

Local govt bodies

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Similar councils had been planned for thana level. But before they could be formed, Bangabandhu was assassinated on August 15, 1975, and a military rule ensued.

Till 1990, the military strongmen ran the country either directly or indirectly. They used the local government system to gain political base at the grassroots level.

After restoration of democracy in 1991, the twelfth amendment revived the provisions on local government that had been deleted in 1975.

It also brought back articles 59 and 60. Article 59 says, "Local government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law."

Besides, it adds, parliament shall prescribe the functions of the local government bodies.

Those functions may cover administration and work of public offices, maintenance of public order and preparation and implementation of development plans.

The provisions on local government mark out Bangladesh's constitution from those in other countries. No constitution contains such definitive provisions on local government, Justice Mustafa Kamal observed in Kudrat-e-Elahi and others vs Bangladesh case in 1992.

Justice Kamal, who later became chief justice, also said local government is part of the constitutional system; it is not mere adornment. So, articles 59 and 60 cannot be left to lie dead.

In a landmark verdict on the case of Kudrat-e-Elahi and others vs Bangladesh, the then chief justice Shahabuddin Ahmed said local government is an integral part of the democratic polity.

"The system of local government institutions may be altered, re-organised or re-structured, and their powers and functions may be enlarged or curtailed by act of parliament, but the system as a whole cannot be abolished," he asserted.

About the significance of the local government provisions, former attorney general Mahmudul Islam in his book "Constitutional Law of Bangladesh" said the idea is that the central government should deal with matters concerning the nation as a whole. Administration at district and lower levels should mostly be left to the local government bodies.

The reality, however, is quite the opposite. The government has all local administrative tasks done by bureaucrats and in some cases lawmakers.

Successive governments since independence had moved to reform the local government system. But as most of those reforms were politically motivated, they failed to strengthen the local government bodies.

"So, despite a long historical existence, local government institutions in Bangladesh could not really take root," observed a study by Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, an autonomous institution for training, research and experiment on rural development.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: PAST AND PRESENT

After revisions of its structure by different governments, the local government system now has three tiers—union parishad, upazila parishad and zila parishad.

Besides, there are municipalities and city corporations for urban areas. All are considered administrative units in line with the constitutional provisions.

In 1976, General Ziaur Rahman promulgated a local government ordinance providing for zila parishad in each district.

Though the ordinance said the parishads shall be composed of elected representatives for a five-year term, no elections have yet been held.

Instead, deputy commissioners were appointed ex-officio chairmen of the parishads.

Two years after promulgation of the ordinance, the country's first military ruler amended the constitution through a martial law proclamation to bring back the provision requiring the government to promote local government institutions.

Grabbing state power in 1982, General HM Ershad introduced upazila parishads.

During his rule, he promulgated an ordinance and five acts including the zila

parishad act of 1988. Each thana was upgraded to upazila and designated as focal point of administration with responsibility for all local development activities.

The central government retained the authority to oversee regulatory functions and major development activities of national and regional importance.

Ershad regime held two upazila elections—one in 1985 and the other in 1990.

Zila parishads constituted under the act of 1988 worked up to 1990.

With the downfall of Ershad, the zila parishad chairmen, most of whom were MPs from Ershad's Jatiya Party, were removed and DCs returned as ex-officio chairmen.

The BNP-led government also abolished the upazila system shortly after coming to power in 1991.

Things did not improve even after reintroduction of the constitutional provisions on local government in 1991.

The zila parishads continued functioning under the act of 1988 during the BNP rule between 1991 and 1996.

In 2000, the AL-led government repealed the zila parishad act of 1988 and framed a new law providing for direct election to the parishads. But up till now, no election has been held, allowing the bureaucrats to run the parishads.

In 1998, the AL-led government reinstated the upazila system. But over 12 more years were needed to hold elections. Upazila polls were finally held in January last year, but the elected representatives have not yet been able to do much due to opposition from local administration and interference from the lawmakers who are advisers to the parishads.

"We are kind of left to rot. We have little to do since UNOs are doing most of the work with the help of the MPs," Ataur Rahman Ata, chairman of Manikganj sadar upazila, told The Daily Star recently.

Though elections to union parishads, the lowest tier of local government, were held almost regularly since independence, no major reforms have been made to strengthen them.

Union parishad elections were held in 1973, 1977, 1983, 1988, 1992, 1997 and 2003.

The present union parishads are facing a legitimacy crisis, as two years have passed since expiry of their tenure.

The last union parishad elections were held between January 25 and March 16 in 2003. The next elections were supposed to be held in early 2008, but that could not happen as the country was under a state of emergency and there was no union parishad act.

Taskforce

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any attempt to move the chemicals from shops and depots.

Traders kept shops shut like other holidays and they will resume business for first-half of the day today.

Against the backdrop of a devastating fire at Nimtoli on June 3, the government banned storage of combustible chemicals in Old Dhaka and directed the traders to move their stocks to a safer location by August 17.

Following requests from the traders the government later extended the deadline to September 30.

However, a good number of traders continue to store and sell combustible chemicals defying government order putting lives of thousands of residents under constant threat.

Mohammad Tofazal Hossain, office secretary of Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants' Association said they do not know whether any trader has shifted the stocks from the depot after the deadline.

Environmental activists from a citizens' rally at Nimtoli yesterday demanded relocation of factories and depots, using and storing flammable chemicals, from Old Dhaka immediately.

They also asked for stern action against the businessmen for failing to comply with the deadline.

Speaking at the programme organised by the Paribesh Sammita Basjoggya Dhaka Bastabayan Parishad (Council to Establish an Environment-friendly and Livable Dhaka), they urged the government to implement the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) to make the capital a livable city.

Mud-house collapse kills 2 in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two persons were killed when a mud-house collapsed in Kanaighat upazila of the district yesterday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Mani Das, 30, son of Gopal Das, and Apu Ranjan Chowdhury, 6, son of Ranjan Mohan Chowdhury, of village Baroband about 20 kilometres from the upazila headquarters.

Mani Das was the house servant of Apu's father Ranjan. Mani was building a mud-house and yesterday at about 4:00pm a wall of the under-construction house collapsed on Apu and Mani, said locals and Kanaighat police.

The boy was taken to Kanaighat Upazila Health Complex where he died and Mani died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Mizanur's

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department of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) collected the blood samples and his [Sumon's] fingerprints for verification," Mazharul Islam, operation officer of Jatrabari Police Station, said.

"We've yet to know for sure the motive behind the killings, but we suspect family dispute over properties might be a reason," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Police on Thursday afternoon detained Mizanur's two brothers Zahidur Rahman Lipton and Touhidur Rahman Linkon, Linkon's son Sumon and security guard Akbar Ali.

Lipton and Linkon were freed at night, but Sumon and Akbar were shown arrested in a case filed by Mizanur's son Ashkur Rahman, said Gias Uddin, sub-inspector of Jatrabari Police Station.

Meanwhile, family members of Bithi alleged both Lipton and Linkon were involved in the killings but their influence is hampering the investigation.

On the day of the incident, Ali told reporters that Bithi asked him to fetch some milk and medicine from nearby shops in the morning.

On his return, when nobody responded to his shouting, he entered the room and found Mizanur groaning, while the bodies of the two ladies lay motionless on the floor.

Zafar Sadek, one of Bithi's cousins, said some unidentified criminals forcefully brought Sufia from the third floor, where she used to live, to the second floor to enter the flat of the Mizanur couple and killed them.

BNP softens

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local leaders so that all can get prepared for a movement against this government's wrongdoings," he added.

Some leaders claimed they have not retreated from the planned tough movement; rather the chairperson will address rallies outside the capital as part of the movement. The rallies will unite the people against this government.

Rafiqul Islam Mia, another standing committee member, said public opinion has to be mobilised first for the success of any movement.

"We are worried about the existing situation in the country. Our leaders will go for field level visits and our chairperson will address many meetings," He hoped that people will get united for an effective movement under the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

Organising Secretary of BNP Mohammad Shahjahan said the party is already in a movement against autocratic and anti-democratic practices of the Awami League government. Their countrywide campaign will intensify this movement, he added.

Among other issues, BNP has been speaking against the deals signed between Bangladesh and India during the prime minister's visit to New Delhi, and Indian plan to build a dam at Tipaimukh. It has also been demanding withdrawal of cases against Khaleda and her two sons.

MONTH-LONG CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED
BNP yesterday launched the month-long campaign to hold rallies at all upazilas across the country.

Party's Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday at a press briefing said the programme aims to inform the grassroots level activists about the government's undemocratic activities.

The National Standing Committee of BNP recently decided to send its central leaders to all districts and upazilas to boost organisational activities.

A total of 75 organizational district committees will coordinate the programmes in their respective upazilas. The district committees have already been given instructions about the programmes, Rizvi added.

He urged the government not to create any obstacles to BNP's month long programmes.

Recruitment test

FROM PAGE 16
Golam Faruk Prince.

The test was held at six centres in two shifts -- one from 10:00am to 11:00am and the other from 4:00pm to 5:00pm.

The turnout, however, was a little more than half of the total candidates, official sources said.

"Some three thousand examinees took the test. But we're happy to complete the examination peacefully amid tight security," said Md Jafar Ullah, additional district magistrate.

Officials at the district's statistics department said 5,615 applicants applied for 456 posts of class-III employees.

"It's an old circular. Some applicants might get other jobs by this time," a district administration official in return for anonymity said, adding, the recent untoward incident might also have some impact.

Yesterday's, however, was not the one foiled in the September 17 attack.

The test was held at Pabna Govt Women College, Pabna Govt Girls' High School, Pabna Zila School, M Mansur Ali Degree College, Pabna Islamiya College and Pabna Technical School and College.

Earlier on Thursday morning, local administration imposed section 144 within 200 yards of the six examination centres but later withdrew it around 10:30pm.

Additional District Magistrate Md Jafar Ullah, who enforced section 144 in the morning, told The Daily Star Thursday night that law and order in the district was normal, and the test could be conducted without imposing

AL, BNP

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the spot and restored the communication.

Police said a group of BNP supporters had been occupying Sukhan Dighi (big pond) at Harati village of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila since long. The clash occurred when a group of AL men, led by Jubo League leader Toton Miah, tried to take possession of the pond at night.

The BNP supporters, led by local BNP leader Mohammad Khan, chased the invading group, which ultimately caused the casualties.

Officer-in-charge of Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station, Moynul Islam confirmed the incident adding that additional police were deployed in the area.

No case was filed in this connection, added the OC.

ADB loan

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workers, including women.

The project aims to ultimately increase income by Tk 15,400 per household (40% increase) as the income of farmers will be increased by Tk 73,000 per hectare of HVC.

According to the project estimates, poor households growing HVCs will benefit from increased labour employment of Tk 3,230 per household and Tk 12,170 from increased crop income based on an average 0.167 hectares in HVC production per household.

Poor farmers will benefit from increased incomes due to returns from crop production and increased value addition through marketing interventions. The landless poor will benefit as agricultural labourers due to the creation of additional employment opportunities in HVCs and ancillary industries.

The project will target farmers in 27 districts of southwest and north-western parts of the country, including some of the poorest, least developed and most climate-vulnerable areas.

At present, over 75 percent of the country's population is involved in agriculture with rice being the prime crop.

However, the supply of fruits and other nutritious foods is not adequate that forces the country to rely on pricey imports. Given the situation, the government has put in place an agriculture development strategy to diversify crops, ensuring national food self-sufficiency and increased incomes for farmers.

With Bangladesh highly susceptible to extreme weather events due to its low-lying position along the Bay of Bengal, the new project will help test climate-resilient varieties of crops in drought and flood-prone areas.

The new project will build on the gains of an earlier ADB-assisted Northwest Crop Diversification Project and provide farmers in the targeted districts with the latest high-value crop production techniques, including 'green' technologies for organic manure.

144.

District administration officials earlier refused to conduct the test after the attack on their colleagues.

The government on September 27 sent prime minister's Adviser HT Imam and State Minister for Home Shamsul Hoque Tuku, also a lawmaker from Pabna, to resolve the row.

Police arrested five ruling party men while 21 others on September 26 surrendered before a Pabna court -- all of them are now in jail.

Police last week pressed charges against 33 Jubo League and Chhatra League men for the attack, vandalising vehicles and burning question papers.

Following HT Imam and Tuku's visit, the government has withdrawn the deputy commissioner, two additional deputy commissioners and superintendent of police and made them officers on special duty (OSD), and transferred the upazila nirbahi officer to Monpura upazila in Bhola.

India calm

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RKS Rathore, the senior superintendent of police, told The Associated Press there were no confrontations between Hindus and Muslims in the region.

Streets had been mostly deserted as the ruling was delivered, but vehicles returned Friday, ferrying children to schools. Shops and businesses reopened in Ayodhya, Varanasi, Lucknow and other potentially explosive places with a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims.

The Allahabad High Court ruled Thursday that the 64-acre (25-hectare) site should be split, with the Muslim community getting control of one-third and two Hindu groups splitting the remainder.

Muslims revere the compound as the former site of the 16th century Babri Mosque, while Hindus say it is the birthplace of their god Rama and contend a temple to him stood on the site before the mosque.

Thursday's ruling said the Hindus could keep the area where the mosque once stood because the court determined it was the birthplace of Rama and archaeological evidence showed a temple had predated the mosque.

Over the years, the dispute triggered bloody communal violence and threatened India's foundation as a secular, multicultural democracy.

The muted reaction to the potentially explosive verdict generated hope the increasingly confident country, with its growing regional clout and skyrocketing economy, has moved beyond its divisive history.

The dispute over the religious site in the city of Ayodhya, 350 miles (550 kilometers) east of New Delhi, has been one of the country's most contentious issues.

In 1992, while the legal case lingered, tens of thousands of Hindu extremists ripped apart the mosque with spades, crowbars and their bare hands as security forces shrined to Rama now stands on the site.

The demolition sparked nationwide riots that killed 2,000 people and shook the foundations of India's claim to be a multiethnic, secular democracy.

No progress

FROM PAGE 16
Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakka, Roads and Highways Department, Dhaka City Corporation, Local Government Engineering Department and Bridge Department -- to complete the tasks at the earliest possible time.

DCC is entrusted with the construction of Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.

But when asked, DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said, "DCC is not involved in such project."

A top-ranking official of Bangladesh Railway said none of the five departments inform them anything about the progress of work.

The projects are getting delayed due to lack of coordination among different offices concerned, he added.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mohammad Shahjahan, joint director general (operations) of Bangladesh Railway, said they urge the government to immediately build these flyovers and overpasses, but the authorities concerned are not responding.

In the capital there are 30 level crossings through which trains pass 84 times a day.

Court's dignity

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Rafique-ul-Huq said the Supreme Court should have thought several times before convicting Mahmudur Rahman, acting editor of the daily Amar Desh, as there is no scope for appeal against its order.

"If Mahmudur Rahman is jailed for six months for publishing a news over the stay orders of the apex court, I should have been jailed for 25 years for what I said during the state of emergency," he added.

"If anyone speaks the truth, he lands in jail and if anyone tells lies, he is safe in this country," Rafique-ul-Huq said.

He also said if newly appointed Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque works for ensuring the rule of law, democracy and independence of judiciary according to his Thursday's speech, Bangladesh would turn into a golden Bengal.

The chair of the roundtable Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, said it is the duty of every citizen to protect the dignity of court-- the last resort for justice.

He said the judges should be, as if, in a glasshouse so that the nation knows about their activities through media.

Language Movement veteran MA Matin said the people have to strive for establishing democracy and their rights and protecting the dignity of court.

Khandker Mahub Hossain, president of Supreme Court Bar Association, said the contempt of court act should be updated to protect the image of the court of law.

Prof Mahub Ullah, columnist Mahfuz Ullah, ESB president Foyzul Hakim, journalists Zahed Chowdhury and Waliullah Noman, among others, spoke at the roundtable.

Biman's

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Hasina assured expatriate Bangladeshis in New York that Biman's flight would resume in 2011.

Officials say Biman authorities have informed the government of the risk of losses for reopening the NY flights and urged the government for support either in the form of compensation or fuel subsidy.

In line with the promise of Sheikh Hasina administration that took over in January 2009, Biman had several times set targets to resume NY flights but failed.

The Biman chairman said going through various formalities such as permission from different US offices including Federal Aviation Administration, New York Port Authority and John F Kennedy Airport lingers resumption of the flights.

"We have completed almost all formalities. Now we are waiting for the security clearance of Shahjalal International Airport from Transport Security Administration of the US," said Jamal Uddin.

Biman opened flights to New York in 1993.

Private clinic

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the woman.

Faima gave birth to a baby boy. But her condition started deteriorating and Fatema referred the mother of the newborn to Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital around 2:30am today.

Faima expired soon after she was taken to the Dinajpur hospital.

As the death news spread yesterday morning, hundreds of locals stormed the clinic and damaged its rooms and furniture.

The husband, Sadeque Ali, a resident of Basudevpur village, claimed her wife died due to negligence of the clinic staff and doctors.

He also alleged the clinic authorities referred her wife to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital in the wee hours but they declined to provide oxygen support to her.

Fatema Ahmed told local reporters she is neither a gynaecologist nor a surgeon. The clinic owner, Rafiqul Islam imprinted "Gynaecologist" on her nameplate, she added.

However, she claimed to have completed MBBS from a private medical college.

During the operation, two nurses -- Nigar Sultana and Lily Begum -- had assisted Fatema. Locals said the nurses, who are two siblings, have no training in that field.

Contacted, Shawkat Ali, officer-in-charge of Phulbari Police Station, said he took three persons including Fatema Ahmed, Nigar Sultana and Lily Begum into their custody.

Iraqi Shia bloc backs al-Maliki

AP, BAGHDAD

Powerful Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has agreed to support the bid by Iraq's prime minister to retain power, aides said yesterday, in a move that could speed an end to the seven-month political impasse and bring deal making that may give key concessions to al-Sadr's anti-American bloc.

The decision by al-Sadr would mark a significant boost for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-led coalition to secure enough parliament seats to form a new government.

Iraq has been in political limbo since March elections, won by a Sunni-backed bloc but without the majority needed to oust al-Maliki.

US military officials say the power vacuum is encouraging a spike in attacks by Sunni insurgents trying to humiliate authorities and tap into public frustration. The uncertainties also have hindered Iraq's efforts to lure badly needed foreign investment and get domestic reconstruction plans off the drawing boards.

Three senior al-Sadr aides told The Associated Press that a formal announcement on backing al-Maliki's coalition is expected later yesterday.

A top official for al-Maliki's bloc confirmed that a joint press conference is planned with al-Sadr envoys to "announce the name of the nominee."

They all spoke on condition of anonymity because they

Ctg EPZ

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government," Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (Bepza) Jamil Ahmed Khan to the news agency.

Jamil described this recognition as one of the major achievements of Bepza.

This success clearly manifests that an investment-friendly atmosphere is now prevailing in the country, he said, and hoped that this would help encourage more FDI in Bangladesh.

Pak militants

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Thursday's strike was in Sindh province, far from the border, and might be taken as a sign that the insurgents are expanding their reach.

Around 10 gunmen attacked the vehicles when they were parked at an ordinary truck stop on the edge of Shikarpur town shortly after midnight. They forced the drivers and other people there to flee before setting the fires, said police officer Abdul Hamid Khoso. No one was wounded or killed.

The trucks were alight several hours after the attack, according to an Associated Press photographer at the scene.

Another officer, Nisar Ahmed, said the tankers had arrived in Shikarpur from the southern port city of Karachi and were heading to Quetta, a major city in the southwest. From there, the road leads to the Chaman border crossing.

Attacks on Nato and US supply convoys in Pakistan give militants a propaganda victory, but coalition officials say they do not result in shortages in Afghanistan. Some of the attacks are believed to be the work of criminals. Some officials allege truck owners may be behind some of them, perhaps to fraudulently claim insurance.

The vast majority travel, however, through the country unharmed and the frequency of attacks reported in the media does not appear to have risen much, if at all, over the last two years.

In recent years, the alliance has sought to shift more of the supplies through Central Asian countries north of Afghanistan and Russia, aware of the problems of relying too much on Pakistan, which some argue does not share America's strategic goals in the region.

There is a risk, albeit small, that militant attacks could one day seriously squeeze supplies. But the overriding concern is that hosting the supply routes gives Islamabad immense leverage in its relationship with Washington. The United States cannot force Pakistan to, say, crack down on militants in the northwest behind attacks in Afghanistan because Islamabad holds a trump card: it can cut off most of