

Together on top of the world

After conquering Mount Kilimanjaro, Bangladeshi couple eyes seven summits

Conquering heights is an urge so prehistoric that many have taken the test of fate to assess their mortal limits. After Wasfia Nazreen, Nishat Majumdar and Musa Ibrahim – Bangladeshis who have already conquered the highest peaks – the names of Julia Parvin and Mohammad Shahidul Alam (Shemon) have just been added to that list.

NAZIFA RAIDAH

Julia and Shemon have been living as expats in Mombasa, Kenya since 2012. They run a car importing business together. Little did they know that amid their busy schedules they would sign up for the feat of their lives – conquering the Seven Summits, starting with their homeground, Mount Kilimanjaro.

They named their summit “U& Me – First step on Seven Summit” to encourage couples to take up mountain exploring together.

“The journey started at the wake of the pandemic. I was going through pictures from our visit to Mount Kenya, the second highest peak in Africa a year back. Missing the view from the top, I was engrossed with the idea of going back there again,” Julia told this correspondent over the phone.

“When my husband pitched Mount Kilimanjaro for our expedition, I was even more excited. I started my research – going through articles, vlogs and even talking to few local guides. I found that though reaching our destination wouldn’t be that challenging, surviving the trek would be, since altitude sickness and lacking physical fitness are major barriers,” she said.

Shemon chimed in, “At first, I treated it like a fever dream. But then, when I saw my wife looking up so many resources day and night, I couldn’t help but join in and support her.”

And thus, preparations for the ambitious feat began.

THE PREPARATION

The couple woke up early and went for their 5km power walk, which gradually increased to 10km a day and kept growing over time. They carried heavy backpacks on their walks so that their bodies could get adjusted to pulling weight.

Julia said they started training around the end of July, 2021.

“After 2-3 months of practice, we could walk around 35km

without breaking a sweat. We camped around different mountain ranges in Kenya at least twice a month, in places where it was dangerous to camp due to the presence of wild animals. But thankfully, we didn’t face any trouble,” she added.

THE JOURNEY

Finally, the anticipated day arrived on January 31, 2022. After getting the technicalities cleared with a registered tour operator, Shemon and Julia set off with a pack of 11 – including their guide, trekking crew and porters.

“We started facing natural challenges from the get go. While passing through the Lemosho route, we had to pass through a rainforest where we had to wade through thick mist and cold. Throughout the journey, the weather was gloomy and we

a few breathing exercises and went back to the tent to rest. The next day, I was ready to resume the journey,” she said.

The next day they started their ascent at 5:00am. They reached Stella point, after a long 10-11 hours hike, where they could see the summit sign from a distance.

FROM STELLA POINT TO UHURU PEAK

“For the path from Stella point to Uhuru peak, we had to cross a crater rim. The last 250m of vertical ascent was quite challenging as our legs were sore and fatigue was catching up to us,” said Shemon.

Despite the struggle, the couple pushed on, and finally, after seven days of hardship they reached Uhuru peak, the highest point of Kilimanjaro.

“Unfortunately, we could only spend



hardly encountered the sun,” said Julia.

“We had to double our energy as the path we were crossing was very slippery due to the mist. We wore raincoats, which was very uncomfortable to trek in,” added Shemon.

“The first few days, till 10,000-13,000 feet, we didn’t face a lot of issues. But then during the middle of the night, we started getting altitude sickness. Your head feels heavy, breathing gets difficult and your chest feels like you’re being punched. By the time we reached the base camp, I felt far worse,” said Julia.

“There was no medical crew 15,000ft above sea level and I was almost in the mindset to tell Shemon that we should turn back. But later, I thought, I couldn’t let all of this effort go to waste. I got out of our tent at the Barafu campsite, put the snow on my face and head and did

about five minutes at the peak, since a snow storm was approaching,” said Shemon.

“Within minutes the whole area turned white with snow, it was hauntingly beautiful, but it also made our descent difficult as it was hard to find a path to get down,” added Julia.

Their daring feat finally came to an end. The title of being the first Bangladeshi couple to trek Mount Kilimanjaro, one of the highest peaks of the world, was now theirs.

So what’s next for the couple?

Julia said the trek to Kilimanjaro made them confident and optimistic that they can conquer more peaks.

The couple plans on trekking Mount Aconcagua in Argentina, with a summit elevation of 6,961 metres.



‘Too precious to lose’

Proposed safari park at Lathitila forest can prove counterproductive, fear experts

MINTU DESHWARA

After Gazipur and Dulahazra, the forest department has finalised plans to build the country’s third safari park in Lathitila forest, located in Moulvibazar’s Juri upazila.

But experts said projects like this can prove counterproductive in protecting the biodiversity of the evergreen tropical forest, home to numerous animal species.

The prospect is particularly troubling given the recent heart-wrenching death spree of animals at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park in Gazipur. Between January 2 and February 3, 11 zebras died at the park, along with a tiger and a lioness. Following this, two top officials of the park were removed over negligence in carrying out their duties.

Amidst all this, the master-plan for Lathitila’s safari park project, which has a budget of Tk 846.25 crore, awaits government approval.

Out of the total budget, Tk 203 crore is allocated for animal management and Tk 182 crore for purchasing animals for the park.

Despite protests from environmentalists, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has finalised the project.

According to its feasibility report, around 8-10 lakh visitors are expected to come to the park every year.

Lathitila is not only home to numerous animals, it is also home to a few endangered species as well, its elephant species being the most talked about among them.

This correspondent talked to several residents of the area during a recent visit.

In the depths of the 5,631 acres of Lathitila forest, five female elephants still survive. But according to experts, there are no male elephants left in the forest to save the species from extinction. But their troubles don’t just end there.

Activist Khorshed Alam said various species of trees and bamboo have been felled, resulting in a food crisis for the remaining elephants.

“And when the forest becomes a safari park, they will face shelter crisis too. This will drive them further towards extinction,” he added.

Asked if there would be any damage to the elephants’ habitat because of the proposed safari park, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, divisional forest officer, said there is no possibility of danger.

FOREST DEPARTMENT’S STAFF SHORTAGE

Asked about how they are going to manage the workforce for the third safari park, as they do not even have skilled workforce for the existing

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

SAIDPUR 100-BED HOSPITAL

Patients hostage to ‘ambulance syndicate’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The two ambulances at Saidpur 100-bed Hospital have been out of order for years now.

Taking advantage of this situation, unauthorised private ambulances gather in front of the hospital gate daily to take patients to other hospitals on the outskirts, charging a high fare, alleged patients.

They said some hospital employees and brokers have joined hands with the ambulance agencies to form this syndicate.

Sources informed that out of two ambulances, one has been out of order for 18 years and the other, which was donated in 2016, became inactive in 2017.

However, the driver and staffers are still getting paid with their regular salaries.

According to the syndicate’s victims, a section of the hospital authorities refer patients to Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) or specialised hospitals, even though they could be treated here.

During a recent visit to the hospital, this correspondent found Shakil Ahmed (22) from Saidpur’s Munshipara waiting in a wheelchair with a fractured leg, while his attendants were looking for transportation to RMCH.

Two ambulance drivers started dragging him. One demanded Tk 3,200 as fare and the other Tk 3,000, even though government ambulance charges only Tk 700.

Dr Omedul Hasan Sarker, resident medical officer of the hospital, however, denied the allegations and said that only critical patients are referred to specialised hospitals.

Dr Nabiur Rahman, additional director of the hospital, said, “We’ve written to the higher authorities for new ambulances.”



Four to die for killing schoolboy

UNB, N’ganj

A Narayanganj court yesterday sentenced four people to death and two others to life-term imprisonment for killing Emon Hossain (13) in 2013.

Narayanganj Additional District and Sessions Judge Court-2 Begum Sabina Yeasmin handed down the judgment.

The condemned convicts are Siraj (45), Ahmed Ali (55), Nahid (21) and Sentu Mia (25). Salma (42) and Husna (47) were sentenced to life.

According to the prosecution, Ahmed Ali had a longstanding feud with his nephew Iqbal, a Bangladeshi expatriate in Singapore, at Char Radhanagar village in Fatulla area.

On June 13, 2013, Ahmed killed Iqbal’s brother 13-year-old Emon Hossain, a class VI student, and dumped the body after cutting it into nine pieces.

Later, police recovered the dismembered body from a field in the area and a complaint was lodged with Sadar Police Station.



Remembering Teroshree massacre

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

The Liberation War has left our nation marred with atrocious tales. The Teroshree village of Ghior upazila of Manikganj bore testament to such a tale.

At dawn on November 22, 1971, the occupying forces and their locals allies attacked the village, preying on its innocent habitats.

They set fire to houses, shot and stabbed people, and killed more with bayonets. Loud gunshots and cries of the villagers were all that could be heard in that morning.

Forty three people were killed that day. Prominent residents like Siddheshwari Prasad Roy Chowdhury, a zamindar of Teroshree village, and Atiar Rahman, principal of Teroshree College, were killed in the attack.

Advocate Azharul Islam Arzu, a member of Communist Party of Bangladesh’s central committee and former president of its district committee, said, “In 1971, many people from surrounding areas



took shelter in Teroshree village. A freedom fighters’ camp was formed there.” He said the people of Teroshree were always active in the country’s struggles.

“Teroshree village was a centre of non-communal progressive revolutionaries of the war. That’s why the Pakistan army attacked this village,” he added.

Retired teacher of KN Institution

Someshwar Prasad Roy Chowdhury, son of Zamindar Siddheshwari Prasad Roy Chowdhury, shared the tale of that horrific day.

“I was just 12 years old, but I remember everything vividly. Hearing news of the attack, my father took shelter in a laundry house beside our house. But he was found through the local collaborators. The

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6