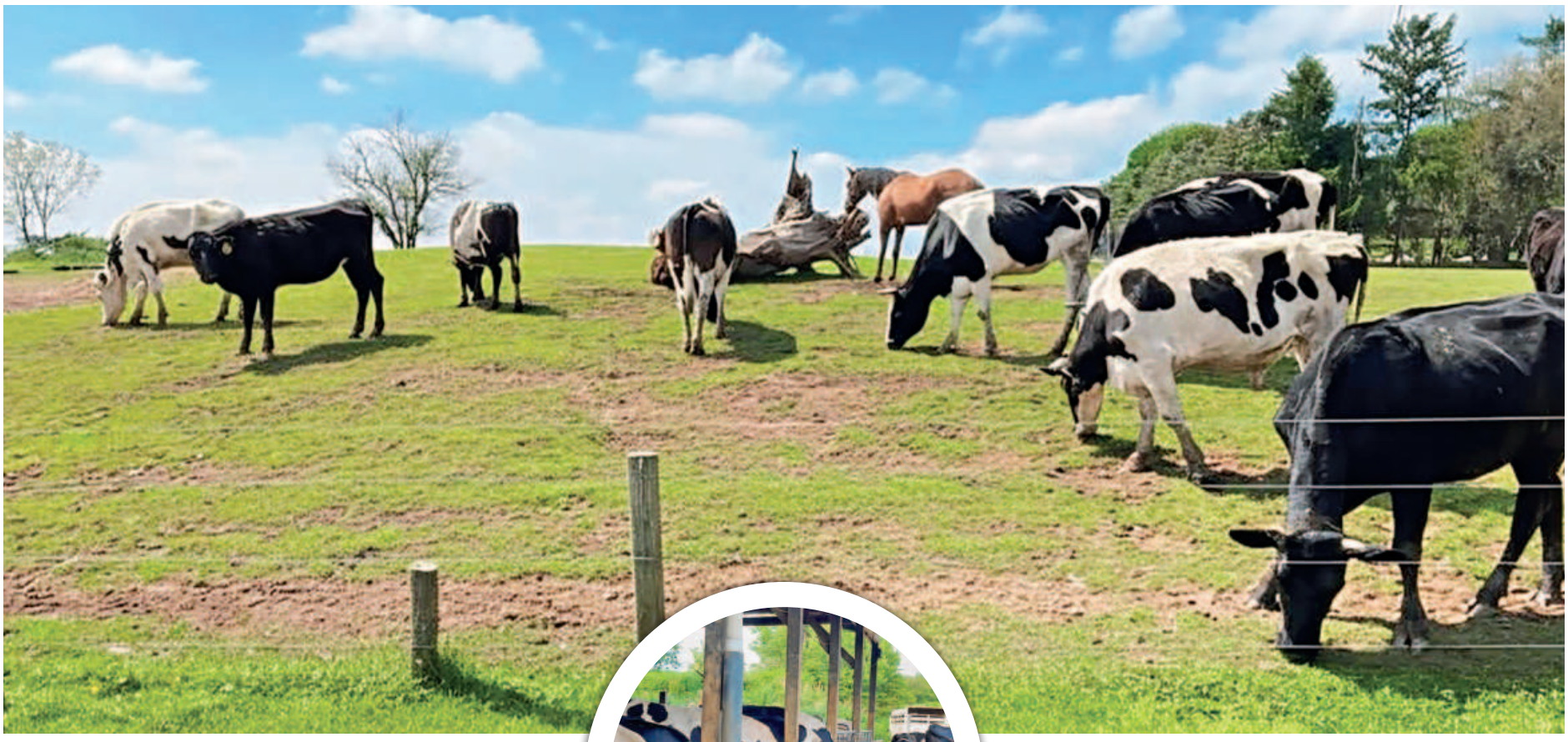




We asked non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) about their experience of performing Qurbani away from home, and the result was a collection of varied emotions.

I did not know what to do with 140 kg of meat

When Jubair Al Sakib performed his first Qurbani in Sydney, Australia, in 2022, he had not the faintest idea about what awaited him.

In Dhaka, his father always took care of Eid rituals, from visiting cattle markets to arranging butchers. Sakib and his brother-in-law went to a local slaughterhouse and ordered, not knowing how much meat an average Australian cow yields. The day after Eid, when his brother-in-law brought the meat home from the slaughterhouse, Sakib could not believe the quantity that was in his share.

"I received 140 kilograms of beef!" he said in astonishment.

Knowing not what to do with so much meat, he and his wife asked a "Bangladeshi auntie" they knew to keep as much beef as she wanted to. The auntie, too, did not have enough freezer space to store so much fresh meat, of course, so she decided to keep as much as she could in her bathtub! The plan was to prepare it the next morning for consumption as well as preservation, using cooking techniques that our great-grandmothers and grandmothers did in the past when freezers were not available.

"We still had a lot of meat left, so I put as much as I could in the trunk of my car and drove to Lakemba, a place that is famous for South Asian shops and restaurants," he said.

In Lakemba, Sakib parked his car in front of a row of shops and opened his car's trunk. Six or seven Bangladeshi men were standing on the pavement, chatting. He shared with them his story and requested them to help themselves to the meat.

"In a matter of five minutes, my car was empty. The Bangladeshi brothers were happy to have the meat," he said.

It was Sakib's first in Australia, and an anecdote that he laughingly shares with others.

Sakib now chooses to go to a Lebanese shop instead. There, the staff slaughter the cow, cut up the meat, and package it for clients like him.

"It's much easier, and I can order just one share or bhag, which is more than enough for a family of three," Sakib said. "In addition to sacrificing in Australia, we also give Qurbani in Dhaka, where the meat is distributed among the needy," he added.

When asked how much it usually costs him for a share of a cow or a goat, Sakib said, "It varies from place to place and year to year. Prices have increased this year, and I saw that an Arab butcher in Sydney was asking for 340 AUD per one share of cow, 340 AUD for a lamb, and 320 AUD for a goat."

Sakib, who is an assistant store manager at Telstra, an Australian telecommunications company, recently relocated to Queensland with his family from New South Wales, so at the time of writing this piece, they had not planned for this year's festivities.

It is a profitable seasonal business for the local animal farms

Five years ago, when Shamimul Islam, a Pennsylvania resident and a software engineer at Comcast Corporation, planned on performing his first Qurbani ritual in the US, he did not know how to go about it. Eventually, he found some Facebook groups where Muslim men were looking for people interested in shared Qurbani. This seemed like the only viable option because a mature Angus cow, for instance, a breed known for its rich, savoury, and robust beef, weighs between 1,200 and 1,500 pounds. This means that seven people generally band together to sacrifice one Angus cow. Other cattle breeds can weigh up to 3,000 pounds!

Islam and his friends have been going to a family-owned animal farm for the last several years. Nestled in the rolling hills of Mohrsville, Pennsylvania, Clover Farms draws crowds from New York to Virginia during Eid ul Adha.

"Pennsylvania is famous for its animal farms, and many accommodate halal slaughtering. People from various states, including New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, come to these farms to perform their sacrificial ritual," he said.

Islam added, "Over the three days of Eid, a family-owned farm like Clover Farms slaughters up to 100 animals. It is a profitable seasonal business for them."

Asked how much a share of cow generally costs him, Islam said that prices have gone up after the pandemic.

"Before COVID-19, a share usually cost 450 USD, now it costs between 550 and 600 USD," he said. "The price includes the cost of cutting. It is 400 USD if you want the cow to be cut up into medium-sized pieces, and 600 USD for small pieces."

Islam donates a portion of his meat to the local mosque. From there, different charity organisations collect the meat and distribute it among those genuinely in need.

"Most of the mosques here, where I live, collect Qurbani meat for donation. The meat is generally distributed locally among the refugees," he said.

We usually do not get the chance to see the animal being sacrificed

It was the year 2006 when Dr Golam Murshed Parosh, a senior data engineer with the United Kingdom's Office of Communications (Ofcom), the country's independent regulatory authority for communications industries, made a lamb sacrifice during his first Qurbani in the UK. He was pursuing his doctoral studies at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, at the time.

The UK is fond of lamb, so are Dr Murshed and his family. In Ipswich, England, where Dr Murshed now resides, a sheep producing 20 to 30 kg of meat costs him around £320.

"The price varies depending on the butchery that is taking the order and the location of it. In my area, no butcher takes orders for a share of cow," he said.

Asked how the process works in the UK, Dr Murshed said, "Usually, around three to four weeks before Eid ul Adha, butchers in many halal shops begin taking bookings and announce their prices for animals".

In the UK, most butchers work with approved suppliers, often those holding HMC (Halal Monitoring Committee) certification. The suppliers source the animals from farms, and the slaughter takes place on Eid day in accordance with Islamic guidelines and UK regulations. The animals are then processed and delivered to the meat shop. After that, the butcher cuts the meat into pieces suitable for cooking.

Asked if he misses Bangladesh during Qurbani Eid time, Dr Murshed said that he deeply misses the raw, electric energy of the cattle markets, the hours spent walking among large, majestic bulls, and the lively bargaining with traders, which felt like an essential part of the tradition.

"Here, the sacred act has been reduced to a mere transaction, cold and routine. It is like ticking an item off a shopping list. Most of us do not even get the chance to see the actual animal being sacrificed," he said.

The non-resident Bangladeshis miss the vibrant atmosphere of cattle markets, the chaos and excitement surrounding the sacred act of animal sacrifice, and the good times spent savouring delicious red meat dishes with friends and family. However, life goes on, and our NRBs adhere to local laws, regulations, and practices to perform Qurbani thousands of miles away from their homeland.

By Wara Karim
Photo: Shamimul Islam / Collected