

Bi-cameral parliament needed to ensure good governance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a workshop yesterday underscored the need for bi-cameral parliament to ensure good governance in the country and suggested that the tenure of parliament should be reduced.

Zakeria Shirazi, Joint Editor of the Daily Independent, in his keynote paper, said a sound political system obviously is a prerequisite for good governance. Democracy may not be an ideal system of government, it has many limitations, he added.

He observed that the five-year tenure of parliament is too long.

"This long tenure tends to make the ruling party irresponsible and the opposition parties desperate," Shirazi said.

He said if general election is held at shorter intervals, political activities will be more parliament-centred and election-oriented and the tendency to settle matters in the streets will decline.

Organised by the Daily Independent, the workshop on 'Governance in Bangladesh' was held at CIDRAP auditorium with the Editor of the daily Mahabul Alam in the chair.

Extending support to the bi-cameral system, Abu Hena MP suggested abolishing highly centralised bureaucracy and transferring all ministries in respective buildings outside the secretariat.

He called upon the government officials to change the colonial mindset and consider themselves as

servants of the people.

Former cabinet secretary Mujibul Haq said the bi-cameral parliamentary system would check the highly partisan activities of any ruling party.

Dr. S.A. Samad, Principal Secretary of the Prime Minister's office, dwelt on the present situation in governance and the civil service and the reform process.

Describing good governance as a means to protect people's right, Dr. Samad said, "Massive reform is not needed for good governance since it can be achieved through enforcing the existing laws."

Former advisor of caretaker government Kazi Fazlur Rahman favoured strict enforcement of the existing laws instead of enacting new ones.

"We have many good laws including some colonial ones. Those should be enforced first. Then we can think about enactment of new laws or amending the Constitution," he said.

Former IGP Abdul Khatiq suggested forming a constitutional commission in place of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption with a respected and honest person as its head.

Monowarul Islam, Vice-Chancellor of East West University, Prof. Mohabbat Khan, PSC Member, Dr. Shawkat Ali, former Secretary, M.A. Samad, former Secretary, Shamsul Haq, former Chairman of Administrative Reform Commission, and Major General (ret) Mainul Hossain Chowdhury also spoke at the workshop.

Continuation of reserved seats for women in JS stressed

UNB, Dhaka

Speakers at a roundtable have stressed on increasing the number of women candidates by each political party with continuation of the reserved seats for women in parliament by direct voting for another 10 years.

There has been a consensus by the women organisations on the continuation of reserved seat system for another 10 years, but it should be done by direct election, they added.

The roundtable titled "Women in Politics: Bangladesh Perspective" was organised by Khan Foundation in cooperation with the American Centre at Democracy auditorium yesterday.

Linda Moscarella, a renowned grassroots community activist and civil society change agent from USA, was present as guest speaker in the

discussion chaired by Executive Director Khan Foundation Rokhsana Khondker.

Among others, Abul Kalam Azad MP, BNP leaders Khurshid Jahan Haq MP and Selima Rahman, Union Parishad Member of Patuakhali Promila Rani Mondol, Sita Chakrabarty of the American Centre, Farah Kabir of British Council and Taleya Rahman of Democracy Watch spoke.

Rejecting the issue of reserved seat, Khurshid Jahan Haq of BNP said women can now compete equally with men.

"If they can be doctors and engineers by reading the same books, why not the parliamentarians," she added.

Echoing the same, Selima Rahman of the same party also demanded the direct election for women candidates and abolition of the reserved seat system.

The guest speaker Linda shared her experiences on the electoral systems of different countries, including USA, Africa, Sweden, Norway, and said all over the world women faced the same problems in realising the women empowerment in the parliament.

Giving the example of South Africa where African National Congress nominates 50 per cent women candidates in the election, she suggested following the example.

Ruling party lawmaker Abul Kalam Azad pointed to the women rights ensured in the constitution but lamented: We could not still come to the right decision to achieve the women rights in politics.

He said the view towards women is changing gradually in our society and called upon the women organisations to be united to realise their political rights.

Inqilab reporter beaten up at Minto Road

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of unknown youths mugged a reporter of the Daily Inqilab near the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament yesterday evening.

Witnesses said M Abdullah, a senior reporter of the daily, came under attack outside the main gate of 29 Minto Road at about 8 pm while he was on his way to his office after covering the meeting of the Central Liaison Committee and press briefing.

Plainclothes policemen at the gate rescued Abdullah, but the attackers managed to escape.

The victim told The Daily Star that those who assaulted him shouted at him saying "beat the Inqilab man".

Mahmud Ali

FROM PAGE 1

It said a comprehensive internal inquiry by the BBC World Service into an interview by him that appeared in the daily Janakantha in February resulted in his removal.

"The inquiry found no evidence to back up the inferences which some readers may have drawn from the article but judged that his conduct during the interview amounted to a failure of editorial judgement that compromises effective stewardship of the Bengali section," it said.

The BBC stresses that the objectivity of his broadcast work has not been brought into question.

However, his comments in the interview on the politics of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi Prime Minister were not those expected of a section head of a BBC World Service language section.

The three Senior Producers of the section will, each in turn, be Acting Head of the Bengali Section until a permanent head is appointed, said the BBC World Service release.

Youths passing 'critical, adverse' time: President

UNB, Dhaka

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday noted with concern that youths are passing a "critical and adverse time" when some of them are spoiling their academic career through dabbling in party politics.

"As a result," he said, "the total situation in society, including the educational campus, is gradually taking a frustrating turn."

The President made the observations while speaking as chief guest at President's Scout and President's Rover Scout Award-giving ceremony at Banghaban yesterday.

President Shahabuddin said no nation, government and people expect such a degradation from the future generation of the country.

The President said he had time and again emphasised freeing the educational arena from partisan politics and parochialism.

"They must be groomed for shouldering future leadership and vehemently discouraged from using arms and terrorism. Otherwise a vacuum would be created in the future leadership of the country," he said reiterating his suggestion against negative student politics.

President Shahabuddin laid

emphasis on character building of the youths through scout movement. Lauding the role of Bangladesh scouts for building the youth community as self-reliant, self-confident, patriotic and good citizens with strong moral character he called for its expansion and development keeping its standards intact.

In this context, the President mentioned that the government is financing the scouting movement for its development and expansion through 'Promotion of Scouting in Bangladesh' project.

He emphasised the need for ensuring qualitative expansion of scouting utilising the government assistance properly.

The President and Chief Scout distributed the award and certificates among 35 President's Scouts, including one Girl-in-Scout, and President's Rover Scout to 9 Rovers, including one Girl-in-Rover.

Among others, President of Bangladesh Scout Manzoor Ul Karim, Chief National Scout Commissioner and Science and Technology Secretary M Fazlur Rahman and Habibul Alam Bir Pratik addressed the award-giving ceremony.

PM accuses Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

Explaining, she said the opposition leader once rushed to the president to ask for election by May but later she termed his advice unconstitutional.

The prime minister also bitterly criticised the opposition leader for "frequently shifting" her position on the next election and making "contradictory and inconsistent" statements about the issue.

Elaborating, she said the opposition leader first wanted polls by May 31 and then asked the government to renege by March 30 leaving 61 days for the caretaker administration to go for the election, although she preferred 90 days for the voting.

Interestingly, said the prime minister, the opposition leader rejected her offer to leave office after April 17 to make way for election by April 12, which will give the caretaker regime 55 days (although according to her it is 65 days).

The PM however claimed that her plan could have given the caretaker government 80 days as she added another 15 days, the period between the dissolution of parliament and take-over by the caretaker government, to the miscalculated 65 days.

Claiming that the opposition leader had asked for polls in the monsoon, Hasina said she had accepted the former's demand and asked her to abandon destructive programmes like hartals until that time.

Denouncing frequent hartals

without any "issue", she asked the opposition leader what she was getting out of such destructive programme.

"What does she really want and where does she want to push the country?" the prime minister said, accusing the opposition leader of infringing people's fundamental rights through such action.

"Who has given her the right to make people's life miserable?" asked Hasina, adding that the opposition leader "eats and drinks" in air-conditioned room during the hartal.

However, the prime minister quipped that the recent hartals had in fact helped her government to clear all the pending files.

Hasina disclosed before the House that she wanted early general elections after coming to know of an opposition plan to create anarchy in April, right after the end of the SSC examinations.

She said she made the offer to stop the opposition from going ahead with the destructive plan that included acts of sabotage like dismantling electricity tower. But, she regretted, the opposition leader had rejected her offer and opted for violent street confrontation.

In her 70-minute speech, the prime minister highlighted her government's achievements in various sectors. She cited statistics in a bid to prove that the pace of development during her rule was much more than that of the previous BNP government.



Ainijob Oikya Parishad held a meeting at the south hall of the Supreme Court Bar Association yesterday protesting police action in Baitul Mukarram Mosque area and arrest of over 600 opposition leaders and workers.

Where the rivers run black

FROM PAGE 1

With no other option than living with this man-made hazard.

Fertility of arable lands along the rivers has dropped drastically due to pollution. Farmers fear that the vegetables they are producing by irrigation from the river water might be contaminated. Because, they say, whenever water is pumped from the rivers it produces thick white foams in the fields - a clear indication of toxicity.

The water of the Narai, Debdholai and the Balu was so clean only a few years back that the villagers even drank it, recalled Akbar Hossain, a local youth and an advisor to the Barogram Development Association.

"These rivers had so much fish that a large chunk of the capital's population could survive on it. Today the fisherman community has nothing left to make a living on," said Hossain pointing his finger at the fishermen's village nearby.

Development workers on agricultural projects in the area said that the localities along the rivers face a bleak future unless something is done immediately to tackle the pollution. The country director of The Hunger

Project, Badul Alam Majumdar, said that their activities in twelve villages along the rivers were badly hampered by extreme pollution of their waters.

According to local people, waste from the WASA sewerage flows into the Narai and Debdholai from Maghbar, Syedabad, Mughda and Manda points. From Bashabo and Madartek, the WASA drain lines are connected to the rivers. The Narai starts from the Balu in the east and joins the Debdholai at the Trimothoni area. Debdholai winds its way to the Buriganga in the south.

Most of the polluting substances pour into the rivers from the Tejaigan industrial area through the Rampura point.

Water of the three rivers has become so polluted that Idris Mia, a boatman from Balurpar village, said he could not even wash his hands in it. Idris said many other boatmen in the area had no other option to making a living.

"I make my living by ferrying passengers and agricultural goods. I do not know how else I would earn my living. Please do something to cleanse the rotten water," Idris pleaded.

Kazi Akhtar Hossain, a young non-resident Bangladeshi based in Saudi Arabia who is currently visiting his parents at Balurpar, told The Daily Star that he was alarmed at the extent of pollution of the rivers.

"In Saudi Arabia when I think about my parents and relatives I feel sorry for them because they are living in such a rotten atmosphere," Akhtar Hossain said.

Local people said they had protested against pollution several times. They even held rallies in the area urging the authorities to act quickly to stop pollution of the rivers. They said WASA officials had promised to do something as soon as possible.

WASA officials are going to hold a meeting at the WASA Bhaban on April 13 to explore possibilities of an immediate resolution to the problem.

Local people said the government should immediately set up small retention points for the wastes before discharging them into the river. They said the retention points could be set up as an immediate remedy to the problem.

Rapid assessment

FROM PAGE 12

Operation programmes has been approved by the World Bank, the sources said.

In severely affected municipalities, water samples of hand-pumped tubewells will also be tested and required manpower including NGO workers will be trained up to implement mitigation programmes, they said.

Geo-hydrologists and geo-chemists, when contacted, said the level of other metallic substances like fluoride, boron, magnesium etc. in ground water should also be tested along with arsenic.

"Excess level of fluoride has been found in ground water in some areas of Narayanganj district. Such excess level of metallic substances may be found in many areas of the country, if tested. So it will be wise to go for testing other parameters in drinking water," said a geo-hydrologist seeking anonymity.

There are 224 municipalities in the country and 100 of those have pipeline system to supply water.

Deadly violence

FROM PAGE 12

environment in which both sides can find a way forward," US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov said in a statement after meeting in Paris.

And UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who has been in contact in recent days with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, urged both sides to take "urgent steps" to quell the rising violence.

At Wednesday's security meeting, the Palestinians said Israel had pledged to take steps to ease its choking blockade of the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip, amid heightened international pressure for a halt to the raging violence that has cost more than 470 lives.

(More on page 10)

New JS definition

FROM PAGE 1

Pubali Bank Managing Director Ibrahim Khaled said there is a theoretical contradiction in the new law. On one hand, the loans will be classified and these are treated as default loans on the other," he pointed out.

"But practically speaking, the change in the law will affect 20 per cent of the current bad loan portfolio, as bad loans not covered by the amendment constitute 80 per cent of the current classified amounts."

Prime Bank Managing Director Kazi Abdul Majid said the current law may be rigid, but it is helpful as the borrowers will remain under pressure. Given the current situation in the country where hartal and other factors affect businesses, the amendments are acceptable.

However, another managing director of a NCB said the change in definition would make the NCBs that are often subjected to the directed loan suffer.

"Even if a loan is substandard or doubtful, I'll have to give fresh loans to the company and then when the fresh loans will fall bad, I'll be caught out with the whole amount old and fresh loans," he said.

"Now, I can always apply prudence and stay away from giving fresh loans to a company when its loans become substandard or doubtful. But in Bangladesh, prudence does not work and so, our prudence was supposed to be guarded by a law. In this case, the guardian angel has been abolished," he quipped.

Irregularities

FROM PAGE 1

accounts and two finance accounts of the government, to the President.

The Comptroller and Auditor General said the long-felt need of updating audit reports had been materialised and nine annual audit reports for the year 1999-2000 finalised.

"Plan for undertaking audit of selected ministries for 2000-2001 is under process," he told President Shahabuddin.

The president appreciated the Auditor General for his endeavour in preparing and submitting the audit reports on time.

Controller General, Defence Finance, Syed Sajedul Karim was also present on the occasion.

Jail killing case

FROM PAGE 12

them to hand over the bodies to relatives of the victims. Then they did so.

The complainant filed the case with Labagh thana on November 4, 1975.

He further said some of his wellwishers advised him to withdraw the case as it involved army personnel. But he refused to do so. He distributed copies of the complaint among the IG, DC, SP and others concerned.

Metropolitan PP Quamrul Islam, Special PPs Mosarraf Hossain Kajol and Sahara Khatun appeared for the state while advocates Hazi Nazrul Islam, Abul Shafiqul Islam, SM Rafiqul Islam and Mohammad Hanif represented the accused.

Ershad, Manju

FROM PAGE 1

When contacted Manju told The Daily Star that he did not yet get any formal proposal for unification. "Once such proposal is made, it will be discussed by policy makers of the party."

However, Joint Secretary General of JIP (Mizan Manju), Sadek Siddiqui, said their party will, in no way, merge with the other faction led by a "corrupt person like Ershad."

Another senior leader of Manju's JP said, "Ershad has been released from jail under a blueprint of the government. In case BNP boycotts the next general election, Ershad may play the role of a 'proxy opposition' as did ASM Rob in 1988. We can't afford to reconcile with Ershad, who changes colour every now and then."

JS session prorogued

FROM PAGE 1

Property (Return) Bill was passed in the session paving the way for return of some vested properties to the original owners or their successors.

The House also passed two other crucial bills: the Sylhet City Corporation Bill 2001 and the Barisal City Corporation Bill 2001. These will provide for upgrading the municipalities at the two divisional headquarters into city corporations.

Coinciding with the opposition-called hartals of staggering 132 hours, the 22nd session witnessed heated debates on the "issue-less" shutdown for six days in two phases.

The passing of bills apart, scrutiny reports on some other bills were placed in the House. Chairman of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Shipping Col. (ret.) Shawkat Ali placed a report on its performances in the last four years,

while Education Minister ASHK Sadique placed the annual report of the University Grant Commission.

The House also unanimously adopted a thanks motion to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Finance Minister S A M S Kibria and State Minister for Textile A K M Jahangir Hossain for their roles in handling over the ownership of nine state-run textile mills to the workers of the respective mills.

CID nabs

FROM PAGE 12

CID has got names of five persons including Shushil Dafadar who is directly involved in the murder, sources said.

Meanwhile, a plan to kill Mukul Gazi inside the Sakhira jail leaked out on Saturday. Since then he has been lodged in a cell under tight security, sources said.

Stampede at soccer match

FROM PAGE 1

Emergency services spokesman Rodney Eksteen said five people were critically injured, 20 to 30 seriously injured and 130 in a stable condition after being treated for minor injuries.

"Outside, it was chaos," said Victor Motimele, who was unable to get in. "The organisers did too much to promote this game... they forgot about our safety. Something had to happen."

Petrus Saayma, a security guard at the park, told AFP he saw a young girl squeezed between two gates.

"I tried to help her but by the time I got to her, she must have already been dead, because her body was limp," he said.

"After the game her mother made an announcement that her girl was missing. I went to the police and then to her mother who was in

tears and who came and identified the body of her daughter."

Said injured Harrieth Dlamini, a 31-year-old mother of two: "I was in my seat and the next thing we knew, people were on top of us and we were flung out of our seats."

"I have no feeling in my legs," she told the SAP news agency.

A crying 12-year-old boy with a fractured leg had lost contact with the people he arrived with.

"I came from Meadowlands (in Soweto township) by taxi," the boy told SAPA. "I don't know where the other people came with."

State broadcaster SABC, which televised the mayhem live as it covered the game, said an estimated 120,000 supporters had turned up at the 68,000-seat stadium.

It reported that too many tickets had been sold for the national league match and that as those

outside tried to push into the stadium, many were trapped against barbed wire.

The fans, who had been singing and dancing, turned silent as they watched the chaos unfold.

Scores were injured and carried on stretchers to medical helicopters. Emergency vehicles had trouble moving outside the stadium because traffic was gridlocked.

The match was halted after 35 minutes with the score locked at 1-1.

Fans were told to keep their tickets for a rematch between the Pirates, heading the premier league six days before the end of the championship, and the Chiefs, still in the running in fourth place.

Premier Soccer League chief Robin Petersen said, "Maybe we had responded earlier, the situation would have been averted. We didn't realise the magnitude of the prob-

lem."

Jabulani lali, a fan who arrived late, tried to warn security officials.

"I asked them to intervene to try and control the situation, but they ignored me," he told SAPA.

President Thabo Mbeki, who watched the drama unfold on television, appealed for calm.

"An urgent inquiry will have to be held to ensure this doesn't happen in South Africa again," he said in a statement.

Crying relatives gathered at Johannesburg Hospital, and radio broadcast the telephone number of a Johannesburg morgue so people could check if loved ones were among the dead.

In 1991, when the Chiefs and Pirates played at Orkney, south-west of Johannesburg, 40 people died and 50 were injured when their fans clashed over a disputed goal.

72-hour hartal from Apr 23

FROM PAGE 1

delays its resignation, he said.

On April 16, BNP, Jatiya Party (Nazir), Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote and some other parties will observe the "prisoners release day" through holding rallies and processions in the city and at all thana headquarters.

Component parties of the alliance will bring out a joint procession from Paltan Maidan on April 19. Khaleda Zia will lead it.

The AL government has resorted to acts of sabotage to push the country towards conflict to cling to power, Bhuiyan alleged.

Ruling party activists are responsible for the killings during hartals but they are blaming the opposition for those. There would not have been any killing had the ruling party not brought out "so-called peace processions," he said.

Resignation of the "incompetent, corrupt and fascist" government is the only way to resolve the current political crisis, he said.

Replying to a question, he said, "Rainsy season is not at all an issue. The main issue is resignation of the government. If the government resigns, a caretaker government will hold polls as per constitutional provisions. The caretaker government must get sufficient time to hold the election in a free and fair way, but the election must be held within the timeframe provided by the Constitution."

Bhuiyan said people observed

hartals spontaneously although "Awami League terrorists" and the administration made all-out efforts to foil those.

The Prime Minister continued making provocative statements and her party activists attacked leaders and activists and houses of MPs belonging to the Opposition to push the country towards a situation of confrontation.

On Wednesday night, police laid a siege to the BNP central office in the city for about six hours and arrested over 150 party leaders and activists. Even passers-by and local residents were not spared, he said.

Bhuiyan advised the government to refrain from such fascist activities and quit power immediately. He suggested that the President should dissolve parliament right now and ask the AL government to hand over power to a caretaker government.

Mannan Bhuiyan urged the opposition leaders and workers and the people to make the fresh hartal programme a success and intensify the out-governments movement.

BNP leaders Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, M Shamsul Islam and Sadeque Hossain Khoka; JP (Nazir) leaders ABM Golam Mostafa, Mostafa Jamal Haider, Saifur Rahman and Taibur Rahman; Jamaat leaders Mujibur Rahman, Abul Qader Mollah and ATM Azharul Alam (I) leaders Ahmed Abdul Qader and Maslehuddin Abu Bakar were also present at the press briefing.