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PHOTO: PON CHANGMA

“When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.”  
— Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

**SNAPSHOT**

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Shoaib Hossain, a 26-year-old madrasa teacher, was well-thought-of by his neighbours for his honest and polite character. He was also venerated as a young *hafiz* (a person who has memorised the entire holy Quran) by the inhabitants of Charigram village under Singair upazila of Manikganj district. The son of a solvent farmer, Shoaib’s life was prosperous and peaceful. However, everything changed when Shoaib met Rafiza, an 18-year-old Rohingya woman who, with eight of her family members, took refuge in Singair to escape starvation and disease at Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar. Shoaib met Rafiza at his teacher Maolana Tajul Islam’s home, where Rafiza and her family members took shelter and were treated warmly as *muhajirs* (Muslim immigrants).

“Shoaib fell in love with Rafiza at first sight. When he learned about her family’s sufferings, he became very sympathetic. He informed me of his

“Shoaib was so heartbroken that he did not come to the madrasa for three days. I met him at his home and he looked devastated. Then suddenly one day, I heard that Shoaib had disappeared from the village,” says Maolana Tajul.

Travelling 264 miles to Kutupalong refugee camp at Cox’s Bazar, Shoaib tracked down Rafiza amidst 500,000 Rohingya refugees living in the overcrowded makeshift shelters. Defying the government ban, Shoaib married Rafiza at a mosque located inside the camp. The marriage was conducted by the imam of the mosque following only religious procedures and without any marriage registration. Shoaib even returned to his village with his newlywed wife, covering her under a *burka* to conceal her identity. However, the news of Shoaib’s secret marriage soon reached Singair police station. Law enforcers raided Shoaib’s place, but the couple escaped. Since September 24, 2017 this couple has been on the run and law

enforcers have been searching for them all over the country.

Marriage between Bangladeshi nationals and Rohingya refugees is not something new. Since the first major Rohingya influx in 1978, thousands of refugees have married Bangladeshi nationals and settled in Bangladesh. However, in 2014, Bangladesh’s Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs issued a ban on marriage between nationals and Rohingya refugees, stating that “strict punitive actions shall be taken against the marriage registrars who will register the marriage of any Rohingya in Bangladesh.” During the recent and renewed influx of Rohingya refugees, the ministry once more reiterated the ban and warned all marriage registrars across the country.

This ban was first proposed by Cox’s Bazar district administration in 2013. Ali Hossain, District Commissioner of Cox’s Bazar district, says, “Rohingya refugees come to Bangladesh without any

passport or identity cards. So when they marry a Bangladeshi, they get Bangladeshi voter ID cards and become permanent citizens of the country. The ban has been issued to stop this practice.” He also admits that it is very difficult to stop these weddings as most of them are done in secret through mutual understanding of the couple. “To prevent such weddings, we have informed local politicians of the ban. They have been asked to inform the local police station if they get any information about such marriages.”

The ban was imposed without taking any decision about the fates of the thousands of existing Rohingya-Bangladeshi cross-national marriages. “If we get evidence that a Rohingya is married to a Bangladeshi citizen, we shall take legal steps. For instance, after arresting Rafiza and Shoaib, we might prosecute them under the Foreigner’s Act of 1946,” argues Hossain.

Experts have criticised this ban, claiming that it violates Bangladesh’s own laws and is contrary to all international human rights accords to which Bangladesh is a party. Former Law Minister Barrister Shafique Ahmed

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# THE MARRIAGE CONUNDRUM

*Can the Bangladeshi government ban cross-national marriage between Rohingyas and Bangladeshis?*

**MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN**

decision to marry Rafiza the day after he met her. I didn’t forbid him because I didn’t know about the ban and I thought Rafiza would find a permanent shelter and safety with Shoaib,” says Maolana Tajul. However, on September 14, Shoaib’s dream of marrying Rafiza was shattered on the very day he started preparations for the wedding. The Singair police station had already been informed about the Rohingya family and the district administration deported Rafiza’s family to Kutupalong refugee camp at Cox’s Bazar the same day. The local police also informed Shoaib that the government had banned marriage between Bangladeshi nationals and Rohingya refugees and it would be impossible for Shoaib to marry Rafiza.



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

## MAILBOX

Please note we have a new email address:  
starweekendtds@gmail.com



PHOTO: AFP

### Living the genocide

The series of harrowing events that the Rohingyas are facing is extremely disheartening. They are living in miserable conditions and suffering from various diseases. A huge number of Rohingyas are teeming in Cox’s Bazar and more are expected to come if the situation doesn’t improve in Rakhine. What is lamentable is that most of the world and organisations such as the UN are working on this issue yet they are

failing. On humanitarian grounds, we are receiving aid from different countries and doing our part as much as possible. Presently, the influx is way higher than the aid received so many children and the elderly are not getting enough nutrition as required. All we can hope for is an amicable solution to this ever-growing crisis.

Rafid Alam  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka



PHOTO: ABM SAROWAR ALAM

### Bringing back 'Jatayu' from the clutches of 'Ravana'

It’s great news for nature lovers that the number of White-rumped Vultures, a scavenger, is no longer declining. The initiative demands appreciation and support from all of us. They are doing something not only for nature but also for all human beings. As the article shows, this great bird, a carcass eater, is killed by diclofenac in the system of domestic animals. Our government, though after delays, has taken some initiatives for this creature including establishing safe zones, forbidding diclofenac and ketoprofen, and

passing the Vulture Conservation Action Plan etc.

But the government can do more to support conservationists, by adding literature in school books for children to know about endangered species. Our country’s birds and animals, though available today, may very soon be rare in the near future as once, these vultures were abundant too. Creating awareness among people of all walks is necessary. And there are some other species which need to be protected as well and this is a task to be shared for our own benefit. Thanks to *Star Weekend* for publishing this informative article.

Jayed Sheikh  
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University of Barisal

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.

**JUST A HOOK TO SOME LOVED ONES' SAFETY TO US**

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