



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."

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**Santu sees govt**

FROM PAGE 2

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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 Bhattacharya 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.

Manbij had been a key transit point along IS's supply route from the Turkish border to Raqa, 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 Darwishi said.

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