

# Free local govt from grip of lawmakers, bureaucrats

## Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Union Parishad (UP) chairmen and civil society members at a roundtable yesterday expressed grave concern over the state of local government (LG), saying the system would be destroyed soon if it is not freed from the grips of the Members of Parliament (MP) and bureaucrats.

Most of the laws related to local government are inconsistent with the constitution and curb the power of the democratic institutions at the grassroots level, and thereby breaking its backbone, they said.

The views came at a roundtable on 'Our role in forming an effective Union Parishad' organised by Swashashito Union Parishad (UP) Advocacy Group-Bangladesh at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

"The local government is actually held hostage to the national government and bureaucracy. The local government structure has actually been transformed into the extended form of the national government and administration," said General Secretary of the advocacy group Matiur Rahman Tapan.

The local government is fully dependent on the MPs and ministers, he said, adding that even its representatives have also been threatened of being ousted from their elected posts, which is totally humiliating.

On the other hand, the national government compromises with the bureaucracy and butter it up for clinging to power, but shows no interest for decentralising and empowering the local government, Matiur Rahman said in his presentation.

The government has downsized the UP's sources of income transferring those to the upazila and district administrations, he said, suggesting providing one-third of the budgetary allocation directly to the UPs and formation of an independent finance commission.

The advocacy group Chairman Abul Hossain Khan said the Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) treat with the UP chairmen just as the feudalists did to people.

"Now when there is no political government in power, the UNOs are controlling us with an iron hand. The upazila coordination committee meeting decides one, but the executive orders are made different," he regretted.

Sazzad Hossain Mukul, UP Chairman of Chilmar in Rajshahi, said that if the control of bureaucracy over the UP chairmen

remains the same, the UP system will cease functioning within the next two years.

"They (bureaucrats) now are threatening the UP chairmen of joint forces," he said.

Demanding upazila parishad and district parishad elections, Shushashoner Jonney Nagorik (Shujon) Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumder said the controlling power of the bureaucrats over the elected representatives is humiliating.

Financial and budget making freedom of the local government is a must for strengthening the local government, he said, adding that without the participation of people at the local government system, no true democracy could be established.

Awami League leader Dr Abdur Razzak said the bureaucrats' power of dissolving the post of a UP chairman is unacceptable. "I do not know if there is a crueler act than this."

When the power lies more in the central government, the MPs can help the local government in policy making, but the local government will have to implement those, he said, adding that decentralisation of power, however, should be made by changing laws.

Jatiya Party leader GM Quader said there is technically no local government in Bangladesh, as the bureaucrats control the system.

It is not right to blame the MPs for intervention in the local government, rather the bureaucrats systematically control them, GM Quader said demanding amendments to the laws to loosen the bureaucrats' control over the local government.

Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury of Gono Shasthya Kendra suggested putting the primary education under the local government and involving more women in the judiciary at local level.

Columnist Syed Abul Maksud, former minister Golam Sarwar Milon and Prof Asaduzzaman also spoke.



General Secretary of Swashashito Union Parishad Advocacy Group Matiur Rahman Tapan speaks at a roundtable at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left is Prof Asaduzzaman while on his right are Abul Hossain Khan, Dr Badiul Alam Majumder and Syed Abul Maksud.

# Road crash creates negative impact on economy

## Global Road Safety Week begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health and Family Welfare Adviser Major Gen (Retd) ASM Matiur Rahman yesterday said high speed and tendency for overtaking are the main reasons for road accidents that create negative pressure on national economy of developing countries like Bangladesh.

"A strong and healthy person may become disabled and burden for his family as well as society at any time due to road accident. But we are not conscious enough to avoid it. We usually like to drive vehicles with high speed and overtake other transports which are the

## Lecture on empowerment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Empowerment of women should be gauged in terms of their capacity to make choices of their own. But the choices that do not reflect her welfare should not be considered as an indicator of empowerment.

Naila Kabeer, a fellow of the Institute of Development Studies at University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, said this at a lecture in the city yesterday.

Although there is no universally acceptable scale to gauge the empowerment of women, their access to education, resources and decision-making process should be the indicators of women's empowerment in society, she observed.

Replying to a question about the role of micro-finance in empowering women, she said there are a number of ways to achieve empowerment and micro-finance is one of them.

But such an approach should be pro-poor, she said, adding that otherwise, it would not sustain in the long run.

About the condition of women in South Asian countries, Naila said they were forced to bear children against their will and that mothers still discriminate against girls.

The Department of Women and Gender Studies of Dhaka University organised the lecture session in association with the Royal Netherlands Embassy. Chairman of the department Ayesha Banu presided over the programme. Its former chairman Nazmunnaahar Mahtab and Prof MM Akash were also present.

main causes of road accidents in our country," said the adviser while speaking as chief guest at the inaugural session of the first United Nations Global Road Safety Week at the auditorium of Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons at Mohakhali in the city.

This year the theme of the week, that began from yesterday, is: "Young Road Users".

The health adviser claimed that Bangladesh has to suffer a loss of Tk 5000 crore and around 12000 lives annually due to road accidents.

"Our 1.5 percent GDP wastes away annually due to road accident which is preventable. We can avoid road accident by increasing our awareness," he added.

The adviser suggested road dividers including the creation of separate lanes for different vehicles and awareness programmes for all especially drivers.

He also asked the doctors to be more alert in providing treatment to victims of road accidents.

"Emergency care unit will have to be opened in all hospitals and health centres for proving better treatment for road accident victims," he added.

Dr Duangvadee Sungkhobol, World Health Organisation (WHO)

representative to Bangladesh, said road accidents claim around 12000 lives in the country every year, including 3500 people who are aged below eighteen.

Vice-chancellor Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology Prof Dr ANM Safiullah said co-ordinated efforts of law enforcing agencies and different non-government and voluntary organisations are needed to reduce road accidents and ensure better health services to the injured.

He laid emphasis on raising consciousness for compliance with traffic rules, cautious movement of pedestrians on the streets and carrying of accident victims to hospitals at the earliest possible time.

Liberation War Affairs Secretary AKM Mahbubul Alam, Health and Family Welfare Secretary Ehsan Ul Fattah, Committee Chairman and Health Services Director General Shahjahan Biswas and National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) Director Prof Siraj-ul-Islam also spoke on this occasion.

## Cop harasses woman in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An assistant commissioner (AC) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) has been charged with harassing a woman bus passenger at City Gate under Pahartali Police Station on Saturday night.

Pamela D'Silva (Saba), an officer of Qatar Airways in Dhaka, yesterday lodged a formal complaint with CMP Commissioner Md Moinur Rahman Chowdhury against AC Mofazzal Hoque in this regard.

The CMP Commissioner while talking to journalists regretted the incident and said action would be taken after departmental investigation into the matter.

Witnesses said Pamela was returning to Chittagong from Dhaka aboard an air-conditioned bus of Silk Line Paribahan on Saturday afternoon.

The wife, brother-in-law and mother-in-law of Mofazzal were also the passengers of the same bus.

As the bus was crossing the City Gate at around 9:30pm, a team of cops stopped the bus and got inside it in search of Pamela while plainclothes Mofazzal, who was standing in front of the door, forced her to get down, they said.

"As I got down from the bus, Mofazzal angrily ordered me to go to my residence (Jamal Khan Road) on foot from there. At this I got so frightened that I could not move for a while. Then I tried to hire a CNG auto-rickshaw, but the police officer again interfered and threatened the taxi driver not to carry me. Observing the scene, other passengers of the bus came to my rescue and helped me get on the bus again," Pamela alleged in her complaint.

She said the entire incident developed from a trifling matter that took place earlier in the noon in Dhaka while she was going to Arambagh main counter of Silk Line on board a minibus from Shukrabad.

"An altercation took place with Mofazzal's wife on that minibus that made her so infuriated that the lady immediately informed her husband over mobile phone and threatened me with serious consequences after my arrival in Chittagong," Pamela said.

When contacted, Mofazzal admitted the incident of altercation but denied the allegation of harassment or misuse of power.

"I went to City Gate just to receive my wife and others," he explained.

## Manjur made DG of CA's office

UNB, Dhaka

Manjur Hossain, member of Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA), has been appointed director general of the office of chief adviser, said a handout yesterday.

## Cop action on family members of jute workers condemned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different organisations yesterday expressed grave concern over the police atrocities on family members of workers of different jute mills in Khalishpur industrial area in Khulna.

They also demanded proper investigation and trial of the persons responsible.

Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) in a press release urged all to find a peaceful solution to the problem and take immediate measures to protect the family members of the jute mill workers from further harassment.

In a press release, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) condemned the incident and demanded immediate trial of the people responsible following proper investigation.



A singer performs at Nasreen Haq Memorial Lecture 2007 at the National Museum auditorium in the city yesterday.

# Charge sheets against listed graft suspects in few days

## Says ACC chairman

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) will start submitting charge sheets within a few days against the listed graft suspects against whom first information reports (FIRs) were filed earlier.

"We're working to accelerate the task of the cases and charge sheets...Charge sheets will be submitted not in a week, but in a few days," ACC Chairman Lt Gen (Retd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury told the journalists at his office yesterday

afternoon.

He said an independent proposal for the amended organogram will be made within 10 to 15 days.

Responding to a query about development on the proposed amended organogram of the Commission, he said, "Development does not take place in a day... Within 10 to 15 days an independent proposal will be made. The government has already decided in principle about it. We've made progress in this regard."

To another query about inclusion of those employees into the proposed amended organogram who were earlier withdrawn from the Commission, Mashhud said, "So far the issue is resolved legally, a decision cannot be taken in principle."

Referring to his district tours, he said it would not be possible to travel by helicopters due to weather condition. About visiting surrounding districts by car, he said, "I'll go on tours after solving the cases."

About his meeting with the National Security Intelligence (NSI), he said during the meeting he got ideas about the NSI organogram and both of them were discussed so there remains no misunderstanding in working together. "At the same time discussion took place about using the common facilities...I went there, as they (NSI) are neighbours and the NSIDG came to see me."

He said he will also meet Inspector General of Police Noor Mohammad today as the IGP came to meet him more than once.

# Tk 4.93 lakh looted, 9 hurt in city incidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nine people were injured and Tk 4.93 lakh was looted in four separate incidents in the city yesterday.

At West Boxnagar in Demra, a group of eight to nine robbers broke into the residence of one Jamal Uddin, tied hands and legs of the family members and gagged them at 3.30am, sources said.

The robbers opened fire on the locals as they chased the criminals hearing cries of Jamal's neighbours leaving one person injured.

However, the locals managed to catch two robbers—Shahjamil and Azhar—while the others managed to flee after robbing valuables worth Tk 1.75 lakh including Tk 80,000 cash and five tolas of gold ornaments.

A robbery case has been filed with Demra Police Station.

In another incident, a group of eight robbers raided Hotel Parvez International at Karwan Bazar at around 8:30am yesterday and robbed Tk 8,800 after stabbing two hotel staffs—Kamrul and Sanjoy.

Locals caught three of the robbers—Ismail, Arfan and Abul Kalam—as they were trying to flee and beat them up severely. Tk 1,150 was recovered from them.

The robbers were handed over to Tejgaon police.

In Mirpur, seven robbers stopped a rickshaw and snatched away Tk 3.10 lakh from its passenger Shahnaj Kanji.

A robbery case has been filed with Pallabi Police Station.

At Madartek, the joint forces arrested Ataur Rahman, 32, an extortionist, as he was trying to enter into a garments factory for collecting toll.

## Indian visa centre closed for 2 days

The Indian Visa Application Centre at Gulshan shall remain closed today and tomorrow, says a press release of the High Commission of India in Dhaka.

It will reopen on April 26, added the release.



Additional police forces were deployed on the Dhaka University campus to step up security after a student organisation took out a procession on Sunday. This picture was taken yesterday.

## 'Nasreen Huq fought for women's empowerment'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Establishing a society free from oppression is not possible until administering freedom of women in the real sense and Nasreen Huq struggled throughout her life for establishing women's empowerment and freedom of women.

Former adviser to the caretaker government Advocate Sultana Kamal said this at a lecture on Nasreen Huq titled 'Women, patriarchy and the dream of a repression-free society' at National Museum auditorium in the city yesterday.

Social activist and Country Director of ActionAid Nasreen Huq passed away in an accident on April 24 last year who dreamt of a society free from oppression and inequality and challenged patriarchy through her activities, Sultana said.

Patriarchy has attributed a particular shape and characteristics on women and it always tries to ensure superiority of men in every sphere of life. It aims to expand male dominance and to protect their controlling power that victimises women most, the memorial speech reflected.

Equity in the real sense speaks of equal rights and dignity irrespective of gender, caste or religion, whereas patriarchy gives men the right to control women in every case.

"Although women empowerment is a much-talked issue now-a-days, women are yet to have the control over their income and to take decision on how they would use it," said the former adviser, adding that women's right to inherit property is yet to be established in this patriarchal society.

Prof Serajul Islam said power lies in a patriarchal system based on dominance and absolute supremacy. The capitalist system is also patriarchal where women are neglected, insulted and sometimes treated as commodities.

"And so the women leaders even in the country are seen possessing patriarchal attitude," he said adding that we could not sustain the spirit and dreams of the War of Liberation that was aimed at achieving real freedom of all and so, are still living in nightmare.

"The leadership is accountable for this," he blamed the leaders and said freedom of women could be measured on whether the society is enjoying freedom or not.

Nasreen Huq also fought against globalisation that is taking toll in the developing countries, the speakers said, adding that her thoughts and dreams should be spread among the next generation.

Prof Mesbah Kamal moderated the programme while Prof HKS Arefin and ActionAid Bangladesh Country Director Shoyeb Siddiki spoke.

## DOUBLE TAXATION Deal with Switzerland soon

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and Switzerland yesterday agreed to sign an agreement on avoidance of double taxation soon to enhance Swiss investments in Bangladesh.

The matter along with other issues of development, trade and investment came up when Head of Political Division of the Swiss Foreign Office Pierre Comberousse had a meeting with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury in Dhaka.

Swiss Ambassador Dora Rapold was also present.

"We discussed the total gamut of our relations," Comberousse told reporters after the talks. He said the discussions covered development, trade and investment issues.

The adviser said Bangladesh values Switzerland's friendship and cooperation and hoped that the agreement on avoidance of double taxation will be signed soon.

## Computer training for underprivileged children

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Australian High Commissioner Douglas Foskett on Sunday inaugurated a project to provide vocational training on computer for underprivileged children and assist them in securing jobs in related fields.

"The underprivileged working children in Bangladesh deserve the same rights, opportunities and positive future that we wish for our own children," said Foskett at the inaugural ceremony at Maghbazar in the capital.

Funded by the Australian High Commission's Direct Aid Programme, the project 'Expansion of SUF vocational training and job placement programme for working children' is being implemented by the Society for Underprivileged Children (SUF).

Under the project, children who have completed class eight at the SUF education centre would be provided computer training. The project would also help them secure non-hazardous, skilled employment, an Australian High Commission press release said.

"By receiving computer skills training, they will increase their chances of obtaining better paid, safe and long-term jobs," Foskett said.



## Rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at many places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at a few places over Barisal and Khulna divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 39.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Ishwardi and lowest 19.7 degree Celsius at Dhaka.

**The sun sets in the capital at 6:24pm today and rises at 5:29am tomorrow.**

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature In Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	35.0	19.7	83	76
Chittagong	32.2	22.0	74	83
Rajshahi	39.0	26.5	77	64
Khulna	36.0	24.4	74	67
Barisal	33.8	23.5	74	74
Sylhet	23.8	20.8	98	77
Cox's Bazar	32.4	23.5	80	80