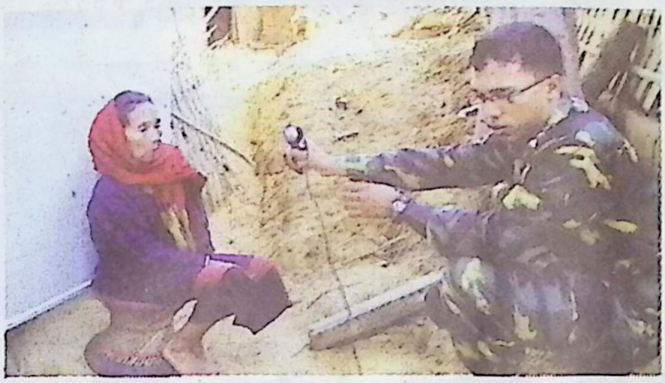
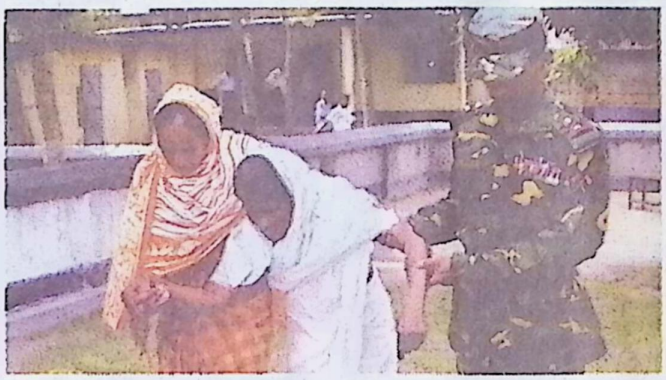




The efforts to get everyone registered reached the most marginalised and the remotest areas.

fingerprint for individuals whose fingerprints took considerably longer time to capture. To prevent such incidents we had to take a number of technical and administrative actions.

These factors became critical for coastal, hilly, haor and char areas. We had to complete the registration of these areas keeping an eye on cyclone, monsoon, norwester and flood timing. In some areas like chars and haors it was more convenient to conduct the registration during flood than dry seasons. To meet the requirements of coastal areas, naval vessels were used. For Chittagong Hill Tracts, helicopter sorties were used to transport operators and equipment.

Many have voiced concerns about the issue of privacy. How do you perceive the issue?

For many nations, privacy is a controversial issue when it comes to ID cards with biometrics. However, more and more countries are resolving this problem and national ID cards are being introduced. In our case, we looked into the problem quite critically and took adequate administrative and legal measures to prevent the exploitation of sensitive data. For example, under no circumstances hard or soft data are handed over to wrong/ unauthorised recipient. Also, when data is given to public domains, biometric data is not released. This is the reason why contesting candidates in the forthcoming elections will be given electoral roll "without" photographs. Moreover, an exclusive organization (under the Ministry of Home Affairs)--the National Identities Registration Authorities (NIRA) has been set up to be the owner of the data relating to national ID cards. Most importantly, the enacted ordinance on national ID prohibits handing over of any biometric data without a court order. In the same ordinance, strict punishment has been mentioned for any unauthorised release or leakage of individual citizens' data.

Will you share any personal experience centring on the project?

There are countless events of the two-year long project that are worth mentioning. In fact every day our team was enriched with new experiences. However, I shall share two small incidents from our pilot project at Sreepur Pouroshobha. To capture fingerprints we kept open-ended options so that a person could be registered with any of their ten fingerprints. We even anticipated that there would be few people (farmers, for example) for whom none of the fingerprints would be captured by scanners and therefore kept an 'Unreadable Fingerprint' option. However, at Sreepur someone showed up for registration who unfortunately didn't have any of his hands and consequently the software didn't allow his registration. We immediately sat down with the programmers and incorporated a NO FINGER option and then registered the person. In another incident an elderly woman, approximately of 90 years of age arrived for registration. She could barely walk or even raise her head for photograph. The operator's helper held her head up so that she could be photographed. It was not mandatory for her to come to the registration centre since we would visit her home to register because of her age. So when asked why she had come she replied 'amarta ami nibo".

I predicted in my concluding remarks during the Sreepur Pilot Project concluding ceremony that probably these indomitable spirits would be our inspiring light for the uncertain future ahead. Now at the end of this journey I am convinced that their spirits and prayers have helped this challenge to come out with flying colours.

How do you feel after being awarded such a prestigious award?

I feel that through this award, the capability and hard work of Bangladesh Army have been recognised and every Bangladeshi all over the globe has been honoured, because every bit of this mega achievement is the result of the dedication, commitment and belief in the ability of self of all the Bangladeshis. And when this was recognized by a congress, which is the champion of ID technology, it was recognition of the synergic efforts of a nation thriving to identify itself with the progress of the advanced countries of the world. I echoed the same sentiment in front of the audience when I was requested to give my instant feeling in Milan on November 18, 2008. ■