

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Mother and child, Dhaka.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

They grow up so fast

Sometimes an ordinary event triggers an extraordinary flood of memory.

Recently one morning the lift stopped at my floor. The door opened to let me out. Outside a father was holding his school-age daughter's hand, taking her to school. As I exited and they entered the lift we nodded at each other.

This was the flat we had moved to in 2005 when we returned to Bangladesh from abroad. Our son, then thirteen, and daughter, then eight, attended a nearby school. My son - big guy - went alone. But I took my daughter to school every day. I too had held her hand as we entered the lift every morning on our way to school. Walking to school we discussed names of roadside trees: koros, bot, mahogany.

Perhaps I should have stopped the father and asked him to relish every second with his daughter, because she would grow up in the blink of an eye just like my children had. He would have those memories to savour when his daughter grew up, just like I have of my children.

Our son was a happy baby virtually from the day he was born, smiling away at the world. But he disliked wearing protective mittens after birth, contorting his face with irritation and throwing punches into the air.

Our daughter, the younger sibling, sometimes fixed me with a stare. I could not look away from her eyes. She had soft curly hair that you wanted to reach out and touch.

I remember the look of abrupt shock on their face - followed by tears - when they got their first vaccination. Both times, only their mother could soothe away the tears.

Raising children is hard. But somehow the hard work is filtered away from these memories. What remain are the sweet impressions and flashes of memories.

Our son hated going barefoot in the grass, saying his feet tickled. Our daughter didn't mind the grass but she ran whenever I watered the lawn, disagreeing with the cold water. Neither was overly fond of animals - even the ducks in the nearby pond froze them.

The parade of memory continues relentless: of cradling my one-year-old daughter in my arms and rocking her to sleep every night on a rocking chair; of watching "Babylon 5" with my four-year-old son who eagerly called out the name of each alien character as it appeared, rolling with laughter at the ridiculous-looking aliens; of feeding them both their favourite foods (Gerber and *daal-bhat* respectively) and subsequently changing their diapers.

There were books and homework every night, poems to memorize and math problems to solve, swimming, violin and piano, basketballs to throw, soccer balls to kick. I remembered my son at eight working with his mother on Hamlet's soliloquy, and my daughter, then only three, mimicking her brother: "thadees da quash-shun!"

I remember two magical moments - five years apart - when each of them balanced on their bicycle and rode on two wheels for the first time without my help.

And so spins the circle of life.

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DMCH'S 'DIRTY' LAUNDRY

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and HASAN MEER

People from across the country flock to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for treatment. According to hospital authorities, around 4,000 patients remain admitted to this 2,600-bed public hospital on a regular basis.

And every day, around 1,500-2,000 hospital linens such as bedsheets, aprons of doctors and nurses and operation sheets are being gathered from wards and operation theatres, washed and dried round the clock to meet the demand.

But for a hospital of this size and proportion, its washing service still remains archaic, failing to meet the strict hygiene requirements of healthcare facilities.

The washing facility, located adjacent to the nuclear medicine building and Dhaka Medical College morgue, was set up in the mid-1940s, right about the time when the hospital was established.

Over time, the hospital went through many changes, improved and upgraded its services. However, the procedures at the laundry did not see any improvement and still rely on human labour, which is also not up to the mark due to manpower shortage.

This laundry stays open from 6 in the morning till 1 at night. There are 10 workers who collect, wash and dry linens there.

And of course, this method of using human labour, that too with only 10 persons, to cover

THE LAUNDRY'S OPERATION

- » 1,500-2,000 linens washed daily
- » Facility operates from 6am to 1am
- » 10 workers collect, wash and dry linens six days a week in shifts
- » Bleaching powder, washing soda, detergents for washing

THE PROBLEMS

- » Workers wear no protective equipment when handling water mixed with bleaching powder, detergents
- » Work pressure puts toll on limited staff
- » Linens not cleaned properly due to archaic method
- » Sheets not replaced regularly at wards

such an extensive amount of work results in constant complaints from patients and hospital staffers about the quality of the work, and above, all raises questions about hygiene.

There are also complaints that the linen sheets often have spots and gets torn.

THE WASHING PROCESS

The workers have it hard too. They work six days a week in shifts and on a temporary basis through a contractor, making around Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000 per month.

Saddam is one such worker. The youth started working last year.

"I was looking for a job amid the pandemic to support my family," the Mymensingh resident told The Daily Star in March. "One

of my acquaintances referred me to the contractor, and that's how I started working here."

He said all the workers live nearby as they have to start working early in the morning.

Five of them start at 6am. They go to different wards, OTs and collect used linen sheets and put them in sacks.

"Then we use trolleys to carry them to the laundry place. Sometimes, we have to carry those sacks on our head, as we cannot bring the trolley everywhere," he added. "By the time we are done with that, it's almost 10:30am."

During multiple visits over the month, these correspondents saw that most of the sheets collected from the OT were blood-stained.

Also, there's no markings to

specify which pieces of cloth are from which department or ward. All the things collected from wards get mixed up during washing and are taken back randomly.

When asked if they use any gloves or masks, Saddam replied in the negative. Once the pieces of cloth are taken to the laundry, they are boiled in huge bowls filled with detergent and water.

The workers said they use bleaching powder, washing soda and detergents for washing.

From there, they bring those to the washing place, where at least five persons wash them in water mixed with detergents in large tanks.

Once washed, the linens are dried on wires or ropes besides boundary walls or anywhere they can find open space inside the hospital premises.

After that, they are brought back to the laundry. One group then folds them and another takes those back to hospital wards.

Saddam said he mostly collects and dries the sheets. "It's hard work, but I don't want to leave it, as jobs are scarce at this moment," he said.

HEALTH RISKS, MANPOWER CRISIS

However, those who are involved with washing have to handle water mixed with bleaching powder and detergents for hours, which also takes its toll on them.

While talking to the workers, many said they often get sick

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It's concerning that the laundry facility of a hospital, where hygiene is of the utmost importance, works in such a manner. Linens, many stained with blood, are regularly carried, washed and dried by hand. This process puts both workers and patients in danger, as they face the risk of contracting all kinds of diseases from poorly cleaned linens. These photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Bangladesh can tackle climate change on its own

Says agriculture minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaka yesterday said the government will be able to tackle climate change-related losses with its own fund.

"Climate change will have a severe impact on the country's agriculture sector. We're giving agriculture top priority to save it from the consequences," he said.

The minister said this during a seminar on "World Climate Summit 2021: Bangladesh's Expectations", organised by the subcommittee on forest and environment affairs of Bangladesh Awami League at CIRDA, reads a press release.

The minister mentioned that the government has formulated a strategic action plan and created a climate change trust fund worth Tk 700 crore to tackle adverse impacts of climate change.

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COMMUNAL ATTACKS

Vested quarter instigated violence for self-interest

Says law minister, state minister for religious affairs

STAR REPORT

A vested quarter instigated violence on the Hindu community during and following the Durga Puja celebrations for their own interests, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

"Investigations have revealed that an insidious quarter has created chaos during [Durga] Puja celebrations to materialise their own and [political] party interests," he said.

The minister made the remarks while addressing a rally in Brahmanbaria's Akhaura, reports our Brahmanbaria correspondent.

The rally was organised by the local upazila administration to mark the reception of two life support ambulances gifted by the Indian government. The

ambulances will be allocated for the 250-bed Brahmanbaria General Hospital and Akhaura Upazila Health Complex.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram K Doraiswami attended the event as guest of honour.

In his remarks as chief guest, the law minister said there were 580 pavilions in Brahmanbaria district during this year's Durga Puja but none faced any untoward incident.

He added Bangladesh will always uphold secularism and never tolerate communal politics.

Meanwhile, addressing an interfaith dialogue in Noakhali's Chowmuhani on Thursday night, State Minister for Religious Affairs Faridul Haque Khan said the

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Ray of hope for the gentle giants



MOSTAFA YOUSUF

After sighting multiple elephant calves over the last one and a half years, the divisional forest office of Cox's Bazar (south) is seeing hope for the endangered species in the region.

During the same period, the office has also witnessed a few instances of calf births in at least 14 spots within the reserve forest of Cox's Bazar.

Over the years, the elephant population in the region has been declining rapidly due to multifaceted threats, with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categorising the mega-herbivore as critically endangered.

The calves were sighted in Jhlongja, Himchori, Teknaf, Huyaikong, Shaplapur, Roikkon, Inani, Thinkhali and Khuniapalung beat under Divisional Forest Office (south).

Humayun Kabir, divisional forest officer of Cox's Bazar (south), told The Daily Star that his staffers have come across around dozens of elephants calves roaming along with herds in the reserve forest within his jurisdiction.

Besides, at least four instances of calf birth were sighted as well. "This shines a ray of hope for a healthy population of this majestic animal," he said.

Additionally, he mentioned that among the primary challenges the department faces in conserving wildlife is deforestation, which is made worse

AT A GLANCE

In one and half years, four instances of calf births, dozens of calves sighted

Reasons behind decline in population: deforestation, refugee crisis, food scarcity, habitat fragmentation, and human-elephant conflict

120 elephants poached in last 20yrs, 90 killed by electrocution or shooting

by multifarious reasons, including the Rohingya influx.

Monirul H Khan, eminent zoologist and professor of zoology at Jahangirnagar University, told the Daily Star, "Elephants give birth to one calf in every four years, which is another reason behind the decline of their population. However, though they are slow breeders, their survival rate is higher than any other animal", he said.

In addition, he emphasised on mitigating the other crises faced by the elephants for their healthy conservation.

According to Forest Department data, 120 elephants were poached in the last 20 years, while 90 were killed by electrocution or shooting.

The data says, around the beginning of the century, elephants used to roam in 13 districts of the country, which has now reduced to just four - Rangamati, Bandarban, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar.

Among other reasons behind the species' decline are food scarcity, habitat fragmentation, deforestation and increased human-elephant conflict, which has claimed both human and elephant lives.

To prevent the latter, Bangladesh Forest Department has readied a conservation plan this year to reduce human-elephant conflicts. If approved by ECNEC, they will start working on it from next year.



Closed due to fears over cracks emerging on its surface, the port city's MA Mannan Flyover's Kalurghat-ramp is getting height barriers installed to control movement of heavy vehicles. This photo was taken from Bahaddarhat area yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

130 more hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 130 dengue patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday, of whom four are from outside Dhaka, according to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With the new cases, a total of 5,160 were diagnosed during the running month, out of a total 23,357 infected. Of the total infected, 3,328 are from outside Dhaka.

At least 7,841 were diagnosed in September, 7,698 in August, 2,286 patients were hospitalised in July, 272 in June, while 43 were infected in May, and the rest are from January to April, according to DGHS.

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