



While not the same as a traditional, rural haat, the centenarian Meradia haat at the capital's Banasree still brings back memories of a village haat for those who are blessed to have seen one. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

A HAAT, IN DHAKA?

Traders don't have any fixed space and sit wherever they can find an empty spot. Some sit down on pieces of ceremonial tent and tarpaulin, while some just get down to business on top of newspapers.

DIPAN NANDY

The word "haat" brings with it images of some rural setting. Banks of a river, a banyan tree, rows of traders selling their haul under it, that's what a haat is, right? Surprisingly, there's a haat that sits right in the capital every Wednesday. At Meradia, beside Banasree, it brings together buyers and sellers with its fresh produce. How old is the Merdia haat? Veteran vegetable seller Abdul Latif told this correspondent, "I've been sitting here since the Pakistan era. My father and grandfather used to come here too. I don't know the exact age, but it's been going on since the British period."

As this correspondent entered the haat, he was greeted with the hustle and bustle of a large crowd. Locals said it starts heating up from early dawn every Wednesday. On both sides of the road, seasonal vegetable, fresh fish and other colourful items could be seen. Although parts of the haat have become informally allocated for different types of products, traders don't have any fixed space and sit wherever they can find an empty spot. Some sit down on pieces of ceremonial tent and tarpaulin, while some just get down to business on top of newspapers. Lined up by the road were a lot of bamboo-made products. Inside the haat, there are clothes sellers, while the west side is taken up by vegetables of all kind. Both fresh and relatively cheap, they're ideal for the customers. The north side of the haat is used as a fish market. Everything from koi, catfish, tiny fish, shrimp, mola, sunfish and more could be found there. It's worth mentioning that fish and vegetable traders sit there throughout the week.

Poultry shops are right beside the fish market. By its side are the cows and goats. One can buy them by kilogrammes, but whole cows and goats are sold as well. At a corner of the haat, Swapan Chandra Das sits with his Jilapi, Amritti and other sweet. "It's been 50 years," he said of his time

us." Nil Kamal has been going there with dried fish bought from Narsingdi for the last three decades. "We used to sell more even before the pandemic. Although that's not to say it's bad now by any means," he said. Sellers said people go there from the



there. "Much has changed, buyers' number has decreased, but we still sell a decent amount on these Wednesdays." Md Sohrab has been shopping there since 1988. "The crowd has decreased compared to the past, but those who know about it can't buy from anywhere else but here." Resident of Demra Abdur Rahman identified the freshness of the vegetables as the reason. "They aren't laced with medicine, which is why I prefer buying from here, even if the prices are a little high," he said. The haat is known for its bamboo-made items and dried fish. Hazrat Ali, who sells bamboo products, said, "While sales aren't what they used to be, those who prefer bamboo products still come here to buy from

neighbouring Rampura and Banasree, as well as Aftabnagar, Badda, Khilgaon, Satarkul and Nasirabad as well. While most of the traders come from Rampura, Banasree, Khilgaon, Fakirkhali, Demra, Badda, Beraid, Ichapur and Rugganj. "This haat reminds me of my village. Even though the city has been taken over by concrete, this centenarian haat still stands. It's become a part of the local tradition," said Banasree resident Abdul Matin, while sipping on a green coconut after shopping. Right beside the coconut stand flows the Narai River. Boats could be seen rowing through its blackened water carrying vegetables, much in the same manner as it's happened over the last hundred years or so.

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TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Elusive Birds



The elusive Masked Finfoot, Sundarban, Bangladesh. (Note the lobes on its feet.) PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

In the world of birds and birders, some birds have become legendary because of their elusiveness. They hover in the mythical zone between alive and extinct. Some of these birds are seen once in ten or more years; sightings cannot be repeated and often remain unconfirmed. The Ivory-billed Woodpecker is one such bird. It was a large woodpecker once common in the Southern United States. A striking bird, it measured up to twenty one inch in length with a wingspan of thirty-one inches. When it swooped into view, people often exclaimed "Lord God, what a bird!" earning it the nickname "Lord God bird." Once common, its numbers dwindled as it lost its forest habitat to logging and deforestation. The last confirmed sighting of this bird was in 1944. Since then, several sightings have proved to be false alarms. Confusion arose because another bird, the commonly seen Pileated Woodpecker, looks very close to it. But its chapter closed in September 2021 when the US government officially declared the Ivory-billed Woodpecker extinct.

My Australian birding friend Dick told me about the Night Parrot. It was described by the famous ornithologist John Gould (whose wife lent her name to Mrs. Gould's Sunbird seen in our forests) in 1861. Between 1912 and 1979 there was no confirmed sighting of this bird. Its natural habitat is spinifex grass that covers much of Western Australia. One must search in this grass at night to find it.

In this century there have been several confirmed sightings of the Night Parrot. In 2015, two ornithologists were able to capture a specimen in Queensland. A photograph was released to the press, but the bird's location was kept strictly secret due to the fear of hordes of birders descending on the spot.

The Night Parrot remains one of the most mysterious and elusive birds of the world.

Gabriel, my birding guide in Brazil, told me the story of the Banded Ground Cuckoo. Some of his clients are fanatical birders who look for rare birds. One such birder had targeted this cuckoo – found in a small region of Ecuador and Colombia – and spent weeks searching for it. The bird, which mostly runs around the forest floor, builds a nest among the lower trees of the forest, perhaps five meters from the ground where it lays one round egg. The client eventually added this bird to his impressive list. A considerable number of guides were employed to help him reach his goal.

Our own Masked Finfoot falls in the category of rare and elusive birds. Found in the Bangladesh Sundarban, it lives in the waters of the mangrove forest. Not quite a duck – its toes are lobed instead of webbed – it nests on trees that span over smaller streams. I have seen it during my trips to Sundarban. However, it has become increasingly rare in recent years. According to a recent research paper, around a hundred couples are left globally, almost all of them in our mangroves (and a few more in Cambodia.)

For the author's daily bird photos, please follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

RESOLVING TEESTA WATER SHARING

Annual hydrological assessment vital

Says Ainun Nishat

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and India must sit for the annual hydrological assessment to resolve the Teesta water sharing issue, said Emeritus Professor Dr Ainun Nishat. India is unilaterally withdrawing water from the Teesta, which is not acceptable ethically, under international law or even Indian law, said Dr Nishat, also adviser of Brac University's Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research. The 1958 law on transboundary water usage also does not support this sort of diversion of water, he said while chairing the three day virtual 7th International Water Conference 2022, titled "Teesta River Basin: Overcoming the Challenges". Organised by ActionAid Bangladesh, it began on Thursday. During his keynote speech, Dr Imtiaz Ahmed of DU's international relations department said people can now literally

walk across the river in dry season. This year's conference aims to draw policy makers' attention to the problem through collection and discussion of data on the morphology, ethnographic issues and territorial disputes of the river. Ex-minister Hasanul Haq Inu said, "To save the Teesta, movement is going on in North Bengal. Even Indians are suffering during monsoon and dry season." Speakers also identified the lack of willingness of top leaders to sit together on Teesta river water allocation, urging leaders from both countries to come together in this regard. Manzoor Hasan, chair of ActionAid International Bangladesh Society's executive board and executive director of BracU's Centre for Peace and Justice; Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh; Dr Rohan D'Souza of Kyoto University; and Iftekhar Iqbal of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, also spoke.



As a student falls sick, others tend to her during the third day of their hunger strike demanding Sust VC Farid Uddin Ahmed's resignation. At least 12 students were hospitalised yesterday while many were put on saline drips. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR