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## Politics no longer for people since '90s

*Laments ex-chief adviser Justice Habibur*

Staff Correspondent



Former chief adviser to a caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman speaks at the launching ceremony of a conference, “40 Years of Bangladesh: Retrospect and Future Prospects”, as the chief guest at Brac Inn in the city yesterday. Photo: STAR

Politics in Bangladesh gradually has become an investment rather than a vocation for serving the people since the early 1990s, former chief adviser to a caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman said yesterday.

A major qualitative change took place after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 as the armed forces emerged as a dominant factor in politics and governance, he pointed out.

He was addressing the launching ceremony of a conference styled, “40 Years of Bangladesh: Retrospect and Future Prospects” as the chief guest. Brac University and University of BATH, England, jointly organised the function at Brac Inn.

“The charisma of politics has gone and it has become a mundane affair. Politics has advanced little in the last 40 years,” observed the former chief justice.

He, however, mentioned that in the economic field the country has moved from a bottomless basket to a frontier economy.

Justice Habibur termed the indemnity act of 2003 a black dot in the country's history as it indemnified the deaths in the Operation Clean Heart. "We should not justify further killings citing that horrible precedent."

Operation Clean Heart was a nationwide anti-crime operation that ran from October 2002 to January 2003. It led to the death of around 60 people, the maiming of around 3,000 and the arrest of more than 45,000, according to rights bodies.

A criminal is to be captured alive and it is no credit of the police to eliminate him in a "crossfire" or an "encounter", he insisted. "A homicide -- whether it is committed in the name of revolution or religion, in an encounter or a crossfire involving the law enforcement agencies -- is reprehensible."

About political culture, he said parties centre around two famous names, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman, and we are in the midst of politics of illustrious families.

Constitutional provisions for the caretaker government were made by amending the charter to ensure free and fair elections, which may not be followed by the self-respecting nations, he mentioned. "They may wonder when the elected representatives could be entrusted with running a government, why they cannot be relied for supervising elections as a caretaker government."

There are countries in the world where elections have been held in civil war situation and power has been transferred without the mechanism of caretaker government, maintained Justice Habibur.

Criticising the culture of politicisation, he said the country's public service has been destabilised by filling in the key posts with partisan officials. Moreover, some people have been sent abroad as officers on special duty and some faithful outsiders or retired persons have been recruited on contractual basis.

He emphasised building institutions to deal with economic, social and governance problems to work for a more equitable society.

He further said darkness will descend in the noon if the number of unemployed increases further, international standard of excellence in higher education is not maintained, "bastardisation" of democracy by strikes and hem-ins are not stopped and continuous boycott of parliament is not ceased.

Talking about holding elections without a caretaker government, International Affairs Adviser to the prime minister Dr Gowher Rizvi said debates should be on how a free and acceptable election can be held under a mechanism, not under the caretaker government.

“A series of elections have been held since the 2008 national elections and the Election Commission is performing its job outstandingly. There are ample evidence that the elections were fair,” he noted.

Dr Rizwan Khair and Dr Ipshita Basu of Brac University and Prof Jeof Wood of University of BATH also spoke on the occasion.

A video documentary on 40 years of Bangladesh was also screened.

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