

From footpath to Facebook

A 32-year-old streetside book business moves online

MATHEWS CHIRAN and AANILA KISHWAR TARANNUM

Sixty-four-year-old Habibur Rahman came to Dhaka from Narsingdi in 1988. For the past 32 years, he has been selling books around the city, and now, to the elderly man's amazement, he is selling books online with the help of his son.

Habibur started selling books on the street in front of High Court and at Sadarghat. He settled at Dhaka University campus in 2004, and for the past 16 years, he has found many loyal customers among the students.

"I tried selling books in many areas of the city, but people would often be disrespectful; to them, I was just any other hawker. But at the campus, students showed respect for me and my profession. They were very welcoming," Habibur told The Daily Star.

"They would ask me to bring certain books sometimes. They also helped me financially during trying times. This means so much to me. I would not receive such love anywhere else," Habibur added.

But when the pandemic hit Bangladesh and the university was declared closed, Habibur's business could not continue. He has set up the venture on the footpath at DU, but there are little to no customers visiting amid the outbreak.

"I used to sell books worth Tk 3,000 per day. Now even a Tk 500



PHOTO COURTESY: LABIBA FAIAZ BARI

For the last 16 years, Habibur has set up shop on this footpath at Shahbagh.

sale is rare. It is a tough time," said Habibur.

But Habibur found new hope through his son Md Emon and the wonderful world of social media. "I started operating a Facebook page called Book Destiny last Saturday (July 11), and in just two days, we received a huge response. The page currently has nearly 9,000 likes," said Emon.

Habibur said he asked his son for help during this crisis. "I'm not well-versed in online platforms. But some of my well-wishers came forward and my son has been looking after the page."

Emon had already been helping Habibur out with the business at Shahbagh; he would collect books

from Banglabazar for retailing.

Emon said, "It was actually a regular customer of ours who suggested we take the business online. I deliver the books in person sometimes and other times we use a delivery service."

Book Destiny has already delivered books to Mirpur, Moghbazar, Mohammadpur, Lalmatia, Farmgate and Khilgaon areas, he said.

Regarding the challenges, Emon said, "My phone is a bit of an outdated model, so I can't always manage communication with so many customers. Besides, we are yet to provide service outside Dhaka." Emon is trying work through the glitches, and hopes to establish a more efficient

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When Shahed hoodwinked four officials of CMP

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Cg

"I've come from the PMO. I am an adviser to the prime minister."

This is how Regent Hospital Chairman Md Shahed, now arrested, introduced himself to the senior officials of Chattogram Metropolitan Police at CMP Headquarters in 2017 while inquiring about a raid at a warehouse in port city's Khoajnar in November 2016.

A team of Detective Branch raided the depot belonging to one "Mega Motors" and seized 17 auto-rickshaws, which had multiple chassis numbers, on November 5, 2016. DB also detained owner Zia Uddin Mohammed Jahangir and his staff Shahidullah.

During his visit, Shahed not only deceived senior officials of CMP, but also "threatened" some junior officers over the recovery of the auto-rickshaws.

Meanwhile, once best of friends, Jahangir on July 13 this year filed a case with the city's Double Mooring Police Station, accusing Shahed of misappropriating Tk 91.25 lakh in the name of managing route permits from BRTA for 200 imported auto-rickshaws.

After the case was filed, the CMP officials started to speak up on how Shahed deceived and threatened them.

According to CMP sources, Shahed, using

his power, helped lodge a complaint with the Discipline and Professional Standard unit of Police Headquarters against four CMP police personnel, involved with the warehouse drive.

Two policemen -- Assistant Sub-inspector Md Azmir Sharif (now in PBI) and ASI Md Sadek Md Nazmul Haque -- have already faced punishment following the complaint while involvement of two senior officials

-- Inspector Rajesh Barua and Inspector Aftab Hossain -- is being investigated for the last three and half years, said police sources.

The two inspectors are now attached to CMP's Counter Terrorism (CT) unit.

Police sources said after the arrest, Jahangir allegedly pressurised the senior CMP officers to free them.

"After the drive, we had been pressurised in different ways and following the order of high command, we released them under the custody of a lawyer that very night," Inspector Aftab Hossain told The Daily Star.

He said they also released 16 auto-rickshaws and kept one as evidence to verify. "On Nov 6, I sent a letter to the BRTA authorities to verify the authenticity of the seized chassis numbers," he added.

On January 1, 2017, BRTA Assistant Director Towhidul Hasan in a letter said they had no record of such chassis numbers.

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416 women raped in last six months: BMP report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On average, more than two women were raped every day in the last six months in the country, said rights body Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP).

Citing data collected from reports published in 14 national newspapers, BMP yesterday said 416 women were raped and 24 of them killed after rape in last six months, whole two died by suicide following rape. There were also rape attempts on 79 others during this time.

BMP disclosed this data at an online press conference titled "Violence against women and justice to them during Covid-19 crisis".

Reading a keynote paper, Maksud Akhter, director (advocacy and lobby) of central legal aid sub-committee of BMP, said there were 1,451 reports of torture and sexual violence against women from January 1 to June 31, including the rape incidents.

She said 244 women were killed in different circumstances and 80 died by suicide within the timeframe; 33 women suffered torture by husbands and in-laws

for dowry and 62 were kidnapped. Besides, there were three incidents of trafficking and 13 cybercrimes and other incidents.

Maksud said BMP had submitted a set of recommendations to the prime minister, concerned ministries, administrations and local administrations to prevent sexual violence to women during the pandemic.

She read out the recommendations, including appointment of adequate on-duty women police officers at every police station, expansion of One-Stop Crisis Center and Victim Support Center, ensuring Covid-19 tests free of cost and adequate supply of food to poor women until the situation improves, and strengthening hotline service so that victims can complain quickly.

In her speech, BMP General Secretary Maleka Banu said adequate shelter should be provided for women and girls and the role of the administration should be strengthened in preventing child marriage.

BMP acting president Fauzia Moslem stressed on political empowerment of women to establish women's right properly.

FAKE COVID-19 CERTIFICATES

JKG CEO Ariful on four-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed JKG Health Care Chief Executive Officer Ariful Chowdhury and one of his associates Sayeed Chowdhury on four-day remand each in a case filed over issuing fake Covid-19 certificates.

Metropolitan Magistrate Abu Sufiyan Md Noman passed the order after Md Liakot Ali, an inspector of Detective Branch (DB) of police and also the case's investigation officer, produced them before the court with a seven-day remand prayer.

In the remand prayer, the IO said the two arrestees were directly involved in issuing fake Covid-19 certificates.

So, they need to be remanded to find out the cause behind committing such an offence and know the whereabouts of others responsible, the IO added.

On the other hand, defence lawyers submitted a petition seeking bail along with cancellation of the remand prayer. After hearing both sides, the magistrate turned down their bail petitions and issued the remand order.

The case filed with Tejgaon Police Station on June 24 has been handed over to the DB for investigation.

On June 24, police arrested Ariful and four others for alleged involvement in issuing fake Covid-19 certificates.

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Ujjal waits for customers by a road, unable to sell them elsewhere.

PHOTO: STAR

M'singh potters struggle to make ends meet

Md AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Potter families in Mymensingh are struggling to survive as they cannot sell their products amid coronavirus outbreak.

The artisans usually make their clay items from Bangla month of Kartik to Chaitra (November to March) to sell those at fairs held on various occasions like Chaitra Sangkranti, Austami Snan, Pahela Baishakh, Eid, Rathjatra, and Nazrul Jayanti round the year.

In fact, their items have remained unsold as such gatherings are not being held to avoid the virus transmission.

While talking to The Daily Star, a number of potters shared stories of their plight.

Ujjal Chandra Paul from Muktagachha was one of them. With his clay utensils and toys, the 40-year-old walks all through Mymensingh city to hawk or vend those. "I have been doing so since the countryside shutdown was withdrawn," he said.

Ujjal said his family members include his three schoolgoing daughters and a bed-ridden ailing mother.

The potter, who was seen in the city's Kanchijully recently, said he invested Tk 1.5 lakh he took from a local NGO as loan and made clay items to sell those at different fairs in Trishal and many other places.

Due to embargo on such celebrations, most of his items have remained

stockpiled at home, he said.

"During the lockdown period, I also worked as a day labourer," said Ujjal.

"Now the NGO started realising installments and I have to pay Tk 1,300 per week. That's why I came out with the products for more money," said Ujjal who studied up to third grade.

"The daily sale is some Tk 500 and I have to spend Tk 150 per day for transport fare and food while moving from my Raghunathpur Rowarchar village to the city. The rest of the money is spent for the installments and family," said Ujjal.

Swapna Rani Pal, a potter from the village, said, "Every year, we earn a profit of around Tk 50,000 from our sale, which supports my family in the off season but this year we are in serious financial crisis."

"Everyone wants to provide proper education to their children, but it is elusive for us due to little income," said Swapna.

In Muktagachha, around 200 potter families are now in crisis; of them, around 38 ones in Raghunathpur Rowarchar alone, said some potters.

Bishnupriya Rani Paul, a century-old woman in Raghunathpur, said she never experienced such a critical time in her whole life. "The sale of clay articles has sharply come down in recent decades due

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Andrew Kishore laid to eternal rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Hundreds of music lovers bade farewell to playback singer Andrew Kishore, as he was laid to eternal rest at Rajshahi City Church's cemetery yesterday.

His funeral took place at the church, and later, Kishore's coffin was kept at a floral stage at the premises, where people placed wreaths to pay homage to their favourite singer. From his funeral to burial, Kishore's songs were played on loudspeakers. Many present there joined in to sing, while some broke into tears.

A last wish of Kishore was to keep his body at Rajshahi University's Central Shaheed Minar and Rajshahi Government College premises for his fans.

But due to the pandemic, this was not possible, as authorities of the institutions expressed their inability to ensure proper health rules during the possible gathering.

Kishore's body was taken to the church in a coffin at 9am, where his funeral

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POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

ADB to support govt plans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government and Asian Development Bank (ADB) at a virtual meeting yesterday agreed on the specifics and time-bound actions to further accelerate implementation of ADB-assisted projects.

The tripartite portfolio review meeting (TPRM) was co-chaired by Fatima Yasmin, secretary of Economic Relations Division (ERD), and Manmohan Parkash, country director of ADB, says an ADB press release.

The coronavirus pandemic has slowed down the implementation of at least 40 of the 49 projects funded by ADB in Bangladesh.

Around 250 senior government officials, project directors, and ADB staff participated in the review meeting. The participants discussed the overall portfolio status and prioritised actions to achieve timely results.

"We intend to support the government's plans for post-pandemic socio-economic recovery by expediting project implementation and quick delivery of development results to the people," said ADB director Manmohan Parkash.

The plan for improving project performance include accelerating approval process of large contracts, strengthening health safety guidelines implementation, and virtual training to the project staff and beneficiaries.

ADB's current portfolio has 49 projects with around \$11 billion under sovereign portfolio. ADB focuses its cooperation in Bangladesh in six sectors—energy; transport; water and urban, municipal infrastructure and services; education; finance; and agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, the press release said.

Country's first heliport in the offing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Work to build the country's first-ever heliport in the city's Ashkona has already started with an aim to oversee the operations of helicopters, Mohibul Haque, senior secretary to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, said yesterday.

"Discussions are now ongoing about the operations of helicopters," he told The Daily Star after a virtual discussion on tourism and the economy. The event was organised by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the ministry and travel magazine -- Bhraman.

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A rather steady stretch of grass growing on a side the Moghbazar flyover makes for an oddly fascinating sight. A combination of factors -- the road remaining somewhat traffic-free during the last few months, possible lack of maintenance and clenup, and the recent rain -- has created small mud beds on the sides on which the vegetation has sprouted, reminding us that nature can prevail on the most lifeless of manmade creations, given enough time. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Remove obscene content from OTT platforms: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the authorities concerned of the government to remove the obscene contents and films from the OTT (over-the-top) platforms across the country in seven days.

The court also asked Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to submit a report before it in a month on how the government collects revenue from the OTT platforms.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim came up with the order after virtually hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Tanvir Ahmed seeking necessary directives to this effect.

He submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC recently saying that several OTT platforms contain Bangladeshi and Indian obscene and questionable content and films, causing moral degradation, particularly among adolescents and youths.

The lawyer in the petition prayed to the HC to deliver order on the authorities concerned to remove the obscene contents and films from the OTT platforms.

GOVT BARISHAL COLLEGE

Two groups come face to face over renaming

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal demonstrated in front of Barishal city's Ashwini Kumar Hall yesterday, demanding implementation of a proposal that Government Barishal College be named after Ashwini Kumar Dutta.

On the contrary, the institution's present and former students held a mass signature collection programme at the same venue, seeking that its name remain unchanged.

The city and district units of the left-leaning party formed a human chain and brought out a procession from the spot. BSD member secretary Dr Manisha Chakrabarty and convener Imran Habib Khan Rumon, among others, addressed their programme.

They said they raised the demand as Ashwini Kumar Dutta's residence once existed on the college premises. Besides, he was a social worker and patron of education. They handed over a memorandum to Deputy Commissioner SM Ajjar Rahman in this regard.

On the other hand, students at the signature collection programme staged a rally there. Awami League city unit secretary Zahangir Kobir, panel mayor and AL leader Rafiqul Islam, and Bangladesh Chhatra League's city unit president Sumon Serniabat joined it in solidarity with students.

They said the name -- Govt Barishal College -- has been familiar for the last 50 years. So, it cannot be changed, they said.

Due to their separate programmes, Sadar Road was blocked for more an hour from 11am. Both sides chanted slogans in favour of their respective demands, until police calmed them down.

On February 29 this year, the DC sent a letter to Ministry of Education with a recommendation that the college should be named after Ashwini Kumar Dutta.