

MY DHAKA

CHARUKOLA'S UNSUNG HERO

Sentu and his animal friends

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Dhaka has its own noise. Along with it, it also has its own rush, distractions and plenty of dust. But if you pause for just a moment, you'll see that this city also has its quiet pockets! Its little moments of stillness, almost like unsung poetry!

Confused? Let me explain. Right outside the boundary walls of Charukola, under a canopy of dust-filtered polythene, sits one of those quiet moments. A man, not surrounded by crowds, but by creatures of the quiet – birds, squirrels, stray cats, and the occasional bold rodent. They all gather around him like old friends.

The man's name is Mohammad Kamal Hossain Sentu. Middle-aged and modestly dressed, Sentu can also be seen wearing what might just be the warmest smile in all of Dhaka.

You could walk past him without even noticing. He doesn't shout for customers or wave his hands like most vendors do. His tiny street-side stall is a curious mix of small treasures: black-laced pendants, handmade rings, and braided bracelets. Pretty things? Sure. But that's not why we're here today. We're here to talk about the kindness he spreads, not the things he sells!

Because the real story isn't hanging from his stall. It's alive!



PHOTO: JANNATUL BUSHRA

Every day, without fail, tiny paws and fluttering wings find their way to Sentu. Squirrels dart down from trees, sparrows flutter nearby, starlings even shy rodents peek out from cracks in the pavement. All it takes is the soft rustling of a bread packet in his hand – and the little ones come to him.

"I do my business for my family," Sentu says, his eyes twinkling beneath the tiredness of years. "But I feed these little souls for myself."

While people forget, Sentu believes,

and his band of merry animal friends remember him.

In a city that never pauses, where concrete consumes greenery and kindness, Sentu sits patiently with a plastic bottle of water and a pocketful of crumbs, offering safety to the smallest, most overlooked hearts of Dhaka.

His journey here has been anything but gentle.

Born and raised in Dhaka, Sentu's life has been a patchwork of grit and survival. Back in 2000, he owned a small stationery shop. Before that, he laboured in the tannery factories of Hazaribagh – a place where the air itself bites back. He also once sold toys

near Science Lab, and for a while, he filled gas cylinders on the streets. He's even sold ghungroos in Dhanmondi, Farmgate, and Science Lab, walking through alleys and markets with bags full of sound and hope.

"I did everything I could, for my family – my wife and my two children," he says.

But nothing was steady. Life slipped and stung; jobs faded like the ink on old receipts. Yet, through it all, Sentu never let go of his warmth. The fact that he is still on his feet motivates him every day!

For the last 12-13 years, he has been stationed outside Charukola. His small stall is unassuming, but each pendant tells a story. Some bear interesting designs. Others look like they belong in forgotten fairy tales.

"Each piece has a meaning," he says. "I don't just sell things. I offer stories."

And yet, it's his story that seems to pull people in. Not the struggle, but the stillness – the way he kneels down when a bird limps towards him, the way he smiles when a squirrel perches on the railing to nibble his offerings.

Strangers often stop to take photos, to ask questions. But for Sentu, it's never been about attention.

"Animals don't speak. But they feel. That's enough," says Sentu.

There are no awards on his wall. Just a small man, seated on the edge of one of Dhaka's busiest cultural spots, teaching with every crumb what it means to care – gently, consistently and without expecting anything in return.

13 Dhaka wards at high risk

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and wards 4 and 23 (B: 20 each) were found to be at high risk.

Among the breeding sources identified, cement water tanks accounted for the highest proportion (22 percent), followed by flooded floors (20 percent).

The other sources included plastic drums (13 percent), water meter holes (11 percent), plastic buckets (10 percent), flower tubs and trays/plastic pipe pits (7 percent), discarded tyres

pucca houses (8.88 percent) and vacant plots (2.8 percent).

To combat the growing risk, the report urged several measures including community-based interventions to eliminate breeding grounds and enhanced coordination with REHAB and flat owners' associations, especially in multi-storey and under-construction buildings.

A year-round larvicidal programme in wards with high BI and House Index;



(6 percent), internal water channels (5 percent) and cement plots (4 percent).

The highest concentration of Aedes mosquito larvae (58.88 percent) was found in multistorey buildings, according to the survey, which was published yesterday.

The other breeding grounds included under-construction buildings (19.63 percent), independent houses (9.8 percent), semi-

a nationwide cleanliness drive involving schools, civil society, youth groups and other stakeholders; and regular dissemination of awareness messages through electronic and print media were also advised.

Authorities emphasised that immediate, coordinated action is essential to prevent a large-scale dengue outbreak in the coming monsoon months.

The Tigers dominate

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reverse sweep off debutant Tharindu Ratnayake, glowing it to Kusal Mendis behind the stumps.

With rain interrupting play shortly after lunch, only 61 overs could be

bowled on day two.

A persistent drizzle forced an early tea and fading light ended proceedings prematurely.

Play will resume fifteen minutes early on Thursday to compensate for the lost time.

Parties row over constitutional council

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According to the reform proposal, if parliament is active, the proposed council would be composed of the president, prime minister, opposition leader, speakers and deputy speakers from two proposed houses of parliament, the chief justice, and one member from outside the ruling and opposition coalitions.

Those who oppose the proposal argue the council could disproportionately benefit the opposition and constrain the government, risking instability.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said the party could not support a body with sweeping constitutional powers but no accountability mechanism.

"If an institution holds authority and power without accountability, we, as a democratic party, cannot support it. Creating a separate body to carry out these functions will lead to an imbalance in the system," he said.

He also opposed introducing a new system for presidential elections, saying the president should

continue to be elected by sitting MPs, and, if an upper house is formed, by its members as well. He called for amending and strengthening existing laws governing the constitutional appointments.

In contrast, NCP Convenor Nahid Islam said those opposing the constitutional council were trying to preserve a "fascist" structure. He challenged them to offer alternatives.

Describing the proposed council as a mechanism for balancing power, Nahid said, "Our journey towards a new Bangladesh began with a goal to curb the executive's unchecked power. That's why we support the formation of the constitutional council.

"But it should not have the authority to appoint the head of the armed forces. And the president and chief justice should not be on the council," he said, calling for further discussions on these points.

Expressing his disappointment, the NCP chief said, "We had hoped to reach a policy consensus so that appointments to constitutional bodies would be made impartially, not

at the prime minister's discretion. But that consensus did not emerge."

Jamaat, which skipped Tuesday's session in protest against a joint statement after a meeting with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman in London, participated in yesterday's discussion.

Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher said Jamaat supports the constitutional council in principle but echoed concerns about including the president and chief justice in the council, citing the need to protect the dignity of their offices.

Taher also said local government elections must be held under a caretaker government so that representatives are fairly elected. He supported a direct presidential election, but said more discussion was needed on who would vote.

Amar Bangladesh Party President Mujibur Rahman Manju called support for the NCC a "moral imperative".

"If we do not build accountability mechanisms like a constitutional council,

the spirit of the 2024 uprising will be betrayed. Thousands gave their lives for a more democratic Bangladesh. We must not let that go to waste," he said.

Ganosamhati Andolon Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki also endorsed the constitutional council, noting that similar councils exist in many democracies.

"At a minimum, appointments to the Election Commission, ACC, and PSC must go through a framework like the constitutional council," he said.

Ali Riaz, vice chairman of the consensus commission, said the constitutional council is intended to hold the executive accountable.

"We have an opportunity to design a system where those in power are finally subject to checks and balances," he said.

Islami Andolon's Gazi Ataur Rahman also voiced his party's support, noting that constitutional bodies have never operated freely since independence. He proposed a referendum if consensus remains elusive, criticising left-leaning parties for opposing urgent

reforms despite being long-time advocates for structural change.

Meanwhile, Shahadat Hossain Selim, spokesperson for the 12-party alliance and chairman of Bangladesh LDP, an ally of the BNP, said, "We are against forming the constitutional council at this moment. It's not the priority now."

During a break in the talks, Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, clarified that while his party is not opposed to the constitutional council, such structural reforms should be left to the next elected parliament.

"If this is done now, it may appear as if another government is being created within the government. Our priority should be ensuring credible, impartial elections," he said.

WALKOUT
After the break, leaders from the CPB and Gono Forum staged a walkout, alleging that the Jamaat was allowed to speak at length while others were restricted.

Prince said the consensus commission took note of their protest, after which

CPB and Gono Forum rejoined the talks.

However, Gono Forum's General Secretary Mizanur Rahman later said the commission had lost neutrality and that their party would not be attending further sessions unless fairness is restored.

Bazlur Rashid Firoz, general secretary of Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, also alleged bias in how the session was conducted.

Wrapping up the dialogue, Ali Riaz said most parties agreed on the need for a constitutional institution for key appointments, despite some policy disagreements. He added that proposals to reform both the presidency and the electoral system remain under active discussion.

Consensus commission members Justice Md Emdadul Haque, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Safar Raj Hossain, Iftekharuzzaman, and Md Ayub Miah, attended the talks. Monir Haider, special assistant to the chief adviser on consensus building, was also present.

A total of 30 political parties participated in yesterday's session.

There can be no justice if culprits hold power: UN

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"I'm not surprised that families are afraid to file police cases if the person responsible for the disappearance is still in the same building."

The group urged all law enforcement and security agencies to come forward with evidence that could aid the prosecution of enforced disappearance cases.

"To the police ... We do not see how they are serving people and serving justice if they are not disclosing who the perpetrators are," said WGEID member Ana Lorena Delgadillo Perez.

"To the army ... Collaboration is not just a word. It needs to be translated into action. You have evidence. Bring the evidence before the institutions investigating and prosecuting these cases."

She also noted that some military personnel accused of enforced disappearances were absconding. "We have not heard any logical explanation of how that happened."

Dr Baranowska said the WGEID had raised the issue of military involvement in

enforced disappearances with the UN's Department of Peace Operations.

To this, Brigadier General Md Asif Iqbal, judge advocate general at the Army Headquarters, said, "There is a difference between the army and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence [DGFI]. We must specify whether the act was committed by the army or the intelligence."

Major General Hakimuzzaman, a faculty member at the National Defence College, said the army often had no knowledge of what took place in other agencies unless such actions were officially reported or covered in the media.

"The Bangladesh Army is not involved in enforced disappearances. A handful of individuals on deputation to the DGFI and Rab were to blame," he said.

He further questioned the conditions under which certain individuals acted "inappropriately", noting that Rab and the Border Guard Bangladesh report to the home minister, while the DGFI and National Security Intelligence fall

under the defence minister, who is always the head of government.

"Their channel of reporting was not the Bangladesh Army," he said, adding that intelligence agencies operate in a highly compartmentalised manner.

"Many army personnel have undergone trial and been punished when reported by those organisations, the media, or others. In many cases, the army has unilaterally withdrawn personnel and taken necessary action."

Asked by this newspaper whether any individuals had been held accountable specifically for enforced disappearances, he responded in the negative.

"If we [the army] can earn the trust of the people by standing with them during floods, how can the Bangladesh Army act against its own people?" he asked.

He proposed that retired army officials be included in the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and the International Crimes Tribunal to make them

more "inclusive".

Meanwhile, Sharmin Akhter, superintendent of police at the Police Headquarters, reaffirmed the force's commitment to investigating enforced disappearances.

The UN working group further stressed that victims need justice through a fair and credible process.

"What the families and victims need are sentences that will be kept; sentences that are brought in a fair trial and that will stand the test of time," said Dr Baranowska.

She cautioned that while some families demand swift justice, rushing trials could compromise fairness. "Sentences that can later be revised would be detrimental to everyone."

The team welcomed the possible extension of the current commission's tenure until the end of the year, but stressed that other mechanisms should also be used to resolve individual cases.

"There are search mechanisms beyond this commission that would help solve individual cases, which is not the core

mandate of the commission but it is a task that needs to be achieved," said Dr Baranowska.

The team also noted the long-term harm inflicted on victims, who often face job loss, ruined education prospects, and years of legal harassment following their illegal detention.

It called for a review of the country's counter-terrorism legislation.

Golam Mortaza, a survivor, shared how he was picked up by Rab in 2010 and forcibly disappeared for a month.

"My lip had split open from the beatings, and it was sewn back up without anaesthesia. They clipped crocodile clips to my genitals and tortured me with electric shocks. I could smell my flesh burning."

He described being hooded at all times, kept in a five-by-ten-foot cell with no hygiene facilities, and being deprived of food to the point that he lost 20kg in a month.

Released on the condition that he remain silent, Mortaza still endured eight more months of incarceration under various

legal cases.

Mahdi Amin, policy adviser to the acting BNP chairperson, said the party believes in a Bangladesh where no one is subjected to human rights violations.

"The party's grassroots has suffered tremendously because of enforced disappearance," he said, pledging to continue efforts to locate the missing.

Tasnim Jara, senior joint member secretary of the National Citizen Party, said her party envisions the formation of a permanent commission of inquiry – not only for justice, but for closure.

"Every case must be investigated for closure, and we must have a mechanism to recover records that have been destroyed. If case records can't be accessed, the command chains must be investigated," she said.

The WGEID concluded by emphasising that this was only the beginning of its collaboration with the country, stating that it will be issuing recommendations to the Bangladesh government in the coming days.