

ROADS AND MUSINGS: AROUND THE PARLIAMENT

M H HAIDER

The national parliament building, Jatiya Sangsab 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.

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

Today, on her way back home, Nusrat 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 flat worn out sandals under her feet were all to protect from the rain.

But Nusrat did not mind walking on the roads surrounding Sangsab Bhaban in Shere-Bangla Nagar. The area is beautiful and well-maintained. Joggers come in the morning for a breath of fresh air amidst the greenery. Motorists during the day, however, had to haggle out for a lazy stroll; and a number of fuchka-chopoti 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 Jatiya Sangsab Bhaban complex, designed by the legendary Louis Kahn, is arguably the most outstanding architecture project in the country. Completed in the early 1980s, the ambitious complex took around twenty years to build.

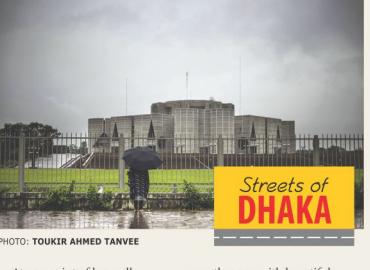


PHOTO: TOUKIR AHMED TANVEE

At one point of her walk, Nusrat stopped and turned to face Sangsab Bhaban. It stared at her with all its splendour and majesty.

Nusrat stared back. Triangles, circles, and other geometric figures and the grand design of the complex at large have always fascinated her.

Looking at Sangsab Bhaban also somehow ignites the feeling that the parliament is bigger and greater than any one group or even its members. It makes – it is, after all, a beacon of democracy. It is the ultimate home of the people.

Remember Lincoln's saying, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."

Nusrat is just another ordinary citizen like any of us. 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 Sangsab 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 democratic things we as a people are now willing to compromise on. Let us live in peace, and not in fear and helplessness – 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 Nusrat stood facing the building?

On one side of the fence was Nusrat; 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?

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Streets of DHAKA

PHOTO: TOUKIR AHMED TANVEE

Life-saving drug to get pricier

FROM PAGE 1

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

In case of acute nephritis (a type of kidney disease), albumin infusions 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 pricy 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.

Samuel 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 him.

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 gen), 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 AIT and AIT 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 that has not happened.

In the drug there is no VAT on its price to the life-saving drug.

Samuel 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 him.

Dr Fahmida Naz, assistant professor at state-run Muslim Medical College Hospital in the city, said albumin is another drug which is used mostly for critically ill patients.

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

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.

As 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-heavy speeches to small groups of hand-picked activists, Corbyn has drawn large crowds to open-air rallies.

60-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 choose to be our leaders."

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 getting 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 fared 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 and the National Health Service, it weighs on my vote," said Saskia Green, 39, a university student in London.

The campaign 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-war stance and his alleged past support for Irish paramilitaries.

But May also faced uncomfortable questions over cuts 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 as 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 #dogsatpollingstations.

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

FROM PAGE 20

home to be under constant special care, and the small pouch found 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 reports 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 had 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 years old, and suffering from intestinal worms. He was given a treatment and made a full recovery.

Fortunately, this heartbreak 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 a loving family. He also has a new name now, Sky.

Shafat, Nayem

FROM PAGE 1

All the five are now behind bars.

Shafat is the son of Dildar Hossain Selim, one of the owners of Apun Jewellers.

Inspector Imot Arun Ara of Women Support and Investigation Division of DMP 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 probed through their confessional statements, witness accounts and circumstantial evidence, though no forensic evidence of rape was found. Ismot 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 a long time.

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

"We submitted the charge sheet against all 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 Yesmin, 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" in 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 and physically assaulted him and kept him confined in a room with the girl that came along with him, according to the charge sheet.

Two men were arrested by police "supported by firearms officers" on a street in Ilford, 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 at a home in the same area of the British capital. He was also arrested on "suspicion of the preparation of terrorist acts", police said.



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 the police to Raintree hotel on the night of the incident.

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

But the police allegedly mishandled 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 arrests, Shafat and Nayem were brought to the court 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 forced 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.

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