

Carry out duties with restraint

Gen Waker urges army personnel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman yesterday called upon the army personnel not to engage in any disorderly activities during their deployment.

"We need to ensure that no such unruly activities occur, and force should not be used," said Waker while speaking as the chief guest at the closing and award distribution ceremony of the Bangladesh Army's firing competition, held at the firing range of Savar Cantonment.

Waker urged the army personnel to carry out their duties with patience until a government is elected.

"We must continue working for the country until we have an elected government in place and peace and order returns to the country."

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



To raise awareness against sound pollution and improve road safety, the environment ministry organised a day-long campaign at multiple locations in the capital, including the foreign ministry area where this photo was taken yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Dhaka should clear the air

FROM PAGE 1
\$10,000 here, \$10,000 there -- and bam, \$29 million from the US government," he said.

"Two people! They're very happy. Very rich. They'll be on the cover of a top business magazine -- for being great scammers," quipped the US president.

Addressing the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Maryland on Saturday, Trump again accused the agency of funneling \$29 million to prop up a "radical left communist" in Bangladesh.

"\$29 million goes to strengthen the political landscape and help them out so that they can vote for a radical left communist in Bangladesh. You've got to see who they supported!"

This has confused Bangladeshis and NGO professionals, who have been worried since Trump's announcement of terminating US funding for the projects that don't align with his policy.

One American NGO whose name surfaced in relation to the \$29 million funding is Democracy International (DI), which got the fund from the USAID and UK's DFID for the Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) in Bangladesh from 2017 to 2024.

The Daily Star emailed the DI for comments, but its Chief of Party Catherine Cecil said she has no comments on the matter.

An official who earlier worked for a project with DI said the US NGO has more than 40 employees and how the \$29 million fund can go to two people is not understandable.

"US President Donald Trump's remarks might be meant for the audience in America. It has no link with that of Bangladesh," the official told this correspondent.

According to NGO professionals, any NGO working in Bangladesh with foreign funding must secure approval from the NGO Affairs Bureau.

However, NGO Affairs Bureau Director General (acting) Md Anwar Hossain said they looked into their records and did not find any approval in favour of Democracy International.

"We have to check how Democracy International received the USAID funding and used it," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Abu Sayed, additional secretary and wing chief for America and Japan at the Economic Relations Division (ERD), said USAID sends quarterly reports to the

ERD on the amount of money disbursed for projects.

He, however, could not immediately provide details of the projects and funds coming from USAID.

Asked about the matter, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said it might be possible that USAID has directly funded the US NGO in its own applicable process as part of a bilateral agreement between the US and Bangladesh.

In September last year, the USAID signed an agreement with the ERD for giving \$202 million in aid to Bangladesh, which is a part of USAID's total commitment of \$954 million to Bangladesh for the period of 2021-2026.

According to the ERD, through the 1974 Economic, Technical and Related Assistance Agreement, the US has contributed over \$8 billion across various sectors, including democracy and governance, food security, health, education, and climate change, primarily through USAID and other US agencies.

Iftekharuzzaman said the US NGO, as the principal awardee for the SPL project, appears to have funded some sub-grantees as implementing partners.

In such cases, non-US sub awardee NGOs, local or international, must have had approvals from the NGO Affairs Bureau, he said.

"Interestingly the USAID funding in Bangladesh is much more than what has been mentioned by the US President. I am not sure if the position he has taken is politically motivated," Iftekharuzzaman said, because the principal grantee US NGO may be linked with his arch political rival Democratic Party.

Hence, it is likely that Bangladesh is being dragged into US domestic politics, which on the other hand is facilitating smear campaign against a section of NGOs of Bangladesh by the ousted regime.

In addition to development support, the US has a multifaceted relationship with Bangladesh including trade, investment, education and not least diplomatic and strategic.

"Trump's parroted political rhetoric can therefore have implications on the bilateral relationship, which Bangladesh can neither ignore nor can any sensible US government wish away. Therefore, it is important that both sides work together sooner than later to clear the

confusion," he added.

Former ambassador to the US, M Humayun Kabir, said each and every penny of the USAID fund is calculated and the NGOs using the fund has to ensure transparency and accountability. There is no scope for the USAID to fund "two persons" as claimed by Trump.

"The USAID fund is not political party-blind. It works with all the political parties. So, you cannot say that the US NGOs work for this party or that party," he said, referring to Democracy International's collaboration with Awami League.

According to a statement of the Centre for Research and Information, a think tank of the AL, published in its website on June 11, 2016, DI has provided training and enhanced skills of thousands of political workers from all major political parties, including the AL.

The DI has also been working with CRI closely on research issues, it said.

AKM Jashim Uddin, director at the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh, the apex body of NGOs, said the remarks by Trump are akin to blaming the NGO sector in Bangladesh.

"People will question us. This is not fair, especially when the sector makes huge contribution to the country's development," he said.

It would not be wise for Bangladesh to accept what Trump said, he said, adding, "Bangladesh must come up with the right response. Otherwise, it will be an issue of dignity for us."

National Martyred Army Day today

FROM PAGE 1

observed today.

The government issued a notification on Sunday, announcing February 25 as the National Martyred Army Day. The Cabinet Division instructed all ministries, divisions and organisations to comply with the observance annually. However, the day will not be marked as a public holiday.

A total of 57 high and mid-ranking army officers were killed in the February 25-26 mutiny at the BDR, now Border Guard Bangladesh, headquarters in Pilkhana. Seventeen others were also killed and most of their mutilated bodies were retrieved later from mass graves inside Pilkhana.

"The crime rate is influenced by the size of the population. It doesn't necessarily matter whether the crime rate is increasing or decreasing, but when high impact crimes rise, it creates a sense of fear among the public," he explained. "Do they even understand this?"

YOU'LL FEEL IT'

Despite such concerns, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury yesterday insisted that the country's law and order situation remains satisfactory, although there is "room for improvement".

"You will see tonight [Monday] that our law enforcement activities have increased significantly. I have instructed everyone in the law enforcement agencies. You will feel this starting from the evening," he told reporters after a meeting of the "core committee" at the home ministry.

Among them, the February 17 robbery and sexual assault on a moving bus drew national attention, highlighting severe security lapses.

On February 17, a video went viral showing two men attacking a couple with sharp weapons in Uttara.

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actions. At the same time, no one should be subjected to undue harassment."

Talking to reporters in Cumilla yesterday, Hasnat Abdullah, convener of Students Against Discrimination, expressed discontent about the law and order situation.

Between February 1 and February 24, 2025, dozens of crimes, including murder, rape, mugging, robbery, and extortion, have been reported across the country.

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Stay alert, don't let fascism return

Says Tarique at Khulna rally

UNB, Khulna

Emphasising the need for unity among political parties, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged everyone to remain vigilant against the return of fascism.

"The fascist who fled the country will try to spoil our unity, and we all must remain alert," he said while speaking at a rally in Khulna city via video conference.

Tarique called upon those who have fought for over 16 years against the Awami League not to engage in infighting over trivial issues.

Holding the Awami League responsible for the destruction of democratic institutions during its rule, he said that restoring people's voting rights through a fair election is the main task.

Expressing optimism about his party's prospects, he said that BNP will win if the election is held fairly, and urged party activists to stand by the people in both good and bad times and to be responsible and acceptable.

He claimed that several lakh BNP activists faced "ghost" cases during their fight to restore democracy, while several thousand leaders and

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5



Crime rates spike

FROM PAGE 1
month of the previous four years, Police Headquarters data show.

Cases for robbery rose to 171 in the first month of this year, compared to 114 in January 2024. Abduction cases more than doubled in January this year from 51 in the first month of 2024.

An analysis of monthly crime data over the past six years revealed that the highest number of mugging and robbery incidents in a single month occurred in January 2025, with a total of 242 reported incidents.

Incidents of mugging, robbery and abduction also saw an increase in December and November last year compared to the corresponding months of the previous five years, according to the police data.

The rising trend appears to continue even amid "Operation Devil Hunt" that began on February 8 to restore law and order.

Omar Faruk, a professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, told The Daily Star that they too have seen an increase in crimes, such as mugging, robbery, and theft in the last six months.

"Are these crimes, which are instilling fear among the public, truly a sign of satisfaction?" he said, criticising the government's claim that law and order was normal.

He added that people are living in fear of becoming victims of murder, theft, mugging, or burglary, and the government seems unconcerned, as it doesn't know how to address the issue.

"The crime rate is influenced by the size of the population. It doesn't necessarily matter whether the crime rate is increasing or decreasing, but when high impact crimes rise, it creates a sense of fear among the public," he explained. "Do they even understand this?"

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