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Justice for All

Find ways for rule of law

India's ex-chief justice Altamas Kabir tells discussion in Dhaka
Staff Correspondent



Unless there is a will to put laws into practice it is very difficult to ensure that justice reaches all the people, former Indian chief justice Altamas Kabir said yesterday.

Speaking on "Access to Justice for All" in the capital, he shared how alternative dispute management strategies have been used in India to provide means to the poorest of the poor who do not have the means, make justice system more accessible, and remove backlogs.

Replying to questions by young lawyers, activists and journalists, Justice Kabir said, "Political pressures will always be there but you must have shoulder broad enough to check that pressure."

"Use your wisdom to find ways around a problem," he said in his speech, organised by the Institute of Governance and Development of Brac University, at The Daily Star Centre.

Kabir, who was India's 39th chief justice from September 2012 to July 2013, talked about the village level "lok adalat" (court of the common people), where disputes are settled across the table on consensus basis, and the legal aid clinics that give primary solution and advice.

He said women were given preference while recruiting paralegal volunteers for the legal aid clinics. "A man can only go up to the door. A woman has much more entry into the house, and it is easier for them to understand the problems."

In their efforts to make the legal system accessible, mobile vans with a little court inside and accommodation for judicial officers have been introduced, said the former judge. "These vans go to different haats (village markets), melas (fairs) and hold lok adalats."

Kabir shared several anecdotes from his life to illustrate how he utilised his position and vision as a legal practitioner to ensure that justice was provided to those who could not access it before.

Chairing the programme, Executive Director of Ain o Salish Kendra Sultana Kabir said access to justice for all had remained a distance dream in Bangladesh, and urged all to think about how "we can do from our respective positions to ensure justice for all".

Vice Chancellor of Brac University Prof Ainun Nishat was present during the speech also attended by eminent jurists, former lawmakers and bar council members.

Earlier, Altamas Kabir met with Chief Justice Md Mozammel Hossain and leaders of Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association.