

Restore democratic atmosphere for successful govt-parties dialogue

Participants tell BBC Sanglap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Participants at a discussion yesterday said the proposed dialogue between the caretaker government and the political parties would not be successful until democratic atmosphere is restored in the country.

In order to restore democracy and hold a meaningful election in the country, state of emergency and ban on political activities must be lifted, they said while taking part in BBC Bangladesh Sanglap at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital.

"The dialogue won't be successful by keeping politics banned," said Awami League (AL) Organising Secretary Mahmudur Rahman Manna.

BNP Joint Secretary General Salima Rahman, former caretaker government adviser Shoaib Ahmed and Chairman of Bangladesh Krishi Bank Khandaker Ibrahim Khaled also took part in the Sanglap as panellists.

BBC Bangla Service in conjunction with the BBC World Service Trust organised the discussion moderated by Kamal Ahmed of BBC Bangla Service.

"It's true that the dialogue won't be meaningful by keeping the state of emergency in force and politics banned. To make the dialogue a success, ban on political activities must go," said Salima Rahman, a former state minister.

Shoaib Ahmed said, "Right decisions won't come through dialogue if there is no free political

environment. Dialogue must take place after bestowing full political rights."

Khandaker Ibrahim Khaled said the dialogue would not be successful if it is not held for restoring democracy and holding a meaningful election.

"The dialogue will be paradoxical if the leaders sit amidst ban on political activities," he added.

There is no need to keep state of emergency in force to hold a meaningful dialogue, he opined.

Replying to a query, the speakers said a democratic environment is needed to carry out necessary reforms in political parties.

They warned that imposed reforms would not be acceptable to political parties as well as to countrymen.

They also suggested the government to adopt an appropriate policy to check price hike.

Over women development policy, the former adviser said it is not the duty of the government to protect any quarters' (those who resorted to violence around Baitul Mukarram National Mosque protesting the policy) interests.

He said it would be good if political government enacts the policy after taking opinion of people's representatives in parliament.

The AL leader said the government surrendered to the 'extremists' who violated the state of emergency.

The BNP leader observed that the government failed to control the situation created over the women development policy.



Awami League presidium member Motia Chowdhury speaks at a discussion marking the historic Mujibnagar Day at Moni Singh-Farhad Memorial Trust Bhaban in the city yesterday. Jatiya Char Neta Parishad organised the event.

7 DU STUDENTS COMMIT SUICIDE IN TWO AND A HALF YEARS

Authorities yet to take steps to prevent recurrence of suicides

RAKIB AHAMMED

Despite increasing tendency among the female resident students of Dhaka University (DU) to commit suicide in last couple of years, the university authorities are yet to take any effective steps to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

In last two and a half years, seven students of the university committed suicide. Of them, five were female resident students and three incidents occurred within last one and a half years.

"The trend is increasing day by day as depressed female students do not find any mental supports in the hall to resolve conflicts of their life. They are alienated from their family and live in a place where they cannot share their guilty feelings with someone dependable. So simple internal conflicts sometimes grip them deeply and push them towards suicide," said Prof Mahmudur Rahman, chairman of the clinical psychology department, while talking to The Daily Star.

He said the trend may rise if the university authorities do not take effective steps immediately.

The latest incident occurred on Tuesday when Chhanda Rani Sarker, a fourth-year student of the Institute of Education and Research and a resident of Rokeya Hall, committed suicide hanging herself from a ceiling fan in her room.

The very next day, two more students of the same hall tried to commit suicide, but they survived as other girls noticed their activities, said sources from the hall.

Zohra Khan Progaya, Khadiza Khatun and Shilpi Rani Sarker were three students of Rokeya Hall who committed suicide respectively on June 25 of 2007, July 28 of 2006 and October 20 of 2005, while Sabera Yasmin Papri of Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall and Humayun Kabir of Surya Sen Hall committed suicide on August 8 of 2007 and February 22 of 2005 respectively.

Sources said all the students had killed themselves failing to cope with their emotional conflicts.

After the third suicide incident

at Rokeya Hall within one and a half years, the authorities on July 28 of last year took an initiative to appoint some part-time psychiatric consultants for four dormitories of the university.

But the authorities are yet to appoint any consultant in any of the dormitories.

When asked DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz said, "We had to create the posts through the University Grants Commission, so it took time."

However, the process of appointing nine consultants in four female dormitories is now almost complete, he added.

The authorities of four female dormitories also decided to launch a special counselling programme for the resident students to avoid repetition of such incidents through counselling. But they could not continue the programme.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman said a long-term and realistic plan is needed to avoid repetition of such incidents.

"A suicide prevention commit-

tee should be formed immediately to provide regular consultancy by clinical psychologists in each dormitory.

Besides, there should be a system like 'Emergency Suicide Prevention Phone Line' so that student can get emergency counselling over phones anytime," he added.

Prof Rahman also stressed on creating a homely environment in dormitories and said it should be monitored whether the house tutors are friendly and cooperative with the resident students or not.

Quoting several female students of different dormitories he said, "Unfortunately many of our house tutors are not friendly to students, rather they behave roughly with the students. They never think that these girls are alienated from their family."

Meanwhile, the Students' Counselling and Guidance Office at the Teacher-Student Centre has also failed to attract students since its inception in 1963.

Only 292 students took psychotherapy from there last year.



Freedom fighter and woman leader Shirin Banu speaks at a view exchange meeting on 'constitutional rights of women' at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium in the city yesterday. On her right are Nasrin Mahmud and Dr Farzana Islam. Partnership of Women in Action (PWA) organised the meeting. (Story on page 1)

Govt should amend Labour Act after consulting with experts

Speakers tell seminar

DU CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday said the government should amend the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 after consulting with labour, trade and legal experts and NGOs.

They said without the involvement of legal experts and representatives of bodies concerned, the long desired act would be ineffective and unable to fulfil the expectation of labourers in the country.

The seminar, held at Cirdap auditorium in the city, was organised to discuss the 77-point draft recommendation introduced by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) for the amendment of Bangladesh Labour Act 2006.

The speakers also demanded cancellation of a few sections in the Labour Act Amendment Ordinance 2008 that violate the fundamental rights of labourers.

They welcomed the "mobile court process" in the amendment ordinance and stressed appointing labour law experts in the court for its perfect execution.

BLAST set a 77-point draft

recommendation for the amendment of Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 after consulting labour representatives, legal experts, NGO representatives and trade union representatives to make the act timely, realistic and effective.

In the recommendations, BLAST urged the government to ensure that the owners follow building code while constructing or demolishing a building.

Children and teenagers should not be allowed in any sort of works in ultraviolet and risky area, it also

recommended.

Vice President of BLAST Justice Nayeemuddin Ahmed presided over the seminar while Executive Director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, Principal of Shilpa Samparka Shikshatan Kabir Ahmad Chowdhury and Advocate Azadul Haque also spoke.

Deputy Director of BLAST Farida Yeasmin presented the 77-point recommendation at the seminar while representatives from different labour bodies, NGOs and trade unions were also present.



Premier University Vice Chancellor Dr Anupam Sen speaks at the biennial conference of Chittagong Press Club in the port city yesterday.

20 garment workers injured in violence

UNB, Savar

At least 20 workers were injured, five of them seriously, amid violence triggered by an attack by hoodlums at a garment factory in the new zone of Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) in Savar yesterday.

Sources said a clash erupted at about 8:00am between the workers of 'Shine Fashion Ltd' and a gang of local hoodlums when the outsiders attacked them over Thursday's work abstention programme in the factory.

Receiving information, the police rushed to the spot and charged baton on the workers to bring the situation under control.

Seriously injured Mohsin, Mohiuzzaman, Abul Qader, Harun and Ali were admitted to a hospital.

The workers later went on a strike in protest against the attack by the 'outsiders'. They alleged that the gang attacked them with the backing of factory officials Nasir Uddin and Shakib Hossain.

Police arrested three persons -- Ruhul Amin, Mohsin and Bozlu -- in connection with the attack. The factory management sacked 19 workers, including Nasir and Shakib, for creating anarchy. Officer-in-Charge of Ashulia Police Station Kamrul Islam told UNB that the situation has returned to normal.



Temperature may rise

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore, Kushtia and Comilla in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country. Mild to moderate heat wave sweeping over the Khulna and Rajshahi divisions and the regions of Dhaka, Barisal, Patuakhali and Rangamati may continue, Met Office said.

It predicted slight rise in day temperature over the country. Yesterday's highest temperature of 39.0 degree Celsius was recorded at Chuadanga and the lowest of 20 degrees at Sylhet.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:22pm today and rises at 5:32am tomorrow.

The highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	36.2	27.0	73	49
Chittagong	32.3	26.0	75	77
Rajshahi	38.9	26.6	86	35
Khulna	36.8	27.5	80	63
Barisal	36.4	26.6	84	78
Sylhet	33.3	20.0	84	69
Cox's Bazar	34.5	26.3	66	75

Train passengers escape accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Several hundred passengers narrowly escaped a train accident in Netrakona yesterday morning due to the presence of mind of some boys.

The Mohonganj-bound local train could have met an accident as eight fishplates and 24 nuts were stolen from the rail line at Pukuria on Friday night.

Train communication remained snapped for at least three hours.

Shyamganj Railway Office Sub-Assistant Engineer Mohammad Giasuddin said eight fishplates and 24 nuts were stolen from Mymensingh-Netrakona-Mohonganj rail line.

The act of stealing fishplates and nuts came to the notice of some boys who were cutting grass near the rail line.

Sources said the Mohonganj-bound local passenger train left the Netrakona Court Station at 7:30am. Sensing an imminent accident, the boys raised an alarm and hoisted a red flag. Seeing the red flag, the driver of the train stopped the train.

The sub-assistant engineer filed a case with Mymensingh GRP Station. None was arrested in this connection.

74 EWU students receive merit scholarships

The merit scholarship award ceremony for the fall semester 2007 and the spring semester 2008 of East West University (EWU) was held at the university auditorium in the city yesterday, says a press release.

A total of 74 students received full and half tuition merit scholarships in the ceremony.

EWU Vice Chancellor Prof Mohammed Sharif handed over the scholarship certificates to the students and also congratulated them for their outstanding results.

He urged the students to dedicate themselves to nation-building activities so that the nation can cope with the crises like poverty, food shortage and climate change.

HN Ashequr Rahman, member of the board of directors of EWU, and Col (ret'd) Shah Murtaza Ali, registrar of the university, were present in the ceremony.

Obituary



Alhaj Sharifa Haider, wife of Dr Syeed Haider, former chief medical officer of BTMC, passed away at her Uttara residence in the city on April 17 at the age of 73, says a press release.

She left behind one son, Dr Ashraf Sayeed, and one daughter, Sharmila Sayeed.

A doa mahfil will be held after Asr prayers today. Relatives, well-wishers and friends have been requested to attend the mahfil.

DHAKA TODAY
Seminar
 Campaign for Good Governance organises a seminar on agriculture, food security and service sectors. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 10:00am.

Award giving ceremony
 The award giving ceremony for excellence in journalism will be held. High Commission of Canada and Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC) will jointly organise the programme. Venue: LGED conference room. Time: 11:00am.

'Ensure community participation in healthcare at upazila level'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a workshop yesterday called on the government to increase community participation in the healthcare service at upazila level to ensure service delivery system is decentralised.

They said the health sector didn't get adequate funds in the national budget.

They also urged the government

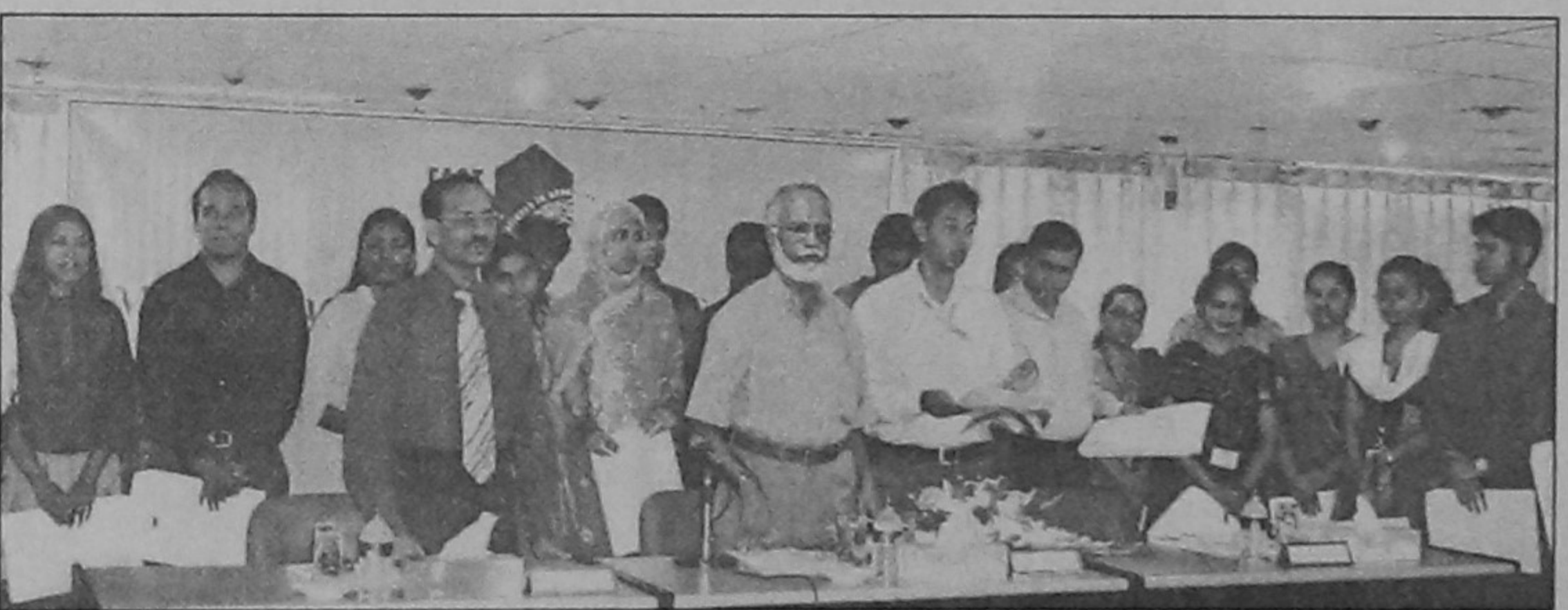
to identify major health requirements and ensure optimal utilisation of available funds and manpower for a positive outcome.

Development Organisation of the Rural Poor (DORP) organised the workshop on 'Health and Family Planning Budget Monitoring: Tools and Indicators Formulation' at Biam conference room in the city.

At present, our health sector at

the upazila level is deplorable and an effective mechanism is needed to find out the cause, said the speakers.

Former adviser ASM Shahjahan, Additional Secretary Abdul Halim, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Mohammad Golam Quddus, Secretary General of DORP AHM Nouman spoke at the inaugural session.



Recipients of merit scholarships pose with East West University Vice Chancellor Prof Mohammed Sharif at the scholarship award ceremony in the city yesterday.

New 2012 deadline set to rid world of chemical weapons

AFP, The Hague

A body set up to rid the world of chemical weapons agreed yesterday on a new global deadline of 2012, after admitting that Albania is the only country to have completely destroyed its stock.

After 10 days of deliberations at a review conference in The Hague called to re-assess its 11-year mission, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) gave itself a new five-year mandate to achieve total disarmament.

"The review conference text was adopted at 5:30 a.m. (0330 GMT)," spokesman Michael Lohan told AFP.

The United States, Russia, India and Libya, with some of the largest stockpiles, previously had individual deadlines, some of them earlier than 2012, but have signed up to the revised founding treaty.

"The discussions are difficult, some states are more ambitious,

others are more wary," the conference head and Algeria's ambassador in The Hague, Benchaa Dani, told AFP during the conference.

The OPCW said 37 percent of global chemical agents with military functions have been destroyed alongside a third of all chemical munitions stocks.

The United States has removed half of its arsenal, Russia around a quarter.

The treaty has to-date been ratified by 183 countries representing 98 percent of the world's population.

Twelve states have yet to sign or ratify, including five in the Middle East -- Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

Director-General Rogelio Pflüger told AFP before the conference began that he had "serious hopes" of seeing Lebanon and Iraq sign up "in the near future".

The OPCW -- which has conducted over 3,000 inspections in 80

member states since its formation -- had yet to establish any communication with North Korea.

Established under the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention treaty, the OPCW is also charged with monitoring security at industrial chemical production plants around the world as well as working with states to limit the opportunity for rogue terror groups to launch chemical attacks.

CUJ election today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The biennial election of Chittagong Union of Journalists (CUJ) will be held today.

A total of 208 voters will cast their votes to elect a 10-member new committee of the union for 2008-09. Voting will be held from 9:00am to 4:00pm.

New bird flu vaccine could last longer, protect more

AFP, Chicago

A new bird flu vaccine being developed by US researchers could provide broader protection, last longer and be easier to mass produce than existing vaccines.

The vaccine protected mice from bird flu infection for more than a year and researchers are hopeful that similar results could be found in humans.

It is also broad enough to protect against some mutations of the virus, according to a study published in The Journal of Infectious Diseases.

"We want to have a vaccine that can be stored in advance and have the potential to provide protection for a period of time until we can change the vaccine to match the latest form of avian influenza," said study author Suresh Mittal of Purdue University.

"The combination of flu genes that we've used to produce the vaccine, I think, will provide that capability."

Mittal and his colleagues used a mutated version of a common cold virus to deliver genes from two types of the deadly H5N1 avian influenza.

This delivery system has a number of advantages.

Since their adenovirus is incapable of multiplying, people will not get sick from the vaccine.

It is also produced without the use of eggs, which become scarce during bird flu epidemics. This will lower costs and increase the speed at which the vaccine can be developed, Mittal said.

The vaccine also includes molecules which stimulate the body's immune system, allowing for the use of lower doses of the vaccine.

The molecules further allow the vaccine to be stockpiled, so more people can be vaccinated and helps the vaccine protect against new strains of H5N1.

The H5N1 strain of bird flu has killed 240 people worldwide since late 2003, according to the World Health Organisation. Experts fear the virus, which is usually spread directly from birds to humans, could mutate into a form easily transmissible between people, sparking a deadly global pandemic.

The only vaccine currently approved by US health officials requires a very high dose, only works in about 60 percent of those immunized and does not protect against new strains of the H5N1 virus.