

VILLAGE COURTS

Govt mulls judicial assistants for UPs

Says prime minister

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government is considering appointing a judicial assistant to each union parishad (UP) across the country to help public representatives make village courts operational.

The village court system, which will be expanded to all unions, will be an ideal justice delivery model for developing countries. There might be some loopholes initially but the process will be gradually standardised, she said.

Hasina was addressing the inaugural session of a two-day "Village Court Conference" under "Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Project" at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

Rangpur Poursabha will be very shortly upgraded to a city corporation, she declared.

Chairmen and secretaries of 350 UPs under the project are taking part in the conference to review the success of the Village Court Law and identify its loopholes for improvement.

Local Government Division, with financial assistance from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and European Union (EU), initiated the project in 350 unions in 2009.

The project preliminarily aimed at executing the village court law, enacted to give the traditional local dispute resolving system a formal and legal structure.

Hasina said the government took steps to introduce village courts in over 400 UPs outside the project area and urged donors to provide assistance in this regard.

She reminded that village courts are a unique opportunity for elected representatives to deliver justice and service to people, being authoritative on one hand while undertaking a huge responsibility on the other. "Nothing unjustified should be imposed, under an external influence, on people who seek justice. Religious superstition and fanaticism should also have no role while justice is being discharged," she said.

There should also be provisions for punishment against false complaints. Disputes should be resolved through understanding and motivation, she added.

Hasina said local representatives can earn the confidence and love of the people using the

authority bestowed upon them by the village court law.

Peaceful resolution of disputes would also help maintain peace in society and fraternity among people, she noted.

Stating that the government is pledge-bound to undertake any activity required for the people's welfare, Hasina hoped that village courts will pave the way towards ensuring justice for the poor and disadvantaged rural people.

She reiterated that Dhaka City Corporation was divided into Dhaka North and Dhaka South city corporations to improve service delivery and for the decentralisation of the administration.

Narayanganj and Comilla municipalities were upgraded to city corporations and Rangpur would be upgraded to a city corporation very shortly, she said.

The government enacted and amended the upazila parishad laws and formulated the regulations to strengthen the upazila parishad, she said.

It also undertook massive development programmes for the municipalities. For instance, pourasabha mayors and UP chairmen are being trained at home and abroad, she said.

A master plan is being prepared for municipalities in 23 districts headquarters and 223 upazila headquarters, said Hasina.

She said the union councils are implementing a number of projects aided by UNDP, EU, World Bank and Unicef.

The largest WB financed project, "Local Governance Support Project (LGSP)", was executed during 2006-2011 when Tk 1,034 crore was directly channelled to the local government's lowest tier as the basic grant, she said.

Moreover, the government took up LGSP-2, which will cost Tk 3,912 crore and be operational till 2016, she said.

LRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam and State Minister Jahangir Kabir Nanak, UNDP Resident Representative Neal Walker and EU Delegation Charge d'Affaires Milko Van Gool attended as special guests.

Local Government Division Secretary Abul Alam M Shahid Khan was in the chair while the project Director KM Mozammel Haque spoke on the occasion.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses an audience of chairmen and secretaries of 350 Union Parishads (UPs) during the inaugural session of a two-day Village Court Conference at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

HIMU'S DEATH

Cops stuck at one arrest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Fifteen days after the death of Himadri Majumder Himu, an A-level student of Summerfield School and College in Chittagong, little progress has been made by the police enquiry into his death.

Only one accused has been arrested in this connection. Police, however, say that they have been trying their best.

The bereaved family members expressed doubts whether the administration was working freely to ensure justice.

Himu, 18, was taken to Farhad Mansion in Panchlaish Residential Area on April 27 allegedly by his friends. They beat him up there, unleashed dogs on him and allegedly pushed him off the fourth floor of the building centring drug peddling. He

succumbed to his injuries at Square Hospital in Dhaka on May 23.

A day after the torture, his father Prabir Kanti Majumder lodged a general diary with Panchlaish Police Station.

Himu, the same day, in the hospital bed gave a description of the brutal torture he had faced.

Prakash Das Asit, a distant uncle of Himu, filed a murder case with Panchlaish police accusing Junaid Ahmed Riad, his father Shah Selim Tipu, the owner of Farhad Mansion, and Riad's friends Shahadat Hossain Shaju, Danny and Shaon.

Detective Branch (DB) of Police personnel so far arrested Shaju from Teknaf on June 2.

Yesterday, a group of rights activists visited the home of Himu and expressed sympathy towards the family members. Led by Rana

Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, the team included Sara Hossain, honorary director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust, Nijera Kari Coordinator Khushi Kabir and Subrata Chowdhury, a Supreme Court lawyer.

They also assured the family of keeping an eye on the proceedings and taking necessary initiatives.

The team later met Commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Shafiqul Islam and urged him to arrest the accused immediately and prepare the charge sheet following proper investigation.

Asked about the delay in arresting the accused, the CMP commissioner told The Daily Star that the accused had been on the run since Himu's death.

"We are conducting regular drives

to arrest the accused," he added.

Himu's father Prabir, however, expressed frustration over the slow pace of police activity.

"It makes us question whether the administration is working sincerely and without any kind of pressure from influential quarters," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, leaders of Shikor, an anti-drug organisation with which Himu was involved, and Manobadhikar Kalyan Sangstha, a rights body, at a press conference at Chittagong Press Club yesterday sought assistance of the prime minister and the home minister for immediate arrest of the accused and ensuring exemplary punishment.

They also declared to form a human chain on June 13 and warned tougher agitation if the killers were not arrested soon.

CELEBRATING LIFE
Films from workshop screened at IUB

METRO DESK

The films produced from the "Celebrating Life Film Making Workshop" were screened at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) in the capital on Thursday.

The event started at 11:00am and its next session at 2:00pm.

The university Vice Chancellor Prof Omar Rahman graced the event. School of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Faculty Dean Prof Nazrul Islam and head of Media & Communications department Dr Shahidul Alam were present, says a press release.

The film workshop course directors Nurul Alam Atique, Amitabh Reza and Mejbaur Rahman Sumon were also present and interacted with the audience about the films.

SHAHJALAL FERTILISER FACTORY AL leaders 'obstruct' land development

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Land development work for construction of the proposed Shahjalal Fertiliser Factory in Fenchuganj upazila has remained suspended since June 4 after the assigned contractor firm faced obstruction from the local Awami League leaders.

The local leaders claimed that they struggled for years to get the project approved, and it was locals, not a firm from Dhaka, who should do the work, Nazrul Islam Shipon, site manager of the firm, Brothers Group, said yesterday.

He said a day after the start of the work on June 2, the Upazila AL President Shaokat Ali and General Secretary Abdul Basit Tutul came to the camp office and asked him to stop the work. The land development project is worth about Tk 6 crore, he said.

Contacted, Shaokat Ali admitted to the incident and said he informed the matter to the local lawmaker who was looking into the whole affair.

The AL leader said it was a huge project,

involving more than Tk 5,000 crore, being implemented by a Chinese company. But the locals have the right to do the small works like land development, and this is why they have asked the firm to stop, he said.

Md Quamruzzaman, project director of Shahjalal Fertiliser Factory, said he along with the lawmaker visited the site yesterday. The matter is not a serious one, and it would be resolved very soon, he added.

Asked about the locals' demand for the land development work, he said it was not possible for them since some sophisticated equipment were needed for the job. As many as 18 dump trucks, two excavators, two pay-loaders and a dodger were in operation for the work.

On March 24, the prime minister laid the foundation of the factory in the vacant land adjoining Natural Gas Fertiliser Factory (NGFF). A Chinese company has been given the contract to install the factory, which later appointed Brothers Group for the land development.



Muktijodha Sangskritik Sangsad forms a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday demanding completion of the trial of war criminals.

PHOTO: STAR



BNP leaders and activists hand out leaflets to bus passengers in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday as part of the opposition's mobilisation campaign across the capital to solicit public support for its grand rally scheduled for tomorrow.

PHOTO: STAR

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