

School or police outpost?

Same building houses students, cops

TAREK MAHMUD, Ctg

It is a three-storey primary school. On top of the building a national flag and a flag of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) flutter together.

On one corner of the building a signboard reads Peyari Mohan Sen Registered Primary School, North Kattali. In the other corner, another signboard announces the building as the North Kattali Police Outpost.

The coexistence of a primary school and a police outpost under the same roof is a rare thing and exposes the helplessness of the police department in finding a place for its operation.

The law enforcers have taken over half of the first floor and the entire second floor for their office and dormitories for at least 19 police personnel. The school children are crammed in a total of six classrooms on the whole ground floor and one half of the first floor.

The school was established through private initiative in 1995-96. Since January 1 this year, it has been a government primary school.

Teachers and students have mixed feelings about the strange coexistence. Some say they feel secure at the presence of the police on the school compound while others say they are scared to see police action, such as bringing in criminals into the compound in handcuffs.

The headmistress of the school, Beauty Das, said that before the police set up the outpost here school furniture had been stolen regularly. No such things happen now, she said.

"But I have to admit that my students are growing up in an unusual environment, and most importantly we are really short of space with 500 students in the school. So the outpost should be moved from here," added the headmistress.

Sub-inspector (SI) Sanat Kanti Das, in-charge of North Kattali Police Outpost, said, "We are under a police station. We wanted to move from here but we have not been able to find any proper land till now."



Originally, it is the Peari Mohan Sen Registered Primary School building at Uttar Kattoli in Chittagong. But for the last five years, the school is housing a police outpost that has occupied half of the school's space. While this is seriously hampering academic activities, the police officials are facing difficulties in doing their job.

EC sees no need

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The CEC said members of law enforcement agencies, like police and Rapid Action Battalion, were enough to handle the elections scheduled for June 15. Border Guard Bangladesh personnel would also be deployed later.

Ruling Awami League-led alliance backed mayoral aspirants claimed that the law and order in the electoral areas was better than any previous times.

Talking to The Daily Star, mayor aspirants of the four city corporations -- Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet -- came up with contradictory observations about law and order in their areas.

The opposition alliance backed candidates alleged that local police were harassing their supporters and that it would be a problem for them if the harassment persisted.

"The law and order situation is not satisfactory in

Khulna. Police know the whereabouts of every criminal but do not arrest them," said Moniruzzaman Moni, opposition-backed candidate in Khulna City Corporation election.

He claimed that locals want a drive against criminals but the police were uninterested. He said if an atmosphere congenial to polls were not created, people would not go to the polling centres to cast votes.

He believed the army could be of help in this regard.

His rival Awami League-led alliance backed candidate and former mayor of the city Talukdar Abdul Khaleq disagrees. Khaleq claimed that law and order was normal and there was no need for the army.

Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul, who is enjoying opposition blessing in the mayoral battle in Rajshahi City Corporation, alleged that police asked his workers to

withdraw from his election camps in two to three areas which panicked his activists.

"The army must be deployed three days prior to the election and should remain there for holding a free and fair election," said Mosaddek.

Former mayor of Rajshahi city AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, a ruling party backed candidate, said police and Rab were enough to maintain law and order.

The two other opposition backed mayor candidates in Barisal and Sylhet city corporations, Ashan Habib Kamal and Ariful Haque Chowdhury, also alleged that police were harassing their workers and demanded army deployment to maintain law and order.

Badrudin Ahmed Kamran and Shawkat Hossain Hiron, the ruling party backed candidates in Sylhet and Barisal, spoke against army deployment.

BNP's demand illogical

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be held the way other democratic countries across the world hold," mentioned Hasina, also the president of AL.

The country, noted the prime minister, in the past has witnessed how during the election period its people were oppressed, polling centres captured, ballot papers sealed, ballot boxes stuffed, election results changed and the religious minorities driven away from polling centres.

People will exercise their democratic right of franchise to elect their representatives, she said, asserting that the AL as the ruling party would not cling on to state power.

She directed party men to remain alert so that another political changeover like the 1/11 could not take place in the country again. Bangladesh will move forward with the spirit of Liberation War, she added.

Hasina complained that the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have been killing AL men across the country in a planned way to destabilise the country ahead of the next general election after failing to get any response from people over their demand for caretaker government.

Terming BNP the "patron of terrorists and militants", Hasina called upon people to ensure that those forces who

had indulged in massive corruption, money laundering and committed killings in the past could not return to power again.

Criticising Khaleda Zia for joining hands with Jamaat-Shibir and Hefajat-e-Islam to topple the government and save war criminals, she asked her party men to resist those who use religion for political ends.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, prime minister's adviser Alauddin Ahmed and party leaders Mahbubul Alam Hanif, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, BM Mojmoll Haque, and Ahmed Hossain were present, among others.

Star-DHL business awards

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Institution, Best Enterprise, Business Person of the Year and Outstanding Woman in Business.

Finance Minister AMA Muhiith will hand over the crests to the winners as chief guest at a ceremony at

Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka.

Business personalities, entrepreneurs, leaders of different trade bodies, celebrities and academicians will also attend.

The awards ceremony is an annual event of The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide

Express (BD) Pvt Ltd to honour successful business personalities and business houses for outstanding performance, innovations, sustainable growth in profit and extraordinary contribution to society under corporate social responsibility.

New virus 'threat

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infections in the country's eastern region.

Although many of the cases have occurred on the Arabian Peninsula, people have died of the infection elsewhere.

However, "all of the European cases have had a direct or indirect connection to the Middle East," the WHO said earlier this month. But "in France and the United Kingdom, there has been limited local transmission among close contacts who had not been to the Middle East but had

been in contact with a traveler recently returned from the Middle East."

On Tuesday, a patient died in France after having contracted the virus during a trip to the Middle East, the WHO reported.

Coronaviruses cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, as well as a variety of animal diseases.

However, the new virus is not SARS.

The WHO recently gave it a more specific name: Middle East respiratory symptom

coronavirus, or MERS-CoV.

It acts like a cold virus and attacks the respiratory system, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said. But symptoms, which include fever and a cough, are severe and can lead to pneumonia and kidney failure.

Health officials do not yet know much about how the virus spreads, which makes it hard for scientists to prevent infections, Chan said.

The WHO is calling for the world to pull together its resources to study and tackle the virus.

Govt mulls tough law on hartal

Says home minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government is mulling over formulating a new law regarding hartal that will force any political party to pay for the damage done in the shutdown enforced by them.

Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir said this at a view exchange meeting on law and order organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at its auditorium in the port city yesterday.

Otherwise the party's registration would be cancelled, the home minister added.

Hartal had remained a stigma attached to the nation, he said, urging all to resist autocratic forces in order to save democracy.

Business slows down

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addition to the existing gas crisis and political unrest," said Mostofa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries, one of the biggest conglomerates in Bangladesh with an annual turnover of \$1.5 billion.

Meghna Group is unwilling to take out loans of Tk 200 crore sanctioned by a state-owned bank due to the present hostile business climate.

Energypac, a leading player in power sector, and Ifad Group, a vehicle and commodity trader, have also refrained from availing themselves of sanctioned bank loans.

Not only them, almost all businesses -- from large to small -- have been cautious about making new investments.

"It is impossible for an entrepreneur to do business with such high bank interest rate," said Azam J

Chowdhury, chairman of East Coast Group that is involved in shipping, power, banking and lubricant businesses.

Chowdhury said political turmoil is nothing new in Bangladesh, and businesses know that there would be turmoil once in every five year centring the national election. But they were not ready for such a jump in bank interest rates.

Banks are charging 16-17 percent interest rates for big clients, and even higher for small ones. Handling charges and other fees add to the interest burden. In addition to bank interests, a business has to spend on salaries of its staff, utility and office management costs.

"What will we do with high-interest loans amid the growing political uncertainties?" asked Iftekhar Ahmed Tipu, chairman of Ifad Group.

Tipu claimed he had never defaulted on bank loans, and

wished not to do it ever. He is not willing to take bank loans at this moment considering the unfavourable business climate.

"You have to make profits between 28 and 30 percent, which seems impossible, to pay the banks and survive," said Tipu.

Humayun Rashid, managing director of Energypac, also voiced similar concerns. Though the company invested heavily in power sector in the last few years, it has not recently taken any new project.

"Project costs are soaring. Banks now charge 16.5 percent, which goes up to 18 percent if payments are overdue. So, we are not taking new loans," said Rashid.

Kamal of Meghna Group said entrepreneurs must be given facilities, otherwise they wouldn't feel encouraged to make new investments.

Chowdhury of East Coast Group demands the central

bank's intervention to ease the interest burden on investors.

"The central bank should hold talks with all stakeholders to reduce the bank interest rates and create a business-friendly environment," said Chowdhury.

SK Sur Chowdhury, deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, is also concerned about high bank interest rates.

"If banks have enough loanable funds, the rate will automatically go down." Latest reports show that interest rates have already fallen by 1-1.5 percent, he said.

However, the BB deputy governor said private sector credit went down because of tightening of policies and monitoring by the central bank, not for high interest rates.

"Our banks were aggressive in lending. Now they cannot play games with loans, especially with the non-funded ones," he said.

Go for safer model

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both the reactors had similar safety features and that the only difference between them was capacity.

The VVER-1000 reactor was developed and introduced by Russia in the 80's. There are allegations that many countries cancelled construction of it on safety grounds. Later, Russia developed the VVER-1200 and some reactors of this type are now being built.

Vice-President Yu Sokolov of Rosatom ruled out any safety lacking of the VVER-1000 reactor, saying, "It is the customer's choice to select reactor model."

Director of Communication S Novikov of Rosatom said both models were equally safe. "If any customer wants to take additional safety applications, they have to spend additional money on that," he later told The Daily Star.

Asked about the number of older reactors declining and that Russia itself had stopped the construction of VVER-1000, he said a total of 31 VVER-1000 reactors were in operation globally, 10 of them in Russian and

15 in Ukraine.

"We are constructing a couple more in Russia," he added.

However, Abdul Motin, former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, said, "People are concerned about the safety of nuclear power plants. My suggestion is to organise another seminar where operation experience of the older model will be discussed elaborately."

Echoing him, Prof Azizur Rahman of the department of physics at Dhaka University said Bangladesh should pursue the latest model as it has more safety features.

According to Wikipedia, the oldest VVER-1000 reactor, which went into commercial operation in 1981, had to be shutdown in 2010 so that its life could be extended by another 30 years. The VVER-1200 is expected to last up to 50 years.

Jasim Uddin Ahmed, a former director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said the seminar skipped discussions on ecological impacts

of the proposed power plant.

Developing infrastructure for implementing a nuclear power project, educating manpower for construction, operating the project and waste management issues were discussed on the last day of the seminar.

Alexey Utenkov, head of the department of regulatory infrastructure, international cooperation and protocol at the Federal Service for Environment, Technological and Nuclear Supervision in Russia, said responsibility of safety lies in full with the national regulatory bodies of a country.

"We will extend full cooperation to Bangladesh," he said, adding that the two sides had not decided yet what would happen to the nuclear waste produced at the plant.

Prof Vladimir Artisyuk, deputy director of the International Training Centre of the ICET, said Bangladesh would have to develop a national human resources development plan to prepare its workforce to

become successful in installing the plant.

"Education of citizen comes first," he added.

Artisyuk also said Bangladesh needs to send its engineers and scientists abroad to better understand the complex technical aspects of nuclear plants.

"Nuclear plants should start with the personnel who have the necessary qualifications and authorisations to perform," he said, adding that scientists and engineers must hold university degrees and have training before venturing into the crucial job of setting up a nuclear plant.

Former chairman Naim Chowdhury of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission said Bangladesh should move ahead with the project despite concerns over safety.

Speaking at the concluding session of the seminar, State Minister for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman said the government was open and transparent about the project.

"Whatever we did we have always let people know about it," he added.

Living Fridge

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produced by the fish and the fish can then survive in the filtered water with little interference or cleaning from the owner.

The system has also been dubbed 'fridge-aquarium' because owners can use the fish as food -- growing and breeding the fish within the 'Local River' before killing and eating it.

French designers Mathieu

Lehanneur and Anthony van den Bossche created the system.

The 'Local River' ecosystem uses the principle of aquaponics -- a sustainable food production system that combines aquaculture, such as snails, fish and prawns, with hydroponics, plants that live in water.

The plants get nutrients from the nitrate-rich waste of the fish. In doing so, the

plants remove this waste from the water and act as a natural filter to purify it.

This maintains a balance for the ecosystem so the fish can survive.

The same technique is used on large-scale pioneer aquaponics and fish farms, especially in the Far East.

Mathieu said "Local River" aims to replace the decorative 'TV aquarium' by an equally decorative but also functional

'refrigerator-aquarium'.

"In this scenario, fish and greens cohabit for a short time in a home storage unit before being eaten by their keepers, the end-players in an exchange cycle within a controlled ecosystem."

The final results are a variety of food sources that are completely fresh and that have not been affected by mass consumer production.