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FIRE SERVICE & CIVIL DEFENCE

High-risk job, low pay

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Despite risking their lives constantly in the line of duty, firefighters are deprived of the pay enjoyed by employees of other departments, an analysis of their organograms shows.

Although firefighters have similar qualifications as those in other departments, they work for lower pay, as the department's organisational structure has not been upgraded in four decades.

The last upgrade was in 1983, following up on a commission's recommendation to cater to ever-increasing demands for firefighting and Bangladesh's industrial expansion, said officials.

The extent of discrimination becomes clear when the Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) is compared with other departments.

The Fire Service and Civil Defence, with a workforce of 14,515, has 48 first-class positions. In other words, there is one first-class officer for about 300 personnel.

In contrast, the Department of Prisons, with 12,178 staff members, has 306 such posts (one first-class officer for every 40; the Department of Narcotics Control, with 3,059

- One 1st class officer for about 300 personnel
- Deprived of promotion to 1st class even after 25 years
- Prolonged career in 2nd class cause frustration

personnel, has 308 (one for every 10); and the Department of Immigration and Passports, with a workforce of 4,137, has 526 (one for every eight).

One officer who joined the fire service in 2020 having passed the 37th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination was posted as a station officer in the 12th grade of the pay scale. Government employees are divided into 20 grades, with 20 being the lowest rung.

The non-cadre officer said that even if he gets promoted to a senior station officer and then a deputy assistant director he would still remain a second-class officer in the 10th grade.

According to career firefighters, promotion to first-class posts is rare, even after 25 years of service, much of which they spend risking their lives regularly. The disparity, they say, is due to the limited number of first-class positions in the department.

An FSCD officer, unwilling to disclose his identity, said, "Our frustration increases as we remain in second-class positions even after years of service and promotions."

In 2012, the government upgraded the posts of police inspectors to first-class positions and police sub-inspectors to second class.

But FSCD officers have not seen similar upgradation despite the high-risk nature of their job, he added.

Another officer pointed out that, despite passing the same recruitment tests, FSCD officials remain in second-class positions for much longer while those in immigration and passports or narcotics control are appointed as first-class officers in the 9th grade and receive promotions faster.

An officer said 25 graduates of the 37th BCS had joined the FSCD in the 12th grade, but seven of them later opted for other departments, which they thought were better opportunities.

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Brick kilns have been set up, and at least 25 fish farming ponds have been dug, encroaching upon the Sholmari river in Khulna's Botiaghata upazila. According to locals, this encroachment began about 10 years ago, causing damage to the biodiversity of the river. The photo was taken in the Chak Sholmari area recently. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

OF CRONIES AND CRIMES

Ratan: The haunting shadow over Sunamganj wetlands

DWOHA CHOWDHURY and RASHIDUL HASAN

Land-grabbing, illegal sand-mining, and the iron grip over Sunamganj's wetlands — these are just a few of the dark allegations that people whisper about former Awami League MP Mouazzam Hossain Ratan.

Locals recount tales of how Ratan amassed his fortune by instilling fear. Even after his party's fall, they prefer to remain anonymous, fearing the long shadow of his influence.

Sunamganj, a region teeming with water bodies, including wetlands and fishery estates, is a land of natural wealth. The district and upazila administrations lease these water bodies to the fishermen's cooperative association, the Matsyajibi Samabay Samity. Yet, locals allege that Ratan, his relatives, and followers control the entire process from behind the scenes.

Sunai, one of the largest fishery estates in the district, was reportedly under the control of Ratan and his younger brother Mozammel Hossain Rokon, former chairman of Dharmapasha upazila parishad and president of upazila Jubo League.

On January 7, a fisherman named Shyamacharan Barman was brutally killed while guarding the estate for the fishermen's cooperative association. Another

15 to 20 people were injured in the attack.

Shyamacharan's son, Chandan Barman, filed a complaint accusing Ratan, Rokon, and their elder brother Mobarak Hossain Masud, then religious affairs secretary of the upazila Awami League. However, police allegedly did not record the case because the complaint contained Ratan's name.

Masud was arrested on October 5 this year after a Shramik Federation leader filed a case with Dharmapasha Police Station, alleging that Masud extorted nearly Tk 200,000 from the federation — Tk 1,500 a month for over a decade.

Several locals, including politicians, journalists, cultural activists, and teachers in Ratan's constituency Sunamganj-1, allege that the former lawmaker, through his men, was involved in the illegal lifting of sand and stones from rivers, causing significant environmental damage.

"Illegal lifting of stone and sand has almost destroyed the Jadukata river at Tahirpur upazila," a local primary school teacher told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

A cultural activist and a local journalist from Sunamganj, who also wished to remain unnamed, said

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Three more held over violence at Ctg court

Slain lawyer's family set to file case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chattogram Metropolitan Police arrested three more people Thursday night on charges of being involved in last week's violence on court premises, taking the number of arrestees to 37, including seven suspected of murder.

The new arrestees are Babla Dhar, Sajal Shil, and Durlav, said Kazi Tarek Aziz, additional deputy commissioner at CMP.

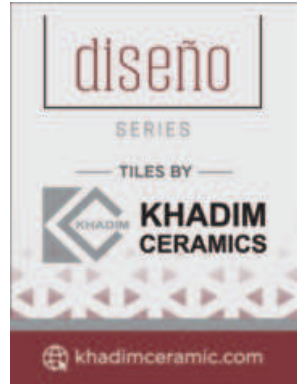
On Tuesday, followers of former ISKCON leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari clashed with law enforcers and lawyers in the Chattogram Court Building area after a court ordered to send him to jail on charges of sedition.

Amid the clashes, a lawyer named Saiful Islam was hacked to death.

Multiple police sources said Babla and Sajal were near the prison bus, which Chinmoy's followers stopped from leaving the court premises on Tuesday.

Durlav was seen in security camera footage, said an officer of the Kotwali Police Station.

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Dhaka slams desecration of nat'l flag in Kolkata

Decries violent protest
outside its mission

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday strongly condemned the desecration of Bangladesh's national flag and the burning of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's effigy in Kolkata as "deplorable acts".

The foreign ministry in a statement decried the violent protests outside the Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in the West Bengal capital.

Expressing "deep concern" over the incident, the ministry called upon the Indian government to take necessary measures to prevent such occurrences.

It also urged New Delhi to ensure the safety and security of all the diplomatic missions of Bangladesh in India as well as its diplomats and non-diplomatic members of staff.

A large group of protesters participated in the demonstration in the evening, organised by a Kolkata-based Hindu organisation "Bongio Hindu Jagran".

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A Palestinian boy sits amid the destruction as displaced residents return to Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip after Israeli shelling of the camp stopped yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Plot on to label Bangladesh as a communal country'

Says Fakhru; he leaves for
London today to meet Tarique

UNB, Dhaka

Stating that there is a plot to brand Bangladesh as a communal country by labelling false allegations of repression against minorities, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday urged all to remain alert to thwart such a move.

"My only request is that what we have achieved should not go in vain, because there is a fascist sitting on the other side of the border," he said at a student convention held at the Krishibid Institute of Bangladesh (KIB).

The event, titled "Student Convention 2024," was organised by the Thakurgaon Chhatra Kalyan Parishad in Dhaka.

The BNP leader claimed that fascist forces, staying in India, are devising various conspiracies and instigating a series of untoward incidents.



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