

INDO-BANGLADESH DIALOGUE

'Strengthen cultural, media cooperation to dispel mistrust, suspicion'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite having a long and common history and cultural heritage, Bangladesh and India are still trapped in suspicion in their political relations, said Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hosen yesterday.

"We lived together long enough in the past to know each other better culturally than we understand each other now under post-independence political dispensation," he said at the inaugural session of a dialogue as the chief guest.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in collaboration with India International Centre (IIC) organised the fourth meeting of 'Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue on Media and Culture' at Brac Centre Inn in the city.

Mainul Hosen said Bangladesh was the initiator of the Saarc dream, but the boldness of its dream does not match the boldness of political leadership.

He suggested strong cultural cooperation and review of media policy of both the countries to propagate unbiased but friendly attitude to cope with political distrust and to encourage affinity.

"Cultural cooperation is a soft touch way of influencing hard realities for meaningful and closer ties between the peoples of different countries," he said, adding that the two countries are anxious to improve the overall relationship to move forward together for a better future.

"Many argue that low-level political and diplomatic understanding that persists between otherwise



Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hosen speaks at the inaugural session of a dialogue as the chief guest at Brac Centre Inn in the city yesterday. On his right are CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan and former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Dev Mukharjee.

so closely linked two countries is responsible for contributing to low-level success in poverty alleviation and persistent underdevelopment," he said.

The media can play an important role in removing misunderstanding and prejudice through free flow of information and responsible journalism, Mainul Hosen said.

"What is necessary is to bridge the gap between what we aspire to

do and what we do," he said, adding that the present caretaker government appreciates the genuine need of good and constructive relations with India.

Bangladesh has no political ambition other than ensuring better future for its people while working with other countries, he added.

Chairing the session, CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan said the media of both the countries

should play responsible and unbiased role in dispelling all the mistrust and suspicion.

"The print media of the two countries can jointly work on the issues, which have cross-border implications," he said, adding that there are many examples of such collaboration to ensure that the information made public is accurate and unbiased.

He also suggested more cultural

exchanges in the fields of theatre and film.

Former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Dev Mukharjee, who co-chaired the session, said there are many positive things happening in both the countries, but this civil society initiative is an additional effort to give some new directions to the government actions.

Urging all to work more closely in strengthening the cultural and media cooperation, he said, "Let's not hate each other, but meet and move onwards and never retreat."

In his introductory speech, CPD Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya said the three-day dialogue was aimed at finding out ways how the media of both the countries could work more independently and making recommendations for the next Saarc summit in Delhi.

At the dialogue, eminent academics, diplomats, editors, artists and media personalities will constructively explore ways to resolve outstanding problems between the two nations and to identify opportunities for greater cooperation, he noted.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty and former adviser to the caretaker government Mahbubul Alam were also present.

'Remove illegal structures along rivers'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environmentalists yesterday urged the caretaker government to immediately launch a drive to remove all illegal structures along the rivers Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakkhya.

They also called for effective steps to check pollution of river water and restore navigability.

They also demanded effective steps to maintain natural flow of the rivers.

Members of Save the Buriganga Movement made the call at a meeting with the officials of BIWTA at its conference room in the city yesterday.

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, Save the Buriganga

Movement Member Secretary Mihar Biswas, Bapa executive member Dr Abdul Hai Muzumdar and Peace Secretary General Ifma Hossain were present at the meeting.

BIWTA officials apprised the environmentalists of their plans regarding rivers and sought cooperation from local people and civil society members in implementing the plans.

TIB debate today

BSS, Dhaka

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) will hold a debate titled "Women Against Corruption" today on the occasion of International Women's Day.

Girl students from private and government colleges and universities will take part in the debate beginning at 10:00am at Teacher-Student Center (TSC).

TIB has organised the debate in cooperation with the DU Debating Society, East West University, Independent University Bangladesh, Shamsun Nahar Hall Debating Club and Stamford Debate Forum.

'Women still repressed in Bangladesh'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said women are still repressed in the country although Bangladesh has signed a number of international charters to protect the rights of women since our independence.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) held the discussion at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday to mark the International Women's Day.

Women in the country have progressed much by dint of hard

work, devotion and commitment, the speakers added.

Journalist Nasimun Ara Huq moderated the discussion while BMP President Hena Das presided.

Addressing as the chief guest, Justice KM Sobhan said it is time to boost women's self awareness. A uniform family code is a must to establish the rights of women in the society, he added.

He also said that we should fight against fundamentalism and communalism to build a progressive nation.

A 13-point proposal was placed at the discussion to establish women's rights in the country, including initiating the uniform family code, restoring the Women Development Policy of 1997 and full ratification of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw) charter.

The proposal also demanded cancellation of the discriminatory citizen law, reservation of one third seats of the Parliament for women and direct election in the reserve

seats, reformation of law in the light of Cedaw to resist violence against women and enactment of laws to end domestic violence.

The speakers also said all forms of women repression should be considered as human rights violation, fundamentalists as well as war criminals should be banned from contesting the general election and legal steps should be taken against all kinds of fatwa (edict).

General Secretary of BMP Ayesha Khanam and Justice Gulam Rabbani also spoke at the discussion.