

## 7 DMP OCs transferred, 4 made OCs anew

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a major reshuffle, 11 inspector rank officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, including officers in charge of seven police stations, have been transferred.

In this regard, DMP Commissioner Khandker Golam Faruq issued an order yesterday.

Mohammad Mohosin, OC of Uttara West Police Station, has been transferred to Mirpur Model Police Station; Abul Basar Muhammad Asaduzzaman, OC of Bhasantek Police Station, to Bhatara Police Station; and Mostazirur Rahman, OC of Mirpur Model Police Station, to Wari Police Station.

OC Kabir Hossain Howlader of Wari Police Station has been posted to Motijheel Division Detective Branch, OC Sajedur Rahman of Bhatara Police Station to DMP Logistics Division, OC Monirul Islam of Airport Police Station to DB cybercrime (south) division, and OC Abdul Latif of New Market Police Station to DMP Operation Division.

Besides, Inspector (investigation) SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

## ACC sues Khasru, wife 3 others

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission has filed a case against five people including BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru and his wife in connection with misappropriating a plot of land, hiding ownership of shares in Hotel Sarina Dhaka, and violating the Building Code

ACC Secretary Md Mahbub Hossain disclosed this during a press briefing at ACC headquarters yesterday.

The others accused in the case are Khasru's wife Tahera Khasru Alam, Hotel Sarina Chairman Golam SEE PAGE 10 COL 4



Fresh turnips from districts surrounding the capital arrive at Karwan Bazar early yesterday. While at the wholesale markets, the vegetable is sold at around Tk 15-20 per kilogram, the prices go up to at least Tk 40 at the retail markets. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Putin, Xi to talk as Ukraine war drags on

3 killed as drone hits Russian air base

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping will speak before the end of the year, Russian state news agency TASS said yesterday, as the 10-month-old Ukraine war shows no signs of slowing down.

The development comes a day after Putin said Russia was ready for talks with Ukraine to end the war, receiving a shrug from Kyiv.

It also comes as Moscow yesterday said its forces had shot down a Ukrainian drone close to a long-range bomber base

deep inside Russia, while Ukraine said the Russians had unleashed heavy artillery barrages on its cities in the past 24 hours.

Kyiv, meanwhile, yesterday called for Russia's ouster from the United Nations.

The same day, Russia's domestic security agency said it killed four Ukrainian "saboteurs", who allegedly attempted to enter Russia via a border region.

Putin and Xi proclaimed a "no limits" partnership between the two countries when the Russian leader visited Beijing in February, three weeks before his invasion of Ukraine.

With Western countries condemning

the war and slamming Russia's economy with sanctions, the partnership with China has taken on even greater importance for Putin, though he publicly acknowledged in September that Beijing had expressed "questions and concern" over Ukraine.

The drone was allegedly flying near Russia's Engels air base, where long-range strategic bombers that may have been used to target Ukrainian cities and infrastructure are based.

The Russian defence ministry said in a statement three air force personnel had been killed in the incident but no planes were damaged.

## Missing girl's body found a week later

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

The body of a four-year-old girl was found in Narsingdi's Belabo upazila yesterday, seven days after she went missing.

Sohana was the daughter of Sohel Mia, a resident of the upazila who worked at a garment factory in Gazipur.

Police and locals said Sohana had been missing since December 19.

Locals spotted her body in some bushes on the bank of the Arial Kha river in Binnabayd union around 3:00pm.

Informed, police recovered the body and sent it to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy, said Belabo Police Station OC Tanvir Ahmed.

The circumstances surrounding her death would be known after getting the autopsy report, he added.

## 2 'cattle thieves' killed in mob beating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BAGERHAT

Two persons were killed in a mob beating for their alleged involvement in stealing cattle in Sadar upazila of Narail early yesterday.

Of the two, one was Asadul Sheikh of Bagerhat and the other was yet to be identified, said Narail Sadar Police Station OC Mahmudur Rahman.

A group of five to six thieves entered the house of one Rebu Biswas in Birgram village under Kalora union late Sunday night.

Seeing them, Rebu and his wife screamed for help. Soon, neighbours and locals gathered at the house and surrounded the thieves.

The mob caught two of them and the rest fled. The villagers then beat them mercilessly, leaving them dead.

Police recovered the bodies today and sent them to the Narail Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

A case was filed in this regard.

## Man posing as presiding officer arrested in Rangpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A man pretending to be a presiding officer was arrested in Rangpur yesterday, just a day before the city corporation election.

Laltu Islam Rana demanded a bribe from Sultan Ahmed, a councillor candidate of ward no 33, for a guaranteed win in the election.

The candidate, suspecting something amiss, informed Mahiganj police.

Police arrested Laltu and took him in for questioning.

## Is Grameenphone punished for Padma glitch?

FROM PAGE 1

Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (Amtob), the trade body for carriers, sought permission from the Padma bridge authority to survey the 6.15 kilometre bridge to get an idea of the equipment needed to ensure proper service.

If adequate equipment is not installed, signal quality on the bridge is bound to be poor, as too many mobile phones would be seeking out signal from the nearby sites, Amtob said in the letter.

"The vast waterbody of Padma is a natural enemy of radio signal propagation," said Abu Saeed Khan, a noted telecom expert.

So getting signal from nearby sites would be challenging.

Subsequently, a meeting was held with the Padma bridge authority over the issue, said SM Farhad, secretary general of Amtob. "Yet, Amtob did not receive any further direction," he added.

Then on June 13, less than a fortnight before the long-awaited inauguration, BTRC instructed the operators to take permission and security clearance for installing temporary base transceiver stations and cell on wheels on both sides of the bridge.

"This is absurd and unscientific," Khan said.

The signals emitting from the existing base stations at the riverbanks are bound to interfere with the temporary base stations' coverage on the bridge.

Therefore, additional base stations are mandatory across the bridge to keep the temporary base stations' signals on track across the bridge, he said.

The security clearance came in less than a week before the inauguration and not for all the requisite equipment. The operators installed whatever they were allowed.

On June 24, the day before the inauguration, BTRC in a press release said its chairman visited the bridge to verify the network quality and the steps taken by the mobile operators to ensure quality coverage on the bridge and adjacent areas.

In short, the press release did not find any lack of preparation at the operators' end and even gave a special mention to Grameenphone's raising transmission bandwidth of 50 of its sites in the area adjacent to the Babubazar-Bhanga highway.

And yet, it was Grameenphone that was singled out for punishment.

"Grameenphone is being punished for the telecom ministry and BTRC's incompetence -- the SIM ban has exposed their lack of fundamental engineering knowledge to regulate the sector," Khan added.

The SIM ban also runs afoul of the laws of the land, according to KM Tanjib-ul-Alam, a corporate and constitutional law practitioner.

Telecom Act 2001 empowers BTRC to issue directions for corrective measures as well as certain penalties such as licence cancellation, licence suspension and an administrative fine.

But the SIM sales ban is not among the corrective measures or penalties. Neither the commission nor the ministry has the power to impose a SIM sales ban.

Besides, before initiating any corrective measure or imposing a penalty, the telecom regulator has to send a show-cause notice first. That was not issued.

"What law did they follow to make this decision? It is totally arbitrary, illegal and mollified. If Grameenphone did something unlawful, you can take them to trial. It is like giving a sentence without adjudication," Alam said.

This unusual treatment of Grameenphone, which is 55.8 percent owned by Norwegian Telenor Group, is not painting the most favourable picture of the country's business environment. The Norwegian state holds 53.97 percent stakes in Telenor.

There is a law -- The Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act, 1980 -- that bars "such malign acts" against foreign investors, according to Alam.

Since its inception in 1997, Grameenphone has invested Tk 41,660 crore, making it one of

the largest foreign investors in Bangladesh. The operator is the largest listed company in the bourses.

"This will discourage foreign investment in the country, which is already low, to begin with," Alam added.

The SIM sales ban has been inconvenient for the sector -- and the general public, too.

In many parts of Bangladesh, Grameenphone, which has a market share of 44.8 percent, has the strongest network with the highest number of towers, so the demand for its SIM is rather robust. The Daily Star has learnt from a host of retailers.

This explains why its competitors could not close in on market share despite the SIM ban, shows BTRC's latest statistics. Robi's total subscriber count dropped between July and October, while Banglalink's saw a slight uptick. State-owned Teletalk's subscriber count saw no change.

Between July and October, the total number of mobile subscribers dropped by 23.7 lakh to 18.2 crore.

"This is curbing the freedom of choice of people -- what wrong have they done? A regulator should analyse the impacts -- social, business and others -- before taking any decision," said TIM Nurul Kabir, a former secretary general of Amtob.

The prolonged, open-ended, and arbitrary directives on the SIM sales ban not only unfairly affect customers' choices and are counter-productive to the Smart Bangladesh ambition but display an unlevel playing field and are against licensing rights, Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, told The Daily Star.

Jabbar, though, is resolute, insisting that the ban was imposed for the sake of the general people as they do not get quality service.

"Grameenphone has not built up the capacity to deliver quality service to new customers," he told The Daily Star last month.

The operator's service quality continues to be "bad".

"In seven out of ten calls, I find disturbance," he said, emphasising

call drops.

His grievance does have some merit, as Grameenphone users in big cities have expressed annoyance about the frequency of call drops on the network.

Sometimes, call drops for reasons beyond the operators' control, Azman said in his letter to the posts and telecommunication division and BTRC.

For surveillance and security of critical sites, devices like jammers and repeaters are being used by government agencies. This external interference upsets the signal received by a mobile phone.

The general public also uses illegal jammers in places of worship and boosters for better signal. Those also compromise the network quality.

"Our analysis pointed out that some spots (i.e. external interference, black spots) having chronic problem are responsible for multiple call drops and for that around 1.5 lakh subscribers suffer," he said, adding that the operator will reimburse free one minute for every call drop from the second instance in a day instead of the third call as being practised.

Expansion of mobile network is needed to keep pace with the rapid and uneven urbanisation around Dhaka and other mega cities but the delayed permits from government authorities and city corporations mean the operators struggle to build sites for long.

"It is important to mention that towerco regime does not permit us to build towers and we are to depend on the solutions provided by the towerco operators," Azman added.

Grameenphone will explore all available avenues to get the ban lifted, said officials of the operator on the condition of anonymity to disclose sensitive deliberations.

"I have nothing new to say on this issue -- we did it as per the ministry's instructions," Sikder told The Daily Star on Sunday.

Khandaker Anwarul Islam, who was the cabinet secretary at the time of Padma bridge inauguration, could not be reached for comment.

with symptoms including high body temperature, cough, and sneezing are required to have a rapid antigen test.

"The four passengers were asymptomatic. If they are tested positive in RT-PCR test, the protocol may be changed," said Shahriar.

## Don't meddle

FROM PAGE 1

elections under the independent Election Commission.

Momen said Bangladesh welcomes constructive suggestions from foreign friends.

Earlier yesterday morning, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said, "Foreign diplomats will not bring anyone to power, the country's people will. Foreign diplomats have to follow the Geneva Convention when they talk about the internal affairs of our country. It's the government who will solve the country's problems, not them."

Quader said this while talking to reporters at the ministry.

On December 14, US ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas visited the Shaheenbagh home of missing BNP leader Sajedul Islam Sumon to meet the families of some other victims of enforced disappearances.

During the meeting, members of Mayer Kanna took position in front of the house and demanded justice for their relatives who were victims of court martial during the regime of late president Ziaur Rahman, founder

of the BNP, in 1977.

The meeting was interrupted by protesters, who attempted to enter the house. Due to security concerns, Haas ended the meeting earlier than scheduled.

He immediately called on the foreign minister at the foreign ministry to share his concerns over the incident.

The Russian embassy later issued a press release mentioning its stance against foreign interference in local political issues.

The following day, the US embassy in Bangladesh posted a news article about Russia's statement, with a caption that read: "Does this apply to Ukraine? #StandwithUkraine".

The same day, the Russian embassy tweeted a cartoon mocking the US foreign policy.

Later, Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian foreign ministry, said that Russia believes the US ambassador's visit to Shaheenbagh is an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

"Russia considers the US ambassador's visit to Shaheenbagh as an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh," she said.

## AL, JP battling

FROM PAGE 1

"Large numbers of our partymen will be present near the polling centres. They will resist all sorts of irregularities. No one will be allowed to use muscle power," he added.

On the other hand, Rangpur AL General Secretary Tushar Kanti Mandol, said, "We hope that people will vote for us to continue the government's development programmes.

"We want favour from neither the law enforcers nor from any other government agencies. Our nominee will win, if the election is fair.

"But, we, the Awami League men, will resist chaos and irregularities with iron hands."

The Election Commission on Sunday said there were concerns over violence at 86 of the 229 polling centres.

Additional law enforcers will be deployed at those centres, said Election Commissioner Begum Rashida Sultana.

"We will closely monitor all the centres through CCTV cameras. Voting will be suspended, if any irregularity takes pace. We want fair elections," she told journalists at her office in the capital yesterday.

Members of police, Bangladesh Border Guard, Rab and Armed Police Battalion (APBn) will be deployed to maintain law and order, said EC

## 4 passengers from China test positive for Covid

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Omicron, BF.7, is said to be much more transmissible than earlier coronavirus strains, has more immune escape capabilities and a shorter incubation period. This variant has caused a sudden surge in new cases and deaths across China,

and has been detected in India.

The Directorate General of Health Services on Saturday urged people to be cautious, including taking booster jabs and wearing masks in crowded places.

Besides, a notice has been issued to all port authorities in 14 districts

to ensure rigorous screening of all incoming passengers from China, India, Japan, South Korea, the US, France, Brazil, and Germany witnessing high Covid cases recently.

Even though the four were tested in random, as per the existing screening protocol, only passengers