



## Dhaka footpaths, a money-spinner for extortionists

### Ruling party leaders, cops, hawkers' associations get cuts

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and HELEMUL ALAM

On the footpath next to the General Post Office (GPO) in the capital, Sohel Howlader sells children's clothes from a small table.

He sits on a stool beside the table, roughly 5 feet long and 3 feet wide, and runs the business by paying Tk 150 to the ruling party and hawkers' association leaders every day. He also has to pay another Tk 150 a day to the security guards and for electricity.

When sales peak in the month of Ramadan and in the days before Puja, the "rent" jumps to Tk 250.

"All of us who have set up shops on the footpath pay these men," said Sohel.

There are around 100 such shops on the footpath adjacent to the post office, and as these correspondents asked around whether it would

- Around 5 lakh hawkers in Dhaka city
- Daily footpath 'rent' Tk 100-Tk 300 a day
- Tk 30,000 a day extorted from GPO area alone
- City corporation's rehab programme fails

be possible to "rent" space, a leader of the vendor community named Monir Hossain said. "Bookings are already closed for this year. For next year, you will have to make a one-time payment of Tk 1.5 lakh, and then pay Tk 150 each day."

A space big enough for a stool and a table can be bought permanently for Tk 8-10 lakh, depending on how close it is to the GPO gate.

Monir, who according to locals is a ruling party supporter, assures that shopkeepers make a profit of at least Tk 300 a day, and the space is worth the investment.

Footpaths and roadsides in the city's busiest places like Gulistan, Farmgate, and Motijheel, are illegally occupied, and a lot of money changes hands every day to keep the system in place, according to sources in the hawkers' community.

This worsens congestion in the areas and makes pedestrians suffer.

Contacted, Enamul Haque, councillor of Ward-13, said political leaders, hawkers' associations, and the law enforcers receive a cut.

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Commuters waiting at the edge of a platform of the Kamalapur Railway Station for the Jayantika Express, which operates on the Dhaka-Sylhet-Dhaka route, yesterday afternoon. The train, which was supposed to arrive at 11:15pm, was at least an hour late, causing sufferings to passengers who had reached the station much earlier in the morning.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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## Traffic jam mars Eid journey north

### 10 trains run behind schedule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People have started leaving the capital for the Eid-ul-Azha holidays and many suffered yesterday due to traffic snarl-ups on Dhaka-Rangpur highway and train delays.

There was a gridlock on Dhaka-Rangpur highway between Bangabandhu Bridge east toll plaza and Rasulpur in Tangail for about 10 hours. Traffic flow normalised around noon yesterday.

At least 10 trains departed Kamalapur Railway Station late. The delays were between half an hour and four and a half hours.

## BENAZIR'S ASSETS Confiscate 8 flats, 77 bighas of land

### Court orders authorities

STAR REPORT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered the authorities concerned to confiscate former inspector general of police Benazir Ahmed and his family members' 77 bighas of land, eight flats, and shares in two firms.

The properties include 75.8 bighas in Bandarban on which a farm was built; 1.2 bighas in Rupganj of Narayanganj; three kathas in Dhaka's Gulshan; two flats in Badda; and six flats in Adabor.

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## HC postpones NRBC Bank's AGM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court postponed NRBC Bank's annual general meeting slated for today, following a writ petition alleging irregularities at the bank.

The HC also instructed the Bangladesh Securities Exchange Commission (BSEC) to show cause as to why it should not be directed to send a number of its senior officials as

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## It's humiliating to stand in an iron-cage dock

### Yunus says after court hearing

COURT CORRESPONDENT

It is humiliating for an innocent citizen to stand in an iron-cage dock during a court hearing, said Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday.

"I have been facing a lot of harassment ... it will

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