



Pursuit of dream ends in tragedy

Debt, captivity, death stalk Bangladeshi fortune seekers heading for Europe illegally

PORIMOL PALMA and DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Europe has long been a promised land for Bangladeshi fortune seekers. With illusion further fuelled by human traffickers, many take risky journeys through the Mediterranean, knowing well it may turn fatal in the hazardous sea.

But when they are held hostage by human traffickers or other criminal gangs in Libya, a transit point en route to Europe, they realise that heading for the continent illegally was the gravest mistake of their life.

It's late by then as they already got caught in the clutches of torture and debt.

Alamin Miah, 25, of Agailjhara in Barishal, who survived the migrant boat capsized off Tunisian coast on Friday, could be the perfect case in point.

Convinced by a manpower broker, he took the risk of leaving for Libya sometime in May last year. The contract with the broker was for a trip to the North African country from where he on his own would try to reach Italy.

Alamin, then a private university student, says he found it difficult to get a job or do business in Bangladesh. So, he decided to

go to Italy and build a career.

"I had no idea that things were so different in Libya," Alamin told The Daily Star by phone from a Tunisian Red Crescent camp Monday night.

He is one of the 16 survivors, including 14 Bangladeshis, of the tragedy that claimed lives of some 65 migrants including around 40 Bangladeshis.

Alamin said mafias held him and dozens of others hostage in camps of Libya. He faced various forms of physical and mental tortures for ransom.

In several phases, his family had to pay around Tk 11 lakh before he was put on an Italy-bound ship last Thursday night. In mid-

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From the clutches of death

Migrant boat capsized survivor tells his story

PORIMOL PALMA

Alamin Miah is one of those who came back from the jaws of death and lived to tell the tale after a boat carrying migrants capsized in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Tunisia, last Friday night.

"I had no hope for survival. I thought of my parents and what would happen to them if I don't survive. I tried my best to cling to the overturned boat," he told this correspondent over phone yesterday from a shelter managed by the Tunisian Red Crescent.

He is one of the 16 survivors, including 14 Bangladeshis, from the

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Names surface, bodies don't

STAR REPORT

The names of those feared dead in the boat capsized in the Mediterranean last week are surfacing, but the chances of recovering their bodies are fading, possibly burying the last hope of their relatives to see their loved ones for one last time.

Sajib Hossain, 21, from Madaripur, is one of the 39 still missing in the sea off the Tunisian coast since the accident in the wavy sea in the deep night on Thursday.

"I want to see my son's body," sobbed Baby Khatun, mother of Sajib.

She had talked to Sajib by phone on May 8, the day before the fateful night, when he told his mother that he would leave for Italy from Libya by boat the next day.

"But we came to know from another brother of mine in Italy that Sajib died in the sea," said Mim Akter, elder sister of Sajib, urging that at least his body be brought back home.

Her call is echoed by relatives of other victims from different districts of the country. However, that hope is fading as Bangladeshi officials who visited Tunisia following the incident say it is highly unlikely that any more bodies would be recovered.

Since the accident, Tunisian coastguard rescued 16 migrants, including 14 Bangladeshis, and only one body. He was identified as Uttam Kumar Das, from Naria in Shariatpur.

"Chances of recovering any more bodies are very thin," ASM Ashrafur Islam, labour counsellor at the Bangladesh Mission in Libya, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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Ehsan Hoque, who arranged sponsorship for over 1,500 underprivileged and orphaned children, shows some of them how to get educational materials online at his Mohammadpur home. Inset, Ehsan uses eye drops. He has struggled with poor eyesight all his life as he was born with congenital cataracts.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Eyes in distress, eyes of hope

Surviving child blindness narrowly, Dr Ehsan becomes guardian of children in distress

SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

"Amader baba. Swear!" proclaimed some 15 girls in unison.

Crowded by children aged 5-17, the cheerful "father" too nodded in agreement to this sudden visitor in a recent evening. Chirping of more children could be heard from other rooms of the flat at the residential building in Mohammadpur.

"Fifty daughters are here and 1,500 more across the country," beamed the man in his mid-fifties. An innocent smile spread all over his baby face but stopped at the edge of his eyes. None could clearly see his eyes, as those are kept away under thick, blurry, criss-cross layers of glass.

Ehsan Hoque was lucky not to be blind for life, after his birth in 1964. Born with congenital cataracts, an optical disorder responsible for child blindness, he could survive with a limited eyesight, undergoing seven surgeries on his tender eyes by the age of five.

However, unlike most other victims of child blindness because of infections or nutritional deficiencies in pregnancies, his story was to unfold completely differently over the next five decades. His eyes in distress

would eventually transform him into an angel parent of children in distress.

Ehsan, who lives in Boston along with his wife and two biological daughters, has come up with a unique social initiative, through which he's connecting children in the west with children in Bangladesh, creating a bond of humanity between them. 1,550 children, mostly from the US, are forking out on accommodation, education, food and vocational training of 1,550 children in Bangladesh.

Each of these children in happiness is sponsoring one girl in distress till she is 18-year-old. Each of them saves \$15 a month from pocket money or earnings from part-time work and donates for the girl he or she chooses to support. Technology makes it easy for the

little sponsors to regularly check on the sponsored, and occasional trip to Bangladesh turns the bonding even deeper. Growing up doing community services, these tiny patrons eventually end up getting a premium recognition from the US government: President's Volunteer Service Award.

On the other hand, orphaned or abandoned, these girls in Bangladesh are making the most of this new lease of life. They're growing up

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CHANGE MAKER



1 killed, 5 hurt in shipyard blast



STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

A ship-breaking worker died and five others were critically burnt in an explosion at the engine room of a ship in Chattogram's Sitakunda yesterday morning.

The incident took place at Mahinur Ship Recycling yard in Baro Awalia area around 8:00am.

Rubel, 25, of Noakhali's Senbagh died by the time he was taken to a hospital.

Other workers Masud, 19, Sohel Suman, 22, Al Amin, 27, Jalil, 26, and Mamunul Islam, 27, were critically burnt, said Mohammed S Khaled, assistant professor of burn and surgery at Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

One of the injured workers, wishing anonymity, told The Daily Star that the management of the ship-breaking yard didn't give them any safety gear, saying that the gears would slow down their work.

Describing what he saw moments before the explosion, another injured worker Mamunul Islam said Rubel was cutting a pipe with a blow torch at the engine room while six others, including himself, were working nearby.

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SC lawyer sent to jail in ICT case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Supreme Court lawyer Imtiaz Mahmood was sent to jail by a Dhaka court yesterday, hours after police arrested him in a case filed under section 57 of the ICT Act about two years ago over his Facebook posts.

Police picked him up from his Banani home in the morning in compliance with an arrest warrant issued by a Khagrachhari court on January 21, court sources said.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Satya Brata Sikder passed the order after Sujan Saha, sub-inspector of Banani Police Station, produced the arrestee before the court.

In July 2017, one Shafiqul Islam filed the case against Imtiaz with Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station on charges of hurting his sentiments and inciting communal violence in the Chattogram Hill Tracts.

During hearing on a bail petition yesterday, Imtiaz's lawyer Asaduzzaman Rachi

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