

WEATHER FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S TEMPERATURES

DHAKA
H 30.8 | L 22.8

MYMENSINGH
H 30.6 | L 22.5

CHITTAGONG
H 32.0 | L 24.0

SYLHET
H 31.8 | L 22.2

RAJSHAHI
H 31.5 | L 24.4

RANGPUR
H 31.0 | L 23.7

KHULNA
H 32.0 | L 23.0

BARISAL
H 32.8 | L 23.2

COX'S BAZAR
H 31.8 | L 23.0

Rain is likely to occur at one or two places over Khulna, Barisal, Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions till 6:00pm today, reports UNR. The sun sets in the capital today at 5:23pm and rises tomorrow at 6:02am, said Met Office.

Fighting a losing battle

SHARIFUL ISLAM and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Believe it or not, there are only six officials at the directorate of prisons, which oversees 68 prisons across the country containing around 70,000 inmates.

The officials also include the inspector general of prisons (IG prisons). The shortage of officials is so acute that the prison directorate often calls back their officers posted in different jails to come and perform duties at the headquarters, said sources in the directorate.

Meanwhile, these jails also have been running short of required supervising officers and supporting staff, they added.

In the absence of adequate supervision, corruption and illegal practices are rampant in the jails across the country.

"I often tell the high-ups if the number of officers is not increased, there will be a lack of supervision. And if [the death of required supervising officers] continues, I will not be able to stop what is being written about prisons [allegations of corruption and malpractices] in the media," Inspector General of Prisons Brigadier General Syed Iftekhar Uddin told The Daily Star recently.

There are widespread allegations of selling drugs and allowing prisoners to use cell phones inside jails. Allegations also run rife that a section of jail staff give special favour and facilities to notorious criminals and VIP prisoners in exchange for bribe. Besides, in connivance with jail staff, some VIP inmates take advantage of staying in hospitals for days on the pretext of being 'sick'.

At present, under the directorate of prisons, around 12,000 people, mostly jail guards, work in the 68 jails -- 13 central jails and 55 district jails, eight divisional offices, one training academy, one prison intelligence unit, and lone 200-bed hospital at the newly-built Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj, according to the sources in the directorate.

On May 15 this year, the prison directorate sent proposals to the home ministry -- the ministry that supervises the directorate -- to create 135 new posts and allocate 16 more vehicles, said the sources. However, the proposals still remain pending with the ministry, they added.

The proposed new posts include an

additional inspector general, three deputy inspectors general (DIGs), one chief medical officer, one law officer, one system analyst, three chief jail guards, the rest are office assistants, drivers, auditors, storekeepers, jail guards, female jail guards, waiters, cooks and cleaners.

Brig Gen Iftekhar said it remains a herculean task for the limited number of officials -- both at headquarters and

PRISONS AT A GLANCE	
Jails	68
Employees	12,000
Inmates	70,000
Ambulances	14
Jeeps	69
Pick-up Vans	11

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elsewhere -- to look after subordinate staff and around 70,000 prisoners. "For instance, I run the activities in Dhaka Central Jail with two first class officers; we have to supervise 7,000 prisoners and 750 jail guards and staff," he said.

In the headquarters, one officer is looking after two to three tasks; if attention is given to one task, work gets hampered in other sections, he said.

Only three assistant inspectors general (AIGs) are looking after activities relating to law, training, finance, maintenance and development.

Apart from that, the IG prisons said he always has to assign an officer at different courts to verify bail bonds.

"I even need an officer to move a file at the ministry..." he said. The overall situation is really frustrating, he added. However, expressing his optimism, Brig Gen Iftekhar said if the jails -- especially Dhaka and Kasimpur jails, which quite often hit the newspaper headlines and where a good number of prisoners including the VIPs are kept -- are brought under strict supervision with deployment of required officers, the situation might take a turn for the better.

VEHICLE SHORTAGE

The IG prisons said they have only 11 jeeps and 69 pick-up vans for the jails and other offices. Due to the shortage of vehicles, officials in many jails have to face serious problems as they have to travel between jails, attend meetings and run administrative activities.

What is alarming is that there are only 14 ambulances for 68 jails. The lone hospital at Dhaka Central Jail is also running short of required number of ambulances.

A number of jail staffers said in the absence of sufficient ambulances, they often face difficulties to send emergency patients outside the hospital.

In this regard, the prison boss said they have only 14 ambulances against a requirement of at least 75 -- one each for small prisons and no less than three for Dhaka Central Jail.

If an ambulance rushes to a hospital with a sick prisoner, it takes hours to return. In the meantime, if other prisoners get sick, there will be no vehicle to send them to hospital.

"It takes almost 2-3 hours to send a patient outside completing all formalities -- arranging an ambulance and ensuring adequate security personnel," Biplob Kanti Biswas, a doctor at Dhaka Central Jail, told The Daily Star.

According to sources in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Dhaka Central Jail, on an average 50 inmates die every year at DMCH; out of whom, 20 are brought dead.

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PERSISTENTLY WATERLOGGED! Rain or shine, this road in front of the capital's Ramna Kalimandir always remains under water. Thousands of people have to suffer every day because of this. Not only have the commuters become a victim of a poor drainage system, businesses were hurt as well since the area has become less accessible. Local people say the situation has been persisting for the last few months and they took the issue to the authorities, but it did not work. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



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is a significant milestone in the progress of Bangladesh. Along with the nation, we are proud of this construction.



PHOTO: STAR

Winners of "My teacher, my inspiration" at the capital's The Daily Star Centre yesterday. Marking International Teachers Day, The Daily Star and AT Haque Mr Cookie organised the campaign. At the event, 10 winners received prizes for writing about teachers who inspired them and played an important role in their lives. The campaign started on September 26 and ended on October 10. Around 1,000 participants from across the country wrote stories and posted pictures about their teachers on the newspaper's website as part of the competition. The winners were also given additional prizes for their teachers. Sher Ali, general manager (business development) of The Daily Star, and Nasrin Luna, head of marketing of AT Haque, were also present during the prize giving ceremony.

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