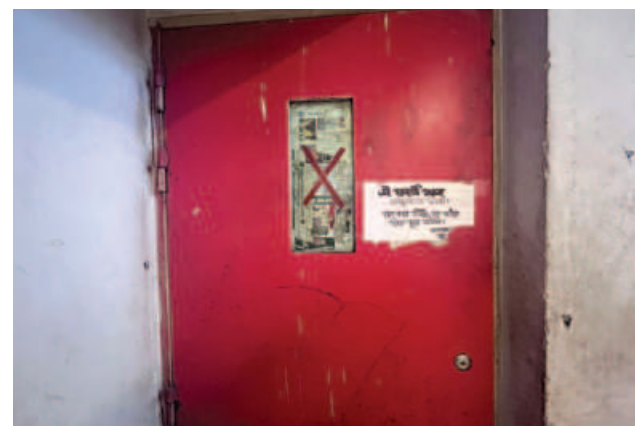


Green Cozy Cottage shopping mall on Bailey Road lacking a fire exit is not an anomaly. Restaurants around the city have the same problem. Clockwise... The fire exit of another Bailey Road restaurant building leads directly to LPG gas cylinders stored on the ground floor, blocking the egress. The sole staircase of this restaurant building in Banani has little space left with broken furniture scattered along it, which will likely act as fuel in case of a fire. The ground floor door of a fire exit at this Dhanmondi restaurant was found locked. A side exit leads straight to a semi-outdoor kitchen that uses LPG.

PHOTO: STAR



Amend public gambling act

Top cops urge ministers to curb online gambling

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Police high-ups have sought the amendment of The Public Gambling Act 1867, as the existing law has no option to take lawful action against online gambling.

Most gambling in Bangladesh is now on online platforms. However, the existing law only has provision for lawful actions against gambling houses, destruction of gambling materials, and action for using animals or birds in street fights. For this reason, the police high-ups requested upgrade of the laws so that action could be taken against online gambling houses, sources said.

During a meeting with the ministers, secretaries, and additional secretaries of finance, law, and public administration ministers, Mohammad Ali Miah, additional inspector general of police, also the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department placed the demand.

The close door meeting was held at the Rajarbagh Police Lines auditorium yesterday – the fifth day of police week 2024.

Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Law Minister Anisul Huq, and Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain were present at the meeting. Secretaries and additional secretaries of these ministries were also present.

The police high-ups have placed dozens of demands that include a 30 percent allowance for the police training institutes, modern residence for the Inspector General of Police (IGP), allocating the IGP's existing residence to Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner, an increase in the IGP's spending limit on construction and equipment purchases, and making the police chief a technocrat member of the Superior Selection Board that decides which officer gets promoted.

Zelensky calls for more Western air defence systems

5 killed by Russian drone attack on Odesa

AFP, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday urged the West to deliver more air defence systems as a wave of Russian missile, drone and artillery strikes killed at least eight people.

Five were left dead, including a two-year-old child, after an overnight strike on the southern port city of Odesa while separate shelling attacks on the frontline Kharkiv, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions killed three, Ukrainian officials said.

"Russia continues to hit civilians," Zelensky said in a post on social media.

"We need more air defences from our partners. We need to strengthen the Ukrainian air shield to add more protection for our people from Russian terror. More air defence systems and more missiles for air defence systems save lives," he said.

Ukraine is currently on the back foot in the two-year war as a crucial USD60-billion aid package is held up in the United States congress.

In Odesa, "a nine-storey building was destroyed as a result of an attack by Russian terrorists," Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said on Saturday in a post on Telegram.

The attack killed at least five people, including a child, and injured eight, Ukraine's emergency services said.

The child was two years old, Odesa region Governor Oleg Kiper said on state TV.

Others were still unaccounted for, with almost 100 rescuers searching the rubble on Saturday for survivors or the bodies of more victims.

Footage shared from the scene showed several floors of a residential building collapsed and its facade ripped off.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, a 76-year-old man was killed in a shelling attack shortly after midnight, regional governor Oleg Syneubov said.

And shelling in the frontline Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions in the south on Saturday morning killed two more, the provincial heads said.

Four-day annual DC conference starts today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The annual Deputy Commissioners' (DC) conference, an important meeting between the government's policymakers and district administrators, is set to begin today.

The four-day event will see discussions on as many as 356 proposals submitted by DCs and divisional commissioners.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the conference at the Shapla Hall in her Dhaka office.

Subsequent working sessions of the conference will take place at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium, featuring a total of 30 sessions, Cabinet Secretary Md Mahub Hossain told a press briefing at the secretariat yesterday.

Of the proposals received, the issues of increasing public services, reducing public suffering, building roads and bridges, developing tourism, amending laws and regulations, and protecting public interest have been prioritised, said Mahub.

He added that the majority of the proposals (22 in total) are related to the Road Transport and Highways Division.

A total of 245 proposals were received from top field administration officials last year.

Hit by trains, 2 die in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Two people died after being hit by trains in separate incidents in Kaliakoir upazila of Gazipur last morning.

One of the deceased, Rabbani, 30, of Mukutpara village in Dumur upazila of Nilphamari district, was a worker at a local factory.

The other victim, a young man, could not be identified immediately.

Eyewitnesses said Rabbani was walking across the Dhaka-Tangail railway tracks at Mouchak Ratanpur Rail Crossing. He had headphones on and did not notice the incoming train that hit him from behind around noon.

"Rabbani died on the spot. Informed, police reached the spot and recovered his body," Sub-Inspector Shahidul Islam of Junction Railway Police in Joydevpur told The Daily Star.

Earlier in the day, the body of a young man was recovered from the railway tracks in the Kholapara Purbapara area under Konabari Police Station around 8:00am, SI Shahidul Islam added.

Gold worth Tk 2 crore seized at Ctg airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two passengers arriving from the United Arab Emirates were detained at Chattogram Shah Amanat International Airport last morning for illegally possessing two kilogrammes of melted gold, which they were attempting to smuggle into the country disguised as electronic products.

The detainees were identified as Shafiqul Islam, from Chattogram's Patiya upazila, and Mohammad Morshed, from the district's Hathazari upazila.

They both arrived on Air Arabia flight G9526 which landed at the Chattogram airport from Sharjah, UAE at 6:35am.

Acting on a tip-off, the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID), National Security Intelligence (NSI), and Chattogram Customs officials conducted the searches and seized the smuggled gold worth around Tk 2 crore.

Bangladesh remains a transit hotspot

FROM PAGE 1

country remains a transit hotspot for wildlife trafficking.

Forest officials sent all these recovered and rescued animals to Bangabandhu Safari Park in Gazipur, but could not identify the traffickers or the final destination of these animals.

Forest officials, wildlife crime control officials and researchers say that all those exotic animals from South America and Africa were rescued by the Indian border, indicating that they were brought into Bangladesh to be trafficked to India.

"Wildlife being smuggled out of Bangladesh is not a new thing. But analysing all those animals and information from our field research, we can clearly say Bangladesh is also being used as a wildlife trafficking route," Nasir Uddin, a leading researcher of wildlife trafficking in Bangladesh told The Daily Star.

He said Bangladesh now plays the role both as a source of and a transit route for wildlife trafficking. It is also a consumer of many wildlife species.

WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING FROM BANGLADESH

A study by Nasir Uddin and other researchers titled "Exploring market-based wildlife trade dynamics in Bangladesh" found that different Asian countries, including Thailand, Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar have a demand for Bangladeshi wildlife.

The study, published in Cambridge University Press journal in November 2022, surveyed 13 wildlife markets across Bangladesh and identified 421 traders selling wildlife.

Another research titled "Laundered alive? The transnational trade in wild felids through Bangladesh" published in December 2022 found that various Tiger products are trafficked from Bangladesh to 13 countries in Asia, Europe and Australia.

Citing anonymous wildlife traders, the study report, co-authored by Nasir Uddin, said South Africa,

India, Indonesia and Kenya are the four main countries that export live felids (mammals of cat families) to Bangladesh.

It also identified 15 countries that receive live wildlife from Bangladesh, including four countries in the Middle East, four in South Asia, four in Southeast Asia, and three in East Asia.

"India is the top destination of live felids from Bangladesh followed by Myanmar, China and Malaysia," the report said.

During interviews for the study, at least eight wildlife traders said traffickers smuggle both native and exotic felids to India from Bangladesh.

Citing wildlife traders, the study

Banglabandhu, Bhurungumari, Benapole, Teknaf, Chattogram seaport and Tamabel.

A separate study published in November last year by Wildlife Justice Commission found tiger cubs are brought to Bangladesh from Thailand.

"In the past, we knew tiger body parts are smuggled out of Bangladesh. Now we see even live tiger cubs are coming to Bangladesh. But we do not know what is happening to them," said Nasir.

An Interpol report released in 2016 said traffickers export different tiger parts to Myanmar, Malaysia, China and Korea through Dhaka airport



Two of the Patagonian Maras recovered near Satkhira border in 2021 are now sheltered in Bangabandhu Safari Park, Gazipur.

PHOTO: STAR

said traffickers sometimes use forged permits from CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) to first smuggle wildlife into Bangladesh for eventually trafficking them to other countries.

Interviewees described live wildlife being imported and exported by air via Dhaka and Chattogram airports. But they use land border to traffic those to India and Myanmar.

Both the studies by Nasir Uddin and others identified 16 points along the Bangladesh-India and Bangladesh-Myanmar borders that are used to traffic wildlife to neighbouring countries. These points include

with consignments of frozen food.

Nasir Uddin said he analysed export data from the CITES website in 2022 and found exporting countries declared 188 felids export to Bangladesh. Of these, Bangladesh reported only four imports. On the other hand, Bangladesh declared 16 more imports that were not reported by any exporting countries.

He noted that most of these felids were trafficked to other countries via Bangladesh, and stressed the need for creating a digital database for legal wildlife imports.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Bangladesh has a fairly rich biodiversity, but wildlife trade amid

loss of habitat is putting a huge pressure on wildlife in different sanctuaries of the country.

International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) latest report published in 2015 shows that the of 1,619 wildlife species that live in Bangladesh, 313 face threats of varied degrees. Of them, 17 types of mammal, 10 types of bird, 17 types of reptile, two types of amphibian and one butterfly species are critically endangered.

IUNC's assessment found that around 27.54% mammals, 6.9% birds, 22.76% reptiles, 20.41% amphibians and 61.63% butterflies are threatened.

ONE CAR, SEVEN PEOPLE

Wildlife Crime Control Unit Director Sanaullah Patawary admitted that Bangladesh is both a "source of and transit route for wildlife trafficking."

Asked how wildlife like Patagonian Mara, zebra or lion cubs could have entered the country, he said someone must have imported them with false declarations.

The Unit does not have any desk at Dhaka airport, making it easier for the traffickers to have the smuggled wildlife released.

"It is possible that dishonest importers declare cows while importing zebra from Africa," he said.

Also, officials at the airport or members of border guard are neither sensitised nor trained to identify endangered wildlife and prevent their trafficking.

The Unit has only one car, and that too without any budget for fuel, making it difficult to promptly conduct any drive or recovery operations.

Officials say if they want to conduct a drive or rescue operation, they need to pay for the fuel cost themselves first, and then submit the bill.

"Currently, the Wildlife Crime Control Unit is running with three inspectors, two scouts and two outsourcing officers under a director. That is the entire manpower we have," Sanaullah said.

Fire exits horrifying

FROM PAGE 1

At another 13-storey cafe and restaurant building, the fire-escape door was locked on the ground floor.

There was another exit but that leads straight to a semi-outdoor kitchen fuelled by LPG.

A 12-storey restaurant tower on road 27 stored broken furniture on its main staircase.

BANANI
Correspondents of this newspaper documented violations in four high-rise buildings housing 21 restaurants in these areas.

A 21-storey building on Kamal Ataturk Avenue had only one staircase barely wide enough for two people.

A lift operator at the building said, "In case of a fire, that narrow staircase is the only escape route."

The building housed at least three restaurants on the first and second floors, while the upper floors were occupied by a private university.

In 2019, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha marked this building as risky.

Another 13-storey building with five restaurants on road-11 had only one staircase. There were no fire-rated doors to keep the stairs safe.

The staircase was partially blocked by construction materials on the second-floor.

Across the street from this building is another 13-storey building with seven restaurants. But it has no emergency exit or fire-rated doors.

Another seven-storey building in Banani with six restaurants was found to have a single narrow staircase – and even these stairs were used for storing four 45KG LPG gas cylinders.

KHILGAON

The only way out of a five-storey restaurant building at Taltola are two flights of steel rung stairs that lead from the first floor to the ground.

A single stairway in this building leads to this steel structure on the first floor, which could become unusable in case of a fire.

Another seven-storey building with three popular restaurants and a popular electronics store had only one three-foot wide staircase.

A five-storey building with six restaurants and one sweetmeat shop, and a three-storey building with three restaurants also had only one narrow staircase each.

BAILEY ROAD

Of the five buildings with 23 eateries visited by The Daily Star on Bailey Road, three had safety issues.

Right next to the building that caught fire on Thursday was a 14-storey building with restaurants and flats.

The main stairways led to the first floor while the upper floors could only be accessed with elevators.

Towards the back of the building, there was an exit adjacent to the restaurant kitchens.

A person exiting through these stairs would face several gas cylinders kept along the narrow path next to the "exit" gate in the basement.

A few metres ahead, a 10-storey shopping mall and residential building had a fire exit, but it was found locked.

Another nine-storey building with restaurants on the ground floor and shops and offices up to the third floor had no designated fire exit or door.

MIRPUR

On Mirpur-II correspondents of this newspaper visited at least five restaurants where violations were aplenty.

An eight-storey building with a rooftop had no emergency exits. There were only two lifts and a narrow staircase.

On Mirpur 12, a building with at least 14 restaurants had no fire exit on the first three floors.

In addition, the fire exit stairway was obstructed with construction materials.

Zyma Islam, Abdullah Abbas, Muntakim Saad, Dipan Nandy, Arafat Rahman and Sajjad Hossain contributed to this report.