

## In search of a lost time

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Meanwhile, due to a lack of awareness, some villagers have removed bricks from similar structures and used them in their houses, an act which archaeological experts termed a painful destruction of what could be a heritage site.

The archaeological team found suspected traces of the structures and believes bricks were taken from the surface portions.

Enter Khirtola village in the district, you will be surprised to see beautiful mud houses with antique bricks.

Some locals said using tools like crowbar, the villagers have been collecting those bricks from huge structures -- covered by mud and old trees -- for decades, in the absence of monitoring from the authorities concerned.

Locally, those structures are called dhibi.

"I have constructed my house of three rooms taking bricks, digging the nearby Dhibi three months ago," Sunil Chandra Mahato, a resident of Raiganj's Khirtola village, told this reporter recently.

Like Sunil, hundreds of other villagers have also built houses with those bricks.

Archaeological experts and locals said Khirtola in Dharmainagar union and nearby Nimgasi in Sonakhora union faced similar "destruction" over the last three decades.

"In my childhood I saw many old structures in the jungles of Khirtola and adjoining villages. Most of the structures have been destroyed with time," said Gonesh Mahato, a 60-year-old man.

There were about 100 to 150 houses in Khirtola three decades ago. The number has almost doubled and most of the new houses have antique bricks in them, he said.

It was only recently when the local administration asked the villagers not to destroy archaeological structures, the locals said.

According to the "1990 District Gazetteer of Bangladesh", Pabna, there was an old city spanning over

eight-square mile area at the west bank of the old Korotoa river.

The gazetteer said there were nearly 50 structures (dhibi and ponds) in eight kilometres of Nimgasi (and adjoining villages). "There are huge artifacts hidden in the structures," it read.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rifat, the leader of the archaeologists' team, lamented lack of government steps for the preservation of the archaeological sites.

Rifat feared only a few of those 50 dhibis now barely exists while the rest were damaged by villagers.

Contacted, director of Bogra regional archeology department Nahid Sultana said if any structure reaches 100 years of age or any structure carrying the history of culture of early ages can be considered to be archeological assets, but archeological research is needed for that.

"Nimgasi archeological site had the historical evidence. Physically the existence of the site was mostly damaged. Villagers destroyed huge historical site many years ago, so we could not run archeological survey," Sultana said.

But Rifat said, "Still we have many archeological resources in those sites and we can find and preserve those if we are allowed to excavate them."

The young archeologist also said the department of cultural heritage and Bangladesh studies of Rabindra University has started archeological research on those sites.

"We are conducting the historical and surface surveys for spotting the entire site. We are likely to make an archeological map of the site within December before seeking the permission for excavation of the site," said Rifat.

Contacted, Raniganj UNO Shamimur Rahman said, "The destruction of the historical site took place many years ago. We are now trying to protect a few remaining of them for the sake of archaeological research."

He did not elaborate on the matter.



People through the traditional *Jamai Mela* (son-in-law fair) in Rasulpur of Tangail yesterday. Every year on the 11th, 12th and 13th of the Bangla month of Baishakh, the fair is held on the playground of Basirunnisa High School.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

## No pressure on MPs to take oath

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reporters after placing wreaths at the grave of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar together with leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal.

He further said, "Undoubtedly, there is a pressure from the government [to take oath]. The BNP is a party of the people. It hardly gets affected by any decision of an individual or a quarter. We're not worried about the matter and there is no indiscipline in our party."

Zahid on Thursday became the first among the six BNP-MPs elect to have taken oath.

Earlier, the BNP had rejected the December 30 polls results alleging widespread irregularities and decided not to join the 11th parliament.

Yesterday, Hasina firmly said her party has enough manpower and followers, and it does not need any more. "The Awami League itself is enough to ensure the welfare of people."

She said every party has its own characteristics and they are very much independent to make any decision as the country has a multiparty democratic system.

"The BNP is a political party. Whatever it does is the party's own political decision. Any other party cannot impose its decisions on them," the PM said.

About the parole of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, the premier said one has to apply first to be granted parole. "No one has applied for that so far."

Regarding the killing of Feni madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi, Hasina said the government would not let anyone involved in the crime get off scot-free.

She said such an unjust act was not acceptable. "I don't want the culprits to belong to my party or any other one."

**ROHINGYA ISSUE**

Replying to a question on relocating Rohingya refugees to Bhashanchar Island from Cox's Bazar, the PM said although the Rohingyas wanted to go there, there were people in many agencies who did not want this to happen.

"This is because the people of those agencies and NGOs go there for volunteering. I think the problem lies there. Let me tell you something openly. It is very much easy to go to Cox's Bazar; it has beautiful places to stay. They go there to carry on humanitarian services, but they take care of their own purposes in a greater way," she said.

In this connection, Hasina said the government prepared the Bhashanchar Island to provide shelter to 100,000 Rohingyas with better facilities and scope of earning their livelihoods.

The PM expressed fear that unemployed Rohingya youths might be drawn into militant activities.

She said something was always there to be worried about the rise in terrorism and militancy in the country.

"But we are always on alert. Our intelligence agencies are working nicely. I held a meeting with the heads of all the agencies and forces last night [Thursday night]."

Hasina said the government was taking appropriate and effective steps. She also put emphasis on finding out the roots of terrorism and militancy across the globe.

She said people from the religious minority communities were living in peace although 90 percent of the

country's population is Muslim. "Even the religious festivals are celebrated by the people from all religions and that's the unique character of Bangladesh."

She said the people of all religions celebrate Pahela Baishakh together. "We have been able to maintain communal harmony in the country and this has to be maintained."

Responding to another question, the AL chief said she does not see any "intruder" and "opportunist" in her party.

She said she had to go into retirement. "The next leadership will be picked by the party. I am not the one to decide on that. The Awami League as a political party will choose its leader, or the people will pick their leader. How can I say who will be the leader?"

In this connection, Hasina mentioned that she never thought of being the president of the AL, but the party made her the chief.

She expressed deep shock at the tragic death of Zayan Chowdhury, eight-year-old grandson of AL leader Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim. The schoolboy was killed in a terrorist attack in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.

Strongly condemning the attacks, the PM called upon all to mobilise public opinion and take effective measures against terrorism.

**'VISIT TO BRUNEI BOOSTED TIES'**  
The premier said her April 21-23 visit to Brunei has taken the relationship between the two countries to a new height.

Hasina said she had a bilateral meeting with Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

She said she placed specific proposals for cooperation on various sectors, including exchange of high-

level visits, trade, investment, food, agriculture, fisheries, energy, ICT and air connectivity.

Welcoming the proposals, the Brunei Sultan pledged to work together to implement those.

Hasina said the two sides agreed to actively consider the possibility of a preferential trade arrangement and conduct a joint feasibility study to this effect.

## Raid Modi's home

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"Tughlaq Road election scam money has been used for naamdar's (dynast's) campaign."

"From Delhi to Bhopal, in the Congress, corruption is the conduct. Your chowkidar [watchman] is vigilant. Neither the naamdar nor their loyalists will be saved," the Prime Minister said.

Last week, Modi said in an interview that the recent income tax raids on certain politicians were not part of "political vendetta" and things were happening as per the law.

He had said the raids have all yielded proof of corruption, including siphoning of money from schemes meant for the most vulnerable sections of the society like children and expectant mothers.

Earlier this month, the Election Commission had instructed investigation and enforcement agencies under the Union Finance Ministry to ensure that their pre-poll raids remain politically neutral. The poll body also mandated that its officials be informed in advance before any such exercise is undertaken.

The tax department maintains the raids are not politically motivated.

## UN urges int'l help

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They noted that almost half of the 5.4 lakh refugee children under the age of 12 were missing out on education altogether. The other half only has access to very limited schooling. Only a handful of teenagers had access to any form of education or training.

"This remains one of the world's biggest refugee crises," said Filippo Grandi. "There are more than 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, most of whom fled Myanmar in 2017. I saw a great deal of progress, but their situation, especially for women and children, remains fragile. With the current crisis almost two years on we must give refugees the chance to learn, build skills and contribute to their communities while also preparing for reintegration when they can return to Myanmar," said Grandi.

"The future of the Rohingya refugees hangs in the balance."

"The Rohingya community is made up of so many young people who are in need of hope and opportunities if they are to build successful lives upon their return to Myanmar," Antonio Vitorino added.

The UN leaders discussed with government officials ways the international community can further support preparedness and response efforts for the cyclone and monsoon seasons.

At the camps, they assessed ongoing work to address weather-related risks, including strengthening of shelters, improvement of infrastructure, and the training of

volunteers. They recognised the critical role the refugees themselves were playing in these efforts.

The UN leaders met families going through the joint government and UNHCR biometric registration process and were receiving documents that confirm their identity in Bangladesh and enhance their right to access services and protection.

They also witnessed an innovative World Food Programme e-voucher system which gives refugees the ability to choose from an array of locally-sourced food staples and fresh vegetables in eight designated stores.

"The first time I was in Cox's Bazar in 2017, hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas had just fled across the border from the most appalling brutality imaginable," said Mark Lowcock.

"I met with children who had seen parents killed. Women who were just holding on told me horrendous stories of sexual violence they had survived."

"During this trip, we met with a remarkable group of male refugee role models as well as women volunteers who are supporting those who have survived this brutality and also working to prevent sexual and domestic violence in the camps. A wise, far-sighted approach would see a stronger focus on helping the refugees not just recover from the horrors they have experienced, but also to prepare for a dignified longer-term future," said Lowcock.

## Ex-Jamaat men

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the 1971 Liberation War.

The Jamaat, which opposed Bangladesh's birth, had already been in trouble after its senior leaders were handed down punishment for crimes against humanity, according to its insiders. Besides, the Election Commission cancelled the party's registration with it.

On February 15, Jamaat assistant secretary general Barrister Abdur Razaq quit the party, citing its failure to apologise for its role in the Liberation War and bring reforms to its constitution.

The following day, Mujibur Rahman (Manju), a member of Jamaat's policy-making body Majlish-e-Shura, who had been vocal about brining reforms to the party, was expelled from the Jamaat for "breaching discipline" and "anti-party activities".

Mujibur, who was president of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, is now at the forefront of this new political initiative.

He is expected to announce the initiative at a press conference to be attended by a number of former leaders of the Jamaat and the Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, Mujibur said, "We are under pressure from various quarters. Right now, I cannot give you details ... We will gradually disclose the names of the people involved in the process."

He alleged that Jamaat leaders are trying their best to thwart the new

initiative.

According to Jamaat insiders, the party's central leaders have taken measures so that no one from the party or its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir joins the new initiative.

Seeking anonymity, a former Jamaat leader involved in the initiative said, "We will try to form a political party with those who express solidarity with our thoughts and work strategy. We will finalise through discussions the name of the organisation, its structure, work strategy, objectives and programmes."

"We feel that a new political initiative, enthusiastic leadership and an active organisation are needed for the country," added the leader.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone recently, Razaq, who has been in London since 2013, said he pushed the Jamaat leadership to apologise for the party's role in 1971 but he was "rebuffed by a section of the top leadership".

"In January this year, I advised the leadership of the necessity of taking responsibility for its predecessors' role in 1971. In the absence of any better or viable alternative, I also suggested dissolving the Jamaat. But all my efforts have been unsuccessful. My advices fell on deaf ears."

Asked about the new political initiative, he said, "As I had said earlier, I will not be directly involved in politics. But my best wishes will be with them."

## Murders he wrote

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Later on September 16, 2016, police arrested him over shooting a rickshaw puller in the leg. He was released on bail three days later.

He faces at least four cases filed with Banani police alone.

All of his alleged crimes were heavily reported, but Soheli remains beyond the reaches of law. This air of immunity around him stems from what those close to him say is an association with the power-brokers in the country, including top ruling party politicians and police officials.

In fact, when officials at Gulshan Police were asked how Soheli still had a licence for his guns, they could not come up with any answer.

Assistant Commissioner (Gulshan Zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Rafiqul Islam said that it was a matter for the Detective Branch, who in turn said local police should deal with the matter.

For now, it seems Soheli is laying the groundwork for his "homecoming".

**'IT'S A MURDER'**  
Recounting the infamous murder, brazen in its execution, Inspector Moniruzzaman said six people were involved in the incident. One of those arrested -- Zaki -- confessed that it was Soheli who had fired the shot that killed Rashed.

"The rest of the five are absconding, but we are making every effort to arrest Soheli," the inspector said.

On July 15, Kazi Rashed, 32, was killed allegedly by Soheli, with whom he had a long-standing feud.

At the time, police said there was evidence suggesting that Rashed was actually killed inside the Banani office of the Jubo League and his body was dumped near his home, which was 100 yards from the office complex.

Afterwards, a leaked footage from a CCTV camera, which Soheli himself

installed at the entry of his office, captured him and his cohorts removing Rashed's body from the premises. The damning evidence forced Soheli to go into hiding.

Rashed's wife Kazi Mousumi filed a case with Banani Police accusing Soheli and several others, Rafiqul Islam, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star at the time.

**A RETURN UNWELCOMED**  
Although Soheli has not been seen in the area since the murder, his presence can still be very much felt in Mohakhali. The bloodshed he left behind is still very fresh.

And no one is talking anymore. Soheli, who was given the name Sundari Soheli by his friends for his fair complexion, has left behind an aura which has become the physical manifestation of the man himself.

He may have left the neighbourhood, but the neighbourhood has yet to free itself of him.

An Awami League office, right at the entry of Mohakhali near the kitchen, is adorned with posters prominently featuring Soheli next to some of the most powerful leaders in the country.

He smiles bright in the picture but those that know him closely are quick to point out how his eyes betray no emotion.

A few feet away from the office is the house where the high-profile murder took place. This is where Rashidul -- a former vice-president of the local Jubo League -- was dragged to the third storey of a building and shot.

The same building still has the sign of Rainbow News 24, a supposed online news portal run by Soheli. It was at this building's entry that the CCTV Soheli put up for his own security had instead captured his crime.

But the first sign of Soheli's infamy are the posters lining the road towards

Rashed's house. Walls are plastered with posters demanding justice for Rashed's murder. It is accompanied by a picture of Soheli with a noose placed around it.

A few yards from there is an under-construction building. When the owner of the unit had refused to pay Soheli Tk 1 crore in ransom, the Jubo League man took it upon himself to mete out a fitting reply to what he considered a huge slight.

In a fit of rage, Soheli stormed into the building, grabbed one of the workers there and threw him off the roof, killing him on the spot. The action earned him a supposed Tk 30 lakh, according to sources close to the victim.

Despite his reputation though, Soheli carried himself like a shaman does: attracting followers with charm and when that failed, intimidation.

This combination is what led Rashed to leave South Africa and return to Bangladesh when Soheli came calling.

A beautiful friendship was about to meet a tragic end and Rashed was not blind to the signs of that.

**VIOLENT DELIGHTS, VIOLENT ENDS**  
A number of locals and family members said Rashed and Soheli grew up very close to each other. They went to South Africa together and stayed there for six years after the BNP-led government assumed power in 2001.

In 2011, Soheli returned first, only to go back and bring Rashidul back along with him.

He promised him riches and a stable life. Soheli peddled dreams and Rashed bought them.

Such was the bond that Soheli appeared as Rashed's wife Mousumi's legal guardian during the marriage ceremony.

However, soon the cracks in the friendship appeared as Soheli began to find solace in alcohol.

"He was an angel in the morning

when he was sober. But at night, it was a completely different picture," Mousumi recalled while speaking to this newspaper at her home in Mohakhali.

After long hours of drinking, Soheli would fly into alcohol-fueled rages, even beating up Rashed on multiple occasions.

"Rashed would return home at night and I would see his bruises. He would always tell me that everything would be fine and that he would leave Soheli's side soon," she said.

Over the last three years, a silent enmity developed between Rashed and Soheli.

Soheli, under the influence of alcohol and drugs, had grown increasingly paranoid.

He began suspecting Rashed of joining forces with someone else. Soheli was "sure" that a betrayal was in the offing. He was very bitter about Rashed distancing himself from him and a conflict arose between them.

Locals and other family members of the slain Jubo League leader corroborated the account.

On the morning of July 15, Rashed was summoned away some place. His family waited for him to return in vain.

Finally, around 4:30am the next day, neighbours informed that Rashed's body had been found close to their home.

Rashed's mother rushed out towards it. When she saw the lifeless body of her son, she broke. She cradled her child in her arms for one last time.

Even then everyone knew who was responsible for the murder.

People's suspicions have been confirmed for over a year. Yet Soheli remains elusive.

And he might just be coming back