

STEPS' GENDER AND COMMUNICATION FAIR

Promoting gender equality, human rights and good governance

MOON MOON SULTANA

... The first ever 'Gender and Communication Fair' was held at city's Chhayanaut Sangskriti Bhaban in the city with a view to promote gender equality, human rights and good governance through different communication tools.

Steps Towards Development (Steps), an NGO, has taken the initiative to popularise different forms of communication as effective means to raise awareness among people about gender equality on the occasion of 'International Women's Day'.

Britt F Hagstrom, Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh, inaugurated the three-day fair holding the theme "social communication for social change" on March 6.

Speaking as the chief guest Hagstrom said gender equality is one of the central components of the Swedish policy for global development since it is strongly linked to sustainable development and pro-poor growth in any society.

She stressed the need for highlighting success story of women empowerment, messages about justice and good governance through media campaign.

Ranjan Karmakar, Executive Director of Steps, said that there are many traditional and cultural practices, which can be used as effective means of communication.

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Karmakar mentioned some seven communication tools focused in the fair including painting, rickshaw painting, slide show, poster, cartoon, photography and pot

painting.

These tools highlighted violence against women, women's human rights, child rights, gender and governance, women and education and women's contribution in national development.

He claimed that the fair could attract the attention of people of all strata. "The visitors expressed surprise the way different social issues are addressed through some unusual tools of communication," he said.

Besides, the presence of country's distinguished personalities and their discussions in the seminars helped chalk out further action plan,

he added.

Karmakar expressed hope that Steps would organise this sort of fair in 20 more districts by the end of this year and bring out more local communication tools in disseminating messages.

A total of 42 organisations including Acid Survivors Foundation, Action Aid Bangladesh, Asia Foundation, Hunger Project Bangladesh, Brac, D-Net, Unicef, Women for Women, Nari Pakkha and DemocracyWatch took part in the fair.



Despite massive drive throughout the city to ensure in-house car parking facilities some business houses in Naya Paltan defy the authorities to display cars for sale on public pavements.

Activities in most Wards

**FROM PAGE 21** Like Ahsan Ullah Hasan, many DCC ward commissioners have been avoiding public appearances as well as any kind of contact with the authorities, leaving thousands of city dwellers like Kawsar Ahmed in immense sufferings.

Monowar Hossain Dipjol, commissioner of DCC ward 9, could not be found in his office at 11:00 am on March 11. His personal assistant told this correspondent that Dipjol was last seen in his office during the first week of January and he did not know when the commissioner might be back. "He is not in the office and I have no idea when he would be back."

Dipjol's personal assistant also said he used to be responsible for filling in various certificates and documents while the commissioner used to sign those. He however could not give any satisfactory answer on how he manages the office now without the authorisation of his superior.

When contacted, the family of commissioner Selim Ullah of ward 42 told this correspondent that Selim Ullah was staying in London for medical treatment. Residents of that ward however claimed that Selim Ullah had been 'hiding' in his house.

Iftekhar Islam, secretary to the ward commissioner, said he

attends the commissioner's office from 9:00am to 1:00pm and 7:00pm to 10:00pm everyday. He also said around 100 people come to the office daily for various reasons including citizenship certificates, school admissions, marriages, driving licences and job opportunities.

"I haven't seen the commissioner since January 11 and a huge amount of work got piled up since then," Islam said adding, "While going on a leave, the commissioners are supposed to handover the responsibilities to the secretary, but I was not given that much responsibility at all."

Munshi Bajul Basid, commissioner of DCC ward 7, told this correspondent that he has been attending his office as usual. "I do not know about the other commissioners, but I am available in my area and go to the office everyday because absence of the commissioner would affect the ongoing development work in the ward and residents would suffer."

"Why they (other commissioners) went into hiding would be a question best answered by them only," was Basid's response when asked about the reason that caused majority of the commissioners to disappear.

Ariful Islam, commissioner of DCC ward 53, said, "I was in my

area during the 'Operation Clean Heart'. I would never neglect my responsibilities under any circumstances as politics is my creed rather than just a mere occupation."

"The commissioners with other agendas and a shady track record are maintaining a low profile. Besides that, many other commissioners panicked with the sudden declaration of state of emergency and went into hiding in the beginning, but most of them have come back," he added.

Even though the female commissioners are supposed to have authorities similar to that of their male counterparts and should administer various local government activities, female commissioners alleged that the responsibilities given to them are only on papers.

"It is somewhat annoying to have identical authorities (on paper) with the male commissioners, especially when we have no authority in reality," said Nasima Mannan, female commissioner of the reserved seat 11.

"There is only one female commissioner for three DCC wards and with most of the male commissioners absent from their offices, we -- the female commissioners have been getting more visitors and appli-

cants lately," she added.

However, DCC Mayor Sadeaque Hossain Khoka told this correspondent that he did not know how many commissioners went into hiding. "The fact that they are not in their offices does not mean that they are hiding because they are not required to have office hours and are not enforced to be in their offices everyday," said Khoka.

When asked if the DCC is having any problem in administering its wards due to the absence of ward commissioners, Khoka said the commissioners are supposed to be present in the DCC board meetings and also to participate in different committee meetings at the Nagar Bhaban as they are members of the steering committee. "Since there haven't been any meeting in the recent past, we did not face any problem yet. Besides, the regional offices in different wards also can look after different development projects in the wards with the help of the female commissioners," said Khoka.

"It is helpful to have the commissioners present since they know their areas better and can provide important information on different problems in their wards," he added.

Young man returns to life

**FROM PAGE 21** Within a short time, the business partners cheated Edris and a frustrated Edris became totally dependent on drugs.

"I started with little, but in course of time I started taking at least 35 to 40 Pathedrine shots, several bottles of Phensidyl and huge quantities of Heroin on a daily basis," he said. "The drugs damaged my health so severely that internal bleeding become a regular phenomenon in my life."

"My family confined me to the house or to police custody several times. They even took me to hospitals three times for treatment, but nothing could help me overcome the addiction. I became a monster in the world of addiction," he said.

He made promises several times touching his mother and his wife that he would not take drug, but failed to keep the promise.

One day in the year 2000 the miracle happened in the life of this confused young man. His 7-year-old son Imran made a shocking request to him. After

little Imran found his father taking Heroin, he asked his father to let him have some of the drugs too.

"I was taking Heroin in the bathroom and my elder son Imran discovered me there. He requested me to share it with him. It was a shocking request. I couldn't stop taking Heroin right away, but the next day I gave up drugs. I did not look back ever since. I don't know why, but something happened inside me after that incident," he said.

Edris then started an automobile sticker and parts business without having any capital. His innovative ideas and hard labour made him successful in the business. He now owns three shops and workshops where at least 15 workers are employed.

His wife Rosy Begum said to Star City, "It's a story of hate, oppression and harassment for me and although there was no ray of hope, I survived with my firm belief that some day I would find him by my side."

Edris was so out of control that he even beat up his mother and

his wife and snatched their gold ornaments.

On several occasions, Rosy's parents advised her to leave Edris. Despite poverty, negligence, physical assault and humiliation by neighbours, Rosy refused to leave her husband.

She said there had been days when she had to pick up intoxicated Edris lying almost unconscious in sewerage or at filthy places in slums. His old friends left him after he got addicted, but he made new addict friends. His new friends turned out to be an obstacle in his struggle to give up drugs and they even threatened him not to leave their circle of drug abusers.

"We left behind those dark days and now I got him beside me as always dreamt of," Rosy said.

Dr Sarder Faruque, a medicine specialist and a drug abuse specialist trained by World Health Organisation, told Star City that Edris' case is an example of overcoming high level of drug abuse through the patient's strong willpower.

Rajuk

**FROM PAGE 21** But instead of complying with what they committed with the government authorities, they filed a writ petition with the High Court, which issued a three-month injunction on any demolition at the building.

Authorised officer of Rajuk Shamsur Rahman said, "We have so far faced 10-12 such cases of court injunctions on taking actions against the rule violators."

The HC bench issued the injunction on February 13, barring Rajuk demotion at Rahmania Super Market.

Rajuk Magistrate ASM Emdadud Dastagir said, "Almas is the first instance that has gone to court to obtain injunction despite it has given an undertaking to rectify the deviations in the building."

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