

Latest in a long list of crime

SULTANA RAHMAN

Nothing seemed unusual on Sunday morning in Runa Akther's daily life.

Living with her maternal uncle in the Pallabi area of Mirpur Section-11, Runa 22, responded to a knock on the door of their second floor apartment. The security guard of the building asked her to open the door.

As soon as she opened the door, three armed robbers confronted her. The gunmen had forced the guard at gunpoint to persuade her to open the door. They then entered the house and started ransacking it.

As the robbers looked for valuables in the house, Humayun, the son of the homeowner wrestled down one of the assailants. The other two immediately opened fire. Runa was shot in the chest while Humayun received serious injuries to his neck. The criminals then made their way out unchallenged.

Toffazzal Hossain, the owner of the house said that Runa died with a bullet in her chest on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. "My son Humayun Kabir is now fighting for his life at the hospital," he

said.

Over the last few months similar incidents of household robberies have risen alarmingly in the city. Armed gangs of criminals in different parts of the city are conducting household robberies almost every day. Though, currently, Police Headquarters have identified Mirpur as the city's most crime prone area.

As soon as operation "Clean Heart" came to an end, criminals returned to their activities without much resistance from police, sources said. Moreover, in the last 19 months some 42,000 alleged criminals have been released from different jails. Many of these freed men were accused of committing robberies, muggings, and other antisocial activities.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) sources said, during the months between May and June seven household-robberies occurred in the city's different areas. Meanwhile, 96 petty thefts and 28 cases of vandalism were recorded in police files. However, sources said, because robbery is a serious crime, many cases are recorded in police files as 'petty theft' or 'vandalism' by dishonest police

officials in order to avoid responsibility.

Police sources said criminal activities are likely to increase. They also said that current crime figures recorded at different police stations were only those of reported cases, but there are many crimes, including extremely serious ones, which are never reported to the police.

According to reports in the national dailies, in June at least 31 robberies occurred in the city. In most of the cases the robbers were armed and they forced house owners inside bathrooms or other rooms at gunpoint.

Meanwhile, a report of Mass-line Media Centre (MMC), a Non-government organization, shows that 850 robberies occurred in the country from January to June, while 2,659 were wounded. MMC has compiled the report from news items published in six national dailies.

Early last month, about eight robbers wearing black masks ransacked three apartments in Sidhshari and made away with Tk25 lakh and 120 *bhori* gold ornaments. In the first week of June five robberies took place at different areas of the

city.

A businessman in Tejaon said that the increasing incidents of robberies prove that the law and order situation has significantly deteriorated. "Law enforcing agencies have not taken a single step to prevent such incidents," he said. On June 26 he himself fell victim to the worsening crime situation in the city as his own house was robbed in Tejaon. The armed felons made away with Tk four lakh in cash, ornaments and other valuables.

The Inspector General (IG) of police Shahudul Haque refused to comment on the state of law and order saying, "I am unable to make any comment on this situation."

Police said that gangs of hoodlums, mostly with homemade weapons and some with modern arms such as pistols and rifles, have virtually taken over all the small and large localities of the city. Politically motivated transfers of skilled police officers have largely contributed to the rise in crimes. Moreover, interference by politically influential individuals has also played a role in the worsening situation.

Rollermania hits Dhaka

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Young boys and girls clad in skin-tight sporting outfits, bright helmets and with wheels at their feet, hit the road on Manik Mia Avenue last Friday. Colourful sporting outfits and sunglasses created quite a novel scene for the spectators present. They were witnessing the *Friendship Roller Skating Meet 2003*, the first of its kind in Bangladesh.

Organised by the Roller Skating Club of Dhaka, the competition involved 66 skaters from Bangladesh and India -- four teams of 40 Bangladeshi skaters and three Indian teams of 26 skaters.

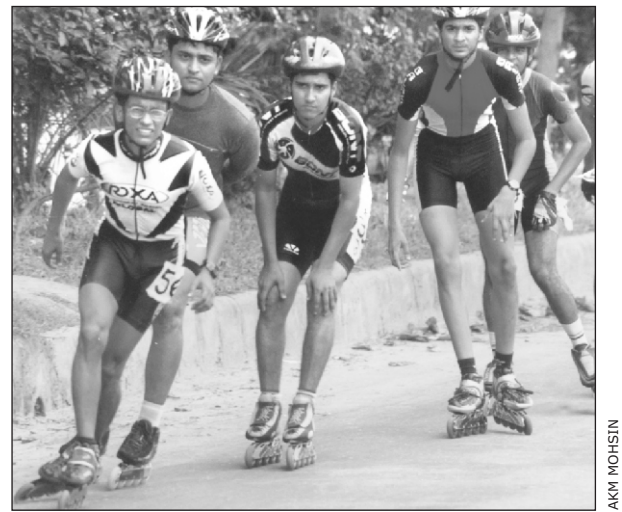
Though roller-skating has yet to become popular in Bangladesh and facilities are very limited, a large audience was drawn to the daylong event, comprising 26 categories of races for different age groups. Unfortunately, due to rain on Friday, many of the evening events had to be cancelled.

"Despite poor skating facilities in Dhaka, the Friendship Roller Skating Club organised the special meet on its own initiative. We don't have even any areas for skating, let alone the bent tracks which is mandatory for the game. We request the government to provide us a skating track with facilities commensurate with international standards," said Lutfar Rahman, general secretary of the club's Dhaka division.

"If we can make the game popular here then we can produce very good athletes for the country because a lot of physical techniques are associated with it," said Lutfar Rahman.

"The Bangladesh Roller Skating Federation was formed in 1995. But its activities are not that visible owing to lack of funds," said an organiser of the meet.

Indian participants dominated almost every race of the meet. Masum, was the only Bangladeshi skater to attract attention not only from the local audience but also from the



Rock and Roll: The Friendship Roller Skating Meet 2003 was the first of its kind in the country.

Indian participants too. "Masum is the best among the Bangladeshi skaters; he is the only one who showed real aptitude in competing with us," said an Indian participant.

Gurpreet Singh Puri, Manager of India Team lauded the effort of the Roller Skating Club of Dhaka for organising the meet. "In order to expand the sport across the country, you should encourage its practice in schools. Only after that, can it become popular. In India, skating competitions are held from the school to the national level. That's why Indian skating is coming up," said Puri.



The China Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre needs clients to sustain itself.

China Bangladesh centre needs business

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The government has decided to lease the China Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre out to the private sector through international tenders.

"It will be leased out to those having experience and ability to run it properly," said a government official seeking anonymity. The decision was taken at a recent cabinet meeting.

A committee will be formed to decide what way and how long the centre will be leased out, said the official.

The centre that took Tk 200

crore for construction was inaugurated on January 12, 2002, with the Chinese government funding Tk 135 crore.

It was designed to host NAM Summit during the Awami League rule. But the plan was cancelled after the caretaker government took office.

To maintain the huge centre, there are only 30 staffers, most of them technical workers. "It's difficult to maintain such a huge complex with so less manpower," said Mohammed Atiur Rahman of the Public Works Department.

The centre misses out on customers for its halls, as it does not have catering service. People

do not want to bring food from outside, he said.

The government has monthly proceeds of around Tk 35 lakh from it. The huge plenary hall with 1,662 seats is rented out at Tk 2,30,000 with 15 per cent VAT (value-added tax). The big banquet hall with a seating arrangement for 700 can be hired at Tk 2 lakh.

The maintenance of the centre costs around Tk 4 lakh a month, said the sources.

The government is earning profits through renting the halls. The leasing-out of the centre to the private sector can be more fruitful for the government, the sources said.

New market replaces old

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Construction of a new kitchen market is underway on the Inner Circular Road near the AGB colony.

The Motijheel Kanchabazaar Small Business Shamabay Shamity Ltd., which has been looking after the AGB colony kitchen market since 1990, is building around hundred shops made of bricks on the spot adjacent to the AGB Colony market where some destitute people had been running a temporary bazaar for nearly two years.

The kitchen market is popularly known as *Bou Bazaar* as most of its customers are female. This tin-shed market also does brisk business because it is the main source of everyday cooking needs for nearly fifty thousand inhabitants of the AGB colony and nearby areas.

But controversy has arisen with the construction of the new market. Some allege that the local ward commissioner has evicted the poor people who had been earning a living through the temporary market in order to cash in on the business potential of the area.

The commissioner however claimed that the market was closed down for sewerage work, which became absolutely necessary.

"We have dismantled the temporary kitchen market for repairing the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)'s drainage system which was in a bad condition," said Commissioner Harun.

The construction of the new market is being done under the auspices of Motijheel Kanchabazaar Small Business Shamabay Shamity Ltd.

"We are building it from our own funds after obtaining the permission from the DCC," said president of the Shamity, Salam Talukdar.

But the unfortunate people whose businesses got destroyed, are passing days in uncertainty wondering whether

they will have any space in the new kitchen market. Their fears are compounded by rumors that Commissioner Harun and the Shamity were allotting shops to their own people.

Harun however, brushed aside the allegation.

"We have not finished the construction of the market yet. Once completed, it will be handed over to the people who had lost their businesses, on a priority basis. We are keeping a separate space for the destitute people," said the com-

missioner.

Recently, the construction of the new kitchen market came under inquiry of the Estate Department of DCC.

"We have done an inquiry on the situation and sent the reports to the high authority. We will verify the claims so that the actual victims are allotted shops," said chief estate officer Fazluzzoha.

Some residences of AGB colony are not happy with the kitchen market in their area. "There are two kitchen mar-

kets near AGB colony, in Fakirapool and Shantinagar. The kitchen market on the road beside AGB colony is creating environmental pollution. It also hampers civic amenity of the residential area," said a residence of AGB colony.

DCC gave permission for the market only on a temporary basis. "So far the market has not been constructed in reinforced cement concrete (RCC) -- it is still temporary. If required we would get back the road," said the chief estate officer Fazluzzoha.



Bou Bazaar, being replaced by a new market, provided food and everyday needs for nearly fifty thousand residents of the AGB colony and surroundings.

Event horizon

New Nazrul theatre and statue at Bangla Academy

A new theatre in honour of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam was inaugurated, along with the unveiling of his sculpture, at a simple ceremony at Bangla Academy on June 25. Health and Family Planning Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain presided and State Minister for Cultural Affairs unveiled the sculpture. Syed Lutful Haque designed of the stage, and artist Hamiduzzaman created the sculpture.

Nari Uddug Kendra: Forum for Women Ward Commissioners

A National Forum for Women Ward Commissioners was formed recently to strengthen women's participation in good governance.

The forum was created at the end of a three-day training session from 24-26 June held by Nari Uddug Kendra (Centre for Women's Initiatives) in Dhaka.

The forum's main objective is to make the women commissioners aware of their human, democratic and political rights, to make effective their role in decision-making and the process of governance. This in turn will help eradicate all kinds of violence against women and produce a mass movement against such activities at the city corporation level through enhanced communication.

The six city corporations that have reserved seats for women ward commissioners throughout the country are Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Barisal.

Mango Fair: promoting organic and chemical-free food

A three-day long mango fair promoting organic and chemical-free food ended yesterday in the city.

"Our main target is to produce and promote organic and chemical-free foods. From 1988, we have been trying to produce chemical-free mangoes while the markets use 'carbide' and other chemicals to ripen mangoes," said Shamsul Haque, of Policy Research for Development Alternatives, the organisers of the fair which was held at 'Prabartana' in Mohammadpur.

The organisation brought thirteen kinds of mango to the fair including Hazipuri Langra, Surma Fazli, Bara Khirshapat, Dudhsar, from Chapainawabganj, in North Bengal.

"It is our second mango fair. We sold mangoes of Tk one lakh. Many people came along with their children to show them the varieties of mango that are available," Haque added.

BSTI: identifies 8 harmful products

In an investigation into 13 shops of Mohakhali Kitchen Market, the Bangladesh Standard Testing Institute (BSTI) detected eight food items being marketed and sold without certification by BSTI. The eight items are Manikganj Special Ghee, MM brand butter oil, MC Gawa Ghee, Normand brand butter oil, Suman's Special Banspati, Saudia salt, Al Hamim salt and Arham Chemical Industries coconut oil. The BSTI has ordered the manufacturers to stop producing the items and also requested consumers to stop buying them.

FEMA: Fair Election Monitoring Alliance

The Fair Election Monitoring Alliance, with its new legal status and structural reorganisation will be a more effective national organisation in its efforts to ensure fair, free and credible elections.

At a National Convention, held in Dhaka on Monday, representatives from every district of the country discussed delimitation of constituencies, preparation of electoral rolls, civic voter education, and training of polling officials. They also raised questions on dealing with violators of the election code of conduct, armed party cadres, the raising and disbursement of party funds and all parties' compulsory registration with the Election Commission.

FEMA was recently legally registered as a separate and independent entity, with a new mandate that includes issues related to governance, human rights and transparency and accountability in politics, besides election coverage.

Child Brigade

There is no security for the street children of Dhaka. They are persecuted by mastans and forced into crime and anti-social activities.

Street children gave voice to these and other issues in an opinion exchange meeting held on Monday by The Child Brigade, an organisation set up by and for working street children to help themselves and others like them.

They said that many children become addicted to drugs because by mixing with drug addicts on the street. They are also forced to carry drugs by dealers.

Police are another source of harassment. Often arbitrarily arrested, particularly during hartal, street children are the prime target of police who pick them up for suspected criminal activity.

The children urged all to help them to live in a more secure and safe environment.

Apology

We extend our apologies to Dr Dina Siddiqi, in reference to an article in our last issue (Sunday June 26) titled 'State sponsored torture rising.' Our correspondent regrets his error in misquoting Dr Siddiqi and mistakenly attributing words to her in our report.

Dr Siddiqi stressed from the start of her speech that she would not be speaking about 'torture' as such, but rather about her experiences as a Bangladeshi woman living in the US after September 11 2001. She spoke about being spared from racism because she "did not have any visible markers of Muslimness" as did other "women of cover", as Laura Bush refers to Muslim women."