

Trained women arbiters settle disputes successfully

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When Nazma, an 18-year-old housewife, approached the village arbitration to settle her family dispute over dowry, the arbiters did not allow her to say anything. They just wanted to listen to her husband.

But a woman shalishkar (arbiter), who had received training on arbitration, came to her aid. Nazma finally described the agonising ordeals she

went through after her marriage as her father could not pay dowry. Her story helped the arbiters work out a peaceful solution to the dowry dispute.

"The chairman and elderly people of the village, who had no training, generally conduct the arbitration. And most of the time women are deprived of justice and the powerful people go unpunished," said Monwara Khatun Minu, a Shalishkar of Nandailapur union in Kushtia.

"But the training under a Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) project styled 'Gender, Knowledge, Networking and Human Rights Intervention in Bangladesh' has helped us conduct the arbitration neutrally and successfully," she said a discussion at Cirdap auditorium yesterday.

BLAST initiated the four-year project in 2003 to enhance knowledge and raise awareness about gender

equality and women's rights at the household and community levels.

At the discussion on 'Gender and Human Rights Intervention in Rural Community' organised by BLAST, the speakers highlighted the achievements, challenges and future plans with regard to the project.

Though women arbiters have been working efficiently to settle disputes in 12 districts, they are facing various obstacles, said Mirza M Hasan, team leader of BLAST.

"Exploitation have been going on across the country since long. As the people are not aware of their rights, they cannot understand how their rights are being violated," said Justice Naimuddin Ahmed, chairperson of BLAST.

The media can play an important role in raising awareness and the media persons can help the rights organisations work better by digging out the facts, he said.

Executive Director of BLAST Taslimur Rahman presided over the discussion while Senior Adviser to Norwegian Embassy Zakia K Hassan and Project Coordinator Uma Chowdhury were also present at the discussion.

Janakantha editor sued

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A lawyer from BNP filed a defamation case yesterday against the editor and one of the reporters of the daily Janakantha for running a "defamatory" news item about the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on December 5.

Barrister Omar Sadat, also the son-in-law of former minister and BNP leader Shajahan Siraj, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka accusing the daily's editor Atiq Ullah Khan and its staff reporter Shanker Kumar Dey.

Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mojibul Haq recorded statement of the complainant and ordered a judicial inquiry into the matter.

In his complaint, Sadat said that the accused published a story headlined "Rab shows its true colours at Hawa Bhaban's directives," on December 5, which tarnished the image of Rab in the society. The force was formed by the immediate past government for eradicating terrorism and other crimes from different parts of the country.

On December 4, Sadat filed a criminal case against Vice-Chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud and other lawyers for vandalising the offices of attorney general and chief justice and also for creating disturbance in court proceedings on November 30.

The case was later turned into a seditious case after an investigation into the matter by a sub-inspector of Shahbagh Police Station.



Sammilita Ainjibi Samannaya Parishad stages a demonstration on the High Court premises yesterday demanding withdrawal of the cases against eminent lawyers and resignation of chief adviser, chief justice and attorney general.

SARASWATI PUJA

'Re-fix polls day'

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad requested the Election Commission, political parties and caretaker government to re-fix the election date as it coincides with Saraswati Puja, one of the major religious festivals of the Hindus, on January 23.

The parishad in a statement yesterday said the members of the Hindu community "wouldn't be able to exercise their franchise if the polling takes place on the day of Saraswati Puja".

Hemayet made OIC Director General

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin has been selected for the post of OIC Director General, official sources said.

A number of OIC member-countries were vying for the post. He got the appointment letter as director general early this month, said the sources at the Foreign Office.

"He might join his new assignment at the end of this month or after a new foreign secretary is appointed," said one source.