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(The Daily Star)

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Editor (Star Weekend)

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Published by the Editor from

Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon

Industrial Area, Dhaka on

behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52

Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000.

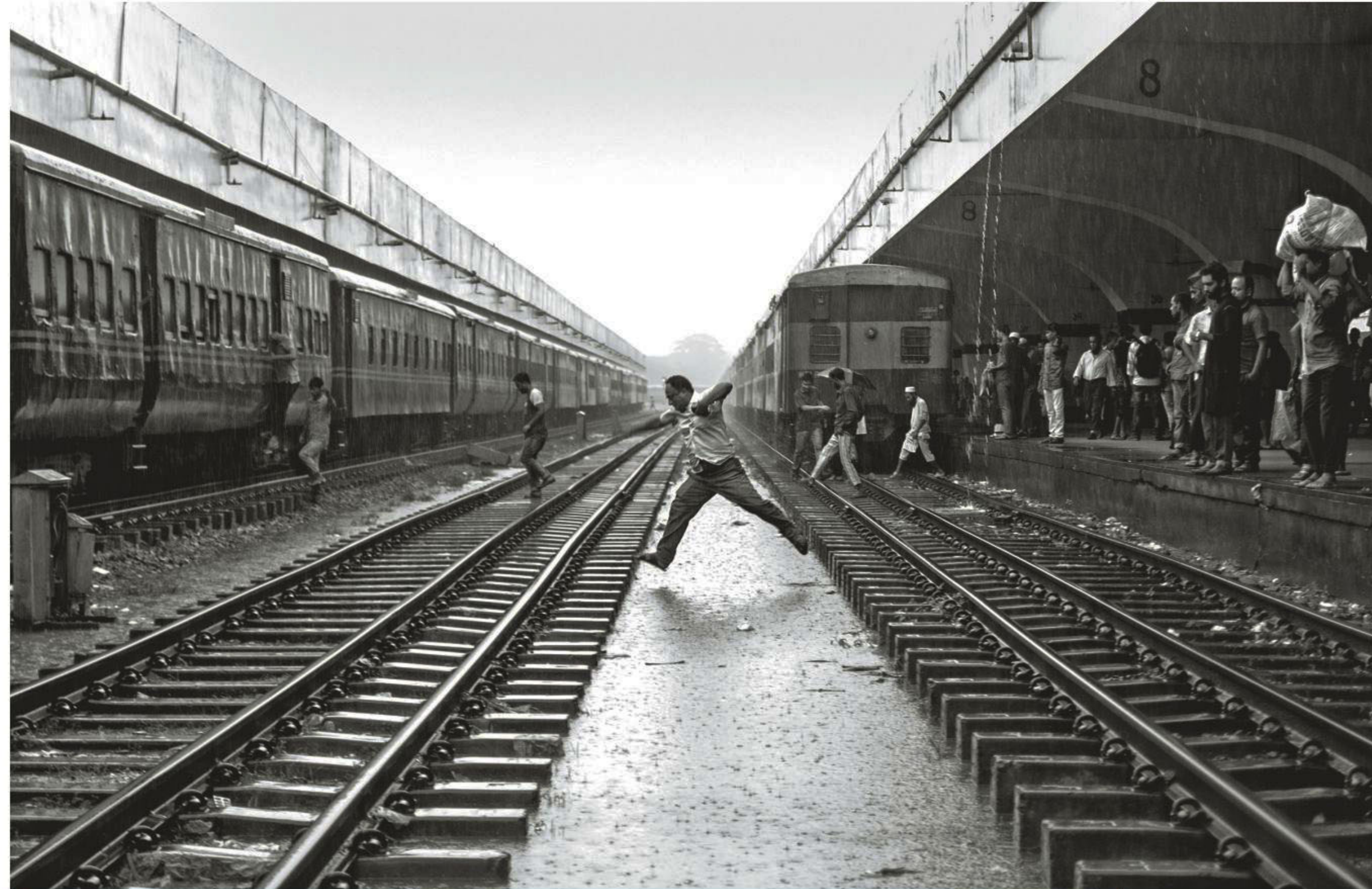


PHOTO: TANMAY SARKAR AKASH

“There are times when life is planned and then there are moments when the only thing you can do is run, jump and hop mindlessly, until you get what you want.” — Anonymous

SNAPSHOT

SPECIAL FEATURE

In the first part of this series the Star Weekend revealed, how huge amounts of waqf (an endowment made by a Muslim to religious, educational or charitable cause) properties in Bangladesh have been completely grabbed by illegal occupiers. We found that 122,294 acres of endowed estates are now under illegal occupation and Bangladesh government's waqf administration has lost control over 90 percent of these estates.

Widespread corruption, weak legal framework, severe shortage of manpower and sheer negligence of the state to maintain the endowed properties have completely paralysed this resourceful model of social entrepreneurship which once developed institutions such as the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and Dhaka Medical College.

Due to widespread corruption and extremely slow legislative process, the practice of waqf is diminishing in Bangladesh. For instance, waqf administration filed a case in 1964 to restore the waqf properties of Khan Jahan Ali's historic shrine in Bagerhat. The case was finally solved in 2013. It took 49 years to get the verdict which ultimately stated that the waqf properties belong to Khan Jahan Ali Shrine Waqf estate.

However, cases regarding the 12,500 acres Ainuddin-Faizunnesa Waqf estate, the biggest waqf estate in Dhaka Metropolitan city, are yet to be resolved. The first case to rescue the estate's property was filed in 1944. There are still several pending cases on this precious estate and the waqf administration's drive to rescue the properties is uncertain due to the unsolved cases. “Very few people come to register for new waqf properties...I should say nobody. In fact, we are struggling to maintain the existing waqf properties and restoring the old ones,” states Waqf administrator Shahidul Islam.

Again, the waqf administration also does not have any precise records of the pending cases. According to Islam, there are around 421 pending cases in different courts. On the contrary, another official of the administration anonymously says that the actual number of pending cases is more than 2000.

In fact, the waqf administrator says, “Some of the cases were filed in the British period. Some papers of those cases could not be retrieved from Kolkata after the partition. This is why, many cases regarding waqf estates have been stalled and are not progressing at all.” However, the office could not give any exact estimation regarding the

WAQF REVIVING ITS TRUE SPIRIT

(Ending of a two-part series)

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

progress status of the unresolved cases.

Barrister Mohammad Shazzadul Islam, advocate at Supreme Court, says, “As far as I know, more than 400 cases are pending only in the High Court. So, the actual number should be much higher...there are several reasons behind this extreme procrastination. In most cases, the illegal occupiers are politically powerful people. They bribe government officials, prepare fake documents and employ politically influential advocates in the court.”

“On the other hand, the archiving system of the waqf administration office is very poor and traditional. Many old documents have been completely destroyed. The officials also don't know the whereabouts of most of the documents. As a result, we face difficulty to produce necessary documents in the court which also delays the legal procedures,” adds Barrister Islam.

In fact, in the archive room thousands of documents can be seen stacked on the open shelves without any protective covering. Many documents were seen to be eaten up by termites and are no longer suitable for any official use.

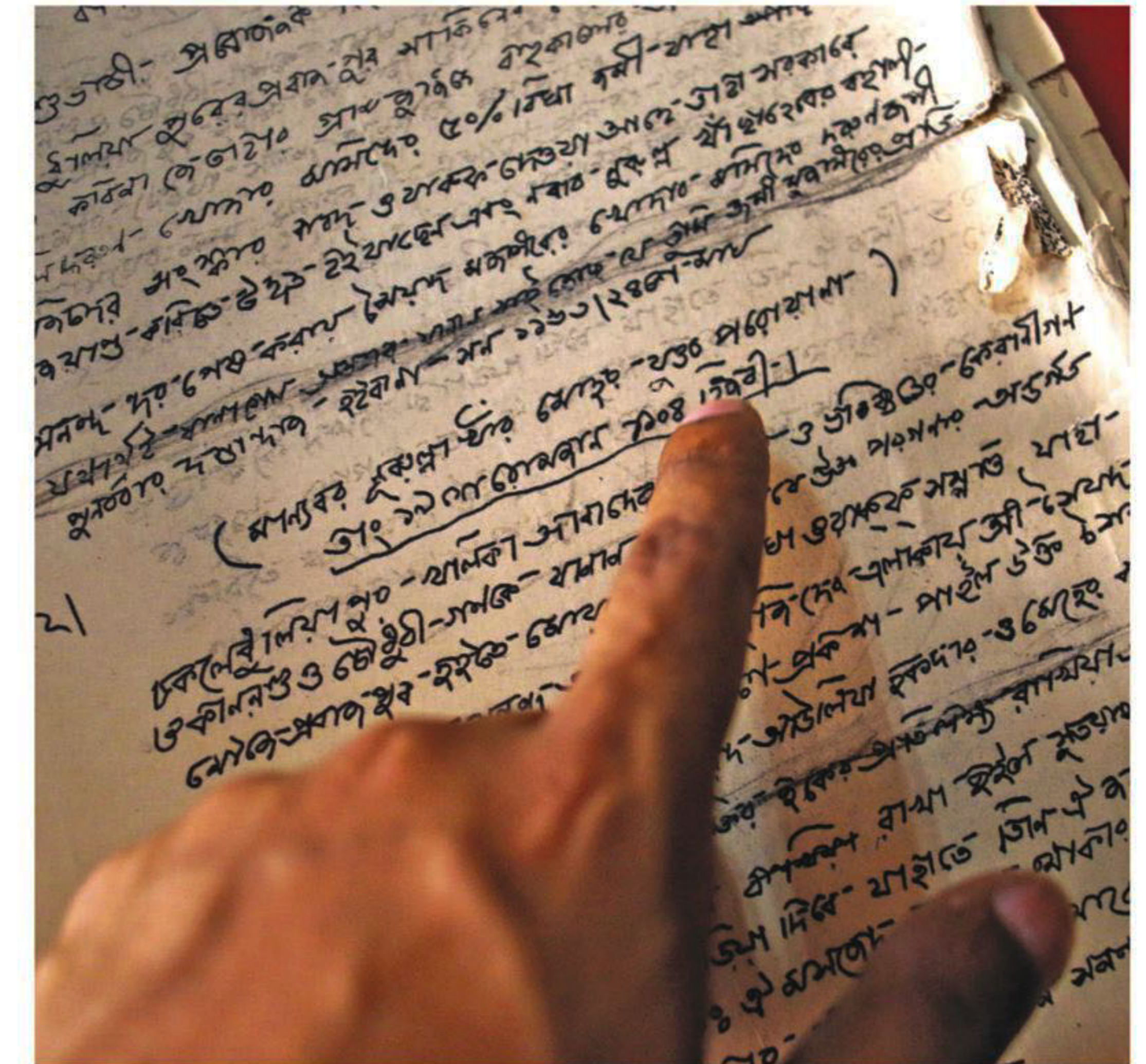
While most of the precious endowed properties have been illegally grabbed and its valuable papers yellowing and rotting in the bureaucratic archives, there are some waqf initiatives which are still trying to maintain the original essence of waqf amidst such a deadlocked situation. In fact, by ensuring transparency and accountability in the management system, these initiatives have set an example of how waqf can serve a developing country like Bangladesh.

One of these initiatives is Islamic Development Bank-Bangladesh Islamic

Solidarity Educational Waqf (IDB-BISEW). From the income of the endowed IDB building and the computer market housed in the building, this waqf initiative spends USD 4 million every year for vocational training, IT (information technology) scholarship course and technical education in madrasas.

To run the waqf project, IDB-BISEW has formed a committee of mutawallis (trustees) with three high ranking officials from the Islamic Development Bank and three high ranking officials from the Bangladesh Government.

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This waqf settlement deed belongs to Nurullah Khan Waqf property which Nurullah Khan, a Mughal officer, endowed in 1693 AD
PHOTO: KAZI TAHSSIN AGAZ APURBO

“Waqf funds can also significantly contribute to bring sustainable economic development in the impoverished part of our society if it can be disbursed in an organised and transparent way.”

MAILBOX

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

Waqf: A forgotten legacy

As one of the youngest sons of one of the heirs (called the nine sharers) of the Dhaka Nawab family, I thank your correspondent Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan for this story last week. Just recently, when family members on my mother's side went to visit the waqf state in Savar, they were severely abused and chased away by the people living there on disclosure of their family's identity. The Nawabs of Dhaka, even when in power, donated not only a huge amount of goods and money to Dhaka City including electricity and water supply but also donated to the holy city of Mecca during severe flooding there in the early years of the last century. We must remember heritage is not only our pride but good for tourism.
Syed Raiyan
IUB, Bashundhara
Dhaka



PHOTOS: STAR FILE



The Unremembered

I was surprised after reading the article titled “Remembering World War One's Army of Bengali Workers” published in the Star Weekend two weeks ago. It is certainly a timely and praiseworthy article. History is the reflected image of a country, which evaluates what happened

to our past. It was about some forgotten people and their contributions in the World Wars. I enjoyed reading the issue since it gave me information that had almost been lost. I didn't know that, along with the Indians, Bengali people also served tremendously in the wars. However, the fact is that very few people know about their contributions. There is

also no sculpture or some sort of memorial to commemorate them or any particular day by which we can at least pay tribute to the Bengali workers of the first World War. If we cannot document our past properly, it will in some way or the other jeopardise our future.
Khayrul Alam
Chaukbazar, Dhaka

বিশ্ব বলেছিলো- পদ্মা সেতু ‘সম্ভব না’
একজন প্রধানমন্ত্রী আর ১৬ কোটি বাঙালি বলেছিলাম-
‘কেন না!’

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