

Gram Sarkar back to life from July 1

REZAUL KARIM

Gram Sarkar, the lowest and the biggest tier of local government, is set to come into being from July 1.

Some 40,392 Gram Sarkar (village government) units will be formed across the country by mid August. One Gram Sarkar will be constituted in each of 40,392 wards under 4,488 Union Parishads (UP). Gram Sarkar is meant to bridge rural development with mainstream development as an auxiliary body at the grassroots level.

Late president Ziaur Rahman first introduced Gram Sarkar. But it

was abolished during Ershad's regime. Later, the Awami League government passed the "Gram Parishad" Act in 1997, but did not introduce it.

Gram Sarkar will be constituted through reviewing the abolished Swanirbhar Gram Sarkar Provision of 1980, the Gram Parishad Act of 1997 and recommendations of a local government commission formed in 1992.

Justifying the move to reintroduce Gram Sarkar, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said it would

greatly help to infuse dynamism in the development activities in rural areas and integrate local people in various socio-cultural and development activities.

As per the Gram Sarkar Act, the body will have a five-year tenure. Each ward of a Union Parishad would be a unit of Gram Sarkar.

Gram Sarkar will be an auxiliary of union parishad and elected UP members will be chief of Gram Sarkar. One female elected UP member will be advisor to three Gram Sarkar units.

The 13-member body will have

Funds remain main question

REAZ AHMAD

With the inception of the Gram Sarkar just a week away, people working to run the system are still waiting for increased funds for the union parishad (UP).

Work at the constitution of 40,392 units of the Gram Sarkar, an institution supportive of the UP, begins on July 1 and the Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry has asked upazilla nirbahi officers (UNOs) to complete the process by mid-August, official sources said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Executive Chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman said: "Gram Sarkar has been given many responsibilities and little resources as the case is also with

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Pharmacy: Part Three

Fake drugs make inroads

PINAKI ROY

Counterfeit versions of a number of life-saving medicines are being made and sold in Bangladesh, putting patients at serious risk.

The fakes are usually of no therapeutic value.

Counterfeiters are cashing in on a demand as patients struggle to pay the high cost of genuine drugs, and get away with their fraud because of poor government supervision of the pharmaceutical industry.

Last November the govern-

ment's drug-testing laboratory at Mahakhali identified fraudulent copies of a drug named Cavinton, used for strokes and brain haemorrhages. The fake Cavinton was found to lack one of the main chemical ingredients of the real drug. Cavinton costs around Tk 300 for 50 tablets compared with Tk 130-Tk 150 for the fakes.

Most fakes are made by dishonest pharmacists, according to industry sources. But some small pharmaceutical companies appear also to be involved.

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Second record import of grains in 2 decades

3 million tonnes of cereals costing \$421m brought in the outgoing fiscal

RAFIQ HASAN

Bangladesh imported 30.53 lakh tonnes of grains in the outgoing fiscal at a cost of around US\$421 million (around Tk 2,500 crore), the second highest in two decades.

Only in fiscal 1998-99, 42.56 lakh tonnes of grains were imported, as 75 per cent of agrarian areas remained under floodwater for several months.

Finance Minister M Saifur

Rahman told journalists earlier that the grains imports proved to be a drag on the foreign exchange reserve, as \$300-400 million is spent on that every year.

This fiscal, all grains imports took place in the private sector mainly because of high profit margin, said government officials.

The price difference between Bangladesh and India is a major factor leading to huge grains import, explained the officials.

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The lower duty structure also led private traders to go for importing grains, said the officials. The import duty for rice and wheat has been lowered to 7.5 per cent from 23 per cent and 14 per cent.

"As the prices of rice and wheat are a little higher in Bangladesh than India, the private importers often open L/C when an upward trend surfaces on the domestic market," said a high official of the food plan-

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Tk 10,126 crore in pockets of 325 loan defaulters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 325 big defaulters hold Tk 10,126 crore in classified loans, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

The amount of defaulted loan in each case is above Tk 10 crore, Saifur said.

The minister also informed the House that Tk 32.63 crore in VAT from 42 insurance companies remains unrealised.

Answering a query, the minister said the government has no plan to constitute a permanent pay commission.

Generally, pay scales are announced every five to seven years taking into account inflation. Pay scales were revised in 1977, 1985, 1991 and 1997 by the last four pay commissions, Saifur said.

Jittery wait for nine additional judges

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Nine additional judges waiting for confirmation of their service are keeping their fingers crossed, as indications are there that some of them might be axed.

Some of the judges have even prepared themselves to accept non-confirmation, sources close to them said.

The government will decide on them by July 2, the day their temporary appointment expires.

After assuming power, the coalition government did not confirm the services of 12 additional judges. Senior lawyers quoting the immedi-

ate past chief justice said that the government did so although the chief justice had recommended in favour of at least 11 of them.

The lawyers accused the government of politicising the judiciary and said these judges were not confirmed just because they were appointed during Awami League government.

In such a context, most of the nine judges, who would complete their two-year term on July 2, believe that their days as judges are all but numbered, sources pointed out. They were appointed at the fag end of the Awami League govern-

ment. Law ministry sources said the government was yet to initiate processing of the files related to the judges' confirmation.

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'Regional cooperation bogged down in internal rifts'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has become a moribund organisation due to mutual suspicion and territorial and other conflicts, said a former secretary general of SAARC yesterday.

"There is hardly any progress in forging fruitful cooperation among the member states, and inter-regional trade among SAARC nations is still less than five per cent," Ambassador Abul Ahsan, former secretary general of SAARC, told a seminar on security of South Asia and future of the regional body.

Bangladesh's initiative at the

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Teenage bride acid-tormented

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

Life of a teenage bride has changed forever when an incensed suitor threw acid on her only six days after her marriage.

Jarina Khatun was asleep at her father's house at Raipara village,

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EC mulls e-voting

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) ponders introduction of the electronic voting system (EVS).

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Sayed yesterday told The Daily Star the EC wants to introduce the system by phases.

"We will study more about the

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electronic system. If necessary, we will visit India to enrich our knowledge," said the CEC.

The EC also decided to hold meeting with political parties to know about their views on the EVS, he added.

The EC yesterday held a meeting with the Electronic Corporation of

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Court orders withdrawal of explosion case in Rajshahi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The District and Sessions Judge's Court yesterday ordered withdrawal of the sensational bomb explosion case at Jamaat-e-Islami leader Dr Mozammel Haque's house following a Home Ministry notification.

Judge Abu Bakar Siddique passed the order after government lawyer Advocate Mortuza Reza sought withdrawal of the case in a petition.

Earlier, on February 3, a Home Ministry notice said the government decided to withdraw the case as it was politically motivated. It also asked Deputy Commissioner of Rajshahi and Public Prosecutor (PP) of the Sessions Judge's Court to arrange withdrawal of the case.

The PP in his petition informed the court about the government decision and said it would not be viable for the State to run the case.

On April 17 in 2001, a powerful bomb exploded at local Jamaat

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Nawabpur traders enforce strike for police failure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Traders of Nawabpur area observed a two-hour strike yesterday protesting failure of police to recover cash and machinery looted from eight agricultural machinery shops on June 16.

Though police arrested four alleged robbers, they are yet to recover looted cash and machinery.

The traders called the strike yesterday, four days after expiry of the three-day time police sought for recovering the cash and machinery.

All shops of the markets in Nawabpur kept their shutters down from noon to 2:00pm. Nine local traders' associations expressed solidarity with the strike called by Bangladesh Agricultural Machinery Merchants Association (BAMMA).

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Notice

Today's full-page 'To the Editor' is printed on Page 8 instead of Page 5. ---- Editor