

# Stop interference by bureaucrats, MPs to strengthen local govt

Speakers tell regional seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a view to strengthening the local government, the interference by bureaucrats and lawmakers should be stopped right now, said the speakers at a seminar yesterday.

The regional seminar on Local Government Reform was organised jointly by Rupantor, an NGO, and USAID Bangladesh at the LGED auditorium in the city.

"The MPs and government officials always stand in the way of the local government. The relation between the central and local governments lacks co-ordination and it is completely top-down," said Advocate Mohammad Ajmatullah Khan, chairperson of Municipal

Association of Bangladesh (MAB).

The government should send officials on deputation to work in accordance with the laws of union parishad and they should be accountable to local public representatives, said Mahbubur Rahman Tulu, convener of Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF).

In their keynote speeches the two local leaders regretted that instead of having a strong financial base, the local governments have to look forward to the central government even for small allocation.

Apart from a number of suggestions for the reforms of the local government, they demanded rise in allocation in the forthcoming budget, formation of a finance commission and an autonomous local

government commission.

The keynote presenters also demanded that health and education at the grassroots level should be brought under the authority of the local government and proposed a two-tier structure instead of the current four-tier body to make the local government autonomous and pro-people.

Terming the democracy in Bangladesh 'conservative', Dr Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser to the caretaker government, insisted on the "democratisation of democracy."

He alleged that the central government has always made the local government institutions weak intentionally although the constitution envisages the formation of a

strong local government.

He called for holding the parliamentary election and local government election at the same time so that it would not have to play a subservient role, adding that since all the power is centralised in the hand of the prime minister, the country failed to get a democratic government.

Roger D Carlson, mission director of USAID, laid emphasis on local initiative.

"It is a wrong perception that development comes in the back of a jeep," he added.

Narrating the role of local government in her country, Dr Dora Rapold, ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh, said local government is closest to the heart of people and this body is meant to ensure service delivery contributing to their welfare.

She laid emphasis on the smooth power sharing between the central and local governments.

At the seminar, two delegations from India and Nepal shared their experiences with other participants.

They were Deboprosad Jana and Dr Ashok Sirkar of West Bengal, India, and Ram Balak Singh and Tri Bikram Pandey of Nepal.

Local Government Expert Dr Tofail Ahmed, Prof Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Dr Salahuddin Aminuzzaman and Narayanjan Municipality Chairman Dr Selina Hayat Ivy also spoke on the occasion.

Dr Rezaul Haque of USAID moderated the first working session, while the second session was anchored by Engr Quamrul Islam Siddiqui.

Earlier Swapan Guha, chief executive of Rupantor, delivered the welcome address.



PHOTO: STAR

Eight eminent personalities who received Mercantile Bank Annual Awards pose with the guests at the 8th founding anniversary programme of the bank at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city yesterday.

## Eight eminent personalities get Mercantile Bank Awards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight eminent personalities received Mercantile Bank Annual Awards at a function celebrating the bank's 8th founding anniversary yesterday.

The Mercantile Bank Limited honoured the eight personalities in recognition of their outstanding contribution to different fields.

The award recipients are Prof Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed for Bangla language and literature, Prof Sanjida Khatun for education and culture, Meghna Guho Thakurota for research on Liberation War, former adviser to the caretaker government Dr Akbar Ali Khan for economy and economic research, President of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Latifur Rahman for industry and commerce, Dr MR Khan for science, technology and medicine, ABM Musa for journalism and Khaled Masud Pilot for sports.

Each winner received a gold medal, a crest and Tk 50,000 at the function held at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city.

In his welcome speech, Managing Director of the Mercantile Bank Shah Md Nurul Alam said the deposit of the bank stood at Tk 3,332 crore while the asset value stood at Tk 3,725 crore at the end of 2006.

## BES-PROTHOM ALO ROUNDTABLE ON EARTHQUAKE 'Lack of awareness to make situation worse'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a roundtable yesterday stressed the need to strengthen coordination between the government and non-government organisations in their efforts to mitigate damage in the event of massive earthquake.

They also warned that some two lakh people would die in Dhaka city alone if the country is hit by an earthquake with a magnitude similar to the quake that struck Assam and Sylhet region in 1897.

But there is little preparedness on the part of the government to mitigate the damage after any massive earthquakes, they said, adding that there is also a lack of awareness among the general people in this regard, which would only make the situation worse.

Bangladesh Earthquake Society (BES) and the Prothom Alo jointly organised the roundtable on 'Devising earthquake in 1897 and today's Bangladesh' at the newspaper's office in the city.

On June 12 in 1897, a massive earthquake with epicentre at Shillong in Assam occurred, leaving 1542 dead. The roundtable was organised to assess today's position in context of 1897 quake.

Brac University Vice-chancellor and BES President Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury presented the basic information about the 1897 earthquake. He said, "We are lucky that no devastating earthquake took place in Bangladesh in the 20th century. We also do not have experiences of tackling such a disaster."

He also said that the government has not yet adopted any effective policy to mitigate the damage in the event of any massive quake.

In his speech, Prof Muntasir Mamun of history department, Dhaka

University, highlighted the human tragedy caused by the earthquake that occurred in 1897 when the population of Dhaka city was one lakh.

According to official statistics, nine big establishments were damaged in Dhaka and the financial loss was estimated at Tk 1.5 lakh, he said. But the figure was Tk 20 lakh according to newspaper reports during that time, he added.

Deputy Town Planner of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) Sirajul Islam said the Dhaka city is now home to 1.3 crore people. The owners of most buildings did not follow the rules and regulations during the construction. So, if any massive earthquake strikes the city, there would be numerous casualties.

As Rajuk has only 600 employees, it is difficult to monitor on the regular basis whether the building code are being followed during the construction work, he said.

Director General (additional) of Bureau of Disaster Management AHM Abdullah said the government has taken a number of measures to tackle quake damage.

The government is implementing several projects to equip the city corporation, fire brigade and the armed forces with modern equipment in this regard, he added.

BES Secretary General Prof Mehedi Ahammad Ansari, Senior Vice-President Md Abu Sadeque, Vice-President Prof Aftab Alam Khan and disaster risks reduction specialist Khurshid Alam also spoke.



PHOTO: STAR

Former adviser to caretaker government Dr Akbar Ali Khan speaks at a seminar at the LGED auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left are chief executive of Rupantor Swapan Guha, Deboprosad Jana of India and Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh Dr Dora Rapold.

# Saarc parliamentarians for creating South Asian Union

BSS, Simla

Parliamentarians representing all major parties and from all shades of opinions from the Saarc countries yesterday

## Nurjahan Murshid's birth anniversary programme tomorrow

DU CORRESPONDENT

A programme celebrating the 83rd anniversary of birth of Nurjahan Murshid, a renowned leader of women renaissance of Bengal and one of the major organisers of the Liberation War, will be held in the city tomorrow.

Born in Taranagar of Murshidabad district on May 24, 1924, she died in Dhaka on September 1 in 2003.

Nurjahan Murshid's birth anniversary celebration council announced the programme at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unit auditorium yesterday.

The programme will start at 6:00pm at Showkat Osman Auditorium of the Public Library at Shahbagh.

The programme includes a reminiscence session, reading from the writings of Nurjahan Murshid and screening of a documentary on her life and works.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Ayesha Khanam, Mahmuda Islam, Farida Akhter, Masuma Akhter Jolly and Shamin Murshid were present at the press conference.

Members of the celebration council are Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Nari Pakkha, Jatiya Konyashishu Advocacy Forum, Manusher Jono Foundation, Women for Women, Nari Udyog Kendra, Sammilito Nari Samaj, ATN Bangla, Brati and Steps Towards Development.

expressed their commitment to act in accordance with the peoples' desire for shaping the future course to create a South Asian Union.

Participating in the Second South Asian Parliament Conference, organised by South Asian Free Media Association (Safma) at Simla in India, the parliamentarians have showed goodwill, farsightedness, flexibility and adjustment.

The conference, coinciding with the 150th anniversary of the historic Great War of Independence in 1857, also laid ground for hastening process for a South Asian Parliament.

Speaker of the Lok Sabha, lower house of the Indian parliament Somnath Chatterjee inaugurated the two-day conference at Simla, the former summer capital of British India and also the capital of Himachal Pradesh, where destiny of the sub-continent remained on negotiation table for several times.

This is the second meeting of its type -- the first was held nearly two years ago at Bhurban, Pakistan. The theme of the conference is "Towards South Asian Unity".

During the conference, the parliamentarians, keeping in mind that the twenty first century belongs to Asia, deliberated on the core issues which relate economic cooperation, mobility

and connectivity and security in the Saarc region.

Presided over by president of Safma KK Katyal, the conference was addressed by Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Virbhadra Singh, Speaker of Sri Lankan Parliament WJM Lokubandra, former education minister of Bangladesh Dr M Osman Farooq, Pakistan opposition leader Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, Dr Mohammad Saleh Salzuqi of Afghanistan, K Keshab Rao of India, Mohammad Shihab of the Maldives, Madhav Kumar Nepal of Nepal, Tshering Tobgay of Bhutan, Safma General Secretary Intiaz Alam and Safma General Secretary, India, Vinod Sharma.

The participants paid respect to the memory of all those who had laid down their lives in the Great War of Independence to secure freedom and dignity. National anthems of eight countries of Saarc were also played.

Chief Adviser to the caretaker government of Bangladesh Fakhruddin Ahmed sent a message to the two-day conference, wishing it a success.

He also reiterated Bangladesh's firm commitment to strengthen regional cooperation for betterment of the people of this region.

## Rare surgery at BSMMU today to mend jaw deformities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A rare surgery is going to be performed on three patients by oral and maxillofacial surgery department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) in the city today.

Known as 'Orthognathic surgery', this surgery is to correct deformities of jaw and tooth.

This kind of surgery is rare in the country although there are many patients suffering from such congenital deformities, said the surgeons of the department at a lecture on 'Orthognathic surgery' yesterday.

"The exact number of people suffering from jaw defect is unknown and we do not know how many children will go through their entire lives without being able to smile," they added.

The speakers said congenital deformity in the jaw is responsible for an ugly appearance of the face and is a major problem for girls who can never think of marriage with such a physical deformity.

On top of that, many people of the country are still unaware that the problem can be remedied, and obviously the earlier the treatment the better the result, they added.

They also discussed the latest technologies and developments of orthognathic surgery.

Dr Shahid Aziz, a renowned orthognathic surgeon from New Jersey Medical University of USA who will perform the surgery, presented a keynote paper at the seminar.

Prof Motiur Rahman Molla, chairman of oral and maxillofacial surgery department of BSMMU, chaired the session sponsored by Orion laboratories.

Dr Mohammad Zakirul Karim, senior manager of Orion, was also present.

## WEATHER TODAY

### Rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

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

Mild to moderate heat wave may continue over Khulna and Rajshahi divisions and the regions of Tangail, Madaripur and Faridpur, Met Office said.

Day temperature may fall by 1-2 degree Celsius over the country.

Highest temperature 39.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Ishwardi and lowest 23.4 degree Celsius at Tangail.

**The sun sets in the capital at 6.43pm today and rises at 5:11am 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	35.3	23.6	75	68
Chittagong	33.0	27.7	77	74
Rajshahi	38.7	27.4	72	56
Khulna	36.6	28.6	74	65
Barisal	35.0	28.0	77	69
Sylhet	31.5	25.5	89	69
Cox's Bazar	34.2	28.0	73	65

## DHAKA TODAY

### Roundtable

Shushashoner Janney Nagorik-Shujan will hold a roundtable on 'Preparation of voter roll: Review of the proposed methods'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 9:30am.

### Seminar

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) will hold a seminar on 'Problems of SME financing'. Venue: FBCCI seminar room. Time: 11:00am.

### Workshop

Action on Disability and Development (ADD) will hold a workshop on skill development of the organisations on disability in South Asia. Venue: Brac Centre Inn. Time: 9:30am.

PHOTO: STAR

Chairman of the 21st Fobana Convention Mahbub Reza Rahim addresses a press conference at Sheraton Hotel in the city yesterday. On his right are Member-Secretary Rehan Reza and Lipi Khandker and on his left is Convener Rabiul Karim.

## Fobana convention on August 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 21st Convention of the Federation of Bangladesh Associations in North America (Fobana), the largest organisation of Bangladeshi expatriates in the United States, will be held with due festivity on August 31.

The three-day convention will be held at Wichita in Kansas this year with the slogan 'Bridging mainstream with the new generation abroad'.

This was stated by the organisers of Fobana convention at a 'meet the press' programme at Sheraton Hotel in the city yesterday.

They said with a view to introduce the new American-Bangladeshi generation with Bangladeshi culture and to nurture the Bengali language, custom, arts

and traditions, Fobana has been playing an important role since its inception.

The speakers said preparations are going on in full swing to make the convention more meaningful and colourful this time.

Fobana incorporates 52 organisations in 22 states of America and Bangladeshis across the USA thronged the convention every year to remain close to their roots even when they are far away from their motherland.

Talent search, summer camp for children in Bangladesh and seminar with the youths will be the new addition of the convention this year, said the organisers, adding that they have established Bangladeshi cultural centres in different parts of America.

They said the non-political

organisation will uphold the culture and tradition of Bangladesh abroad and would encourage the new generation to work for the country.

Chairman of the 21st Fobana Convention Mahbub Reza Rahim, Convener Rabiul Karim and Member-Secretary Rehan Reza spoke on the occasion.

Noted litterateurs Syed Shamsul Haque and Imdadul Haque Milon, the daily Jai Jai Din Editor Shafiq Rehman, Editor of the Weekly 2000 Golam Mortoja, Joint News Editor of the Prothom Alo Abdul Quaiyum, artiste Syed Abdul Hadi, Media critic Muhammad Jahangir and Chief Executive Officer of Grameenphone Kazi Islam also spoke on Fobana and wished its success.

## Charge framing against Lobi today

UNB, Dhaka

The hearing on charge framing of a graft case against detained former BNP lawmaker Ali Asgar Lobi takes place at the special Judge's court today.

Shirin Parveen, an official of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), filed the case against Lobi with Gulshan Police Station on charges of evading over Tk 17 crore tax by making a "false statement" on his wealth.

According to the case, Lobi in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC mentioned that he owns wealth worth Tk 7 crore, but the commission has discovered his wealth worth Tk 22.25 crore.

In the FIR (first information report), the investigation officer (IO) mentioned that Lobi has Tk 22.25 crore as Fixed Deposit Receipt (FDR) in seven accounts with the Dhanmondi branch of Premier Bank and the Banani branch of Bank Al Falah. But he gave information about only Tk 7 crore in his wealth statement.

On February 6, the joint forces arrested Lobi at his Gulshan residence in the capital.

Another unit of the special court today resumes hearing of the graft case against former state minister for civil aviation and tourism and BNP leader Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin.

Mir Nasir was accused of concealing information to the ACC about his wealth worth about Tk 25 crore amassed by illegal means.

## Mamun's associate held in Gazipur

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Joint forces arrested a close associate of controversial businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun at Kaliakoir in Gazipur yesterday afternoon.

The arrestee was identified as Akram Hossain Khan Shanju, 40, a ready-made garments businessman.

Various police sources said Shanju had close connection with Mamun.

Shanju was handed over to the Kaliakoir Police Station, which was confirmed by the Officer in Charge (OC) Shahjahan Kabir.

Joint forces were interrogating Shanju as of filing this report at 8:20pm.

## Tree plantation movement begins today

BSS, Dhaka

The three-month National Tree Plantation Movement and Tree Fair 2007 with the theme "stop felling trees, plant rare trees" will be formally inaugurated today.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed will launch the national movement by opening a tree fair at Tangail sadar ground with a call for creating mass awareness to protect environment and biodiversity through stopping desertification and ensuring poverty reduction.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and the chief adviser issued separate messages on the eve of the occasion, describing tree as the friends of humankind and urging all to spontaneously participate in the large scale plantation all over the country.

The president in his message called upon all to plant more trees to increase forest resources across the country that would protect environment side by side maintain ecological balance in the country.

"Tree is good friends of ours, playing an important role to create a sound environment including ecological balance" he said describing tree as an integral part of the overall environment. "We are depended on trees in different way in our day to day life," he added.

Iajuddin Ahmed said trees could play a vital role for national progress and prosperity as they are considered friends in adversity.

He also congratulated those who got the Chief Adviser's National Award 2006 and hoped that they would further play their effective role in inspiring other people to plant different saplings in future for increasing the forest resources in the country.

In his message, Fakhruddin Ahmed urged all to turn the national tree plantation into a social movement by ensuring spontaneous participation of all in this highly significant task.

"Spontaneous participation of people is greatly needed to make the government efforts a success by planting fruit bearing, medicinal and timber trees and nursing them for their unhindered growth," he said.

The chief adviser also called for stopping felling of trees as Green South Asia 2007 for the first time is being observed in the Saarc region to expand multidimensional cooperation including green movement, sustainable development and protecting environment in this part of the world.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has chalked out an elaborate programme on the occasion, which would be specially highlighted by both print and electronic media.