

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Still no sign of life

## CITY CORRESPONDENT

Local government activities in the 90 Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) wards of the capital city still remain virtually inactive.

Following the imposition of emergency many ward commissioners, allegedly involved in various crimes, went into hiding. Many others were arrested by the joint forces.

Although a number of the ward commissioners have returned from their 'self imposed hideouts', several others are still keeping a low profile and avoiding public appearances.

The commissioners' absence in the administration has virtually frozen the local government activities in their designated wards, depriving thousands of residents from collecting valuable legal documents including the likes of marriage or citizenship certificates despite inevitable emergencies.

Iftekhar Ahmed, a service provider from Mirpur (DCC ward no. 9) is suffering from a heart disease and is in desperate need of passports as he is planning to go abroad for treatments. However, Monowar Hossain Dipjol, the local ward commissioner being unavailable in the office, Ahmed can't get his documents and photographs approved, let alone obtaining his citizenship certificate.

"I desperately need the passports issued immediately, but the officials from the (commis-

sioner's) office keep telling me to come back later as the commissioner is not there," said a frustrated Ahmed.

"Now I reckon that I will have to find the local female commissioner to get the papers issued," he added.

Efforts to contact Monowar Hossain Dipjol, commissioner for DCC ward no.9 through both land phone or cell phone turned out to be futile as nobody

could not give any satisfactory answers about his current whereabouts.

When contacted the family of Selim Ullah, DCC commissioner for the ward no.42, they told the correspondent that he is not at home and could not give any satisfactory answer on when he would be back.

Itekhar Islam, secretary for the designated ward said that he receives roughly around 40 to 50

the different developments works in the ward and the general people would suffer," said Basid.

"Why they (other commissioners) have gone into hiding is a question best be answered by them," was the answer from Basid when asked about the reason that made majority of the commissioners disappear.

According to DCC sources, the ward commissioners' responsibilities are similar to those of UP chairmen. "They are supposed to look after the development works within their vicinities and approve various legal documents such as citizenship, marriage, character along with residential certificates," said Majibur Rahman, secretary of DCC.

"The commissioners are also responsible for overseeing the operations of specific government owned establishments such as community centres and playgrounds that fall under the ward vicinity," he added.

The female commissioners, although have similar authorities to those of the male commissioners and can operate the various local government activities, female commissioners alleged that their influences are pretty much limited in the papers.

"It is somewhat annoying to have identical authorities with the male commissioners, especially when we have virtually no authorities at the same time," said Nasima Mannan, female commissioner for the reserved

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answered the calls.

Asked, his personal assistant told the correspondent Dipjol was last seen in his office earlier during the first quarter of January and he does not know when the commissioner would be back. "He is not in the office and I have no idea when he would be back," he said.

Ahsan Ullah Hasan, commissioner of DCC ward no.6 could not be found in his office on June 21 on 11:00 am. His family members told the correspondent that he is not home and

people who come for citizenship certificates for various reasons including school admissions, marriages, driving licenses and job opportunities everyday.

"I have not seen the commissioner since January 11 and a huge amount of work has been piled up since then," said Islam.

Munshi Bajul Basid, commissioner of the DCC ward no.7 claimed that he is regularly operating his office. "I am available in my ward and operate my office everyday as absence of the commissioner would hamper



The office of Paltan area's Ward commissioner is open. A rare site when ward commissioners are hard to reach following the declaration of state of emergency.

seat no.11.

"There is only one female commissioner for 3 DCC wards and with most of the male commissioners absent from their offices the female commissioners have been

getting more visitors and applicants for different certificates," she added.

Asked why DCC authorities have not taken any measures to better the overall situation to ease public sufferings, DCC

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka pointed out to the options available to the ward residents.

"The duties of the ward commissioners absent from the administration is usually designated to the commissioner of the

adjacent ward," said the Mayor. "In cases of emergencies, the residents can seek help of the local female commissioner who is responsible for the combined operations of 3 adjacent DCC wards," he added.



STAR PHOTO

**Following a story published in Star City on May 28, 2007, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) finally took initiatives to repair the shabby underpass in the Sonargaon intersection of the city. Workers were seen repairing the broken stairways by filling in the cracks with marble slabs while sweepers were cleaning the scattered debris littering around the whole place. The authorities have also installed new tube lights to improve lighting facilities in the underpass. However, the overhead sewerage pipes are yet to be repaired while the graffiti that stretches across the wall needs to be removed.**

## Organised gangs control begging

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exhibiting with the object of exciting any deformity or disease or any offensive sore or wound" is a punishable offence. The offender may be fined a maximum penalty of Tk 5000 for the first offence.

Thousands of other professional beggars crowd bus terminals, railway stations, market fronts, residential and commercial areas. According to commuters there are many beggars at busy intersections, who look perfectly healthy.

Most of the city's traffic signals are also crowded by vendors selling items varying from fresh fruits, flowers to towels, maps, popcorns and pirated copies of bestsellers. Flow of traffic is often disrupted due to the presence of such a big working crowd shuttling between vehicles on major thoroughfares.

According to several sources, at least three Dhaka based organised gangs control the traffic-signal-begging business. Generally each beggar is forced to hand over more than half of his day's earning to one of the gang members. A day's earning could range from Tk 150 to Tk 500, according to

beggars. In turn the beggar is given accommodation, food and transportation.

The stories of most of these physically challenged beggars start from the rural Bangladesh, where poverty, social prejudice and lack of rehabilitation facilities virtually outcast a person having physical disability.

Exploiting the situation the gangs controlling begging in big cities pounce on the victims. At times the poor parents of such victims are promised a regular monetary allocation if they hand over their physically disadvantaged ward. The gangs take control of the person's food, shelter and transport in Dhaka and post the victims at different intersections.

"I am glad my food and shelter are guaranteed by my boss, he also gives me new clothes during eid," said Physically challenged Morium Begum from Sirajganj begging at Farmgate intersection. Morium lost her legs to polio when she was a child.

The police on the other hand are unable to control begging at traffic signals. Police officials said it has always been a mouse and cat game with the beggars.

"When we try to catch them and send them to vagrant centre, we are told not to make the vagrant centre overcrowded, they are here at least making a living out of something while the society has rejected them," said a police sergeant at the Farmgate intersection.

## Rajuk starts

**FROM PAGE 21**  
"It is an open secret that these papers are issued without any inspection or question asked by any authority. But for the sake of an approved plan we have to buy them," said the developer requesting anonymity.

A seemingly reformed Rajuk officials now believe that it is high time for the authority to verify the authenticity of the high-rise buildings in the city.

"Although most of the damage is already done, we have decided to study the overall situation of the number of high-rise buildings in the city. This would also allow us to find the irregularities in the system, subsequently allowing us to strengthen the constitution of Rajuk," said an authorised officer of Rajuk requesting anonymity.

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