

Red-green homes for war heroes

Govt hands over 117 'Bir Nibas' in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Sixty-year-old war veteran Abul Khair Munshi recently received a pleasant surprise from the prime minister -- a complete single-storey building named Bir Nibas.

When young Munshi from Biswas Bekta area in Tangail municipal area signed up for the Mukti Bahini during the Liberation War of 1971, he did not expect or think of what he would gain if the country won independence.

Like thousands of the country's sons of the soil, Munshi's only concern was to free the motherland from the foreign oppressors at any cost -- be it with his own life. He took two bullets to do this during a frontal assault in the battle of Singulia in Sirajganj on September 18 in 1971.

Forty five years have gone by since injured Munshi returned home where he had been living with his wife, two sons and their wives and the grandchildren in two separate rickety tin-roofed rooms on a small piece of land.

Despite all his financial woes, Munshi, till date, held his head high and did not resort to any unethical means to overcome the situation.

The new red and green brick house, with a concrete roof on top, comes with almost all basic amenities -- two bedrooms, a dining space and a kitchen. The toilet is built adjacent to the main building. There are even a tube well, a cow barn and a poultry cage.

"My heartiest appreciation goes to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for bestowing such honour on me by giving this house to me," Munshi told this correspondent.

Until I received this gift, I struggled all these years, trying to fit in all my family members in the two small tin-roofed rooms, he added.

At the directive of the prime minister, Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) in Tangail is implementing a Tk 12.5 crore housing project for insolvent freedom fighters. Out of a total of 146 Bir Nibas to be built under the project, 117 have already been handed over while 29 are currently under construction, said LGED officials.

Another of the proud recipients of such a Bir Nibas is Asya Begum, wife of late freedom fighter Abul Kalam of Gala village in Sadar upazila.



Freedom fighter Abdul Quiyum with his wife in front of his *Bir Nibas* in Basail upazila of Tangail. Inset, freedom fighter Abul Khair Munshi in front of his *Bir Nibas* in Tangail town. The government built the houses for freedom fighters in need.

PHOTO: STAR

'Councillor ransacks' homes, shops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A municipality ward councillor allegedly vandalised several houses and businesses near Mymensingh Zila School yesterday.

Syed Shafiqul Islam Minto, a commissioner of ward-6, along with around 400 of his followers, ransacked two houses, a variety store and office of a cable operator around 4:00pm, said locals.

The incident took place in retaliation of an assault on Minto by his rival Ripon -- a local businessman from Akua area on Boundary Road in the town -- and his goons earlier in the afternoon, they added.

Minto and Ripon have a longstanding dispute over construction of a flat in Zila School Road area, local sources said.

Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said, police have brought the situation under control.

Minto told this correspondent, locals rushed to the spot and rescued him after Ripon and his gang attacked him. "No incident of firing or ransacking took place."

His rival Ripon also refuted the allegation, saying Minto's accusations were false. "I am not involved with the incident in any way."

First ever polls; AL to win it

FROM PAGE 1

grassroots leaders to contest for the chairman posts.

The BNP is not participating in the December 28 polls, first ever elections to the zila parishads in Bangladesh. The party alleges that "the election process goes against the constitution as the polls would not have direct participation of voters".

According to the District Council (Amendment) Act, 2016, only the elected representatives of different local government bodies will vote to

12 districts as they are the lone contenders for the posts.

Those districts are Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Natore, Sirajganj, Bagerhat, Netrokona, Joypurhat, Bhola, Jhalakathi, Thakurgaon and Jessore, according to our correspondents there.

Soon after the announcement on the polls, top district-level AL leaders expressed their desire to run for the chairman posts, and a total of 700 such leaders submitted applications seeking party blessings.

Later, the AL high command picked 61 of them for the 61 chairman posts.

The move, however, angered many of those deprived of the party support and 85 of them decided to step into the electoral race, defying the party decision.

For example, in Gopalganj, which is the home district of AL president Sheikh Hasina, the party backed district AL President Chowdhury Emdadul Huq for the chairman post. However, local AL leader Mollah Obaidullah Baki is also vying for the post.

In Noakhali, home district of AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, two vice-presidents of the district unit of AL -- Dr Jafarullah and Fakrul Islam Montu -- are challenging the party-supported candidate ABM Jafrullah.

In Pabna, district AL Senior Vice-president Rezaul Rahim got party support, but he will have to face two party dissidents. One of them is Mahjabin Shirin Piya, daughter of Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sherif and also the woman affairs secretary of Pabna district AL.

Asked, Piya told The Daily Star that she was contesting the polls ignoring party decision as "the elections were non partisan and she had enough experience in local government affairs".

In Sunamganj, incumbent district council administrator Enamul Kabir Emon got party support. But former district unit AL general secretary Nurul Huda Mukut is also contesting for the chairman post.

"I should have got the party support as I have been working for the party for the last 30 years. I am the fittest candidate," Mukut told The Daily Star.

Contacted, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the party was yet to take any specific decision about the rebels. "As it is a non-partisan election, Awami League didn't give any nomination. Rather, we gave our support. Now we want our party-supported candidates to win," he said.

He also said the party would take decision about the dissidents after

the scrutiny of nomination papers by the returning officers.

A LUCRATIVE POST

The post of a zila parishad chairman is very prestigious and respectable at the district level. Even during the British era, many national level leaders used to become the chairmen, said eminent local government expert Dr Tofail Ahmed.

"Because of such factors, the chairman post has become lucrative and many Awami League leaders are running after it," he told The Daily

POLLS MODE LEGALITY QUESTIONED

Voters are not allowed to exercise their franchise to elect chairmen and members of the zila parishads.

According to the Zila Parishad Act, 2000, elected representatives in union and upazila parishads, municipalities and city corporations are the electorates who will elect one chairman and 20 members, including five for women reserved seats, for each of the 61 zila parishads.

This provision was challenged with

ZILA PARISHAD LEGAL PROVISION VS REALITY

THREE-TIRE SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ZILA PARISHAD ↓ UPAZILA PARISHAD ↓ UNION PARISHAD	FORMATION A chairman and members including those from women reserved seats	ELECTORS Elected representatives of all other local govt bodies in the district	TENURE 5 years ADVISER MPs in the dist
SPECIAL LG BODIES IN URBAN AREAS CITY CORPORATIONS MUNICIPALITIES	FUNCTIONS Maintenance of public order and preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development. Local government bodies shall be given powers to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds. [Constitutional provisions]	REALITY CHECK: Bureaucrats of the government's administration do almost of the works in district and upazilas. "The poor state of local governance remains a major impediment to good governance in the country," Finance Minister AMA Muhith in his budget speech in June this year said about the state of local government bodies.	
	CONSULTATION: other local government bodies within a district will be consulted by parishad to finalise and implementation of development projects.	BUDGET: govt source and own income	

Star.

Also, the absolute power to deal with financial activities of the district councils and political prestige has prompted many AL men to contest for the posts, said local government experts.

On an average, a district council gets around Tk 5 crore to Tk 6 crore annually from the government for different development activities, including construction of roads, culvert and school-college buildings, said a senior official of the LGRD ministry.

Besides, a district council earns a huge amount of money by leasing out ferry ghats, lands, markets as well as renting out auditoriums, rest houses and others, he said.

Meanwhile, election experts fear that the use of black money can play a prominent role in the elections as the votes are very limited and fixed.

"As the number of voters here is limited, the chairman aspirants may use money to buy votes," said Abdul Alim, director of Election Working Group (EWG).

the High Court in 2000 immediately after passage of the zila parishad act.

The petitioner challenged the legality of election system as it denied voters the right to elect chairman and members of the zila parishads and labelled the provision unconstitutional.

An HC bench also issued a rule upon the government on July 19, 2000, asking it to explain why the law shall not be declared unconstitutional. The government was given four weeks to respond.

But the government did not respond to the rule and the issue still remains pending for last 16 years.

On this November 29, another writ petition was filed with the High Court seeking a stay on holding elections to district councils scheduled for December 28.

Eunus Ali Akond, a Supreme Court lawyer, submitted the petition challenging the legality of three provisions of district council law including the one for election system.

The court is likely to hear the petition today as decided earlier.

A ZILA PARISHAD in a brief (RANGPUR)

Area: 2367.84 sqm

Upazilas: 8

Unions: 83

City Corporation: 1

Municipality: 2

Villages: 1431

Population: 33.34 lakh

Land of parishad: 3774 acres

Roads under parishad: 736 km

Rest House: 2

Dukbunglow : 8

Markets: 3 including one supermarket

Zila Parishad: top local govt body

Current status: running by administrator since Dec 2011

elect a chairman, 15 general members and five women members in reserved seats in each district council.

Most of the representatives belong to the ruling AL.

The elections are taking place in 61 districts. The three other districts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts -- Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban -- are run by separate laws.

AL-backed chairman candidates are set to get elected unopposed in

Dream debut lifts Kings

FROM PAGE 16

That is something which could be crucial in terms of reaching the final four.

Saqlain Sajib removed both Nurul Hasan and Mominul Haque for 12 and 21 respectively, while Sabbir Rahman was trapped in front in the 11th over after a 9-ball eight.

However, the day belonged to the teenage off-spinner from Khulna. Afif's extraordinary debut was the reason why the Kings won the game so easily yesterday. The off-spinner, who is actually renowned for his batting prowess in the age-group levels, was taken into the team to counter the left-handed duo of Tamim Iqbal and Chris Gayle.

Not only did the Under-19 vice-captain end up bowling Gayle, he also went on to take five wickets while playing at the top level of any format for the first time in his career.

The evening began with Kesrick Williams bowling Tamim Iqbal out off the very first ball. In the next over Anamul Haque was stumped courtesy of a beautiful delivery from Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

Afif was introduced into the attack after that and he struck immediately, removing Jahurul Islam in the fifth over, although replays though suggested that Afif was a bit lucky as Jahurul had edged that ball on to his pads.

But he did not need any luck for the rest of his wickets. His slow loopy deliveries seemed almost unplayable yesterday.

He removed Gayle in the seventh over with a flighted straighter delivery, which Gayle failed to clip towards the leg side, and got bowled. Zakir was caught in the deep in the ninth over, while Saqlain Sajib was trapped in front in the 13th. His final wicket came off the fifth ball of over number 13, when a wide turner got Imran Khan caught behind.

By then the Vikings had been reduced to 70 for 8 with Shoaib Malik being their sole fighter. Had the Pakistan all-rounder not scored a 54-ball 67, they would have been in

deeper trouble. He hit three sixes and six fours during the innings, a number of which came towards the end and helped the Vikings cross the 100-run mark.

However despite the defeat, Rajshahi's fate in terms of qualifying for the final four, is not in their own hands. They are currently placed third with 12 points. If the Rangpur Riders and the Khulna Titans win their respective games today, Rajshahi will be knocked out. For Rajshahi to qualify they will need either Rangpur or Khulna to lose today.

As of now, Dhaka Dynamites and Chittagong Vikings are the only teams to have confirmed their places in the last four.

FROM PAGE 1

percent during the same year.

During a recent visit to the PUST, this correspondent found only two trees planted on campus under the project.

Faruk Hossain Chowdhury, assistant director of public relation department of PUST, said he learnt that a tree plantation project was taken up by the zila parishad and that 10 to 15 trees were planted.

"I don't know anything more about the project," Faruk added.

A project worth Tk 1 lakh on consumer rights awareness was completed in 2014-15, says a project completion list of the parishad. Some billboards were supposed to be set up for creating awareness among people but those were not seen in the district town in the last three years.

These are among 102 development projects that "had been implemented" in the fiscal year 2014-2015, according to the zila parishad's annual project performance report.

Local AL men and people close to the zila parishad administrator were awarded the work, sources in the parishad said, adding that in most cases there was no tender floated.

In the last five years, Pabna Zila Parishad spent Tk 31.5 crore for around 1,000 development projects, officials in the zila parishad said.

A former official of the parishad said in most cases, the administrator took up projects of his choosing and the work was shown completed in official documents.

"In the same way, most of the development project fund has withdrawn without any work but nobody dares to protest as he has political backing," said a former parishad official on condition of anonymity.

District AL leader Saidul Haque Chunnu was appointed administrator to Pabna Zila Parishad by the LGRD ministry in December 2011. He is one of the 61 district administrators appointed for the same number of the district councils.

The administrators get monthly remuneration and allowances of more than Tk 30,000. He is also entitled to a vehicle and fuel allowances.

A district council on average gets around Tk 5 to 6 crores annually from the government for different development projects and activities, including construction of roads, culverts and school-college buildings, said a senior official of the LGRD ministry.

Besides, a district council earns a huge amount, more than what the government gives it, from its own sources like leasing out ferry terminals, land, markets as well as renting out auditoriums, rest houses, and other establishments, he said.

Like other MPs, lawmakers of Pabna district are advisers of the zila parishad. However, lawmakers in the district allege that the administrator, Chunnu, has been running the parishad at will.

Criticising Chunnu, Pabna-2 constituency lawmaker Azizul Haque Arzu said the parishad never invited him to any coordination meetings.

He said lawmakers are advisers of the zila parishad and are supposed to take part in monthly coordination meetings.

Arzu said the administrator sometimes calls him for sending project lists but there was no follow up.

Golam Faruk Khandaker, AL MP of Pabna-5 constituency, also president of district AL, echoed the same.

"The administrator talked to me some times. Those were informal talks. But I was never invited to attend the parishad meetings," he told The Daily Star.

'EVERYTHING DONE PROPERLY' Contacted, Chunnu denied the allegations brought against him. He claimed that all the projects taken by zila parishad had been successfully implemented.

"Zila parishad takes up development projects with reserve funds of the parishad and the government's allot-

ment for the annual development projects (ADP). All the projects have been conducted as per government's project implementation method," he added.

He said lawmakers were informed about all the development funds. MPs were invited to attend every meeting but nobody joined, he claimed.

When pressed with detailed and specific allegations of corruption, he refused to comment but said everything was done according to the rules.

Talking to The Daily Star, Accountant of Pabna Zila Parishad Surujit Kumar Majumder said a total of Tk 31.5 crore ADP fund from fiscal years 2011-12 to 2015-16 had been spent.

He claimed that over 1,000 projects were completed in the last five years under the supervision of the administrator.

"All the projects were implemented according to government rules," he added.

Surujit further said a project involving around Tk 2 lakh could be implemented by the project implementation committee without floating tenders. A project worth over Tk 2 lakh has to be completed through proper bidding.

THE REALITY

Zila parishad sources said in most cases there was no tender announcement for inviting bidders, except for big projects. People chosen by the administrator got the job, manipulating the bidding process.

They added that sometimes the parishad cut project cost to under Tk 2 lakh to have the job completed without needing to float tenders.

Pabna Zila Parishad officials seeking anonymity said the administrator himself chooses the person to complete the project and in most cases the entire project fund is shown used with little or no work done.

MORE EXAMPLES

According to the annual progress report of the development project, the zila parishad authority allocated Tk 3 lakh from the ADP fund for constructing new classrooms in Chaikola Degree College in Chatmohor upazila.

The parishad revised the project and spent Tk 2.85 lakh for constructing rooms in 2012-13.

Contacted, Saiful Islam, principal of the college, said they only got a check for Tk 1.5 lakh.

"We have got the check for the development project and we will complete the work according to the college government body's decision," said the principal. The annual report of the parishad, however, claimed that 100 percent of the work was done and it was completed through proper bidding process.

In the year of 2015-16, the parishad allocated Tk 1 lakh for constructing a boundary wall for the Bishnapur Kali Mandir of Santhia upazila of Pabna.

The parishad in its annual report claimed that the work was done.

Contacted, secretary of the temple Ranjir Kumar claimed that they only got a check for Tk 30,000 a year ago.

"We spent Tk 2 lakh for the wall collecting Tk 1.7 lakh from locals," Ranjit Kumar said, adding that he did not know about the allotment of Tk 1 lakh.

According to the progress report of the development projects, the zila parishad allocated Tk 2 lakh for Sonatola High School's development in Santhia upazila and the same amount to Monjur Kadir Mohila College in Bera upazila in 2015-16.

No work was done in the institutions but official documents say the work was complete.

Talking to The Daily Star, Golam Mousa, headmaster of the school, and Mostafizur Rahman, principal of the college, said they only got information about the allocation a few weeks ago but were yet to get any money.