

# So close, yet so far

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

This distance of just about six feet between them seems painfully huge. And agonising, too. When they come to see each other here as two bamboo fences separate them, they know they are so close and yet so far.

A mother cannot touch her daughter; a son cannot hold his mother in his arms. And yet they come here.

Every day hundreds of people from Bangladesh and India gather on the Burimari-Changrabandha border to meet their loved ones living on the other side. Most of these people cannot afford to have passports to travel, as they are very poor.

The Bangladeshis wait near Burimari Customs Check Post in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila while their relatives in India stand at Changrabandha Customs Check Post in Cooch Behar of West Bengal.

The meeting is held between 10:00am and 4:00pm every day.

People who visit the place can only meet their relatives from a distance and exchange greetings. They are not allowed to share goods or any other items, sources said.

This unofficial arrangement is made by the immigration police and customs officials of both the countries.

Sufola Rani Bala, 68, a widow who went there from Gaibandha, said she met her daughter and talked to her.

It was painful as she could not touch or embrace her daughter, she said.

"I was in tears, so was my daughter," Sufola said, adding that she goes there to meet her daughter six to seven times a year.

"As I don't have the ability to have a passport, I take this opportunity to meet my daughter here," she said.

This correspondent managed to talk to Sufola's daughter Saraswati Rani. She came from an area under Dinhat Police Station in Cooch Behar.

"I brought some sweets and a sari

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A small group of Bangladeshis exchanging greetings with their relatives in India at the Burimari-Changrabandha border. The photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

## ATTACK ON BAULS Jamaat man held in Chuadanga

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

Police yesterday arrested an activist of Jamaat-e-Islami for his alleged involvement in Sunday's attack on a Chuadanga baul akhra (den) that left four bauls, including two women, seriously injured.

The arrestee is Jamat Ali, 41, an activist of Jibonnagar upazila unit of Jamaat, said Belayat Hossain, additional superintendent of police in Chuadanga.

"We suspect that Jamat was directly involved in the incident," said the police official.

Shahidul Islam, a veteran baul and also donor of the piece of land where the akhra is situated, filed a case with Jibonnagar Police Station on Sunday night, accusing eight to 10 unknown people.

Now, Shahidul's son Mukul Hossain, who is also a baul, looks after the akhra. Shahidul gave up taking care of the akhra because of his old age.

Police said they picked up five Jamaat and Islami Chhatra Shibir men from the area on suspicion of the

attack early yesterday. After interrogation, they freed all except Jamat Ali.

Police claimed that they have gleaned some information from him on the attack.

Chuadanga Chief Judicial Magistrate's court sent Jamat to jail after police produced him before the court yesterday.

Police said they would seek remand for Jamat for further interrogation.

Humayan Kabir, officer-in-charge of Jibonnagar Police Station, said the drive was going on to arrest the other culprits.

Around 1:30am on Sunday, some eight to 10 attackers carrying sharp weapons swooped on the bauls, including the four, who were asleep at a tin-shed room of the akhra in Ektarpur village.

Of the injured, Abdur Rahim, 65, Rashida Khatun, 60, and Bulu Begum, 50, were badly hacked. Condition of the other, Bakso Mondol, 50, could not be known since he has been out of trace.

The victims of the attack had come to join a two-day Sadhu Sanga

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## Dengue strikes early

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13 in March, 41 in April, 76 in May, 183 in June and 147 in this first 17 days of this month. At least three of the patients have died.

The number of such infection was quite low in Dhaka from January to May in 2007-2015. However, it started to rise in June and reached its peak in September, according to statistics.

In the previous years, the reported number of dengue patients was below five in April, below 10 in May and below 60 in June.

The dengue issue is critical as the country had reported having 2,551 cases of the disease last year. The number was highest in a single year since 2005.

Five people infected with dengue died last year.

The same year, India had nearly one lakh dengue cases in which around 220 people died.

In Bangladesh, most of the dengue cases are reported in June as intermittent rains and high temperature and humidity during the month create the ideal breeding conditions for Aedes mosquitoes that transmit the dengue virus to human bodies, say health officials.

Prof Saif Ullah Munshi of virology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University said this year's "dengue scenario" could turn

"worse" following the early outbreak.

Aedes mosquitoes have bred early this year which would increase their population. So there are chances that they would bite people more, he told The Daily Star.

He also claimed to have found in his study on dengue that around 70 percent of the dengue patients in last year were attacked by DEN-1 serotype of the virus. It was only 10-15 percent in the previous two years.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says dengue outbreaks can occur any time if mosquitoes are active and there are four serotypes of the virus -- DEN-1, DEN-2, DEN-3 and DEN-4.

The serotype DEN-1 is comparatively new in Bangladesh, a country whose people had developed immunity to the previously-dominant DEN-2 serotype, Munshi said.

It seemed that more and more people are being infected with DEN-1 virus every year and that is why the number of dengue patients could rise this time around, he added.

To fight Aedes mosquitoes, he suggested that the authorities concerned should immediately launch a wide-spread campaign to encourage cleanliness in households and their surroundings and proper disposal of waste, empty bottles and other containers.

Dr AKM Shamsuzzaman, director (communicable disease) at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said rain, humidity and high temperature since April created the perfect condition for

Aedes mosquitoes to breed.

However, he said there was nothing much to worry as the DGHS had "already started working on creating awareness through the media and doctors."

"With the help of the WHO, we have sent diagnostic kits to the public hospitals in districts. Such kits at district levels had not been provided earlier," he told this newspaper over the phone.

Chief health officers of two city corporations in Dhaka said their mosquito control programmes were going on as usual.

"Soon, we will hold rallies at particular zones and run campaigns through the media to create awareness on dengue," Brig Gen SNN Saleh Bhuiyan, chief health officer of Dhaka North City Corporation, told this correspondent last week.

The DNCC recently started distributing posters and leaflets among people to create awareness on dengue prevention, he added.

Brig Gen Saidur Rahman, chief health officer of the Dhaka South City Corporation, claimed to have received reports of only five dengue cases in the

DSCC area this year.

Aedes mosquitoes breeds on clean water, mostly within and close vicinity of households which are out of the purview of the city corporation cleaners or mosquito controllers, he pointed out.

Therefore, the DSCC has written to the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) to help create awareness among landlords on the issue. Besides, the corporation would hold a meeting with the REHAB in a week, Rahman mentioned.

**DENGUE VACCINE**

In April, the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation recommended that countries with dengue cases consider introduction of the vaccine, Dengvaxia, developed by pharmaceutical company Sanofi Pasteur, only in geographic settings with high endemicity.

The vaccine was first registered in Mexico in December last year and then in the Philippines.

It is a live recombinant tetravalent dengue vaccine that has been evaluated as a 3-dose series and registered for use in individuals 9-45 years of age living in endemic areas, WHO said.

Prof Munshi said Bangladesh was still not a high endemic country for dengue, and so the vaccine was not required.

## 3 Bangladeshis killed in Saudi road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least three Bangladeshi nationals, two from the same family, were killed and two others were injured in a fatal road crash on Sunday afternoon near the plain of Arafat in Makkah of Saudi Arabia.

Altaf Hossain, first secretary at Bangladesh Consulate in Jeddah, told The Daily Star over phone that the dead were identified as Hena Akter, 30, and her son Arif Ahmed, 5, from Dhanmondi in Dhaka and Rokeya Begum, 31, from Narsingdi.

The two injured are Sohrab Hossain, 35, and Hafsa, 6, he added.

The accident occurred when the car carrying members of two expatriate Bangladeshi families collided with another car, Altaf mentioned quoting local sources.

"Our officials have already visited the spot and the hospital to gather more information about the accident," he told this correspondent adding that the bodies of the three were kept at Al Noor Hospital mortuary while the two injured were admitted to a local hospital for treatment.

## Prosecution is ailing

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"There is shortcoming not only in investigation, but also in prosecution as the public prosecutors do not perform their duties properly," he said.

But nothing has changed in the last one year. The government continues to form its prosecution team in every district with partisan people.

There are as many as 4,000 public prosecutors as well as additional and assistant prosecutors and government pleaders, who pursue civil cases across the country, according to law ministry sources.

Their remuneration is also poor which, according to lawyers, appears to be an obstacle to recruit skilled professionals.

A prosecutor, additional prosecutor or special prosecutor gets just Tk 500 to represent the government in one case. This is all he gets for a day's work, even if he represents 10 cases that day, said prosecutors in Dhaka metropolitan courts.

"Prosecutors cannot submit bill for more than one case a day. They are not allowed to do private practices either," said one prosecutor, asking not to be named.

"If the court remains open for 20 days a month, a prosecutor can earn Tk 10,000. How can he run his family with this money?" asked another.

An assistant public prosecutor gets

Tk 200 for a case. But he can do private practice.

Because of such poor payments, some prosecutors are forced to earn money in dishonest ways, said a lawyer practising in Dhaka courts.

Legal experts say like any other alleged criminals, a suspected militant is also presumed innocent until found guilty as per the basic principle of the criminal justice system. The onus is on the prosecution to prove his guilt by adding cogent and reliable evidence.

And the proof must be beyond reasonable doubt. Whenever the courts find any flaw in the evidence of the prosecution, for the sake of a fair trial, they may grant acquittal or bail to the alleged accused, giving them the benefit of doubt, they added.

On Saturday, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star it was the duty and responsibility of the prosecutors to inform his office when a suspected militant got bail. But the public prosecutors do not do so. If they did, his office could take steps by appealing before the High Court.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abdullah Abu said they performed their duties properly. The allegations that they are negligent, lack skills and have other weaknesses are just not true. Law Minister Anisul Huq recently

said his ministry instructed the public prosecutors to place strong arguments against bail prayers of accused militants.

But there is no move to reform the current prosecution system.

Loyalty to the party in power remains the main criterion for appointment as law officers in the Supreme Court as well.

**FAILED ATTEMPTS**

The long-standing demand for reforming the prosecution system with professional lawyers remains unmet, thanks to successive governments' policy of appointing partisan people as prosecutors.

Like CJ Sinha, Moudud Ahmed, when he was law minister of the 2001-2006 BNP-led government, was also critical of the political appointment of prosecutors.

He had even moved to establish an independent and permanent public prosecution service.

At a two-day consultation meeting on the introduction of the proposed government attorney service in May 2005, Moudud said the present system of political appointment of law officers hindered case proceedings.

"As a result, some 70 percent cases get quashed for the lack of accountability, sincerity and skills [of the pros-

ecutors]. In this situation, the government is formulating rules for appointment of accountable and skilled law officers," he said.

But his move did not succeed.

The caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed in 2008 had done the groundbreaking work for making a law through the promulgation of an ordinance to set up a permanent attorney department.

The law made through the ordinance had mandated that an individual must have certain qualifications to get appointed as a public prosecutor.

The law ministry had also sent a proposal to the then establishment ministry for creating more than 3,000 posts for the attorney department.

Lawyers had welcomed the caretaker government's move meant to stop politicisation of the public prosecution.

But the Awami League government that took office in January 2009 opted for retaining the system of appointing party men as prosecutors, and has never made any move to reform the public prosecution system.

Contacted yesterday, the law minister said they were planning to gradually set up a permanent prosecution service and also increase remuneration of prosecutors.

## 41 indicted, finally

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Rana and 33 others pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after Judge SM Kuddus Zaman of the District and Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka read out the charges to them.

The trial will begin on September 18.

During yesterday's hearing, Additional Public Prosecutor Mizanur Rahman proposed to bring different charges, including murder, against all the accused.

Before the charge framing, the court rejected 25 petitions submitted by the defence pleading that its clients, including Rana, be exempted from the murder charges.

Earlier in December last year, another Dhaka court used its inher-

ent power to include three labour ministry officials in the charge sheet of the murder case.

They are Deputy Chief Inspector (Mills & Factories) Jamsedur Rahman, and inspectors (engineering) Yusuf Ali and Shahidul Islam.

The investigating officer of the case found their involvement in the crimes. But the labour ministry refused to give its approval to bringing charges against them.

According to law, the government's prior approval is required to name a government official in a charge sheet.

On June 14 this year, another Dhaka court framed charges against Rana and 17 others in the case filed

over "violation of building codes" in the construction of Rana Plaza.

Earlier in June last year, investigation officer Bijoy Krishna Kar submitted two charge sheets -- one for murder and the other for building code violation.

Rana, owner of Rana Plaza, constructed the unauthorised building on a swampy land in Savar, using his political clout and bribing the local administration and government officials. The nine-storey building housed five garment factories on its upper floors.

IO Bijoy, assistant superintendent of the CID, found involvement of 14 officials of different ministries and departments in the crimes.

## Kejriwal cleans dishes

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Kejriwal scheduled his "sewa" or service before daybreak to avoid the media and crowds but failed to beat either.

"I had come here to offer voluntary service to apologise for the unintentional mistake committed in our youth manifesto... I have peace of mind now," he said.

With folded hands and a handkerchief covering his head, Kejriwal went around the shrine complex, offered prayers and later cleaned utensils at the "Langar hall" or the community kitchen which serves food to over one lakh people in a single day.

The AAP chief was at the temple for about 45 minutes.

Earlier this month, a complaint was filed against the party's spokesperson Ashish Khetan, who was accused of

hurting Sikh sentiment by comparing the manifesto with religious books.

"This is our bible, our Gita and our Guru Granth Sahib," Khetan had said while unveiling the 51-point manifesto at an event. Kejriwal, who was also present at the time, was criticised on social media with hashtags like #KejriinsultsGoldenTemple.

Khetan apologised saying he didn't mean to disrespect the holy books, but many Sikh leaders said it was not enough. Punjab's Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal had called it an "act of blasphemy".

The controversy has hit AAP at a time it is preparing for an aggressive election campaign in Punjab, hoping to emerge as a formidable third party in what has traditionally been a direct contest between the Akali Dal-BJP and the Congress.

## BNP questions PM's national unity remarks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday questioned how national unity, as stated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, could be formed excluding a major political party like it and others.

The unity that the prime minister spoke of is only the alliance of the ruling 14 parties, said BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters in the capital.

The people of the country are disappointed by such a remark by Hasina, he said and reiterated the BNP's call for immediate national unity, in true sense, against the rise of militancy.

The party came up with its formal reaction a day after the PM spoke of reaching a national consensus on how to contain terrorism and extreme violence.

Hasina said the people of the country, except those who have links with militancy and terrorism and have records of war crimes and burning people alive, had already reached a consensus.

"The unity of common people, which is truly required for eliminating terrorists, has already been forged, and this unity will prevail," she said.

Nazrul yesterday said that only the unity of parties of the ruling alliance could not stop terrorism, rather it would give rise to militancy and extremism.

He urged the prime minister to take quick and effective steps to form national unity.

Militant activities have increased in the country due to the government's boundless failure and inactive and confused policies, Nazrul alleged.

From the beginning, the BNP alerted the government to the rise of militancy, but it did not consider it and when any incident took place, the government put the blame on the BNP to take political revenge, he said.

He urged the government not to continue blaming others. Instead, it should unite the nation to save the country from uncertainty, the BNP standing committee member said.