

Robbers of the ‘grey areas’

Criminals exploit cop ‘negligence’ in capital’s periphery; 8 held in connection with recent incident

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During the day, one of them is a van-puller, someone sells coconut while another is a bus driver or helper. But as the night grows dark, they come out as notorious robbers of the highways in the capital’s periphery.

According to police, multiple such robber gangs are active in these “grey areas” of Dhaka, Savar, Tangail and Gazipur. They rent out buses and take up passengers, only to rob them while moving through the empty roads.

Curiously, police often avoid recording some of these cases, stating that victims should file cases with the stations that deal with the area they boarded the vehicle from, rather than the station charged with the area of the crime’s occurrence.

The issue came to light recently, after a physician -- who was robbed on a Dhaka-Rajshahi-Chapainawabganj bus -- took to social media to share his eight-hour ordeal and lack of cooperation from police, which generated much criticism. He alleged that Uttara West and Jatrabari police stations tried to pass on responsibility and denied to record any case.

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Coming from a poverty-stricken family, 12-year old Alif could only continue education till the third grade. While his father resides in the village suffering from an illness, his mother, the current breadwinner of the family, works as a house-help in Lalbagh area. Little Alif, unable to just sit around doing nothing, took the initiative to help his family survive by selling colourful toys in front of Lalbagh Kella, earning Tk 100-200 a day. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

School land ripe for the taking

Authorities building shops on premises of Lalmatia Housing Society School and College



Four shops have already been constructed, while three are being built. Despite it being illegal, authorities are using the land for the shops as, according to them, there is a lack of funds to run the school.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



HELEMUL ALAM

Inside Lalmatia Housing Society School and College in the capital, four shops stand tall, after being inaugurated by a local councillor. During a visit in mid-January, it was seen that three more shops were under construction.

Criticising the move, former teachers, residents of the area and urban planners blasted the school authorities for damaging the premises’ environment like this.

School authorities have taken Tk 1 to 2 lakh as advance payment from each shopkeeper and are taking Tk 8,000 to 16,000 as rent, according to sources. The shops are built on the south-west side of the premises.

A retired teacher told The Daily Star, “Constructing shops on school land like this is unacceptable. It will destroy the ambience of the school, which was once renowned for its education quality.”

Another former teacher said at least three big trees were cut down during

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MD ASHRAFUL ISLAM
Rajuk town planner

construction of the shops, which is an additional woe that the premises have to face.

Besides, five to 10 years ago, a local councillor constructed the councillor’s office and two shops at the school’s north-west side of the premises. The shops, however, were not in use at that time, he said.

However, locals said the shops opened for business around a year ago.

Adil Mohammad Khan, former general secretary of Bangladesh

Institute of Planners, said it is illegal for school authorities to construct shops on school land.

He said if authorities come up with half-hearted excuses like fund crisis for going through with this, it will only set a bad example.

Md Ashraf Islam, town planner of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), said schools are public facilities, and any kind of commercial activities on their premises is totally prohibited.

Contacted, Syed Hasan Nur Islam, councillor of Ward 32 under Dhaka North City Corporation, who is also head of the school’s governing body, said the area where the new shops were built was abandoned, and there were no trees there.

Hasan said they constructed four shops following the governing body’s approval. While three others, which did not get approval, are under construction. They will take further decisions based on demand for the shops.

He said 50 percent of teachers’ salaries come from the government while the rest are from school earnings.

“We were struggling to run the school during the pandemic. So, we decided to generate money this way,” the councillor said.

He added that they also constructed a canteen at the location for students.

School principal AKM Akmal Hossain echoed the councillor’s reasoning, saying that the school has a shortage of funds to pay salaries, and there are 10 teachers who are not under the government’s monthly pay order (MPO).

Akmal said the school was constructed in 1962 on 3.37 acres of land and has more than a thousand students. He said they took permission from the environment ministry before cutting 15 trees for the development works.

Some residents of the area, however, said the shops will attract many people, which will form huge gatherings on school premises and in turn harm the school’s environment.

Ekushey book fair set to start from Feb 15

DIPAN NANDY

Bangla Academy has decided to hold this year’s Amar Ekushey Boi Mela from February 15, with the condition that all concerned with the fair will have to possess Covid-19 vaccine certificates.

Bangla Academy sent a letter to Academic and Creative Publishers Association of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Publishers and Book-Sellers Association, stating that the fair would be held from February 15 to 28.

The letter signed by academy Secretary AHM Lokman asked all writers, publishers, salespersons, officials and others involved with the fair to take their booster doses if needed.

The Publishers Association has forwarded the letter to all publishers.

Ittadi Grantho Prokash publisher Johirul Abedin and Nalonda Prakashani Publisher Redwanur Rahman confirmed that they received the letter yesterday.

“We expected that the fair would take place from the start of February. But now we will get some additional time for preparations. We believe that between this gap, the infection rate



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will decline,” said Farid Ahmed, president of Academic and Creative Publishers Association and publisher of Somoy Prakashon.

Contacted, Bangla Academy Director General Mohammad Nurul Huda said they have sent a letter to all those concerned.

However, he also said, “Right now, I will not say when the book fair will begin.”

He said the academy has contacted the DGHS to establish a Covid-19 vaccine booth. “They [DGHS] agreed that they will provide necessary support.”

Fair authorities have already made primary preparations at Suhrawardy Udyan.

On January 16, the fair that was set to begin on February 1 was decided to be postponed for two weeks, due to the ongoing spike in Covid-19 infections.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid at that time said if cases are under control, one of the biggest cultural events in Bangladesh may start in the third week of February.

Although the fair starts on February 1 every year, the tradition was broken last year as well. It started on March 18 due to the pandemic and also ended early -- on April 12, instead of April 14 -- after the government enforced a countrywide lockdown around that time.

50YRS OF DIPLOMATIC TIES Stronger defence, economic ties our goal: Australian PM

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Australia looks forward to strengthening defence and economic relations with Bangladesh, said Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, as the two countries celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations yesterday.

“Australia and Bangladesh stand fast in our resolve to build a more secure, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific. This year, we look forward to strengthening our defence and economic cooperation, and working towards our shared recovery from the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic,” he said in a message.

In the message sent to the media by Australian High Commission in Bangladesh, Morrison said on behalf of all Australians, he is delighted to send warm greetings to the government and people of Bangladesh.

Noting that the people of both countries have a love of sport, a passion that brings the competitive spirit to the fore, most notably on the cricket field, he said he is confident that the countries will see this sporting rivalry develop further in the years ahead, as Bangladesh continues to make its mark in world cricket.

Australia looks forward to welcoming Bangladesh for the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup later this year.



If the streets of Gulistan weren’t already clogged enough, horse-ridden carriages, popularly used by people to explore Old Dhaka in style, have only added to the chaos of the area. The carriages are also parked illegally by the roadside, which only makes it worse for moving around, as the footpaths have already been claimed by different vendors. This photo was taken in front of Golap Shah Mazar in Gulistan yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

PRAYER
TIMING
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	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5:30	12:45	4:15	5:52	7:15
Jamaat	6:05	1:15	4:30	5:56	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION