

The Daily Star

Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Vol. 5 Num 1137

Fri. August 10, 2007

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Poor work condition make cops wobble

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The draft Police Reform Programme (PRP) holds political influence as a major factor that prevents policemen from performing their duties, but field level policemen who constitute about 99 percent of the total force blame it on lack of logistic supports and poor work condition.

These police officials ranked between constable and sub-inspector (SI) said no reform will be meaningful unless their salaries are increased, daily work hours are reduced to an acceptable level and all operational costs are met by the government.

These policemen earn extra money through illegal means to meet a major portion of the costs for conducting investigations and arrest drives.

The draft PRP only mentions that the government shall grant separate payment and allowances or a comprehensive compensation package for the police service based on the recommendation of the National Police Commission within one year of the promulgation of this ordinance.

The government shall provide the police chief with sufficient fund to cover the cost of investigations, says the draft undertaken by the government with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, UK Department for International Development, and the European Union. It also focuses on improving the force's image that has already been tainted by sleaze.

Ironically, a good number of constables said they do not have any idea about the drafted reform proposals. They unanimously expressed their frustration and doubt that whatever the reforms are, nobody will think of them and that they will continue to lead inhuman life.

There are 1,23,197 policemen in the force at present. Of them, 1,21,659 are between the ranks of constable and inspector who work at field level. There are 87,934 constables in the police force.

A constable now starts his career in the department with a monthly salary of Tk 4,112 and daily duty of 14 hours, which often goes up to 18 hours but for no extra payment.

"I leave the barracks for duty at 6:00pm and return at 8 in the morning the next day. Often I have to go out for duty after only two hours' sleep," said a constable at the Mirpur Police Barracks.

Another policeman of the same rank said, "I have to pay Tk 2,200 for house rent and with the rest [of Tk 4,112] I have to run my four-member family and other expenses...Nobody can imagine how we maintain life amid extreme rise in prices of all essentials."

He said, "I am running 29 but I cannot think of wedding. My two younger sisters are yet to be married off. My mother is becoming ill thinking of me."

An SI who leads field operations in different drives said quality service cannot be expected from them until logistic support and enhanced work condition are ensured.

"If just human treatment and logistic facilities could be ensured, police service in the country will be immensely improved," said an SI of Ramna Police Station.

An SI who has a government motorcycle gets around 1.7 litre fuel a day but one who does not have a government motorbike gets around Tk 3 a day as conveyance allowance although he has to travel to many places for investigation purposes besides his regular duties. On the other hand, an SI who has his own motorbike gets only Tk 127 a month for fuel cost.

A policeman of this rank gets Tk 333 a month as risk allowance, Tk 300 as subsistence allowance, Tk 25 as cleaning allowance and Tk 100 as tiffin allowance. Many alleged that most often they do not get the risk allowances of the last two or three months of a year.

"How can one expect 'service' from a person whose fundamental human demands remain unmet?" said an SI of a model police station in the city requesting anonymity.

A few policemen acknowledged their involvement in various illegal means to earn extra money to maintain their life, but they said it is under the existing inhuman circumstances that they are forced to resort to such illegal means.

Policemen between the ranks of constable and SI said they have to remain on duty for a minimum of 12 hours a day. When on patrol or outside police station, a constable usually performs 18 to 22 hours' duty a day.

"After the caretaker government took over following expiry of the BNP-led four-party alliance government's tenure, I had to perform duty for even four days without any break," said an SI.

Moreover, after the regular 12-hour-duty, almost every SI has to find time for investigation of different cases assigned to them.

An SI at a police station in the capital has 20-30 cases on an average to investigate.

"Is it possible to behave normally with hundreds of people after performing duties for such long hours?" an SI said. He said they never get any allowance as overtime and conveyance and that the investigation officers themselves have to manage the money needed for investigating different cases.

An SI of Mirpur Police Station said every night they have to deploy 10 mobile teams on an average to watch the most crime

prone areas, but the police station has only six vehicles. Even the SIs often have to bear the fuel cost for the vehicles requisitioned for patrol duty.

The policemen said they are entitled to 20 days of casual leave and 28 days of other leaves a year, but they can hardly enjoy a full leave. They also alleged that the food they are supplied are of low quality.

A number of constables living at the Rajarbagh Police Lines said there is severe accommodation crisis in the lines. When a policeman returns to the lines after long hours of duty he finds his bed occupied by a fellow colleague.

Forces living in the barracks said water at the barracks bathrooms gets exhausted within two hours of the return of a batch of policemen from duties. "Most days many of us have to go out for duties without having a shower," said a constable.

They said the authorities even take 15-20 days to repair a fan or change a bulb in the rooms.

At least seven SIs live in a room at the Ramna Police Station with one television set as their only means of entertainment.