



Kalpana with her five-month-old son. With the exchange of enclaves between the two countries, she now hopes to find jobs legally and seek treatment at hospitals without trouble.

PHOTO: INAM AHMED

She exists, now as Bangladeshi

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She did not stop there but pushed all the way to Delhi where she started working in a brick kiln until she got pregnant and came back.

"But you badly need to see a doctor," I had insisted.

"I will be okay," she had said after an awkward silence. I doubted it.

Yesterday, as I walked down the road in the enclave, I remembered her helpless face. Is she dead? Could she

pull through as she had said?

I asked the villagers if they knew her. There was more than one Kalpana. And several were pregnant. Which one was I talking about?

They took me to several houses. And finally to the Kalpana's I was looking for.

She stepped out the house and smiled. A beautiful child in her arm. Yes, she had fought it out. Her five-month-old son reached out as I took

their photograph.

Kalpana is happy that from tonight the enclave will no longer exist. Bangladesh will be her home.

"We can go to hospitals now," she said. "We will find jobs. We will not have to go to India in search of work."

Her husband did not come back from Delhi. He does not call or keep in touch. He has just disappeared.

But Kalpana will fight through without him. She is a fighter.

Perfect day

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neighbours, they also used to offer their prayers at the same mosque.

But yesterday, Jelal and Habikat, both in their 90s now, became friends again as the sense of freedom following decades' old wait wiped out the distance between them.

They hugged each other emotionally.

The reunion brought tears of joy to eyes of many.

About 700 people live in the area that has just become a part of Bangladesh. These two are the most seniors there. People call them nana (grandfather).

The two friends said even though the issue relating to the disputed land was yet to be resolved, they were overwhelmed with joy and excitement that they were becoming Bangladesh citizens at last.

"The exchanging of enclaves [by Bangladesh and India] has returned me my friend after 30 years," said

Jelal.

Habikat said he would always be with Jelal like the old days.

Jelal has three sons, two daughters and 15 grandchildren while Habikat is the father of four children and grandfather of nine. Both of them lost their wives many years ago.

Mafizul Islam, 58, a witness to the reunion of the two friends, said the two had quarrelled over the ownership of only five decimal of land.

"But today [yesterday] is the great day for them. They offered Juma prayers together. We all are happy to see them reunited again at this stage of life," he said.

According to the historic land boundary agreement between Bangladesh and India, all the 162 enclaves in the two neighbouring countries were dissolved yesterday midnight. And those who used to live in the enclaves are now citizens of either Bangladesh or India.

Freedom in the air

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The government will nationalise at least nine schools in Dashiarchhara and there has been none. So everybody is trying to set up their own schools and claim the government fund.

Those with more crooked ideas are setting up schools in the hope that they will make some hefty business by appointing teachers for bribes. And these 'teachers' in some cases are paying for the constructions.

Then you see policemen. Dashiarchhara was beyond the reach of law because India could not police it as it was inside Bangladesh. Bangladesh police could not enter it because it belonged to India.

So Dashiarchhara remained beyond the territory of law. It had its

own Panchayet or people's administration.

"We had our elections. We had our own election commission and held voting to elect chairman and members of Panchayet," said Obaidul. "We used to police ourselves and also solve conflicts."

But now the Panchayet house, a small yellow derelict concrete structure, sits in a corner of a field.

And Bangladesh police walk through the village roads.

And since there was no official law system, Dashiarchhara had turned into a haven for criminals and drug dealers.

If you enter through the bazaar and walk for about half a kilometre or so, you find yourself in a square surrounded by five or six small tin struc-

tures and two restaurants.

One evening as I was passing through here, strange men were sitting in each tin hut, glaring at me. They did not look like locals, they came from outside, I was told. Several bikes were parked haphazardly.

"Don't stop here. Don't even look at them," Golam Mostafa, the secretary of the enclave coordination committee, nudged me on. "They have come here to take drugs. If they suspect you are a journalist, they might harm you."

I stayed the night there at Mostafa's house, very close to that strange square and heard motorbikes arriving and leaving every few minutes.

In the absence of law, the criminals had made it a safe haven for drugs and illegal arms.

Free, finally

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President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina congratulated the enclave people on getting their own identity, the national flag and the map of their motherland.

From elderly people to youths, from housewives to children, everyone seemed equally happy. As the moment came at the stroke of midnight, they all were over the moon, singing, dancing and hugging each other.

"We are Bangladesh nationals now. I cannot describe in words how happy I am," said 65-year-old Hashem Ali, an inhabitant of Bhitarkuti enclave in Lalmonirhat, the district that had 59 enclaves.

"The confined life for 68 years has finally come to an end. Now we will live like a citizen of an independent country," he said.

Mansur Ali, 60, of Banshkata enclave in Patgram upazila, said, "Now we will enjoy all kinds of state facilities. Our children would not need to use fake identities anymore. They will now get jobs."

Azizul Islam, general secretary of India-Bangladesh Enclave Exchange Coordination Committee's Lalmonirhat unit, said the national flag of Bangladesh would be hoisted officially in all these enclaves today.

In Kurigram, the main programme was held in Dashiarchhara enclave with hundreds of residents of the enclaves and people of adjoining areas gathering there since yesterday afternoon.

A discussion was held there followed by a cultural programme. Local lawmaker Tajul Islam Chowdhury, among others, attended the discussion.

Earlier, locals participated in boat race, stick fight and rally.

People in the area lit 68 candles and exploded 68 fire crackers. Locals set up large gates and decorated various installations with lighting at various points.

At many places, cultural programmes were underway when this report was filed around 1:00am today.

Nur Islam, 28, of Dashiarchhara, said they now wanted the government to take development activities there.

Younus Ali, 75, of Gangarhat Bazar area in Phulbari of Kurigram, said there were allegations of criminal activities in Dashiarchhara and all these would be over once the government started developing the areas.

Abdulla-Hill Baki, principal of Kashipur Degree College in Phulbari upazila, said some students of the enclave studied in his college using fake identities since there was no education institution in the enclaves.

"But now I believe education institutions will be built here and students would not have to use fake identities," he said.

In India, similar programmes were held in Mashaldanga enclave in Cooch Bihar of West Bengal where political leaders and officials of local administration attended, reports a correspondent there.

At a discussion around 8:00pm, some people who had been arrested on charges of intruding into India narrated how they served additional time in jail, as the authorities were confused where to send them after their prison term ended because "they had no country".

[Our Lalmonirhat and Kurigram correspondents contributed to this report.]

TORTURE ON HOUSEWIFE No arrest yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly six days have passed but police are yet to arrest any of the culprits who poured acid into the mouth of a housewife and forced her to gulp it down for dowry in Kotiadi upazila of Kishoreganj.

In-laws carried out the grisly torture on Ripa Rani Pandit, 23, as her father Sadhon Pandit, who has a small clothing store in Netrokona, failed to give them Tk 4 lakh as promised dowry.

Her husband Ratan Pandit stood nearby as the tragedy unfolded on Sunday, said a relative of the victim.

Sadhon last night filed a case with Kotiadi Police Station against Ratan and his parents Rabindra Pandit and Kalyani Pandit.

"The accused went into hiding locking their house. We are trying to arrest them," said Hedayetul Islam Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Ripa was struggling to recover at Dhaka Medical College Hospital with respiratory tracts burns, her brother Apu Pandit told The Daily Star yesterday.

I've no right

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In February, Mamata promised to play her due role in signing of the Teesta water sharing deal, a longstanding bilateral issue between the two next-door neighbours.

However, while she visited Bangladesh again in June alongside Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Dhaka tour, Mamata didn't even speak to journalists or before any forum, let alone the Teesta issue.

On the enclave exchange, Mamata said they would do everything to rehabilitate the people who opted to be Indian citizens. "It's our duty to look after them; we will discharge our duty."

Girl gang-raped

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building. Around two hours later, the girl jumped off the building, and reached home with the help of a rickshaw puller, he said.

The victim, who passed the SSC exam this year, came to Dhaka from Barisal two months ago in search of a job. She has been staying at her maternal uncle's house in Uttara's sector-12.

After hearing everything from the girl, the family took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 3:00am yesterday. She was undergoing treatment at the One-Stop Crisis Centre at the hospital.

Bilkis Begum, coordinator of the centre, told The Daily Star that in preliminary tests they found evidence of rape.

The girl would undergo forensic tests today, she said.

On information, officials from Uttara Paschim Police Station recorded victim's statement at the hospital.

Biplob Kishore Sheel, inspector (investigation) of the police station, said police were trying to arrest the rapists.

Meanwhile, Rab-1 detained a youth named Arif for interrogation in this connection, said the battalion's Commanding Officer Lt Col Tuhin Mohammad Masud.

Jubo League man stabbed to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

Criminals stabbed a Jubo League man to death in Chittagong's Sandwip upazila yesterday.

Monir Hossain, 42, of Moghdhora union succumbed to his injuries at a local hospital, said police. His brothers Samir and Jahangir, also injured in the attack, were admitted there.

Witnesses said around 20 people with sticks and sharp weapons attacked them at Sholoshohor Bazaar.



This Panchayet house used to be the administrative building at Dashiarchhara before it became Bangladesh territory. Dashiarchhara was beyond the reach of law because India could not police it as it was inside Bangladesh. Bangladesh police could not enter it because it belonged to India.

PHOTO: STAR

Jehad, symbol of a movement

FROM PAGE 1

the enclave, had no healthcare service whatsoever: no hospital, no doctor and not even a pharmacy.

Shahjahan immediately informed his neighbours of the matter and some youths offered help instantly. They put Asma on a rickshaw-van and took her to Dinhat Sub-divisional Hospital, some 13 km away from the enclave.

But to Shahjahan's dismay, the hospital staffs refused to admit Asma, who was screaming in pain out on the van, as she was a resident of a Bangladesh enclave inside India with no ID.

Upset by the hospital authority's behaviour, Shahjahan and those accompanying him pleaded with the doctors to ignore the formalities about a patient's residence and to

treat a pregnant woman whose life was in danger.

They even declared that they would not object if they were arrested on charge of intrusion. But Asma should be admitted, they insisted.

When the hospital super arrived, he too repeated that Asma could not be admitted without an ID.

This triggered a protest among the enclave dwellers. Many inhabitants of the enclave had joined Shahjahan by then, threatening to stage a huge demonstration in which all the 14,000 enclave dwellers would take part.

They stuck to their guns saying Asma should be admitted even if they were to go to jail en masse.

The leaders of India-Bangladesh Enclaves Exchange Coordination

Committee informed the district magistrate and the police super of Cooch Behar of the matter.

As the news of their threat to hold demonstrations surfaced in media, the authorities of State General Hospital were forced to admit Asma. She gave birth to a baby boy on the night of March 24. The boy was named "Jehad" as a symbol of the first movement launched by the enclave people.

So that was also the day when Shahjahan learnt about the power of people who come together for a just cause.

Jehad is four years old now but he has not got his birth certificate yet.

"We have not anticipated that our emancipation would come so quickly," said Shahjahan.

Shahjahan and Asma took their

son to a programme held yesterday night marking the functional exchange of the Bangladesh-India enclaves. The programme began with a brief history of Jehad's birth and how it initiated a movement.

Five residents of Bangladesh enclave, who were arrested and served in jails in connection with the demonstration demanding Asma's admission four years ago, were also present at the programme. India-Bangladesh Enclaves Exchange Coordination Committee organised it.

"The enclave people are peace-niks. The problems and deprivations that the people have had for the last 68 years will be over now," said Diptiman Sengupta, joint secretary of the committee.