

## 'Free flow of information key to establishing rule of law'

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Free flow of information is the key to establishing rule of law, said the speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

They said corruption remains rampant as rule of law stumbles due to lack of transparency and accountability.

The roundtable titled 'Right to information in establishing democracy and rule of law' was organised by Campaign on Citizens' Right to Information, as part of a three-day programme at the National Press Club in the city to mark the Right to Information Day today.

The speakers said democracy is still fragile because of people's limited access to information.

They urged the government to enact the right to information law soon and amend all the existing laws that contradict the freedom of expression.

"Corruption has become a main problem of the country. Lack of transparency and accountability and no access to information have made the country most corrupt in the world for five times," said Assistant Professor Hafizur Rahman Karzon of Dhaka University in his keynote presentation.

He said a democratic state does not mean only the presence of an elected government, rather a good governance is an integral part of democracy where openness and people's participation are ensured in decision-making process.



PHOTO: STAR

BFUJ President Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul speaks at a roundtable at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left is Nagorik Uddog Chairman Dr Khan Sarwar Mursid.

Hafizur said if there were free flow of information, the democratic system in the last five years would not have stumbled.

Presiding over the programme, Nagorik Uddog Chairman Dr Khan Sarwar Mursid said though democratic governments ruled the nation in last one and a half decades, they could not make parliament effective leaving democracy in a fragile condition.

Hundreds of questions have been raised by MPs (members of parliament), but those were not responded, he said, adding that parliament was made crippe so that good governance is not established in the country.

Severely criticising the culture of

secrecy among the government officials, Dr Khan said, "We want the government to frame the right to information act soon and ensure that people have access to information from the state and private sectors when they demand it."

Economist Prof Anisur Rahman said feudal mentality still prevails in the society where people elect the feudalists as their representatives who actually maintain a sort of patron-client relationships with the electors.

"Politicians deprive people of true education and push them towards fanatic education, because they are its beneficiaries," he added.

BFUJ President Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul said democracy cannot take a

strong shape unless there is free flow of information, but unfortunately people hardly speak of such issues though they are excited about democracy.

"It is more difficult to get information from the NGOs and private sector

than that of the government machineries," he said, adding that mindset of the culture of secrecy must be changed to establish a true democratic society.

Demanding enactment of the right to information law during this govern-

ment, Manjurul said civil service rules, a strong instrument to hide information, should be reviewed and the official secrets act be amended.

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust Executive Director Taslimur Rahman, Supreme Court

Advocate ZI Khan Panna, Campaign on Citizens' Right to Information Member-Secretary Zahir Hossain and former chief engineer of Wasa Kazi Mohammad Shish also took part in the roundtable.