

On hunt for roots

41 years after separation from family, a Danish citizen of Bangladesh origin returns to Pabna to look for his loved ones

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Mentoo, who was formerly known as Mintoo, reached into his pocket and drew out a sepia-toned photograph. "I have a childhood photograph and can recall the name of Nagarbari ghat in Pabna's Bera upazila. Nothing else," he said in crisp English.

Mentoo is a man on a mission. He has returned to his birthplace after 41 years of separation, the memory of which remains foggy in his head. All that remains from his past is the photograph depicting a smiling Mentoo surrounded by what appears to be his friend.

Now he wishes to discover his roots. "I have shown the photograph to many people," Mentoo Carsten Sonnich, a Danish citizen of Bangladesh origin told The Daily Star, adding that as of yet no one had been able to help him find out where he actually came from.

The story of his journey to Denmark remains foggy too, making his mission an even tougher one.

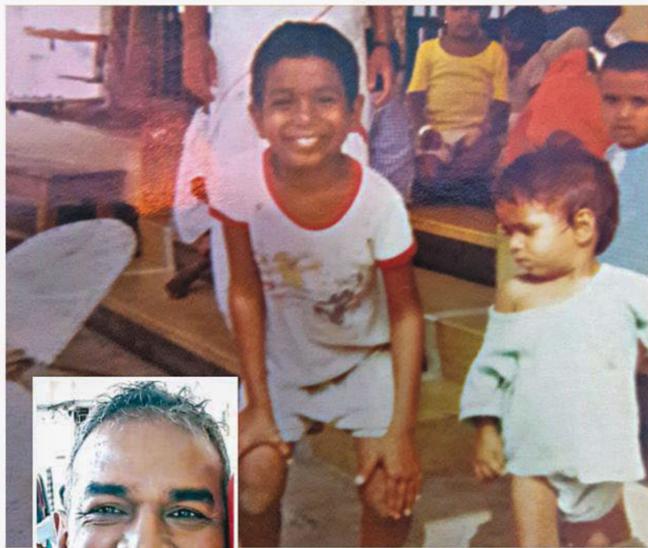
According to him, on 12 April, 1977, a man travelling to Dhaka through the Nagarbari ferry terminal found Mentoo while he was roaming the area alone. He was six at the time and he remembers having lost his way.

The man, Chowdhury Kamal Hossain, then brought Mentoo back to Dhaka and took him to Terre Des Hommes, a non-government organisation, working for children.

While there, Mentoo's first passport was made using Kamal's Dhaka address. Later, he was sent to Denmark where a Danish couple, Ole and Benfe, adopted him.

"I grew up in a Danish family. Now I am a Danish citizen but I had always been eager to get in touch with my roots," he said.

To this end, a now 47-years old Mentoo Carsten, along with his wife Anette Holmelhave, came to Bangladesh last week. Their visit first took them to Dhaka's Thataribazar as this was the first documented address



The childhood photo of Mentoo, which he carries around in the search for a lost part of his life.

PHOTO: STAR

he had. However, they found no trace of the mess there and nor anyone who could offer any information.

"I have visited the spot but found nobody at the address. I then came to Pabna and checked into a residential hotel in the district."

For the last four days, he has been visiting the Nagarbari port and speaking to the locals to find some trace of his history.

He shows his photo to people, hoping it jogs someone's memory. He has even taken to distributing leaflets containing the picture, the last strand connecting his past and present together.

A painter by profession in Denmark, Mentoo believes he must trace those who were present in his past, as they can be a source of pride for him.

"Now I am a successful man but I don't know my past. This is a matter of disappointment for me and sometimes I get upset [thinking about] having lost my root so I am eagerly waiting to find it," Mentoo added.

Anette Holmelhave too is eager to rediscover Mentoo's past and meet her husband's biological parents. "I feel his pain so I accompanied him," she said.

Shadhin Biswas, a Facebook friend of Mentoo's, contacted him and offered to be his guide in Pabna.

"Mentoo is eagerly waiting to rediscover his past. Few people came to us [claiming to know him] but they were not convincing," Shadhin said, adding that if someone's story was convincing, they would then opt for a DNA test to remove any doubts.

Mayor abroad

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sent him to jail rejecting a bail petition, court sources said.

Meanwhile, Mayor Anisur, 52, also organising secretary of Gazipur district Awami League, left the country for Indonesia on Saturday night.

Anisur has been the mayor of Sreepur for three consecutive terms. His current tenure started in 2015.

The matter came to light when residents of his municipality saw in the news that their mayor was sent to jail along with a colleague.

Locals said some of them knew that Anisur had gone to Indonesia and people started talking it.

Contacted, Gazipur District AL President and Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq said he learnt about the incident from the media.

"It is a sensitive issue. It is a gross misconduct," he said, adding Anisur would face consequences if found guilty.

Nur's son Kaushik told The Daily Star that before leaving the country, Anisur told his father to take care of the graft cases.

"That is why my father appeared

before the court," he told this correspondent.

Badruzzaman Badal, secretary of Sreepur municipality office, said Anisur left the country as part of a delegation of mayors invited by the Indonesian government.

Anisur is scheduled to return on September 16. He is on leave until September 18, Badruzzaman added.

Municipality officials said their Mayor Anisur and accountant Abdul Mannan were supposed to appear before the court on Sunday for hearing of graft cases filed by the ACC.

Mannan, who is facing charges in two graft cases, appeared before the court. He was sent to the jail, they added.

On January 21, 2015, ACC Deputy-Assistant Director Fakhru Islam accused Mayor Anisur and several others of misappropriating Tk 43.76 lakh of the municipality, said Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Sreepur Police Station.

The ACC had earlier filed three cases against the mayor.

Although the cases were filed with police, ACC officials investigated them, the OC said.

JS body

FROM PAGE 2
Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) and a faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) to a meeting on May 22 to hear their views on the bill.

At the meeting, the Editors' Council, an organisation of editors of the country's national dailies, the ATCO, and the BFUJ faction voiced concern over sections eight, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the proposed law, saying they would greatly hamper freedom of speech and independent journalism.

They also unanimously said several sections in the proposed law had ambiguity and loopholes that should be addressed, otherwise there would be ample scope for their misuse.

After that meeting, Law Minister Anisul Huq said they agreed to sit again with representatives of the Editors' Council, ATCO and BFUJ, once the parliamentary committee concerned revised the bill in light of the discussions.

Later, the committee again sat with Editors' Council, ATCO and BFUJ to hear their views on the proposed law.

Freedom

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which is indispensable for free and fair elections.

"Troubling reports also indicate that an anti-narcotics drive has led to over 220 killings, and thousands of arrests, with allegations of extrajudicial executions.

"Drug issues everywhere are best tackled through a focus on health, education and opportunities -- not the death penalty, or death squads. The Office has submitted a report to this session on more effective, and human rights compliant, measures to address narcotics issues," she said.

The next parliamentary polls in Bangladesh are likely to be held in late December.

New Australian PM survives first test

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia's centre-right government united behind new Prime Minister Scott Morrison to fend off a de facto vote of no confidence yesterday but his coalition still appeared likely to be heavily punished by voters at an election due by May.

Morrison's Liberal Party, the senior partner in a Liberal-National coalition, fractured in August when a backbench revolt forced then prime minister Malcolm Turnbull from office in a party-room vote, ushering in Australia's sixth leader in 10 years.

His first session of parliament as leader was hostile but Morrison's government united to defeat a series of motions by the opposition Labor party to debate Turnbull's ousting that would have amounted to a confidence vote.

A case, many questions

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been bedridden and my mother feeds him. The day police filed the case, my father was home."

They took the old man to the High Court on a wheelchair seeking bail on September 5, two days after the case was filed with Wari Police Station. The court granted him bail until the charge sheet is submitted.

Rezaul said once his father was involved with the BNP, but for the last six to seven years, he has been very sick and suffering from multiple diseases. Now there is no question of his being involved in politics.

Visiting the Labaid Specialised Hospital yesterday, a reporter of this paper collected Luthful's bill payment receipt that mentioned his age as 82.

Luthful received treatment there from August 4 to 11 and paid a bill of Tk 1,27,865. He was admitted to Cabin No 560.

Three nurses who attended him backed the family's statement about his ailment.

ABROAD, YET SUED
The case also named BNP's ward-level leader Sabbir Ahmed Arif as an accused although he was not in the country when the incident allegedly took place.

His visa, immigration and hotel documents, boarding passes of his flights to and from Kolkata show that he was in India from September 1 to 4. The Daily Star obtained these papers.

"I can't stay home as police are always after me. I was not even spared from being implicated while I was in India," Sabbir told The Daily Star recently. "It's just to harass me."

Sabir is accused No 13 and Luthful alias Abdul Latif is No 51 as per the case document. The Daily Star collected a copy of it.

The story of another accused in the case, Md Ibrahim, a Juba Dal leader of Wari unit, is a bit different.

Before this, he was made an accused in another case, filed with Wari Police Station on November 12 last year, on charges of creating panic among people through subversive activities earlier that month.

Ibrahim was accused No 24 among 44 named and around 50 to 60 unnamed others.

Air tickets, immigration and hotel documents show that he was in Chennai from November 7 to 16. He accompanied his ailing sister Rokeya Islam for her treatment at Apollo Hospitals there.

As his lawyer submitted the paper to a Dhaka court on December 19 last year, the court granted him bail. After reviewing the documents, the magistrate in his order said it is evident that during the time of occurrence Ibrahim

was out of the country.

Ibrahim, now facing 16 cases, said he was in the country on September 3 but had no involvement in any such incident.

The complainant, Sub-Inspector Utpal Datta Apu of Wari Police Station, in the case statement mentioned that after a tip-off, he along with other policemen went near Bangladesh Boys Club playground at 11:55am on September 3 but the miscreants fled away.

Later, quizzing people at the scene, it was learnt that 96 identified and many unknown others assembled there to carry out subversive activities, he said.

Visiting the playground around 10:30am yesterday, a reporter of this paper found over a dozen youths playing cricket there.

Asked about BNP men's alleged gathering on September 3, one of them said, "We play here every day. We neither saw nor heard about any such incident."

At least 10 people living around the playground said they did not see any chaos on that day.

The case was filed at 2:05pm and it mentioned the incident occurred at 11:55am, just hours ago.

The case statement said the BNP men fled as soon as police reached near the playground.

During the visit yesterday, it was found that the playground is fenced with an eight-foot wall and a lone entry-exit point.

Utpal said in the case that he came to know about the accused from locals near the place of occurrence and shopkeepers on the roadside footpath.

Talking to The Daily Star, employees and owners of at least 15 nearby shops said no such incident happened recently.

"I just came to know about it from you ... BNP men gathered on the playground!" said a shopkeeper, bursting into laughter.

"How can such a big gathering go unnoticed when even the news of the arrest of a small drug peddler or addict spread rapidly in the area?" asked another trader.

Utpal refused to make any comment over the phone when he was contacted yesterday.

Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Wari Police Station, said, "I will not discuss it over the phone. Come to my office and have a cup of tea."

Asked about accusing an 82-year-old sick man and a man who was in India on the day of the alleged incident, Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general (media and PR) at Police Headquarters, said they would investigate if there is any such irregularity.

Free Mozammel

FROM PAGE 1
Mozammel, general secretary of the Samity.

At a press conference, organised by the platform at the Jatiya Press Club around noon, Mozammel's wife Rizu Akhter Chowdhury said, "I am not in a position to talk. My husband is kept in jail as he worked for the cause of passengers."

"... I am requesting the prime minister to ensure the unconditional release of my husband," she said and broke down in tears.

Around the same time, Sub-Inspector Kazi Raihanur Rahman of Kafrul Police Station filed a petition with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court of Dhaka to show Mozammel arrested in a case filed for creating anarchy.

Raihanur, investigation officer (IO) of the case, also sought a 10-day remand for the arrestee.

The court fixed Thursday for hearing the plea.

The case, filed with Kafrul Police Station on February 4, accuses over 50 people of committing anarchy. Mozammel's name was not included in the First Information Report.

Now in jail, Mozammel, a resident of Narayanganj's Siddhirganj, has already been remanded for a day after his arrest on Thursday for extortion, a charge his wife and fellow road safety campaigners termed false.

In the case statement, complainant Md Dulal, a lineman at a bus stop, alleged that Mozammel, claiming to be a transport leader, demanded Tk 2 lakh from him, and he gave the accused Tk 10,000 in front of Sony Cinema Hall in Mirpur on September 3.

Dulal, however, told reporters that Mozammel was not familiar to him and that he had signed a computer-typed paper without knowing what was written on it. He did that "following directives from two leaders of transport workers".

The lineman later found that the paper he signed was the case statement.

'MOZAMMEL IMPLICATED'
Speaking at yesterday's press conference, eminent human rights activist Sultana Kamal said Mozammel took a stance against the anarchy in the transport sector and deaths on roads, forming the Jatri Kalyan Samity.

"... There was no anti-government element here," she said, adding, "When such a man is arrested and put on remand by a state or by an organ [of the state], we become astonished."

Sultana, also a former advisor to a caretaker government, then said such an incident happened in a country where the government, through different media outlets, regularly says it is upholding democracy and has achieved incomparable development. "... Such development was achieved that more than 10 people are being killed on roads every day!"

She also said the road transport and bridges minister recently told parliament that a Jatri Kalyan Samity report

on road accidents was "fake". "If that was so, then why Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had to issue directives to prevent road accident?"

"If all were fake, why the minister held a meeting over the issue a few days ago?"

"That means this issue is something to be concerned. We had expressed that concern. Is this a punishable offence? Is this a criminal offence? Won't we be able to talk in this country even if we have to face torture, anarchy and defamations?" she questioned.

"We won't talk. If you say anything, you will be punished. If this is the situation, they should kindly refrain from saying that they are upholding democracy in the country."

Sultana demanded immediate release of Mozammel.

Reading out a written statement at the press conference, Shamsuddin Chowdhury, a member of Jatri Kalyan Samity's executive committee, said three Bulgarian ministers resigned recently after a road accident left 17 people dead in that country.

But in Bangladesh, nobody is held accountable for the death of hundreds of people in road crashes, he said.

Mozammel's "offence" was that he sought justice for those being killed on roads and an end to the anarchy in the transport sector, Shamsuddin said, adding that the 16 crore people of this country "have been held hostage by a vested quarter" which was threatening Mozammel not to raise voice.

"But such threats could not deter Mozammel from working for passengers' rights. That's why the false extortion case was filed against him."

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosambhati Andolon, said Mozammel faced wrath as he worked against the interest of a vested quarter.

THE NEW CASE
Maruf Hossain, sub-inspector of Kafrul Police Station, filed the case under the Special Powers Act and Explosive Substances Act against 11 named and 40 to 45 unnamed people.

According to the case documents, the accused were holding a meeting at Mirpur-13 near the office of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) on February 4 for carrying out subversive activities to create anarchy in the country.

They hurled petrol bombs on vehicles to damage people's property and the government's image, the documents read.

Police arrested one of the accused, Abidur Ahsan Abid, from the spot. Sources said he later obtained bail from the High Court.

In his yesterday's petition to show Mozammel arrested in the case, IO Kazi Raihanur Rahman claimed evidence proves that Mozammel along with other listed accused was present on the spot and carried out the offence.

He needed to be shown arrested in the case and put on a 10-day remand to unravel the mystery over the incident happened in February, the police officer

DEAD MAN SUED

On Sunday, Bangla Daily Prothom Alo reported that BNP's Chawkbazar thana convenor Abul Azizullah, who died in May 2016, was made an accused in a case filed 28 months after his death.

According to the statement of the case filed on September 5 with Chawkbazar Police Station, Azizullah threw brickbats with other leaders and activists in Old Central Jail area that day. He even blasted cocktails with other leaders and workers.

Complainant of the case, SI Kamal Uddin, told this paper yesterday that he named the accused as per statements of witnesses following the incident. He did not get enough time to verify.

The investigation officer will correct it if anyone named as accused died earlier, he added.

THE HABIGANJ CASES

Meanwhile, in Habiganj district, where there were no safe road agitations of students, 10 cases were filed with four police stations, mentioning violence relating to the protest and accusing unnamed people.

Bidhan Tripura, police superintendent of Habiganj district, said these cases were filed after being confirmed that some incidents happened during the safe road agitation.

On August 12, SI Nazmul Islam of Habiganj Sadar Police Station filed a case with the station accusing 70 to 80 unknown miscreants who allegedly engaged in criminal activities by destroying vehicles and government property in front of JK High School of the town.

The incidents took place on July 30, according to case statement.

That day, SI Abdur Rahim of the same station filed another case accusing 100 to 120 unknown miscreants alleging that they carried out criminal activities in front of Brindaban College on July 31.

Our Sylhet correspondent reported that no such incidents of violence occurred in those areas on July 30 or 31 and no students took to the streets in the district supporting the safe road movement.

Students of schools and colleges in Dhaka began an unprecedented protest after killing of their two peers in a road accident in the city on July 29. It continued for over a week.

"This is not mandatory to file cases right after the incidents and police filed these cases after primary inquiry," said Bidhan.

"Unknown people were made accused as no particular names were found. But this is not to harass anyone. These cases are under progress and police are investigating those."

[Shaheen Mollah and Doha Chowdhury contributed to this report]

BNP demands

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Plainclothes police detained some BNP leaders and activists from the human chain programme.

Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said some people were arrested from Segunbagicha area, but he did not say the number.

To avoid arrest, BNP leaders and activists started leaving the place 20 minutes before the end of the programme.

Party's senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said around 200 party men were held.

BNP leaders also demanded formation of a non-partisan neutral administration to hold an inclusive election, dissolving of parliament and cabinet before announcement of election schedule and deployment of the army during the polls and reconstitution of the Election Commission.

Besides, they reiterated their demand of treating Khaleda at a private hospital.

Referring to Khaleda's call for a greater national unity to oust the government, Fakhru said, "We need a very strong unity. Our party people and all political parties will unite to form a pro-people government and restore democracy by removing the current monstrous government."

"We want the release of Khaleda. We are not seeking any favours. It is her right to get bail and we want that," Fakhru said.

Alleging that the government is filing "ghost cases" against BNP men, he claimed that around one lakh people were accused in various cases in the

last couple of days and some 12,000 were arrested.

BNP Standing Committee member Khandakar Mosharruf Hossain said all demands of the people should be met before the polls schedule is announced. "Otherwise, people forging a national unity will wage a movement to oust the government."

He said no participatory election could be held without Khaleda.

In Chittagong, BNP leaders formed a human chain in Kazir Dewri area in front of the office of Chittagong city unit BNP. Several hundred leaders and activists of BNP and its associate organisations attended the programme.

Shahadat Hossain, president of Chittagong city unit BNP, said Khaleda was "deprived of" better treatment.

In Gazipur, nine BNP leaders and activists were detained when they were holding the programme.

They formed a human chain in front of the office of Gazipur district unit BNP on Rajbari Road. They also brought out a procession which was obstructed by police, triggering a clash, witnesses said.

Gazipur district BNP President Fazlul Huq Milon claimed that 15 party men were injured as police suddenly attacked their peaceful procession.

Golam Sabur, additional superintendent of Gazipur police, said the BNP men started throwing brick chunks at police, and police charged truncheons on them.

Our correspondents in Chittagong and Gazipur contributed to this report.