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PUBLIC SERVANTS

Anti-graft laws, rules relaxed over the years

BAHARAM KHAN

For over two decades, laws and regulations that curb corruption by government employees have been relaxed, which according to the experts, have created room for officials to engage in irregularities with relative impunity.

Both the BNP and Awami League-led governments made amendments that lightened penalties for corruption.

Through an amendment to the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules (1985), the authorities in 2018 included "reprimand" as a penalty for corruption that has been proven through an investigation.

Before the amendment, the punishment for proven acts of corruption was "compulsory retirement", "removal from service" or "dismissal from service".

Civil service expert Firoz Mia said relaxing the rules and regulations will have a harmful impact in the long run.

<p>1979 As per Government Servant (Conduct) Rules, submission of wealth statement every year was mandatory</p>	<p>1985 As per Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, the punishment for corruption was "dismissal" or "removal from service."</p>
<p>2002 The rules were amended. Govt officials now have to submit wealth statement every 5 years.</p>	<p>2018 The rules were amended. A provision of "reprimand" was included creating scope of lighter punishment.</p>

"If an investigation finds corruption by an employee, why would the employee remain in service? Why should other officials work alongside the corrupt individual? What message would other service holders get?" he asked.

Instead of creating opportunities for corrupt officials to evade accountability, the government should make strong corruption-busting efforts that promote transparency and accountability, he added.

In April, an investigation found that Promatha Ranjan Ghatak, now an assistant secretary, had embezzled Tk 7.35 crore while he was the land acquisition officer from June 2020-June 2021 in Madaripur.

On papers, he provided the money to five locals who owned lands in the Magurkhanda area that were acquired for the Padma Bridge. But in reality, as public administration ministry investigations found, the plots of land did not belong to the five individuals.

Those were government lands and there was no need to compensate anyone.

The punishment Promatha received was a demotion from the rank of senior assistant secretary to assistant secretary.

Feroz Mia said the punishment was not commensurate with Promatha's crime.

A joint secretary of the cabinet division, requesting anonymity, said, "Had the 1985 rules not been weakened, the official would surely be dismissed. Keeping this corrupt official in the job makes his honest colleagues uncomfortable."

In April, the government reduced the salary of Bir Amir Hamza, an assistant commissioner (land) of Bogura Sadar Upazila, for 12 months after he was found guilty of forgery for financial gains.

The punishment raised eyebrows as many of his superiors thought he would get fired for the offence.

"ALMOST IMPUNITY"

Many believe that the government provided impunity to the public servants by enacting the new "Government Services Act, 2018", replacing "Public Servants (Dismissal on Conviction) Ordinance, 1985". The former included a provision for punishment for criminal offences.

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The roof of the platform at Narayanganj's Fatullah Railway Station is falling apart due to a lack of maintenance. This is causing suffering to passengers as they find it difficult to cover themselves from sun and rain. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

2 of the killers faked identity, worked at a temple: DB

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Foysal Ali Sahazi and Mostafizur Rahman Fakir, suspects in Jhenaidah-4 (Kaligani) MP Anwarul Azim Anar murder, are truck drivers. But to dodge the eyes of law enforcers, they became cooks at a temple.

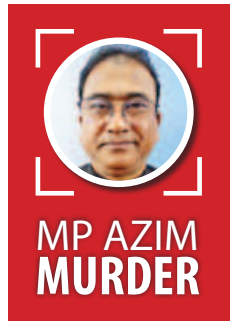
They used to wake up in the morning. Then they went to the kitchen market, bought vegetables, chopped and cooked those. Like ideal Hindu devotees, they did work for the temple so that no one could doubt them.

Sources in the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), investigating the killing of MP Azim, revealed this about the duo.

The two are on a six-day remand in DB custody, following their arrest from a Kali temple in Chattogram's Sitakunda on Wednesday evening.

According to investigators, all the accused of MP Azim's murder went into hiding after detectives arrested Amanullah alias Shimul Bhuiyan, the

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MP AZIM MURMUR

Rice prices up by Tk 2-3 a kg

Sellers attribute it to paddy price hike, mills closure during Eid

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Prices of almost all varieties of rice have gone up in the capital's kitchen markets over the last one week.

Traders said rice prices have increased by Tk 50 to Tk 100 per sack of 50 kg because of the price hike of paddy and the closure of rice mills for the Eid-ul-Azha.

The prices of the staple have soared at a time when the county has sufficient stock.

Visiting several markets in the capital yesterday, The Daily Star found that retailers were selling Miniket rice for Tk 62 to Tk 68 a kg, Nazirshail for Tk 65 to Tk 78, BR-28 and BR-29 for Tk 54 to Tk 56, coarse grain rice for Tk 54, and coarse hybrid rice for Tk 48, depending on quality.

Wholesalers sold Miniket rice for Tk 59 to Tk 65 per kg, Nazirshail for Tk 62 to Tk 74, BR-28 for Tk 51 to Tk 53, BR-29 for Tk 52 to Tk 54, and Pajjam for Tk 54 to Tk 55 per kg.

Before the Eid-ul-Azha, which was celebrated on June 17, the retail prices of these varieties of rice were lower by Tk 2-3 per kg.

Nayeem Hossain, a private service holder, said he had bought miniket rice from a store in East Shewrapara at Tk 72 a kg before the Eid. But he had to pay Tk 75 yesterday for the same variety of rice.

Abul Hashem, owner of Hashem General Store at Ibrahimpur Bazar in Kafur, said he sold Miniket rice for Tk 68 a kg a week ago, but the staple sold for Tk 70 yesterday. Similarly, the price of BR-28 rice has gone up to Tk 55 per kg from Tk 53 a week ago.

"The price hike in the wholesale markets is having an impact on the retail prices," he said.

Alamgir Hossain, manager of Suchana Rice at Mohammadpur Krishi Market, attributed the rice price hike to the increase in paddy prices.

He said the prices of Miniket and Nazirshail rice have gone up by Tk 100 per sack of 50 kg, while the price of BR-28 rice has increased by Tk 50 per sack of 50 kg.

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Maiden triumph or return to glory?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ninth edition of the ICC T20 World Cup will draw to a close today with a never-seen-before matchup in the final, as inaugural champions India take on first-time finalists South Africa for the right to call themselves the best in the world in the shortest format of the game.

The match, set to take place at the Kensington Oval in Barbados starting from 8:30 pm Bangladesh time, will draw the curtains on perhaps the most unique edition of the T20 World Cup so far.

The tournament was set to be different from the onset, with 20 teams competing, the most in any cricket World Cup, and the USA co-hosting the event for the first time alongside the West Indies.

More surprises got unravelled as the tournament kicked into gear, with the drop in pitches in the USA and the sluggish wickets in the Caribbean making way for some low-scoring yet exciting encounters throughout the competition.

A number of shocking results also took place, with the USA's stunning win over Pakistan and qualification to the Super Eight and Afghanistan triumphing over Australia and making it to the semifinals for the first time topping the list.

After four weeks of action across North America, India and South Africa, the two undefeated sides in the tournament, are the final two standing.

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GANGA WATER-SHARING

Indian foreign ministry refutes Mamata's claim Says centre consulted state govt about treaty's renewal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian foreign ministry yesterday refuted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's claim that the Centre did not consult the state government on the renewal of the Ganga water-sharing treaty with Bangladesh.

"The facts do not bear out the assertions [by Mamata]. The representative of the West Bengal government has attended all the meetings of an internal committee set up on the issue (of the Ganges water-sharing accord with Bangladesh) consisting of all stakeholders. In fact, on April 6, 2024, a communication was received from the West Bengal government indicating its requirement of drinking water and industrial water under the treaty beyond 2026," Ministry of External Affairs Randhir Jaiswal told the weekly media briefing in New Delhi.

His remarks came after Mamata wrote a letter to Indian Prime Minister

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Democrat candidate, US President Joe Biden, and Republican candidate, former US president Donald Trump, attend a debate ahead of the US presidential election, in Atlanta, Georgia, US, on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

US PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Flop show rocks Biden campaign

AFP, Atlanta

A badly wounded Joe Biden looked to get his re-election campaign back on track yesterday after a debate performance that unnerved supporters and left allies of Donald Trump unable to conceal their glee.

Democrats had hoped to see the president defiantly answering critics who say he is too old for a second term while hammering Trump on his criminal record and the threat they say he poses to democracy.

Instead, many acknowledged, they got a faltering display from a candidate who sounded hoarse for much of the showdown, stumbled over words, pulled punches, often stared open-mouthed and looked confused.

"There are no two ways about it - that was not a good debate for Joe Biden," Democratic former White House communications chief Kate Bedingfield told host network CNN as the curtain came down on the match-up.

David Axelrod, a senior advisor in Barack Obama's administration, said Biden's performance had "confirmed people's fears" about an 81-year-old being too old for the Oval Office.

The president, who had spent days in mock debates at his Camp David retreat, was scheduled to begin the clean-up yesterday with his largest event of the campaign, in the battleground state of North Carolina.

Facing tough questions over his performance and

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