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Children dance at the Bijoy Utsab (victory festival) at the Abahani ground in the city yesterday. The Liberation War Museum organised the festival.



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Udichi, a cultural organisation, stages a demonstration in front of the Bangla Academy in the city yesterday demanding publication of works of Ekushey Award recipient Satyen Sen.

'Ensure equal participation of women in local govt'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a workshop yesterday called for ensuring women's equal participation and their empowerment in local government to strengthen it.

Male representatives of local government bodies are not cooperating with the women representatives in development activities and the lawmakers are also interfering in the local government activities, they said.

Though the participation of women in local government is satisfactory, they have very little authority and their remuneration is also quite low compared to the male representatives, they added.

"There is no provision for a woman member to deliver more services than a general member, nor does she have the authority to supervise others' services. They are left helpless and vulnerable to the critical assessment by their constituencies without having the right to fulfil their obligations," said Prof Zarina Rahman Khan of the Department of Public Relations, Dhaka University.

As a result, the number of women seeking election to the reserved seats has declined by 12.34 per cent in 2003 compared to 1997, she said in her keynote paper on 'Local government and women's empowerment in Bangladesh'.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) organised the workshop on 'Strong local government: A major step for establishing democratic state' at the Biam auditorium in the city. Around 300 women representatives of local government took part in the workshop.

At the inaugural session, Parishad General Secretary Ayesha Khanam said the state should play an important and timely role in ensuring women's equal participation.

Former vice-chancellor of Jahangirnagar University Prof Amirul Islam Chowdhury criticised the government for creating obstacles to strengthening the local government.

The government has made the local government bodies fully dependent on it by reducing their sources of income, he said, adding

that even allocations were made to them on the basis of political considerations.

Prof Amirul also called for decentralisation of the local government to make it stronger.

Highlighting the weak points of the local government system, Parishad Secretary Rekha Chowdhury said lack of awareness among people and lack of accountability are major hindrances to strengthening the local government institutions.

Parishad President Hena Das, Dr Nazrul Islam and Norwegian Ambassador Lise Norheim also spoke.

Expressing concern over the rise of fundamentalism, Hena Das said the Parishad started a token protest on February 1 and it will continue until March 26. The protesters will wear badges with the slogans 'Communalism and fundamentalism is against human rights' and 'Build a nation with the spirit of liberation war' throughout the protest period.