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After 12 Years in India, Mentally Ill Bangladeshi Woman Reunited with Family

After 12 long years of separation, Shantana, a mentally ill woman from Gaibandha district, Bangladesh, has finally returned home from India. Her repatriation was made possible through the tireless efforts of journalist, humanitarian & Amateur Radio Operator Shamsul Huda (S21HD), who has dedicated years to reuniting cross-border missing persons with their families.

***Huda, who has
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borders***



Shamsul Huda S21HD
Organizing Secretary,
Amateur Radio Society Bangladesh (ARSB)



Shantana arrived at the Benapole border on Tuesday morning, escorted through the Petrapole checkpoint in India. Following immigration formalities, she was handed over to her family in the presence of officials from both nations and representatives from relevant government departments.

Shantana, who went missing nearly 12 years ago, had been living in a shelter (Manav Vikas Training and Rehabilitation Centre, Dist Nagpur, Mumbai, India). Her story came to light when Tapan Pradhan, a coordinator from the West Bengal-based NGO Ishwar Sankalpa, contacted Huda in July. Through a phone call, Shantana was able to recall her village—Kastipur in Sundarganj Upazila—and names of family members, sparking a search that spanned multiple unions and local officials.

Despite internet blackouts and political unrest, Huda persisted. With the help of union chairmen Abdul Jabbar and Mokhlesur Rahman Mondal, Shantana's father, Abdus Salam Akand, was located. Her husband, Sekendar Ali, initially hesitant due to financial constraints, was reassured that the family would bear no cost for her return.

Shantana's disappearance had deeply affected her family. After marrying Sekendar in 2014 and having four children, she began showing signs of mental illness. She went missing twice—first found in Bogura, and later vanishing from a relative's home near Savar's Fantasy Kingdom.

Her return marks the 56th successful reunion facilitated by Shamsul Huda, who has independently tracked and repatriated missing individuals across borders. Many had been imprisoned or housed in shelters, and some had died in custody. Huda's work has brought closure to families long separated by borders and bureaucracy.

As Shantana embraces her loved ones once again, her story raises pressing questions about the role of the state in protecting vulnerable citizens. Until systemic support is ensured, it is individuals like Huda who continue to bridge the gaps left by institutions.