

Man used fake NIDs to buy 8 Dhaka flats

Says CID

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Joynal Abedin alias Idrish, a former salesman of a jewelry shop in Dhaka's Mirpur, managed to have six NID cards bearing his name with the help of an outsourced employee at the Election Commission's NID wing. A person having multiple national identity (NID) cards can easily secure several tax identification numbers, open multiple bank accounts, take out many bank loans, and even obtain multiple passports.

Joynal amassed crores of taka in connivance with some staffers of the NID wing, land registry office, and banks, said investigators of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). All these crimes came to the fore in the first week of April after the Detective Branch of police had arrested four people, including Joynal, 42, and Pallab Das, 36, an outsourced employee of the NID wing, from different areas in the capital.

On Friday, the CID arrested seven more members of the forgery racket, including two employees of a bank and a land office.

The ring embezzled about Tk 30 crores taken out of banks as loans, said the investigators.

"Some unscrupulous employees of the NID wing, the land registry office, banks and financial institutions are involved with the racket that amassed crores of taka," CID chief Mohammad Ali Mia said yesterday.

Pallab Das was working at the NID wing in Rangpur. He would access the NID server to prepare NID cards using different numbers, but the cards would bear the same name and address. These fake cards were subsequently provided to Joynal in exchange for Tk 2-3 lakh for each. Joynal would use the cards to secure loans from different banks, according to investigators.

"Pallab either used a finger reversely or the toe to give impressions of fingerprints for preparing a new NID card," Jewel Chakma, additional superintendent of police at the Cyber

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State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat speaking at a discussion on “A press for the planet: Journalism in the face of environmental crisis” at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday. The Editors’ Council organised the event marking the World Press Freedom Day.

PHOTO: STAR

Hopes of Gaza ceasefire rise

Hamas negotiators begin talks in Cairo; CIA chief present for indirect diplomacy

REUTERS, Cairo

Hamas negotiators yesterday began intensified talks on a possible Gaza truce that would see a halt to the fighting and the return to Israel of some hostages, a Hamas official told Reuters, with the CIA director already present in Cairo for the indirect diplomacy.

The Hamas delegation arrived from the Palestinian movement's political office in Qatar, which, along with Egypt, has tried to mediate a follow-up to a brief November ceasefire amid mounting international dismay over the soaring death toll in Gaza and the plight of its 2.3 million inhabitants.

Taher Al-Nono, a Hamas official and advisor to Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, said meetings with Egyptian and Qatari mediators had begun and Hamas was dealing with their proposals “with full seriousness and responsibility”.

However, he reiterated the group's demand that any deal should include an

Israeli pullout from Gaza and an end to the offensive, conditions that Israel has previously rejected.

“Any agreement to be reached must include our national demands; the complete and permanent ending of the aggression,

32 more Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes

Any deal should include Israeli pullout from Gaza: Hamas

Death toll in enclave now 34,654

the full and complete withdrawal of the occupation from Gaza Strip, the return of the displaced to their homes without restriction and a real prisoner swap deal, in addition to the reconstruction and ending the blockade,” the Hamas official told

Reuters.

An Israeli official signalled its core position on this was unchanged, saying “Israel will under no circumstances agree to ending the war as part of a deal to free our hostages.”

More than 34,600 Palestinians have been killed - 32 of them in the past 24 hours - and more than 77,000 have been wounded in Israel's military operation, according to Gaza's health ministry. The bombardment has laid waste to much of the coastal enclave.

Before the talks began there was some optimism over a potential deal.

“Things look better this time but whether an agreement is on hand would depend on whether Israel has offered what it takes for that to happen,” a Palestinian official with knowledge of the mediation efforts, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

Meanwhile, Gaza's Civil Defence agency and hospitals reported several more deaths from strikes in Gaza's north, centre, and in Rafah.

Mother of two beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A woman was beaten to death allegedly by her husband and brother-in-law on Friday night in Gopaldi municipality of Narayanganj's Araihaazar upazila.

The deceased Golnahr Begum, 25, was a mother of two children, said police.

Her husband Md Ripon, and brother-in-law Md Arif, went on the run after the incident, said Ahsan Ullah, officer-in-charge (OC) of Araihaazar Police Station.

According to police and locals, on Friday night, Golnahr was beaten senseless by her husband and brother-in-law during an argument over a trivial matter.

She was pronounced dead on arrival when she was taken to the Araihaazar Upazila Health Complex.

The victim's brother, Abdul Haque, said Golnahr got married to Ripon seven years ago and had two children.

He also said his sister was often tortured physically and mentally by her in-laws for dowry.

The victim's body has been sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy on Saturday morning.

OC Ahsan said a murder case was being filed in this connection.

College student stabbed to death

UNB, Gazipur

A 19-year-old college student has been stabbed to death, allegedly by some muggers, in Gazipur.

The incident took place in the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) area in the city yesterday around 4:45pm.

The deceased Al Amin was a resident of the Chandana area in Gazipur metropolis. He was a ninth grader at the Chandana High School and College.

Iqbal Hossain, brother-in-law of the victim, said that in the afternoon, Al Amin along with his younger brother and cousins went for a walk in the BRRI area. Suddenly, a group of four to five men stopped them and asked them to hand over everything they were carrying.

At one point, they tried to snatch the mobile phone from Al Amin. When Al Amin resisted, one of them stabbed him on the left side of his chest, leaving him dead on the spot.

Police recovered his body and sent it to the morgue at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital, said Gazipur Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Syed Rafiul Karim Rafi.

Efforts are underway to arrest those involved in the murder, he added.

People suffer

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at Joydebpur Outer Signal (Kazibari) area around 10:45am on Friday, leaving three people, including a train driver, injured.

Several coaches of the commuter train were derailed stranding several trains at different stations.

Railway authorities resumed services using one line, which slowed operations.

During a visit to Kamalapur Railway Station around 2:40pm yesterday, this correspondent saw many passengers waiting for trains in the summer heat. Children and women were the worst victims of the delay.

Romana Akhter arrived at Kamalapur around 8:30am to catch the Rangpur Express, which was supposed to leave the station at 9:10am. There was no sign of the train as of 2:40pm.

The dashboard at the station read: “The train will be delayed.”

Romana said, “We don't know when the train will arrive....It's almost unbearable to wait for the train for so long in this heat.”

Similarly, the Chapainawabganj-bound Rajshahi commuter train was supposed to depart at 12:20pm but the train did not reach the stations as of 2:40pm.

Contacted, Masud Sarwar, station manager of Kamalapur Railway Station, said some trains got stuck on Friday at different points following the collision.

“Those trains arrived at the station late, so they're leaving late,” he told The Daily Star around 3:00pm.

He said all trains using the Joydebpur route got delayed by two to three hours.

Heavy rains

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of increasingly intense hailstorms and more frequent lightning strikes, both linked to climate change. These factors are major contributors to injuries and fatalities during storms.

Until yesterday, secondary schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical schools across Dhaka and 24 other districts were mostly closed, with some classes held in between, due to the prolonged heatwave that has been afflicting the country since April 1.

However, starting today, classes will resume at all secondary schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical educational institutions across the country, said a press release issued last evening by the education ministry's Public Relations Officer MA Khair.

On the other hand, sources from the Primary and Mass Education Ministry said all primary schools will also resume classes today, while pre-primary classes will remain suspended until further notice.

Mahbubur Rahman, the ministry's PRO, however, mentioned that morning assemblies at all primary schools would remain suspended as previously directed owing to the ongoing heatwave.

AL, BNP struggle to keep a grip on grassroots

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In the third phase, BNP leaders are running in Khulna, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Bhola, Sunamganj, Sylhet, Cumilla, Kurigram, Narsingdi, Tangail, Manikganj, Thakurgaon, Patuakhali, Sirajganj and Naogaon. There is still time for withdrawal from the race.

Tangail Sadar BNP President Asgor Ali, who is running for chairman in the third phase, told the Daily Star that he would not back down because he had reached an advanced age and wanted to seize the opportunity.

“As I have popularity in my area, I decided to participate in the election. Let the party do what it can. I am going to the doorsteps of the constituents

and asking for vote,” he said.

In the third phase, relatives of 18 AL lawmakers are in the race, up from 15 in the second phase. Around 30 relatives of the AL lawmakers and ministers are participating in the first phase.

Ruling AL's instructions for party MPs were largely unheeded as in the recent past the ruling party didn't take any stern action against party leaders for violating party discipline which might encourage MPs to ignore the party decision, according to AL insiders.

The MP's nepotism pushed the party's dedicated grassroots leaders in a tough spot. Many AL leaders think MPs backing their loyal leaders

Opening in July but full benefits far off

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The Dhaka-Bhanga section of the line was opened in October last year.

Currently, Jashore-bound Benapole Express from Dhaka, Rajshahi-bound Modhumati Express, and Khulna-bound Sundarban Express, and Nakshikatha Commuter use the route.

Yesterday, Railways Minister Zillul Hakim inaugurated a commuter train on Dhaka-Bhanga-Rajbari route.

The train will be operated as Bhanga Commuter on Bhanga-Dhaka-Bhanga route while as Chandana Commuter on Rajbari-Bhanga-Rajbari route, officials said. The train will be operated with old carriages and locomotives.

Speaking at the inauguration programme at Madaripur's Shibchar, the minister said Dhaka-Jashore rail line will be opened within two months.

Once the line is opened fully, BR will move Khulna-bound Chitra Express, which now uses the Bangabandhu Bridge, to the Padma Bridge route.

Besides, BR, upon receiving consent from India, will move Moitree Express, being operated on Dhaka-Kolkata route via Bangabandhu Bridge, to the Padma Bridge route too.

Asked about the plan, BR Director General Sardar Shahadat Ali said

they will introduce new trains and increase frequency of the existing ones once the line is opened fully.

BR will double the frequency of trains on Dhaka-Jashore and Dhaka-Khulna routes, he told The Daily Star last night.

Asked how BR will increase frequency amid the severe manpower crisis, he said, “It would be tough, but we will try to manage.”

According to recent BR data, the state-owned rail transport agency currently employs 24,403 people out of its total authorised 47,637 posts, meaning 23,234 posts now lies vacant.

Besides, BR's proposal for creating 1,674 posts for operating trains on the Dhaka-Jashore route is pending with the public administration ministry although the proposal was submitted over two years ago.

Apart from manpower, there are shortages of carriages, Asim Kumar Talukder, general manager (west) of BR, told The Daily Star last night.

BR procured 100 broad gauge carriages under the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project but those have already being used in different trains, he said.

A BR official said they are going to sign a contract with Indian companies on May 20 to procure 200 broad gauge carriages.

“But it would take at least 18 months after the signing of the

and relatives might deepen the already existing rivalry within the party.

According to AL sources, ruling AL lawmakers are taking the election as an opportunity to tighten their grip on their areas by supporting the candidates loyal to them, while many MPs are putting their weights behind their close relatives, especially children, brothers and spouses.

AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim told the Daily Star that Sheikh Hasina wants unity in the party.

“Every leader should obey the party directives. Those who ignored the directive might face action,” he said.

contract to get the new carriages,” Asim Kumar said.

So, Bangladesh Railway will have to deal with the problems of shortages of manpower and carriages in increasing trips and introducing new trains on the new line, he added.

The railways minister yesterday said they were hiring people on contracts due to a shortage.

Another BR official said if BR wants to introduce trains to new destinations like Gopalganj or Narail, it has to develop some facilities there.

Opening of rail line via Padma Bridge is considered as a key to bring Barishal division under the rail network, which is the only division where there is no rail line.

Although BR has completed the feasibility study for constructing rail line from Bhanga to Payra sea port in Patuakhali via Barishal around three years ago, it could not take up the project as the fund could not be managed.

The railways minister yesterday said the entire Bhanga-Payra rail line would be elevated due to the poor condition of the soil there.

However, managing the huge amount, Tk 65,000 to Tk 70,000 crore, required for the project would be tough, a top official of railways ministry told this correspondent recently.

All-out support for media

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He then gave the example of the passwords for Bangabandhu satellite and Nuclear power plant as sensitive information.

“If anyone tries to publish those, they will be considered a thief. We then will not consider what profession they are in.”

About the authorities recently banning journalists from entering Bangladesh Bank, Arafat said the state bank will have to provide all the information that the public has a right to know.

“We are working to find how central banks in other countries operate and how much accessibility journalists have. We'll try to keep everything within international standards.”

In this regard, AK Azad, president of Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh, said barring journalists from entering the BB without permission amid the current situation in the banking sector will only “encourage the looters”.

About the industries polluting the environment, he questioned, “What is the environment ministry doing about it? Where is their accountability? Why aren't they closing down the factories [that harm the environment] or imposing fines on them?”

Azad added that corruption is on the rise while there is a lack of coordination among the ministries, which in turn results in a lack of accountability.

Meanwhile, he said, journalists are being harassed while reporting about these.

Saying the distance between journalists and the government is yawning, he proposed meetings between the media workers and the information ministry once every three months to bridge this gap.

Azad and Editors' Council President Mahfuz Anam both said that although the Digital Security Act has been repealed, there are nine other laws that directly or indirectly adversely influence independent journalism.

“There are so many laws that are oppressive. But there is no journalist-friendly law,” said Mahfuz Anam, also editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

Regarding the state minister's assurance of protecting journalists who report on the environment accurately, he said, “You can issue an official statement that would bar anyone from hurting journalists who come up with objective reports on the environment.”

He said that journalists and the government can work together for the environment.

“This is something we can really put our hearts and minds into ... But our [journalists'] responsibility will be informative reporting, not vengeance towards anyone,” he said, demanding a law supportive of environmental journalism.

About the state minister's comment that the Digital Security Act does not exist anymore, Mahfuz Anam said even though the DSA has been repealed, victims are still being imprisoned under the act, and it's just not right.

He also expressed hope that the government will do something about the recent BB ban on journalists, which he termed “undemocratic”.

He expressed solidarity with the Palestinian journalists covering the Gaza genocide, as they have been named laureates of the 2024 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

He called for an immediate end to the massacre of Palestinians.

In her speech, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, said reporting on river grabbing and pollution has helped them to showcase the extent of environmental degradation and legally fight those responsible.

“We need strong environmental reporting to save the environment.”

Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta, also the general secretary of the National Press Club, said, “This is a crisis, and the reality is that owners of many media houses, many lawmakers and businesspeople are polluters themselves.”

Dhaka Tribune Editor Zafar Sobhan said there are many controversial issues, which bring the government, the opposition, and the civil society into conflict with one another, but “the environment should not be one of those issues”.

Desh Rupantor's acting editor Mustafa Mamun said the grabbing of rivers and water bodies is easy as the “polluters do not face protests”.

“It seems everybody's responsibility is nobody's responsibility.”

Pinaki Roy, chief reporter at The Daily Star, said the government took up many projects worth a lot of money and there are even court instructions and directives of the prime minister regarding pollution.

“But nothing is stopping environmental pollution due to the indifference of the field-level officials.”

The discussion was moderated by Editors' Council General Secretary, Dewan Hanif Mahmud, also editor of Bonik Barta. Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiuur Rahman and Daily Inqilab Editor AHM Bahauddin, among others, were present.