340 students have applied for the test, vying for the 7,148 seats available under five units of the university.

The exam for "Kha" unit will be held today, "Ga" unit on October 22, while the "Cha" unit exam will take place on October 9. The "Gha" unit test is slated to be held on October 23.



Star editor elected IPI vice-chair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuza Anam has been elected as one of four vice-chairs of the International Press Institute's (IPI) global Executive Board.

Mahfuza Anam and his colleagues from Spain, Turkey, and the United States -- all leading editors and media experts -- have been elected to the positions by their fellow members of the Executive Board, shortly after the 2021 IPI World Congress, said an IPI media statement issued yesterday.

The three other new vice chairs are Virginia Pérez Alonso, editor-in-chief of

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The chaos that the capital faces at the onset of DU admission tests every year were spread out across all divisional cities yesterday. From riding on top of trains to walking along a crowd under the scorching sun, the rush had the cities buzzing from the morning all the way till the afternoon. These photos (counter-clockwise) were taken from Chattogram, Khulna, Barishal and Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN, HABIBUR RAHMAN, TITU DAS, PALASH KHAN



Death toll 68

22 died in Sept

34 in Aug, 12 in July

165 hospitalised yesterday

Total infected 18,362

Dengue claims another life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least one more dengue patient died while 165 were hospitalised this year. Of the total infected, 2,337 are from outside Dhaka.

This year, 68 people have died of dengue infection in the country, all of whom died between July, August and September.

Twelve people have died in July, 34 died in August and 22 in September, according to the DGHS.

1 in 4 elderly persons suffer from malnutrition

Reveals BSMMU study

MOUJIB AHMED SUJAN

One in every four elderly people, aged 60 and above, are suffering from malnutrition, and over half of all elderly people are at risk of developing malnutrition, revealed a study.

The prevalence of malnutrition among elderly women is higher (28.8 percent) than men (22 percent), stated the research, conducted by the Public Health and Informatics (PHI) department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

The study, which was conducted on 125 elderly people from three villages of Dhaka's Uttarkhan neighbourhood, found that 65.3 percent of the population are at risk of malnutrition.

The data was collected during October and November of 2019, while research findings were shared at a programme on BSMMU campus on Thursday.

Researchers said there are around 1.5 crore elderly people in the country, but arrangements to ensure preventive healthcare for them is falling short.

The main reasons behind malnutrition among elders are depression; underlying oral and dental health conditions; avoidance of food like meat, milk



KEY REASONS FOR MALNUTRITION

Depression, underlying oral and dental health conditions

Avoidance of meat, milk and eggs

Prevalence of non-communicable diseases

ARTHRITIS

More than half of elderly in rural areas suffer from arthritis

Problem needs to be addressed at early stage

More trained staff required at grassroots to help patients

and eggs; and prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

"The target population in our study was mainly from insolvent families... So a suitable nutrition programme is needed for them," Dr KM Thoudidur Rahman, lead investigator of the study and scientific coordinator of PHI

department, told The Daily Star.

STUDIES ON ARTHRITIS, PALLIATIVE CARE

The study conducted by BSMMU's Internal Medicine and Rheumatology department revealed that more than half (52 percent) of all elderly people living in the country's rural areas are suffering from arthritis pain, while half were found to be suffering from moderate disability.

This aging-related disease is more prevalent among women (56.6 percent) than men (43.4 percent), according to the study, conducted on 380 people of Dhaka's Dohar upazila from April 2017 to March 2018.

"The main problem is that if arthritis pain is not addressed at an early stage, it causes disability among elders. Despite a large number of elders suffering from this problem, there is no proper treatment arrangement," said Dr Moinul Hassan, lead investigator of the study.

He said, "If health staffers working at grassroots, like community healthcare providers, were trained, they could have referred people to tertiary hospitals."

Another study conducted by

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Free Lawachhara from grabbers

Speakers urge govt at human chain

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Demanding protection of Moulvibazar's Lawachhara forest, a group of activists yesterday formed a human chain to raise awareness about the forest's importance.

They also demanded that the authorities concerned free the forest from grabbers.

The activists staged the demo in front of Lawachhara Bagmara area under the banner of "Lawachhara Jibo Boichitra Rokha Committee" (Lawachhara Biodiversity Protection Committee).

Manjur Ahmed Azad Manna, committee chair, who presided over the programme, said, Lawachhara's very existence is under threat. Beyond just illegal grabbing, it's destruction is now "officially" underway thanks to the railway and forest departments.

He urged the government to take steps to preserve its biodiversity by shifting the rail tracks and regulating mindless tourism.

Moulvibazar district council Helal Uddin, BAPA district coordinator SM Saleh Suhel also spoke at the programme.

SHOTS FIRED ON FARMERS IN CTG No case filed, none arrested yet



SS Dredger kept machinery on agriculture land for months

Farmers protested the move as it disrupted farming

'WDB contractor's men' attacked them during debate

7 farmers sustained shotgun pellet wounds on Thursday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

No case was filed till yesterday after seven people, mostly farmers, were shot and injured in an attack "by a Water Development Board (WDB) contractor's men" at Tulatoli in Satkania, Chattogram the day before.

The incident happened over putting dredging materials in agriculture land by the river Sangu.

Villagers said the contractor's company, SS Dredger, kept dredging machinery on their agricultural land for months without their consent. The landowners, mostly farmers of the village, protested the move as it was disrupting farming. But the company allegedly did not pay heed to the protesters.

Anwar Hossain, OC of Satkania Police Station, said, "We contacted family members of the injured to ask for filing a case. They said they are at hospital attending the victims."

Asked why police did not file the case, he said if the families do not lodge a case, police would do so.

The OC said they were trying to arrest the miscreants and recover the gun used on Thursday's incident. However, no arrest was made till filing of this report yesterday.

Health condition of seven people hit by pellet of shotgun was stable, said doctors at Chattogram Medical College Hospital where they were undergoing treatment in surgery ward.

Meanwhile, a tension was prevailing at Tulatoli village yesterday fearing further violence in the area.