

# Steps taken to amend Vagrancy Act

11,26,000 vagrants in country

ASHIQR RAHMAN

The government has recently taken an initiative to amend the Vagrancy Act, 1943 in an effort to rehabilitate the vagrants who are deprived of all fundamental rights.

There are six vagrants' centres with a total capacity of 1900 seats, far less than is necessary to accommodate more than 11 lakh vagrants across the country.

The total number of vagrants is 11,26,000, according to a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Project Management Institute, in cooperation with the Department of Social Service (DSS), in 2001.

Of them, 4,08,000 are children, while women account for 55 percent of the total number of vagrants.

The survey report also revealed that 81 percent of vagrants live in urban areas -- about one and half lakh in Dhaka city alone.

According to experts, the existing Vagrancy Act is inconsistent with the human rights.

On the one hand, vagrants face various forms of harassment and on the other, female vagrants pose a threat to public health as they are being abused sexually, which may help spread various diseases, said Siddiqur Rahman, deputy director of DSS (Vagrants).

The government has taken an initiative to make the Vagrancy Act time-befitting and to mitigate the suffering of the vagrants, he said.

The proposed law, 'Vagrants Welfare (Amendment) Act 2004', will not only include vagrants but also destitute children, prostitutes and

mentally challenged people.

The amendment act proposed cancellation of a provision granting indemnity to persons involved in the death of vagrants or any kind of unexpected incident in the vagrants' centres, DSS sources said.

It also suggests taking up a three-year rehabilitation programme for the vagrants and forming three national management committees for the welfare of vagrants in rural areas.

As per the existing act, inmates are not allowed to leave the vagrants' centre on their own, but the proposed act calls for repeal of the provision in this regard, the sources added.

Siddiqur said the proposed

amendment has been forwarded to the law ministry from the social welfare ministry.

"Besides, the government has also set up five more vagrants' centres in the divisional cities," he added.

Most of the existing six vagrants' centres are located in and around Dhaka, but these cannot be managed properly because of lack of government assistance, said a DSS official on condition of anonymity.

Only Tk 16 is allocated for a vagrant per day which is too inadequate, he added.

However, the deputy director said he applied to the finance ministry several times for an increase in the allocation to Tk50.

## 2,000 bags of urea worth Tk 30 lakh seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Navy personnel seized 2,000 bags of urea fertilizer worth about Tk 30 lakh from near the St Martin's Island on January 20.

While patrolling the area, Bangladesh Navy Ship SR Amin challenged the boat MB Mayer Doa for its suspicious movement, and arrested eight crew members and seized the fertilizer.

Locally made urea fertilizer was seized during the routine anti-

smuggling and anti-piracy duties of the navy in the coastal areas, says a press release.

The seized goods were deposited with the appropriate authorities and the arrested persons handed over to the police.

Earlier on November 8 of last year, the navy personnel seized 23,530 bags of locally made urea fertilizer worth about Tk 2.80 crore from five mechanised boats from the river Baleswar at Kaliganj thana under Laxmipur district in a similar anti-smuggling drive.



### Obituary

Dr Khandakar Mohammad Alamgir, a freedom fighter and Language Movement veteran, died in New York on January 21 at the age of 75, says a press release.

Former president of Chhatra Union, he returned to the country in May, 1971 from the US to join the War of Liberation. Later, at the instruction of Mujibnagar government, he again left for the US and mobilised support of the members of US Congress and Senate for the liberation war.

He also organised the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden.

Dr Alamgir, who was also a president of Bangladesh League of America in 1973, donated his entire landed property to Gonoshasthaya Kendra for setting up a hospital for the disabled and elderly people.

He also instituted a scholarship with a fund of Tk 40 lakh for the medical students of greater Barisal and Rangpur districts.

His body will be flown in to Dhaka today. The first namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Central Shaheed Minar at 10:30am tomorrow and the second janaza at Pallabi, Mirpur at 12:00 noon. He will be buried at the Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard at Mirpur.

### M Israil Hossain

M Israil Hossain, a retired district and sessions judge, died at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the capital on January 21 at the age of 80, says a press release.

He had been working as a panel lawyer in Bangladesh Krishi Bank and legal advisor of National University for last two decades after his retirement in 1983.

He hailed from Kirtunia village under Gabtoli upazila in Bogra district.

His qulshwani will be held at his residence Ka/62/ 3 School Road, Kalachandpur, Gulshan in the city after Asr prayers on January 28.

### 994 more held

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested 994 people on various charges during their country-wide drive in the last 24 hours till 6.00am yesterday.

During the period, the law enforcers recovered two firearms and eight bullets and filed three cases against two people under Arms Act.



Brisk business in hides: Traders gather hides of sacrificial animals from different parts of the city at North South Road on Sunday.

# Legal safety net for women a must to stop spousal abuse

155 women were killed by their husbands and another 35 women tortured last year, BNWLA report says

MAHUBA ZANNAT

Domestic violence, especially spousal abuse, can decline significantly if the government launches an effective awareness campaign and establishes a strong legal framework, according to human rights experts.

The government should also ensure a legal safety net for women to stop spousal abuse which is rampant in the country, they said.

According to a survey report by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), 155 women were killed by their husbands and another 35 women tortured last year. But the number of cases filed is far less -- only five for torture and 60 for murder.

The Oxfam, an international non-government organisation, in a research found that 47 percent of women fall victim to physical abuse in their homes. While it is commonly believed that economic dependency makes women vulnerable to abuses,

the Oxfam found that 32 percent of working women are abused.

Although the government claims that the condition of women has improved in recent years, the human rights activists do not agree.

"The government is not working actively to stop domestic violence, fearing that such steps might affect the election results," said Sultana Kamal, president of Ain O Shalish Kendra.

"Because the government does not want to upset men and the conservative groups through a mass campaign against domestic violence," she explained.

Sultana also noted that the government is pledge-bound to provide security to the countrymen but it never thinks of the vulnerability of women only for the sake of its political interest.

Although the government signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw) last July, nothing has been done to implement the convention at home.

"The government is not proceeding with the Cedaw as it will ensure women's equal rights to property and divorce, fearing that it may irk a certain community," Sultana said.

Thousands of women of middle- and low-income groups, both educated and illiterate, have been facing physical and mental spousal abuse. Common physical assaults include hitting, slapping, kicking, throwing acid and beating while psychological abuse involves constant scolding, intimidation, humiliation and coercive sex, according to research reports.

These realities are widely accepted in the society but these are not publicly discussed. And this silence is aggravating the situation.

The government and different organisations have launched efforts

to break this norm several decades ago, but ignorance remains a major obstacle to improving the situation.

The Oxfam under its Gender Equality Programme conducted a study titled 'Knowledge Attitude and Practice Study' which identified the reasons why husbands beat their wives and found that awareness programme can help change the attitude of the people.

The government claims that it is trying to raise awareness. Last year, it undertook a road march programme to raise awareness about trafficking, dowry and domestic violence.

"The road march programme covering 12 districts of the country has received a good response," said Minister for Women and Children Affairs Khurshid Jahan Haque.

On the Cedaw, she said the draft of the convention will be placed

before the National Council for Women Development (NCWD) for its adoption.

Kathryn B Ward, project director of Nari Jiban, an NGO, and a visiting professor at Millennium University, also feels that the weapon against domestic violence is raising public awareness through media campaign, posters, stickers and leaflets.

To break the social silence, media campaigns should, particularly hammer on the availability of options such as shelter homes, treatment facilities and legal aids for the victims.

There are many women who still believe that a husband has the right to beat his wife as he earns money for the family, she noted.

Worthless people try to dominate their wives as there is no law in this regard and the tradition of silence promotes these heinous acts, she maintained.



Two employees embrace and wish each other Eid mubarak at the GPO in the city while their office looks deserted yesterday, the first working day after Eid holidays. Attendance in other government offices was also very thin.

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Brigadier General (Rtd) Mukhlisur Rahman Khan  
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Suraiya, Binmi and Nikita

17TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY

The 17th Death Anniversary of late Khalid Ibrahim will be observed to-day (25-1-2005) at his banani Residence, Dhaka. All his relations friend's and well wishers are requested to pray for the departed soul.

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