



Some of the 35 Bangladeshis, who were rescued from the Andaman Sea in May last year and kept at a detention centre in Malaysia, coming out of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Infant dies 3 weeks after thrown from 4th floor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The newborn baby, who initially survived a fourth-floor fall in the capital on February 1, died yesterday. The boy died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where he was undergoing treatment, around 12:30pm, Assistant Director (Admin) Khawja Abdul Gofur of the hospital told The Daily Star.

The baby was first fed through tube but as his condition deteriorated, he was given saline, he said. "He contracted Septicemia, a type of blood infection."

Wrapped up in a plastic shopping bag, the newborn was dropped, allegedly by the mother, through the window of a fourth-floor flat on Bailey Road hours after his birth. The 15-year-old mother, who works for an elderly couple, delivered the out-of-wedlock child in her employer's house in the morning with the help of a fellow domestic worker, according to police.

The baby fell on the roof of a nearby tin-shade shop. The impact broke his legs and injured the head. A video showing the rescue of the child went viral on social media.

The teenage domestic help got pregnant after her brother-in-law had raped her in Comilla, Officer-in-charge Mashiure Rahman of Ramna Police station had told this correspondent after the incident.

She wanted to get rid of the baby in fear of social stigma, he had said, quoting the girl's mother.

## Afghan boy bags

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who comes from the Jaghori District, in the eastern Ghazni province of Afghanistan.

Messi's management team confirmed yesterday that Murtaza was sent a signed Argentina shirt and football from the Barcelona forward, who has been crowned the world's best player five times.

"I love Messi and my shirt says Messi loves me," Murtaza said - already perfecting his own goal celebration.

The online search for the boy was sparked by a single photo that went viral, showing him wearing the homemade shirt made from a striped blue plastic bag, imitating the famous Argentina strip.

Claims initially followed that the boy was an Iraqi Kurd and that the Barcelona star wanted to find the young fan to give him a proper shirt.

But the source of the online rumours claiming that the picture was taken in Dohuk, Iraq, later admitted making it up.

Murtaza was finally identified as the boy in the picture after his uncle, Azim Ahmadi, an Afghan living in Australia, put BBC Trending in touch with his brother, Arif - the young devoted Messi fan's father.

The Ghazni farmer confirmed his son was the boy who captured people's imaginations worldwide and added that Murtaza was "extremely happy".

Messi is a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) and the agency helped to get the shirt to the boy, posting the picture of Murtaza on its Facebook page.

Messi also sent some extra shirts, which may now be snapped up by Murtaza's family, including his oldest brother Hamayon, who published the original pictures on Facebook, which then went viral.

It's not clear what's happened to the plastic bag, which may now have been retired.

## 35 victims return

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The returnees are from Cox's Bazar, Tangail, Sirajganj, Narsingdi, Jhenidah, Chuadanga, Satkhira and Madaripur.

With the 35, a total of 656 Bangladeshis returned home from Malaysia since July last year. At least 60 others are still in Malaysian detention centre, according to an official at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

All the expenses regarding the repatriation of the rescued Bangladeshis were borne by the government, the official added.

Talking to this correspondent, some returnees alleged that they had faced serious difficulties in getting food and other basic amenities at the Malaysian detention centre for nine months.

"We were given little food in the detention centre. Besides, the accommodation was not good. We had to do everything -- from bathing and to eating -- at the same place," alleged Yousuf Ali, 27, of Belkuchi upazila in Sirajganj.

The medical facilities at the detention centre were inadequate, he added.

Another returnee, Anjan Hossain, said, "Although it was difficult to stay in the detention centre, we were at least safe there." He hails from Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj.

The returnees were happy as they could finally return home.

"After suffering for one year, I have talked to my wife and three children today [yesterday]. I am very happy that I will be able to lead a normal life again," said Mostafa, 35, from Satkhira.

Mostafa's wife Nazma Akter, 30, told this correspondent over the phone that she almost had given up the hope of her husband's safe return.

"Three months ago, police came to

## IO testifies

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Ataur said he started investigations on June 6, 2013 and visited crime spots, took statements of witnesses and collected documents.

He submitted the probe report and other documents on April 12, 2015 as the involvement of the five in the crimes were preliminarily proved, added Ataur.

The tribunal adjourned proceedings until March 1 when the defence counsel will cross-examine Ataur.

## Plenty to gain

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work needs to be done for the Tigers to become a force in this format, like they are in 50-over cricket.

"I am hopeful that the team will bounce back but the reality is that we have a lack of resources for T20 cricket. The more we play the more we will learn the craft and in this contest the most important thing is to continue our domestic T20 competition," said former national captain-turned-selector Habibul Bashar yesterday.

Mashrafe said yesterday that they made some mistakes in the first game and they will play much better cricket today against the UAE. Yes, improving their fielding and bringing changes to the batting order may get some results. The way Soumya Sarkar tried to execute a flick while the ball swung puzzled many. The left-hander may correct his mistake to overcome his prolonged bad patch but the question was whether Bangladesh has the T20 shrewdness or the firepower in their batting to change the complexion of a match in quick time. Is there someone at the top who can build an

our home and informed us that he [Mostafa] was alive and now in a Malaysian jail. I was very happy at the thought that my husband would come back home one day."

Nazma said she had to work very hard to support her three children during her husband's absence.

The other returnees also hoped that they would start their lives afresh again. However, they urged the government to arrest the traffickers and give them exemplary punishment.

## Govt cannot

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initiatives of individuals. Or you can say they did it being over enthusiastic," he said.

"...Does the government or the state have any right or jurisdiction to withdraw a case if it is filed by an individual?"

Mizanur was talking to reporters after the inauguration of a law school at Chittagong Independent University in Jamalkhan area of the port city yesterday noon.

He claimed that it was being assumed that the cases were being filed not by individuals but by "someone else". He called the assumption baseless.

There may be some "personal issues" behind the cases, he added.

At one point, journalists asked him whether Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, was being harassed because of the cases against him.

In reply, the NHRC boss praised the editor for admitting his mistake but said it was also necessary that the allegations being brought against him be investigated.

The Star editor has been facing a barrage of cases since February 9, days after he made an introspective comment about a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing some reports, based on information given by the Task Force Interrogation cell during the 2007-08 caretaker government's tenure, without being able to verify those independently.

During the period, almost all the media outlets, both print and electronic, ran similar stories.

This newspaper published 11 such reports -- seven on alleged corruption of Khaleda Zia, her two sons -- Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko -- and other BNP leaders. Three reports were on graft allegations against Sheikh Hasina and the other one on the then chief conservator of forests, Osman Gani.

## SC refuses

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29, his lawyer Sagir Hossain Leon told The Daily Star.

He said they (Fakhrul's lawyers) submitted an explanation on behalf of the BNP leader to the SC on Wednesday, but the reasons for making such remark were not specifically mentioned in the explanation.

A five-member bench of the Appellate Division of the SC headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha came up with the order while dealing with three petitions filed by Fakhrul seeking an extension of bail in three cases.

The apex court also fixed February 29 for passing order on the petitions.

On February 22, the court had refused to take the explanation of Fakhrul as the affidavit containing the explanation was not signed by Fakhrul.

Addressing a public meeting in Sylhet on February 7, Fakhrul said, "The government is trying to control the judiciary."

On February 18, the SC asked the BNP leader to submit an explanation of his comments to the court.

The High Court on November 24 last year granted bail to Fakhrul for three months in the cases filed on January 4, 5, and 6 that year with Paltan police on charges of vandalising and torching vehicles in the capital.

The BNP leader recently submitted the three petitions to the SC, seeking an extension of his bail.

## ATM scam probe

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more until we are sure (about their involvement)."

The arrestees, purported German citizen Piotr and three City Bank officials Moksed alias Maksud, Rezaul Karim alias Shahin, and Refaz Ahmed alias Rony, have all begun to give important information to police, he told journalists at the DMP media centre.

"Piotr was wanted in 3-4 countries on charges of fraudulence and we would seek information from those countries through the Interpol," Monirul said.

On February 12, Eastern Bank detected 21 suspicious card transactions. A fraudster with a fake EBL card used one of the ATM booths of United Commercial Bank Ltd, which sounded off the alarm in UCBL's system, subsequently leading to the unearthing of the crime ring.

Asked whether Piotr told police how much money his gang has stolen from banks, the official said Piotr did not know the exact amount as he lost track of the money after stealing several crore from the banks. The transactions were limited to amounts ranging from Tk 5 lakh to 20 lakh, he said.

"Besides Piotr, two other foreign nationals involved in the scam came to Dhaka. But they left before the crime came to our attention," he said.

"Piotr said one of them was Romanian and the other Ukrainian. But we will try to verify. We will try to gather information about them through the help of the Interpol, agencies of the countries concerned and the embassies."

The ring of fraudsters also included 1-2 expatriate Bangladeshis in London and investigators know their names, while nationals of Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Italy were also involved, he said. "But not all of them came to Bangladesh."

Piotr and his aides used to find a corrupt business entity like a hotel or travel agent that uses a POS (point of sale) machine, and then they would find some corrupt bank officials in the section concerned of the bank, he said.

After that they made transactions of Tk 5-7 lakh at a time, but the transactions had nothing to do with real business, Monirul said, adding that the higher authorities of the banks did not have any knowledge of the transactions.

"Comparing frauds and the deficits in different banks' transactions may let the banks find out the sources of the deficits."

Monirul assured that DMP officials would talk to the banks and inform them about the "loopholes that allow the scope for such scams. "We are already talking to the experts at Bangladesh Bank."

Piotr, who was the mastermind of the scam in Bangladesh, had the passport of one country and national identity card of another, he said.

Piotr was born in Ukraine and had obtained German nationality. He entered Bangladesh by using the stolen Polish passport of one Piotr Szczepan Mazurek and a one-year business visa that expired recently.

## Tale of two stranded

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inspired many movies and captured the imagination of children and adults alike.

The joy and sheer magic of watching dolphins jump in and out of the water, frolicking as the tide changes course, that deceptive smile etched on their faces and the mysterious sound of breathing, akin to a shoosh-shoosh or rustling of leaves in a dense forest in the dead of the night -- all lend to their enchanting appeal, especially to the human psyche.

In the fading orange light of dusk on February 5, a team of conservation biologists came across a pair of Irrawaddy dolphins stranded on a shore in Sandwip of Chittagong. The animals were caught in the long shore nets of fishermen there. Watching through their spotting scopes, the surveyors initially thought the fishermen were trying to harm the dolphins.

A one kilometre sprint later, they realised the fishermen were fervently trying to save the pair. Splashing water on their bodies and watching helplessly, the wildlife conservationists found their hearts sinking as they realised they had no idea how to take these heavy animals to the ocean which was now fast receding. The shoreline was at least a kilometre away. It was ebb tide. The sun was setting quickly. The steely horizon, dark and empty for miles held unknown threats. With no cellular network, it was hard to determine the next course of action - "Do they try to carry the heavy animals to the water?", "Do they continue to splash water on them?"

In that stressful situation, the conservation biologists were left with no choice but to dig a puddle around the dolphins, splash water on their bodies to keep them hydrated, and keep the dolphins' top-side up. The team and the fishermen had to leave as the receding water was taking their boats further and further away. With heavy hearts, the team walked towards their boat now docked almost two kilometres away in the fast diminishing light of dusk, scarred by a sight so profound, it would haunt them for days to come.

The next morning, the surveyors went to the same spot but did not find the dolphins there.

In retrospect, it seems a lot could have been done. However, as mentioned by Elisabeth Fahmi Mansur, director, Training & Education of Wildlife Conservation Society Bangladesh Programme, the circumstances of such stranding were particularly challenging. Faced with a situation such as this, one needs to ensure that the animals are returned to water deep enough, allowing them to swim away. Makeshift stretchers can be made by putting two poles through a lungi or simply by four people holding each corner of the lungi. If the ground is muddy and soft, the animals could also be placed on a cloth and carefully dragged to the water. The body needs to be kept wet and the blowhole (the animal's nostrils on the top of the head through which it breathes) should be kept unobstructed. The animals should always be kept upright without damaging the fins which are very delicate.

Asked whether she thought the Irrawaddy dolphin pair survived, Elisabeth said: "There is no way of knowing if these animals survived or not. Fishermen in Bangladesh generally do not wish to harm dolphins.

This incident is important in highlighting the conservation threat that long-shore as well as gill nets directly or indirectly pose for dolphins and many other animals."

The fishermen (in whose long-shore nets the pair of dolphins were caught) said this season five dolphins were caught in their nets and all of them survived. While that makes our hearts soar for the animals that got away, these cases of dolphins being trapped in gill nets or long-shore nets are all too common unfortunately.

"If the animals can't come to the surface to breathe, they drown -- just like us. Our WCS Mortality Monitoring Network receives information on dolphin entanglements and mortalities regularly, mainly through the WCS Dolphin Hotline," says Elisabeth.

In the coastal waters of the Bay of Bengal, entanglements of dolphins, as well as sharks, rays, and marine turtles are very common. Accidentally though, dolphins are frequently caught in the drifting gill nets meant for catching hilsa.

The Irrawaddy and Ganges river dolphins are very special. Bangladesh has comparatively healthy populations of both Irrawaddy and Ganges river dolphins in the Sundarbans waterways -- the only place in the world where they co-exist. These Irrawaddy dolphins are part of the world's largest population of this species right here in our very own coastal and estuarine waterways.

They are top predators, just like tigers in the Sundarbans, and they maintain a healthy ecological balance in the places they live.

"But on top of that, our freshwater dolphins are valuable indicators of ecological changes that are otherwise very difficult to measure. We share so much with these rare and threatened animals - besides being air-breathing mammals that give birth to live babies and feed their young mother's milk, they also depend on sufficient clean water and fish," says Elisabeth.

There is a great opportunity to effectively protect the amazing abundance and diversity of dolphins in Bangladesh.

"Firstly, fishermen and, in general, people in Bangladesh have a positive attitude towards dolphins. For conservationists that's a great advantage. And secondly, the government of Bangladesh through the forest department has shown exemplary leadership in dolphin protection for our region. They have declared crucial dolphin habitats as new sanctuaries in the Sundarbans and declared the country's very first marine protected area. They have been also actively engaged in developing and implementing science-based, community informed management plans for these areas," Elisabeth adds.

Watching dolphins at play, jump out of the water, a smile etched on their face all lend a sense of life and playfulness to the waterways. As Sayam U. Chowdhury, a conservation biologist and nature writer, said in one of his articles: "It seemed as if the rivers breathed through these dark grey creatures and they in turn convey a message of love and perseverance to the river. And when they vanish, the river dies."

Anyone finding a dolphin alive or dead on the beach can call the WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society) Dolphin

## Accused killed

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accomplices of Bacchu.

A team of the elite force conducted a drive in Dawargachh area around 4:30am yesterday to arrest Bacchu as Shaheed informed them that he was preparing to flee to India in the morning.

Sensing the presence of Rab members, Bacchu along with his accomplices "opened fire on them". The Rab team fired back, triggering the "gunfight", the official said.

Later, the bullet-hit body of Bacchu was found and sent to Chunarughat Upazila Health Complex for autopsy. The law enforcers recovered a pistol and two rounds of bullets from the spot.

But the family members turned down the Rab version.

"My husband never touched a gun, let alone operate it. How come he engaged in gunfight?" said Bacchu's wife Rina Akther in a tearful voice.

She alleged that two men in plain clothes on the afternoon of February 17 came to their house at Sundraterki village of the district looking for her husband.

"After talking to them outside the house, my husband came back and told me that police asked him to meet them for some reasons. He did not tell me the reasons and went away," she told this correspondent yesterday.

After a while, she called her husband on his mobile phone, but he was not picking it up. At one stage, she found the phone switched off, Rina said.

Contacted repeatedly, police could not provide any information on him, she added.

Bacchu's mother Elai Bibi alleged that it was the Rab that picked up her son and killed him.

"My son was not involved in the killings. Even if he had been involved in the murders, court was there to try him. Why did he have to die without trial?" she said.

The company commander of Rab-9 Kazi Moniruzzaman, however, denied the allegation outright. "I have also heard the allegation, but it was not true," he told this correspondent.

He also said, "The media is being informed from time to time about whatever Rab members or police are doing in this case."

Contacted, Lt Col Mahub Hasan, commanding officer of Rab-9, said the allegation is untrue.

"Bacchu was killed in the gunfight. The family might have made such allegations to draw public sympathy and project him as innocent," he told The Daily Star.

Mahub said the criminals, including Bacchu, have committed such crimes also in the past and they were confident that they would not be arrested.

The Rab never held Bacchu. He had gone into hiding following huge public and media outcry, added the official.

So far, police arrested six suspects, all neighbours of the four children.

One of the arrestees, Rubel Mia, reportedly told a local court that Bacchu was one of the key planners of the murders.

According to Habiganj police, the murder was the result of a longstanding dispute between two factions of local panchayat (village council). Rubel and Arju, who have been arrested in this connection, confessed it in a judicial magistrate's court.

Police also say the children were killed on orders from Abdul Ali, who leads one of the two rival groups that have long been at loggerheads over establishing supremacy in the area.

Khaleque Master, a retired school-teacher, heads the other group and all the victims belonged to families loyal to him. Bacchu too used to be his supporter.

After a row with Khaleque, Bacchu joined Abdul Ali's group.