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Sardined into prisons

Over 87,000 caged while capacity is for only 27,451

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

More than 87,000 prisoners, with the exception of a few dozens high profile inmates, are passing hellish days as the country's jails are equipped to accommodate only 27,451.

The number of prisoners nearly doubled in just a decade while the jail authorities failed to increase their capacity to accommodate the growing number of inmates.

Official records show about 27,000 additional prisoners landed in jails over the last seven years while the authorities could create extra accommodations for some 4,000 only.

Successive regimes paid a little or no attention to the matter, said the jail authorities, pointing it out as the main reason for the awful condition of prisons. They said they could construct only a few new prisons and build extensions for a few others in years.

The hellish living condition in

the country's 67 prisons has worsened further since the army-led joint forces launched a country-wide anti-crime crackdown following takeover of state power by Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government in January last year.

Several hundreds were being netted and put in jails by the joint forces since the launching of the drive, sharply increasing the number of prisoners to 90,000 from

65,000 by the year end. "We are now in a situation where there is no space left for even to sit, let alone for lying down," a prisoner of the jam-packed Dhaka Central Jail told The Daily Star last week.

Prisoners in the country's largest jail can neither sleep properly nor can they use the toilets when they need them, it is currently accommodating around 9,000 to 10,000 prisoners while having the

capacity to house only 2,600.

"We sleep in shifts and have to wait in long queues for hours to use the bathrooms and toilets. We have become used to it," said the prisoner who has been in the jail for about five years now.

Three sleeping shifts have been formed for the 24 hours in a day for the prisoners to sleep in rotations, and the situation is more appalling in other jails.

The authorities recently transferred some 300 prisoners to balconies from some cells in Tangail Jail in an effort to give 'relief' to 1,500 inmates, who had been living in a space that can accommodate only 400.

"You will not understand the misery if you don't see it for yourself," said an official of the jail, who did not have the clearance for talking to the media.

Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Md Zakir Hasan, who described time and again the awful

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EIGHT-YEAR OVERCROWDING IN PRISONS

Month/Year	Capacity	Prisoners
January 2001	23,942	60,887
January 2002	24,997	62,486
January 2003	25,018	75,135
January 2004	25,396	69,519
January 2005	26,157	74,710
January 2006	27,112	72,836
January 2007	27,254	68,278
May 2007	27,254	85,941
July 2008	27,451	87,011

STAR GRAPHIC



PHOTO: ANSUR RANNA

UNUSUAL... Aslam, 40, does the job of recovering Jewellery items lost in ponds and rivers. He does it not by miracle as he has years of experience from boyhood. On recovery, he charges the owner an amount which is around half the price of the lost valuables. The picture shows, Aslam, hailing from Khulna, walks along the Kazibasha river in Poddarbar, in quest of a job.

Ershad says JP to remain a partner of AL-led alliance

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday said his party will continue to play its role in national politics as a partner of the Awami League-led grand electoral alliance.

"I have been in the grand alliance and I will continue to be there in the future," he told the news agency by phone on his return from London in the evening.

The grand alliance was formed under the leadership of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, throwing a big challenge to the then four-party alliance led by the BNP.

Ershad's remarks came amid speculations that he had a secret

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Hasina's talks with JP may spur 14-party discord

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

tion's after declaration of the state of emergency in January last year. AL responded by announcing that it no more considers Gono Forum as ally.

Besides, they added, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal's (JSD) statements often in a swipe at the AL over the last 18 months led to a gulf growing between AL and JSD.

Lately, Hasina's meeting JP acting chairman Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud and president member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu in London has complicated matters further.

Sources in the UK said the former prime minister has had a series of discussions with the JP leaders with a view to revive the grand electoral alliance that was formed before the now cancelled parliamentary polls for January 22, 2007.

Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua said he wonders

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Train collision at Laksham kills 2, injures 20

UNB, Comilla

Two people were killed and 20 others were injured in a collision between two trains at Laksham junction Friday afternoon.

Witnesses said an Akhura-bound local train from Chittagong collided with Noakhali-bound Upakal Express from Dhaka around 12:30pm killing the two on the spot.

The injured were admitted to the Upazila Health Complex.

Train communications between the district and other parts of the country remained disrupted as of 3:00pm.

Fire brigade along with railway staffs rushed to the spot immediately after the accident and started the rescue operations.

Four bogeys, including the engines, were badly damaged and went off the tracks, BSS reports quoting police sources.

TOP CORRUPTION SUSPECTS Proceedings stayed against 50, bigwigs granted bail

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The High Court (HC) in recent weeks has stayed graft proceedings against more than 50 high profile corruption suspects including former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina.

It has also granted bail to a number of political bigwigs including Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami, Awami League (AL) presidium members Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Tofail Ahmed, BNP leaders Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, MK Anwar, Redwan Ahmed, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, MA Hashem, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Barisal City Corporation (BCC)

Mayor Mujibur Rahman Sarwar, adviser to AL president and industrialist Salma F Rahman and former AL lawmaker Lotus Kamal.

Besides, the court has quashed charges against 12 people, mostly family members of the prime accused, on grounds that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) did not issue to them notices asking for written statements.

Sources said lack of coordination between the government and the anti-graft body, and incompetence of the prosecution lawyers were the main reasons for the ACC's poor performance at the HC.

Legal experts said the ACC suffered the setbacks at the HC mainly for failure of its officials to submit investigation reports

within the stipulated 60 days since filing of the cases.

Besides, the anti-graft body could not properly sanction filing of the cases and issue gazette notifications on appointments of its investigation officers, contributing to its abysmal records at the HC.

ACC's counsel Khrushid Alam Khan however said submitting an investigation report within 60 days was not mandatory for the ACC.

"When there would be detailed hearing at the Appellate Division or the High Court, the provision of 60 days would prove directory, not mandatory. And accordingly, the High Court orders granting bail to the accused and staying the graft proceedings would be vacated," he said.

Pichchi Hannan aide killed in 'shootout'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another aide of slain top criminal Pichchi Hannan was killed yesterday in a shootout between his cohorts and Rab-2 in the capital's Tejgaon industrial area.

The deceased was identified as Shahab Ali, 35.

Rab-2 sources said acting on a tip-off a team of Rab-2 raided a place near the truck stand at Tejgaon where Shahab Ali and his accomplices gathered at about 1:30pm.

Sensing the presence of Rab members, Shahab Ali and his accomplices opened fire on the law enforcers prompting them to retaliate.

Shahab was killed on the spot while his cohorts managed to escape the scene.

Rab members recovered a revolver and a bullet from the spot.

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Hasina returns to Washington for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina returned to Washington from London yesterday morning for the treatment of her eyes.

Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and his wife received Hasina at the Dulles International Airport. Hundreds of AL leaders and activists from different US states also gathered there to receive Hasina.

Meanwhile, in the wake of a probable clash between two feuding groups of the US chapter of AL, law enforcers of the Dulles airport did not allow any of them to enter the airport, forcing them to wait at the airport's parking lot, news agencies ANA and News World report.

As airport security personnel escorted Hasina to the parking lot the two groups began blaming each other.

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DHAKA AND ADJACENT DISTRICTS More low-lying areas flooded as Padma keeps on rising

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The low-lying areas of Munshiganj, Manikganj, Dohar and Nawabganj of Dhaka district were further inundated with floodwater yesterday as the water level of the Padma kept on rising.

According to Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC), the water level of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna has started falling while the Padma continued to rise but at a slower pace.

The flooding of low-lying areas in Munshiganj, Manikganj, Dohar and Nawabganj of Dhaka district is likely to continue, an FFWC bulletin said.

The Padma is flowing 29cm above the danger level at Goalunda and 36cm above at Bhagytak point. The Kobadak is flowing 4cm

above the danger level at Jhikargacha and the Arialkhan is flowing 1cm above the danger level at Madaripur.

The bulletin said the FFWC expects rainfall to decrease in the north and northeastern part of the country and in neighbouring sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya.

The flash flood situation in Sylhet, Sunamganj, Netrakona and Sherpur are likely to start improving, the bulletin said.

The Jamuna is approaching danger level at Sirajganj point but may not cross the level in this spell, the FFWC forecast.

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BOGRA GBB Power ministry's version

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Pashchimanchal Gas Company Ltd (PGCL) would take necessary actions, including suspension of gas supply, against rental power plant GBB Power Ltd if it fails to pay arrears in ten days after issuance of notice to that end, the power ministry said.

Water Development Board (WDB) sources said even though the mighty Jamuna was flowing above the danger level at Sirajganj, water was flowing 4cm above the danger level at Enayetpur yesterday.

The flood-affected upazilas in Sirajganj are: Sirajganj Sadar, Kazipur, Belkuchi, Chowhali and Shahzadpur. Many villages of Kazipur, Belkuchi and Chowhali upazilas have been badly affected.

Many roads in these upazilas have gone under water. Many

upazilas of Sirajganj have been inundated with floodwater.

Prices of Ramadan items rising

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and WASIM BIN HABIB

With Ramadan still five weeks away, prices of food items like puffed rice, chickpea, pulses, onion, boshon (powdered pulses) and spices that see a sharp rise in demand during this month have already increased in kitchen markets in the capital over the last four days.

The rejoinder followed the publication of a report, titled "Irregularities: Boga power plant gets free gas", in The Daily Star on July 24 in which it said the PGCL has been supplying gas to the GBB even though the private power plant did not submit any security deposit or

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resulting in the price rise, market sources said.

Chickpea, an important iftar item in Ramadan, was selling at Tk 58 to Tk 65 a kg yesterday as against Tk 27-30. A kg of imported onion was selling at Tk 23-25 yesterday while it sold Tk 21-22 four days ago.

A wholesaler at Karwan Bazar said prices of chickpea and khesari pulses increased by Tk 5 per kg yesterday. Four days ago, its price was Tk 48-55 a kg.

Onion price rose by Tk 2-3 a kg in the last four days. Local variety of onion was selling at Tk 30-32 per kg yesterday as against Tk 27-30. A kg of imported onion was selling at Tk 23-25 yesterday while it sold Tk 21-22 four days ago.

A wholesaler at Karwan Bazar said prices of chickpea and khesari pulses increased by Tk 5 per kg in wholesale markets in the last one week, which led to their price rise in retail markets. He however did not explain why these prices rose.

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