

Economic uplift hinges on strong political institutions

Policy analysts suggest reforms

FE Report

Political settlement and strengthening pivotal institutions were underscored Friday by policy analysts from home and abroad to help Bangladesh achieve its cherished economic development.

Speaking in a session on the second day of a three-day conference, they stressed the urgency of electoral and political reforms to this end.

"We find strong positive effects of political institutions on the magnitude of growth," said Prof Kunal Sen of the University of Manchester while presenting a paper on 'Political Determinants of Economic Growth'.

International Growth Centre (IGC) Executive Director Prof. Jonathan Leape presided over the session on 'Political Dynamics of Economic Growth'.

The international conference on 'Political Economy, Accountability and Governance' has been organized by the Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University.

Think Tank Initiative (TTI), International Growth Centre (IGC), London School of Economics (LSE) and Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) partnered with the BIGD in holding the Dhaka meet.

"Electoral and political reforms are urgently needed not only to ensure free and fair elections but to correct institutional deficiencies," said another paper authored by Dr Kamal Hossain.

The keynote of the jurist-politician was presented at the seminar in his absence. Dr Kamal could not attend the meeting as he was staying outside the country.

According to Dr Kamal, the country had been freed from autocracy but democracy was yet to be free. "Elections alone cannot ensure a working democracy, unless democratic institutions are strengthened and function effectively," it is stated in the paper.

"The systemic crisis of development of a working democracy has been caused by injection into politics of arms, money and extremism, thus making politics sick."

Former caretaker government adviser Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Research Director Binayak Sen, Mushtaq Khan of SOAS, University of London, Rounak Jahan of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Nishith Prakash of the University of Connecticut took part in discussion.

Speakers in most of the sessions discussed various models of economic growth, political economy, political determinants of economic growth, electoral and political reforms and their impacts on the country's overall socioeconomic and political situations.

According to Dr Kamal, parliament did not develop into a forum of debating and adopting national policies on major subjects, ranging from education to industry and agriculture nor did it exercise accountability.

"With a dysfunctional parliament and a non-accountable government, social and economic change, which is a basic national goal, remains neglected," he said.

Dwelling on India, Kunal said in developing countries distribution of political power depends significantly on organizational abilities of various groups.

"Formal institutions alone cannot ensure distributions of benefits consistent with distribution of power," he said.

This is why, he said, informal institutions like patron-client networks and deals between political and business elites are rampant.