

Reimagining Comilla

Couple's self-motivated mural initiative brightens city streets

KHALID BIN NAZRUL with ANDREW EAGLE

A far cry from today's bustle, the Comilla town that Zonayed Mustafa grew up in was calm, clean and leafy. Ponds were translucent, songbirds plentiful. While the artist can't literally re-create yesteryear, he does let boyhood memories guide him as, with his wife Janvi Tonni's help, he designs the latest mural to be painted on a wall at a street side rubbish dump. Of their own accord the couple are reimagining Comilla, bringing striking and vibrant colours to precisely the places where one might least expect to see them.

"Comilla has become so crowded," Zonayed laments. "Many places stink of garbage. It's the exact opposite of how it was. Through our murals I hope to share sweet recollections of a past Comilla. I hope to take people closer to nature, to imagine again sunlit fish in sparkling ponds or the aroma of blossoms that once wafted from roadside trees."

Zonayed first shared the idea to use the walls of rubbish collection points as his canvas with an uncle, freedom fighter Nazmul Hasan Pakhi, who last April introduced the artist to Monirul Haque Shakku, the city's mayor.

"The mayor gave verbal permission to proceed with our project and he also covered some of the cost of the paint," Zonayed says.

The couple began by painting walls in Thakurpara before moving on to the Fire Brigade Pond area. With five murals already finished, artistic efforts are currently focused around Nanua Dighirpar.

"It's not easy to complete each mural,"



Zonayed Mustafa with his wife Janvi Tonni beside a mural painted by them on the wall of a rubbish dump in Comilla city.

PHOTO: STAR

Zonayed says. "We have to stand and work beside putrid garbage. We do wear masks but they can't hide the entire stench. Often we work at night and sometimes it takes us the whole night to complete one. But when we see the finished result, we forget all discomfort."

Zonayed, who also directs television commercials, has a fine arts background from Dhaka University. But to name the

ultimate inspiration for his artistic pursuits he goes back further still. "It was my mother Hasina Chowdhury who encouraged me to learn to paint and to play the guitar," he says.

Tonni meanwhile is a business administration graduate who has gained an appreciation for art from her husband. "I've found that really enjoy painting," she says.

"I am proud to be an artist," Zonayed

says, "I dream that this project can be replicated right across the country. But paint is expensive; to complete a single mural including paying for wall-cleaning labour and paint costs at least Tk 10,000. It's not easy for us to bear such expense. We do it because we hope to encourage a renewal of art and culture in Comilla. We do it, quite simply, as an expression of patriotic love."

Fury of Madhumati river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Two places on the only road between Bir Sreshtho Shaheed Lance Naik Munshi Abdur Rouf Memorial Library and Museum in Kamarkhali union under Madhukhali upazila were washed away by the Madhumati river 10 days ago.

As a result, thousands of people in that area are suffering a lot during the rainy season.

Several villagers told this correspondent on Sunday that the road from Kamarkhali bazar to Rouf Nagar village has been devoured in Gondokhali and Rouf Nagar villages.

The homesteads of Yunus Mridha, Ayub Mridha, Siraj Mollah, Salam

Mridha and Taslima Khanom were devoured by Madhumati river at Gondokhali area, and some families are under threat of erosion.

Trinath Kumar Deuri of Dayarampur village said about 31,000 people of 10 villages, including Gaueshpur, Char Gaueshpur, Char Kusumdi, Jarjar Nagar, Bijoyagar, Dayarampur, Nowdapara and Rouf Nagar, are suffering a lot as they have to go to their destinations through different routes.

Md Manik Khan, a rickshaw-van puller, said it is very tough to pull a rickshaw-van on the road because if the puller is a little careless he can fall into the river at any time.

Abdur Rahman of Gondokhali village said they told the local public

representatives about their suffering, but no steps have been taken as yet to prevent erosion.

Abida Sultana said the Madhumati river has been devouring land for seven years in the area but no step has been taken to stop it.

"I am facing a great problem as local people asked me to protect the villages from erosion. I have requested the Water Development Board (WDB) authorities to take steps, but they have not done so yet," said Kamarkhali Union Parishad Chairman Jahidur Rahman.

"We have prepared a design and we will submit a project to the ministry based on the design," said district WDB Executive Engineer Sultan Mahmud.



The lone road to go to Bir Sreshtho Shaheed Lance Naik Munshi Abdur Rouf Memorial Library and Museum in Kamarkhali union under Madhukhali upazila was washed away by the Madhumati river 10 days ago. The photo was taken on August 5.

PHOTO: STAR

Militants trying to regroup

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thwart the "regrouping" attempt by radical groups.

"There is threat, but we are aware of it and working on it in full swing. So, their activities have been minimised," (Additional Deputy Inspector General (Intelligence & Special Affairs) Md Moniruzzaman told The Daily Star.

The targets of the terrorists are as usual.

"The militants are planning to kill popular, progressive and secular Awami League leaders, progressive writers, thinkers and bloggers, foreigners working in development projects and minorities," states the home ministry letter, a copy of which this newspaper has obtained.

Besides, the members of the law enforcement and intelligence agencies working to combat militancy could also be their target, it added.

The letter issued in the first week of May this year also mentioned that so-called jihadists from Bangladesh, now busy in fighting in Syria and its adjacent territories, have close links to these activities

and plots.

A number of police officials, however, claimed that they have already arrested some of the militants, including "Neo-JMB" leader Akram Hossain Khan Niloy, and several others who had communications with the jihadists abroad through apps.

Niloy, also the mastermind of an attempted attack on a National Mourning Day programme at Dhanmondi 32 on August 15 last year, was arrested on March 22 this year.

Police officials claimed that they have weakened the militant outfits with the arrests in March.

About the formation of a single platform, a counterterrorism official said they got intelligence that the militant groups are trying to regroup and form a single platform but they are yet to get any concrete evidence in this regard.

Amid police claims that the strength of militant outfits reduced significantly, progressive writer Shahjahan Bachchu was shot dead

in Munshiganj on June 11 this year. The murderer, who turned up on two motorbikes, also set off explosives.

Investigators initially thought that two militant organisations -- mainstream JMB and pro-al Qaeda Ansar al Islam -- jointly murdered Bachchu. Finally, they came to know that it was an act of the JMB alone.

A prime suspect in the murder, Abdur Rahman -- the military wing commander of JMB's Dhaka division -- was killed in a shootout with police several days after he was arrested on June 24.

Seeking anonymity, an official of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit said they already got details of several JMB members involved in Bachchu's killing and several robberies.

Besides, another intelligence agency in a special report in May said a top leader of a faction of Gonojagoron Mancha might also be a target of the militants as the mainstream JMB had been monitoring his activities.

Ancient

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And by using those same findings, researchers might be able to understand whether there could be life in other solar systems.

The research confirms that important organic materials appear to have been formed at the beginnings of our solar system. By looking at the isotopic signature of the compounds within the rocks, they can find the "fingerprints" of key elements -- including carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and sulphur, all of which are both central to the beginnings of life and have been found inside those rocks.

If such organic materials can be formed through relatively simple processes in the early solar system, then they might be widespread elsewhere, too. That might mean that life could be found more often in other planetary systems than we had expected, the researchers suggest.

The kind of ancient meteorite studied by the University of Manchester scientists are incredibly rare: known as carbonaceous chondrites, they comprise only a few percent of all known meteorites. And they are an incredibly important and unusual way of looking back at the very beginnings of the solar system that surrounds us, since the Earth tends to wipe out such records.

"Earth is a dynamic planet -- processes such as plate tectonics and erosion have erased most of the early Earth records," said Romain Tartèse of Manchester's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences.

Attraction Raja Babu



Khairul Islam and his daughter Eti Akter fondly tend this giant bull at their Baraid village home in Saturia upazila of Manikganj.

PHOTO: STAR

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

A 2094-kg (52 maunds) bull named 'Raja Babu' is drawing visitors from far and near to Baraid village in Saturia upazila under the district.

"The three-year-and-10-month-old bull weighs 2094 kg. It is six feet and six inches high, eight feet long, its chest fence is ten feet, neck fence five feet, face three feet and two inches, the horns are one foot long and the tail is four feet and three inches long," said Saturia Upazila Livestock Officer Dr Md Salim Jahan.

"So far as I know, this is the biggest bull in the country," said Salim, who measured the bull on July 27.

Two years ago, Khairul Islam bought the then 18-maund bull for Tk 4.80 lakh from Barahirchar in Savar, he said during this correspondent's visit on July 25.

"After rearing it for one year, the bull weighed 39 maunds during the last Eid-ul-Azha. I did not sell it although I was offered Tk 14.50 lakh. The bull now weighs 52 maunds and I expect to sell it for Tk 22 lakh before the Eid," he said.

Khairul's wife Porishkar Begum said, "The bull is bathed four to five times a day. An electric fan is run to keep it cool. If the electricity is off, it has to be fanned

with hand fan. There are three other bulls and four cows in our farm."

"The bull eats foods worth around Tk 2,000 daily. These include bananas, malta, orange, chira, molasses, hay and grass. The bull looks like a king and eats like a king. That is why I named it Raja Babu," said Khairul's daughter Eti Akter.

"After passing the SSC, I took three months' training on 'livestock, poultry rearing, primary health care, fisheries and agriculture' at Savar's Sheikh Hasina Youth Development Center in 2017," she said.

People from different areas including Dhaka come to see the cow.

"I never saw such a big cow," said Imran Khan of Singha-ragi village in Delduar upazila of Tangail, who has a small cattle farm.

"I have uploaded photos and video footage of that cow on my Facebook group (fb.com/gorurhaat) and on YouTube Goru Hat so that the farmer can sell the cow from his house at a fair price," said Aminul Islam, administrator of the Facebook group.

Before Eid-ul-Azha two years ago, Khairul sold his 34-maund cow 'Lakshmi Sonar' for Tk 14 lakh at Gulshan in the capital.

'Boma Mizan' held in India

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Bangladesh by bringing him back," Mohibul added.

Asked about bringing Mizan back, he said the police headquarters would look into the procedure.

Mizan's arrest has also brought relief among the Indian law enforcers, as he was wanted in the Burdwan blast case in West Bengal on October 2, 2014 and masterminded the Bodh Gaya blast in January 19 this year.

The NIA in the release said Mizan is the top leader of JMB in India.

Mizan was arrested following information squeezed from Abdul Karim alias Chhota, 19, of Elizabad district in Murshidabad and Mustafizur Rehman Shaheen alias Tuhin, 37, of Birbhoom of West Bengal who were arrested by NIA on October 3, the statement read.

They were arrested on charge of the blast in the Buddhist pilgrimage centre Bodh Gaya in eastern state of Bihar, reports our Delhi correspondent.

Karim and Mustafizur were hiding in a camp of Bangla-speaking labourers in Malapuram district of Kerala after allegedly planting explosives in Bodh Gaya. "Incriminating" materials including circuit design of improvised explosive devices (IED) have been recovered from

them, the NIA said.

According to sources in Bangladesh law-enforcement agencies, "Boma Mizan" is JMB's explosives expert who along with some other JMB operatives received training from RSO arms experts in a camp near Myanmar border in 2002.

Executed JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman sent them for the training. In exchange for the firearms lessons, JMB trained Rohingyas to improvise and set off bombs.

Officials from police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and some intelligence agencies of Bangladesh quizzed Mizan, who was arrested by Rab on May 14, 2009.

Mizan and the others, who took training from RSO, later trained up JMB operatives across the country, said investigators. Another investigator said Mizan had received explosives training from JMB bomb expert Shakil alias Mollah Omar and later taught around 25 JMB operatives how to make and detonate bombs. Omar was killed in a shootout with Rab and three of his family members in explosions meant to resist a raid on their hide-out in Comilla on March 13, 2006.

He was trained by Shaekh Rahman, who had received training in explosives

from militant organisations in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Earlier on February 23, 2014, in a well-orchestrated plan, an armed gang ambushed a prison van and snatched three convicted JMB militants including Boma Mizan in Trishal upazila of Mymensingh. A police constable was killed as the gang of 10-15, all masked, opened fire and hurled crude bombs at the prison van at Signboard point of Aminabari area.

Since then Mizan was hiding in India. The other two convicted JMB leaders were Rakib Hasan Russell alias Hafez Mahmud and Salauddin Ahmed alias Salehin.

However, police arrested Russell within five hours. He was later killed in a shootout with the law enforcers.

Salauddin, who was awarded death sentence, later declared himself as the chief of the mainstream JMB. He is also believed to have been hiding in India.

The investigators believe they will now be able to trace Salauddin after interrogating Mizan, who has been found guilty and awarded different terms of jail sentences by three courts.

Less flow of Indian cows

Jessore farmers say local cows are enough to meet demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Bringing of cows from across the border through different points at Benapole has almost stopped as Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel are not allowing anybody to go to India for the purpose.

The cows entering Bangladesh are brought by the Indians to the zero point at the border. The cows are taken to a place where there is no barbed wire in the name of grazing them and pushed into Bangladesh.

A small number of cows, however, are coming through Benapole's Putkhali, Agrabhulot, Daulatpur and Goga illegally. The traders keep the smuggled cows in *khataals* (cattle enclosures) at the four points and the customs officials realize value added tax (VAT) at Navaron to make them legal.

Customs Revenue Officer-in-Charge at Navaron customs corridor Anjuman Ara Begum said 5,000 to 7,000 cows used to come every day through Putkhali, Agrabhulot, Daulatpur and Goga *khataals* four to five years ago. Now the number has come down to 20 to 25, she said. These illegal cows are kept in the BGB *khatal* and they are made legal after payment of Tk 500 per cow as tax, she added.

Anjuman said 35,678 cows were smuggled into Bangladesh between January and July in 2017 and the government received Tk 1,78,39,000. During the same period this year, 7,536 cows were smuggled into the country and the government received Tk 37,63,000.

BGB 21 Battalion Commanding Officer (in-charge) Major Syed Shohel Ahmed said the number of cows coming from India has decreased. Nobody is allowed to go to India to bring cows from across the border, he said. As a result, the number of Bangladeshis killed at the border came down to zero in the last one month.

Meanwhile, farmers in Jessore said there will be no impact on the cattle market although cows are not being imported from India.

Upazila Livestock Officer Joydev Kumar Singha said there is a demand for 30,500 cows and 27,000 goats in Jessore during Eid-ul Azha. There will be no crisis of sacrificial animals this year as the farms are planning to supply 40,000 cows and 30,000 goats, he added.