



The untold lives of Sadarghat’s boatmen

SABRIN ZAWAD RITU

The Buriganga holds unimaginable history, many stories, and so much more. It was never calm from the very beginning. Every day, thousands of people pass through this river, noticing its chaos, but some things are left behind unnoticed – the faces of men whose lives begin before the sunrise and end long after dusk.

While Dhaka races by on flyovers and metro rails, these river warriors continue to row through the city’s past and present, carrying passengers, stories, and generations of tradition on their wooden boats.

Boatmen of Buriganga, who never left the water, have been living a contrasting life but no one ever noticed that part of Dhaka life.

To an outsider, they may seem like just another part of the scenery. But spend a few minutes on one of their boats, and sadly, an entire new world unfolds.

Mohammad Wahid Ali, who was not supposed to have this boatman life, said, “I realised that if I could earn even Tk 10 consistently every day, it would be better than working two days and sitting for five.” When he first came to Dhaka to earn a living, he used to be a



laborer, but managing expenses for family was tougher than he could ever imagine.

For the past 32 years, life has been cruel to Ali, but this river becomes more than home for people like him.

70-year-old Abdul Malek is among the oldest boatman, even witnessing the liberation war, shared how the past two decades have been stuck on life, spent only trying to survive and support his family. “My family lives in Chandpur. I’m the only earner. But it’s not enough for what I earn,” he

sighed. “I don’t really have money left for my family, it mostly goes towards food and survival.”

Malek continued, “This boat is like everything to me, I even spend my night here too.” When the sky turns dark and the monsoons bring rain and storms, it’s not something to enjoy for them. “When it rains, polythene sheets are the only shelter I can manage for myself.”

If you go for an hour to Sadarghat in the afternoon, you’ll see how their one boat becomes their office, and their bedroom. A small plastic bottle serves

as a water container, a folded cloth becomes a pillow during those quiet afternoons. Under the blazing summer sun, maybe a torn umbrella saves their life from heat stroke. Even during sudden monsoon downpours, they remain on the river, chasing passengers and daily earnings.

Life at Sadarghat runs on a rhythm of its own. Passengers hop on and off boats with urgency, bargaining over fares as if negotiating big deals.

Abdul Majid explained that they usually charge Tk 30 per trip. “But we don’t always get enough passengers. That’s why we sometimes ask for as much as Tk 40 or Tk 50,” he stated. “Even then, people often shout at us, saying we’re charging too much.”

On a good day, Majid earns around Tk 500 to Tk 600, most of which goes straight to his family. “Whether I eat or not, my family has to survive on this small income,” he smiled. “If they can live a good life, that’s enough for me.”

This is how the life of Buriganga’s boatmen goes on. Still, they show up every day, with a smile on their face, and with the tune of Bhatiyali. They expect that one day, this “Nil doriya” will take them someplace where they will live a better life with their loved ones.

Tankers cross strait as US, Iran sign deal

FROM PAGE 1
people were killed. Iran says fighting must end in Lebanon and other fronts to enforce the deal.

Meanwhile, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar told BBC Urdu that today’s signing ceremony in Geneva is cancelled as the memorandum of understanding has already been signed remotely.

The US vice-president, JD Vance, was expected to sign the deal at a more formal ceremony in Geneva today.

American forces yesterday lifted their parallel naval blockade of Iranian ports that had prevented ships from sailing to or from the Islamic republic, the US military said, noting that American warships “will remain in the general area”.

The memorandum of understanding calls for the immediate opening of the Strait of Hormuz and lifting of a US blockade of Iran’s ports. Though shippers say it will still take time for transit across the strait to reach pre-war levels, with a need yet to ensure safe access and clear mines, there were immediate signs of an impact.

Ships which once might have concealed their positions by switching off their transponders were now broadcasting their locations, poised to transit the strait. Three Saudi flagged supertankers carrying 6 million barrels

of crude and a French-flagged LNG tanker left the Gulf through the Hormuz, a tracking platform said.

Benchmark Brent crude futures prices fell by another 2 percent to below \$78 a barrel, lowest since the shooting began. US consumers saw some relief at the fuel pump, as the average price of a gallon of regular gasoline fell below \$4 for the first time since March, according to the AAA motor club.

The US military, which had enforced its own blockade after Iran shut the Strait at the start of the war, has allowed at least 12 ships to pass through, JD Vance said.

Before the war, the strait saw around 120 transits per day, according to the shipping journal Lloyd’s List.

Vance said he planned to go to Switzerland for “technical negotiations” with Iran “this weekend” rather than Friday, but emphasised that the plan “could change”.

In Iran, the Tasnim agency said “nothing has been confirmed” about the Iranian delegation’s trip to Switzerland.

The deal should bring an end to the current US Israeli conflict with the Islamic republic, which saw five weeks of all-out war until a ceasefire was struck in early April.

But some in Tehran expressed a downbeat mood at the prospects for peace.

“I have no hope that this is a lasting agreement. Maybe after the 60 days they start fighting again,” said Mina, 54, a psychologist from Tehran.

Under the MoU, the US, Iran and their allies agreed to an immediate and permanent ceasefire on all fronts, including Lebanon, and to conclude a final agreement within 60 days.

The US pledged to lift its blockade of Iranian ports immediately and withdraw forces from areas near Iran within 30 days of a final deal.

Washington also commits to immediately waive oil sanctions crippling Iran’s economy and gradually lift sanctions and release frozen Iranian assets.

And once a final agreement is reached on Iran’s nuclear programme, the United States will facilitate the release of a \$300 billion reconstruction fund supported by regional nations, the deal says.

US officials also said Iran would dilute its enriched uranium stocks, possibly by “down-blending on site” under the supervision of the UN nuclear watchdog. Iran’s ballistic missile programme was not mentioned in the agreement, despite Israel’s longstanding push for its dismantling.

Iran agreed to restore commercial shipping through the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, with traffic resuming immediately and returning to full

capacity within 30 days after mines are cleared from Hormuz.

Any final agreement will be backed by a binding UN Security Council resolution.

Trump’s decision to end the war, in which 13 US service members were killed, and a vast proportion of US ammunition stockpiles was used, has unsettled some of his allies at home.

US Senator Bill Cassidy from Trump’s Republican Party described it as the “worst foreign policy blunder in decades”.

Apparently anticipating such criticism, Trump said at a G7 summit that he was prepared to “bomb the hell” out of Iran if they violated the agreement.

“These fools, who think I haven’t been tough enough on Iran, when the Stock Market Just Hit A RECORD HIGH, and Oil prices are ‘tumbling’ down, are either jealous, bad people, or stupid,” Trump added on social media yesterday.

There has also been some criticism from hardliners within Iran, where the conflict was described as an “imposed war” and compared to the 1980-1988 conflict with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

But parliament speaker and top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf insisted the deal represented a US “failure”, while Pezeshkian called it “historic”.

may reflect legitimate business activities, international trade settlements and the movement of assets by non-resident Bangladeshis.

“However, the sharp increase has also revived concerns about illicit financial flows, tax evasion, corruption, trade mis-invoicing and the laundering of proceeds from financial crimes,” said Raihan, also a professor at the University of Dhaka’s economics department.

Switzerland’s reputation for financial stability and strong wealth-management services continues to make it an attractive destination for overseas assets, he said.

To curb money laundering and the illegal transfer of wealth abroad, Bangladesh should strengthen the enforcement capacity of the financial intelligence and anti-corruption authorities, enhance scrutiny of politically exposed persons and improve monitoring of cross-border transactions, according to him.

Greater transparency in beneficial ownership, stricter oversight of trade invoicing and the wider use of digital tracking systems can help detect suspicious financial activities, Raihan said.

The government should also deepen cooperation with foreign jurisdictions, including Switzerland, to obtain information on undisclosed assets and recover illicit funds when necessary, he said.

“At the same time, improving governance, ensuring policy stability and creating a more attractive domestic investment environment would reduce incentives for capital flight and encourage individuals to keep their wealth within the country.”

Shahe Alam saga

FROM PAGE 1
allegations involving someone holding such a high office.

Speaking to this correspondent yesterday, 13 ruling party MPs, three ministers, two state ministers, and six BNP Standing Committee members said the issue had given the opposition an opportunity to criticise the government.

The controversy emerged after Shahe Alam faced questions in parliament over the naming of three newly formed unions in his constituency, whose names match his family title and those of his two sons.

Rejecting the allegations in parliament on Monday, the state minister said the names had “miraculously” matched the names of his sons.

All cabinet members, MPs, and senior party leaders quoted in this report declined to be named, saying the matter involved a sitting state minister who had “close ties with the prime minister”.

According to three ministers, the controversy had become difficult for the government to ignore and had drawn concern within the cabinet.

A minister from Chattogram division, speaking anonymously, said, “When our prime minister refuses to rename an institution after his own mother, ministers should be more cautious about anything that appears personal. Shahe Alam should explain it properly instead of speaking mockingly in a parliament session.”

“He belongs to an important ministry where our party’s second-in-command [BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir] is involved.

“His every act is linked to all ministers and the government. Not only the people, but also our own cabinet members are not satisfied with his explanation over the naming.”

A minister from a northern district said, “Everyone loves their own area and wants development work so that people feel the government is doing something. But what benefit do people get from naming a union? Despite the prime minister creating a good image, this type of controversy can have a negative impact on the government.”

Another minister from Dhaka division said, “Even if we accept that the names matched miraculously or by coincidence, my question is why he did not stop it before finalising the names. Why should we give the opposition such an opportunity?”

Asked whether the issue had reached the highest level, the minister said, “The prime minister knows about this issue. It is now a matter for the prime minister how to deal with it. We have nothing to say or advise in this regard.”

According to lawmakers, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has repeatedly instructed party members in internal meetings not to engage in activities that could undermine public trust in either the government

or the party.

They said Shahe Alam’s actions appeared inconsistent with those directives.

During a break in the parliament session yesterday, an MP requesting anonymity said lawmakers were frustrated by the state minister’s conduct.

“All of us MPs are annoyed by his activities. The explanations he gives are weak and put us in an uncomfortable position. He is doing things as he wishes. He is taking all projects to his own constituency, and this is not right.”

“Perhaps someone is backing him, and that is why he is carrying out such controversial activities. We also cannot say much because we are not in that position,” the lawmaker added.

Another MP from Chattogram division said, “A group of MPs discussed the matter during a parliament break. At a time when the prime minister is trying to build a new image, such actions by a state minister are truly disappointing.”

A ruling party MP from the north said, “Even we face questions from our grassroots leaders. The state minister behaves as if his actions do not bother anyone.”

Another MP from the south-west said the government should take action; otherwise, others might follow suit and set a bad precedent.

The controversy has also reached the BNP Standing Committee, according to four members who spoke on condition of anonymity.

One member said the leadership was aware of the unease created by the issue.

“We came to power through an election after a long 17-year struggle. Many persecuted BNP leaders did not get the opportunity to be part of the government. But if someone gets that opportunity and then puts both the government and the party’s image at risk, it cannot be accepted.”

Another standing committee member said, “Recently, several reports have been published in newspapers about him, saying that his own constituency received the highest allocation. Even one of his children got the contract for that work. People are seeing these things and blaming the government and the BNP. Now it remains to be seen what action the prime minister takes.”

This correspondent last night tried to reach Shahe Alam for comment by phone and sent him a text message, but he did not respond.

Party sources said Shahe Alam became MP from Bogura 2 after the BNP reversed its decision to leave the seat for Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna. The party had earlier announced it would not field a candidate there. Shahe Alam later secured the nomination, won the seat, and was appointed state minister.