

## No govt is saint

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be confined to the needs of a locality.

"...The members of parliament have got no direct role or function, in respect of either development or maintenance of law and order, in the district or in other local administrative units (bodies)," said the High Court Division of the Supreme Court in the verdict. The verdict was on a writ petition titled "Anwar Hossain Manju versus the Government of Bangladesh".

Explaining the current state, seasoned bureaucrat Kamal Siddiqui in his book "Local Government in Bangladesh" observed that in reality MPs dictate instead of advising the affairs of local government, particularly in development activities.

Thus, elected representatives of local government bodies cannot play the role they are supposed to, said Kamal, who was principal secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

THE WAY MPs WERE EMPOWERED

After Bangladesh's independence, Awami League-led government in the very first year of its rule in 1972 made several attempts to replace the traditional local leadership with the local rank and file of their party.

In 1972, the government abolished the Pakistani union council system and formed "union panchayats" with government nominated members and also formed "Union Relief Committees".

Lawmakers along with local party wings selected members for the two bodies that played a vital role in distributing relief materials and carrying out construction and rehabilitation work.

Therefore, legislators got great scope to consolidate their power by picking people loyal to them for the two bodies.

The venture failed to serve the government's purpose; rather it spoiled the government's image largely for widespread corruption of relief committees, contributing to Awami League-backed candidates' massive defeat in 1973 union council elections.

In 1975, the then Awami League government abolished the elected local government system and introduced a new system. A district governor then headed administration at the district level. Baksal was introduced and the traditional local government was supplanted by party machinery.

Alongside members of the public service and members of Baksal, some lawmakers were also appointed as district governors who were empowered to control all government offices and departments at district level.

The system, however, was nullified following the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975 and after the military grabbed state power.

Utilising local government bodies, military ruler Ziaur Rahman consolidated his power and formed the political party BNP.

By the end of 1980, Zia introduced a new structure of rural institutions, Swanirvar Gram Sarkar (Self-Reliant village government) in 68,000 Bangladesh villages, marginalising the union parishads.

MPs took chairmanship of district and thana level Gram Sarkar coordination committees to ensure control over the rural areas.

The then government claimed that Gram Sarkars were formed to ensure people's participation in the development process at the grassroots. But people speculated that Zia was trying to build a party through Gram Sarkar. The selection process was criticised because in most cases the committees were formed with members of ruling BNP.

Grabbing state power in a military coup in 1982, General HM Ershad abolished the unpopular Gram Sarkar system to win over the local representatives.

He put himself in Zia's shoes in consolidating power and in addition, he introduced the upazila system, which established command over local affairs in absence of MPs.

The emergence of MPs through the third parliamentary election in 1986 triggered conflict between lawmakers and upazila parishad chairmen. Irrespective of party affiliation, MPs were looking forward to cut the authority of upazila, as they did not have formal control over local administration.

Finally, Ershad-led government introduced Zilla Parishad Act in 1988 that made MPs chairmen of the district parishads to coordinate all development activities under

the districts.

Assuming office in 1991, BNP-led government abolished the upazila system and formed Thana Unnayan Samannay Committee at the upazila level to work as a coordinating and development body. MPs were made advisers to the bodies in the upazilas under their respective constituencies.

Instead of MPs, the BNP-led government appointed deputy commissioners as chairmen of the district council. But lawmakers continued dictating deputy commissioners in running the district parishads' activities.

In 1998, the AL-led government revived the upazila parishads by enacting a law that made MPs advisers to the upazila parishads under their respective constituencies.

The last caretaker government in early 2008 omitted the provision of the upazila parishad act that made MPs advisers. Later, it repealed the upazila parishad act as a whole and made a new one through promulgation of an ordinance.

But assuming power in 2009, the Awami League-led government did not ratify the upazila parishad ordinance in parliament. It reintroduced the repealed upazila parishad act of 1998 with provisions for making MPs advisers.

Lawmakers belonging to the parliamentary standing committee on LGRD ministry, however, had recommended that the House also make provisions in the city corporation and municipality laws to make MPs advisers to those bodies. The government, however, did not accept the recommendations.

Although MPs are advisers, their interference in the upazila parishads' functions made those bodies unable to function in full swing since their elections in January 2009.

Against this backdrop, upazila parishad chairmen, vice-chairmen are preparing to launch a movement against making the parishad dysfunctional.

"In fact, the upazila executive officers, who are secretaries to the parishads, are running the upazila parishads on the advice of MPs," Ataur Rahman Ata, chairman of Manikganj Sadar upazila, told The Daily Star. He said they are planning to hold a grand rally in the capital in October to protest against making the upazila parishad dysfunctional.

On the other hand, the Awami League-led government repealed the Zilla Parishad Act of 1988 and introduced a new one in 2000 with provision for direct election. This law also made MPs advisers to the parishads. Elections to the parishads were not held.

In 2003, the BNP-led government formed district council development coordinating committee for each district headed by a chief executive officer, a government official. Upazila executive officers, chiefs of LGED, public health, education and other government departments at local level are members of the committee.

Asked about the role of MPs as advisers, an executive officer told The Daily Star that MPs are dictating the district parishads' activities. When the parishad gets allocation of annual development programmes, MPs send a list of projects to implement in their constituencies, he said.

"We have nothing to do but implement the projects prescribed by MPs," the chief executive officer said.

## 3 Ctg girls

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CMCH Surgery Ward said, "Though the injuries were not severe, the burn marks will remain on their faces for life."

Tarin was supposed to get married on October 10, sources said.

Rezaul Masud, assistant commissioner (AC) of Panchlaish Zone of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, said Tarin, her two brothers and Farzana were sharing a bedroom while Tasnim was sleeping in the next room. Their parents were not at home on that night.

The AC suspects the girls sustained the injuries around 5:30am and had the acid been pure, it could have caused more fatal injuries.

The victims live in an apartment on the third floor and both the gates leading into the building were locked, said the AC. "It does not seem likely that the act was done from the outside," he said adding that it looked like an inside job to him.

The police are trying to unravel the mystery and track down the culprit.

## Free footpath

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sector that include purchase of locomotive and passenger coaches," he said.

It is expected that people would shortly get benefit of the improved railway communication, he added.

On commuter service he said the government is actively considering introducing train services on Dhaka-Mymensingh and Dhaka-Narayanganj routes. This will reduce the pressure on roads.

"Meanwhile, overpass or underpass in every important point where traffic jam is severe are being constructed," he said.

The communications minister invited the business leaders to join hands with the government if they are interested to build any overpass or underpass in Dhaka. "I'll ensure approval from the government if you come up with proposals," he said.

The minister also reiterated that the Padma Bridge would be constructed by the current tenure of the government.

"We've progressed much through completion of land acquisition, bridge design and managing fund for the project. People will see work of the project from next year," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself is very sincere to implement the project on time, he added.

DCCI President Abul Kashem Khan, Institute of Development Strategy Chairman Mustafizur Rahman and Coordinating Director of National Communication, Transportation and Infrastructure Development Waliur Rahman, among others, took part in the discussion.

## Triple murder

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suspect that more than three people were involved in the killing and the assailants used their own weapons besides Mizanur's firearm.

DC Taufiq Mahmud said Sumon had a plan to kill all the family members of the house, but Ontu, deceased Mizanur Rahman's son, survived, as he left home a few minutes before to the incident.

Mizanur with his wife Bithi and his mother Sufia Begum were shot and stabbed to death at their Jatrabari residence Thursday morning.

Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Jatrabari Police Station, said security guard Akbar Ali was not arrested but he was detained for interrogation.

He said Mizanur's brothers Lipton and Lincoln were released a few hours after they had been detained for interrogation on condition that they would appear at the police station when needed.

The OC said they are waiting for CID's fingerprint report and would send the used bullet they collected as evidence for ballistic test.

On Thursday, police detained Mizanur's brothers Zahidur Rahman Lipton and Touhidur Rahman Lincoln, Lincoln's son Sumon and security guard of the building Akbar Ali.

Ontu, the lone survivor of the family, filed a murder case with Jatrabari Police Station accusing Sumon, Akbar Ali and five to seven unidentified persons. He told The Daily Star that he now feels insecure as his uncles, with whom they have a history of land dispute, were released.

## JMB's

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The Rab media wing chief said Sharful seldom went to his village home at Talshan in Joypurhat. They had information that Sharful and two others were coming back to Dhaka yesterday, he added.

He said Sharful planned to carry out subversive activities in some posh areas in the capital and was collecting bomb-making materials from across the country.

The Rab intelligence wing has information that Sharful after taking charge of Dhaka division engaged some ehshar members to help him in reorganising the banned organisation.

Motor mechanic Sharful used to prepare circuits used in bombs, collect bomb-making materials, Sohail said, adding, Sharful also used to take help from Rabiand Liton.

Sharful during primary interrogation admitted that he led the August 17 serial blast in Joypurhat.

Sharful told interrogators he first came to Dhaka in 2003 and began to work at a motor workshop in Kafrul. Later he learned how to prepare bombs, he added.

Sohail said they have found an identity card of Uttara Motors issued for Sharful but could not say immediately whether it is fake or real.

Ehsar Shahin was arrested in Panchagarh in 2004 for his involvement with JMB. He was accused of possessing explosives in Dinajpur in December 2008 and remained absconding since then after securing bail from the court.

Chainur was arrested in April 2007 in connection with an explosives case in Kurigram and remained absconding after coming out of jail on bail.

## Indigo back

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landless farmer of Rajendrapur. He also cultivates indigo on the roadsides of his village.

He added that since he was struggling for money, his daughter had to stop attending school after primary education. Those days are gone for him and she is back to school now. Jagadish was referring to the Nijera Cottage and Village Industries Ltd (NCVI), a social enterprise of the underprivileged. It has helped change the socio-economic conditions of the underprivileged greatly.

"That is not all. We have started exporting indigo to Canada, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and India," said Sumanta Kumar Barmon, chairman of NCVI.

With the increase in use of natural dye world wide, the demand for indigo dye is swelling. The company exported indigo dye worth Tk 10 lakh in the past six months.

"Initially we weren't familiar with the export procedure. We have passed that stage and hopefully, the volume of export will double in a few months," added Sumanta.

Only 180 members started NCVI like a co-operative society. It has extended its working units and set up structures gradually.

"It has grown into a company with about 1,500 shareholders from five northern districts," said Salma Begum, managing director of NCVI adding, "All shareholders are also workers of the company."

Farmers other than the landless are also cultivating indigo on their land. According to them, indigo crop on 25 decimals of land yields around Tk 3,000 in just three months.

"Indigo stick is good fuel. We

## Sundarbans tigers

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study suggest this could be related to the small size of deer available to tigers in the Sundarbans, compared to the larger deer and other prey available to tigers in other parts of the world.

Dr Adam Barlow from WTB said, "We always thought the Sundarbans tigers were small based on their track size, but until now we didn't know just how much small they really were. After all these years of people studying tigers it is exciting to dig up new information about this elusive and highly endangered animal and to see how it is adapting to live in different environments."

Using a vast collection of tiger skulls from the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, the researchers also looked at differences in skull measurements between subspecies, finding that Sundarbans tigers have slightly different skull shapes compared to other tigers.

These findings are preliminary due to the small number of specimens used and not

## CNG pumps

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Abdullah Al Mamun, and 16 leaders from different zones were present at the meeting, reports news agency UNB.

Earlier, the association demanded limiting the closure hours to three hours from the currently observed six hours. Due to the huge pressure from the station owners, the association now demands total withdrawal of the shutdown.

As the executive members and the secretary of the association sought time before declaring their decision, the owners of the gas stations forced them to announce the ultimatum.

Finally, after discussing the issue with the representatives from all 14 zones across the country, the association leaders declared their call for the strike.

Other demands of the association include installation of electronic volume metres at the CNG pumps; reducing energy regulatory commission's licence fee to Tk 5,000 from the present Tk 10,000 and setting the annual renewal fee at Tk 1,000; and exempting the CNG pumps from taking the environment department's no objection certificates.

More than 400 representatives from different pumps across the country attended the meeting, said the association leaders.

The owners of CNG (compressed natural gas) pumps have been keeping their pumps closed from 3pm to 9pm daily since August 16 this year in line with a government order.

The government issued the order as part of its gas rationing move to tackle the nagging

can make about Tk 4,000 more from selling the sticks," said Shawkat Hossain, a farmer of Rajendrapur.

CARE Bangladesh worked with the poor people of Rajendrapur under its Social Economic Transformation of the Ultra Poor (SETU) project. Shareholders of the company lauded the role of CARE for coming up with the idea of reviving indigo farming.

Team leader of SETU project Anwarul Haq said, "When we found that the villagers needed to be involved with long term income generating activities, we began to explore resources for them. We found indigo farming to be a good solution to this end."

Anwar praised the company shareholders who have been working hard to upgrade it gradually. CARE Bangladesh provides technical support and training for the company.

Some other cottage enterprises of the NCVI produce quality products, which are in high demand in the foreign countries.

The shareholders-cum-workers of the company manually sew elegant kantha (bedspread), which are dyed with indigo.

Momotaz Begum, a director of the company, told The Daily Star that they participated in handicraft trade fairs in India on four occasions.

"Last August we joined a weeklong trade fair at Dasker in the Indian city of Bangalore. We had sales of Rs. 4 lakh," she said.

At present the company has assets in cash and property worth Tk 2 crore.

"We'll go for large scale production soon," added the company director.

enough to make the Sundarbans tigers a new subspecies, which would require genetic investigation.

However, their physical differences do increase their importance in terms of conservation, because these tigers have unique physical traits not found in other tigers. They are also the only tigers in the world to live in a mangrove habitat.

The Sundarbans is the world's largest mangrove forest, with 6,000 sq km falling in Bangladesh, and 4,000 sq km over the border in India. With approximately 300-500 tigers in the Bangladesh side of the Sundarbans alone, this area may also represent one of the best chances for saving the species, which probably numbers less than 3,500 individuals in the world.

These remaining pockets of tigers are threatened by poaching from the traditional Asian medicine trade, hunting of the tiger's prey for local meat consumption and destruction of their habitat to make room for expanding human populations.

energy crisis.

The CNG pump owners at the meeting said they have set up their pumps investing over Tk 1,000 crore mostly financed by banks.

But the new government order has put their investments at risk and many of them already became bank loan defaulters, they said.

The association said the six-hour pump shutdown has resulted in excessive increase in public transport fares. Moreover, the decision does not contribute to resolving the gas crisis. Rather, the pump owners had to introduce a new night shift for keeping their pumps open at midnight.

The meeting said the CNG pumps consume only 5 percent of the total gas supplied to different sectors.

## No talks

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requested Bangladesh to send combat troops to Afghanistan.

Dipu Moni, however, said the USA envoy at the meeting had asked for Bangladesh's cooperation in the development of Afghanistan but there was no discussion about sending troops to Afghanistan.

"We said Bangladesh can contribute to the national development of Afghanistan through providing training to officials in administration, police, education and some other sectors," she said.

The minister also said Bangladesh sends troops to different countries as peacekeepers under the UN supervision and it will think over the issue if the UN takes any such projects in Afghanistan.

## Ensure media

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"We have urged her [Hasina] to make sure the media are not hostile to the government under any circumstances. Since the media act as a bridge between the government and the people, there's always a need for them," one adviser told The Daily Star in return for anonymity.

In response, the prime minister said her government believes in a free press. "Everyone has the right to criticise the government for its misdeeds, but it saddens us when we see exaggeration," another adviser quoted Hasina as saying.

Hasina said she expects responsible journalism to take the country forward.

She said her government was taking actions against the wrongdoers, which unfortunately have not been much highlighted in the press. Many have been expelled from the party and many sent to jail.

"I am again saying that those who are tarnishing the image of the government will get no mercy, whoever they may be," said Hasina.

The advisers told her that people want to see tangible progress in the government efforts to bring about the changes pledged in the election manifesto.

The premier said she feels embarrassed at what some of her party men did in Pabna. The government wants to ensure recruitment on merit, she added.

About war crimes trial, she said international standards will be maintained. Since it is not possible to try all war criminals at one go, the trial would continue like the one after the Second World War.

To resolve organisational problems, AL leaders will start touring the districts next month. The prime minister too will exchange views with the district and upazila leaders at the Gono Bhaban.

Besides, the AL central working committee will meet on October 9 to work out strategy over various issues.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said the advisers wanted to know from the prime minister about implementation of AL's election manifesto.

He said the premier would soon sit with the special parliamentary committee on constitutional amendments.

Ashraf added that a few more persons would be inducted into the advisory council to make it complete within two/three days.

## Extra-judicial

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Of the total extra-judicial killings, 71 persons were killed either in 'crossfire' or 'encounters' or in 'gunfights' with the law enforcers.

A total of 87 persons allegedly died in custody during this period.

Among them, five were killed in 'crossfire', 16 were 'tortured to death', one was shot in custody while 14 BDR 'mutineers' died in custody.

Alleged sickness was the reason behind the death of 47 persons while in jail custody.

Two persons also died in court custody, one in police station and another one in Rab custody.

## Stalked, burnt

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Amena rushed to her daughter's rescue, but the flame had already burnt most of her body, she said.

Amena was initially taken to Bakshiganj upazila health complex, and shifted to DMCH burn unit on Wednesday as her condition worsened.

Bakshiganj police arrested Tairan's brother Swapan, an accused in the case filed by the victim's mother while the three main accused are on the run.

Swapan denied any involvement in the incident, but said he knew that the three used to stalk Aneza, said Nasir Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Bakshiganj Police Station.

## People's sufferings

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Quoting local police, our Madaripur correspondent adds, clashes between awaiting transport workers have become commonplace as they all push for a serial number ahead of each other.

Four of the inoperative ferries have been sent to Naryanganj dockyard for major repair works while the other two are under maintenance in Mawa and Paturia, informed the BIWTC officials.

"It has become a regular feature nowadays as most ferries are too old to endure the pressure", said Md Mosharraf Hossain Howlader, GM (commerce) of BIWTC.

"Shortage of ferries puts extra pressure on the existing ones. Most of the time those remain in operation for 24 hours which results in further increase to their downtime," he added.

## Misfortune-seekers

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Training (BMET), the government doorkeeper to prevent cheating of overseas jobseekers, and the airport immigration in Dhaka.

The BMET on record issued emigration clearances to 30 people who went to Liberia in different phases late last year and early this year, never raising a question as to when and how Liberia became a "job market" for Bangladeshis.

The rest nine had no emigration clearance, which is mandatory for overseas jobseekers and issued only by BMET, though they went to Liberia with "work visas".

Officer-in-Charge (immigration) at Shahjalal International Airport Shamsuzzaman said it is not possible for the Bangladeshis to go to Liberia without clearance by BMET.

"They might have gone to Dubai or other destinations first and then to Liberia," he said.

Two of the nine victims, however, said they all went to Liberia with work visas and a broker named Mitul bribed an immigration officer before passing the immigration desk at Shahjalal International Airport.

According to normal practice, recruiting agencies or their sub-agents secure job demands or visas for the workers and apply to BMET for emigration clearances. The BMET is supposed to verify the documents through Bangladesh missions so that workers are not cheated.

Experts say BMET officials are, in most cases, able to identify dubious incidents on the basis of their experience. Moreover, every country seeking foreign workers can be contacted directly over the phone. As a gatekeeper BMET is expected to have several mechanisms to check and verify authenticity of every case.

In fact, says a source, whenever a dodgy deal is identified, "charges go two-fold up" for the emigration clearance.

"To keep their own records clean, they ask the agency or individuals to sign a written undertaking, in which the agency and the jobseekers take all responsibilities for any mishap," adds the source. "But legally the agency that seeks emigration certificates for jobseekers is always liable for anything that goes wrong."

For each of the 39 workers, the unscrupulous brokers first obtained fake work visas and job contracts on separate sheets, bearing names and other personal details.

According to documents, the recruiting agencies secured emigration clearances for 23 jobseekers from BMET, while seven got their emigration clearances on their own efforts. If any jobseeker secures emigration clearances themselves, they have to go to BMET personally.

BMET Director Selim Reza said he himself interviewed the jobseekers before issuing emigration clearances. "I thought Liberia could be a new labour market for Bangladesh," Reza added.

However, at least two of these seven said they never went to BMET before going to Liberia for any interview.

The agencies involved include HA International, Taslim Air International, Bangladesh Export

He also mentioned Mawa and Kawrakandi terminals borrow ferries regularly from other terminals to cope with the pressure.

Most of the ferries currently in operation are more than 30 years old. They are past their economic lives, pointed out Mosharraf, adding that the only time these get rest is when they break down.

The ferry terminals connect 23 southern districts with Dhaka and rest of the country. About 3000 vehicle use the ferry services daily.

There are plans however to increase the number of ferries, the official informed. "Three ferries, each costing about Tk 30 crore, are being locally built currently. Building of another is awaiting approval from Ecneec," he said.

The BIWTC made its last procurement of two Chinese ferries in 2002.

Corporation, The Reach Eastern, Afia Overseas and Al Shikder Overseas. There are also names of AR Trade Ltd and East West Trade Linkers on the workers' passports, but not in the BMET records, which also means a lot of anomalies in emigration clearances process.

Contacted, officials of these agencies categorically denied their involvement in the Liberia scam. Some said they just helped the workers in securing emigration clearances and did not receive any money from them, while others said some common used their companies' names to cheat the jobseekers.

"My company secured emigration clearances for three individuals going to Liberia, but we know nothing who obtained visas for them," said Abul Bashar of East West Trade Linkers.

Immigration researchers, however, say there was surely a big money game on emigration clearance. "Passing