

Upazila parishads

FROM PAGE 1
upazila parishads, have also been controlling many local development activities engaging their party people to ensure their stronghold in the areas.

"Upazila executive officers and MPs are controlling everything including administrative and development work. Even the government carries out all its correspondence with the upazila executive officers. We have nothing to do at the moment," Bishwanath Sarker Bitu, chairman of Badarganj Upazila of Rangpur told The Daily Star recently.

Under such circumstances, over 1,400 elected chairmen and vice-chairmen of 481 upazila parishads across the country have not received any remuneration since their elections on January 22 this year, as the government has yet to fix the amount. They are not even getting any fund for running their offices.

The government also has yet to frame the rules of business for upazila parishads, triggering frustration among the elected representatives of newly revived upazila level local government system, which had been dissolved in 1991 to satisfy the erstwhile MPs and bureaucrats.

The national committee to monitor the functions of the upazila parishads also has not held any meeting yet, since its formation four months ago.

Almost all upazila parishads have yet to form a set of departmental standing committees to carry out their tasks properly as well, because of a lack of guidelines. Many of the parishads do not even meet regularly, said a number of upazila chairmen.

Those frustrated chairmen also said they just go to their offices, spend some time there, and then leave due to not having anything specific to do. They do not even get any administrative file to deal with, they added.

"We have four things --- copies of the gazette of our elections and oath, a space for the office and a circular of May. We got nothing to make the upazila parishad effective for public welfare," Harun Ur Rashid, chairman of Dumki upazila parishad of Pataukhali, told The Daily Star.

Harun, also the convener of Bangladesh Upazila Parishad Association, said the situation is quite humiliating for the elected upazila parishad chairmen and vice-chairmen.

"We can't let the situation continue for an indefinite period. We are consulting to launch an agitation for an effective upazila parishad system, in light of the constitution and law," he said. The agitation might be launched soon after the Eid-ul-Fitr, he added.

According to the constitu-

tion, the upazila parishads are authorised to oversee local administrations and the work of public officers, maintenance of public order, and preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

In its election manifesto, ruling AL also promised to bring massive changes to the country's system of governance, giving emphasis on the local government system. Union parishads, upazila parishads, and zila parishads would be strengthened by decentralising the power, it asserted.

"Local governments of districts and upazilas will be made self-reliant and autonomous, and they will play pivotal roles in local development," says AL's election manifesto that contributed hugely to its landslide victory in the December 29, 2008 parliamentary election.

But the present scenario is totally opposite, since the upazila parishads are not yet self-reliant as they are not being allowed to function without consulting respective MPs.

The central government also did not amply clear its position on the local government institutions, although it already empowered the law-makers to meddle in the functions of the upazila parishads, by making them advisers to the parishads.

The local government and rural development (LGRD) ministry in May this year issued a set of guidelines for upazila parishads, without defining the jurisdiction of elected parishad representatives in relation to approval, implementation, and monitoring of rural infrastructure maintenance projects. It also said the guideline will remain effective until the Upazila Parishad Rules of Business 2009 is framed.

Following submissions of a large number of applications to the Cabinet Division for amending the Upazila Parishad Act, the LGRD ministry also planned to amend it, to change the official status of upazila executive officers to chief executive officers of upazila parishads, from their current status of secretaries to the parishads, said ministry officials.

Upazila executive officers, also known as upazila nirbahi officers, had sent the applications as they 'do not like to work as secretaries under elected upazila parishad chairmen', the ministry officials added.

King of Pop

FROM PAGE 1
on a warm summer evening to celebrate the singer's life. Jackson's children -- Prince Michael 12, Paris, 11, and seven-year-old Prince Michael II, otherwise known as "Blanket" -- placed a crown on their father's flower-laden coffin before the service got underway.

Unpredictable to the last, Jackson was late to his own funeral, his ornate casket set down before mourners more than 90 minutes after the service had been scheduled to start Thursday evening. Jackson's brothers -- all dressed identically in black suits and red ties while each wearing a solitary white glove in tribute to the pop icon -- served as pallbearers as the coffin was removed from the hearse.

His children reportedly left notes in their father's coffin reading "Daddy we love you, we miss you."

Mourners made spontaneous tributes to Jackson in a service held beyond the prying eyes of hundreds of media personnel gathered outside the Forest Lawn Memorial Park, home to a who's who of late Hollywood legends.

Soul legend Gladys Knight sang the gospel hymn "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," while lyricist Clifton Davis belted out his "Never Can Say Goodbye," which became a hit song for the Jacksons.

Following the ceremony, Jackson's brothers carried the casket into Forest Lawn's imposing Great Mausoleum, followed by guests.

"Michael Jackson reached his final resting place tonight at 9:43 pm (0443 GMT) in The Great Mausoleum at Glendale Forest Lawn Memorial Park," a statement from the Jackson family read after the service.

"The Jackson Family wishes to once again thank all of Michael's fans around the world for their generous outpouring of support during this terribly difficult time."

Earlier, a convoy headed by six Rolls Royce luxury limousines transported the family to the cemetery.

Other guests included close Jackson friends Taylor, actor Macaulay Culkin, comic Chris Tucker and outspoken right activist Reverend Al Sharpton, who posted on micro-blogging site Twitter during the service.

"What MJ went through was so unfair yet he succeeded," Sharpton said. "In the end, he was the biggest artist ever. He faced the headwinds but he made it."

But there was no sign of soul diva Diana Ross, who was named as a back-up guardian to Jackson's children in the singer's will.

Invites issued to guests urged mourners to celebrate Jackson's life.

"We loved him, we laughed with him, we sang with him. We danced with him. But on this day, we celebrate him," the invite read.

The mausoleum housing Jackson is also home to Hollywood icons Clark Gable, Jean Harlow and Carole Lombard.

Stars buried elsewhere at Forest Lawn include Humphrey Bogart, James Stewart, Spencer Tracy and Walt Disney.

Thursday's service contrasted with the lavish public memorial held at the Los Angeles Staples Center in July, which was attended by 20,000 fans and beamed live around the world to an estimated billion-strong audience.

Police had cordoned off the neighbourhood surrounding the cemetery after earlier urging fans to stay away from the event. Helicopters, sniffer dogs and plain-clothes officers patrolled the 300-acre (120-hectare) cemetery, on the lookout for any fans trying to gatecrash the service.

But die-hard devotees were undeterred and waited outside the perimeter. One group held up a banner reading: "King of Pop Michael Jackson Gone Too Soon."

Jackson's delayed funeral followed months of speculation about the exact cause of his death and reported divisions within the singer's family about where he should be buried.

Elder brother Jermaine had said he wanted the star to be interred at his Neverland Ranch estate north of Los Angeles. Jackson fled the property in 2005 after being acquitted on child molestation charges.

Los Angeles coroners said last week that Jackson's death was being treated as a homicide and revealed that he had six drugs in his body when he died, including the powerful anaesthetic propofol.

The coroner's announcement fuelled speculation that authorities may charge Jackson's personal physician, Conrad Murray, in connection with the death.

Jackson, one of the most influential figures in pop music history whose four-decade career included the highest-selling album of all time -- "Thriller" -- had been preparing for a July concert comeback at the time of his death.

PDB under pressure

FROM PAGE 1
capacity by late 2010. The tender process for these projects will be floated on September 10.

These are a 100MW diesel-fired plant in Bheramara and three 50MW diesel plants in Rajshahi, Thakurgaon and Syedpur. At the same time, there will be two 100MW heavy fuel oil-based (HFO) plants in Madanganj, Jessore, a 50MW HFO plant in Barisal and a 30MW HFO plant in Jamalpur.

Earlier, two governments awarded inexperienced local companies four rental power contracts between September 2006 and April 2008, totalling 167MW capacity for a 15-year term. Of them, one could not launch its 51MW plant.

Last year the caretaker government awarded eight more three-year rental power contracts--seven of them to local inexperienced companies. Only four of these companies came into operation while four others totalling 180MW capacity have failed to launch their projects as per schedule.

Of these four, two contracts belong to Energy Prima of Hosaf Group that bagged four deals, one contract belongs to Venture Energy and the other to Energies Power Corporation. Both Energy Prima and Venture Energy projects are running more than a year behind schedule and they are not even paying the penalty properly for their failure. These plants are all natural gas based.

The Energies Power venture is running three months behind schedule and the company now expects to launch its HFO plant in December. HFO produces power for cheaper price tag but it has a lot of environmental issues.

The cumulative result of these failures is contributing to the overall power crisis scenario. In addition, these plants, especially the gas-based rental projects, keep occupying PDB's land and even harassing the PDB legally. Due to pressure from lobbies, the PDB could not even cancel their contracts after serving notice.

Now the lobby behind these defaulter ventures is going strong. Sources said they have already "convinced" the power ministry that the tender terms should be relaxed. "Arguments--like foreign power investors are robbing the country, so local investors should be given chance--are being considered. But nobody is asking questions whether local investors are actually trying to rob in the name of relaxed contracts," said an official.

The PDB is holding meetings over finalising the terms and conditions of the request for proposal (RFP). Some of these meetings have been attended by Hosaf chief Moazzem Hossain and President of Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Anisul Haq, who has a stake in a failed rental

power project. Influential businessman Salman F Rahman has also attended a meeting.

A meeting on Sunday to be headed by Energy Adviser Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury is expected to finalise the RFP.

In formulating the RFP, the PDB has proposed that the rental companies must have experience in installing and generating 20MW or higher for a 50MW plant and 50MW or higher for a 10MW plant. But the business lobby wants these provisions to go and it wants the PDB to allow anyone who can provide certificates from any external engineering, procurement and construction contractor and operation and maintenance company. "This means you can manufacture a couple of letters and qualify for PDB's tender," notes a source.

During the caretaker government's rule, Energy Prima used such documents to qualify and win four rental contracts.

The PDB initially suggested commercial operation date (COD) for HFO-based power plant at 180 days. But under pressure from the business lobby, this period has been extended to 270 days, which is against the spirit of rental power. Now the business lobby wants to extend it to 365 days.

The COD for diesel-based plant was initially set at 90 days. Under pressure from the lobbies who wanted 180 days for this job, the PDB extended it to 120 days.

Performance guarantee has been reduced from 10 percent to 5 percent just to accommodate the request of the lobby.

The liquefied damage for defaulter contractor was previously \$500 per megawatt of electricity a day. Under pressure from the lobbies, it has been lowered to merely Tk 5,000 per megawatt. "This clearly shows that the attitude of the lobby is that they are not bothered by any deadline," quips the source.

Again, the damage payment will be deducted from the defaulter rental power company's sale of power to the PDB, which means the defaulter will not pay anything during its failure period. Moreover, it shows that there is no provision to cancel a contract. Although the term for this contract is supposed to be just three years, a failing company can just occupy PDB's space for three years without producing anything.

The new RFP puts the responsibility on the contractor for arranging fuel procurement, transportation and storage facility, a job previously carried out by the PDB. Again, the contractor will pay Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation the fuel cost, which will later be reimbursed by the PDB to the contractor. Both these issues would discourage actual rental power companies and act as an excuse for novice companies for the delay of their power projects.

Elderly woman

FROM PAGE 1
for the domestic help, Enamul, 23. He has been missing with 20 tolas of gold ornaments, Tk 40,000 and a cellphone set, police said quoting her relatives. Enamul, hailing from Panchbibi in Joypurhat, was appointed as domestic help just a week ago.

Police recovered Sajeda's body around 3:00pm with marks of wound in the back of her head and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Victim's sister Sharifa Mostaq said her sister lived in the house alone and she used to enquire about her.

Sharifa said she phoned her sister during Sehri time (early hours) yesterday and promised her to make a call again in the morning.

"I made her phone calls repeatedly from morning to noon and did not get any response. Finally, I sent a relative to her house. The relative found the door locked from inside and no one was responding," she said.

After getting such information, Sharifa rushed to her sister's house soon after noon and broke open the door with the help of her driver.

"Entering the residence, I found blood oozing out from the back side of her head and her two hands and legs were tied with cloth. Her mouth was also tied with cloth so that she would not be able to shout," Sharifa broke into tears.

Officer-in-Charge of Dhanmondi Police Station Shah Alam said they suspect the domestic help tied her hands and legs first and then struck her on the head leaving her dead some time between Sehri and morning.

He said gold ornaments and money were taken after opening the almirah with a key.

The OC said they are investigating whether Enamul alone committed the murder or he did it with the help of others.

He said Sajeda's relatives brought Enamul and appointed him as domestic help, but they did not give detailed information about Enamul.

Declare

FROM PAGE 16
The provision of preventive detention," Prof Kabir Chowdhury, president of the committee's advisory body, said at the conference.

He feared that these people might pose a threat to the country's peace and stability.

Kabir Chowdhury urged the government not to allow any 1971 war crimes suspect to leave the country.

He also demanded reinstatement of the 1972 constitution for establishing a secular, democratic and non-communal Bangladesh.

"We want the trial to begin at the High Court building," he added.

Expressing dissatisfaction over "the government's delay" in starting the trial, Mohammad Golam Rabbani, member of the committee's advisory body, said, "It's not only our duty to try war criminals, rather we owe it to the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives."

Eminent historian Prof Muntasir Mamun said, "I think the entire nation is prepared for the trial of war criminals but the ruling Awami League is not ready for it. It seems that the government has no plan to try them."

Prof Mamun alleged that some leaders of ruling AL and main opposition BNP have been maintaining links with war criminals to serve their interests.

Committee's acting President Shahria Kabir said, "The government is now under pressure from both inside and outside the ruling party for not trying the war criminals."

He claimed that Pakistan has already started lobbying to protect those who supported it during Bangladesh's liberation war and urged the government to take diplomatic measures to deal with the external pressure for not trying the war criminals.

Prof Ajoy Roy, another member of committee's advisory body, demanded that the government announce the names of the probe committee and the head of the prosecution for trying war criminals.

He also urged the committee leaders to arrange a conference of eminent personalities at the Central Shaheed Minar and formation of a human chain in front of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban to press home their demands.

Committee General Secretary Kazi Mukul, and its vice presidents Ferdousi Priyobhashini and Salma Haque, among others, spoke.

Climate change

FROM PAGE 1
attend a special UN conference of heads of government and state of 25 countries to be held on September 22 in New York ahead of the UN General Assembly session.

He highly appreciated the Bangladesh premier for her hectic efforts to improve the living standards of her country's people and restoring democracy there.

The UN chief said Hasina with her relentless struggle for democracy and people's economic emancipation has gradually become a world leader from a national leader.

He recalled that he had an opportunity to meet Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1972.

He termed Bangabandhu a towering personality and praised his farsighted leadership.

Hasina thanked the UN secretary general for his commendable role in the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh.

She specially mentioned the UN support for holding a free, fair and credible election in Bangladesh on December 29 last year.

Ban Ki-moon also appreciated different development programmes being chalked out and implemented in Bangladesh for human resource development and women empowerment, and in health and infrastructure development sectors under the able leadership of the PM.

He also lauded the premier's role in climate change issue to ensure a safe world for the next generation.

In this context, Hasina informed the UN chief that her government would do everything possible to protect its people from the disastrous impacts of the

global climate change.

The present government has planned to launch capital and maintenance dredging in the country's major rivers, creating green belt across the coastal areas and setting up embankments, she said.

In reply, Ban Ki-moon said his office would extend necessary cooperation to Bangladesh in implementing its development programmes.

Later, Helen Clark, administrator of the United Nations Development Programmes, called on the PM at her hotel suite.

During the meeting, Clark congratulated Hasina for her assumption of the office of Prime Minister through a free, fair and credible election.

Hasina, in reply, also thanked the UNDP for its support for the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh through holding peaceful and credible polls.

In this regard, the premier said that desired development has not taken place in Bangladesh as the military rulers ruled the country for a long time.

Referring to the climate change issue, the UNDP administrator assured her for its additional support for adaptation and mitigation programmes of the government in facing the challenges of climate change.

WHO offers

FROM PAGE 1
had taken a project of establishing 18,000 community health clinics across the country for welfare of the rural mothers and children, but the subsequent BNP-Jamaat government stopped the project only from political considerations.

Of the community clinics, 11,000 buildings were set up and 4,000 started functioning, she said.

However, the present government has decided to re-establish the community health clinics, as it believes that without a healthy population, a nation cannot prosper.

As the successes of Dhaka-based ICDDR,B in providing quality health services came up for discussion, the PM emphasised setting up several branches of ICDDR,B in the country's northern and southern parts to make its role more effective in Bangladesh.

The WHO executive director invited the PM to attend the next World Health Assembly, to be held in Geneva next year, as special guest. The premier accepted the invitation.

Margaret appreciated "visionary" leadership of Hasina, saying that Bangladesh can be considered an ideal example of quality health services for grassroots people.

She also highly appreciated the PM and her government for outstandingly promoting women empowerment in Bangladesh.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and ambassador M Ziauddin were present at the meeting.

WTO negotiations

FROM PAGE 16
The chief negotiators and senior officials will meet on September 14 in Geneva to restart the entire process," he said, adding that there was "a unanimous affirmation" of the need to clinch a deal after years of delay.

But the US trade chief backed away from the deadline for a pact of 2010 set in July by a meeting of top industrial and emerging nations, including India and China, for the repeatedly stalled Doha Round to conclude.

"We have missed so many deadlines," US Trade Representative Ron Kirk told a separate news conference, at which he reaffirmed Washington's commitment to the Doha Round.

"Substance will drive this process, not setting deadlines and timelines," he said.

Since an aborted attempt to organise a small ministerial meeting in December last year, the Doha Round of negotiations that began in 2001 has been restricted to low-level contacts in Geneva.

Elections in the key countries of the United States, India and most recently Japan made negotiations difficult to resume earlier, WTO observers say.

Earlier Sharma stressed "that it was too early to talk about an 'end-game' for a pact, given differences on the key issues of farm subsidies in rich countries and industrial product tariffs in developing nations."

"We have a long way to travel before we can safely say we are in the end-game," he said.

The Doha round of WTO negotiations began in 2001 with the aim of creating a new free-trade pact that would boost global commerce to help developing countries.

Deadlock between the major trading blocs has dashed repeated attempts to forge a new pact.

The last push in July last year in Geneva, ended in failure but with new governments installed in Washington and India there was renewed hope for another drive for success sometime next year.

India's disagreement with the United States over subsidy protection for poor farmers

was widely blamed for the collapse of talks in Geneva.

But the world economic slump has given new impetus to reach a deal that would fuel commerce and could bolster global gross domestic product by up to 700 billion dollars a year, according to new think-tank report.

"This crisis actually gives all members a stronger sense of urgency to conclude the Doha Round negotiations," China's Commerce Minister Chen Deming said Thursday, calling a trade deal the best bulwark against protectionism.

The two days of informal talks were seen as preparation for further progress at a meeting of leaders of the Group of 20 wealthy and emerging nations in Pittsburgh later this month.

India took the initiative in setting up the meeting, seeking to inject momentum into the negotiations by getting ministers to gather in New Delhi to set a roadmap for meeting the deadline.

Huge crowd

FROM PAGE 16
Districts from September 7 and continue till September 20.

Bangladesh Railway authorities have also decided to operate four additional trains on Dhaka-Rajshahi, Dhaka-Mymensingh, Jaidevpur-Shantahar and Dhaka-Dewanganj routes for three days on the occasion.

Extra four or five compartments will also be added to each train, said an official of Kamalapur railway station.

"The advance tickets for September 14 would be sold on September 7 while September 15 tickets on September 8, September 16 tickets on September 9, September 17 tickets on September 10, September 18 tickets on September 11, September 19 tickets on September 12 and September 20 tickets on September 13," he said.

He added, one person will not get more than four tickets at a time and each passenger will have to fill out a form.

The authorities would operate all the intercity trains even on weekends, seven days before and after the Eid-ul-Fitr, said another Railway official.

Boon for Rajuk

FROM PAGE 1
his office told The Daily Star that they would complete the scrutiny of the applications by two months to make sure the allotments are made by June.

But on August 25 the state minister said they were trying their best to distribute the plots as early as possible but could not do it yet as Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) delayed in preparing the database.

"We are hoping to announce the name of the plot winners by August," said Abdul Mannan.

Rajuk sources said applicants would have to wait at least two months to get back their deposited money if they fail to win the plots.

Rajuk chairman, however, said they would start returning deposited money to the applicants from immediately after the day of announcement.

Lottery will also be arranged, except for some categories, to maintain transparency in allotting plots, he said.

Rajuk sources said all the lawmakers, ministers, state ministers and judges who submitted applications will get the plots.

Frustration is high among those who deposited the money by taking loans. Now they cannot withdraw their money, applicants said.

"Every month I have to pay Tk 3000 as interest on one lakh taka I took as loan," said Shajahan, a resident of

Mohammadpur area.

Omar Faruk, a resident of Mir Hajirbagh, who applied for a 3-katha plot under the Purbachal project, also pays Tk 2,500 each month as interest.

Rajuk took a deposit of Tk 75,000 for a 3-katha plot, Tk 1 lakh for a 5-katha plot, Tk 1.5 lakh for a 7.5-katha plot and Tk 2 lakh for a 10-katha plot under the two projects.

They took \$ 1500 for a 3-katha plot, \$ 2000 for a 5-katha plot, \$ 2500 for a 7.5-katha plot and \$ 3500 for a 10-katha plot from expatriate plotseekers.

Rajuk will distribute 6383 plots under Purbachal New Town Project and around 800 plots under Uttara third phase.

It will also distribute 2177 plots to affected people under Purbachal project, said an official of Rajuk.

Under the Purbachal project, Rajuk will distribute 3883 3-katha plots, 3545 5-katha plots, 710 plots of 7.5-katha and 422 10-katha plots while the Uttara project will give allotments of 405 3-katha plots and 395 plots of 5-katha.

JMB man

FROM PAGE 16
Hours and handed him over to Kurigram thana police. He was sent to jail hajat when police produced him before the court.

He was an associate of Matin Mehedi, second-in-command of executed JMB chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman.

fare of civilians first in the planning and implementation of operations against Taliban militants.

Kunduz province had been relatively peaceful until violence began rising earlier this year. German forces who are based there come under almost daily attack, including rockets and mortars at their bases and small arms fire against patrols.

Violence has soared across much of the country since President Barack Obama ordered 21,000 US troops to Afghanistan, shifting the focus of the US-led war on Islamic extremism from Iraq.

Fifty-one US troops died in Afghanistan in August, making it the bloodiest month for American forces there since the US-led invasion in late 2001.

Rising casualties