

Separate constituencies, direct elections sought

Women at roundtable outline women representation in parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women activists at a roundtable in the city yesterday demanded separate constituencies and direct elections to women's seats in parliament.

They said there had been enough discourse on the issue, now it was time for action to ensure true and effective participation of women in policymaking.

"Women must have their own constituencies to make sure their representation," Rabia Bhuiyan, senior Supreme Court lawyer and former lawmaker, told the roundtable jointly organised by Women for Women, The Hunger Project Bangladesh and Kanyashishu Advocacy Forum.

Women have to determine their demands and then promote them precisely, she said.

Salma Khan, president of National Committee on Beijing Plus, said, "Political parties must make an honest commitment to nominate women candidates in constituencies that have electability."

Alluding to certain difficulties in introducing direct elections to women's reserved seats in parliament, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed

said, "By increasing the number of reserved seats, we are proceeding gradually in women's empowerment, as nothing can be achieved overnight."

Agreeing to the suggestion that the equal number of constituencies reserved for women would facilitate their more effective representation, the minister said, "But the influence of money and muscle power in politics and elections must also be taken into account."

In its last election manifesto, Bangladesh Nationalist Party pledged to increase women's seats in parliament and arranging for direct elections to them.

Moudud said the issue was just a proposal. "We are waiting to see public opinions on that."

He advised the women to join the political parties, work with women politicians and those who had experience of elections at various levels, in their movement for direct elections for women.

Citing some examples of the last union parishad elections, rights activist Sharmeen Murshid of Brotee said women had proven their ability in successfully contending in direct elections. Obliging political parties to nominate women to vie in

direct elections is a key area for women groups to work in, she added.

Former law minister Abdul Motin Khosru said ensuring women representation in parliament by doubling the reserved seats and introducing direct elections to them were among the election pledges of Awami League (AL). Terming the issue as a national one, he said his party was ready to support any effort in that direction.

AL lawmaker Faruk Khan said all major political parties should nominate at least 20 to 25 percent women candidates for elections.

In his keynote paper, Hunger Project Country Director Professor Badiul Alam Majumdar observed, "Direct election is the only method consistent with both parliamentary democracy and empowerment of women. It will not only make the women MPs people's representatives but also help them develop their own constituencies, making the reservation system unnecessary in the long run."

Taleya Rahman of Democracywatch and Khushi Kabir, among others, also attended the roundtable chaired by Professor Rounaq Jahan.

Ensure safety

FROM PAGE 1

chairman of the BDMS. "We will wait another week to observe what steps are being taken by the authority."

"We want to run our businesses without interference of extortionists and other criminals. And we want the guaranty for a safe return home," Amir remarked.

The business leaders said they would hold a co-ordination meeting and finalise the course of movement. "We are under pressure from the business community to go for tougher movement," another member of the delegation said.

Bellal Hossain Chowdhury, organising secretary of BDMS Chittagong unit, said, "We also have asked the minister to help stop random abductions of businessmen in Chittagong."

Bellal alleged police failed to arrest the principal accused of the abductions, muggings, robberies and killings in Chittagong, which rose to a new high recently. He said the reputation of Chittagong as a port city was marred and business

firms started winding up from there as law and order deteriorated.

The business leaders also recommended tracking mobile phone channels to hunt down the criminals, alleging mobile phones were used in 90 percent of crimes.

The inspector general of police, who was also present at the meeting, said they had certain limitations in combating crime. In reply, the business delegation urged the government to invest more money for logistic facilities and firearms for the sake of people's welfare. "We want to see the police functioning properly," a member of the team said.

The business leaders suggested installing close circuit televisions at some 20 major points in the capital to contain crime. They also voiced introducing lathi-bashi system in different parts of the country.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner and high officials of the ministry were also present at the meeting.

Mayor again pleads

FROM PAGE 1

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka at a meeting with the members of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dhaka yesterday.

Top business leaders however suggested the government form an urban development regulatory council for better coordination among these agencies.

Khoka pointed out that it is difficult for the mayor to implement and bring about a positive change in the current situation. "Besides, we have serious resource constraint. We don't have the logistical support to provide better services for a massive population of Dhaka," he explained.

For instance, the mayor said, the DCC spends Tk 60 crore on keeping the city clean but it has only Tk 14 crore earmarked in its budget for the job. "So, we have no option but to increase taxes. Two more city corporations have been created but the budget has been reduced..."

Khoka agreed to some proposals of MCCI President Kutubuddin Ahmed to involve the chamber to maintain the parks and road islands including Pantha Kunja, Farmgate Udyan, the stretch opposite of the Adamjee Court and the road islands from Dainik Bangla crossing to Rajuk Bhaban.

The DCC is involving the private sector in managing its wards for a longer period. "We need to make our organisational activities smaller and involve the private sector to improve the situation," Khoka added.

Earlier, the MCCI president suggested setting up of a mobile court under a first class magistrate at every important crossing from

9:00am to 6:00pm to deal with the law-breakers.

He urged the mayor to take steps to increase civic amenities, ease the intolerable traffic congestion, free the footpaths of hawkers and improve law and order in the capital.

The unbearable traffic jam in Dhaka has adversely affected the image of the country as well as its economic development, the MCCI president noted. "It is undoubtedly a negative experience for a foreign investor to get stranded in traffic jam for hours on end before reaching Motijheel from Sonargaon or Sheraton (hotels)."

"The corporation should take urgent steps to project our image as a civilised society," Kutub felt.

Financial constraint is the main problem to the development of Dhaka city. For the last 10 years, there has not been any increase in the holding tax collection. Besides corruption, there is a shortage of trained and experienced manpower to collect holding tax, the MCCI president added.

MCCI Vice-president Shahab Sattar, former MCCI president Laila Rahman, Bangladesh Employers' Federation President M Anis Ud Dowla, and Women Entrepreneurs Association, Bangladesh President Rokia A Rahman also spoke.

RPC project

FROM PAGE 12

The 'bhaban' top shots are asking for an unusually high commission and it has scared some bidders away, they said.

Partly funded by the German financier KfW, the RPC floated the tender few months back for engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contract for the first phase of the 450mw power plant at Kadda, near Savar.

The first phase of the project dubbed as Dhaka North Power Project (DNPP) will generate 280mw and involve an estimated cost of 150 million euros.

The KfW is funding 40 million euros while the rest will come from a dozen Palli Biddyt Samities (PBSS), assured of high dividends by the RPC in exchange for investment.

The Daily Star last month reported that though this was an EPC contract tender, which clearly bars participation of any EPC contractors in the bidding, the bid terms were set by consultant Lahmeyer.

The KfW even imposed two conditions, demanding Lahmeyer be made the consultant and only the original manufacturers of gas turbines allowed to submit bids.

Surprisingly, the KfW funding is an 'untied' grant that means it is not supposed to have any conditions.

But no official investigation was made into these anomalies till today, and the REB and RPC kept refuting allegations of corruption.

Customs official shot dead in Ctg

UNB, Chittagong

A customs official of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) unit was gunned down by unknown assailants at Halishahar in the port city last night.

The dead was identified as Mokhter Hossain Afrat, 35, a resident of Halishahar Block-L.

Witnesses said a gang of 10 came in a microbus and called Afrat out of his residence at 8:30pm.

Witnesses said the gang members had an altercation with him and, at one stage, they shot him point blank.

Afrat was shot in the chest and abdomen. He died instantly.

The motive behind the killing could not be known immediately.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body.

BNP leader hurt in bomb attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Liaquat Sarder, senior vice-president of Rampal upazila unit of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was critically injured in a bomb attack in front of the party office at about 8:00pm on Tuesday.

According to witnesses, unidentified miscreants hurled a bomb at Liaquat, also a former chairman of Gouramva Union Parishad, while he was talking to some people. The miscreants left the scene, exploding two more bombs.

JP wants govt

FROM PAGE 1

Party yesterday evening at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"An assurance on fulfilling the demands should be made on the floor of the House," Fazle Rabbi said.

Asked if they had made any contact with the ruling deputies, the JP leaders said they talked on the phone earlier in the day, but no discussion on a meeting between the two sides took place. Earlier in the morning, a joint meeting of the party's presidium members and lawmakers, chaired by Ershad, censured the government for barring the former president from going abroad.

GM Kader, a JP deputy and brother of the deposed president, told reporters the meeting termed the government action a flagrant violation of constitutional rights.

The joint meeting also expressed deep concern over the downslide of law and order and demanded an immediate halt to violence in Natore.

The JP (Ershad), second largest opposition in parliament, has been boycotting the House since February 8 following a stormy walkout to protest government bar on Ershad's visit abroad. The 11th session of the eighth parliament, which has been running without the main opposition Awami League like in three previous sessions, passed last three days without opposition.

Among others, Shamsul Haque, Syeda Razia Fayez, TIM Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury, ATM Ruhul Amin Hawlader, HM Abdul Gaffar, Mujibur Rahman, Abul Kashem, Syed Abu Hossain Babla, Sarder Amzal Hossain and Golam Habib Dulad were present at the meeting held at party's Banani office.

One teacher

FROM PAGE 12

in lower secondary education," according to the Unesco study.

Although the report did not specify the reason for the region's largest share of dropouts – 46 million or 45 percent of the 104 million around the world – it linked the trend to learning difficulties and inadequate teachers' training.

The report says there is one teacher for every 21 students in primary schools in East Asia, compared to one for every 40 in South and West Asia.

The government plans to recruit 35,000 teachers under the Primary Education Development Project-2, involving Tk 4,933 crore, education officials said.

The government will recruit 1,000 assistant education officers to strengthen school monitoring and 216 instructors to primary teachers' training institutions.

The immediate past Awami League government appointed 26,902 assistant teachers to primary schools and 219 assistant teachers to secondary schools.

Microcredit summit

FROM PAGE 1

microcredit by NGOs, is hosting the summit.

By 2001-end, around 54.9 million people in the world were covered by microcredit programmes. Of them, 47.9 million live in the Asia Pacific region. Bangladesh alone has more than 11 million microcredit borrowers.

This is for the first time the microcredit organisations are going to hold such a high profile gathering to exchange views and share experiences with comprehensive programme and target, organisers said.

Finance ministers and central bank governors from a number of countries in the region and first ladies of some other countries would also join the summit.

They will also be taken to rural Bangladesh for them to get firsthand knowledge about microfinance.

Queen Sofia will visit Comilla on February 14 to observe microcredit programmes run by Grameen Bank.

The PKSF alone lent around \$300 million to 210 microfinance institutions covering over 3.8 million borrowers, 90 percent of whom are women.

Tk 27 lakh looted

FROM PAGE 1

CCCI, and Abdur Razzak, security guard of the Comtextile (HK) Limited provided by civil security provider Vigilance.

Razzak left his fourth-floor office a few minutes before the robbery in the building, owned by the CCCI, the apex organisation of businesspeople, heightening security fears in the prime port city, plagued by ransom-motivated kidnaps over the years.

According to the CCCI guards, five robbers – four in jeans and one in lungi – barged in on them during a shift-change in duty at about 10:20pm Tuesday.

Two of the robbers, believed to have been lurking in the upstairs in run-up to the robbery, led the guards to the under-construction fifth floor at gunpoint and held them hostage in a room there. Double Mooring police quoted them as saying:

The gang then robbed all the 11 rooms of the CCCI office and the offices of the EPB, Lucky International firm, its sister organisation Mobiphone Cellular Limited, Seastar Shipping Lines Ltd of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) and Hong Kong-based buying house Ian Burke Limited before leaving a few minutes before Fajr prayers.

CCCI President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury said deposits submitted by the participants of the upcoming Chittagong International Trade Fair (CITF) might have been the target of the robbers.

The assistant commissioner of the Detective Branch of police in Chittagong, Saifuddin Chowdhury, said police were probing the incident that appeared mysterious.

He refused to give further details.

BDR deployed

FROM PAGE 1

and called upon the government to declare emergency in the affected village and arrange relief for the homeless victims.

A seven-member committee formed by Natore district AL and local Awami Lawyers' Council (ALC) is seeking to visit the victims. The team, which is to be led by former state minister for fisheries and livestock Prof Abdul Kuddus, wrote to the Natore deputy commissioner (DC) and SP asking for police protection during the planned visit, but their request was turned down.

The AL staged a sit-in in front of the DC's office for two hours yesterday morning protesting the administration's non-cooperation. Later, an hour-long sit-in was staged in front of the SP's office also.

The DC and SP told reporters that the requested security could not be arranged due to the inadequate number of policemen.

Natore AL also organised a protest rally in front of the DC's office and brought out processions in the town.

Meanwhile, Dalim and Dollar, two other nephews of the deputy minister, who allegedly led the arson attacks were seen moving freely in town yesterday. Local AL claimed police were declining to record any case in connection with the arsons on the plea of the minister's order.

The SP however refuted the allegations, saying police were actually looking for the two men. He also said the reason no case was recorded is no-one came to lodge any formal complaint.

Natore journalists yesterday formed a human chain in front of the DC's office in the morning protesting the attack on Janakantha reporter GM Iqbal Hasan earlier.

Hasan was among a small group of journalists who visited the village in disguise amid death threats by alleged armed cadres of the BNP.

Two other journalists of leading national dailies received death threats over phone Tuesday and yesterday

14 dead

FROM PAGE 12

opening fire and drawing a response from masked gunmen using assault rifles and anti-tank rockets.

Medics said 12 Palestinians, including at least six gunmen and one policeman, were killed. Another two were shot dead in another raid on the southern Gaza refugee camp of Rafah. Scores were wounded.

TSP fertiliser

FROM PAGE 1

went up to Tk 505 a bag from Tk 448 last year, according to sources.

The minister however ruled out any crisis of urea fertiliser, saying there are around 4.30 lakh tonnes of urea stored in government warehouses.

The urea demand was fixed at 23.58 lakh tonnes this year, of which the BCIC factories would produce 20.50 lakh tonnes. The Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company (KAFCO) would provide the rest.

The BCIC factories have so far produced 14 lakh tonnes.

Prime Minister Khaleeda Zia at a meeting with the agriculture minister on Monday asked him to take initiatives to import fertiliser.

They also decided that MOP fertiliser would be imported if need be. The government would also bear the additional cost for import and distribution of the fertilisers, the sources said.

47 die

FROM PAGE 1

slowly, suddenly he exploded... I hit a tree," said Mohammad Jassim, as he dabbed cuts on his head with a blood-dappled rag.

The latest attacks follow a pattern of targeting Iraqis seen as collaborating with the US occupation. Twin suicide bombings in northern Iraq against two Kurdish parties allied with the United States killed more than 100 people on February 1.

Mobiphone Director Rajaul Kabir Shahin said his firm and Lucky International lost Tk 22 lakh in cash and valuables.

The gang looted Tk 3.5 lakh in cash from Seastar, said the firm's Assistant Manager (Finance) Mahtabur Rahman.

The robbers also took away valuables including three digital cameras worth over Tk 1.5 lakh from Ian Burke Limited and Tk 30,000 from the EPB, police said quoting their staff.

The officials of the affected firms expressed dissatisfaction at the laxity in security of the Chamber building guarded by three men in shifts.

"Three-man security of the building is not sufficient," one of them said, adding: "The incident exposed the poor security of the building thought as well secured so far."

Some policemen and locals linked the robbery to a gang with close ties to Agrabad-based Kader group.

Chittagong is in the harsh glare of media attention for ransom-motivated kidnap of magnates in recent months.

On July 24 last year, Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury was kidnapped and no-one knows his fate.

On August 8, the body of abducted shipping magnate Rezaur Rahman Zakir was retrieved from roadside.

During the last Eid-ul-Azha vacation, businessman Nasiruddin bought his freedom in Chittagong, reportedly paying a ransom of Tk 10 lakh.

Another businessman Bablu was kidnapped in Bandarban during the vacation in the latest of high-profile kidnaps in the port city.

Identifying themselves as Dulu's men, the callers threatened to kill the newsmen if they dared to visit Natore again.

The visiting journalists reported that most men of the torched households went into hiding fearing further attack and harassment by police.

"We could hear loud cries of women from a distance as we minister for fisheries and livestock Prof Abdul Kuddus, wrote to the Natore deputy commissioner (DC) and SP asking for police protection during the planned visit, but their request was turned down.

The AL staged a sit-in in front of the DC's office for two hours yesterday morning protesting the administration's non-cooperation. Later, an hour-long sit-in was staged in front of the SP's office also.

The DC and SP told reporters that the requested security could not be arranged due to the inadequate number of policemen.

Natore AL also organised a protest rally in front of the DC's office and brought out processions in the town.

Meanwhile, Dalim and Dollar, two other nephews of the deputy minister, who allegedly led the arson attacks were seen moving freely in town yesterday. Local AL claimed police were declining to record any case in connection with the arsons on the plea of the minister's order.

The SP however refuted the allegations, saying police were actually looking for the two men. He also said the reason no case was recorded is no-one came to lodge any formal complaint.

Natore journalists yesterday formed a human chain in front of the DC's office in the morning protesting the attack on Janakantha reporter GM Iqbal Hasan earlier.

Hasan was among a small group of journalists who visited the village in disguise amid death threats by alleged armed cadres of the BNP.

Two other journalists of leading national dailies received death threats over phone Tuesday and yesterday

opening fire and drawing a response from masked gunmen using assault rifles and anti-tank rockets.

Medics said 12 Palestinians, including at least six gunmen and one policeman, were killed. Another two were shot dead in another raid on the southern Gaza refugee camp of Rafah. Scores were wounded.

The minister however ruled out any crisis of urea fertiliser, saying there are around 4.30 lakh tonnes of urea stored in government warehouses.

The urea demand was fixed at 23.58 lakh tonnes this year, of which the BCIC factories would produce 20.50 lakh tonnes. The Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company (KAFCO) would provide the rest.

The BCIC factories have so far produced 14 lakh tonnes.

Prime Minister Khaleeda Zia at a meeting with the agriculture minister on Monday asked him to take initiatives to import fertiliser.

They also decided that MOP fertiliser would be imported if need be. The government would also bear the additional cost for import and distribution of the fertilisers, the sources said.

At yesterday's meeting, the governor also asked the bankers to be careful in investing their foreign currencies abroad.

Banking sources said some banks recently incurred losses in such investment. A two-decade old bank made a loss of over Tk 50 crore. An Islamic bank incurred a loss of Tk 20 crore and fired one of its high officials.

The victim Mohammad Ali Badal, 28, worked at an automobile workshop at Mohakhali.

Sources said a gang of four sprayed Badal with bullets near the customs warehouse at Siddiqbagar at around 10:30pm as he was returning home from work.

An assistant sub-inspector of Kotwali Police Station rushed him to the DMCH where doctors declared him dead.

The victim's younger brother Yunus Hossain filed a case with Kotwali Police Station. He indicated in the first information report that the murder might be linked to his love affair with a girl.

In Mirpur, criminals hacked an unidentified man to death at South Peereerbagh at about 9:45pm on Tuesday.

Police recovered the body of the 30-year-old from near a box culvert at South Peereerbagh about an hour after the murder. The man was wearing a sky blue jacket and a trouser. The body bore numerous stab injuries.

A case was filed with Mirpur Police Station. Police are unsure about the motive for the murder.

Hasina favours direct polls to women's seats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday said direct elections to the seats reserved for women in parliament is needed if women leadership were to be promoted.

"The proposed 14th amendment to the constitution providing for indirect election to the reserved women seats cannot be accepted...", the opposition leader told leaders of a women-rights group styled Social Resistance Committee.

The women leaders told Hasina they would intensify their campaign to draw support for a direct election to the reserved seats. They handed over a memorandum to the opposition leader stressing the necessity of a direct ballot.

The memorandum said proper representation of women could never be ensured unless direct elections were held in the constituencies reserved for women. A mere increase in the number of women seats in parliament would not ensure women's empowerment. Such a move will be a repeat of the previous system, the memorandum said.

All political parties including the BNP pledged to hold direct polls to the reserved constituencies before the last general election, the memorandum added.

The women leaders said women play a vital role on the economic and social fronts, yet their political rights are being denied.

Hena Das, Ayesha Khanom, Aivi Rahman, Khushi Kabir, Rokeya Kabir, Salma Ali, Sahara Khatun, Momtaz Begum and Dil Afroz Begum were, among those, present.

AL, BSD

FROM PAGE 1

said the alliance government had failed to run the country and "we are anxious about overall situation, including terrorism, communalism and corruption."

"But we have been talking about an alternative stream apart from the bipartisan system," he said. "Awami League proposed for simultaneous movement... we will convey our decision later after discussing the matter in the party and with the Left Front," he added.

Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Kader and Akhteruzzaman took part in the discussion from the Awami League, while Mobinul Haider Chowdhury, Abdullah Sarker, Shuvrangshu Chakraborty and Bazlur Rashid Firoz from the BSD.