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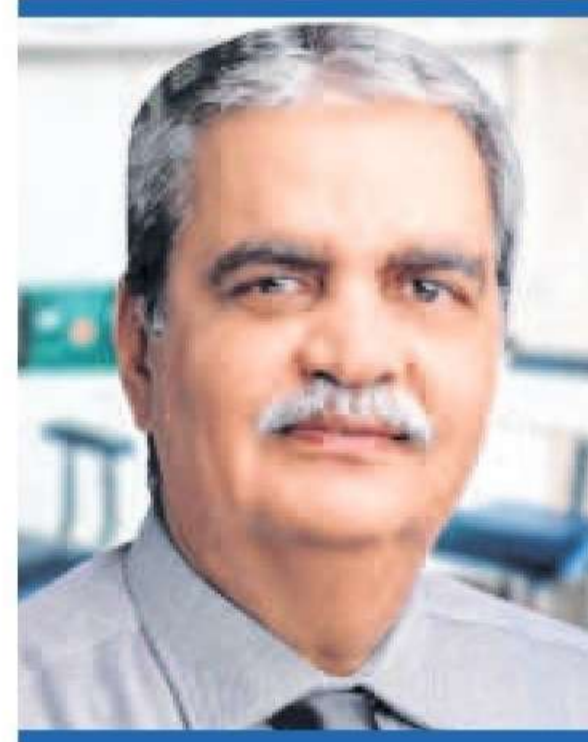
LAST WORD

City NGO takes Bangladeshi home after 20 yrs

S BALAKRISHNAN / MUMBAI

In a heartwarming event scheduled for July 21 at Thakurgaon in Bangladesh, Mohammed aka Moti, a rehabilitated schizophrenic, will be reunited with his family after 20 years because of the collaboration between Shraddha, an NGO spearheaded by Magsaysay Award-winner Bharat Vatwani, volunteers in Bangladesh, and the Bangladesh deputy high commission in Mumbai.

The story began when volunteers of Shraddha, India's only registered NGO run by



The man will be reunited with his family with the help of an NGO spearheaded by Magsaysay Award-winner Bharat Vatwani, volunteers in Bangladesh, and the country's deputy high commission in Mumbai

professional psychiatrists, spotted a destitute man by the roadside in Karjat. They brought the man, who gave his name as Moti, to Shraddha's 6.5 acre centre in Karjat

which shelters at least 120 destitutes with mental illnesses.

Inspired by legendary social worker Baba Amte and his son Prakash Amte, Shraddha provides free food, shelter

and psychiatric treatment to the destitutes. It then helps track down their families.

So far, more than 10,000 destitutes have been reunited with their families in various states, including Bihar; Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Kerala, Orissa, and West Bengal.

Moti was initially totally incoherent and all that the volunteers could make out was that he was speaking in a Bengali dialect popular on the India-Bangladesh border. He showed improvement but could not be reunited with his family as the Covid pandemic broke out.

Later, another NGO, Snehalaya in Ahmednagar (headed by Girish Kulkarni) organised a 75-day Cycle Rally called Sadbhavna Rally, beginning on Gandhi Jayanti 2021 from Ahmednagar to Gandhi Ashram at Noakhali in Bangladesh to celebrate the 50 years of the independence of Bangladesh.

Kulkarni invited a few dignitaries from Bangladesh to Ahmednagar on August 15 last year. One of them was Raha Naba Kumar Das, the director of the Gandhi Ashram Trust, Noakhali, Bangladesh.

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City NGO takes...

Das was approached by Shraddha volunteer Nitish Sharma, who sought his help in reuniting Moti with his family in Bangladesh.

Then began a protracted struggle to track down Moti's family, with two volunteers from Bangladesh, Nafis Nawal and Habib, going out of their way to help.

A detailed interview with Moti strengthened the belief that he might be from Bangladesh. Nawab and Habib then noted down all the information they had about Moti and assured the volunteers that they would try to locate his family. The two succeeded in this endeavour after searching intensely for a few weeks.

Multiple video calls later it was learnt that Moti's real name is Md Rahman and he belongs to Thakurgaon district of Bangladesh. His father also disclosed that Rahman had a history of mental illness prior to his disappearance from his

home in 2002. In the months that followed, Rahman's father (an ex-army man) followed up with the Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh, Mumbai, which asked the NGO to send an official request letter. The Bangladesh Embassy in India then sent the travel permit of Rahman, allowing him to enter Bangladesh.

"As he is still occasionally showing signs of chronic schizophrenia, we decided not to send him alone and unescorted to Bangladesh. Our associate psychiatrist, Dr Swarali Kondwilkar and social worker, Nitish Sharma, volunteered to go with him," said Vatwani.

They hope to cross the border on July 21st and reunite Rahman with his family in Thakurgaon district.