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16 PAGES PLUS LIFE STYLE : Tk 15.00



P3
Shakhari Bazar: Where tradition meets craftsmanship



P7
Brazil elections enter runoff



P11
Pitch under scrutiny in Women's Asia Cup



B3
Good news for RMG makers as cotton price comes down

ERRANT COPS

Leniency lends them impunity

Experts suggest police devise a strict internal mechanism to ensure accountability

SHARIFUL ISLAM and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Complaints about police's involvement in various crimes continue to pile up thanks to lenient disciplinary measures that embolden errant cops, say criminologists and legal experts.

The complaints range from extortion, abduction, and torture, to bribery, drug dealing, framing people and unlawful detention. The offenders inside the force range from the ranks of superintendent of police to constables.

Police themselves investigate allegations against its members and mete out departmental punishments to many, while a few also face criminal charges.

Yet, their involvement in crimes continue because the punishments of police personnel often do not match the severity of their crimes or offences, said

experts.

"Somehow the offenders [in police] are getting spared and so, they are becoming repeat offenders," said Omar Faruk, a professor of the criminology and police science department at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University.

He said unless there is media coverage of these incidents, action is seldom taken against offenders or they are dealt with leniently.

"Only one or two incidents that make headlines, get the attention [of police]. That is why they can't come out of the deviation."

He said a huge number of police at field level are involved in crimes, but proper disciplinary action is not taken against them or only taken on a limited scale. Punishment under the existing laws is also

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Sand dredged from the river bed is being loaded onto a bulk carrier close to the Padma Bridge in Munshiganj's Louhajang upazila. The authorities have allowed 31 dredgers to mine sand, exposing the river banks to erosion. The photo was taken last month.

BUSINESS

Three factors holding back economy

The interest rate cap on loans, frequent changes to exchange rate and a relaxed attitude towards enforcing austerity measures are the major challenges the Bangladesh economy is facing now. The interest rate cap has widened access to cheaper funds for borrowers and changes to the exchange rate have failed to attract higher remittances. Besides, there has been no significant progress in enforcing measures that would help save dollars.

STORY ON B1

HATE CRIMES, DSA

Twin terrors for the minorities

ZYMA ISLAM

On one hand, there were at least 22 incidents of Hindu religious sites being attacked this year.

On the other, there were at least seven incidents in which members of the minority community were sued or arrested under the Digital Security Act or other laws for "hurting religious sentiments".

While both are examples of "hurt sentiments", the legal actions taken were vastly different.

Incarcerated Pritom Das's home in Srimangal is sombre during this year's Durga Puja celebrations.

Pritom, a mobiliser of an organisation named "Rashtra Sanskar Andolon", was arrested a month ago under the DSA. He has since been rejected bail and is now spending Puja in jail.

His favourite delicacy during this time of the year was his mother's special mutton curry. His brother Piyas Das said no one in their home is in the mood to get into lengthy culinary preparations.

"After all, there is no celebration in jail."

Pritom's alleged crime was posting a quote by the Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto, where someone asked the writer what the situation of the country was and he responded, "Just like the Friday prayers in jail ...".

This literary reference was lost on the plaintiff -- 24-year-old Chhatra League activist Mahbub Alam Bhuiyan -- who took one look at Das's surname and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

PADMA BRIDGE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Two years on, still confined to words

MOSTAFA YOUSUF and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Two years have passed since the declaration of the Padma Bridge Wildlife Sanctuary, but the forest department is yet to take any steps to conserve the biodiversity of the Padma.

The move was a bid to reduce the impact on the biodiversity due to the construction of the bridge.

A new problem emerged about a year ago when sand mining began at various points of the river in Shariatpur and Madaripur as part of the river training work of the Padma Bridge project. The Padma Bridge Authority has permitted the dredging.

Extraction of sand is posing a threat to the aquatic life of the river, which may force schools of hilsa to migrate elsewhere. It has also exposed the river banks to erosion in Munshiganj and Shariatpur.

The environment, forest and climate change ministry in 2020 declared the river's 11,772

hectares area, including shoals and wetlands, as Padma Bridge Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary covers 118 square miles in Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Faridpur.

Dewan Md Abdul Kader, executive engineer of the Padma Bridge Authority, said the river training work would end in June next year.

"Dredging is going on to facilitate navigation of cranes and barges around the pillars of the bridge," he told The Daily Star.

Forest department officials said they held several meetings within their office and also with the bridge authority on conservation of the biodiversity after the publication of the gazette. However, no measures have been taken in this regard in the last two years.

The department says it could not look after the sanctuary as the bridge authority was still carrying out river training work.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

29 institutions 'critical info infrastructure'

Illegal access to their data now punishable under DSA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has announced 29 agencies and institutions such as the Prime Minister's Office, central and state-owned banks, and the national identity and immigration departments as "critical information infrastructure", officially declaring illegal access to their information as punishable offence.

It stated this in a gazette published on Sunday by the ICT Division.

According to the Digital Security Act, these infrastructures are those that control, process, circulate or preserve any information data or electronic information that if damaged or critically affected, may adversely affect public safety, financial security, public health, national security or national integrity, and sovereignty.

Due to this new decision, offences like illegal access can be dealt with punishments as strict as life imprisonment.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Pedestrians, including a child, cross the Tejgaon level crossing in front of an approaching train, putting their lives in harm's way. The gatekeepers had lowered the barriers, *not in picture*, but the pedestrians didn't wait for the train to pass. *Inset*, another man crossing the tracks at a switch, where one could get their foot stuck. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Man killed as train hits car at level crossing

STAR REPORT

A trader was killed and his car driver injured when a train hit the vehicle at an unauthorised level crossing in Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Sohel Hasib Khan, 50, a resident of Fuldi village in the same upazila, reports UNB.

Saiful Islam, sub-inspector of Kaliganj Police Station, said the accident took place in the morning when the Dhaka-bound Upakul Express from Noakhali hit the car at the level crossing in Nalchata area, leaving Sohel dead on the spot.

Police later recovered the body and handed it over to the victim's family.

Between January 1 and July 30, at least 35 people were killed in major accidents at level crossings. In late July, 11 people were killed when a train hit a microbus in Mirsharai of Chattogram.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

পরিচালক হিসেবে পুনঃনির্বাচিত হওয়ায়
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