

## DEATH OF BANGLADESHI IN INDIA

## Wrong address holds back return of body

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

It has been five days since his ailing mother died at a hospital in India.

Eighteen-year-old Tokon Sarker of Boraipur in Dinajpur tried in every possible way to bring the body of his mother, Konika Rani Sarker, to Bangladesh.

But a wrong address in her death certificate issued by the hospital made things difficult for the teenager. Tokon was denied permission by the Indian immigration officials to take back his mother's body home.

Finally, Tokon and his family's wait is going to be over as he has secured necessary documents to bring the body back home.

Konika, who was suffering from heart conditions, and Tokon went to India through the Hili immigration check post in Hakimpur upazila on December 26 last year to take treatment in Bangalore, said Tokon's elder brother Khokon Sarker.

As the treatment was expensive, Tokon left her mother at their relative's home in Balurghat of South Dinajpur in West Bengal and returned home to arrange money, he said.

On February 12, Tokon went to India again to take his mother to

Bangalore, but Konika's condition worsened that night. She was taken to a hospital in Balurghat, but doctors there referred her to Malda Medical College and Hospital, Khokon said.

The 43-year-old was admitted to the hospital with a local address. She passed away the next morning.

Khokon claimed that the driver of the ambulance mentioned the local address while filling in the admission form at the hospital. He, however, could not tell his name.

The hospital authorities later issued a death certificate with the local address.

The Indian immigration officials denied Tokon the permission to take back his mother's body home as the death certificate had a local address, Tokon told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

Tokon sought help of the South Dinajpur district administration. Yesterday, he obtained a recommendation letter from the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata.

He would take the letter to the Malda hospital today and the hospital authorities would then issue a fresh death certificate. Tokon hoped he

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is welcomed by local Awami League leaders as she reaches Munich Marriott Hotel in Germany yesterday to join the Munich Security Conference 2017.

PHOTO: PID

## Teacher shortage hits pry schools

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country where more than 2.19 crore students are being taught by 3.22 lakh teachers. Of the total schools, 25,552 were nationalised in 2013.

Educationists have long been pointing out that shortage of teachers is a big hurdle to ensure quality education, and that the only way to overcome this is to recruit adequate qualified teachers.

Kohinur Khatun, headteacher of Ektarpur Government Primary School in Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah, and two other teachers are taking care of their 230 students for months now.

"We have seven posts for teachers, but we are just the three of us at the moment. We actually had four teachers, but one of them is now working in another school on deputation. This has made our job even more difficult," Kohinur told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked how they take care of everything, she said, "We are facing problems in carrying out academic activities, but we have no choice. The teachers take extra pressure as they need to hold classes. I also try my best to manage the classes."

She said the authorities repeatedly assured them of appointing teachers, but nothing actually happened. "Still my

school is doing well."

Riaz Parvez, president of Bangladesh Government Primary Headteachers Association, said it was extremely difficult to ensure quality education with only one or two teachers.

"Things get really difficult when the headteachers go to the district or upazila education offices for official purposes. During those times, only two or three assistant teachers have to look after everything," he said.

"Primary schools have four teachers on average. If one teacher attends training, falls sick or goes on leave, children's education suffers badly."

About the crisis of headmasters, he said the headteachers played a vital role in almost every school activity -- from managing daily schedule and the staff to implementing academic calendar to monitoring co-curricular activities.

The assistant teachers filling in for the post often find it difficult to make many decisions, he added.

Every year, a huge number of posts fall vacant temporarily, but for a significant period, because of training, retirement, resignation and death, said officials from primary and mass education ministry.

Besides, many female teachers take

maternity leave while others take leave for medical reasons or to perform hajj, it takes several months to fill the posts, they added.

Also, there was a long-standing wrangle over the qualification for teachers to be promoted to the post of headteacher. In fact, several cases have been filed over a government decision on recruiting headteachers, adding to the present crisis.

Contacted, Dr Md Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal, ndc, director general of the Directorate of Primary Education, said a process of recruiting teachers was underway.

"We're almost at the final stage of appointing around 4,000 teachers under freedom fighters' quota. Another 30,000 teachers will be recruited soon," he told The Daily Star.

He said the government was recruiting teachers from time to time, around 1.45 lakh in the last seven years alone. "But if we follow the student-teacher ratio as per our National Education Policy-2010, we will have to hire more teachers."

Under the 2010 policy, there should be one teacher for each 30 students by next year. As of December last year, the ratio is 1:38, according to the Directorate of Primary Education.

## Threat came from ex-US high official

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from the US State Department to keep Dr Yunus as the MD, she added.

"The then US ambassador had always threatened me coming to my office that the funding for the Padma bridge project would be stopped if Dr Yunus was removed from the post of managing director of Grameen Bank," she said at a reception accorded to her by the German chapter of the Awami League at Marriott Hotel in Munich.

"Hillary Clinton phoned me and exerted pressure on me in a similar way. Even, the US State Department thrice summoned my son Joy and told him that we would face trouble."

The US State Department officials had told Joy that Hillary would not take the matter so easily, said Hasina. "Convince your mother," she recalled what Joy had said quoting them.

"Why should such a person who received the coveted Nobel Prize be so much greedy for a simple post of a bank's managing director when the government offered him the post of adviser emeritus at the same bank?" the PM questioned.

The PM said as per the country's

existing law, one can hold the post of the MD of any bank up to the age of 60 years. "But he didn't quit that post although he crossed 70 and this was very much interesting. For that he continued lobbying."

The government did not remove Dr Yunus from his post, she added. "We tried to make him an adviser, but he did not accept it and went to a court upon advice from Dr Kamal Hossain. The court gave its verdict."

Hasina said the editor of a newspaper "was involved in this matter as well and they both tried to float a political party during the Army-backed 1/11 regime". "But people didn't respond to their initiative."

Citing a Canadian court's recent verdict that dismissed the graft allegation in the Padma bridge project, she said the truth will always prevail. "Now it has been proved that there had been no corruption in the Padma bridge project."

The premier said her government had taken the issue as a challenge and asked the World Bank to prove the allegation with proof, but it failed to do so. "Our government successfully faced the allegation of conspiracy with honesty."

She also mentioned that those who lost honour and dignity due to the Padma bridge bribe conspiracy must file cases against the WB for its role.

About the trial of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Hasina said she would be punished in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case if the court is convinced that there were proper evidence and documents to support the allegations.

On the BNP's threat that it would not allow the government to hold the next national election if Khaleda was punished, the PM said, "They [BNP] won't allow the election to be conducted just to save a thief. What type of attitude is this?"

About the newly formed Election Commission, she said one election commissioner was picked from the list of the Awami League while another one from the list of the BNP.

"But the BNP is not happy now. They always show a negative attitude," she added.

Leaders of AL and its associate bodies from across Europe, including Germany, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Finland, were present.



Samad with his wife at his house in Vagondanga village of Faridpur. Inset, he is pulling rickshaw and this is what the nature lover does every day to run his family.

PHOTO: STAR

## The guardian of nature

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Samad lives with five family members in two huts belonging to the Faridpur deputy commissioner's office. He has no land of his own. "From rickshaw riding I earn around 100 taka per day," he says. "With that I buy necessities for my family and at least one plant from the Faridpur Horticulture Centre."

His arboreal passion is so strong that others in the family may suggest the daily tree purchase has at times been prioritised over daily expenses. "His income isn't great," says wife Jorna Begum, 50, "and he has to cover the day-to-day needs for our family. Sometimes I forbid him to plant trees but he doesn't listen. Samad's love for trees is unstoppable."

From son Md Kutub Uddin, 30, the father finds less ambivalent support. "I've never told my father not to plant trees," says the son. "He does a good thing for society."

Neighbour Sofik Mollah, 30, is a witness to Samad's activities. "I've seen that every day he plants trees in different places in our area."

"Samad is a model citizen of our community," says another local, Md Abul Kalam Howlader, 55. "To see his good work truly inspires me."

"It's not only the trees," agrees neighbour Md Sakandar Ali, 60. "Samad is a very helpful man. One can ask of him anything and he will do his best to help without reservation. His is that rare type of personality that is so much needed in our society."

"There are so many big trees in our locality that Samad planted long ago," notes Vagondanga Bazar shopkeeper Md Firoj Sheikh, 45. "From my childhood I've seen him planting them."

Naturally, Samad is well-known at the Faridpur Horticulture Centre. "I've worked here for twenty years," says gardener Sohid Khan, "and I've seen that he comes here every day to buy a plant."

"Samad always collects plants from us," agrees the centre's director Kartik Chandro Chakrobarty. "I tell all my employees to help him select a plant when he comes."

"I like to plant fruit trees the most," says Samad. "Of them, jackfruit is my favourite. I plant trees because God told me to do that."

## Women in science

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astonishing 60 percent. In Jahangirnagar University, the percentage of female students in physics is about 35 percent. Elsewhere in the country in Rajshahi University, in the physical sciences, 26 percent students and 14 percent teachers are women. In the biological sciences, the percentages are even higher -- 47 and 16 respectively.

The notion that women do not do well in the physical sciences is a fallacy, according to senior professors and students of at least three of the public universities mentioned above.

They say more women are studying science at the university level in Bangladesh than in the US, Japan, the UK and other European countries. And they excel in physics, chemistry, maths and biological sciences securing top positions in both undergraduate and graduate levels. They are more focused than their male counterparts in research despite facing many barriers.

But they do not receive the recognition even after doing exceptionally well. According to a professor of physics at Dhaka University, women in scientific professions face discrimination in terms of recruitment, pro-

motion and retention. Barriers that limit women's entry to careers in science include lack of grants and funding, balancing family and career, deeply ingrained gender bias, scarcity of job openings, lack of mentors and role models, child care support, laboratory space and lack of confidence. Women have to work twice as hard as men to show that they are equally competent.

Why is this remarkable accomplishment of women in Bangladesh little known to the public? What has caused the false myth of girls' intrinsic unsuitability for science?

## Pakistan forces kill

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insurgent groups operating in Pakistan had encouraged hopes that their leaders were scattered.

"But this has led to a degree of complacency within our civil-military leadership that perhaps they have completely destroyed these elements, or broken their back," Gul said.

If so, that impression has been shattered in recent days.

At Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, the white marble floor was still stained with blood yesterday, and a pile of shoes and slippers was heaped in the courtyard, many of them belonging to the dead.

Outside, protesters shouted slogans at police, who they said had failed to protect the shrine.

"I wish I could have been here and died in the blast last night," a devastated Ali Hussain told Reuters, sitting on the floor of the shrine.

He said that local Sufis had asked for more security after a separate bombing this week killed 13 people in the eastern city of Lahore, but said: "No one bothered to secure this place."

Anwer Ali, 25, rushed to the shrine after he heard the explosion, and described seeing dead bodies and chaos as people fled the scene.

"There were threats to the shrine. The Taliban had warned that they will attack here, but authorities didn't take

it seriously," Ali said.

Sindh police chief AD Khawaja yesterday said that the death toll had reached 83 people with scores more wounded.

The attacks have once again raised questions over the influence of Islamic State in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of 190 million people that has tense relations with its neighbours India and Afghanistan.

In the past two years, Islamic State has worked to build its "Khorasan province" encompassing Afghanistan and Pakistan, often helped by local radicals.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's foreign policy adviser Sartaj Aziz blamed Jamaat-ur-Ahrar (JuA), a Pakistani Taliban faction that has been linked to Islamic State, for the attack.

Most of the other recent attacks have been claimed by factions of the Pakistani Taliban, which is waging its own fight against the government but whose ranks have also cooperated with and sometimes defected to Islamic State.

That has led some observers to question whether the growing prominence of Islamic State actually represents a new threat - since its fighters were already operating under different names to attack government, army and minority faith targets, among others.

However, the increasing number of attacks claimed by Islamic State has raised pressure on authorities to show they are capable of containing the renewed violence.

Islamic State also said it was behind another shrine attack, in southwestern Baluchistan province, that killed at least 52 people last November. In October, it said it carried out an assault on a police training college, killing 59.

The shrine attack has heightened tensions with Afghanistan, after Pakistani officials said some militant leaders took shelter over the border. The accusation echoes similar criticism from Kabul aimed at Islamabad.

In a telephone call with Afghanistan's national security adviser, Aziz expressed concern that JuA was operating from Afghanistan and that Kabul had failed to act against them, according to a statement from his office.

Border crossings with Afghanistan were closed yesterday and Afghan diplomats were summoned to military headquarters in Islamabad and given a list of 76 "most-wanted terrorists" that Pakistan demanded be captured and handed over, the army said.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani condemned the shrine attack on Twitter, calling Islamic State "a common enemy of Afghanistan & Pakistan".