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Every year, many girls are trafficked out of Bangladesh with the promise of a better life abroad, only to end up in the underbelly of cities like Mumbai and Pune, India. An investigation by The Daily Star takes a look into this dark world that involves brokers and law enforcers on both sides of the border. This is the first part of a four-part series.

Lured to India's red light district, and a lucky escape

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN in Dhaka and SHREYA RAMAN in Mumbai

In the bustling heart of Pune lies Budhwar Peth, India's third largest redlight area tracing back to the 18th century and home to around 110 brothels.

Bangla music from a shop selling tea and biscuits mixes with the horns and the chatter. Dotted amidst the shops that line its cramped narrow lanes are many old wooden door frames, some coloured powder blue or green but most left in their original shade, all with cracks that tell

- » Pune is home to over 110 brothels
- » Each brothel houses 800-900 sex workers
- » About 20% of them from Bangladesh
- » Girls are sold for 2-4 lakh rupees
- » They face torture until they agree take customers
- » Some once trafficked Bangladeshi women now run their own brothel

their age.

Standing in front of these door frames are hundreds of women, some old, some young, dressed in bright saris and skirts, chatting and laughing.

From the busy lanes, these door frames look like they lead to dark nothingness. One of these frames leads to a long corridor where the only light source is the lamp lit in front of photos of Hindu gods.

The corridor, that can barely fit two people, leads to a narrower corridor with

three doors on both sides. The doors on the right lead to identical looking rooms with a single metal cot with a bare mattress and a pillow. The cot is flushed to the walls on three sides with only enough space to close the door on the fourth side. On the left, exactly opposite to each door is a small squat toilet.

The only light source in the space is the yellow light bulb in the corridor.

The exterior wooden walls of the rooms are tilting and the yellow oil paint, reflecting the light from the bulb, is peeling in many parts.



In rooms like these live some 800 to 900 commercial sex workers, and over 20 percent of them, numbering around 200 to 250, are Bangladeshi girls and women, multiple sources within rescue networks told The Daily Star.

Every year, many girls are trafficked out of Bangladesh with the promise of a better life abroad, only to end up in the underbelly of cities like Mumbai and Pune, an investigation by this newspaper has found.

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US will have to pay for its 'double standard': PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that the US will someday have to pay for what she said was its double standard.

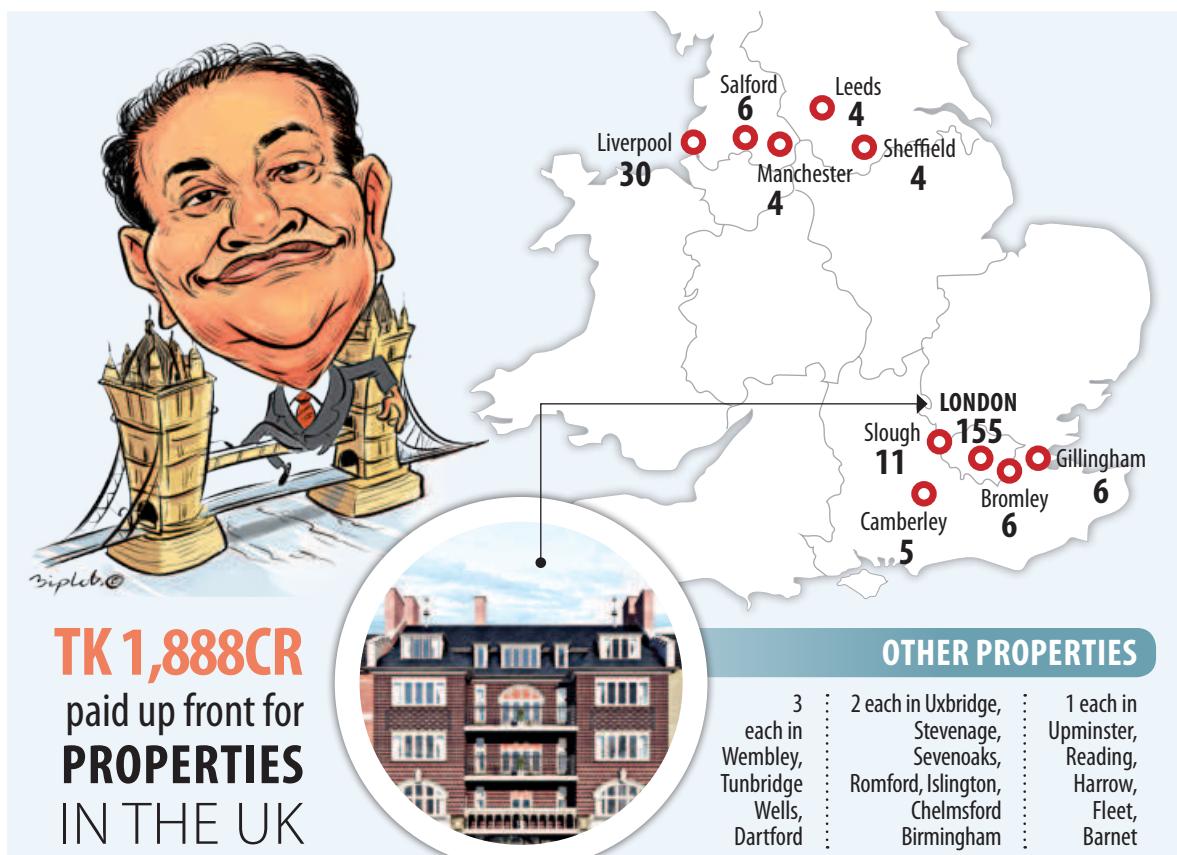
"They keep talking about one thing or another. People were burnt in our country. They talked a lot about elections and terrorism. When they were asked about the train set ablaze by the BNP, they were mum. They did not say a word.

"They have always been picking on me but that does not matter. The strength of the people is the greatest," she said in response to a question during an episode of the show "Let's Talk" organised by the Centre for Research and Information (CRI), the ruling Awami League's research wing.

Taped on December 22, the show was aired by Ekattor TV, News24 TV, and Somoy TV last night.

Claiming that she was not allowed to assume power as she had refused to sell gas to the US, Hasina said, "Our only resource is gas. When I came to power in 1996, many companies came here via international

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Javed owns at least 260 properties in the UK

ZYMA ISLAM and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed has at least 260 properties in the United Kingdom for which he has paid at least GBP 134.76 million or Tk 1,888 crore, according to The Daily Star's calculation from company filings publicly available on UK government websites.

The three-time Awami League lawmaker has also at least 537 mortgages against properties in the UK. A vast majority of these properties are in London.

However, his tax returns, submitted along with his affidavit to the Election Commission, states that he has no foreign income.

The affidavit says his annual income from business is only Tk 1.35 lakh. Although the affidavit

must also reveal the annual income of dependents -- like wife and children -- the minister left that blank.

In addition, his affidavit says that he and his wife jointly hold shares and debentures of only Tk 17.90 crore, about a hundred times less than his total known investment in UK properties.

The minister, who is vying for Chattogram-13 for a fourth time, did not respond to our calls and text messages for comment.

The properties in the UK were purchased by at least eight companies in which Javed has significant stakes. The companies are Aramit Properties, Rukhnila Properties, Sadakat Properties, New Ventures (London) Limited, ZTS Properties, Zeba Properties, ZTZ Property Ventures Ltd and Zaria

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WILL LOOK INTO UNUSUAL RISE IN WEALTH BUT AFTER POLLS: QUADER — PAGE 12

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