

Utility services bills

PARC proposes to realise arrears

Staff Correspondent

Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) has recommended the government to take necessary measures to realise all out standing bills by issuing arrear bills of electricity, water, gas and telephone that remained unpaid for more than three years, by July 2000. In the event of failure to issue the bills by the organisations, within the stipulated time, all arrears would be declared lapsed to end public sufferings, sources said.

In its 21st recommendation, the commission categorically proposed that under the existing Limitation Law of the country, all domestic utility bills including electricity, gas, telephone and water that remained outstanding for more than last three years, would be declared lapsed. According to the proposal, which was submitted to the Prime Minister office on July 15, the authorities would not be allowed to charge those unpaid bills from the domestic consumers.

A meeting, presided over by PARC chairman, was held at premises of the commission at the end of last month. The meeting was participated by the Chairman of National Board of Revenue (NBR), and the high officials from the ministries of Local Government and Rural Development, Energy and Mineral Resources, Post and Telecommunication. Most of the participants accepted

the proposal taking into account the huge public sufferings over the years mainly due to the negligence of some employees and officers of the concerned organisations.

However, sources said, a high official from Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB) opposed the proposal saying that the implementation of such recommendation would deprive the government of a huge amount of revenue.

Moreover, he said that the service organisations would need a strong and efficient manpower along with modern and developed

billing system to implement the proposal constituted by the commission.

Expressing deep concern over the recent activities of the authorities the recommendation said that these utility service organisations were frequently imposing time barred old bills upon the consumers which were creating a huge problem for the end users.

It would be impossible to maintain all the receipts of electricity, telephone, gas and water bills over the months and years on

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the part of the consumers, the recommendation said.

It also said that sometimes the authorities did not issue any bill to the consumers over the months, putting blame on them as defaulters for their unrealised bills.

Moreover, the commission also observed that due to this reason, the domestic consumers fall victim to disconnection drive, and are harassed socially.

In order to avoid such harassment to consumers the commission proposed that the authorities could claim their unrealised bills within a certain period of time instead of claiming it after several years.

The commission proposed some conditions in case of implementation of the recommendation. According to the conditions, all types of domestic bills with legal complexities and self-assessed bills, where the consumers adopted unfair means in preparing the bills, should be excluded from the recommendations.