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Consensus, direct polls keys to involve more women in politics

By DU Correspondent

Speakers at a dialogue in the city yesterday called for a consensus among the major political parties to ensure that more women get involved in national politics.

They were of the view that nothing would be more effective in serving the purpose than arranging direct election for women in national and local elections.

The discussants also emphasised "strong and effective" role of various women organisations to mobilise public opinion in favour of the issue and create pressure on the political parties to pass a bill on it.

At a dialogue on "Political Participation of Women in Bangladesh: The Issue of Constitution", the speakers urged the ruling and opposition parties to take necessary initiatives to pass a bill so that the women can be elected directly in future.

South Asia Partnership-Bangladesh (SAP-Bangladesh) organised the dialogue in association with Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) at the BRAC Centre yesterday afternoon.

Economists, political leaders, university teachers and NGO representatives attended

the dialogue, moderated by CPD chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan.

Addressing the dialogue as chief guest, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Abdul Matin Khasru said the government was ready to accept any bill or proposal for empowerment of women either by increasing the 30 reserved seats in Jatiya Sangsad or by electing them directly.

He said the Cabinet had already approved a bill for extending 30 reserve seats for 10 more years. "The bill will be placed in the forthcoming parliament session scheduled for January," Khasru said adding if necessary the bill would be modified.

Dubbing the bill "very crucial and timely", he said either the number of reserve seat for women should be increased or steps to elect them directly be taken because they not only represent half the population of the country, but also half the voters.

The law minister however said nothing could be done in this regard if the opposition refrains from attending parliament session. He urged various women organisations to launch

vigorous campaign involving all walks of people to realise their demands.

In his concluding speech, Professor Rehman Sobhan asked the women organisations to make a concrete proposal to increase reserved seats for women or for their direct election to ensure participation of more women in national politics.

He said there should not be differences among the political leaders on this crucial political issue.

In her key-note paper, Prof. Zerina Rahman Khan of Public Administration department of Dhaka University suggested a parliamentary committee for initiating discussion among the parties in parliament on the issue and formulation of a draft proposal.

Among others, executive director of SAP-Bangladesh Syed Nurul Islam, Maleka Begum, Khushi Kabir, Dr Debopriya Bhattacharjya, Ruksana Khondaker, Shirin Akhter, Farida Rahman, Dr Meghna Guha Thakurta, BN Rasheda, Rokeya Khatun also took part at the dialogue.

President's query

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dent that in the naked eyes I did not see any scope for the EC to constitute any probe body for resolving election dispute," Chakrabarti told The Daily Star yesterday morning. "The Representation of Public Order, 1972 that deals with the ways of conducting polls suggests that the Election Tribunals are there to resolve any such disputes."

However, Chakrabarti is to meet the President again to give his final views. The law secretary had a discussion on the presidential queries with the CEC at the latter's office yesterday afternoon. During the discussion, the CEC defended his position and said that the commission would go ahead with its decision to conduct the investigation.

The President, himself a former chief justice, is worried about a possible controversy over the integrity of judicial officers — as the probe body findings are bound to dissipate either of the political quarters involved, according to press reports.

He has, perhaps, other reasons to be worried as the Constitution does not specifically say anything about the judiciary's role in the electoral process while it has clearly said what the executive should play.

The Article 126 of the Constitution says: It shall be the duty of all executive authorities to assist the Election Commission in the discharge of its functions.

The EC is however convinced that it has so far not done anything beyond its constitutional and legal jurisdiction.

CEC Mohammad Abu Hena says it is the constitutional obligation of the EC to ensure free and fair elections.

"The EC has ordered investigation into the alleged irregularities following media reports of vote rigging, reports of the professional election observer groups and specific complaints lodged with the EC by a major contender in the by-elections," the CEC said. "The incidents have created a general impression to the people that something had been wrong in some polling stations."

Under such circumstances, the EC believes that it was its responsibility to give certain "consequential orders" which it did by withdrawing one TNO, cancelling votes of certain centres and ordering a probe into the voting matters," the association said.

The Election Commission had suspended four magistrates and four presiding officers following complaints about vote irregularities in four centres in the November 15 bypolls in Tangail-8 constituency.

Meanwhile, an administrative official, preferring not to be named, said the association leaders were preparing to go to court challenging the Election Commission's actions. They have already consulted a senior lawyer.

The members of the association are also putting pressure on their leaders to decide that the administrative officials will not perform their duties in December 8 by-elections in Rajshahi, Sirajganj and Kishoreganj.

The EC also put forward a High Court observation, made by Justice Anwarul Haque Chowdhury, while giving judgement in a case — Afzal Hossain vs Chief Election Commissioner and others — in 1992.

Interpreting a relevant article (119) of the Constitution, Justice Chowdhury said: "The Election Commission has overall control in election matters and it shall be competent to correct any apparent illegality or to remove mass apprehension for the sake of fair elections."

Arguing that the EC had no power for going beyond the framework of the laws, Justice Chowdhury further said, "... but when the law is silent, not ex-

Neighbour of Rubel cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Five defence lawyers yesterday cross-examined a neighbour of Rubel in the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions' Judge's Court yesterday.

Shamim Reza Rubel, 24, a BBA student at Independent University, was picked up by a team of Detective Branch of Police near his residence on July 23 last year and was subsequently tortured to death in the custody the same day, according to CID.

Ten of the 14 charge-sheeted accused, including AC Akram and Mukuli Begum, were produced before the court yesterday. The rest — SI Nurul Islam and constables Mong She Oen, Abdul Kalam Azad and Zakir Hossain — have been absconding since the killing.

Lawyers for five arrested accused — Mukuli Begum, Inspector Aminul Islam, ASI Karim and constables — Mir Faruk and Kamru Hasen — yesterday cross-examined Abu Taher, the neighbour and also a tenant of Rubel's father, for about one and a half hours.

Lawyers for the rest six accused are likely to cross-examine Abu Taher today. Earlier on Sunday lawyers for three accused completed cross-examining Abu Taher.

Action against 4 magistrates challenged

The Bangladesh Administrative Service Association has submitted a memorandum to the government protesting the suspension of four magistrates by the Election Commission for their alleged neglect of duty during the Tangail by-election, reports UNB.

The association leaders handed over the memorandum to the Cabinet and Establishment secretaries yesterday seeking government intervention.

Sources said some 500 administrative cadre officials along with the leaders of the association met the two secretaries and challenged the suspension of the four magistrates.

"Magistrates are posted to election centres to oversee law and order, not to look after the voting matters," the association said.

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'Rash Mela' at Kuakata begins

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Nov 22: The 3-day 'Rash Mela', a religious festival of the Hindu community, began here today.

The main attraction of the festival is the traditional gathering at Kuakata, a well-known sea resort in Patuakhali in the southern region of the country.

Meanwhile, thousands of people have already gathered at Kuakata or sailed for Dublar Char in the Bay near the Sundarbans.

The festival that takes place during the full moon is being observed at Kuakata and Dublar Char for the last 300 years.

Osmany Udyan

From page 1

time prevented journalists from using the link road from Abdul Ghani Road to the park. A policeman said he received orders yesterday from higher authorities not to allow anyone use the road. Asked how people other than journalists are walking down the road, he asked newsmen to leave without further question or else face his wrath.

When journalists tried to take a picture of an office of the Ward number 56 Awami League near the main entrance of the park some, people rushed down the place and blocked ordered them not to take pictures.

The new DCC possession starts from the AL office.

DCC has taken over parts of the shaded park with trees to construct a 'hawker's market', after its effort last year was torpedoed by an order from the prime minister that said there should not be any markets or construction on open spaces in the city.

Jewel murder

From page 1

running to avoid harassment. Havildar Bashar and constable Ajmir chased Jewel, who fell into the sewer canal near an under construction box culvert at South Kamalpur.

Jewel cried out for help, but the two policemen did not help him. They watched as he drowned.

The incident drew some local people, who urged the policemen to rescue Jewel. But instead, the two policemen threatened to arrest them, Nuruddin Sohel alleged in his petition.

20 arrested in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Nov 22: Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) today arrested 20 people on various charges from different areas of the city, reports UNB.

CMP detectives also recovered saris and lungis worth about Tk 20 lakh from Miyanagar in the city. These were found in an abandoned

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Speaker at a discussion meeting in the city yesterday called upon all to work together to eliminate gender disparity for development of the country.

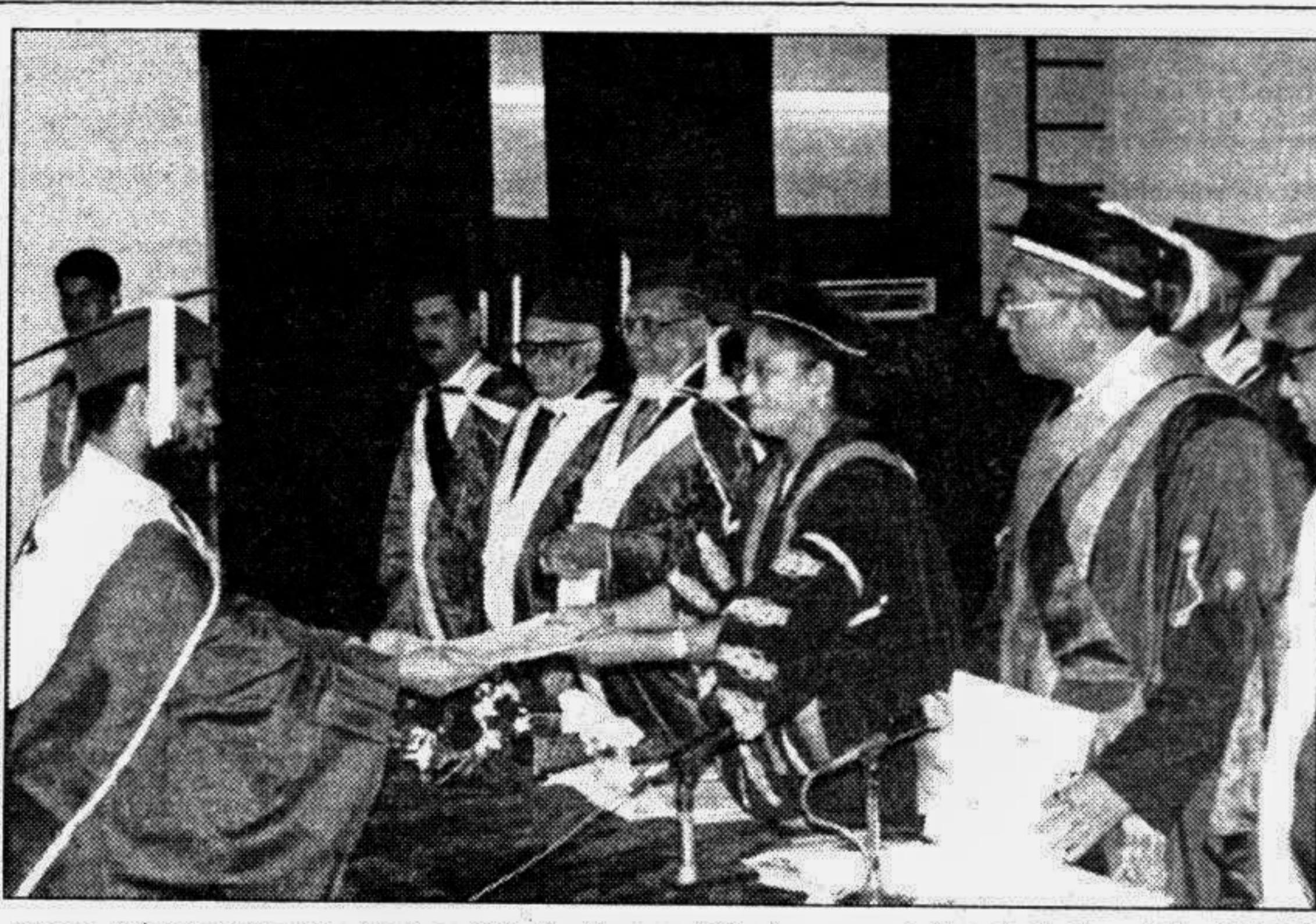
The discussion on "External Planning Consultation on the World Bank's Gender Strategy for Bangladesh" was organised by World Bank and held at the CIRDAP auditorium.

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Temple said, WB supported Integrated Nutrition Programme has achieved significant success in reducing malnutrition among women and children. Following its success, the government is now preparing a National Nutrition Program to cover the entire country, he noted.

Temple emphasised the need



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina distributing certificates among the students of the Islamic Institute of Technology (IIT) at the convocation ceremony '99 in Gazipur yesterday.

— PID photo

Cop allegedly snatches money, kills victim

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 22: A young man was shot dead allegedly by police when he tried to get back the money the policemen had snatched from him at Kanaiyia village here today.

Angry villagers detained the policemen — a havildar and four constables — from Barsala police outpost on Sylhet Osmany International Airport road.

According to villagers, the policemen went to Kanaiyia, some 20 kilometres off the outpost at about 9 am and snatched away cash money worth Tk 1.05 lakh from Samar Ali, 30, son of Masodder Ali of Mollarganj village under Kandigaon union of Sylhet Kotwali thana.

Samar along with his brother was going to the house of a relative at Sujatpur under the same union.

The two along with other villagers seized at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

Customs authorities at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday seized smuggled ampoules worth Tk 6 lakh from a passenger who came by a Saudia flight from Riyadh.

The seized ampoules includes Actrapid HM and Natural insulin injection.

11 independent candidates demand cancellation of Tangail by-polls

Charging the ruling party and government officials with widespread rigging, 11 independent candidates demanded immediate cancellation of the Tangail by-election, reports UNB.

Otherwise, they warned, they would launch a movement and finally go to the courts.

They were holding a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

In a written statement they described how the government and its machinery allegedly influenced the election process.

Their allegations are:

Appointment of Molah Waheeduzzaman, an official known as personally loyal to Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, deputy commissioner to make him the returning officer.

Use of the office of additional district magistrate, a relative of Awami League MP Mirza Azam, as the election office of the ruling party candidate. Issuance of polling agent cards only to ruling party candidates.

Engaging Awami League activists from across the country as ansar and VDP by providing them with uniforms to conduct massive rigging. Bringing ministers and MPs who are experts in rigging and vote dacoity in the area.

They said they took part in the by-poll to prove that no elections under this government would be free, fair and impartial.

"Now it has been proved a farcical election," their joint statement said.

The press conference was called by 19 independent candidates. Of them, A Enayet, M Ibrahim, M Shahidur Rahman Khan, M A Gafur Biro Protik, M Fazlul Haq Sikder, M Nurul Islam, S M Amjad Hossain, M A Mottaleb, Akbar Siddiqui, Abdul Halim and Ansar Ali were present.