



PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

# BEYOND CATS AND DOGS

## The overlooked wildlife of Dhaka

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Often in Dhaka, when we think about animals around us, we most think about lazy cats basking in the sun or brave dogs patrolling neighbourhoods with their ever-watchful eyes.

However, if you pause for a while and look closer, you will see that the city is home to so much more than just its familiar feline and canine residents.

The sparrow is the first bird I frequently encounter if I only start with the birds! This tiny creature has made its place in our homes, workplaces, and balconies.

It is difficult to avoid them because they are practically everywhere! You will see them leaping from one balcony to another from dawn to dusk. I, once, longed to hold them by the hands when I was a child. As they are tiny and jittery, it was impossible to do so!

Another master of the sky you might also notice in Dhaka is the cheel (kite). My mother used to scare me with this one: “Cheel chokh niye jabe (the kite will snatch your eyes),” she would say whenever we were caught misbehaving.

The kite glides above the bustling streets while scanning for prey with its sharp eyes. They often choose the city’s tallest structures for their nests.



One memorable tale I heard from a colleague is of a fiercely protective mother kite that swooped down and delivered a swift, painful bite to an unsuspecting soul who dared to open a window beneath her carefully guarded nest!

And then there are the crows, often dismissed as a noisy nuisance. These black-winged custodians are the city’s unsung heroes, performing essential ecological services.

There is this interesting relationship between monkeys and crows in the city. If you see a gang of crows shouting, be

sure that there must be a monkey teasing them somewhere nearby!

However, monkeys are perhaps the most visible yet misunderstood animals in Dhaka.

These chaotic, yet, utterly resilient urban primates still rule in some places of Old Dhaka like Bangshal, Raisaheb Bazar, Narinda, Gandaria, Shankhari Bazar, Wari, and possibly some other locations I am not aware of.

Their presence sparks irritation rather than admiration.

Interestingly enough, despite their annoyance, most of the people of

Dinanath Sen Road at Gandaria still adore them.

In the quieter corners of Dhaka’s parks and open fields, squirrels can often be seen darting gracefully along sunlit tree branches, flicking their bushy tails as they take in their surroundings.

These tiny, playful creatures have been an endearing part of my university life, often brightening my days as I caught glimpses of them scurrying about on campus.

Reptiles, too, carve out their place in this urban jungle. Gui shaap (Bengal monitor), with its sinuous movements and dinosaur-like appearance, is a surprising resident of Dhaka’s watery margins. I recently spotted one in the Dhanmondi Lake area! And honestly, the child in me was dead scared at the sight of it.

Speaking of Dhanmondi Lake, let’s not forget to mention the small group of ducks that glide across the calm waters and if you look closely, you might also notice tadpoles darting through the water as well.

One thing I have realised is that Dhaka’s wildlife may not roar, chirp, or rustle as loudly as its traffic but it is there, enduring, and adapting every day.

## Christmas today

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The festival is the celebration of rebirth, a new beginning, forgiveness and peace, and a renewed relationship with God and human beings.

Decoration of Christmas trees with colourful lights, special prayers, distribution of gifts among children, and exchange of pleasantries are the main features of the day’s festivities.

Christmas carols and hymns will be sung before and after the prayer sessions at the churches on the day.

The day is a public holiday.

In separate messages, President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus greeted members of the Christian community on Christmas Eve, reports BSS.

President Shahabuddin, in his message, said Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony and here people of all faiths practice their religions and rituals independently, urging all to work together for a happy, prosperous, and non-communal Bangladesh.

## Six factories

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Sugar Industries, S Alam Power Plant, S Alam Cold Rolled Steels, S Alam Cold Rolled Steels Limited-NOF, S Alam Power Generation and Infinity CR Strips Industries. Two of those are located in Kalarpool in Karnaphuli Upazila of Chattogram, three in Ichhanagar and one in Banskhali upazila.

The factories were closed due to a shortage of raw materials, said Ashish Kumar Nath, deputy manager of S Alam Group. However, the salaries of workers and employees will continue as usual.

At least 12,000 workers and employees work in the six factories.

“Even though everything is running normally in our factory, a sudden notice of closing the factory was issued – I don’t know for what reason the factory has been closed,” said Nazim Uddin, production manager of S Alam Cold Rolled Steels.

## Restoration of caretaker system

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and graffiti during the July uprising. They were not associated with the Student Against Discrimination movement or the Jatiya Nagorik Committee.

The commission has undertaken two broader initiatives.

Riaz said, “First, we collected public opinions through our website, receiving 50,573 responses. While these inputs were helpful, they had limitations due to the lack of demographic information about the respondents, such as age, gender, location or profession, which weakened their scientific credibility.”

To address this, the commission collaborated with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to conduct

a household survey using a methodologically sound and scientifically rigorous process.

“This survey collected 45,925 opinions, which we are now analysing. This approach ensured a more representative and inclusive understanding of public sentiment,” Riaz added.

Thus far, the commission has conducted 46 meetings: 23 for consultations and 23 among its members.

“Through these efforts, we have extensively and inclusively gathered opinions and analysed 121 countries’ constitutions – we are working toward making well-informed recommendations,” Riaz also said.

## ‘We’re not drafting constitution’

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and the other is to propose recommendations. The foundation of the recommendations is to make the constitution more democratic, ensure the participation of the people and reform it in a way that prevents the possibility of autocratic rule in the future.

In my opinion, it has essentially been rewritten twice: once through the Fourth Amendment and again through the Fifteenth Amendment. I emphasise the notion of “rewriting” the constitution because, with the Fourth Amendment, the character of the state, the rights of its citizens and the structure of power were fundamentally altered.

The same fundamental changes were made through the Fifteenth Amendment. The core character of the constitution was altered and the rights of the people were not adequately protected. Essentially, this means the constitution was rewritten.

In reviewing Bangladesh’s constitution, we also studied the constitutions of 121 countries to compare and analyse the unique provisions of our constitution and identify similarities or differences with other countries.

For example, Bangladesh’s constitution includes provisions like displaying Bangabandhu’s portrait in government offices and incorporating the Declaration of Independence. Our researchers analysed these aspects thoroughly.

This analysis involved two approaches. First, we examined how the constitution evolved into its current form. Second, we are focused on what the commission will propose.

I believe the commission’s recommendations will not be the final word as the constitution is a political document that reflects the people’s aspirations and provides guidelines for the state.

To develop these recommendations, we engaged with the largest stakeholders: the people. This also involves discussions with political parties, civil society groups, professional bodies and eminent individuals.

DS: What are the key points of consensus among stakeholders, or what proposals is the commission planning to recommend?

AR: I won’t say what we will propose but I can share the areas where I have observed significant consensus. The most prominent consensus I have seen is that people want a participatory government system that ensures voting rights. They want these rights to be constitutionally protected so no one can undermine or take them away.

There is also a strong desire to prevent excessive concentration of power in the hands of a single individual.

As for solutions, there are various opinions. Some emphasise the importance of balancing power, while others point out that the prime minister has become overly powerful due to the constitution.

To address this, it has been suggested to empower and strengthen parliamentary standing committees to prevent the misuse of power.

Additionally, some stakeholders believe the prime minister should not hold multiple positions to avoid accumulating excessive authority.

DS: Many people have discussed the idea of a bicameral parliamentary system. Is the commission planning to propose it?

AR: A significant number of stakeholders have proposed a bicameral parliamentary system. Their reasoning is rooted in a desire to decentralise power, believing that such a system could help prevent the misuse of authority.

The proposals for a bicameral system and limiting the prime minister’s tenure to a maximum of two terms reflect the people’s aspirations to curb the concentration of power, establish constitutional safeguards against autocracy and create institutions that protect their rights.

Ultimately, we will make recommendations based on the political and cultural context, the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people and the political behaviour of the country.

DS: Have you received proposals for amending or rewriting the constitution? What is the commission planning to recommend: amend or rewrite?

AR: I would suggest not framing it that way. First of all, we are not drafting the constitution. Our role is to present what our stakeholders and analyses have indicated needs change.

How these changes will be implemented is a political process and is to be carried out by the political parties that govern the country.

They will draft the constitution, consulting stakeholders in their ways. We are not specifically proposing amendments or a complete rewriting of the constitution.

What we are saying is that, for a democratic Bangladesh, certain principles and provisions need to be incorporated into the constitution.

Whether this is done through political consensus or an electoral process is up to the political parties.

DS: The president’s role has largely been symbolic. Did the stakeholders propose increasing the president’s powers? Will the commission recommend balancing the powers of the president and the prime minister?

AR: This issue was raised significantly. It came up in discussions about reducing the absolute power of the prime minister.

One suggested approach is to grant more powers to the president. However, there are both positive and negative aspects to this.

As a political science teacher, I see two potential approaches. One is vertical power distribution: granting some power to the president (at the top) and empowering the people (at the bottom) by ensuring their voting rights.

The focus should be on distributing power in a way that ensures the prime minister is accountable not only to the people but also to the system itself.

To achieve this, we need robust institutions. Strengthening parliamentary standing committees is essential, as they can monitor not just the prime minister but the entire government.

Additionally, we need constitutional institutions such as a stronger National Human Rights Commission to protect human rights and a more effective Anti-Corruption Commission to combat corruption.

We are considering the broader picture. Distributing power alone will not solve everything; institutional reforms are critical for balancing power.

DS: Some have proposed the idea of a second republic, inspired by the spirit of the July Uprising, similar to how the constitution reflects the spirit of the Liberation War. Is the commission planning to recommend including this in the constitution?

AR: Some stakeholders have proposed the inclusion of a second republic. However, as a commission, it is not our responsibility to decide on this matter. This is a political decision.

DS: Will the commission propose changes to the preamble of the constitution?

AR: The most important aspect of the preamble is its foundation. We believe the foundation lies in the Declaration of Independence during the Liberation War, which emphasised equality, human dignity and social justice. These ideals are the foundation of our state.

This foundation was not created in a single day or suddenly on April 10, 1971. It emerged from the long struggles of the Bangladeshi people: the anti-British movement, the struggle against Pakistan and the movements of peasants and labourers. These aspirations must be included in the preamble.

Unfortunately, these ideals were not fully reflected in the constitution of 1972, even though they were part of the pledges made during our independence.

The state is essentially [based on] a social agreement. We created this agreement to build a state that ensures equality, human dignity and social justice.

It won’t happen overnight, but these

### MUGGING MENACE IN CITY

## Star replies to CA press wing’s Facebook post

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief adviser’s press wing has contested a report by The Daily Star titled “City dwellers on edge as mugging runs rampant” published on its December 22 issue as the lead piece, terming it misleading.

Citing data sourced from a DMP official, the newspaper reported that a total of 96 cases were lodged with Dhaka metropolitan police stations over mugging incidents in the three months after August. Of those cases, 22 were filed in September, 43 in October, and 31 in November.

A post uploaded Monday on the Facebook page “CA Press Wing Facts” challenged The Daily Star report, stating that seven “dosyuta” cases were filed in August, 16 in September, 27 in October, and 31 in November, totalling 81. (Police translate robbery as “dosyuta” and dacoity as “dakati” in their documents.)

In comparison, last year, 30 “dosyuta” (robbery) cases were filed in August, 27 in September, 25 in October, and 20 in November, totalling 102 cases, the post added.

The press wing then drew the conclusion that the number of “dosyuta” cases has actually fallen this year compared to last year.

OUR REPLY

The Daily Star finds the CA press wing’s conclusion misleading. In fact, when considering the September–November period, the data presented by the CA press wing points to a rise in the number of “dosyuta” (robbery) cases this year compared to last year.

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## Commission formed to probe BDR massacre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government issued a gazette notification yesterday forming a seven-member commission to reinvestigate the 2009 BDR (now Border Guard Bangladesh) massacre and uncover the nature of the crimes committed during, before, and after the killings.

The commission will also identify the individuals and entities – both domestic and foreign – that were involved in the incident on February 25 and 26, 2009, according to the gazette issued by the Cabinet Division and signed by Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid.

Former BGB director general Maj Gen (retd) ALM Fazlur Rahman will lead the commission, with retired Maj Gen Jahangir Kabir Talukder and retired Brig Gen Md Saidur Rahman serving as members.

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foundational principles are what we aim to propose for inclusion in the preamble of the Constitution.

DS: Will the commission recommend the caretaker government system?

AR: We did not encounter any dissenting views regarding the caretaker government. Most stakeholders expressed their support for reinstating the caretaker government system.

DS: Is the commission hopeful that its proposals will be reflected in the constitution?

AR: We are hopeful because this stage has been reached through an unprecedented mass uprising. History will not chart our path, but we can ignore the bloodshed, the sacrifices of lives and the pain of those who are still suffering?

These sacrifices must have meant something and they give us hope.

DS: Compiling these extensive proposals, analysing them and preparing recommendations is a long and rigorous process. Do you think you will be able to complete it within the stipulated timeframe of January 7?

AR: We are hopeful for two reasons. First, we have received significant support from the people, institutions, political parties and researchers. This support gives us confidence that we will be able to submit our draft proposals within the stipulated timeframe.

## Advisory council

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Sheikh Hasina from India, Alam said.

“But it is a long process – we are hopeful that Sheikh Hasina’s extradition will take place soon and she will face trial.”

Hasina’s crimes in the last 15 years were “horrible”.

“About 3,500 people faced enforced disappearance. Thousands of people have been extrajudicially killed. About 1,500 people died during the July uprising,” Alam added.

Asked about Adviser Mahfuj Alam’s controversial Victory Day Facebook post, Apurba Jahangir, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser, said the post was deleted within hours of posting and “was entirely his personal opinion and it was not government’s opinion”.

Mahfuj later shared another post from his Facebook account where he made things clear, Jahangir said.

Also at the press conference, Alam said Bangladesh has launched a negotiation with South Korea on an Economic Partnership Agreement in an effort to open a broader window for economic cooperation between the two countries.

“Bangladesh is looking for a bigger market going beyond the European and American markets.”