



Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader distributing relief materials among 500 flood victims at Belayet Hossain High School ground in Manikganj's Shibalay upazila yesterday.

PHOTO:  
JAHANGIR SHAH

## 'Refugee Olympian'

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save the lives of 20 people, including their own, after jumping off their sinking dinghy into the Aegean Sea and pushing their boat to land.

Mardini, who now lives in Berlin, will compete in the women's 100-metre butterfly and freestyle heats on Saturday and Wednesday. Her appearance is being touted as one of the most highly anticipated of the Games.

SYRIA

Mardini was a talented swimmer in war-torn Damascus and professionally backed by the Syrian Olympic Committee. As unrest in the besieged country escalated, she would often find herself training in pools where roofs had been blown open by bombings. "Sometimes we couldn't train because of the war," she said. "And sometimes you would be swimming in pools where the roofs were [blown open] in three or four places."

Damascus became increasingly unstable and Mardini and her sister Sarah eventually left Syria, travelling through Lebanon and Turkey before trying to reach Greece.

SAVING LIVES

Thirty minutes after setting off from Turkey, the motor on their boat, which was meant for six people but carrying 20, began to fail. Most of those on board it could not swim. With no other

alternative, Mardini, Sarah and two strong swimmers jumped into the sea and swam for three hours in open water to stop their dinghy from capsizing, eventually reaching Lesbos.

"We were the only four who knew how to swim," she said of the experience. "I had one hand with the rope attached to the boat as I moved my two legs and one arm. It was three and half hours in cold water. Your body is almost like ... done. I don't know if I can describe that."

But while she now hates open water, the memory is not a nightmare for her. "I remember that without swimming I would never be alive maybe because of the story of this boat. It's a positive memory for me."

After Lesbos, Mardini and Sarah travelled through Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria before arriving at their final destination: Germany.

Mardini is equally remarkable for her self-effacing attitude and resilience as she is for her life-saving act. "It's tough," she has said. "It was really hard, for everyone, and I don't blame anyone if they cried. But sometimes you just have to move on."

STARTING AGAIN IN BERLIN

Mardini has now settled in Berlin, where she was put in touch with the Wasserfreunde Spandau 04 swimming

club and taken on as a member. Quickly realising her potential, Coach Sven Spannekrebs began considering Mardini for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. But her road to the Games turned out to be a much quicker path.

Mardini trains for two to three hours every morning, attends school and then continues to train in the evening.

According to the Guardian, Syria has been monitoring her swimming career and asking for regular updates.

Tackling the dehumanisation of refugees

"I want everyone to think refugees are normal people who had their homelands and lost them not because they wanted to run away and be refugees, but because they have dreams in their lives and they had to go," she said at a press conference announcing her place on the team.

"Everything is about trying to get a new and better life and by entering the stadium we are encouraging everyone to pursue their dreams."

She also has hopes one day that peace could be brought to fruition in Syria and she could take her story home.

"Maybe I will build my life here in Germany, and when I am an old lady I will go back to Syria and teach people about my experience."

## O, A levels

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requested to contact their schools for a unique school candidate registration link. Private candidates from Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, and Khulna can apply through the British Council website.

On July 27, British Council temporarily closed its offices in Bangladesh.

The press release also read, IELTS registration dates are still open for August and September 2016 and candidates are requested to register online at [ielts.britishcouncil.org](http://ielts.britishcouncil.org)

Along with the examinations services, the British Council is running all corporate English courses and workshops as per schedule. Their Active Citizens Youth Leadership Training programme is also running smoothly, the press release read.

## DMP to issue

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terrorist hideouts in rented residential houses and the raids will be conducted in each area of the city. Asaduzzaman said adding that police were working on to enhance people's security by curbing terrorism and militancy.

The commissioner said there was no bar to renting out houses to singles, but once any new tenant moves in, owner of the house should update local police with detailed information of the tenant along with photocopies of his or her national and institutional ID cards.

## Man attacks

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bombers struck Brussels airport and a subway station near the European Union's institutions on March 22, killing 32 people.

The attacks were claimed by the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group, which controls large areas of territory in Iraq and Syria and has claimed numerous terror attacks in Europe in the last year.

Belgian Interior Minister Jean Jambon condemned a "disturbing act in Charleroi" on his Twitter account and said the country's terror threat level -- currently at level three on a scale of four -- would be examined.

Belgian police have carried out dozens of anti-terror raids since the November 2015 attacks in Paris, planned in Belgium and involving Belgian extremists, which left 130 people dead.

Last month they arrested and charged a 33-year-old man, identified as Nourredine H., with attempting to commit "terrorist murder" and "taking part in the activities of a terrorist organisation".

Belgium is the main source per head of population of jihadist recruits going from European Union countries to fight with IS in Syria, causing deep concern that they will return home battle-hardened and even more radicalised.

The interior ministry said 457 Belgian men and women had gone or tried to join jihadists in the Middle East, including 90 who are missing or dead.

Belgium launched its first attacks against IS in Iraq in late 2014 as part of a US-led coalition. It joined a similar anti-IS operation in Syria this year.

Several of those involved in the Brussels bloodshed in March were directly linked to the November 13 bomb and gun attacks in Paris.

In June Belgian authorities charged two men with terrorist offences amid reports of a planned attack on a Euro 2016 fanzone in central Brussels.

Belgium then beefed up security for its July 21 national day celebrations after a truck attack that killed 85 people in the French city of Nice on Bastille Day, July 14.

## Want to return

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two caretakers and two gardeners at the house located in a high security area of Shillong as it is close to local offices of Indian Air Force and an intelligence agency.

The newly-named BNP standing committee member has rented two rooms on the first floor for Rs 80,000 a month.

Police arrested him on May 11 last year as he was "hanging around" in Golf Links area of Shillong after nearly two months of his disappearance from a house in Uttara of Dhaka.

His family members alleged he was picked up by plainclothes policemen, a claim law enforcers deny.

Salahuddin spends most of his time discussing politics with people from his village who frequent him in Shillong in the Indian state of Meghalaya.

To communicate with people in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world, he uses different messengers, including Viber, WhatsApp and Imo. Besides, he uses a Facebook account with a pseudonym.

Over these months, the BNP leader has gained 15 kg. "I now weigh 90 kg. I look a little older now than a year ago," he said with a smile.

He celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr with his wife, two sons and two daughters who had been to Shillong for about a week early last month.

Talking to this correspondent, Salahuddin protested a Daily Star report on his lifestyle at the guest house.

"The monthly rent of the guest house is not Rs 2.40 lakh as mentioned in the report. The actual rent is Rs 80,000," he added.

About politics in Bangladesh, he said there is no opposition politics now.

"I'm not an enemy of Awami League. It is rather my political opponent.

As a friend of Awami League, I can say it should allow the BNP to do politics," said Salahuddin.

A democratic system would have prevailed in the country had the government allowed the BNP to carry out its political activities, he observed.

Asked about the recent militant attacks at a Gulshan café and near the Sholakia Eid congregation ground, he

refused to make any comment.

The former state minister, however, claimed it was his party's government which had arrested militant kingpins Shaykh Abdur Rahman and Siddikur Rahman alias Bangla Bhai. The caretaker government had only executed the court's verdicts against the two, he added.

In fact, trials of Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai ended at the Supreme Court after the BNP had left power in October 2006.

About the mystery of his "disappearance" from Uttara, Salahuddin said he has a plan to write a book on it.

"I want to write down everything in the book, from day one of my disappearance to my days in Shillong," he mentioned.

This newspaper saw three BNP leaders from Cox's Bazar talking to Salahuddin about politics. Seeing this correspondent enter the room, he stopped the discussion and asked a driver to drop the three at a Shillong hotel.

One of the three leaders, Shafiqur Rahman Shafi, said some 10 to 15 BNP leaders meet Salahuddin everyday.

"They travel to Shillong just to visit our leader because they love him," Shafiqur added.

Salahuddin said the three leaders brought famous betel leaves from Moheshkhali for him. He, however, noted that he gave up eating betel leaves on his doctor's advice.

Pointing to coffee served to this correspondent, he said some of his well-wishers brought it for him from Bangladesh.

TRIAL CONTINUES

The BNP leader said the next hearing in the case is scheduled for August 29. The court on that day would ask him for the last time whether he would plead guilty.

Salahuddin said he would repeat the statement he had made before the court on July 22 last year when the case proceedings started. "I will say I didn't come to India willingly. I was dropped in Shillong."

Local lawyers and police officials said usually it takes around three to four months for delivering the verdict in such a case. But the trial in Salahuddin's case was yet to be completed after over a year.

## The floating schools

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The floating schools are run by Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (SSS), a non-profit organisation with the NGO Affairs Bureau of the Prime Minister's Office. SSS says it aims to transform the region's waterways into pathways for education, information and technology.

The first such school was introduced in Singra upazila of Natore in 2002.

In no time, it became quite popular among the people of Chalan Beel areas which remain submerged for months, said SSC officials.

Today, 22 floating schools operate in Chatmohar and Bhangura upazilas of Pabna, Gurudashpur and Singra upazilas of Natore and Tarash upazila of Sirajganj, added the officials.

Many Chalan Beel areas remain under water for four to six months every year, making it almost impossible for children in remote areas to reach their usual primary schools, said Suprokash Poul, coordinator of the school programme.

Every day, each floating school has three shifts having some 30 students, he said.

Talking to this correspondent, some

of the locals said the schools were benefiting them in many ways.

"We get training on crop cultivation in submerged land during the monsoon. We also learn how to cultivate paddy, jute and vegetables and protect crops from pests without using harmful chemical pesticides," said Bulbuli Khatun, a housewife from Kalinagar village in Natore's Singra upazila.

Abu Sayed, a college student from the same upazila, said, "There is no computer facility in our village. We had to go some 30 miles to learn computers. But now, we get this facility on our doorsteps."

A total of 39 boats -- 22 of which are being used as floating schools, 10 as library and computer labs and seven as training centres -- are moving across the Chalan Beel region, said Suprokash.

However, the number of the boats was not enough to meet the need of people living in such a vast area like Chalan Beel.

Asked, Suprokash said the SSS was working to introduce more such boats in the area.

## Hard to crack

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Former IGP Muhammad Nurul Huda said that at one point of radicalisation, militants reach a level of mind where they get pleasure through wrongdoings.

"It needs to be found out why youths are becoming radicals and to serve what purpose," he added.

Over the past few months, law enforcers have nabbed several militants belonging to various outfits. Following two attacks, locals caught several attackers and handed them over to the police.

But police never disclosed the outcome of the interrogation.

Recently, police nabbed Shafiul Islam alias Saiful in connection with the Sholakia attack and bullet-hit Rakibul Hasan alias Reagan during Kalyanpur drive.

Earlier, locals caught one attacker -- Golam Faizullah Fahim -- in connection with the attack on a Madaripur college teacher.

Police took them for interrogation, but within days Shafiul and Faizullah were killed in "gunfights". Rakibul is still being treated at Dhaka Medical College Hospital under police custody.

Another militant Shariful Islam alias Mukul Rana, the key suspect in blogger-writer Avijit Roy murder, was killed in a "shootout" with cops in the capital on June 19.

His father claimed he had been missing since being kidnapped by some unidentified persons in Jessore four months back.

According to intelligence sources, a significant number of militants belong

to "sleepers cells," which are small units of three to four people to carry out parts of an operation.

Members of one sleeper cell have no information about other cells. So when they get caught, they cannot give much information or name the masterminds, they added.

"Since it is hard to glean information from arrested militants, it is important to create a social movement to stop the menace," he told the discussion -- Curbing Militancy and Crime: The Role of Community Policing and Media -- organised by the Dainik Amar Kagoj on its 14th anniversary.

He said while militants were unleashing terror through killing people, bloggers and freethinkers were hurting religious sentiments through their writings.

However, awareness against militancy has been created following Holey Artisan attack with support from the media, he said and urged religious scholars to speak against those who misinterpret religion.

He also called on parents to keep a close watch on their children.

Youths are motivated mostly by veteran militants like Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai (both hanged in 2007), he added.

Sakhawat Hussain said militants who are still out of surveillance might get inspiration from the deaths of their fellows. Also, the happy faces of the five Holey Artisan attackers, first published by the IS which took credit for the attack and then by the media, may inspire others to become radicals.

## Syria rebels

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control of the provincial capital of the same name since mid-2012, transforming the former economic powerhouse into a divided, bombed-out city.

Opposition fighters, Islamists and jihadists have waged fierce assaults since July 31 to end the siege of some 250,000 people in Aleppo's eastern districts by government forces.

Yesterday, rebel groups successfully broke the siege by opening a new route into the city from the southwest, opposition officials said.

"Rebels break Aleppo's siege," wrote the Istanbul-based National Coalition on Twitter.

The Islamist faction Ahrar al-Sham said on Twitter that rebels had seized control of Ramussa on the southwestern edges of the city and thereby "opened the route to Aleppo".

Al-Manar, the television station of the Lebanese group Hezbollah which has been fighting alongside Syrian government forces, denied that Ramussa had fallen or that the siege had been broken.

Riad Hijab, head of the broad opposition body the High Negotiations Committee, tweeted, "The liberation of Ramussa and the breaking of the siege are a good omen for Syria's revolution."

An AFP journalist in eastern Aleppo city said joyful residents were out on the streets and shooting celebratory gunfire into the air.

"Days ago, I was only thinking about how to get a bite to eat," said Ahmad Adna, a 46-year-old resident of eastern Aleppo.

"Now I'm more optimistic after the (rebel) Army of Conquest's advance. I hope today will be the last day of the siege."

Early yesterday, rebels and allied jihadists captured swathes of a military academy south of the city, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The monitor said more than 500 rebels and government fighters had been killed in the offensive since it was launched on Sunday, as well as 130 civilians.

They included at least seven civil-

ians killed yesterday in rebel shelling of the regime-held neighbourhood of Hamdaniyeh, according to both the Observatory and Syrian state news agency SANA.

The former Al-Nusra Front -- renamed the Fateh al-Sham Front after breaking from al-Qaeda -- said yesterday that rebels pushing out from inside Aleppo city had linked up with those on the outskirts.

Drone footage posted by the group online showed a series of explosions on the edges of Aleppo, followed by massive columns of billowing black smoke.

Abdel Rahman said the advance had left the regime forces "in a very difficult position despite Russian air support".

"This is an existential battle. Whoever wins it will win Aleppo," he said.

State media said the army launched a counter-offensive in the afternoon and deployed reinforcements to take on "thousands of terrorist fighters".

An army officer told state television that troops advanced in the areas seized by rebels and were inflicting "heavy losses" on them.

Also yesterday, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces alliance handed a major defeat to IS in Manbij.

The Britain-based Observatory said the SDF "took control of Manbij... and are combing the city in search of the last remaining jihadists".

Manbij had been a key transit point along IS's supply route from the Turkish border to Raqqa, the de facto capital of its self-styled "caliphate".

With backing from the US-led air coalition, the SDF launched its offensive on May 31 and entered the town less than a month later, but the assault was slowed by a jihadist fightback using suicide attackers and car bombs.

The Manbij Military Council -- a key component of the SDF -- said fighting was still ongoing.

"The battles are continuing near the centre of the town. We are in control of 90 percent of Manbij," spokesman Sherfan Darwish said.

Syria's conflict first erupted in March 2011 with anti-government

protests but has since evolved into a full-fledged war largely dominated by jihadist groups.

## Santu sees govt

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of land last year. Until June this year, 29 indigenous women and children fell victim to sexual violence.

Different government bodies in the name of development projects or "reserved forest" are forcing indigenous people to leave their land, Larma said.

He placed an 11-point demand that includes an announcement by the government of a roadmap to implementing the peace accord, effective steps to protect indigenous community's rights to land, education and the state recognition of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Addressing the function, noted columnist Syed Abul Maksud said the government should give a written explanation as to how much the accord had been implemented and why the remaining portion could not be implemented yet.

Bangladesh Adivasi Forum General Secretary Sanjeeb Drong and veteran left politician Pankaj Bhattachariya also spoke at the function.

Meanwhile, the Adivasi Forum and some other organisations have sketched out a four-day programme from today to mark the World's Indigenous Peoples day.

## Six die

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of the district.

The six passengers were missing on Friday afternoon when the boat, headed for Sadar Char of Kalukhali from Harinbaria of Pangsha upazila, with at least 20 passengers on board sank in the Padma near Harinbaria point.

All the passengers except the six had managed to swim ashore, said Nur-e-Alam Fakir, officer-in-charge of Kalukhali Police Station.

A team of divers from Rajbari fire station conducted the search and rescue operation.