

REDUCING POLLUTION

Plastic bottle house holds promises

S DILIP ROY, LALMONIRHAT

A house being built with discarded plastic bottles in the northern border district of Lalmonirhat might be the first of its kind in the country.

Packed with sand and bound with mortar, the bottles lie on their sides, one on top of the other, their round and square bottoms creating colourful patterns on the exterior while the caps dot the interior.

Curious people from nearby areas are crowding Nawdabash village of Chadrapur union every day to catch a glimpse of the visual spectacle.

"It is a wonder...We feel proud to have the country's first environment-friendly house made of plastic bottles here," said 75-year-old Yakub Ali, a resident of the village which is home to some 50 families.

Jalal Uddin, one of the project's four masons with 25 years of experience behind him, said he had never used such an unconventional construction material.

The couple building the house quit teaching environmental science at Shaikh Burhanuddin Post Graduate

College early this year.

In their early 30s, they left Dhaka with their two children Rafidul Alam, 6, and Asfidul Alam, 1, for a habitat sans pollution.

Rashedul Islam said the four-decimal land he inherited in Kaliganj upazila, some 350 kilometres away



Rashedul Islam Asma Khatun

from the capital, seemed ideal for realising his wife Asma Khatun's environmentally-friendly idea of recycling bottles.

Around 80,000 one-litre, half-litre and 250-millilitre bottles have been used till date in the construction, which began two and a half months ago, all of which were sourced from scrap collectors for Tk 60,000, he said.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1



Using plastic bottles to build a house! A couple in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila are doing just that. They are building a house with discarded plastic bottles. The bottles are packed with sand first to make the building blocks and put in place with mortar. The couple claim the house is bullet-proof and eco-friendly and the first of its kind in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STAR

Vision 2030 is nothing but a joke

FROM PAGE 1

imitate, but can't innovate," the minister said.

Some leaders of the AL-led 14-party alliance echoed the views of Quader, saying that there was "nothing new" in Khaleda's plan.

However, some civil society members hailed the BNP's plan saying it contained a lot of great ideas in many ways reflecting public expectations. They said it would be good for the nation if the BNP can implement the vision.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of Workers Party, a component of the AL-

led alliance government, termed the "Vision 2030" "fool's paradise".

"Khaleda made some pledges which she didn't meet in the past and not even during her tenure in power," he said.

Shirin Akter, general secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), another component of the alliance government, said she found nothing new in Khaleda's "Vision 2030". She said what Khaleda has mentioned is already in discussion in the political arena.

"Khaleda Zia will have to apologise to the countrymen for her previous

misdeeds and cut relations with war criminals. Only then people would listen to her words. People won't trust her until she has done so," Shirin added.

Talking to The Daily Star, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder said Khaleda's vision seemed good.

"I will welcome the BNP if it sets off on a new journey by getting over with its past," he said, adding that the BNP failed to ensure good governance during its previous tenures in power.

All other political parties also failed to do so during their tenures in power,

said Majumder.

Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the "Vision 2030" contained a lot of great ideas in many ways reflecting public expectations.

"Hence it deserves to be closely looked into. On the other hand, what has been presented is a hugely ambitious wish-list, many items of which are directly antithetical to the party's ideological orientation and track record of political and governance performance."

He, however, said even if the party is

granted the benefit of doubt, question may be raised if the BNP itself believes the package to be achievable, and consistent with what the party is known to stand for and aspire to.

It would nevertheless be interesting to watch if and when the party comes up with any genuine strategic plan to achieve the lofty ideas, said the TIB executive director.

"If the party doesn't follow up with a concrete road map pretty soon to mobilise its own organisational reform and leadership capacity to be able to implement the noble ideas, the package may well be

forgotten," Iftekharuzzaman told The Daily Star.

Echoing the views of Ali Imam Majumder, former election commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Shakhawat Hussain said he would welcome the BNP if it starts a journey in line with the "Vision 2030".

"Every political party will have to cope with the time and I think the BNP came up with its vision to meet the demand and to look forward. But the party's future position will determine whether it would implement the vision," he told this correspondent.

Difficult, but not impossible

FROM PAGE 1

constitutional changes brought by the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government.

The party also promised to put a stop to political interference in law enforcement agencies and take up reform programmes for the police and public administration.

It also pledged to appoint ombudsmen, allow opposition lawmakers to head some important parliamentary bodies, and take measures to stop extra-judicial killings.

Formation of a select committee and supreme judicial council for transparent appointment of Supreme Court judges, "freeing lower courts from government control", introduction of jury system in lower courts and repeal of all black laws, including the Special Powers Act, are among the proposals.

"Implementation of our vision is difficult but not impossible," said Khaleda.

Many of the BNP's proposals are not new.

In the last 26 years since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991, the two major political parties -- the AL and the BNP -- had promised many of those before national elections.

But the two parties couldn't fully deliver on their electoral pledges after they came to power.

Yesterday, Khaleda alleged that people have been dispossessed of state power they had attained through the Liberation War.

She said her party is committed to upholding the national interest and building a liberal democratic society where freedom of expression and the rights of citizens are protected.

The BNP doesn't believe in confining people's power to the Election Day alone. It wants to be true to the hopes and aspirations of the people, she said.

"The BNP wants to nurture a politi-



cal culture that will transform Bangladesh into a 'Rainbow Nation'.

"The party wants to combine 3 Cs -- 'Good policy', 'Good governance', and 'Good administration'," she added.

BALANCE OF POWER

The BNP chief proposed amending the constitution to curb the PM's powers. The current provisions regarding the PM's power were restored in 1991 when Khaleda was the PM. She became premier thrice since then.

Khaleda now says the existing constitutional provisions vest all executive powers of the republic in the hands of the PM, and that this system is completely inconsistent with the recognised form of the parliamentary system.

"People's recent experience made them realise that the prime minister's monolithic executive authority has created an authoritarian government with a parliamentary facade," she noted.

In order to bring an end to this, the executive powers of the republic will have to be balanced through an appro-

appropriate constitutional amendment, added the BNP chief.

UPPER CHAMBER OF JS?

On the introduction of a bicameral parliament, Khaleda said it would be examined whether upper house of the Jatiya Sangsad may be introduced keeping intact its existing unitary character and the structure of the constitution.

Some "undemocratic" articles and sections were incorporated in the constitution such as the system of holding JS election keeping the erstwhile parliament alive. And the power of impeaching judges of higher judiciary was vested in the JS, she added.

"The BNP will review these controversial and undemocratic articles and sections, and bring necessary reforms to the constitution."

She pledged that the party will restore the provision of referendum in the constitution to "reinstate people's democratic rights".

The referendum system was introduced by former president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman. But the AL

'VISION 2030'
KEY POINTS

- Review of constitutional changes made during the AL rule
- Restoration of referendum system
- Opposition MPs to head some important JS bodies
- Ombudsman will be appointed
- No compromise over corruption
- Special Powers Act 1974 & all black laws to be repealed
- Extra-judicial killings will be stopped
- No political interference in law enforcement agencies
- Reform programmes for police and public admin
- Select Committee & Supreme Judicial Council for appointing SC judges
- No govt control over lower courts
- Election to all students' unions in public universities
- Local govt to be strengthened
- Making Bangladesh a high middle-income country by 2030
- Taking per capita income to \$5,000
- Attaining double-digit annual growth
- Examination of the plan to introduce two-chamber JS

government didn't retain the system when it amended the constitution in 2011.

The BNP also pledged to turn parliament into the centre of all national issues and discard the controversial "winner-takes-all policy".

The chairmanship of Public Accounts Committee and Public Undertakings Committee would be offered to the members of the opposition. To strengthen parliamentary activities, encouragement would be given to form caucuses with inclusion of the back-benchers from the opposition and the treasury bench.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The party has also focused on ways to ensure democracy, good governance and economic transparency in the country.

If voted to power, the party would make sure that all constitutional and statutory bodies are rid of partisan men.

"The BNP will ensure effectiveness of the state administrative machinery, the police and other relevant national institutions by giving due recognition to honesty, efficiency, merit, capability, patriotism and judiciousness," stated Khaleda.

The party would see to it that the judiciary, public administration and the police enjoy the freedom to discharge their responsibilities.

"The BNP will not make any compromise over corruption. The office and position of the ombudsman will be created as per the constitution to ensure administrative accountability and transparency."

Khaleda said a culture of impunity prevails in the country. "Public administration, the judiciary and the police have to be reformed. These institutions should be made transparent, efficient, modern, and updated."

She further said an "appropriate" Civil Service Act will be enacted in the light of the constitution.

If the BNP comes to power, it would repeal all black laws, including the Special Powers Act 1974, and bring an end to extra-judicial killings. All sorts of undesirable political interference in law enforcement agencies would be stopped, she mentioned.

Khaleda also put stress on strengthening the local government system, and said an independent commission would be formed with the authority to disburse funds on the basis of definite policies.

ON THE JUDICIARY

The BNP chairperson alleged that there is no transparency in the process of

appointing judges.

"In order to ensure competence, merit and transparent process in the appointment of judges of the higher courts in the light of the constitution, a law will be enacted laying down the competence and standard through a Select Committee and Supreme Judicial Council."

Lower courts would be "freed from the control of the executives" and a separate secretariat under the Supreme Court would control them. Jury system would be re-introduced in lower judiciary on a pilot basis to make the judicial process transparent, speedy and acceptable, she said.

The BNP chief also pledged that a high-level judicial commission would be formed to reform the existing justice system.

FREEDOM OF PRESS

Khaleda said the BNP always welcomes constructive criticism.

The party would constitute a commission headed by a former SC judge. Renowned educationists, eminent citizens, IT specialists and veteran journalists would be made its members.

A policy for the print, electronic, and online media -- acceptable to all -- would be adopted on the basis of the commission's report, she said.

The controversial Section-57 of the ICT Act would be repealed, she stated.

Khaleda also made public her party's plans regarding the defence, foreign policy, terrorism, education, health, sports, culture, agriculture, workers welfare, health, youths, women and children, climate change, power and energy, tourism and other issues.

BNP senior leaders, diplomats from different foreign missions in Dhaka and distinguished personalities were present at the press conference which began at 4:50pm at the jam-packed ballroom of Hotel Westin.

It took the BNP chief two hours to read out "Vision 2030".

A simple call can save you

FROM PAGE 1

Transmission and Distribution Company Limited reached the spot and fixed the problem.

"It seems that a simple phone call saved us from a big disaster. Gas was leaking and a stroke of a match could have been fatal," said Shovon, a third-year student of Kabi Nazrul Government College.

Every day, hundreds of people like Tasnima and Shovon call the three digit number and get free services from the national help desk, an initiative launched on November 10 last year with an aim to ensure emergency police, fire brigade and ambulance services to those in need.

The ICT Division has also developed a website and a mobile application under the Tk 6.50 crore project to ensure that the emergency services are available digitally through the call centre.

Such short code services were introduced in the UK in 1937 and in the USA in 1968.

Contacted, Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, said, "We have developed this service to serve citizens and reduce their hassle."

He said his ministry was planning to extend the project for two more years from the next fiscal year.

The call centre, which has 70 agents, is at Kaliakoir Hi-Tech Park in Gazipur. Its main function is to connect the call-

ers to the respective agencies they need.

ICT-related non-governmental organisations DNet and MCC Limited are operating the help desk, which has the capacity of handling 120 calls at a time.

Ashraf Abir, chief executive officer of MCC Limited, said they were very hopeful about the initiative. "With this initiative, accountability can be ensured as all the voice calls are recorded," he said.

Since the beginning of its journey, the desk has received more than 24.31 lakh calls. Of them, 15.82 lakh were valid calls, according to call centre officials.

Of the valid calls, 13,105 came for

emergency fire services, 23,054 for emergency police services, and 17,461 for ambulance services. The remaining callers inquired about general information.

The officials said the call centre received around eight lakh calls in just two months. But a big number of the calls were "unnecessary".

"The pressure is huge and we are getting around 25,000 calls in a week day now. A few months ago, the number was just a few thousand," said Mehdi Hasan, manager of the call centre.

The call centre agents were facing a serious pressure as on an average one of them was picking up 700 to 800 calls every day, he added.

But there are other challenges too. The help desk has received around 7.95 lakh prank calls. Frustrated, the authorities have started blocking those who make such calls.

"We get most of the calls from 3:00pm to 10:00pm and if prank calls keep the network busy, a person who is in real need might be deprived of the service and find himself in serious trouble," Mehdi said.

There have been 3.62 lakh unsuccessful calls as well.

Power outages and security concerns at the centre also can be considered as challenges.

In the last three months, the help desk was out of power connection for

about 100 hours, said a call centre agent, requesting anonymity.

Almost half of the total calls came from Dhaka.

The authorities also said the help desk's mobile application has been downloaded 8,547 times so far.

In a meeting with the ICT Division, Prime Minister's ICT Affairs Adviser Sajeb Wazed Joy recently directed it to give this service a permanent shape, said an official of the division.

Contacted, another official said the government was considering the first phase of the service as "study time" and taking reports on it to introduce new services in a bid to make the existing services even better.