



The boat found at sea carrying illegal migrants is seen near Kanyin Chaung jetty after landing outside Maungdaw of the northern Rakhine state in Myanmar yesterday. Myanmar yesterday landed the boat with 727 on board after keeping the vessel at sea for days, witnesses say. Some of the boatpeople, right, are seen rounded up near Kanyin Chaung jetty.

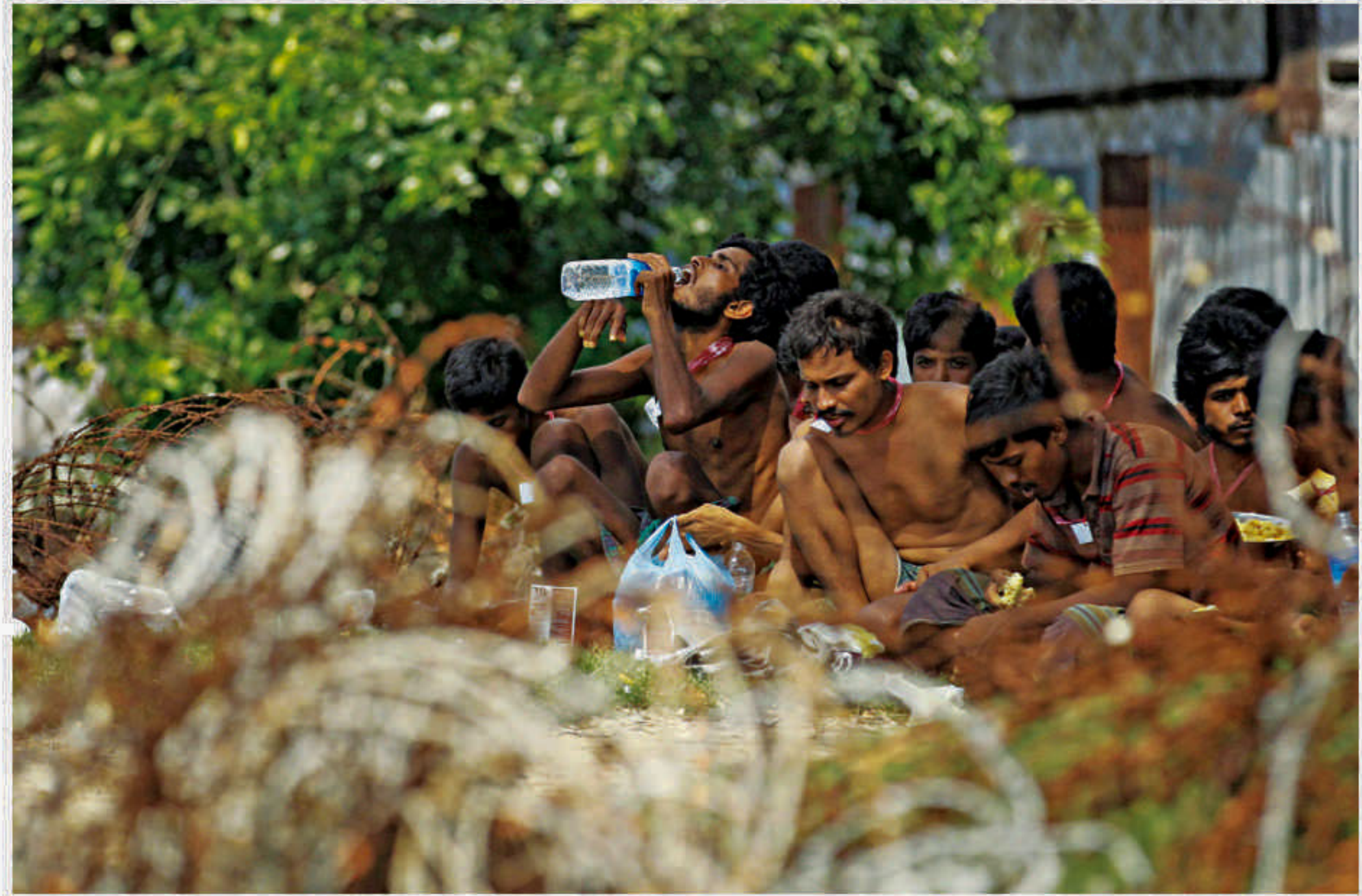


PHOTO: REUTERS

HUMAN TRAFFICKING Solution lies in regional efforts

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has said the issue of human trafficking is a regional and global problem, and it will have to be resolved through regional and global efforts.

"There are some factors and forces behind human trafficking through the sea, which are beyond our control," said Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque while talking to diplomatic correspondents at the foreign ministry on Tuesday.

The foreign secretary said the government would bring back rescued Bangladeshis after proper verification within a month, if possible.

"According to initial estimates, there're about less than 30 percent of Bangladeshis among the victims recently rescued," he said, adding that the number could be around 1,200-1,500.

He also said poverty was not the only cause behind human trafficking.

"It's [poverty] not essentially the main driver. The driver is somewhere else. That does not mean we are saying poverty is not a reason," he said.

Termining human trafficking a regional and global problem, he said Bangladesh or any other country could

not resolve it alone. "It is a multi-dimensional and multi-layered problem."

Haque said Bangladesh has a strong policy to combat human trafficking and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has shown zero tolerance to that end.

In this context, he said Bangladesh's performance was very good in the last three years in combating human trafficking as the global report on trafficking in persons show that. "We got surprised seeing the growth of human trafficking in a particular month. There's a key reason but I don't want to mention it."

Responding to a question, the foreign secretary said it was purely human trafficking not human smuggling as all the elements of human trafficking were visible in recent incidents.

Abig criminal network was working in the region and a huge amount of money was exchanged annually in human and drug trafficking, he said.

He also said the government was also open to address the issue bilaterally and mentioned that an MoU would be signed with India on combating human trafficking during Indian Prime Minister Narendra

Top Thai general surrenders

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Thai police have yet to detail what role Manas is alleged to have played in the country's once thriving people smuggling and human trafficking trade.

According to the Royal Thai Army website, Manas was the commander of the upper south province of Chumphon in 2013, before taking a senior position in Songkhla, which borders Malaysia, reported AFP.

He was moved this year to the Royal Thai Army Headquarters in Bangkok to act as an adviser -- although it was not immediately clear in what capacity.

The army has suspended Manas and launched an internal probe since the arrest warrant was issued against him on Sunday.

Rights groups have long accused Thai officials of turning a blind eye to -- or even complicity in -- the trade of migrants through its southern provinces and into Malaysia, but until now no military personnel have been implicated.

Thai police say they have issued 84 arrest warrants in connection with their people smuggling and human trafficking investigation, with 51 suspects detained so far, including some local officials.

Southern Thailand has long been known as a nexus for lucrative and largely unchecked smuggling networks through which persecuted Rohingya Muslims in Buddhist-majority Myanmar would pass on

their way to Malaysia.

The extent of the trade -- and the brutality of gangmasters who ran it -- was laid bare last month when a Thai crackdown led to the discovery of scores of jungle prison camps on both sides of the Thailand-Malaysia border that were run by smuggling gangs. So far more than 150 graves have been uncovered in the camps where many victims were held for months in miserable conditions until relatives paid hefty ransoms for the release of their loved ones.

US President Barack Obama has sought to make Myanmar's transition to democracy a legacy of his presidency, and Washington is stepping up pressure on the Southeast Asian nation to tackle what it sees as the root causes of an exodus of migrants across the Bay of Bengal that the region has struggled to cope with.

Myanmar does not recognise its 1.1 million-strong Rohingya minority as citizens, rendering them effectively stateless. Many have fled the apartheid-like conditions of the country's Rakhine state. Myanmar denies it discriminates against them.

"Rohingyas need to be treated as citizens of Burma," US Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard told reporters at a press briefing in Jakarta, using the country's former name.

"They need to have identity cards and passports that make clear they

are as much citizens of Burma as anyone else."

Obama said on Monday that Myanmar needed to end discrimination against the Rohingya people if it wanted to succeed in its transition to a democracy.

Politicians in Myanmar were focused on a historic general election scheduled for November, Richard said, which was hindering political discussion of the status of the Rohingya, who are deeply resented by many of Rakhine's Buddhist majority.

Richard said she would like to see all Myanmar's political leaders address the issue. Opposition leader and Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has faced international criticism for failing to speak out on behalf of the nation's many ethnic groups, including the Rohingya.

However, Richard said that the United States was not considering imposing sanctions on Myanmar over the issue, but that sanctions were always "in the diplomatic toolbox".

Meanwhile, Surat Thani police chief Maj-General Aphichart Bunsriroj said a small unrest by Rohingya residents at a local shelter had nothing to do with the ongoing crackdown or instigation by any outsiders. A police force deployed earlier to maintain post-unrest order at this facility has been withdrawn and replaced by a few patrolmen, he added.

Shab-e-Barat observed

UNB, Dhaka

The holy Shab-e-Barat, the night of fortune and forgiveness, was observed in the country on Tuesday night with due religious fervour.

Muslim devotees spent the night offering special prayers, reciting from the holy Quran and seeking divine blessings of Allah for the wellbeing of mankind.

They also visited the graves of their relatives and Muslim saints, and distributed sweets and homemade foods among the poor, neighbours, friends and relatives.

According to Muslim belief, on this night, Allah, the Almighty, decides the fate of all creatures for the coming year taking into account their past deeds.

On the occasion, the Islamic Foundation and various religious and socio-cultural organisations held elaborate programmes, including religious sermons, hamd-na't, recitation from the holy Quran, doa and special prayers.

Yesterday was the public holiday as the Shab-e-Barat fell on Tuesday night.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia issued separate messages felicitating the Muslims on the occasion.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar, private TV channels and radio stations aired special programmes while newspapers published articles, highlighting the significance of the night.

Horrible crimes forgotten quickly

FROM PAGE 1

who were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time during the BNP-led 20-party alliance's nationwide indefinite blockade. All voices and sounds in those days were drowned out by their agonised howls.

Only one burn victim is undergoing treatment now in a room on the fourth floor of the six-storey building while another, having released from the unit recently, is being treated in the medicine ward of the DMCH.

This seems to be the only place which still bears testimony to the indescribable sufferings of victims many of whom died while many with critical injuries won the battle for life.

With normalcy apparently returning to the political sphere, they have been forgotten altogether. The Daily Star has visited some of the victims recently to get a glimpse into how they are living their lives now.

Although they received financial assistance from the government and

some private organisations, they are weighed down by the question whether they would ever get back to normal life.

Take, for example, the case of Masud Sheikh. The trucker from Kahanu upazila of Bogra suffered 17 percent burns to his face and hands in a petrol bomb attack on January 23 when he was driving back home with his brother-in-law Jahangir from the College Station area in the town.

Every time Masud moves his limbs and shifts his body, he is reminded of those horrifying memories.

"I cannot think of resuming work as I'm still worried about recovering fully," he told The Daily Star. He returned home after receiving treatment at the DMCH burn unit for over two months till March 30.

The 35-year-old still cannot have his meal on his own as he cannot move his fingers. Worse still, he cannot shut his eyes completely when he sleeps.

His injury put the fate of his six-

member family in great peril. His younger brother was supposed to go abroad for a better future but the process was halted. Masud got Tk 10 lakh from the prime minister's relief fund, yet he is uncertain about his family's future.

"What would happen if I didn't recuperate fully and couldn't work again," said Masud, father of an eight-year-old boy.

The condition of his brother-in-law's family is more depressing.

A father of two children, Jahangir died at the burn unit after battling with life for 35 days. A resident of Louhajhal of Kahanu, he was the helper of the truck Masud used to drive.

The money his wife Beauty Begum earns through sewing at home is barely enough to run the five-member family. Like Masud's family, they also got Tk 10 lakh and other financial assistance from private organisations.

"I don't know what to do and how to run the family," said Beauty who has

to take care of her aged parents-in-law too. "The money will be depleted at some point. How will we survive then?"

Almost all other victims who took treatment at the unit have similar stories of uncertainty and misery to share.

A total of 182 blockade victims have taken treatment at the burn unit since early January when BNP-led alliance began its blockade along with many hartals. Of them, 22 died.

Safiqul Islam, 18, is the only burn victim still undergoing treatment at the unit.

When these correspondents visited him about a week ago, he was having lunch lying on his chest, with a pillow placed underneath, as his back was badly burnt. After finishing lunch, his sister removed the pillow and he put his forehead on another pillow without changing his posture.

Doctors advised him to remain in this posture after they operated his

back, his father Mohammad Alauddin said.

"He [Safiqul] finds it very difficult to eat his food. He often says 'it pains'," he added.

Safiqul was one of the victims of the deadly arson attack on a bus that killed seven people on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Chouddagram upazila of Comilla in the early hours on February 3.

"We are not sure whether he would ever be a normal man again," said Alauddin, a driver of a three-wheeler in Sonargaon.

Niranjan Singha, 19, a motor mechanic, suffered 42 percent burns in a petrol bomb attack when he was coming to his workplace in Sylhet town on January 26. Released recently from the unit, he is now being treated in the medicine ward.

Babu Sena Singha, his father, said, "Doctors have said that my son will recover, but I wonder if he will ever get back to normal life."

Niranjan is all that Babu is left with after his wife died 11 years ago. Yet he had to send his son to Sylhet for a better living. But now the stress caused by his poor physical conditions has been compounded by an uncertain future.

"My son didn't do any harm to anybody. Why he had to get burnt? Can burning people be a politics?" the father asked with tears rolling down his cheeks.

Fifty-year-old trucker Ismail Hossain recovered from the burns he had sustained in his legs. He was released from hospital about a week ago. While talking to these correspondents, he vented his anger saying, "One party is trying to stay in power while another is trying to come to power. It's totally their affairs. But why are we, the common people, dying?"

The question Ismail has asked remains unanswered with frustration writ large all over his face.

Loss, pain only for families

FROM PAGE 1

Noor Jahan kept all these items as keepsakes of her son in their rented 300 square feet room at Rokonpur in the capital's Dholaikhal. The 19-year-old died an agonising death after being hurt in a crude bomb blast during the countrywide indefinite blockade in mid-January.

And these memories are all she has to live on for the rest of her life.

"Everything in the room always reminds me of him... Sometimes I chuckle remembering his childish exuberance, but most of the time the pain of losing my son rends my heart," said the heartbroken mother after taking a deep breath.

Noor Jahan's is one of 64 families who lost their as many next of kin in grisly petrol and crude bomb attacks in the nearly three-month-long indefinite blockade.

An eleventh grader at Kabi Nazrul Govt College, Ovi suffered serious injuries on his way back home when a crude bomb went off at Anandabazar in Old Dhaka on January 14.

He fought for life for nine days at Dhaka Medical College Hospital before finally losing the battle on January 22.

The blockade on top of intermittent hartals by the BNP-led alliance severely affected normal life. Though the common people have no links to politics, they were made to suffer the most. Some families have been ruined as they lost their lone breadwinner.

The political unrest seems to be over for now, but the harm it has caused to the victims' families is irreparable. Some are still struggling to rebuild their lives and many, perhaps, would never be able to.

At the far end of Kunjubabur Lane in Rokonpur stands a three-storey building. Noor Jahan's family has been living in the room on the ground floor for over a decade. Ovi grew up here and left behind all his bittersweet memories.

Two cupboards, a wardrobe, a television, a refrigerator, a safety locker and a wooden bed -- that's all they have. And everything revives the memories of Ovi.

The refrigerator still carries Ovi's name he had written on it in pink pen few years



Noor Jahan in tears holding the favourite book of her son Sanjid Hossain Ovi. Ovi was killed in an arson attack in the city's Anandabazar in January.

back. "But it is only him who has been lost forever to us," said the 44-year-old housewife, with tears rolling down her cheeks.

"One day he stood up in front of the mirror attached to the wardrobe and asked me to tell him how handsome he was looking."

Noor Jahan still kept the bed he used

to sleep in. "If we can build our own house in the village, I will decorate it with all his belongings," she added.

To earn a living, Ovi's father Delwar Hossain sells boiled eggs at Sadarghat in the evening. He buys vegetables from a wholesale market in Shyambazar in the morning and sells it in his locality. He pays Tk 4,000 a month as house rent.

The couple dreamed that their only son would be educated and change the family's fortunes.

Ovi also felt the need to support his family. He worked at a computer service shop part-time, earned Tk 1,500 and spent it on his private tutor and other educational expenses.

"Ovi wanted to be a lawyer. Many poor people in the country are not getting justice... many women are still being repressed. He wanted to fight for them," said the mother.

The college boy loved reading books. He loved reading the Misir Ali series by his favourite author Humayun Ahmed, said Noor Jahan.

The death of Ovi dealt a double blow

to the family as they lost Salma, a girl they raised as their daughter since her infancy, in October last year. Salma died giving birth to a stillborn child.

Noor Jahan, now raising the two-year-old son of her sister, is still waiting to see justice upheld for her son's death. Early in March, she called up the officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

"I asked the OC whether anyone had been detained. He replied in the negative. Then I requested him not to arrest any innocent people even if it took time to bring the perpetrators to justice."

In April, she received a cheque of Tk 10 lakh from the prime minister. Earlier, she had another Tk 10,000 from the Prime Minister's Office for her son's treatment.

On the politics of confrontation, Noor Jahan said nobody would be able to understand the way politicians act. "They will continue leading a luxurious life, but the common people will have to pay the price."

"Perhaps I will not get justice in this world. But I will definitely get it in the next [after life]... I wish no mother would