

## Endless wait at jail gate to secure freedom

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Relatives of many detainees, arrested during the mass arrest drive two weeks ago, are still waiting in front of the Dhaka Central Jail gate for the release of their close ones.

Police arrested several thousand people in Dhaka ahead of the opposition alliance's Dhaka siege programme on June 11.

Arman Mia, a grocer of Arambagh, was anxiously waiting yesterday afternoon at the jail gate for the release of his brother Julhas Mia.

Arman said the court granted Julhas bail five days ago but the name and address of his brother did not match with the name and address written in the release order.

Arman said his business faced a setback for the arrest of Julhas as he has already spent lots of money for his brother's release and failed to attend to his business properly since Julhas was picked up by the police from roadside.

Most of the detainees were arrested under the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Act and shown arrested in false cases,

said Ila Chanda, deputy director of Ain O Salish Kendra, which is providing legal aid to the detainees.

But the police denied the allegation and said they were arrested in connection with regular cases.

She told Star City yesterday that the problem with those still

got release order from the court but have to stay in jail for unmatched names and addresses, have no choice but to restart the whole process in the court for getting release.

Liton, a worker of Desh Bandhu Bakery at Mirpur Section-6, was arrested under DMP Act and later he was shown

murder and abduction charges but the human rights organisations can't help them as they [human rights bodies] have some limitations.

Khadiza Siddika, programme organiser of the legal aid service of Proshika, told Star City yesterday that she reached the jail gate with the release order of Liton but failed to make him free from the confinement.

She said, "The jail authorities informed me that Liton was not inside the jail."

With legal aid from Proshika, at least 52 detainees got release order from the court but only six of them could be freed from the jail and others appeared missing, she said.

The legal aid providers plan to continue with their initiatives for the release of the detainees.

Ila said they will be in constant touch with the high officials of police and the home minister for the release of the innocents.

"How long do I have to wait for my brother's freedom?" asked a crying Arman Mia, brother of detained Julhas, seeking help from the reporter for his brother's release.

**The detainees, who got release order from the court but have to stay in jail for unmatched names and addresses, have no choice but to restart the whole process in the court for getting release**

in detention has taken a different turn as the names and addresses of the detainees in some cases do not match with the release order by the court.

Ila said this could happen due to negligence of the police in keeping the detainees' identity properly in the documents.

She said the detainees, who

arrested in three other cases. Employer of Liton said that police arrested Liton on the way to his working place.

His employer said Liton had not been accused in any case in the past.

Ila Chanda also said some people were shown arrested in false criminal cases including



Anxious relatives of the detainees were desperate for news at Dhaka Central Jail about their near and dear ones.

### city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"I have been studying the law for 36 years. I can give you [reporters] a lecture on this for three to four hours if you want to understand the law"*

-- MA Aziz

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

Told reporters at his office rejecting the demand by the ruling BNP and Awami League (AL) to prepare the voter list by door-to-door visits, showing legal limitations, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Our Nasiruddin Pintu yesterday (Monday) uttered only a few words. But the way the opposition lawmakers protested was not expected"*

-- MK Anwar

Agriculture Minister

Said in parliament about ruling BNP MP Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu's independent remarks on leader of main opposition and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"During the reign of Jatiya Party there was no terrorism in this country"*

-- HM Ershad

Chairman, Jatiya Party

Told a meeting in Natore, on Friday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

*"I believe he's not a man without conscience, he'll take his decisions considering the present circumstances and the nation's interest will get the top priority"*

-- Nazmul Huda

Communications Minister

Told in an interview with a private TV channel replying to a question about the CEC's resignation, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

*"It becomes very embarrassing when people ask how much I get for the job"*

-- Masudur Rahman

A teacher, Jessore Baliranga Model School

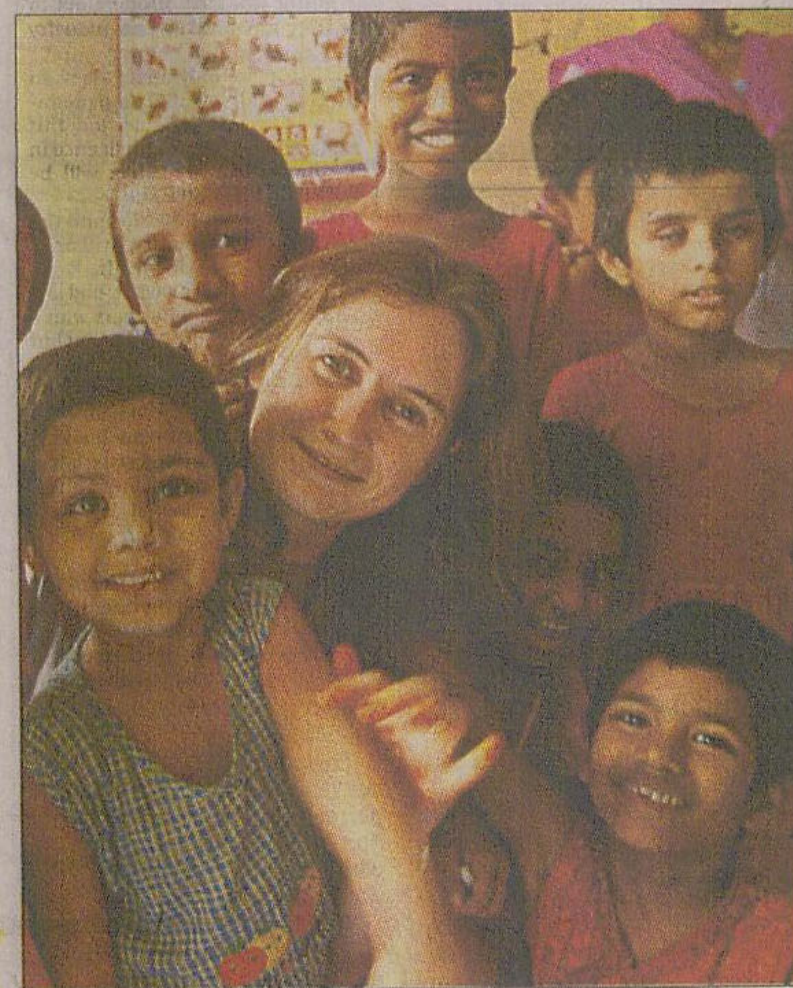
Told reporters narrating the distressing situation he is in as a primary school teacher, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

*"We will mount pressure on the government in such a way that it will find no alternative to passing a law to brand the Qadianis [Ahmadiyyas] non-Muslim"*

-- Noor Hossain Nurani

President, Khatme Nabuwat Andolon Bangladesh

Told reporters as the anti-Ahmadiyya outfit was set to attack the Ahmadiyya mosque last Friday. Source: The Daily Star



Patricia Coveney with some orphans at a Families for Children centre.

## Taking care of orphans

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Ratul's father left him and his mother and married another woman before he was even born. When Ratul was one and a half years old, his mother handed him to "Families For Children" (FFC), a voluntary organisation where he grew up.

Leaving her son to FFC, she married another person and never came to see her son in the last 13 years. Now Ratul is in class IX in a semi-government school. He stood second in his first term examination. He can also play guitar.

"I would like to continue my study but I have not been able to decide yet since I'm an abandoned child. Everything is uncertain in my life," said Ratul. "Despite the uncertainty I want to do something good and be established in future," he told Star City.

There are 131 abandoned children like Ratul in the FFC which started its activities with the objective to provide much needed help to the abandoned, destitute, malnourished children. The children stay in two rented houses in Uttara and a vacation camp in Narayanganj. Their age ranges from newborn to 16.

Patricia Coveney, an Irish national

who works as a volunteer for FFC shared her story on how she got involved with the organisation.

"While on a layover as an Emirates airline crew member in Dhaka Sheraton Hotel about five years ago, I came to know about FFC. After meeting these orphans, I became emotionally attached to them."

"Their faces would light up with joy whenever I brought gifts for them. When I realised that they needed financial support, I decided to resign from Emirates in December 2005 and started working with FFC," said Patricia.

She is trying to help FFC in fund raising and giving financial support in different ways. She collects donations from local people, friends and different organisations. She also works to create awareness among people to know about FFC.

Recently she talked to Dhaka Sheraton hotel authorities who have agreed to provide linen, bedding, clothing and furniture for the children at FFC.

"We want to give these children moral support so that they do not have to suffer from identity crisis. We have a plan to take the grown up children of FFC as trainees," said Mahubur

Rahman, public relations officer of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Meanwhile FFC arranges adoption of babies to local Bangladeshi couple and has so far arranged adoption of three children, said Shikha Biswas, assistant project manager of FFC.

Among the children staying at the home, 22 are disabled. Some of them receive physiotherapy three times a week.

FFC has a school within the home where the children can read up to class IV. Children of class V to class IX are sent to schools outside the home.

The home provides computer training for all the children. It also provides vocational training to the children and five of its older girls are attending garments training and knitting courses in UCEP (Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs).

Shikha Biswas said many families are helping them in different ways. Sometimes they provide one day's free meal to the FFC children -- sometimes they provide donations in the form of zakat for the destitute children.

"Thus well off families can extend their helping hand for the welfare of these destitute, abandoned children so that they can live," Shikha said.

## Disabled passengers deprived of rights

IMRUL HASAN

On 21 June, Anwar Hossain, a student of Dhaka University with disability on his left leg, was trying to board Gulistan-Mirpur Volvo bus number-04311 owned by Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), but the helper did not let him.

"When I started crying, some pedestrians and bus passengers helped me into the bus," said Anwar.

Visually impaired Maimuna Haque, from Rampura said, "After trying to get on a bus for one hour at Motijheel, I was finally able to do so, only with a passenger's help while the helper turned me away."

"I even pay the fare as I am not aware of the facility of free travelling that the government has provided," she said.

People like Anwar and Maimuna, are supposed to have two seats reserved for them in all public transports as per the announcement by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA),

they are often denied to this right.

According to the BRTA circular of October 16 last year, facilities such as a separate ticket counter, reserved seats and all assistance must be extended to the disabled.

Buses and minibuses controlled by Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity (BSPS) are also supposed to keep at least two reserved seats for the disabled people with a notice hung over the seats.

This correspondent inspected a few BRTC buses on June 22, and found no sign stating that the seats were reserved for the disabled.

When asked a driver of BRTC Volvo that plies the Motijheel-Mirpur route, said, "Only a few disabled people get on public bus, so other passengers take the reserved seats."

When asked again, why they don't take steps to arrange seats by removing regular passengers for disabled people when they get on the bus, he said that they try but regular passengers get annoyed and do not want to get up.

"I do not know about the free

ride for any such passenger as I was not told by the driver," said a BRTC double-decker bus helper.

Officials of BSPS said that they have asked all their staffs of public buses and minibuses to make seating arrangements for disabled people just behind the driver's seat.

When asked why BSPS did not implement the instructions of the BRTA circular about hanging a notice that reads "reserve for disabled people" in buses, he said: "We didn't think it was important. We will notify our vehicles immediately."

When further questioned why the staff do not follow BRTA rules, he said: "We usually keep seats reserved for the police personnel but not for the disabled passengers."

When asked whether the authority is aware of the harassment faced by disabled passengers in public transports, Taimur Alam Khondaker, chairman, BRTC said: "We are trying to ensure the right of reserved seats for the disabled passengers without fare."

"If any bus helper or driver does not allow them to ride the BRTC buses, they can complain to me directly," he added.

Fazlul Azim (Nadim), a human rights officer of Action of Disability and Development, said: "The government should not only ensure the right of reserved seats for the vast number of disabled people, but increase the number as well."

"We have already started a campaign in favour of disabled people so that they get a special Identity Card for a smooth journey in the reserved seats," said Nadim.

According to the World Health Organisation, 1.4 crore are physically challenged in Bangladesh, which is nearly 10 per cent of the country's total population.

BRTC now operates 789 buses, including 50 Volvos, 305 double-deckers, on 150 routes throughout the country and all the buses have at least two seats reserved for people with any form of disability without any fare.



Due to lack of proper drainage system, water-logging on the premises of Central Shahid Minar is a common sight on rainy days.