

ROADS AND MUSINGS: AROUND THE PARLIAMENT

M H HAIDER

The national parliament building, Jatia Sangs Bhaban, is not just an iconic architectural edifice of Bangladesh; it is also a symbol of democracy. This week on 'Streets of Dhaka', we visit the roads surrounding this magnificent building designed by Louis I. Kahn, focusing on the thoughts and musings of commuters passing by the incredible feat of architecture which simultaneously is also the melting pot of Bangladesh politics.



PHOTO: TOUKIR AHMED TANVIE

Streets of DHAQA

It was drizzling since early morning. The rain would have been much appreciated if it visited on the weekend, when Nurst had not to go to the office. But today, she had to navigate through the dingy alley where she lived, dodging manholes in the rain, getting wet.

Today, on her way back home, Nurst had to take a walk: buses were overcrowded, rickshaws were scarce and CNGs charged a lot. A black umbrella over her head and a pair of fat worn out sandals under her feet were all to protect from the rain.

But Nurst did not mind walking on the roads surrounding Sangs Bhaban in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The area is beautiful and well-maintained. Joggers come in the morning for a breath of fresh air amidst the greenery. Many visit the place during evenings, to hang out for a lazy stroll, and a number of tucka-chopsthi stalls and small ice cream vans cater to them with simple yet delicious treats.

In the centre of all is of course the parliament house. The Jatia Sangs Bhaban complex, designed by the legendary Louis Kahn, is equally beautiful, with outstanding architecture project in the country. Completed in the early 1980s, the ambitious complex took around twenty years to build.

At one point of her walk, Nurst stopped and turned to face Sangs Bhaban. It stared at her with all its splendour and majesty. Nurst stared back. Triangles, circles, and other geometric figures and the grand design of the complex at large have always fascinated her.

Looking at Sangs Bhaban also somehow ignites the feeling that the parliament is bigger and greater than any one group or even its members themselves. It is, after all, a beacon of democracy. It is the house of the people. Remember Lincoln's saying, 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people'?

We are not very different from citizen like any of us. It is she represented in the parliament? What are her demands, requests, hopes, and aspirations about the country and about her city of Dhaka? Please make all the pavements neat and wide, like those around Sangs Bhaban. Make the streets of Dhaka smooth, not containing thousands of bumps, and definitely not water-logged. Can you

pave the ways with beautiful native trees and not with bonsai plants which we cannot relate to at all? How about adorning with red 'krishnochura'? The street near the parliament building looks so gorgeous! Brighter than the blazing sun. krishnochura provides a beautiful splash of red. Please don't tax us too much. Don't let the rich get away with their crimes. Don't forget us after the elections. Protect our dignity and democracy, things we as people are never willing to compromise. Let us live in peace, and not in fear and hopelessness — of violence, rape, corruption, and other demons.

We are not very different from you. What divides us? Is it the fence around the parliament complex, the fence behind which Nurst stood facing the building? On one side of the fence was Nurst, the people at large, and on the other side, the parliament — lawmakers, leaders, visionaries, the powerful. Is this really what separates us, a fence? A fence, lush green fields and a lake?

May or Corbyn?

FROM PAGE 1
Security was high as millions of voters cast their ballots in polling stations ranging from schools and public buildings to churches, pubs and even a windmill and a laundrette.

An exit poll at 2100 GMT will give an indication of the outcome, although final results will not emerge until early Friday.

Polling experts — many of whom failed to predict the historic referendum vote to leave the European Union last year — are now wary of calling the outcome.

But predictions of her expected margin of victory vary widely, and one shock forecast model even predicted May could lose her majority of 17 in the 650-seat House of Commons.

While May has been touring target seats around the country, delivering slogan-laden speeches, many of whom failed to predict the historic referendum vote to leave the European Union last year — are now wary of calling the outcome.

The 66-year-old vicar's daughter has presented herself as uniquely qualified for the Brexit talks and said her 68-year-old rival would be "alone and naked in the negotiating chamber".

"Get those negotiations wrong and the consequences will be dire," she said on a final campaign stop on Wednesday.

Corbyn, a veteran socialist who has never held ministerial office and defied the odds to win the Labour leadership two years ago, urged supporters in Glasgow to think big on his last day of campaigning.

"Wouldn't it be great if on Friday

we woke up to... a Labour government that will be a government for all of our communities across the whole of the country," he said.

It is the third time Britons have been called to vote since 2015, twice for a general election and once for the EU referendum, and voter fatigue appeared to be an issue among some.

"I have little confidence in anybody," said voter Simon Bolton, 41, in east London. "I think we lack quality in terms of who we can choose, it's very limited."

The election is May's first since taking office after Britons voted by 52 percent to leave the European Union after four decades of membership.

"I want another five years of stability, and a stronger hand in Brexit negotiations," said Dave, 29, in the London neighbourhood of Hackney.

"The main issue for me is staying along with Brexit," added Fabrizio, 42, in the wealthy London district of South Kensington.

But the Conservative government's record on cutting funding for health and education have also featured strongly in the campaign, to the benefit of Labour.

The Conservatives were also damaged by a manifesto plan for elderly care that would see some pay more.

"The cuts that have been happening, the austerity on education at the National Health Service, it weighs on my vote," said Saska, 39, a voter in north London.

The campaign was hit by a suicide bombing at a Manchester concert on May 22, which killed 22 people including seven children, followed by

Saturday's knife and van attack in central London, which left eight dead.

Campaigning was twice suspended in the aftermath of the attacks, which May blamed on "evil" Islamist ideology.

The Conservatives are traditionally strong on defence and security, and have sought to exploit Corbyn's anti-nuclear stance and his alleged past support for Irish paramilitaries.

But May also faced uncomfortable questions over fish to police numbers during her time as interior minister.

Security on election day was reviewed following the London attack, with the city's Metropolitan Police force implementing a "specialist and highly flexible operation" which it said could be deployed if needed.

May and Corbyn both cast their votes in their respective constituencies of Maidenhead, southern England, and Islington, north London.

In a frequently ill-tempered campaign, there was light relief as thousands of voters brought their pugs, poodles and other pets to the polling stations, posting their pictures on Twitter using the hashtag #dogspollingstations.

A final poll by YouGov on Wednesday put the Conservatives seven points ahead of Labour, while ICM gave May's party a 12-point lead over its rivals.

Such predictions stand in stark contrast to a Monday poll by Survation, which gave a narrow one-point gap.

Heartbroken dog waits 3 years

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home to be under constant special care, and the small pooch for itself all alone again. But he had no idea that the old lady was never coming back, so he spent the last three years waiting for her.

Neighbours told news reporters that, every day, Fu Shi could be seen waiting for his owner at the corner of the alley to her house. He would sit

there all day, until nightfall, and would then retreat back into the now-abandoned house that they shared. Touched by the animal's loyalty, one of the neighbours contacted an animal rescue, and told them his touching story. Apparently, Fu Shi survived on the food that the neighbours left for him ever since his owner went away, but they couldn't do anything about his sadness.

After giving Fu Shi a check up, a vet determined that he was 8-year-old, and suffering from intestinal worms. He was given a treatment aimed at a full recovery.

Fortunately, this heartbreaking story has a happy ending. Sina reports that after ample media coverage in South Korea and other Asian countries, Fu Shi has been adopted by his own family. He also has a new name now, Sky.

5 cases filed against Apan Jewellers for evading duty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs intelligence yesterday filed five separate cases against three owners of Apan Jewellers, including Dildar Ahmed Selim, father of Banani double rape prime accused Ahmed Shafat, for defrauding the state.

Dildar was accused in three cases, while each of his two brothers Gusez Ahmed and Azad Ahmed in one case under the customs act, Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID) Director General Mouloud Khan told The Daily Star last night.

The cases were lodged with the Dhaka Customs House. Commissioner of the customs house would adjudicate the cases, he said, adding that duty criminal cases were being prepared against them in connection with the seizure of 567.54kg of gold from Apan Jewellers five outlets.

On Sunday, the CIID confiscated 567.54kg of gold and 7,369 pieces of diamonds from five outlets of Apan Jewellers at Gulshan, Uttara, Mouchak and Shimitano Square as Apan Jewellers failed to produce valid documents for the ornaments.

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Raudha's father Athif marries Rajshahi woman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Mohamed Athif, father of Maldivian model Raudha Athif who was found dead in a medical college dormitory in Rajshahi, married a Bangladeshi woman yesterday.

A notary public registered the marriage with a Rajshahi court. The bride is Kanak Lata, 30, of Nawatha Pillapara in the district's Poba upazila, said lawyer Nurunnahar Babli.

Both Athif and Lata tied the knot for the second time. Athif and his first wife, Raudha's mother, had "got divorced" and Lata's first husband, who was a physician, died two years ago. Lata has a nine-year-old son, Nurunnahar said.

Athif, who introduces himself as a doctor in the Maldives, has been in Rajshahi after Raudha, a second year student of Islami Bank Medical College in Rajshahi city, was found

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Life-saving drug to get pricier

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patients with serious liver diseases because of its ability to contain excess bilirubin, a substance produced by the liver, and increase the volume of blood.

In case of acute nephrosis (a type of kidney disease), albumin solutions are sometimes given to patients to help reduce the edema (an abnormal build-up of serous fluid between tissue cells).

The drug is also used before blood transfusion in treating newborns with hemolytic disease, a disorder in which red blood cells are destroyed.

Maher Khan, son of a terminally ill patient in the capital, recalled how albumin helped his ailing mother fight kidney disease.

"This is already a pricey medicine that patients — rich or poor — need to buy to save their lives. This is ridiculous that the government is imposing VAT on such a life-saving drug."

He feared that a further increase in the drug price would erode people's access to the life-saving drug.

Samul Haq, son of a liver cirrhosis patient in the city, thinks the imposition of the 15 percent VAT on the drug would be an extra burden to bear.

His mother needs to be administered albumin sometimes even three times a day.

Mizanur Rahman, managing director of Shuvro Limited which

imports "Albutein" (of albumin genre), went to Dhaka Customs House to get his shipment of this life-saving drug released on Tuesday, four days after the budget was placed in parliament.

Officials there asked him to pay 15 percent VAT on top of 9 percent AT and AYV he has been paying for all these years for the imported drug manufactured by GRIFOLS, a world leader in producing blood-plasma products.

He argued with them, referring to the manufacturer's documents showing albumin as a life-saving drug. He also mentioned the finance minister's declaration of VAT-exemption for life-saving drugs. But it all went in vain.

Yesterday, he finally got the shipment released upon payment of 24 percent taxes (VAT, AT and AYV).

"There is no such tax on drugs anywhere in the world. In our neighbouring country India, Albumin is also imported from abroad and there is no VAT on it. If in price wars because of VAT imposition, cheaper alternatives would be smuggled in from India and the government would lose revenue," said Mizanur.

Dr Fahmida Naz, assistant professor at state-run Mugda Medical College Hospital in the city, said albumin is a costly medicine which is used mostly for critically ill patients.

An increase in its price would add to the financial burden of patients,

she added. According to medicine market sources, each 100ml bottle of albumin now costs up to Tk 7,400. But the price may go by Tk 1,000 or more unless the government exempts this life-saving drug from VAT.

The Drug Administration is supposed to provide the industry with a list of VAT-exempted life-saving drugs, but that has not happened yet.

In the meantime, importers of life-saving drugs like albumin are being asked to get their shipments released upon paying 15 percent VAT. Contacted, Barrister Jahangir Hossain, member of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), said the NBR would look into the issue.

Minimum Fitra

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essential items, said a press release of Islamic Foundation.

Fitra can be given either in cash or kind.

Maulana Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, senior Pesh Imam of Baitul Mukarram, presided over the meeting yesterday.

Members of the National Fata Fiqh Committee, Mufti Abdul Mannan, Muhammad Abdus Salam, Mufti Mohammad Abdullah, Sirajuddin Ahmed, Mufassir Mohammad Abu Saleh Patwari and Mufti Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan were present.

Shafat, Nayem

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All the five are now behind bars. Shafat is the son of Dildar Hossain Selim, one of the owners of Apan Jewellers.

Inspector Ismat Ara Ame of Women Support and Investigation Division of CID also the investigating officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka.

The court is expected to decide on June 19 whether it will accept the charges.

The charges against the five have been primarily proved through their confessional statements, witness accounts and circumstantial evidence, though no forensic evidence of rape was found, Ismat said in the charge sheet.

They should be brought under trial, she said.

Forensic tests, done about a month after the incident, did not find evidence of rape. Doctors said forensic evidence of rape is hard to find after 10 days.

During the one-month investigation, the IO recorded statements of 47 witnesses, including hotel staffers.

"We submitted the charge sheet against the five accused named in the first information report. Two of them, Shafat and Nayem, raped the two girls while the three others assisted them," Farida Yeasmin, deputy commissioner of Women Support Division, told The Daily Star.

"We also produced before the court all the evidence — digital evidence, biological evidence — that we managed to get," she added.

The police officer said they did not find any video of the rape, but could retrieve from the phone of the accused two short clips of torturing a male friend of the victims that night.

One of the victims earlier claimed that Billal, Shafat's driver, filmed the rape.

Invited to Shafat's birthday party, the two girls went to the Banani hotel around 9:00pm.

They victims wanted to return home as they felt "uncomfortable" at that atmosphere, but the accused asked them to wait until the birthday cake was cut.

When the victims' male friend and a girl with him wanted to leave the hotel after the cake was cut, Shafat and Nayem forcibly took the key of the male friend's car. He physically assaulted him and kept him confined in a room with the girl that came along with him, according to the charge sheet.

After midnight, Shafat raped the girlfriend while Nayem raped her friend in separate rooms, the charge sheet said.

The victims got acquainted with



Ahmed Shafat Nayem Ashraf

Shafat and Nayem at Picasso restaurant in the city through their friends Sakif, some 10 to 15 days before the incident.

Since their first meeting, Shafat often chatted with the plaintiff on the phone. Just a few days before the incident, he repeatedly asked her to attend his birthday party with her friends, according to the charge sheet.

Billal and Rahmat took the victims from their residence to Raintree hotel on a car that night.

The two victims went to the Banani Police Station to file a case more than a month after the incident.

But the police allegedly misbehaved with them and tried to brand them as "bad girls". Police finally took the case on May 6, two days after the two girls reported the incident.

The revelation of the alleged rape and reported police negligence sparked a huge outcry.

After their arrest, Shafat and Nayem confessed to the crime before a magistrate court. Sakif and Billal also gave confessional statements, police and court sources said.

Yesterday however, Shafat, Nayem and Billal submitted separate petitions seeking retraction of their confessional statements, saying police tortured them in custody and coerced them to give confessional statement.

The court kept the petitions with the case records.

Three more arrested over London terror

AFP, London

Three more people were arrested Wednesday in connection with London's weekend terrorist attack which left eight people dead, British police said.

Two men were arrested by police "supported by firearms officers" on a street in Hford, east London, the Metropolitan Police said in a statement.

A 27-year-old was detained on terrorism charges while the second, 33, was arrested on drugs charges.

The third suspect, 29, was apprehended while Nayem raped her friend in separate rooms, the charge sheet said.