

'Enforce laws strictly to elect clean candidates'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday called for strict application of election laws to stop use of black money and muscle power in the next general election.

The ultimate objective of electoral reforms is to elect clean candidates through a free and fair election, they added.

The roundtable titled 'Election Commission's Reform Proposals' was organised by Shushashoner Janney Nagorik (Shujan) at the National Press Club in the city.

Former adviser to a caretaker government ASM Shahjahan and ex-lawmaker of Jatiya Party GM Quader said the previous Election Commission (EC), which was responsible to enforce the election laws, did not perform its duty properly.

"During the previous two elections, I submitted necessary information. But the EC never verified those information," said Quader.

He was supported by former Awami League (AL) lawmaker RahmatAli.

Placing Shujan's proposals at the roundtable, its Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar differed with EC proposal of candidate's submitting affidavit with 8-point information and tax return with the nomination paper.

"The information need to be submitted three days into the announcement of the election schedule so that people have enough time to read those," he said.

He also alleged that detailed information about the candidates would not be available in the existing



PHOTO:STAR

Justice Kazi Ebadul Hoque speaks at a roundtable at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right is journalist Syed Abul Moksud and on his left are ASM Shahjahan and Badiul Alam Majumdar.

form.

While the EC proposes fresh election in case the number of 'No' vote is half or more than the total cast, Shujan proposed barring of the candidates in the fresh election if 'No' vote wins.

Discussing the EC proposal of counting election expenditure of Tk 5 lakh from three weeks prior to the election, Shujan proposed counting it one year ahead and appointing auditors for monitoring.

While former ambassador Maj

Gen (Retd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury opposed it saying it would require a lot of manpower, Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury proposed that it should begin six months ahead.

Shujan President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said the matter of an independent EC Secretariat is yet to be placed at the meeting of the council of advisers.

He said there may not be enough time to complete the process of appointing new upazila election officials if some of the existing ones,

who have been put under observation, are not confirmed.

Some of the discussants stressed the need for re-demarcating the constituencies to bring balance in the number of voters.

Prof Muzaffer said officials on several occasions cited unavailability of updated numbers, but they can do it by using the previous census information.

Several discussants including former AL parliamentarian RahmatAli supported Shujan's proposal of election expenditure through the EC.

"Expenditure will reduce to a great extent if the returning officers hold projection meetings for the candidates," said Advocate RahmatAli.

Earlier, Shujan proposed Tk 3 lakh as highest election expenditure and publishing common posters by the EC with candidates' information disclosed in their affidavit to reduce the expenditure.

Dr Zafrullah and former AL lawmaker Abdur Razzak said fixing expenditure at Tk 3 or 5 lakh won't be realistic and proposed it to be fixed at Tk 15 lakh.

Some discussants including GM Quader, Abdur Razzak and Dr Zafrullah said the condition of having 33 percent women members in the executive committee is not realistic while some saying that there are not

enough qualified women in the political parties.

Prof Asaduzzaman proposed forming a returning committee comprising a judge, deputy commissioner and election officials instead of putting the responsibility entirely on the returning officer alone.

Saying that there are already many good laws in the country which were not applied in the past, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Monjurul Ahsan Khan, Amin Ahmed Chowdhury and GM Quader called for their strict application.

Pointing out that putting candidates' information on the website for public disclosure is not realistic, Muhammad Jahangir proposed publishing a booklet with information of all the candidates of a constituency and sending a copy to each holding.

Shujan also proposed provision for filing counter affidavit and law to deal with post-election violence.

Some discussants proposed barring those who opposed the liberation war, from taking part in the election.

Justice Kazi Ebadul Hoque, vice-president of Shujan, moderated the discussion which was also addressed by journalist Syed Abul Moksud and writer Rashid Haider.