

## FOCUS

## Elected Local Governments and the Bureaucracy

by Hossain Zillur Rahman

**Effective local governments represent first and foremost a political process aimed at making and ensuring an expansion in the institutional and developmental choices available at the local level; they should not primarily be visualised as implementing arms of supra-local entities.**

REFORM initiatives on local governance need to bear in mind two critical ground realities. Firstly, elected local governments at the union level have been a remarkably regular presence since independence. Secondly, weak local governments have not meant any major vacuum in local-level development activities since Bangladesh has witnessed a rich variety of central government and NGO programmes in this field. Thus, it is not primarily from any considerations of political or developmental vacuum that the question of local governance gains its current urgency.

Local governments need to be strengthened not primarily to substitute NGO efforts or to assist project implementation for central government. Local governments cannot be seen mainly as project implementation agencies. The prior issue of project formulation, the quality of project choice, better reflection of felt-needs of an area and last but not the least, a shift in the balance of power between local and central levels of the political system, these are the larger concerns which provide meaning to the discussions on strengthening local governments. Effective local governments represent first and foremost a political process aimed at making and ensuring an expansion in the institutional and developmental choices available at the local level; they should not primarily be visualised as implementing arms of

local entities.

**Administration**

Empowering local government bodies such as Union Parishads may not in some critical senses imply a higher interface with local administration. Discussions on such an interface are frequently premised on a distinction drawn between regulatory and development functions within administration. Regulatory functions i.e. police, magistracy, judiciary and land administration, are commonly kept out of the purview of reform debates while the focus is mainly on 'development' functions. Yet, experience shows that the regulatory organs described above have an enormous influence over lives at the local level and in many ways define, restrict or disrupt the institutional momentum and growth possibilities of local government bodies such as the union parishads.

The issue here is not only one of commonly understood administrative limitations of union parishads vis-a-vis its developmental mandate but of a larger problem of negative externalities generated by the core regulatory organs of criminal judiciary, police and land administration. In such a context,

local government reform cannot meaningfully be restricted to 'local governments' and development functions but must simultaneously move beyond to regulatory functions and address dysfunctionalities within existing regulatory processes. If such an expansion of the agenda is easier said than done, a moot issue is whether the more meaningful alternative may not be to shift the focus from the interface between local governments and administration to the autonomous development of the local government bodies. The jurisdictional issues have to be addressed on their own terms.

**Specific Powers**

A specific aspect of the feebleness of local government bodies vis-a-vis administration is that the powers and responsibilities of the former are invariably defined in general but vague terms while the powers of the latter are enshrined in specific and precise terms. For example, the general power of the union parishad is to maintain law and order but the specific power in this context lies with the magistracy and the police in terms of powers of arrest, bail etc. At the ground level, it is always the specific power which carries the teeth while the general power is more a mere declaration of intent.

There are three sets of issues pertaining to quality. The first has to do with existing proce-

dure of election based on simple majority and how well this reflects the popular will. A review of electoral procedures around the world suggests this as a significant area for reform. The second issue has to do with screening measures to keep out negative candidates. The third issue goes beyond screening concerns and touches on the more pro-active concern of improving the quality of choice available to the electorate. This third has less to do with any administrative initiative but more to do with civil society initiative at awareness-building, social mobilisation and leadership training.

Lastly, there is the related issue of quotas for women and the poor. While quota to enhance representation of women is a move in the right direction, the merit for any quota for the poor is much more questionable. This is precisely because the category of 'poor' is not made up of durable social characteristics which are inherently monitorable for example such as caste. In such a case, the representational opportunity afforded by such quotas is greatly susceptible to manipulation and tokenism as indeed has been the case in the past. The more valid approach here is the social mobilisation of the poor with enhanced participation in local governments as one of the core goals of such mobilisation.

The author is an eminent economist and researcher.

## Medical Waste Disposal in Dhaka City : A Survey

by Salim Rasheed, PhD, Visiting Professor with students Jesmin Ahmed, M Mahfuz Kamal, Nafeez Fatima, Sharfuddin Ahmed Chowdhury and Asif Mahmood

Ans. A6(b): No answer. But they were sold through tender in one case.

7. If dumped —

a. Where do you burn it up?

Ans. A7(a): Always in the premises.

b. Do you have any additional expenses for burning it up?

Ans. A7(b): None given. Basically, personal items, bed sheets and furniture reported burned by some respondents.

8. If dumped —

a. Where do you dump it?

Ans. A8(a): City Corporation dustbin.

b. Is there any special arrangements for dumping it?

Ans. A8(b): No.

9. What sort of transportation is used to dump the garbages?

Ans. A9: Use a trolley.

10. Is there any common place to dispose of the garbages?

Ans. A10: Only the Municipal dustbin.

11. In what form do you dump the garbage? (clinical, non-clinical)

Ans. A11: Both dumped in raw from i.e. without any treatment.

12. Do you suggest any improvement?

Ans. A12: Waste containers should be covered and sanitary.

13. What are the prevailing government policies with respect to disposal of the garbage?

Ans. A13: No one had any idea on this point.

14. Do you have special budget for managing of the garbage? (Yes. No. If yes then what is the amount?)

Ans. A14: No. With one exception — no budget given.

15. How do you account for utilizing garbage specially by recycling in existing framework? (Good. Bad. Not possible)

Ans. A15: Most were against recycling — several thought some improvement of the existing system would suffice.

16. Do you think recycling is beneficial to you? (If it is provided by government).

Ans. A16: Central directives could be beneficial — not unanimous, but consensus.

Some general impressions of the entire investigative experience are as follows: (These are my edited notes after conversations with the student interviewers).

Medical waste management in Dhaka city is a neglected issue. In most places waste is disposed of in raw form. In government hospitals waste is thrown out in an open dustbin; from which the waste is cleaned after one or two days. There are

hospitals where a municipality truck comes after every 2/3 days. So the waste has to be left open on the streets for quite a long time. Some of the clinical wastes which lie out in the open are frequently examined by scavengers and can be very harmful to human health and the environment. The clinical wastes (syringes, saline bags, cotton, ampoules) are usually dumped in raw form (except in BIRDEM where the saline bags are cut in middle and disposable syringes are broken). It is hard to accept the fact that parts of human bodies are left out in the dustbin (orthopaedic hospital). In Shishu hospital a Japanese team is working in a waste management project where they burn the infectious wastes in closed chamber. Only in BIRDEM, has the hospital authority created a system where, through a tunnel, the waste is stored in the basement. The City corporation collects waste from there.

It is not clear how the system is running. Infectious clinical wastes are not identified. Used syringes are sold again in some cases. The government does not have a well-defined waste management policy so many decisions are taken at the micro level. In one hospital (according to the sweeper) the wastes are blocking the drains. Clinical wastes are sold for 20 taka/kg in some places. No one uses special instruments which could make the task easier, more proper and thus safer. The whole thing is done manually using some simple buckets and polythene bags. Among the people we interviewed, we found no one happy with the present system. All of them want it to be improved. But it seems that none of them has the interest or the authority to perform the task.

In conclusion, we can summarise our findings: There is no specific framework for waste management and the hospital authorities are involved in this issue. There is a general lack of awareness of how potentially serious a matter this is. None of the hospitals has special budget for waste management. So the people who do the task have little interest in providing improved service. Great dissemination of information by the Public Health authorities, followed by guidelines to be issued by those who regulate health providers (this could be public or private or both), along with some enforceable measures unstructured by the City Corporation appear to be called for.

## Daring Flights

**P**ILOTS can now fly daring low-level missions at night using Nightbird forward looking infrared (FLIR) imaging systems. The system has revolutionised the operational effectiveness of military aircraft and will soon add to safety in civil air.

Demonstrated in a display at London's science museum FLIR is based on the fact that all objects in the world emit radiations at wavelengths of around 10 micrometers. It is so effective that pilot can taxi, take off, fly at low level with full maneuverability and land all in complete darkness.

The key component of the imager is a detector known as TEC, invented by the UK defence research agency. A prime feature is that it can detect and integrate the infra-red signal and provides the excellent picture quality and high sensitivity which are essential for the demanding airborne role. Actually developed for military roles, Nightbird and its associated family of sensor systems, are useful in finding applications in search and rescue helicopters, customs and excise and varieties of other civil and policing functions.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

## The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Wednesday 9th April  
(All programmes are in local time. There may be changes in the programmes)

BTV

3:00 Opening Announcement Al-Quran Programme Summary  
3:10 News in Bangla 3:15 Patriotic songs 3:20 Recitation from the Geeta 3:25 Drama Serial  
4:30 Cartoon film 'Top Cat 5:00 News in Bangla 5:40 Geetabitan Tagore Song 6:10 Maner Katha 6:50 Open University 7:00 The News 8:00 News in Bangla 8:45 Package Drama 10:00 News in English 10:25 Muktabhar 11:30 News in Bangla 11:20 Thursday's programme 11:40 Close down

BBC

6:00am BBC World News 6:30 Time Out Film '97 7:00 BBC World News inc. World Business Report/Asia Today/24 Hours 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 World Focus: Britain In View 11:00 BBC Newsdesk 12:00 BBC Newsdesk 12:30 Hard Talk 1:00 BBC World News 1:30 World Focus: Britain In View 2:00 BBC World News 2:30 Time Out: Tomorrow's World 3:00 BBC World News 3:30 Hard Talk 4:00 BBC World News 4:30 Time Out Film 97 5:00 BBC Newsdesk 6:00pm BBC Newsdesk 6:30 World Focus: Britain In View 7:00 BBC World News 7:15 World Business Report 7:30 BBC News 7:30 World Focus: The Clothes Show 9:00 BBC World News 9:30 Hard Talk 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 Time Out: Fasten Your Seat Belt 11:00 The World Today 12:00 The World Today 12:30 Hard Talk 1:00 BBC World News 1:30 World Focus: The Money Programme 2:00 BBC World News 2:30 Time Out: Top Gear 3:00 BBC Newsdesk inc. World Business Report/24 Hours



Bonegi Apni Baat on Zee TV to night at 9:30

CHANNEL V

6:30am VJ Alessandra 7:00 Rewind VJ Sophie 8:00 Frame by Frame 11:00 The Vibe VJ Luke 12:00noon Rewind VJ Sophie 1:00 By Demand VJ Trey 2:00 Frame by Frame 2:30 Liberty First Day First Show 3:00 Fashion Police 3:30 Soul Curve 4:00 Planet Ruby 4:30 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 6:00pm Rewind VJ Sophie 7:00 By Demand VJ Trey 8:00 Planet Ruby 9:00 The Vibe 9:30 Videocon Manga Hai 10:00 Liberty First Day First Show 10:30 Soul Curve 11:00 House of Noise VJ Sophie 1:00 Hayashi 2:00 By Demand VJ Trey 3:00 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 4:30 V Spot 5:00 Barnaby Jones

STAR SPORTS

7:00 am Asia Sport Show 7:30 India Tour West Indies 4th Test Match Day 5/6 Australia vs South Africa 5th One-Day International

8:00pm Minaad 7:30 ZED 7:00

ZED 7:30 Ghar 7:30 ZED 7:00

ZED 7