

Why we need an effective zila parishad system



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In Bangladesh, the functionality of zila parishad, or district council, within the local government structure has been under question for some time. As outlined in the Local Government Ordinance, 1976, the zila parishad used to have 97 functions, divided into mandatory and optional categories. It was also tasked with coordinating the activities of local entities such as police stations, unions, and municipalities. However, the Local Government (Zila Parishad) Act, 1988 reduced the number of functions to 12 mandatory and 69 optional. In practice, these functions have not been effectively implemented. With the advent of the upazila parishad, the rise in the number of municipalities, and the strengthening of the union parishad, the zila parishad's direct involvement in development work has diminished considerably. The challenge, therefore, now lies in reviving this parishad, not by narrowing its scope but by redefining its role and finding new areas where it can be

of upazila parishad, union parishad, and municipalities. It would be counterproductive and ultimately unfeasible to restrict these local councils' work by over-involvement from the zila parishad. For this reason, many argue that re-establishing the zila parishad as a local government institution is not the solution. However, abolishing it without proper strengthening would be a regrettable decision as well.

To transform the zila parishad into a democratic, participatory, and accountable institution, we must adopt the electoral changes suggested by the Local Government Reform Commission. At present, only elected representatives from the upazila, municipality, and union parishad within a zila vote in the zila parishad election. If a city corporation exists within a district, its elected representatives also have the right to vote. The commission's proposal suggests direct voting for zila parishad members. In this new system, upazilas will be divided

The commission has also proposed that elections for all local government institutions in a given area should take place on the same day. This change aims to reduce election costs and streamline the process. Elections would be staggered across different areas of the country but held on the same day within each locality. For instance, voters would simultaneously elect members of the zila parishad, upazila parishad, and union

The zila parishad's role would be to coordinate these plans, ensure technical support, and monitor progress. The district plan would include critical infrastructure projects such as the construction and maintenance of inter-upazila roads, educational buildings, and water control structures, ensuring their proper implementation. The zila parishad would also supervise the functioning of secondary

incorporated into the zila parishad's fund. With the collaboration of relevant departments, the zila parishad would draw up a comprehensive development plan that aligns with the available budget. This would offer a transparent overview of government spending at the district level, ensuring better financial management and accountability. Officials from various ministries would continue to serve under their respective departments, but their work would be coordinated under the zila parishad's direction. The chairman would be responsible for preparing the annual activity report of all heads of departments.

Additionally, while other departments may continue operating under their own ministries, they must submit their plans and projects to the zila parishad, ensuring these align with the broader district development strategy. The zila parishad would be tasked with reviewing the feasibility, quality, and progress of these projects, as well as coordinating inter-agency efforts.

To ensure efficient coordination and planning, the zila parishad would establish a dedicated planning unit. This unit, headed by the chief executive of the zila parishad, would consist of the district planner, the district statistical officer, and representatives from the Ministry of Planning and the Department of Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation. Officers from these departments would be deputed to the district level to strengthen the unit's capacity.

While not all functions can be transferred to the zila parishad, those that remain under the control of the government would be classified as reserved subjects. However, the government will formulate a general rule for coordinating development plans, reviewing activities, and other matters related to the reserved subjects. Under this rule, the district-level officers for all reserved subjects will coordinate their activities with the zila parishad. The full management of the government departments transferred to the zila parishad will be vested in the zila parishad.

Political will is essential to implement the reform proposals put forward by the Local Government Reform Commission. By modifying the electoral system, planning, and functioning of the zila parishads, we can aspire to create a truly democratic, effective, and accountable local government system in Bangladesh.



FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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parishad or municipality. In areas with a city corporation, voters should also select ward councillors alongside zila parishad members.

The 1997 Local Government Commission report suggested limiting zila parishad activities to just nine areas, rendering the previous system of mandatory and optional functions ineffective. Under the new reforms, the zila parishad could follow a model similar to that of the upazila parishad, with government activities categorised as transferred or reserved. The reform proposals also advocate for the creation of a comprehensive district development plan that integrates projects from local councils, government departments, and NGOs, reducing duplication and inefficiency.

schools and colleges within its jurisdiction, establish governance councils in educational institutions, and improve quality control in public health services.

The zila parishad should also review law and order in the region, working with the police to address security concerns. It would contribute to the creation of a conducive environment for industrial and commercial growth, while fostering development in education, culture, and sports. Furthermore, the zila parishad would monitor the work of various government ministries at the district level, providing feedback and suggesting improvements where necessary.

The revenue and service budgets for all transferred departments should be

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of use. Rather than directly implementing projects, the zila parishad can be successful if it focuses on coordination and oversight. This includes ensuring accountability, coordinating the activities of government departments, and supporting the work

into three to five wards, with larger upazilas having five. For example, in a zila with 10 upazilas, the zila parishad will have a minimum of 30 directly elected members, who will then vote to elect the chairman of the zila parishad. Only elected members will be eligible to run for the chairmanship.

KHILKHET EVICTION

What is illegal and what is just?



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The images that recently emerged from Khilkhet, Dhaka have been stark and unsettling: broken concrete walls, twisted tin roofs, and uprooted bamboo poles lying scattered under the newly built elevated expressway. In a matter of hours, what had become a familiar sight for locals—a cluster of shops, a string of semi-permanent offices of political parties, and a small, makeshift Durga Puja mandap—was reduced to debris by excavators dispatched under a drive to clear “illegal establishments” from Bangladesh Railway's land.

At the site, about half a kilometre from Khilkhet rail gate to the playground before the entrance of Purbachal 300-Foot Road, the railway authorities carried out their eviction campaign claiming that none of these structures were authorised. That claim, in a strictly legal sense, appears accurate. Whatever their purpose—commerce, politics, or worship—these establishments did not have a legal right to occupy public land. In the eyes of the state, the law does not distinguish between a shop, a party office, or a religious establishment if none possesses valid approvals. And in principle, this is not an unreasonable position. The law must be neutral and uniformly enforced. If the government selectively tolerates certain illegal encroachments because of their political or religious affiliations, it sets a dangerous precedent where everyone claims exceptional status and public land is gradually usurped by private interests.

Yet, the principle of legality alone does not account for the complexities and sensitivities of our

society. In Bangladesh, communal tensions have sometimes led to violence. When the demolition of a temporary place of worship occurs, the optics of the state's action become more fraught with significance. And when religious symbols are demolished, no matter how temporary or unauthorised, the emotional trauma inflicted on the community may outweigh the material damage.

The authorities argue that the

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eviction drive was routine, that they acted equally against all illegal structures, and that even verbal notifications were issued before enforcement. The problem lies not in the assertion that illegal is illegal, but in how that principle is applied in practice and communicated to the public. The same law that empowers the government to reclaim public land also obliges it to protect religious harmony. If eviction is implemented in a way that could even be made to appear to validate communalism, even inadvertently, it risks sowing deeper divisions. And if the authorities are unable to distinguish between a business that sells tea and a pavilion used for worship, then they fail in their obligation to balance enforcement with social cohesion.

One cannot ignore that this incident did not occur in a vacuum. Bangladesh has, in recent years, witnessed some communal tensions. Reports of attacks on the homes of some communities have left deep scars in the national consciousness. Against that backdrop, the demolition of a religious structure—temporary or not—assumes a gravity that a purely legalistic reasoning cannot dilute. That gravity was evident in the reaction of the Bangladesh Pujja Udjapan Parishad and the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, both of which expressed outrage and demanded accountability. Meanwhile, the government reiterated the country's commitment to equality and inclusion.

For many ordinary Bangladeshis

who are neither religious leaders nor legal experts, the question remains: could this eviction have been conducted differently? The answer is almost certainly yes. Even if the railway authorities believed the pavilion was an unauthorised structure, they could have issued a public notice and engaged with the temple committee in writing, so there was no confusion about the expectations or deadlines. They could have provided for the safe relocation of the temple materials, instead of inviting outrage on social media.

That is not to say that law should be suspended for religious structures. It is to say that when people's faith is involved, the same legal process must be carried out with more transparency, more

patience, and more tact. Whether it be a madrasa, a church, or a political party office, the same logic applies to any encroachment. How the law is enforced determines whether it earns public trust or fear. This is not only a matter of sensitivity but also of

strategic governance.

The Khilkhet incident also highlights the plight of the poor Bangladeshis. For many small vendors whose shops were demolished, this eviction is a question of survival. While the authorities insist on verbal

notification being enough, common sense suggests that when people's livelihoods are at stake, a written notice, a timeline for compliance, and arrangements for rehabilitation are not luxuries; they are obligations of a humane government.

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স্মারক নং-৩৫.০১.০৪২৮.৪০২.১৬.৪৬৬.২৫-৯৩৮
তারিখঃ ০১.০৭.২০২৫খ্রিঃ।

সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতিতে (LTM) ঠিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/লাইসেন্স নবায়ন বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, বরগুনা সড়ক বিভাগ, বরগুনা কর্তৃক পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮ এর আলোকে সড়ক ও জনপথ অধিদপ্তরের পরিচালন (সড়ক) বাজেটের আওতায় সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগের মাধ্যমে অভ্যন্তরীণ ক্রয়কার্য (NCT Works) সম্পাদনের লক্ষ্যে ২০২৫-২০২৬ অর্থবছরের জন্য ঠিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়ন করা হবে। সিপিটিইউ কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত আবেদন ফরম নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয় অথবা উপ-বিভাগীয় প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়, সড়ক উপ-বিভাগ, বরগুনা হতে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে সরবরাহ করা হবে। ১০০০.০০ (এক হাজার) টাকা অকেরতযোগ্য পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাকট/ম্যানি রিসিট এর মাধ্যমে নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সড়ক, সড়ক বিভাগ, বরগুনা এর দপ্তরে জমা প্রদান করত: আগ্রহী ব্যক্তি/প্রতিষ্ঠান নির্ধারিত আবেদনপত্র (ডকুমেন্ট) সঠিকভাবে পূরণ পূর্বক প্রয়োজনীয় কাগজপত্রাদিসহ বর্ধিত (ছক-ক) সময়ের মধ্যে বরগুনা সড়ক বিভাগে জমা প্রদান করার অনুরোধ করা হলো।

সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮ এর বিধি ৬৩ ও ৬৪ অনুসরণযোগ্য এবং তালিকাভুক্তিকরণ, দরপত্র আহ্বান/কাজ প্রদানের নিশ্চয়তা বিধান করে না।

উল্লেখ্য যে, ইতিপূর্বে অত্র দপ্তরে তালিকাভুক্তি ঠিকাদারগণ ২০২৫-২০২৬ অর্থ বছরে লাইসেন্স নবায়ন ফি নিম্নের ছক-খ অনুযায়ী অত্র দপ্তরের হিসাব শাখায় মানি রশিদের মাধ্যমে জমা পূর্বক লাইসেন্স নবায়ন করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

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