

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



The Team. Late Sheikh Kamal is third from right on the second row. Our Russian coach is on the front row. Author is leftmost on the last row. Some players are not shown.

Basketball Days

When I stepped into the court on that first day, the elite team of basketball players was already there. I scanned the faces. Most were unfamiliar but my eyes stopped at one. I had seen this face before. It was Sheikh Kamal, and I was one of two schoolboys selected into the same team as him!

At first I was awestruck and nervous. But over the next few weeks I found that Kamal Bhai was completely approachable. He played with the grace and ability of a natural athlete: jumping high, running fast and scoring. He was popular among his contemporaries in the team, liked because of his quick wit. At the same time, he had a soft spot for the youngsters in the team and treated us with great affection. I admired his friendly smile, the twinkle in his eye, and his well-groomed moustache - mine had just started to appear - which gave him a distinguished look. After the demanding early morning practice, when we were ravenously hungry, he often treated us to a special breakfast or snacks.

How did I get there? I had set my sights on basketball, a new game for me, when I was in Class Eight at St. Joseph's High School. I was often the first one on the court every afternoon for practice. Brother Ralph, who joined our games, often coached me. I worked on my game at a feverish pitch, practicing at all hours.

The following year I made the school team, scoring well during the season. Our great rival was St. Gregory's High School, who beat us in several games. But in the Finals of the School League, we defeated them - a win that many of our team still savour.

One day in 1974, when I was in Class Ten, our school had a group of visitors including two Russians: a basketball coach and his interpreter. They auditioned the basketball players on court. The following week I was invited to a training camp for the first ever Bangladesh Basketball Team. I was one of two schoolboys chosen for the camp; the rest were older, more established national players. The Russians, winners of Olympic gold medal in basketball, would coach our team.

The next few months were like a dream. I had the opportunity to play basketball with the nation's best players including Kamal Bhai. The team's youngsters, Dastagir and I, had to work extra hard to keep up with them. But it was the experience of a lifetime.

A few months after our training ended, on the darkest day of this nation, August 15, the world changed as Bangabandhu and most of his family including Kamal Bhai were assassinated. Had he lived, he would have been 71 this year.

The following month, big changes came into my life. I moved abroad for further studies. My interests also changed. I quit playing basketball.

Three decades later I returned to the game. When my son had turned ten I started playing basketball with him to keep him engaged in a sport. He eventually went on to captain his school basketball team. Nowadays I have quit playing basketball for good (really!) but the game will always have a special place in my heart.

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Brac to disburse Tk 10cr among flood-hit people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac has announced to assist 50,000 severely flood affected families with Tk 2,000 as cash assistance for each family.

A total of Tk 10 crore will be given to families in 15 worst-flood hit upazilas in seven districts -- Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Bogra, Sirajganj, Jamalpur and Sunamganj, said a press release of the world's largest NGO.

"We are committed to stand by people seriously affected by this year's flood and give cash assistance which will help them meet their urgent necessities," said Asif Saleh, executive director of Brac.

He also called on individuals and institutions to extend their generosity towards these families in distress.

"BRAC has taken up an initiative to collect funds so that more families can be reached with assistance."

Some 4.7 million people in 31 districts have been affected by flood this year with Jamalpur having most of its region inundated. So far, 41 people have died, mostly by drowning, while nearly one million households are waterlogged. Around 90,000 people with around 76,000 cattle are staying at emergency flood shelters, said Brac.

Early warning messages were sent through four community radio stations, social media platforms and its field staff in the remote and worst hit regions, by incorporating Covid-19 measures.

Besides, dry food and oral saline packets were distributed to the waterlogged families in Islampur and Dewanganj upazilas of Jamalpur.

Brac also installed sanitary latrines adjacent to the flood shelters at Porsha of Naogaon district. Assistance was reached to the worst suffering families in Kurigram from a fund contributed by Greta Thunberg Foundation, it said.

Bangamata's birth anniversary today

BSS, Dhaka

The birth anniversary of Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib will be observed today.

Begum Fazilatunnesa, wife of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and mother of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, embraced martyrdom along with Bangabandhu and other family members on August 15 in 1975.

Fazilatunnesa, who struggled for an independent Bangladesh alongside Bangabandhu, was born in Tungipara village of Gopalganj on August 8, 1930. The Women and Children Affairs Ministry has taken elaborate programmes to observe Bangamata's birth anniversary nationally. The theme of the day this year is "Bangamata is a courageous symbol of sacrifice and beauty".

The prime minister is expected to join the celebration on virtual platform from Gono Bhaban as chief guest.

Marking the birthday, the ministry will distribute sewing machines and money through mobile banking to the distressed women who have been affected during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A total of 3,200 sewing machines will be distributed and 1,300 women will get Tk 2,000 each. At the same time, 100 laptops will be given to poor and meritorious students in Gopalganj.



Govt's legal aid helpline now open round the clock

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Md Abdul Hamid Khan (44) from Fulbaria in Mymensingh was detained in Mymensingh jail since March 4 in a case filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

On March 24, Sirajganj Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal Judge Fazle Md Nazir granted him bail in the case, filed in Sirajganj over torturing his wife, and ordered the authorities concerned to release him from custody. But Hamid did not get released from jail until April 22 as relevant documents did not reach the jail authorities due to the shutdown enforced to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

On April 22, one Abul Hasnat Khan called the national helpline 16430 of the legal aid office under law ministry and sought help to release Hamid, his uncle.

The same day, the office communicated with Judge Nazir, as well as authorities at Sirajganj and Mymensingh. Sirajganj Jail Super AI Mamun sent relevant documents to senior jail super, who released Hamid from custody, law ministry sources said.

This is how the law ministry has been helping the underprivileged get legal aid without any cost. Some 6,106 people received legal aid through the helpline from April 12 to August 3, sources said.

The law ministry launched the helpline in 2016, and has now kept it open round the clock for the poor.

The ministry is providing the service

through its National Legal Aid and Services Organisation (NLASO) and its district legal aid offices across the country.

Masuda Yeasmin, assistant director of NLASO, told The Daily Star on August 3 that anyone can call the toll-free number for legal advice. Replying to a question, she said several people communicate through the helpline every day.

Law Minister Anisul Huq is looking over the activities, and giving necessary directives to the offices concerned, she added.

The government has provided legal aid to 5,21,481 poor people in last six years (since 2014-2015 fiscal till July this year) at its own cost; 1,28,309 legal aid related cases were disposed of through NLASO during the period. Besides, 20,476 people got legal aid from Supreme Court through the Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee (SCLAC) during this period, according to sources.

SCLAC has provided legal assistance to 216 underprivileged prisoners, who had been in different jails for over five, seven and 10 years, SCLAC sources said. A total of 78,500 disadvantaged prisoners were given legal support since 2014-2015 fiscal till July this year, a law ministry study report said.

The NLASO has collected Tk 38.25 crore by settling 29,001 cases through alternative dispute resolution system and gave the money to the victims of those cases.

FOOTBALL FREESTYLE CATEGORY

Barishal youth sets world record



Newly crowned Guinness World Record holder Ashikur freestyles in front of a small but enthralled audience at the Barishal Deputy Commissioner's Office in the city.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

SUSHANTA GHOSH

On July 30, Ashikur Rahman Zubayer received a letter from Guinness World Record at his house on Masjid Bari Road in Jhalakati. Eight months ago, Ashikur had submitted his world record attempt entry to the organisation under football freestyle world records category.

The letter contained the world record recognition certificate Ashikur had been waiting for.

"I have broken the world record on the football freestyle category! I played the ball 625 times per minute, three more than the last record, which was 622 times per minute by a German national," he told the Daily Star.

Ashikur, son of Reksona and Jalal Ahmed, is a fourth-year honors student at the management department of Barishal Government Brojomohun College (BM College).

"I have been trying to be a world famous freestyler for three years. I have practised heart and soul, often learning skills from YouTube videos. I have finally got the recognition I deserve," an elated Ashikur said.

On Thursday afternoon, Barishal Deputy Commissioner SM Azhar Rahman hosted a reception for Ashikur at his office. There the deputy commissioner and the district sports body greeted him with flowers, honored him with a crest, and awarded him a cash prize of Tk 10,000.

"We are proud of Ashikur. The name of Barishal has flourished along with his," the deputy commissioner said.

Ashikur's mother Reksona Ahamed said, "We could never imagine our son would achieve such a prestigious title. We seek blessings and good wishes for him."

Somapura Mahavihara losing lustre

World heritage site at Paharpur in need of care within three years of renovation

ANWAR ALI

Within three years of the completion of several conservation and development projects, the Somapura Mahavihara has started to lose its shine.

The 1,300-year-old Unesco World Heritage Site, located at Paharpur area in Badalgachhi upazila of Naogaon district, bears the evidence of an ancient higher learning centre for Buddhists.

Between March 2014 and December 2016, the Department of Archaeology (DoA) implemented the Asian Development Bank funded "South Asia Tourism Infrastructure Development Project" on the site.

Under the project, the main temple and its surrounding architecture were polished and renovated. Separate wooden structures including staircases were built on the main temple and other places of the site for visitors to go up and move around safely, according to officials.

However, within a few years of completing the projects, the effects of the renovation have begun to fade from the site, making archaeologists and visitors question the quality of renovation and maintenance works.

"As we walk around the place and imagine how the monastery worked in those days, one feels excited. But then it becomes evident that this historic and archaeologically important place lacks the care it needs," said Md Roknuzzaman, a teacher at a private university in Rajshahi.

Since 2019, walls around the main temple started turning black with algae, while salinity took hold on the terracotta plaques. The wooden staircases and pavements got damaged too, due to being exposed to open air and use by too many visitors.

Considering the situation, authorities have suspended visitor



Despite restrictions, people use a wooden staircase to reach the top of the main temple, inset. The photos were taken before the pandemic when the site was open to public.

PHOTO: STAR



movement to the main temple at the end of last year. Visitors now have to use the broken stairs and pavements to the site, which can be quite risky.

After the implementation of the renovation projects, the revenue collection from visitors on entry, car parking and other purposes were increased by more than two-and-a-half times. However, ticket prices were reduced after the site began losing its splendour.

According to the DoA, the revenue in 2014-15 and 2015-16 was around Tk 27 lakh. In 2016-17, the income soared to Tk 72 lakh, and increased further to Tk 77.25 lakh in the following year. In 2018-19 the revenue was Tk 76.60 lakh. However, following the change in ticket price, it came down to Tk 56 lakh in 2019-20.

Talking to The Daily Star, Swadhin Sen, a professor of archaeology at Jahangirnagar University, said the historic site had a "troubled history" of going

through development projects since 1985.

"When we talk about conserving an archaeological site, we mean the site has to be maintained as it is -- which means changing the appearance of an archaeological site is prohibited by law. A large number of visitors are using the stairs for climbing to the main temple. This is damaging the 1,300-year-old historical architecture," he said.

The site had a longstanding problem of waterlogging and salinity. The projects achieved success in controlling waterlogging, but the problem of salinity still persists, he said.

Meanwhile, in the name of protecting the terracotta plaques from the site, DoA did a questionable thing, archaeologists and officials said.

During the excavation, 265 terracotta plaques were taken to the Barind Research Museum in Rajshahi while remaining 3,000 terracotta plaques were on the

main temple. To protect those from thieves and salinity, most terracotta plaques were removed under the projects and replicas were placed, Prof Sen added.

Of the original terracotta plaques, only 17 are on display at the Paharpur Museum on the site, while the rest have been stored "without proper care", site officials said.

The traditions and customs of the Pala dynasty could be traced in these plaques. Evidence of their secular ideas is also found because these plaques reflect the Hindu gods and goddesses as well as Islamic symbols, along with a multitude of arts, culture and practices of the Buddhists of the time, archaeologists said.

Contacted, Naheed Sultana, regional director (Rajshahi and Rangpur) of DoA, said the conservation and development activities were carried out following proper rules and with involvement of local and foreign experts.

"It is very difficult to stop visitors from climbing to the main temple. When there were no wooden stairs, visitors were seen climbing to the top, taking risks. The wooden stairs were helping reduce the risk. Moreover, after the implementation of the projects, the revenue increased," said Naheed Sultana.

The official said they wrote to headquarters to repair the damaged wooden infrastructure, but were yet to receive any response to this end.

Implementation of the projects was directly controlled by the DoA, Sultana said, adding that local officials played no part in the projects besides partial monitoring. She said the site has been closed since March 26 due to the pandemic and will remain closed to public until further notice. As a result, no revenue has been generated between March to June, with most of the revenue coming between November and March, she added.

New drug for diabetic patients launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Healthcare Pharmaceuticals Limited yesterday launched a new drug in the country designed to improve blood sugar control in adults with type-2 diabetes.

Trulicity, a once-a-week injectable medication produced by US-based Eli Lilly and Company, will be available in 0.75mg and 1.5mg doses and can be administered at any time of the day, said a press release.

It is a prescription drug that should be taken only on advice from registered physicians who treat diabetic patients. When prescribed, it should be used as an adjunct to diet and exercise, added the release.

It will be available at pharmacies in four-pen package for a month's use at Tk 13,500. However, patients will be able to purchase a single-pen dose for the time being, Shek Sady Khan, medical manager at HPL, told this newspaper by phone. It is first of its kind in Bangladesh, he added.

Type-2 diabetes is a progressive disease and, in Bangladesh, many patients do not meet their treatment goals, said Prof AK Azad Khan, president of Diabetic Association of Bangladesh.

"Trulicity is non-insulin and injectable," he said.

Journo stabbed in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Miscreants stabbed a journalist in front of local press club in Rajshahi's Mohonpur upazila on Thursday evening, reportedly for writing about an unauthorised market.

Shahin Sagar (26), Mohonpur upazila correspondent of daily Rajshahi Sangbad, was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital with seven stab wounds, said OC Mostak Ahmed of Mohonpur Police Station. Shahin was released from the hospital yesterday afternoon.

Police arrested Kawsar Ali (25), one of the six persons Shahin accused in a case filed with Mohonpur Police Station yesterday, the OC said adding that police also seized a knife used for stabbing Shahin from Kawsar's possession.

This was the second attack on Shahin since publication of his report, the OC said.

On April 23, Rajshahi Sangbad published a report headlined "Mohonpur raate boschhe haat" (Temporary markets in Mohonpur operating at night).

Two days later, the haat's lease-holder Akkas Ali threatened Shahin of dire consequences. Later, local UP member

Alamgir Hossain, president of a local ward Awami League unit at Dhuroil, threatened him on behalf of Akkas, said the OC.

On May 11, Alamgir's men attacked him and fractured his head by throwing a brick-chip, the OC said.

Shahin filed a case regarding the attack accusing four persons including Kawsar.

Police arrested all four accused, but they later secured bail. The accused persons and Alamgir were pressing Shahin to withdraw the case. "I denied to give in to their threats," Shahin told this newspaper.

On Thursday evening when Shahin went to the local press club, he was attacked by a group of five who stabbed him indiscriminately and fled, he said.

Locals rescued him and rushed him to local upazila health complex. He was later shifted to RMCH.

Shahin filed the case accusing Alamgir, and Alamgir's men Kawsar, Abdul Halim, Ekhtar, Roni Hossain, and Abdus Salam.

OC Mostak said all the accused apart from the arrestee are absconding. The Daily Star failed to contact Alamgir, despite several attempts.