

Ex-chief advisor for unbiased use of new anti-terrorism law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former chief advisor of the caretaker government Habibur Rahman has expressed the hope that the new tough laws against extortionists and oppressors of women would be properly used to curb repression on women rather than as a weapon for political harassment.

The former chief justice was speaking as chief guest at the inauguration of the 10th national conference of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad (BMP) held at the Engineers' Institute premises yesterday.

The three-day conference that began on the slogan "For Women's Human Rights, Establish a Society Free From Terrorism and Fundamentalism" is also celebrating the 32nd founding anniversary of the women's association.

"The legal provisions against oppression of women should be used to bring oppressors to book and not treated as a political weapon against different groups," Rahman said.

He said a healthy socioeconomic environment is essential for the individuality, independence and

advancement of woman.

Ayesha Khanam, general secretary of BMP, voiced her frustrations saying that women are the main victims of all kinds of oppression and repression in general. And even when the minorities are attacked, it is their women who become the attackers' first target.

On behalf of the 1,32,800 BMP members, she said women of Bangladesh want to move forward and seek assistance from all in this regard. She mentioned that Bangladesh Mohila Parishad has long been demanding equal representation of women in the parliament. She urged the prime minister to live up to her promise of reinstating the women's quota in the parliament.

Prominent economist Prof. Rehman Sobhan, Norwegian Ambassador, Gerd Wahlstrom and First Secretary of Netherlands Embassy Margret Verwijk also spoke at the function as special guests.

The function was followed by a rally and screening of 'Itihash Kanya' (Daughter of the history), a feature film based on War of Independence.

Jail houses

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the innocent people were harassed in various ways by the thugs. He drew immediate attention of the authorities to the matter.

Speaking as chief guest, Home Minister Altaf Hossain admitted to the overcrowding of prisons. He said the current population of female prisoners in all the jails of Bangladesh was 1699 against the registered capacity of 897. Of them, 429 were convicts, 955 under-trial prisoners, 293 held in safe custody, 7 detainees and 15 others.

He said special priority would be given to female prisoners and that the construction of a separate jail with modern facilities at Kashimpur in Gazipur district for 200 female convicted prisoners was under active consideration of the government. Also, work for renovating the country's jails would start shortly, he added.

He assured that the government would try to improve the quality and quantity of food for the prisoners and punish corrupt jail authorities.

Among others, Dr. Tasmeen Siddiqui, president of Odhikar, Brigadier General Md. Zillur Rahman, IGP (Prisons), and Enamul Haq, former IGP, were present at the meeting.



Seizo Kano, leader of the Japanese delegation to the Japan-Bangladesh Joint Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation, calls on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the latter's office yesterday.

Access to JS info

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The proposed legislation has given immunity to the lawmakers against criminal charges and has empowered the speaker to punish 'strangers' in the parliament for 'misconduct'.

Defamatory comments in the house or in the meeting of a parliamentary committee about the president, speaker, Supreme Court judges, MPs or on a subjudice matter are also punishable offences, the bill says.

Passing offensive remarks or insulting an MP, seditious comments and any obstruction to the functioning of the parliament have also been proposed as crimes.

According to the provisions of the bill, the speaker with the approval of the house would have the authority to mete out punishments including jail terms and fines to offenders.

The proposed law restricts arrest of a lawmaker on their way to and from the parliament for attending a session. However, it is not applicable when an MP is charged with

sedition or actions affecting public safety. No MP can be forced to appear before a court when the parliament is in session, it said.

The speaker will have the authority to issue arrest warrant against an offender or, in cases, to order arrest without any warrant.

Referendum

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racy and a bizarre attempt by a military dictator to perpetuate his rule."

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of exiled former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has also condemned the planned vote.

"We have said that we reject this and we will oppose it... This will be illegal and unconstitutional," said PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar.

The Pakistani cabinet on Wednesday "unanimously approved" Musharraf's plan to hold a national referendum on whether he should stay on as president.

Army: City polls

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Election commissioners Safiur Rahman and MM Munsef Ali, Home Secretary Dr Sadat Hossain and acting EC Secretary SM Zakaria were present and the meeting attended by returning officers and divisional commissioners.

Besides, the meeting was attended by Chief of General Staff Major General Ahsan Nazmul Amin, Principal Staff Officer Major General AM Mahmuduzzaman, IG of Police Moudabir Hossain Chowdhury, DG of Ansar Major General Manzurul Alam, DG of DGFI Brigadier General Sadiq Hasan Rumi, DG of NSI Brigadier General Abdul Rahim, DDG of BDR Brigadier Golam Rabbani and metropolitan police commissioners.

The meeting held at NEC Auditorium was given a picture of law and order in the three cities.

The CEC noted that the corporation polls are as important as national elections.

According to a press release of the EC Secretariat, Syed expressed deep concern over the law and order and ordered taking necessary steps to arrest the "identified terrorists and culprits" for creating a peaceful atmosphere for election environment.

"Confidence has to be created among people by improving law and order so that every voter, irrespective of caste or creed, can exercise franchise safely and without fear," said the CEC.

Jailed leaders

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Liakot got 1204 votes and Babu got 609 votes.

Sujit Roy Nandi, vice-president of the immediate past central committee of BCL conducted the election as chief election commissioner.

Among others contesting for the post of president, Gazi Mazbul Sacchu got 84 votes, Ashraful Azim Rubon 67, Balaram Poddar 65 and Anisur Rahman got 17 votes.

Babu's nearest contestants were Saifuzzaman Shikhor with 380 votes, Abdul Wadud Khokon with 184 and Mazhar Anam with 180 votes.

Liakot and Babu along with eight other BCL leaders were arrested under Section 54 of CrPC on February 25 from in front of the residence of Sheikh Hasina in the city and given a one month's detention.

On March 24, the High Court declared the arrests illegal and ordered their release.

They were arrested again from in front of the Dhaka Central Jail in connection with several murder cases although they were not FIR-named accused.

The last national council of BCL was held on October 22, 1998. Bahadur Bepari and Ajay Kar Khokon were selected president and general secretary respectively.

Uneasy calm at BSS

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The management called police on Wednesday to avoid any untoward incident at the BSS office. Police were withdrawn in the early hours of yesterday.

Meanwhile, the BSS in a statement said the present management of the agency has taken some 'unavoidable' steps in view of its present financial constraints to continue its operation.

"May be, the management will have to take further steps in the coming days," said the statement signed by Subal Dash Gupta, head of administration.

The authorities are concerned to preserve interest of all concerned of the agency, the statement said.

The statement said the BSS has been running with 'excess' manpower not approved by the government.

The agency was allocated salary and allowances for 127 persons against a present manpower of 181. The agency could not allocate funds for the additional manpower despite prolonged negotiation with the government.

In the circumstances, the BSS plunged into a financial crisis and it has become impossible to pay salary and allowances of the staff, the statement said.

It said in 1984, the Enam Committee had approved a manpower of 127 for the agency when it had 111 journalists and non-journalist staff. Later, in 1993 the BSS managing board recommended appointment of 181 more persons and asked for government approval, which is yet to come.

Till 1985-86, there were 119 journalists and non-journalists employed in the organisation. The previous government had appointed 65 journalists. Currently, there are 163 journalists and non-journalists working in the BSS.

The ministry of information had long been objecting to the appointment of additional staff.

The BSS owes over Tk 2.50 crore to different utility services including DESA, WASA, the BTTB, the NBR and foreign news agencies.

50 BCL men

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Motijheel and one from Demra. Of the 23, 12 came from Gaibandha, five from Jessore, four from Gabindaganj and four from Rangpur.

Plainclothes police also searched IBA hostels of Dhaka University at Green Road and Central Road to nab outgoing BCL president Bahadur Bepari and general secretary Ajay Kar Khokon, the sources claimed.

AL has protested the arrests and demanded their immediate release.

"They were arrested without any charge when they were returning to home after peaceful completion of the (BCL) council. This again proves that the present government is an autocratic one," AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman said in a statement last night.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed attended the daylong seminar on "Community policing" as chief guest and it was presided over by Law Secretary Afzal Hossain Ahmed.

Additional Inspector General of Police and Commandant of Police Staff College Nurul Alam delivered a keynote paper at the seminar organised by the Institutional Development of Human Rights in Bangladesh (IDHRB) and Police Staff College at UN Building, IDB Bhaban in the city.

Moudud said the government is doing everything to establish rule of law in the country. "Though we have

Accent on community policing to fight crime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday emphasised a well-defined community policing system in the country to remove mistrust between the police and the people.

Discussing the role of police and their skill and performance, and the country's law and order, they observed that community policing is needed in a country like Bangladesh where crimes rise with the rapid rise of population.

People become wary when a policeman visits their house. Similar is the case when an aggrieved person goes to a police station. "Police have to be friendly through their service and behaviour to change the situation."

Stressing the role of media for restoring people's trust, he said media do not highlight the good side of the police.

Talking about the performance of the police, the Moudud said, "We have excellent police officers but their skill increases after their retirement... when they are in service they face so many difficulties, but

limited resources, we need to introduce community policing system by introducing a separate police wing."

He said the existing police force is already overburdened and they are struggling to deliver. "So, the proposed community policing system is not possible with the same police forces."

The law minister said people do not trust the police and so, no improvement will take place in the country's policing system if such a situation prevails.

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Talking about the performance of the police, the Moudud said, "We have excellent police officers but their skill increases after their retirement... when they are in service they face so many difficulties, but

once they retire they realise there were so many things to do in so very easy way...

"But they never think in such way while in service."

About law enforcement, Moudud said, "I make law but don't enforce it and if a law is not enforced it does not have any value."

Referring to the poor condition of jails, he said when in jail a politician resolves to improve the situation inside the prison but once out he forgets everything. He informed that the 2,500-capacity Dhaka Central Jail is now crammed with 9,000 prisoners.

In his keynote paper, Additional IGP Nurul Alam said community policing can restore people's faith in the police.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar, Resident Representative of the UNDP Jorgen Lissner, National Project Co-ordinator of the IDHRB KM Haque Kaiser also spoke at the seminar. Members of the civil society and representatives of the NGOs, UN agencies and diplomatic missions were also present on the occasion.

Resistance in Nablus

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The Israeli siege has left a trail of devastation across the land that the Palestinians had hoped to transform into an independent nation following interim peace accords with the Jewish state.

Roads have been dug up, buildings smashed and vehicles left in flaming ruins. Hospital and aid workers, immobilised by an Israeli-imposed curfew, say they fear unclaimed dead are rotting in the streets.

"People are trapped inside their homes. They lack food, water and medicine. The number of dead and wounded is going up all the time and we can't reach them to help," said Mustafa Barghuthi, head of the federation of Palestinian non-governmental organisations.

Amid fears of a "second front" in its campaign, Israel warned it would react "very hard" to new attacks from Lebanon, from where Hezbollah guerrillas and Palestinians have fired on northern Israel and a disputed border area.

"We consider Syria and Lebanon as responsible for these agitations," an Israeli official said.

Arab rage over the Israeli campaign exploded on the streets on Wednesday, when thousands of protesters charged the US embassy in Beirut only to be driven back by heavily armed anti-riot police.

Dozens of demonstrators were injured. Other rallies were held in Egypt and Yemen as well as in several European cities, as anger over Israel's clampdown on the Palestinians has spread across the globe.

The United States, Israel's chief backer with some three billion dollars of military and financial aid every year, on Wednesday gave a subtle hint it was listening to the chorus of outrage.

A White House spokesman said President George W Bush was not opposed to political talks before a ceasefire is agreed, which has been an unwavering demand of Israeli leader Sharon.

Secretary of State Colin Powell shrugged off complaints that Washington was not actively engaged in the peace process.

"We are the ones the world is looking to, to show leadership. We will show leadership," said Powell, who did not rule out meeting leaders from the Middle East next week.

US diplomats at the United Nations on Wednesday asked for more time to mull an Arab proposal for a new resolution pressing Israel to heed earlier calls for a ceasefire and military withdrawal. The UN Security Council was to resume debate later yesterday.

Shihab's killing

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Arrested accused Moniruzzaman Liton made friends with Shihab on account of the bike. Liton, who was known to Shihab only as 'Bara Bhai', would show up in front of Shihab's house with the bike and ring its bell, signalling Shihab to come out. Shihab would then go riding the bike with his 'Bara Bhai'.

After killing Shihab, the gang sold the bike to a shop at Bangshal for Tk. 1800.

Investigation officer Nazrul Islam yesterday recovered the cycle from the shop and seized it as evidence for the case.

Rajuk

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plan and sends it back to the authorised officer.

According to Rajuk officials, the whole process should not take more than 30 days or so. Mentioning some irregularities, one Rajuk source said most of the inspection reports contain various misinformation but the inspector "feels too embarrassed to deprive a single client" because so many others have already built structures defying rules.

Saifur terms Bangladesh

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About corruption, the minister said, "There is no place in the world where there is no corruption. Corruption is spreading from Europe to Asia."

Saifur said he is critical of his own government's lack of governance and bureaucratic complexities.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) jointly organised the programme.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Jiro Kobayashi, Japanese delegation leader Seizo Kano and FBCCI President Yusuf Abdullah Haroon, among others, spoke at the inaugural session.

Citing different incentives offered to the foreign investors, Saifur said the country's tax regime is one of the most liberal in South Asia.

"If anybody says Bangladesh is the worst place, do not believe them. Come here and see the real situation for yourself," the minister told the Japanese delegation.

Saifur also said that despite economic hardship, the country has achieved significant developments in the social sector. "If we take the social developments into account, we should not term Bangladesh an LDC."

But he said countrymen, including businessmen, are suffering from inferiority complex, which he thinks

should be changed.

Assuring local entrepreneurs of bank loans at five per cent interests, the minister asked them to invest in the agro-based industries in the northern region.

Despite close ties between Bangladesh and Japan, said Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, the Japanese private investment did not increase much. The commerce minister asked the Japanese to come up with good investments, which would ensure technology transfers and create jobs.

He also said the politics of hartal is losing ground, as there is a growing strong public opinion against it and the political parties cannot ignore the public opinion for long.

Earlier, the Japanese delegation leader, Seizo Kano, quoted a survey on the Japanese companies, members of the JBCEEC, as saying the Japanese companies felt it necessary to ban hartal and improve infrastructure such as electricity, telecommunications and ports.

They would explore all efforts to strengthen ties and trust between the two countries especially at the private sector level, he also said.

Yusuf Abdullah Haroon, also chairman of the JBCEEC, said that though the volume of trade between the two countries is increasing, there is a large imbalance in merchandise trade against Bangladesh.

"The imbalance rose from US\$120.86 million in 1990 to 91 to US\$257 million in 2000 to 01. The

imbalance can be reduced, if Japanese entrepreneurs invest in production either on their own or in collaboration with local entrepreneurs," Haroon said.

Bangladesh and Japanese sides focussed on different aspects of investment and trade-related issues at two plenary sessions that followed the inaugural session.

Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed chaired the first plenary session where Deputy Secretary of the finance ministry presented a paper on the country's economy and Shiniichi Kimura, counsellor of the Mitsui and Committee Ltd, highlighted the economic situation of Japan. Co-chairman of the JBCEEC Abdul Haque focussed on management and promotion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Also discussed were different impediments to investment and trade in the country and infrastructure development.

Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment (BOI) Mahmudur Rahman, former PDB Chairman Nuruddin M Kamal, EPB Director GKM Towfique Hasan, President of Japanese Commerce and Industry Association in Dhaka Hideo Ueno, JICA Secretary General Daisuke Arai and Representative of Japan Bank for International Cooperation Yasunori Onishi spoke on the occasion.

Base station

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urbanisation patterns over the years, monitor regular development work and provide input for future planned development of the port city, they said.

The station was installed in 1993 with financial assistance from UNDP for preparation of Chittagong Metropolitan Master Plan (CMMP). After completion of the CMMP in 1995, the base station was handed over to CDA. Since then it is lying idle. The third floor room where it is based remains locked.

Due to non-utilisation of the station, developers and investors from home and abroad can not be provided with required information and development statistics, a high official said.

When contacted the CDA Chairman MMKZ Jalalabadi said the two persons are not enough to run the station.

"We have written to the government to recruit some persons with specialised training to run the station," he said.

He however said the station would be operational soon. There are only two other such base stations in the country, one at Rajuk and the other at BUET, the sources said.

Where are our leaders leading us to?

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ism would be punished". We are not sure what the PM meant by "information terrorism" and exactly how she would go about "punishing" those responsible for such "terrorism".

If she is talking about the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) article then our suggestion would be to let the free and independent press of Bangladesh give a fitting reply to that malicious report (see editorial on page 4). Censoring or "punishing" will not help. We have seen enough examples in the world where these terms actually became euphemism to strike against the free press.

We must frankly say that we feel alarmed when Khaleda Zia uses these words. For we know she will not be able to "punish" the foreign press except banning an issue or expelling a foreign correspondent now and then or by refusing visas on occasions. But it will be the domestic media, which she may try and control and the word "punish" can only have some meaning in the domestic context. Even if nothing is done, the very stance, the very word, the tone, the fact of uttering it in the parliament send certain signals. Her party enthusiasts may take it as a go-ahead to intimidate the press or even harass journalists.

When Sheikh Hasina talked about "tathya santras" we became alarmed and warned her against going into an offensive against the media under this or that pretext. We repeatedly said that just as flaws of democracy can be cured only and only by greater democracy, so also the shortcomings of a free media (and we in Bangladesh have plenty) can be corrected by greater and greater freedom of the media. Calling the media (Khaleda Zia did not mention the media neither did Sheikh Hasina; however, the implication was, and is, all the same) "information terrorists" serves nobody's purpose except for those who do not believe in free media. Our tragedy is that both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina become great supporters of the free media when they are in the opposition and but feel differently when in power.

The question that is foremost in people's mind today is where our two leaders are leading us to.

Where is the vision, the far-sightedness or the policy and the plan to make Bangladesh move forward? We all know that our RMG sector, the biggest foreign exchange earner, is facing the severest crisis of its life. Has the government given it the attention, the priority, and the care that it deserves? The crucial task of attracting FDI remains confined to the realm of senseless rhetoric of repeating how investor-friendly Bangladesh is. The bad loans in the bank force our lending rate sky high, making new investment shy. The crucial question of disinvesting the SOEs gets shoved under the pressure of political expediency. The reform agenda that we know we must implement, even if the World Bank and the IMF would not tell us to, remains in the backburner. We are still waiting for a meaningful attention to these crucial issues from Khaleda Zia's government. We have the biggest cabinet in history and yet no time for the issues that concern the people.

The hatred, the mistrust, the disrespect, the vicious rivalry

between Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina are dragging us down a path of darkness. Voters elect them to govern the country and improve their lot but they spend their time and energy NOT to govern but to hit out against each other. The power that should be used in the fight against poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and all sorts of backwardness is instead used to try to annihilate the other. For five years the AL tried to repress the BNP in all possible ways, using state power to punish it in various ways. Tragically, we see a repeat of that same policy in the BNP now that the roles are reversed.

What we find absolutely incredible is how the BNP appears to have forgotten the experience of last five years so soon. Did the AL succeed in throttling the BNP by denying them the political space that was due to it? If not, then why should the BNP now think that they will succeed in denying the political space that is due to the opposition? We have condemned the AL for not joining the parliament and we will continue to do so. But we must also

condemn the way the ruling party has been attacking public gatherings of the AL, how it is beating and harassing the opposition leaders and the brutal torture which is being meted out to AL workers and leaders arrested in dubious charges. Simply put, the AL is denied the most rudimentary right that an opposition enjoys in a democracy. We seem to be going in circle in which once the BNP and then the AL forms the government and does what they please. For the AL the most important priority was to restore Bangabandhu's image not realising that historic figures like him do not need the political government of the day to either build or restore their image. Now the BNP's priority seems to denigrate him, again not understanding that whatever malicious scheme they may come out with, Bangabandhu's place cannot be denied him. Just as Ziaur Rahman will be given his due place in our history, regardless of what the BNP does today. In fact, by its over-enthusiasm, the BNP is most likely to harm his legacy as was done by the AL in the case of Bangabandhu.

Democracy is our only path of moving ahead. But democracy is not confined to winning elections. It is a whole way of running a country and its government. At the moment, Khaleda Zia does not seem to realise that. We had hoped that given the last decade's experience, during which both the AL and the BNP came to power and was in the opposition, both these parties would mature and realise that neither can govern without the help of the other. This realisation, we had hoped, would make them more tolerant and accommodative of each other's views and positions. The 'beauty' (some may not see it to be so) of last ten years of our democracy is that the opposition won the elections both time around. This we thought would further add to the realisation of the ruling party of the day about the importance of the opposition. Regrettably that does not seem to be the case. Thus the question comes - "where our leaders are leading us to?" (Sunday, Part 2: "Who is maligning Bangladesh?")

Motia, Nasim

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the bail. After hearing both sides the court granted bail.

The High Court on January 12 granted anticipatory bail to them till submission of the police report.

The Court also asked police not harass or arrest the accused during the period.

The four were accused of obstructing traffic in the city during Awami League-called a half-day hartal on January 9 protesting price hike of oil gas and electricity.

Sub-inspector (SI) Moinur Rahman filed the case with Motijheel thana the same day. SI Mohammad Abdul Matin, investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge-sheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka on March 28. Twenty-one people were shown as prosecution witnesses.

With submission of the bail of the four stands cancelled. So, the accused appeared in the trial court yesterday and prayed for fresh bail. Earlier on March 31, the trial court directed the accused to appear before it on April 25.

The court also fixed the same date for hearing on charge-forming in the case.