

Misshapen photos in ID cards disappoint voters

DURDANA GHIAS

Inclusion of photo ID cards in the process of voter listing was one of the main reasons people were enthusiastic about the project but now many are not happy with their photographs taken for the ID cards.

Until February 18 this year, 34,42,504 people were photographed for national ID cards in the city, said sources at the Election Commission.

Many prospective voters said their faces became deformed and went wide in the photo. Some

looking like a ghost," said Parveen Ahmed, a retired schoolteacher, with a dejected look in her face.

"I cannot blame anyone if someone says that it is not your picture. I'm fortunate that I have other ID cards to substantiate my claim. What about those who will have only one ID card?" said Shahed, a jobholder, who recently took delivery of his ID card.

According to photographers, the round shaped lens of web cams and absence of adequate training in their operation were the reason for distorted images.

"I went to take photo for ID

shadow under eyes, nose and lips. But many of them used the light overhead and did not use flash so the images looked like apparitions," Amirsaid.

"The colour of the skin is also distorted as the skin tone is not maintained because of the wrong exposure of light," he added.

Some questioned the purpose of the photo on the ID card if that is not taken properly.

"The purpose of photo cannot be served if the photo is out of shape or the person cannot be recognised from it," said Nazneen, a young service holder.

said.

"We also faced problems while taking finger prints. Mostly those who work hard using hands and fingers such as housewives and day labourers had faded fingerprints," he said.

Asked, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Shakhawat Hossain said that anyone unhappy with their photos can replace those when national registration authority takes over the job.

"The national registration authority will start its work after EC's work is over in July-August. They will set up stations in every district. The authority will take effect in maximum one month. If anyone wants a higher security card, then he can have it," he said.

"People are free to replace their photos but it will be very difficult for us to take photos anew now because we are burdened with work to finish the job in time," he said.

Admitting the fact of using web cams and young and poorly trained operators, Brig Shakhawat said the EC has some limitations in preparing voter ID cards.

Mentioning the limitations of funds, he said, "We have recruited around 80,000 young men and women, mostly students, for data collection, operating computers and other jobs. They are not trained photographers and it is not possible to recruit such a huge number of photographers."

"Besides, photographers would not agree to work with the honorariums we are paying to the students," he added.

About not using digital cameras or normal ones, Shakhawat said, "There are also some technical glitches in using digital or normal cameras because the web cams are connected with the software we are using for preparing ID cards."

"Besides, there is the money factor as the digital cameras are quite expensive. The ID cards are free of charge. How many of us can pay for the high-resolution digital cameras?" he said.

Until now around 40 million people have been photographed across the country, he said.

About those who are confused over recognising their photos, the election commissioner said, "I think it won't be much problem because every ID card will carry a voter number."



STAR PHOTO

A prospective voter poses for photograph for his national ID card at a centre recently.

alleged that their faces were distorted to such an extent that they could not even recognise their own visages.

"I could not recognise my face when the operator took my photo. He tried in many ways to take a good photo but it didn't work. I took off my sweater but still it didn't work. Then I felt pity on him and said it's ok for me but I was looking like a bald man to say the least," said Swapna, a service holder.

"I was looking like a football," said Sultana M Chisty, a business-woman.

"My image was blurry and I was

card with much enthusiasm but when the operator took my picture my nose and beard became inflated and my eyes were looking like beads," said Amir, a professional photographer.

"When I told the operator about the distortion, he said - 'Brother, don't get emotional. Taking photos is just a rule. You are not going to a cinema audition with this picture,'" he said expressing disappointment.

"It happened mainly because of the spherical lens of the web cam. There are some basic photographic rules. The light should not be overhead which creates

Use of web cams and computer operators taking photos without the knowledge of basic photography rules were the two main reasons for out-of-shape photos, said high officials and operators at the EC.

A student, who worked as a team leader in the voters' data collection process in the city, said, "The reasons behind shapeless photos are cheap web cams and operators who are not photographers."

"A web cam costs around Tk 1,700 while a digital camera costs at least Tk 12,000. We need a bigger budget for nice photos," he

CONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE OVER GULSHAN LAKE HC asks govt to explain legality

TAWFIQUE ALI

A division bench of the High Court (HC) Monday asked the government to explain within ten days as to why construction of the Gulshan-Banani link bridge across the Gulshan Lake should not be declared illegal.

The court also directed the government to refrain from carrying on with the construction work during the period.

The HC passed the interim order following a petition jointly filed by Gulshan Society and an environmentalist group Paribesh Bachao Andolon (PBA) on February 24.

"We have just presented our environmental concern before the court," said Barrister Sara who

moved the petition. "We will also place our concern over whether the bridge will serve the traffic purpose for which it has been undertaken."

Abu Naser Khan, chairman of PBA, said that they are very happy with the court's direction. "Environmental damage would have been far less if we could have a legal intervention in place earlier," he said.

"The implementing agency must comply with the environmental conservation law and rules as the area is officially declared as an environmentally critical area," Khan said. "Why should others abide by the law if government agency does not?"

Khan further said they are not against the bridge but its construc-

tion has to be compatible with the overall traffic planning and should be an integral part of the lake development master plan.

Jahurul Islam Chowdhury, general secretary of Gulshan Society and signatory to the petition, said, "As a resident of the neighbourhood, I am happy with the development."

The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD) has undertaken the Tk 12.47 crore bridge project across Gulshan-Banani Lake with its engineering department assigned to implement it.

A consortium of Vitti Associates and Design Plan Management (DPM) has been appointed for consultancy of the 90-metre long bridge project.

The authorities in the way of construction work earth-filled a huge swath of the lake that sparked widespread criticism among the locals. They expressed apprehension that land filling would virtually destroy the water body and allure the land grabbers.

In accordance with the Environment Conservation Act of 1995, the government in 2001 declared that the lake is ecologically in critical state.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) on November 26, 2007 wrote a letter to the Local Government Engineering Division (LGED) asking whether they have obtained environmental clearance or carried out any environmental impact assessment for construction of the bridge, as required by the environmental conservation act of 1995.

The project authorities did not make response to the query.

Gulshan Society and PBA jointly served a legal notice (demand of justice) upon the authorities asking whether they have complied with all the technical and environmental prerequisites. According to the notice, the project is required to obtain environmental clearance certificate as per section 12 of the Environmental Conservation Act of 1995.

The legal notice maintained that in accordance with rule 7(6) of the Environmental Conservation Rules (ECR) of 1997, the authorities are required to carry out a prior viability assessment report, an initial environmental examination and an environmental management plan, for the project.

But the authorities did not respond to the notice, said barrister Sara Hossain.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A wild bird vendor trying to attract 'wealthy' customers at a road intersection at Kakrail. Illegal sale of migratory and other birds continue under the nose of law enforcers at city points although the authorities recently issued a full-scale alert against the spread of bird flu virus across the country.

SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM IN POLICE STATIONS IOs overburdened with cases as manpower remains same

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Investigation of the cases filed with the 33 police stations under Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) is being hampered due to lack of adequate manpower as the officers available now for the job are unable to accomplish the uphill task effectively.

According to sources, the number of cases lodged with the capital's police stations have increased considerably in recent days following the launching of the Service Delivery System, but investigation capacity of police remains the same as the number of investigation officers (IOs) has not been raised. As a result the present investigation officers are overburdened with huge pending cases and are hardly able to investigate the cases properly.

In March 2007, the government launched a new initiative called Service Delivery System at the police stations under DMP where each police station would have a designated police officer for registering the complaints or cases.

The introduction of the system has made the atmosphere of police stations more inviting and people-friendly. After the system came into force, growing number of people started coming to police stations to file cases. This development, however, created problems for police officials, as their manpower was not enhanced to deal with the increased number of cases.

According to DMP records, in the past the number of cases filed each month on an average did not exceed 2,000. In February 2007, just before the launching of the Service Delivery System, the number of cases filed stood at 1,896. After the introduction of the new system, the number of cases filed per month has reached about 2500 on an average.

The DMP records reveal that a total of 2304 cases were filed in October last while that of the cases filed in November and December were 2248 and 2148 respectively.

But, for investigating the huge number of cases, at present, DMP has 877 sub-inspectors at the 33 police stations and the detective branch. The number of sub-inspectors was 860 just before the launching of the Service Delivery System in the city. The

number fluctuates almost daily due to transfer and retirement of officers.

Before the launching of the service, each sub-inspector used to handle 20 cases on an average. "Even handling 20 cases was a tremendous pressure since beside investigation, a sub-inspector has to perform many other duties such as patrolling, preparing case documents and attending courts frequently during hearing of cases," said a sub-inspector at DMP.

In the past, officials at police stations used to engage unofficially 'writers' for filling up forms and recording information of cases so that the officials can accomplish other

in hand. "This is my first assignment in DMP and I don't know this town very well yet."

A DMP headquarter source said, 263 positions of sub-inspectors out of the total 1140 in DMP remain vacant at present while the pressure can be eased if officers are appointed to these vacant posts.

On this issue, the Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said, the higher authorities have already initiated a move to provide respite for the investigators from the heap of the cases. He said, the move to assign (single digit) not more than nine cases has been taken to reduce burden on the investigation officers and ensure

denial of justice." It is the shortage of investigation officers, and not the negligence of those working presently that is responsible for the piling up of pending cases at DMP, he said. He remarked that the 'one digit assignment' programme would provide relief for sub-inspectors but would put the OCs under pressure.

AKM Doulat Akbar, OC of Ramna police station said, the 'one digit assignment' programme would reduce the burden on the sub-inspectors. When asked how he would handle the cases that are left over after assigning 9 cases each to all his inspectors, he said, under the new programme the sub-



STAR PHOTO

An investigation officer discussing a case at Shahbagh Police Station.

tasks. The officials themselves used to bear the expenses for engaging the writers. But in the changed circumstances in the country, police officials cannot engage writers now for obvious reasons, sources said.

About the large number of cases piled up after the launching of the Service Delivery System, the sub-inspector said, "I am working as a high speed machine to perform my duties, but I don't know how long can I carry on."

Another sub-inspector told Star City that he has just been transferred to DMP and he was yet to decide as to what to do with the huge number of cases

fair investigation.

Officers-in charge at two police stations under DMP were asked about the 'one digit assignment'. One of the OCs was found unconvinced with the policies envisaged in the 'one digit assignment' programme while another was found little aware about the programme.

About the investigation capacity of DMP, an officer-in-charge (OC) at a police station observed, "If the workforce is not increased soon, the overburdened sub-inspectors may fail to investigate their cases properly and that may lead to

inspectors can be assigned more than nine cases but they are not allowed to keep pending more than nine cases.

On the burden on the sub-inspectors, Naim Ahmed, DMP commissioner said, "I found an investigation officer was dealing with 45 cases."

DMP commissioner said that under the new programme an investigation officer will handle not more than nine cases and have to solve at least 6 cases monthly. Solution of the cases at such a rate would reduce the heap of cases on the sub-inspectors within next June, the commissioner hoped.



Star file photo of construction of the bridge over Gulshan Lake.