

# Saifur's reforms miss

**FROM PAGE 1**  
During the four years the 4-party coalition has been in office, the GDP growth has marked an average 5.3 percent. The average had been the same during the previous four years. So, it can be said Saifur has accomplished nothing extraordinary in this regard, except just maintaining an existing trend. Yet, considering his 11-year track of serving the nation as a finance minister, Saifur was expected to perform some extraordinary deeds.

The apparent determination to reform with which Saifur kick-started his current ministerial term gradually waned. His reform efforts have not been sincere but aimed at fulfilling donors' conditions.

Some of the macro-economic successes he is credited with were also not engineered by him. They rather were results of fulfillment of the IMF's conditions for its Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan.

During the 1991-96 tenure of BNP government, when the prime minister enjoyed absolute power, Saifur was an exception and acted quite independently. But, this time, when the government remains as PM-centric as before, Saifur has not been as assertive as he was previously. Though initially he did show some independent stance but with the passage of time he started to bowing down to pressure and taking decisions, which are not financially healthy.

In many cases, Saifur's actions have been self-contradictory, too. It reached its nadir this year, when in his pre-budget campaign he assumed a hard stance against allowing any more whitening of black money and then about-turned by approving in the budget yet another year for whitening the black money.

Saifur has always been admired by many for being an outspoken person and for having an honest image. He has always spoken against corruption and been critical of lack of good governance. However, over the last four years, his image has become clouded by allegations of corruption against some of his family members. This has also weakened his position in the cabinet.

**ACHIEVEMENTS**  
When the BNP-led coalition came to power, the situation of the country's foreign exchange reserve was in shambles, standing at only \$1.3 billion. The government has succeeded to bring it up to over \$4 billion now.

A main contributor to this forex reserve growth has been an increased flow of foreign remittance. The remittance that hovered around \$2 billion a year during the Awami League regime has risen to \$3 billion now. It has grown, because Bangladesh expatriate workers are sending more money through official channels and also thanks to the government's anti-money laundering act and drive.

Sending money home by hundi, bypassing the formal banking channels, is now under tight control and actively thwarted. To encourage the expatriates to use banks for remittance, the banks have been made more efficient, making monetary transfers speedier.

Another key factor that has helped the forex reserve grow is the anti-poverty loan handed out by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the last three years, these two institutions pumped more than \$700 million into the economy.

A second success of Saifur is the introduction of a floating currency exchange rate in 2003. Proving the fears of instability wrong, the floatation has remained more or less stable due to a strong monitoring of the Bangladesh Bank through the nationalised commercial banks. However, the floating currency exchange is yet to function fully and independently on the basis of demand and supply in the market.

Some aspects of banking reforms also have brought in some positive results, especially in the private banks. The interest rates have declined to an average of 10.79 percent in March last from the previous 14 percent. This spurred a lending growth to private industries, resulting in an increase of capital machinery imports, which in turn has already triggered an industrial production growth, which is expected increase further in the coming years.

Revenue collection for long had been a weak area of the government. During the last Awami League regime, revenue growth rate had ranged between 2 percent and 9 percent, though in its last year, 2000-01, it shot up to 21 percent.

The coalition government has successfully retained the fiscal year 2000-01's trend, averaging a 15 percent growth in revenue in the last four years. This has happened because of Saifur's minute and increased focus on the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and some of his reform measures there.

Under the NBR reform programme, the government formed a Large Taxpayers Unit (LTU) for both Value-added Tax (VAT) and income tax payments. The government also has formed a Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) at the NBR to check tax evasion.

Another success attributed to Saifur is simplification of the budgeting process. The government from this year has allowed certain ministries to frame their own budgets for a three-year term, which hopefully will help them greatly in planning ahead.

The finance minister is also praised for scaling down the budget deficits that had for long been dogging the governments. From the 4.5 percent average budget deficit during the AL regime, the coalition government has brought it down to 3.9 percent. Ironically, this has not happened due to any particular initiative but because of the government's failure to implement the Annual Development Programme (ADP) in full, while its revenue collection increased.

**FAILINGS**  
Saifur's most acute failure was in fighting poverty, as half of the country's population is considered poor.

Though it has often been claimed that in the last one decade poverty has

# Lahmeyer sues RPCL for compensation

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Lahmeyer International Palli Power Services Limited (LIPSS) has sued Rural Power Company Limited (RPCL) in an international court, seeking Tk 320 crore in compensation, sources concerned said.

They said the German company, LIPSS, filed the case with an arbitration court in Singapore against the RPCL for "illegally" cancelling the operational agreement of Mymensingh Power Plant.

The RPCL was informed about this yesterday.

Sources at the RPCL said Surman and Starling Ltd, the legal consultant of LIPSS, has opted for an arbitrator.

If the RPCL agrees to accept the arbitrator, it has to inform within 10 days. If not, the RPCL can go for another arbitrator, the sources said.

The LIPSS has asked for 1.63 crore euro and 11.04 crore taka for cancelling the contract while 13.78 lakh euro and 11.04 crore taka for arrears and other outstanding.

**Moudud**  
**JUDICIARY** by the judicial magistracy is needed in the process of separating the judiciary. "We are checking how these have been done in India, Pakistan and other countries."

There are 600 magistrates with several years of experience, and it is not possible to replace them immediately with newly appointed judges, he pointed out.

Asked about failure of a committee formed in 2003 to give a report as yet on the formation of a human rights commission, he said the issue is under consideration.

On extra-judicial killings by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), the minister said there are laws to deal with custodial deaths. If such deaths occur, there are specific provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code to bring those responsible to book.

Asked about criminals being killed in the name of 'cross fire' and fabricated stories about the killings, Moudud said, "I do not agree to this statement. This is baseless."

On indemnity for such killings, he said, "I will not answer to any hypothetical question."

Asked about the prime minister's pledge on Monday to strengthen the anti-terrorism act, he said, "The government will never formulate any law that violates human rights."

"The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is now strong enough to catch the corrupt people of any quarters. You cannot show any flaws in the ACC laws that allow any groups to influence or intervene it."

In the past, the Bureau of Anti-Corruption at times needed government approval to file or withdraw cases but those provisions have been scrapped, the minister said. "They (ACC) now do not need seeking police help for investigation, so, what more do you want. If even after that the commission fails to act independently, then go and ask it directly."

About the formulation of Right to Information Act, the minister said, "We have already asked for the law commission's opinion about it. But according to the rules of business, it is ultimately the duty of the information ministry."

Some provisions of the Official Secrecy Act could be excluded while formulating the Right to Information Act, he added.

He also spoke for appointment of sector-wise ombudsman. "We do not want to appoint one ombudsman for the 14 crore people, but sector-wise Ombudsman for important sectors, such as tax-ombudsman, will be more effective."

On the opposition allegations that some ministers are linked to communal militancy and bombings, he said no political party can do such things.

"The quarters that do not believe in the creation of Bangladesh, democracy, economic development and independence of the country are plotting such activities. They might be within or outside the country."

On the government claim of success in all its activities and the opposition views that those were total failures, Moudud said, "None of the two is fully true. It has become a kind of political culture in the country."

This government formulated 137 laws in the last four years and 54 of those are very important, the minister said.

State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Shajahan Omar was also present at the press briefing.

**Fitra fixed**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
"The meeting fixed the fitra rate on the basis of the price of 1.65 kg flour after monitoring market price in different regions of the country," said the announcement.

Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque Maulana Obaidul Haque and Senior Pesh Imam Mufti M Nuruddin and Khatib of Lalbagh Shahi Jam-e Mosque Maulana M Aminul Islam were, among others, present.

# Local or foreign group

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Formed a day after the attacks, the committee also included deputy IC (crime, director) (intelligence) of Rapid Action Battalion, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch of police, Dhaka, special superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department and representatives of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and National Security Intelligence.

The committee first collected information and evidence of the blasts and studied the nature of the bombs blasted and recovered on August 17. It also analysed the information gleaned by the law enforcers from the arrestees and witnesses.

The committee analysed the confessional statements of the arrestees and the contents of the JMB leaflets seized from the sites of attacks before it reached the primary conclusion that the JMB had carried out the attacks.

But a powerful group worked behind the JMB, a source close to the committee said quoting the report.

"The whole attack involved a huge amount of money. The JMB had to set up a countryside network, send a large number of operatives across the country, provide them with mobile phones, rent houses, spend a lot of money for making bombs and paying the bombers," he said.

It is not possible for the JMB alone to bear the cost of the whole operation. There must have been a powerful "vested quarter" working behind them, the committee noted in the report, saying it learnt about the foreign sources and NGOs from the arrestees.

The committee asked the government to trace the group, which, it said, may

remain inside the country or abroad.

The arrestees and those who confessed to carrying out the bombings are only grassroots operatives and gave almost similar information that some people supplied them the bombs and directed how and where to blast those.

All of these people said they carried out the attacks to establish Islam and that the bombing was no sin as it was done for a "noble religious cause", the report said, noting that the operatives had been motivated strongly for a long time.

"Although these people are claiming that they did it for establishing Islam, it is still unknown what was in the mind of the masterminds," said a source in the committee.

The arrestees disclosed names of some district and top-level leaders, including Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai. These people must be arrested immediately for the sake of unearthing the mystery behind the attacks, said the report.

Since most of the bombers have been motivated for militant activities and trained at different madrasas and since the militant leaders targeted some madrasas for recruiting operatives, it is urgent to bring uniformity in madrasa education to stop such motivation, the source said.

"There should be a thrust also to modernise the madrasa education," he added.

Expressing its apprehension that the militants may make such attacks again, the committee recommended heightened watch and vigilance at different levels of the society.

**PM renews stance**  
**FROM PAGE 1**  
self-reliant in all sectors so that—Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians --could stand together, raising their heads high with pride on the world stage.

Listing some successes Bangladesh achieved in social and economic sectors, the prime minister hoped that Bangladesh would become self-reliant in all sectors within 15 years.

Freedom fighter Maj Gen (ret'd) CR Dutta and Moharaj of Ramkrishna Mission Swami Akharananda spoke on the occasion.

Mentioning permission to celebrate puja at Ramna Kali Mandir by her government and conducting survey to give land to Kali Mandir, she said those who had not taken initiatives in the past to do that are now spreading propaganda against communal harmony.

Referring to the steps taken by her government for the welfare of the Hindus, she said temple-based library project has been launched by her government.

Khaleda said those who are carrying out false campaign and hatching conspiracies are also involved in damaging idols so that Puja can not be celebrated here peacefully.

Referring to her government's adequate security measures to ensure peaceful celebration of Durga Puja, she urged them to remain alert against any untoward incident and cooperate with the law-enforcement agencies to fend off any trouble.

In response to their invitation to visit Dhakeswari Mandir and Raman Kali Mandir, the prime minister said she will try to visit those at a convenient time.

Speaking on the occasion, CR Dutta expressed gratitude to the prime minister for her gesture to exchange greetings

and inviting them to attend the function.

He thanked her for her government's all-out efforts to ensure a congenial atmosphere for celebrating Durga Puja with due religious fervour.

Referring to a few incidents of damaging idols before puja, Dutta said credit also goes to the government as puja is also taking place in those areas after repairing the idols.

Appreciating the prime minister's gesture and initiative, Swami Akharananda said, "We've been able to get closer through exchanging greetings it's very essential for our coexistence."

**Insurgents kill**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
undermine Saturday's referendum, a crucial step in Iraq's democratic transition.

In the deadliest attack in nearly two weeks, a suicide car bomb exploded at about 11 a.m. in a crowded open market in the northwestern town of Tal Afar, killing 30 Iraqis and wounding 45, said Brig. Najim Abdullah, Tal Afar's police chief. US and Iraqi forces routed insurgents in a major offensive there last month.

He said all the victims appeared to be civilians since no Iraqi or US forces were in the center of Tal Afar, which is 260 miles northwest of Baghdad.

Late Monday, a delegation of Arab League envoys was ambushed in the capital, and while none of the diplomats were harmed, two police bodyguards were killed.

"We expected it to be dangerous," the Arab League head of mission Algerian Ahmed Ben Helli said after the attack.

"The world, and in particular the Arab world, must be aware of this situation. If it gets worse, it could spin out of control."

**2 killed in crossfire**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
area of Comilla town.

Police said he stood accused in at least 19 cases including three for murder and two for robbery.

Following a tip-off that Quamrul and his accomplices were hiding in an under-construction building at Chhayabitan Housing Estate in the town, a team of Rab-7 rushed to the site and rined the building at about 4:45am, said sources.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, Quamrul and his group opened fire on them. The Rab men returned fire and at one stage, Quamrul got shot and fell to the ground, added the sources.

The Rab men took him to Comilla Medical College and Hospital (CMCH), where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

One .32-bore revolver with five bullets was recovered from Quamrul while an LG from the scene of the shooting.

The victim's family received the body at 12:30pm from the CMCH morgue.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna adds: The crossfire victim,

Aslam Hossain Golder, 30, was an armed cadre of outlawed New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP).

Earlier on Sunday night, police arrested him at Sonadanga Bus Terminal in Khulna City.

When a police team taking Aslam with them went to Shajira village in Dumuria upazila to recover firearms, a gunfight broke out between them and the NBCP operatives at about midnight Monday, said superintendent of Khulna Metropolitan Police.

More than 30 rounds of fire were exchanged during the gunfight that also left Assistant Sub-Inspector Ajmol Hossain, constables Abdur Rashid and Jamaluddin injured.

One double-barrel gun, two live cartridges and two used shells were recovered from the scene.

According to officer-in-charge of Dumuria Police Station, the slain outlaw was accused in 18 cases including four for murder with different police stations across Khulna district.

**Dhaka sends**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said yesterday.

He said the government has decided to provide some 40,000 pieces of blankets, food, medicine and warm clothes for the quake victims.

As Pakistan prefers antibiotics for treating the injured, Bangladesh will send these items as much as it can, he added.

About the delay in sending relief, he said it took time to complete formalities of using other countries' airspace by the airforce plane.

**Islamabad**  
**FROM PAGE 1**  
time," the spokesperson was quoted as saying in Islamabad.

The Dhaka summit have already been postponed twice -- in December last year following a devastating Tsunami that ravaged large parts of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives and then again for security reasons early this year.

# Flooding

**FROM PAGE 16**  
and essential drug is prevailing in the affected areas.

Upazila administration sources said they could not reach the remote battered areas for providing relief materials for want of adequate water transport.

Meanwhile, Masud, 8, and Ratna, 6, of village Haripur under Gaibandha Sadar upazila died of diarrhoea while 55 others have been attacked with the disease.

There is no sign of early restoration of road communication between Gobindaganj and Dinajpur.

Our Rangpur correspondent adds: This week's untimely flash flood in Badarganj, Pirganj and Mithapukur upazilas has added to the sufferings of about one lakh munga-ridden people who are now crying for food, pure drinking water, shelter and medicine.

At least 10,000 vulnerable families of three upazilas were rendered homeless as their mud houses collapsed in the flood. Many of them are now passing days under the open sky while others have taken shelter in schools, madrasas and colleges.

District administration sources said 50 thousand people in the three upazilas were badly affected in the flash flood but records by different organisations put the possible number at more than two lakh.

Fifty tonnes of rice and Tk 15,000 were distributed among the flood affected extremely poor families in three upazilas while the demand is several times more, sources in the district relief office said.

The affected people of different areas complained that they are passing days half-fed or unfed but no government relief reached them.

With the receding of water, many families began to return home from the temporary flood shelters in Badarganj, but many others, able to mend their collapsed mud houses, have to remain there.

A number of families of Modhupur who took shelter at Modhupur Primary School building said they did not leave the school as their mud houses collapsed in the flood.

**AL labels**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
More than one lakh 'false cases' filed against the opposition activists during the same period bear testimony to the extent of the political oppression under the despotic rule of Khaleda-Nizami, he observed.

Jalil also said that more than six lakh people fell victims to legal harassment while 21,32,304 incidents of robbery, loot, encroachment, extortion, mugging and abduction and 15,12,209 cases of repression on minorities took place in the country between October 2001 and February this year.

The people have been living in great anxiety and fear since the alliance came to power through 'rigging in 2001 national elections', he added.

The government has so far released 70,000 convicted criminals. It appears relentless in subjecting the progressive individuals to abuse while the constitution gives the highest priority to security of life and property, he said.

The ruling coalition has turned the entire country into a criminals' den by sheltering criminals and terrorists, the AL general secretary said adding that the militant groups like Jama'at Mujahideen Bangladesh and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh have thrived under government patronage.

The militants have killed 22 people and crippled more than a thousand in Nature, Rajshahi and Naogaon districts.

Referring to major blast incidents like the August 21 in 2004, August 17 and October 3 this year, Jalil said a new 'bombing culture' has been introduced in the country. People killed in blasts total 181 while 2,000 were injured in 51 bombing incidents across the country.

The law enforcers under the four-party rule have been engaged in various criminal activities and on numerous occasions were caught red-handed.

Seizures of huge cache of arms and explosives at different times inside the Bangladesh territory show the country to be a popular transit point for the gunrunners, observed the AL lawmaker.

Jalil said the prime minister's speech made 'against the backdrop of ever-worsening law and order situation' was full of lies and falsehoods.

"By expressing regret for the failure of her administration and intelligence to know beforehand about the bombings, the prime minister, who is also at the helm of the home ministry, had tried to duck the responsibilities," Jalil continued.

Senior AL leaders Zillur Rahman, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim, Selim, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Obaidul Quader, Mohammad Nasim, among others, attended the press conference.

**JCD cadres**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
executive engineer's office and fled the scene.

No casualties were reported in the blast and additional police were deployed on the Buet campus to avoid further untoward incidents.

Sources said at least three factions of the JCD are trying to grab the tender work, worth Tk 70 lakh, for constructing a residential building for the third class employees of Buet.

JCD sources said leaders of the JCD also threatened the Buet engineers in order to control the buying of schedule papers and barred different construction firms from buying the schedule paper. The JCD factions are working in favour of at least two construction firms for a large amount of money, the sources added.

Only four construction firms have bought schedule papers for the work, sources said.

It has been alleged that JCD's Central International Affairs Secretary Bazul Karim Chowdhury Abed with the help of Danesul Islam, unit President Salimullah Hall, and General Secretary Abdur Rahim Setu were trying to obstruct the buying of schedule papers.

Abed, however, told The Daily Star that he was neither involved in the controlling of the schedule papers nor had he sent anyone to control it.

While talking to The Daily Star JCD President Azizul Baree Helal said Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men hurled the crackers at Buet. "If our leaders are involved in the manipulation of the schedule papers, we shall take organisational action against them," he added.

# Bomb materials

**FROM PAGE 1**  
our Sathkira correspondent.

"You will be executed if you do not stop arresting our men and celebration of puja (Hindu religious festival)," reads a letter sent to Sathkira Reporters' Club by post.

"You are our Muslim brothers, so do not arrest our men to protect the non-Muslims," says the letter claiming to be issued by "White House (Bandakati), Bangla Bhai, Ahle Hadith and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh."

The letter says no Hindu worship or fair will be allowed in the division.

**RAJSHAH**  
Police recovered bomb-making materials and a number of books written by Jamaat leader Ghulam Azam and Prof Ruhul Amin and a notebook of Madina University scholar Abdul Gafur Al Madani from a Baliaipukur house yesterday.

Police conducted the raid following statements of militants arrested in Nature on September 17 but they could not arrest anyone as they abandoned the den after the arrest of their men, our staff correspondent reports from Rajshahi.

Quoting from the seized documents the investigators told reporters that a group of 13 militants had conducted the blasts in Rajshahi city and one Enamul of Gaibandha acted as their commander.

Abdus Samad alias Abdul Awal, son-in-law of JMB chief Abdur Rahman, rented the Baliaipukur house belonging to Rabiul Islam several months ago. Samad stayed at the house until August 30, the investigators said.

Samad escaped arrest in Nature on September 17 when police in a raid on their Mirpara den arrested four militants -- Delwar Hossain Mithu alias Shihab, Matin, Hafizur Rahman, and Hasibul Islam.

**BOGRA**  
Our Bogra correspondent adds: The JMB has decided recently to make Bangla Bhai, operations commander of the militant outfit, inactive as he was getting more focus than JMB chief Abdur Rahman, a source close to JMB said.

Bangla Bhai is now staying somewhere in greater Mymensingh, the source claimed.

The source, however, could not say for sure the whereabouts of the new operations commander Abdul Awal, who hails from Kaliganj of Nature. It is learnt that he had stayed at a rented house in Bogra for a long time.

According to the source, Awal has been given the responsibility to carry out bomb attacks on radio and television stations, telephone exchanges and some other key installations across the country and free the detained JMB and JMBJ members.

Law enforcers suspect Awal has planned to carry out the first bomb attack in Jopurhat to free the arrested militants and then in Sathkira, Chittagong, Rajshahi and other divisional headquarters in phases.

Another source within the JMB said Bogra, Naogaon and Gaibandha districts may be kept out of the bombing plan as the districts are known as the militants' strongholds.

The source said the JMB did not explode bombs in Munshiganj on August 17 as Abdur Rahman was staying in Munshiganj on that day.

**BANDARBAN**  
Police are looking for the source of money spent on setting up madrasas and mosques in the hill district, our Bandarban correspondent reports.

They are also investigating the motive

behind the recent visit of some officials of Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) in the area.

Sources said police are trying to know whether the Rohingya refugees living in Bandarban have any link to the August 17 serial blasts.

A temporary den of militants was found at Faitong in Lama upazila yesterday, around 500 yards off a police outpost. Locals said JMB cadre Latu, arrested in Chittagong during October 3 serial blasts, and four others set up the temporary den in the first week of August to start militant activities from there.

Earlier, three JMB cadres arrested in Bandarban --Abdul Hafiz, Shafiqur Rahman and Moulana Abdul Malek -- admitted their involvement in the August 17 serial blasts.

**DHAKA**  
ADhaka court yesterday placed a youth on a three-day remand for his alleged involvement in the August 17 serial bomb blasts.

Sutrapur police on Monday arrested Mosharrarf Hossain, 25, of Kharugaon village in Munshiganj district. Police produced him at the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday with a prayer for a five-day remand.

The primary investigation reveals that Mosharrarf is a member of JMB and he is involved in the August 17 bomb blasts. Police said he needs to be quizzed to find out his accomplices and clue to the bomb blasts.

**KHULNA**  
Our staff correspondent from Khulna reports: JMB cadre Anisuzzaman, 30, arrested on Sunday in Gopalganj town, made a statement on Monday evening under section 164 before a first class magistrate in Bagerhat.

Anisuzzaman confessed that he had planted a bomb in an under-construction house in Bagerhat town on August 17. He also named some other JMB cadres who planted bombs at six other places in Bagerhat town the same day.

The JMB cadre also said that a secret meeting was held on August 13 at the house of Zillur Molla at Mollahat upazila where seven persons were assigned to carry out the bomb attacks in the district.

Anisuzzaman of Mollahat upazila told the magistrate that JMB cadres had been trained in the Ahle Hadith mosque at Udaypur village of Mollahat.

Bombs issued on August 17 were delivered to him and other JMB cadres by one Shabbir, a khadem of Udaypur Ahle Hadith mosque.

He further said that a secret meeting was held on August 18 at Mollahat Ahle Hadith Madrasa to celebrate the serial blasts.

Meanwhile, JMB cadre Shahidullah alias Lokman was again taken on a five-day remand by Batiaghta police in Khulna yesterday. He has been shown arrested in a case filed with Batiaghta Police Station in connection with a bomb explosion on August 17 on the Khulna University (KU) campus.

Batiaghta police also took JMB cadre Mahbubur Rahman Palash on a five-day remand for questioning in connection with bomb blast on the KU campus. Palash was arrested at Sathkira on August 31.

Shahidullah has named Palash as one of the 12 JMB cadres involved in the August 17 serial bomb blasts in Khulna district.

**Lack of free flow**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
face any serious scrutiny by the legislature, or by legal or audit authorities, speakers said, suggesting the enactment of a Right to Information Act.

Senior leaders of the government and the opposition as well as lawmakers of both sides spoke at the dialogue titled "The role of lawmakers in ensuring right to information for all". The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and Manusher Jonno, jointly organised the dialogue held at the CIRDP auditorium.

The speakers said access to government records is blocked by the old colonial practice of secrecy laws, which protect dishonest officials. Freedom of information is yet to be ensured and there are many laws prohibiting the disclosure of official documents and information, they mentioned.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan supported the lawmakers' suggestion to enact a Right to Information Act and said the process is underway. "We are in favour of providing all information to people, except on some crucial national issues."

On making the parliament function effectively, the minister suggested the opposition to join its sessions and force the government to be accountable. On the opposition allegation that they are not allowed to speak in the House, he said, "You should address this issue in the House, and the people will decide whether you get time to speak or not."

Eminent jurist and President of the Gono Forum Dr Kamal Hossain said an active parliament can ensure free flow of information where government is bound to reply to questions about its functioning.

He demanded that the government make public all investigation reports on different incidents (bomb blasts) in the last 20 months. The people have the right to know what the government is doing about those, he said.

Dr Kamal said the mere enactment of a law is not enough to ensure free flow of information. "What we need is respect for the law."

AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta echoed Dr Kamal and said, "We have a parliament but it is not functional...We have a constitution but little respect for it."

The opposition lawmaker went on, "We have introduced a caretaker government system for fair polling but it has proved that it is not enough. So, I am saying only laws are not adequate, we will have to show full respect for the law."

Presiding over the dialogue, ruling BNP lawmaker Abu Hena said in Bangladesh, once the votes are cast, the voices of the people go competently unheard until the next election.

"Key legislative and budgeting decisions are made with little input from the people who voted in the election. Special and entrenched interests control decision-making both at the community and national level," he said.

The legislators have to become rubber stamps for a dominant executive," he said. The prime minister is the head of both the executive and the legislative wings

of the government, he added.

The BNP lawmakers also said the government controls the magistracy and the lower tier of the judiciary.

Motiu Rahman, Editor of the Prothom Alo, moderated the dialogue. He observed that lack of adequate information is one of the main obstacles to the country's development. The government should be transparent in its functioning by providing information to the people.

Jatiya Party parliamentary group leader Rowshan Ershad said democracy cannot function properly without freedom of information. "We will have to establish democracy first, otherwise we will not be able to ensure free flow of information."

AL lawmaker Faruk Khan said opposition lawmakers do not join the House as they are deprived of information there.

Jatiya Party lawmaker GM Quader said unscrupulous bureaucrats want to hide information about their corrupt activities.

Former advisor of the caretaker government, ASM Shajahan, compared government offices with cold storage and said it seems that government offices are for keeping the information but not for disseminating it.

BNP lawmakers Moazzem Hossain Alal and Rashiduzzaman Millat asked the government to halt 'unhealthy journalism' of some so-called journalists and also to ensure people's right to know.

Economist Dr Attur Rahman said the free flow of information is necessary for the people to take decisions on the government's performances, and is their fundamental right.

Editor of the Weekly Anunnoya asked the government to publish annual reports on performances of different ministries. "There is nothing to hide on the part of the government as it functions with public money," she said.

Shahjin Anam, Team Leader of the Manusher Jonno, urged lawmakers to work in favour of enacting the right to information act, and said it will help strengthen democracy as well as the development of the country.

**Hopes**  
**FROM PAGE 16**  
Kashmir district of Karnah. "It is a calamity that is overwhelming our resources."

The stench of decomposing bodies rose from beneath the collapsed homes in towns reached by journalists and relief teams, where a lack of drinking water and broken sewage systems posed a risk of contagious disease outbreaks.

Desperate people grabbed whatever they could from partially damaged shops, but there were also cases of outright looting. During the night, troops fired in the air to scare off a gang that had repeatedly raided a supply depot in Muzafarabad.

Musharraf asked for more helicopters to bring medical supplies, food and other relief to communities cut off in the region's rugged mountains, the foothills of the Himalayas.

UN officials said the situation was desperate.