

ALERT!

From January 2001 to February 2002, 397 people, mostly female, came under acid attacks in the country. Of them, 216 survivors filed cases and only 16 of them were disposed of.

INSIDE TODAY

SOUTH ASIA 4

M Abdul Hafiz's Abed of thorns Zaglul A Chowdhury's Jayalalitha returns

COMMENT 6

Hasnat Abdul Hye's The bell tolls Mohammad Badrul Ahsan's God of the gaps Shah AMS Kibria's An open letter to Mr Faezul Huq

SPECIAL 15

One-page supplement on International Women's Day

Citizens' body formed to better city law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With criminal acts on the up in the city, the government yesterday formed a 34-member citizens' committee to improve the law and order.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury heads the body which also comprises State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, the home secretary, lawmakers, human rights activists, teachers and journalists.

The committee was formed at a meeting of the home ministry.

Some of the participants at the meeting, including a ruling party lawmaker, suggested deployment of army to curb terrorism in the city.

The home minister however said he was 'happy' with the performance of the police.

"We would involve the BDR, if necessary, and the army does not need to be deployed," he told journalists after the meeting.

Altaf sought full support from all to tame the criminals.

The meeting participants felt

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Notice

The Environment Page scheduled to be in print in today's edition of The Daily Star has been dropped to make room for a special supplement on International Women's Day.

We regret to have inconvenienced the readers.

Erratum

In the last paragraph of BTTB's clarification published in The Daily Star yesterday, the word 'BTTB' was inadvertently printed in two sentences instead of 'BRTA.' We regret the error.

Lost behind bars

Supposed to be in correction centres, juvenile delinquents rather land in jails and become hardened criminals

ZAYADUL AHSAN and BISWADIP DAS

Juvenile delinquents are getting involved with crime cartels as they are huddled together with hardened criminals in prisons across the country.

The Children's Act, 1974, which itself is not properly enforced, says juvenile delinquents are to be kept and tried at the National Juvenile Delinquents' Correction Institute, usually referred to as correction cell, in Tongi and Jessore.

But bureaucratic bottlenecks and an indifferent magistracy land most juvenile offenders in jails, according to official sources.

As many as 197 such offenders aged under 16 -- 12 of them are girl children -- were languishing in prisons across the country till last month. Of them, 39 were curled up at the Dhaka Central Jail alone. One official source said the number is on the rise.

Some of these juveniles at the Dhaka Central Jail are as young as nine and are serving various jail terms for charges including murder, extortion and being in possession of illegal arms and theft.

One of the delinquents, nine-year old Sajal, has been languishing at the

Dhaka Central Jail after being arrested under the Special Powers Act last month.

Al Amin, 13, was arrested in an arms case on October 7, 2000 and is still in the jail. Faysal, 12, was nabbed in August 2000 under the Explosives Act.

Jail sources said juvenile delinquents arrested on various charges everyday are produced before the magistrate's court and if the court does not grant them bail they are sent to jail instead of the correction cell.

But, space crunch at the cell and bureaucratic tailbacks often send these offenders to criminals-strewn jails.

There is no independent cell in the jails for the juvenile delinquents who are exposed to a dark, harsh world. There most of them become get initiated into the crime world by notorious convicts and prisoners.

Soon, they are no more in fear of jails since they mingle with thieves, robbers, muggers, killers and so on.

Worse still, they develop addiction to easily available illicit drugs in the jails.

Sources say terrorist rings scout these juvenile delinquents since they

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: S K ENAMUL HAQ

The ever-shrinking silhouette of the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake snaking through the posh residential areas tells a grim story of indiscriminate land filling, resulting in possible extinction of the waterbody.

Frazzled face of 'posh' Gulshan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indiscriminate filling of Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake, Rajuk's bid to build commercial structures on public parks and open spaces and unplanned commercialisation of residential plots are fast changing Gulshan Residential Model Town into an urban chaos.

The lake is shrinking every day as new batches of so called plot owners are demarcating their pieces of land and putting up new signboards. Almost every lakeside green space has either been secretly allocated by Rajuk or grabbed by influential individuals taking advantage of legal loopholes.

An architect involved in the lake development process recently showed this correspondent a series of photographs taken less than a year ago and compared those with ones he took last week. In the last nine

months, the lake has shrunk so alarmingly that if it continues at this rate its existence would be threatened, he said.

At places in Banani, the entire lake has been sold off as there are legal loopholes allowing return of acquired land to its original owner if it is not developed within a specified time.

Plots in the lake have changed so many hands and so many court cases are now pending that Rajuk does not know what to do. The civil society and the environmentally conscious residents of the area are now the last hope for saving this vital water body of the city.

A resident of Gulshan told The Daily Star that along the lake, Rajuk in one way or the other is allocating plots after fiddling with the dates of allocation.

He said that in cases additional lands were allocated

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Amu faces another graft case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) yesterday lodged a graft case against former food minister and Awami League Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu, official sources said.

Filed with the Ramna Police Station, the case brings the number of such former AL ministers charged with corruption to a total of nine, including former Prime Minister and AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

This is the second corruption charge against the former food minister.

The case alleged that Amu, while

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

NCBs submit branch wind-up plan

INAM AHMED and BISWADIP DAS

Four nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) have drawn up their plans to close down or merge as many as 604 loss-making branches in three phases.

Sonali Bank, Rupali Bank, Agrani Bank and Janata Bank told the Bangladesh Bank yesterday that they will complete the process by June, September and December this year. Two hundred and ninety-five branches will be closed down by June.

The move followed a finance ministry directive on February 6 to six state-owned banks, including Development Financial Institutions (DFIs) namely Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) to shut down 800 loss-incurring branches by this year.

The ministry also set a March 7 deadline for the six chiefs of the banks to inform it and the central bank about their decision.

However, the banks did not specify its plan about the staff in these closed branches. Finance Minister M

Saifur Rahman had earlier indicated that there would not be any lay-off and the excess employees would be employed for loan recovery and other activities.

But the Bank Reform Committee (BRC) in an earlier report had said the four NCBs have 30 per cent of their some 60,000 strong manpower in excess.

Sonali has 455 loss-incurring branches across the country and 212 of them have been in the red for the last five years.

The bank plans to wind up business of 39 branches by June and 71 more by September.

Janata has identified 249 branches incurring losses for the last five years and plans to close down 170 branches, 69 of them by this June.

Of these 69 branches, 21 would be merged with profitable branches.

Agrani has 142 branches incurring losses for the last five years. It aims at closing down 86 of them, 48 through

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Women abuse cases crawl

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The long-time vacancy for all posts of female magistrate and police inspector at six cells under the Department of Women's Affairs is holding back legal proceedings in cases related to repression on women.

Sources in the department said the cells were set up in 1986 to deal with all such cases, which will be lodged with the cells.

But due to lack of magistrate and police inspector, the usual pace of work at the cells has slowed to a crawl. As many as 13,647 complaints have been disposed of by the six cells to date although one and a half the number are pending.

To make things worse, if any magistrate is assigned to the cell, she will have no power to issue warrant of arrest. Nor will the female police inspector have any weapon.

"A magistrate is of no use, unless she has the power to issue warrant order. Besides, the police inspector supposed to provide security to the female complainants at the cells has no weapon," said an official of the Department of Women's Affairs on condition of anonymity yesterday.

"We don't have any magistrate or police inspector here," said the official.

"Five other cells located at five divisional headquarters are equally affected as the cells have no magistrate and police inspector," she went on.

Shireen Huq, a member of Naripokkho, a leading women's organisation, said, "We also found that the magistrates assigned to the cells actually lack ability to exercise their power."

When recently needed for recording the statement of a girl just before her death at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, a magistrate at the cell at the women's affairs department said she had no power to record the 'dying declaration', Huq said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Suspected bank robber held in city

Tk 44,500, shot gun recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday arrested a man from the city's Kalabagan area in connection with Monday's daring bank robbery at the Sonali Bank Branch at the Jute Research Institute.

A shotgun and Tk 44,500 were also recovered from Mohammad Selim, one of the alleged bank robbers.

Headed by Additional Deputy Commissioner Ruhul Amin, the detectives raided the Lake Circus, Kalabagan residence of Selim and recovered a shotgun along with 50 bullets and Tk 44,500, believed to be part of the money robbed from the bank vault and cash counter.

Bank officials of the Sonali Bank branch at the Jute Research Institute identified the money from initials on the bundles, DB sources added.

The team also found two letters written by some member of the organised gang containing instructions about arranging for the release of a man named Qayyum, who was arrested earlier for his alleged involvement in a bank

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Repeal bill on Mujib's portrait law tabled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A private member's bill seeking repeal of the law obligating government offices and educational institutions to preserve and exhibit the portrait of the father of the nation was introduced in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Ruling BNP lawmaker Shamsul Alam Pramanik moved the bill aimed at scrapping the Father of the Nation's Portrait (exhibition and preservation) Act, 2001, terming it confusing.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar sent the bill to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Private Member's Bills and Resolution for scrutiny.

Early last year, the previous Awami League government enacted the law also in the form of a private member's bill, a kind of bill piloted by lawmakers other than ministers.

The last parliament passed the law moved by AL MP Dewan Farid Gazi amid continued absence of the then BNP-led opposition.

The law also provides punish

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Int'l Women's Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Women's Day will be observed today across the country.

With a slogan "resist acid repression, save women", different sociocultural and women's organisations urged everyone to unite against oppression of women.

On this day in 1857, police attacked a peaceful procession of women labourers of a sewing factory in New York.

The labourers brought out the procession protesting the low wage, 12-hour workday and the inhuman working environment. Three years after the incident, the women labourers formed a union to establish their rights.

Later, international women's associations, which met in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1