Leaving 26

ANDREW EAGLE

How many small things there are – power plug adaptors, free-range pencils and pens, the movie poster, those decorative wooden fish that sat unnoticed for five years in the hallway... Moving house is no small feat.

Amongst it all was the Bangladeshi flag that spends the bulk of each year in the cupboard. I bought it from one of those sellers who are once again wandering the streets with flags of increasing proportions dangling in line from a long pole. It's December and each December my flag has been in the habit of hanging itself in front of the living room in anticipation of Victory Day.

I fixed last September for the task of moving from Dhanmondi 26 to a smaller place better suited to a new job that would see me often out of Dhaka. How many things there were to arrange – locate new flat, negotiate, give notice, find transport, locate packing boxes and pack them. It's like juggling, fitting all those extra concerns into one's life.

Then again, sometimes living in Bangladesh feels like juggling too.

The truck hired for the first of October decided it wished to arrive a little too close to midnight – overbooked – everybody moves on the first. It was a nuisance but I realised that waiting for the hopefully more reliable yellow baby-truck hurriedly arranged for the second was a blessing. It meant one final evening in 26.

Temporarily relieved of moving duties I decided to take a walk and incidentally I found a whole lot of other things that belonged to that address – memories. The grocer insisted I stop for a chat and that an invitation to the new place was essential. The tea shop across the street, in the spot where Abdul's tea shop used to be, wouldn't charge from gratitude that about a year earlier I'd offered him a Grameen-style micro-credit loan to start out.

The shopkeeper beside him is Abdul's brother, recently returned to 26 and now occupying Farook's old spot. Both of them used to give credit including cash advances when I first moved to Dhaka and there was an end of month salary squeeze.

Those tea shops remind me of the BDR mutiny.

Like many others, I was coming home from work amid rumours of shooting on the streets. Nobody knew what was going on. I failed in my first attempt to reach 26 by rickshaw because someone suddenly started running down the street near work, which caused hundreds of others to do the same. I jumped off the rickshaw and ran into a nearby market to hide – from exactly what I didn't know. The whole city was jittery.

A few hours later I cautiously tried again, opting for the narrow back streets of Lalmatia. 26 was spookily empty when I arrived and yet, as a sign that the world was not quite at an end, Abdul and Farook were both there ready to serve tea. "There's shooting going on and you're open?" I said.

