

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Eastern Marsh Harrier with Prey, Muhuri, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Predators of Muhuri

Screaming loudly and wildly flapping their wings, the ducks abruptly took off from the water about two hundred feet from our boat. This alerted us to the proximity of a bird of prey. Sure enough, a solitary black and white bird approached from the distant horizon, coming closer as it circled the shallow water covered with *Jol Kolmi*, *Chand-mala*, *Kochuripana* and other aqueous plants. Its head tilted downward, the bird intently scanned what lay below while it circled. It made its move suddenly, orienting its body downwards, tucking in its wings and kicking its feet before diving. Coming up empty-handed it resumed circling. After several attempts, it emerged from the dive clutching the lifeless body of a White-breasted Waterhen, its head resting limply against the mighty talons.

This drama unfolded before our eyes at a lake formed by a dam on the Muhuri river in Feni. During winter many types of birds congregate here including ducks, egrets and herons, jacobins, rails and cranes and migratory songbirds. But for me, the attraction of Muhuri lies in predators of the sky – her raptors.

A year ago I saw the magnificent Greater Spotted Eagle here, a large reddish bird with white spots on its body. It was sitting atop a small, submerged *Mandar* tree. This is a rare winter visitor to Bangladesh. I have also seen two resident eagles: Grey-headed Fish Eagle and Indian Spotted Eagle. The former nests high among the trees that surround the fishponds adjacent to the lake. The latter also breeds here, as I have seen both juveniles and adults.

Then there are the harriers. They

own the skies above Muhuri.

Harriers are medium-sized hawks that fly low over the ground or water. Their flight profile is unmistakable: long wings, narrow tails, flying with the head tilted downward, eyes often hidden by the span of their wings. They take their prey from the ground, including birds, small mammals and reptiles, using their hooked talons to catch, kill and carry.

There are sixteen species of harriers in the world. Six are seen in Bangladesh, most commonly the Eastern Marsh Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier and Pied Harrier. They fly over open spaces: marshlands, *chars*, *haors* and lakes. While harriers are winter visitors to Bangladesh, I have heard unconfirmed reports that some nest in more remote trees around the lake at Muhuri. I have seen harriers over the *haors* in Sylhet and the *chars* of Padma, but Muhuri is the best place for observing them.

Muhuri is a long but comfortable day trip from Dhaka. We left at 5 am by car. Driving the Chittagong Highway we arrived in Feni at 8:30 am and were at the lake at 9 am. The lake is best explored by boats available at the Tourist Spot. Rowboats rather than motor boats are preferable for birding as motor noise frightens the birds. Birding season lasts until early March, when migrant birds start disappearing but blooming *Mandar* flowers switch our attention to the myriad songbirds they attract.

Predator birds are usually shy and hard to find, but if you go to Muhuri in winter, you stand a good chance of seeing them.

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Over 9,000 job seekers in limbo

Results for recruitment in BNFE project yet to be published

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Over 9,000 jobseekers have been waiting for final results of their viva for recruitment at a project run by Bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE), due to delay on the bureau's part in finalising a key component of the project.

The candidates passed the written test held in late 2019 and faced the viva-voce in different phases in January last year for the post of upazila/urban programme coordinator (UPC) under Out of School Children Education Program (OSCE).

OSCE, a sub-component of Fourth Primary Education Development Program, has been designed to ensure education for children aged 8-14 years who could not be enrolled in school or dropped out. Around Tk 3,200 crore was allocated for the programme, which was supposed to run from 2018 to 2023.

Initially, the programme was planned to provide education to around 9,31,000 such students through 31,000 learning centres in 61 districts. A total of 53 NGOs have been appointed as Implementation Support Agencies by BNFE to run these learning centres.

- Project planned to educate around 9,31,000 children, but list of students not finalised yet
- Candidates passed written test in 2019, faced viva-voce in Jan, 2020 for post of upazila/urban programme coordinator
- Final results of viva-voce not out even after 23 months
- It's not possible to recruit before finalising list, says BNFE; points to pandemic for delay

However, BNFE could not finalise the list of students yet.

BNFE was supposed to recruit 300 UPCs to ensure effective management of the learning centres. The UPCs are also responsible for maintaining coordination between NGOs and BNFE's district-level offices, according to the project description.

The bureau published a vacancy announcement on June 30, 2019 to recruit the UPCs. Institute of Education and Research (IER) of DU was appointed as the consultant to administer the exam.

Over 24,000 candidates applied for the posts. The written and viva examinations were completed by January 25 last year, but the final results of the viva-voce did not come out even after 23 months.

"When we requested BNFE to publish our results, they told us to go to IER. When we went to IER, authorities said they were appointed just to administer the exams; only BNFE can publish the final results," said a candidate, preferring anonymity fearing reprisal.

Another candidate said one BNFE official informed them to contact the NGOs, as they shall get salaries from them. "This is ridiculous because as UPCs, one of our responsibilities will be to monitor effectiveness of the learning centres run by the NGOs. How can we ensure quality monitoring and supervision if we have to work under the NGO authority?"

Contacted, Prof Abdul Halim, director of IER, said their responsibility was only to administer

the exam to ensure quality and transparency. "We don't know anything about result publication and the project's future plan."

According to the project requirement, BNFE formed five-member committees in every ward of 61 districts. In 2019, these committees were tasked with making the list of eligible students.

By January 2020, a list of 931,000 students was submitted to BNFE.

The bureau has asked committees to further verify the list and submit a verified final list, which has not been completed in the last two years.

Ataur Rahman, BNFE director general, said, "It's not possible for us to recruit UPCs without finalising the list. Because, there might be some places where we may not open learning centres due to unavailability of eligible students."

He gave the pandemic as the reason for delays.

"Once the list is finalised, we shall start the learning centres and recruit the UPCs," he said.

One thing should be clear: once recruited, the UPCs will work with the NGOs. They will not be the employees of BNFE, as the bureau just facilitated the recruitment process to ensure quality and transparency, he added.



Thousands of butterfly enthusiasts flocked to Jahangirnagar University's Zahir Raihan Auditorium to enjoy the eleventh butterfly fair held yesterday. Throughout the day-long fair, visitors, especially children, were seen surrounding the butterfly enclosures made of net and taking pictures of the vibrant insects.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

The silent warrior

Book launched in memory of Masud Sadique Chullu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In remembrance of Masud Sadique Chullu, a brave member of the Crack Platoon who executed valiant guerrilla operations during the Liberation War, the cover of the book "The Silent Warrior: In Memory of Masud Sadique Chullu" was unveiled yesterday.

The book launching ceremony was held at a community centre at Banani Old DOHS in the capital.

The book has been published by Daily Star Books and edited by Yasmeen Sadique, wife of Masud Sadique Chullu, who passed away in 2017 at the age of 72.

Crack Platoon member Golam Dastagir Gazi, while addressing the ceremony as chief guest, said, "That today I'm a 'Bir Pratik' is because of Chullu Bhai."

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The



"The Silent Warrior: In Memory of Masud Sadique Chullu" was launched yesterday. The book, edited by Masud Sadique Chullu's wife Yasmeen Sadique, has been published by Daily Star Books.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Daily Star, also took part in the discussion on the book, while Shaheen Anam, Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, moderated the programme.

Taking part in the discussion as special guest, AB Tajul Islam, former state minister for Liberation War

Affairs, said the operation in Hotel Inter-Continental introduced the Liberation War in the international arena.

"This book is written by fellow fighters reminiscing Chullu Bhai. Many unknown avenues of the war will be unveiled if our

fellow fighters start writing such reminiscing books", he said.

During her speech, Chullu's wife Yasmeen Sadique said, "I have assembled the book inch by inch, for which my family members and my husband's comrades helped me. I thank them all. I also thank Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, who wrote the book's preface."

Sanjana Sadique, the couple's daughter, said that her father used to talk a lot but never shared anything about the war with them.

"He did not even talk to journalists on occasions of Independence Day or Victory Day. Liberation was simultaneously an issue of valour and agony for him," she added.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said there are many memoirs written on

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

1,408 buses fined Tk 57.31 lakh for taking extra fares

Despite BRTA drives, practice still rampant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA)'s drive against charging extra bus fares in Dhaka and Chattogram city, many bus operators are still taking higher than the government fixed rate.

Shafiqul Islam, a private-job holder, told The Daily Star yesterday that bus conductors ask for Tk 20 for going to the capital's Farmgate from Mirpur 10, even though the actual fare would be around Tk 15.

"When some passengers protested and asked for BRTA's fare chart, some conductors agreed to take Tk 15. We have to deal with this hassle almost every day," said Shafiqul.

Quoting a conductor, he said owners charge operators high amounts, for which they themselves charge extra, otherwise they would only earn Tk 200 to 300 from the whole day's trips.

According to a press release of BRTA,

the authority fined 1,408 buses a total of Tk 57.31 lakh for charging extra fares in Dhaka and Chattogram city in 30 days till December 8.

Nine mobile courts launched drives in the capital, while two were conducted in Chattogram city.

Among the 1,408 buses, 80 were CNG-run and 1,328 diesel-powered, said Sarwar Alam, director (enforcement) of BRTA.

During the month-long operation, 56 buses were sent to dumping stations for non-payment of fines and not having route permits, he said.

Five bus drivers faced imprisonment due to reckless driving and trying to intercept duties of government officials.

A list of 25 buses that were fined by magistrates thrice or more, due to taking extra fares, was sent to Dhaka Metro Regional Transport Committee for cancelling their route permit and taking legal action.

Female tea workers more vulnerable to violence

Says Selina Hossain

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The existing patriarchal social system in the tea gardens keep women away from decision-making activities and make them more vulnerable to violence and discrimination, said litterateur Selina Hossain yesterday.

Men, in particular, must come forward to abolish this culture, she added.

She made the remarks while addressing as chief guest in a dialogue and book launching programme organised by Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) marking "16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence" at Brac Learning Centre in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar.

When it comes to violence against the female workers in tea gardens, the level of impunity is higher, mentioned Selina Hossain.

"We need to educate the women in tea gardens and simultaneously be aware of the deprivation and discrimination that we face ourselves," said Jasmine Akhter,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

HISTORIC SITES AT DHAKA UNIVERSITY

Years of neglect erasing embodiments of history



Prayers are still offered at the Musa Khan Jame Mosque, but its ailing state, due to lack of preservation, disappoints history enthusiasts. Fifteen other historic sites on the Dhaka University premises suffer similar conditions. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

ASIFUR RAHMAN and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Amidst the excitement of centenary celebrations diffusing across Dhaka University (DU) campus, a number of university buildings have been adorned with vibrant lights and decorations.

However, despite the colours and festivities, different historic and architectural monuments of the university area are slowly biting the dust.

The recent centenary master-plan of DU recognised 16 important establishments of the university area. But only Curzon Hall and the area surrounding the vice-chancellor's bungalow are among the 16 that were decorated.

Does this lack of decoration for the century-old structures symbolise the negligence that these sites have been facing for years?

The locations and monuments mentioned in the master-plan include Brajendra temple in Shivbari area, Curzon Hall, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall, Faculty of Fine Arts, Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall, Govinda

Chandra Dev Bhavan of Jagannath Hall, Greek Memorial and Twin Hindu Math at Teacher-Student Centre, Gurudwara Nanak Shahi, Central Library Building, Madhur Canteen, Mir Jumla Gate or Dhaka Gate, Musa Khan Jame Mosque, Sir Nawab Salimullah Muslim Hall, VC Bungalow and Central Shaheed Minar.

Although they were mentioned, no provision exists to preserve them.

"We have recognised the structures to preserve them. The decision can be taken later, after consulting state agencies concerned," Prof ASM Maksud Kamal, convener of the master-plan preparation committee, told The Daily Star.

The Brajendra temple, built on three acres of land, stands in the middle of two buildings built for third and fourth-class staffers of the university. Almost nothing is left of the original establishment. The absence of a signboard makes it even harder to find.

The negligence of Dhaka Gate is another widely discussed topic. Taking the boundaries of Mughal Dhaka into account, the gate was rebuilt by Mir Jumla in 1825.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4