

Election system commercialises politics: Temple

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The political system in Bangladesh is being increasingly commercialised by the way the election system works and generates the demand for bribes. Fredrick T Temple, World Bank country director in Dhaka, told a seminar yesterday.

Candidates spend huge amounts of money to get elected, and if they win, many use their offices to recoup their investments with profit, he said.

The seminar on 'Accelerating Growth and Poverty Reduction in Bangladesh' was jointly organised by the Bureau of Economic Research (BER) of Dhaka University, the South Asia Region of the World Bank and the World Bank Institute.

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, chairman of the BER, presided over the first session of the seminar held at Hotel Sheraton on the city.

Temple said one motive for running for parliament was to gain protection from prosecution as a lawmaker, especially from loan default.

The inner circles of political organisations, that are not very democratic, decide who will run, said Temple, who completes his assignment as the World Bank's country director next Monday. The lack of democracy inhibits the emergence of new leaders, he added.

"Candidates from the major political parties violate the campaign spending limitation, and when the winners become members of parliament, one of their first acts is to lie, by certifying they didn't exceed the campaign expenditure limit," Temple said.

He said law and order must be improved, especially by breaking the nexus among some politicians, the police and criminals.

Weak law and order creates an enabling environment for extortion and toll-taking. They add to the cost of doing business at all levels and also discourage entrepreneurship, he observed.

Temple said reforms of the police and criminal justice system were essential, but they would not be successful unless the top political leadership took disciplinary measures against senior party members

Law & order

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extent, if everybody earns by fair means, he said.

Sadiq Ahmed, chief economist of the World Bank (WB), said in his keynote speech that gross domestic product of Bangladesh has to be raised to 6-7 per cent to scale down the povertyline.

He underscored improvement in investment climate, humane development and social protection. "Without mature political leadership and improvement in public administration, such reforms will not be possible," he said.

The centralised governance structure, dominance of a vested quarter, gangsters' influence and weak accountability are putting a brake on anti-poverty efforts, he said.

"Political instability is reflected in violence, work disruption and poor environment for protecting the rights and freedom of the common citizens," he said.

Lack of a well-defined and stable political system has meant that policymakers have spent far more time and attention on securing their hold on power than addressing development challenges, he said.

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, chairman of the Bureau of Economic Research, said little improvement in terms of reducing rural poverty took place between 1983-84 and 1991-92.

"A serious challenge in achieving

Top criminal

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arrested the sex worker.

About 100 policemen cordoned off the hotel area for over an hour during the raid.

Iqbal kicked up a controversy after he was photographed with at least three ministers and two ruling BNP lawmakers at a meeting on the district's law and order at the Circuit House on February 25 last year.

Iqbal and three of his associates had attended the Circuit House meeting and were snapped with then water resources minister LK Siddiqi, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, State Minister for Forest and Environment Jafar Islam Chowdhury, Whip Syed Wahidul Alam and lawmakers MA Jinnah and Gazi Shahjahan Jewel.

Iqbal, who reportedly enjoys the blessing of some BNP high-ups, was arrested twice in last 15 months. But he was released on both occasions due to his strong political link, a top official of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) told this correspondent yesterday evening.

Police said 14 cases for murder, loot, extortion, mugging and robbery are pending against Iqbal. A warrant of arrest was issued against him in a looting case of a Khatun Gonj business firm last month, police said.

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who are known to be corrupt.

However, society has been changing, civil society finding its voice, and politicians may begin to realise the people's penchant for voting non-reforming governments for bribes, Fredrick T Temple, World Bank country director in Dhaka, told a seminar yesterday.

The discussion took place yesterday at Odhikar's Gulshan office on the occasion of United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. It was organised by Odhikar and Global Network for the Prevention of Torture (GNPT).

The developed countries that had once played an important role in protecting human rights have suddenly cooled off since September 11, 2001, observed a speaker.

Justice Syed J R Modassir Hossain, judge of Appellate Division of the Supreme Court attended as chief guest while International Press Freedom Award holder Tipu Sultan moderated the discussion.

However, Attorney General A F Hasan Arif could not attend the discussion due to unavoidable reasons.

The need for a human rights commission in Bangladesh cannot be overemphasised, said Justice Modassir.

Shahin Anam, team leader of Manusher Jonno, said although Bangladesh has ratified many UN conventions including the Convention on Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Child Rights Convention (CRC), the actual benefits are yet to be seen.

We also need all the human rights organisations in the country to have a stronger role, she added.

Annan

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Cadres of the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) in the Chittagong University (CU) yesterday ousted all the officials and employees from the administrative building before locking it up.

Some ICS cadres rushed to the five-storey building at around 1pm and drove all away, asking them not to come back in the next 72 hours, campus sources said.

But the vice-chancellor (VC) and pro-VC were not asked to leave during the siege.

The ICS enforced a 72-hour siege following a clash with the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) on Tuesday at the Sholoshahar Station that left three Shibir activists injured.

pro-poor growth, therefore, is how to modify or reverse adverse growth-inequality link," he said.

Over the years, there has been a continuous shift of labour from agriculture to the non-farm sector, he pointed out.

"The process of this shift is crucially important in determining the poverty impact of growth not only for the rural areas but also for the country as a whole. While most of the poor live in rural areas, urban poverty to a large extent is a spill-over of rural poverty," said Professor Wahiduddin.

Rizwanul Islam, representing the International Labour Organisation, Geneva, said employment aspects need to be addressed with the macroeconomic policies.

"A pro-employment macro-policy regime would take into account the possible effect of tariff, exchange rate and taxation policies on the growth of sectors and sub-sectors that are by nature more labour-intensive than others," he said.

The seminar was jointly organised by the Bureau of Economic Research, University of Dhaka, the South Asia Region of the World Bank (WB) and the WB Institute.

The seminar was also addressed by, among others, Professor Sarwar Zahan, the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's principal secretary Moshirul Rahman and Dr Kaniz Siddiqui.

Robbers loot

FROM PAGE 1

inmates opened the door, the gang entered at gunpoint and made away with the booty.

Sikder filed a case with the Sutrapur Police Station.

In another incident, muggers looted cash Tk 9.34 lakh from an employee of a cement distributor at North Bashabo, Sabujbagh Wednesday night.

Saidur Rahman, cashier and manager of Masud Enterprise at Gopibagh was on a motor bike with Tk. 9,33500 of the proprietor in a bag at 9:30pm.

A gang of three riding in a motorbike stopped Saidur and took away the money at gunpoint.

Masudur Rahman, owner of the enterprise, filed a case with the Sabujbagh Police Station. Police are yet to arrest or trace the valuables till filing of this report.

Earlier on Sunday, five robbers intruded an apartment at Indira Road, Tejgaon, and looted Tk 27,54,500.

Meanwhile, police arrested seven persons on Tuesday and recovered motor parts worth Tk 2.5 lakh, a colour television and Tk. 4,500 from different parts of the city.

PM

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and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintoo.

Khaleda sought cooperation of the city dwellers to keep the capital clean and help its uplift efforts.

Placing stress on the cleanliness of the capital, she asked for taking steps to reduce the water-logging problem that usually occurs during the monsoon.

Kuakata

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local association that works for the protection of the beach, dumped sandbags to stem the tide of erosion, but the effort failed to halt the process.

The authorities concerned are yet to take any effective measure to protect the beach, a tourist dollar earner, and the huge investment in local tourism by the public and private sectors.

Kalapara upazila administration said they informed the higher authorities of the situation and hoped that effective measures would be taken soon.

US troops evacuated the two bodies from the badly damaged vehicle, which was covered with blood

and broken glass.

None of the names of the injured or killed Americans were available.

At least 19 US soldiers have died in hostile fire since major combat was officially declared over in May.

On Tuesday, six British soldiers were killed in southern Iraq during a shooting rampage by townspersons

furious over the killing of four neighbors during a demonstration, apparently at the hands of British troops.

In Hilla, 45 miles south of Baghdad, three Marines were wounded Wednesday in an ambush, a US military statement said. One Marine was killed and two were injured when their vehicle - part of a quick reaction force dispatched in response to the ambush - rolled over on the soft shoulder on the way to the scene.

On Thursday, two Iraqi employees of the national electricity authority were killed when their US-led convoy came under a grenade attack in west Baghdad, US soldiers and Iraqi police said.

The convoy included US Humvees at the front and the back and two Iraqi civilian vehicles in the middle. The soldiers and Iraqi police said the two Iraqis who were killed were travelling in the same car.

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