

A father's struggle

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"I haven't eaten well in a long time, but I manage. Allah helps....," Musa sighed while talking to this reporter at a restaurant in Penang's Komtar area beside a mega mall – Gama market. The place is a popular hangout destination for Bangladeshi migrants, especially on weekends (Sundays).

Musa Sheikh, a marginal farmer from Saidabad union in Sirajganj, had come to Malaysia in 2007, spending a total of Tk 2.5 lakh for a job in construction. Then a strong man, he was confident and full of hope that he would earn enough to change the lives of his family – wife, two daughters and a son.

It did not take him long for his dreams to shatter once he landed in Malaysia. Musa Sheikh was never given a work permit though he tried repeatedly and spent huge sums of money.

In three attempts in the last eight years, he spent nearly Tk 1.84 lakh (RM 8,000) through brokers. All of them took his money and were full of promises but he remained without a visa.

Musa Sheikh was forced to be an irregular migrant, one of the hundreds of thousands of migrants in Malaysia.

An estimated six lakh Bangladeshis work in Malaysia, half of them are of undocumented status. Irregular workers frequently face various exploita-

tions, including low wages, detention, and bribes to officials. They live in constant fear of police raids and have to bribe their way out of arrests.

Musa has not been arrested by police yet, probably because he looks old and frail, making him an unattractive target, Musa thinks.

Musa has not seen his family in the last eight years. He toils day and night for the sake of the family, and mostly for the education of his only son, Raihan.

"It is very hard to work and live in Malaysia alone without a family. Only those who work here know what it takes," Musa said, his eyes filling with tears.

"But, I do it because of my son's education," he said. He brought out pictures of his son and daughter. Raihan studies in BA Honours in English in a private university in Dhaka. He needs Tk 6,000 monthly and Tk 35,000 each semester.

"Once my son completes his studies in two years, I hope he can start earning and my struggle will end in Malaysia," said Musa.

Before he could finish the sentence, the Muezzin of the local mosque called out the evening Azan and Musa Sheikh got up to hurry to the nearby mosque.

Offered iftar, he declined reluctantly and said, "I will have iftar in the mosque... it is free there."



HOME AT LAST ... Some of the Bangladeshi fortune-seekers kept at a temporary camp set up at a cultural centre in Cox's Bazar are being sent home by the authorities. They were rescued from human traffickers' vessels bound for Thailand and Malaysia in recent months. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Cops to sue

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On Wednesday, Myanmar sent 155 trafficking victims back to Bangladesh, more than a month after rescuing them from a boat stranded at the Bay of Bengal.

Of the 155 returnees, nine were identified as children.

In order to verify their nationalities for the second time, police sent them

to a temporary camp at the Cox's Bazar Cultural Centre.

Meanwhile, all the victims have returned to their homes from the camp with the assistance of the Red Crescent, UNHCR and Cox's Bazar district administration.

So far, 342 trafficking victims have been repatriated from Myanmar.

Thai general, 71 others indicted

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"The OAG has given priority to the issue, as it is a big group of people involving international systems. It has caused a lot of damage to the country as dead bodies were found," he added.

The suspects include local politicians, government officials, police, and Lt Gen

Manas Kongpan, who once oversaw trafficking issues in south Thailand.

Thai authorities faced international pressure earlier this year to crack down on smugglers after images of thousands of migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar stranded at sea were shared around the world.

Migrants were also held in jungle camps under horrendous conditions while they awaited transportation elsewhere.

Mass graves were discovered in an abandoned camp in the southern province of Songkhla in May.

Thailand and Malaysia are desired

destinations for members of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim minority and economic migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh.

An investigation by the BBC's Jonathan Head found entire communities in Thailand had been helping the traffickers.



A Bailey bridge over the Aoliakhana river in Jaldhaka upazila of Nilphamari collapsed on Thursday night when a stone-laden truck was crossing it, ignoring a Roads and Highways Department warning about the structure's vulnerability. Road communication between adjoining upazilas was snapped after the accident.

PHOTO: STAR

Boat of dreams

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"Earlier, we enrolled our son at a [government] primary school. But it was 3km from here. He had to walk all the way to and from school during the dry season. It was very painful for him," said Rajon's mother Mala Begum.

"When the water in the Haors started swelling, the roads would go under water. How could he go to school? So, he stopped.

"But after we've enrolled him here [at the boat school], he doesn't want to miss even a single class!" she said with a gleaming face.

And this exactly what Brac, the world's largest NGO, had envisioned when it floated the project.

The objective is to ensure qualitative primary education for the isolated and most deprived children in low lying and Haor [wetland] areas which remain submerged for around six to seven months of the year, turning homesteads into tiny isolated islands, said Masud Alam Khan, head of Brac's Integrated Development Programme (IDP).

"There are a very limited number of government-run schools in these areas. Besides, parents are often reluctant to send their children, especially girls, to schools in distant locations. Even when some do, their children cannot attend the school regularly due to seasonal flooding," said Ilias Farazi, Baniachong area development coordinator of the

IDP.

The boat school, however, has changed the scene. It has brought new hopes for the Haor people like Samsia Begum, whose two daughters -- Soma Akter, 10, and Seema Akter, 7, -- attend the school.

"The other day, I asked Soma to go with me to my parent's house for a night. It's in a nearby village. She said, 'No, Amma. I cannot miss my school. You go alone.' Instead of being sad for her rejection, I was happy ... I want my daughters to be educated like her," she said, pointing to a senior Brac official who was accompanying this correspondent during the recent visit.

Apart from regular education, students are taught singing, dancing, recitation and other co-curricular activities at the school, said Asma Akter, teacher of the school.

"We also hold monthly meetings with the guardians to inform them of their children's performance, and discuss issues like importance of regular attendance, health, personal hygiene, nutrition, parenting, moral values and social awareness," she added.

"This whole project is based on a simple idea," said Fatema Tuz Johora, communications manager of the IDP. "If the children cannot go to schools, the schools will go to them. And this is exactly what we're doing through these Shikkha Tores."

Probe finds cops negligence

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Locals caught prime accused Muhit Alam, brother of Kamrul, when he was trying to dump the body and turned him in to the police.

On July 14, the SMP formed the three-member committee to investigate alleged police negligence during the killing, their reported financial deal with the killers afterwards and their misbehaviour with the victim's parents.

Originally, the committee was to submit the report within three days, but failed. It then sought five more days.

Rokon Uddin and his two colleagues in the committee submitted the 424-page report to SMP Commissioner Kamrul Ahsan around 11:00pm on Thursday.

The probe found that police indeed misbehaved with Rajon's father when he went to file a case with the Jalalabad

police, and this has been mentioned in the report, said Rokon.

Kamrul Ahsan said he would make the report public through the media later.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the government would take tough action against those held accountable in the report for the murder of Rajon.

"No one will be spared," he told

reporters at MAG Osmani International Airport in Sylhet before leaving for Dhaka yesterday.

He added that the government would soon bring back Kamrul, now in Saudi police custody, and put him on trial.

Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Kingdom caught Kamrul in Jeddah after they saw the news of Rajon's murder on TV and then handed him over to the local police through the

Bangladesh mission there.

On the allegation that law enforcers helped Kamrul flee the country, the minister said the accused would face action if the allegation proved to be true.

"They [the culprits] will be tried under the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act," he said.

So far, 12 people have been arrested in this connection, including all the four accused named in the case.

Myanmar peace talks in crunch phase as polls loom

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's government, military and armed ethnic groups held talks in Yangon on Friday as negotiations to end decades of civil war entered a last-gasp phase before a historic November election.

Long-standing enemies have come to the negotiating table since a quasi-civilian government took power four years ago as the former junta-run nation bids to reach a ceasefire deal and resolve bloody ethnic conflicts.

But as the looming general elections threaten to sweep the peace process off the agenda, lingering suspicions continue to overshadow the deal.

"Trust is very important in negotiation. We can be successful only if negotiations are based on trust," La Ja, one of the leaders of the delegation representing the armed ethnic groups, said during opening remarks.

In March President Thein Sein secured a draft deal with more than a dozen rebel groups to end decades of fighting, described by the United Nations as a "historic and significant achievement".

Now the government wants to seal a full nationwide ceasefire before elections on November 8 which are seen as a key test of reforms after decades of military rule.

No let-up in road fatalities

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culprits from escaping, reports our correspondent there.

DHAKA

Three people were killed in road mishaps at different parts in the capital yesterday.

Special Branch of police constable Sohail Rana, 36, died on the spot when a Farmgate-bound bus hit his motorcycle from behind and ran him over in Karwan Bazar area around 3:00pm, said witnesses.

Police caught the bus driver, Abdul Khaleque, and seized the vehicle.

Around 5:00am, another bus lost control and hit the road divider at Khilkhet. The impact was so powerful that one of the passengers, Nasrin Akter, 19, fell on the ground, breaking

the window glass.

She died later. She had just returned to the capital, spending her Eid holidays, said her relatives.

An unidentified man was killed after he was hit by a bus at East Shewrapara yesterday morning.

At least five people were killed and five others injured in an accident in Nawjor area of Gazipur city on Dhaka-Tangail highway yesterday morning.

Police said a Dhaka-bound covered van collided head-on with a Konabari-bound human haulier around 7:30am, killing three people on the spot. Two more people later succumbed to their injuries in a hospital, reports our correspondent.

The dead are human haulier

driver Saidul, 20, passengers Shohel Mia, 30, Selina Bagum, 28, and Manira Begum, 26. The identity of the other victim could not be known immediately.

Among the injured, Enamul Haque, 35, Mamun, 55, and Panir, 28, were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical conditions.

TANGAIL

Two road accidents claimed three lives and injured 20 others in Mirzapur and Sadar upazilas on Thursday night and yesterday.

A Dhaka-bound bus ran over a bicycle in Tangail Sadar upazila on Dhaka-Tangail highway yesterday morning, leaving the rider critically wounded.

Kamruzzaman Raj, sub-inspector

of Elenga Highway Police Outpost, told our correspondent that the man was declared dead after he was rushed to Tangail Medical College Hospital.

The victim is Selim Miah, 26, of Darun village in the district.

Around 11:30pm on Thursday, a Dhaka-bound bus from Gaibandha lost control and fell into a roadside ditch at Sohagpara in Mirzapur, killing two people on the spot, said police.

The dead are Shahanur Begum, 30, of Gaibandha and Rokonzaman, 25, of Nilphamari.

The injured were admitted to Kumudini Hospital in Mirzapur, while the bodies were handed over to the victims' families on completion of legal procedures, said Humayun Kabir, officer-in-charge of Gorai

Highway Police Station.

MADARIPUR

Four people perished when a bus and a microbus collided head-on in Melkai area of Tarash upazila, reports UNB.

Emdadul Haque, officer-in-charge of Kalkini Police Station, said the Barisal-bound bus collided with the Dhaka-bound microbus on Dhaka-Barisal highway around 1:00pm, leaving four people dead instantly and eight others injured.

On information, police recovered the bodies. The injured were admitted to Kalkini Upazila Health Complex.

Four more people lost their lives in road accidents in Sherpur, Bogra, Narayanganj and Barisal yesterday.