

Staff Reporter

Canadian High Commissioner in Dhaka Heather Cruden on Monday said they would continue to watch very closely the Broadcast Policy 2014 in Bangladesh and its possible implications as Canada strongly believes in media freedom.

“We’ll continue to watch very closely and to engage with our colleagues in the media... this is an issue we’ll continue to monitor very closely,” she told diplomatic correspondents at the Jatiya Press Club in the city.

Cruden said she believes that accountability is at the heart of democracy and the freedom of press essential for accountability.

The diplomat, however, said she has not yet seen an approved English version of the policy and is relying ‘very much’ on newspaper reports to understand what the possible implications can be.

Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB) arranged the 'DCAB Talk' with its president Mainul Alam in the chair. DCAB general secretary Angur Nahar Monty was present.

Cruden, who has been in Bangladesh for nearly three years, said a free and vibrant media can encourage creativity, inspire compassion, teach and help build citizens of tomorrow.

“I encourage each of you to continue to tell stories with professionalism, honesty and with courage. Every time you do so, you’ ll be building a better future for your country,” she added.

Responding to a question, the Canadian envoy said they hope that violence that has ceased after the January-5 elections and brought relief would not restart with the call of movement.

BNP keeps on threatening to wage a movement demanding a fresh election under a neutral administration.

“We all hope that violence won’t start again,” she said adding that they will continue to hope that the movement will not get involved with violence as violence is not good for Bangladesh and its people.

Cruden also hoped that at some point two major parties -- Awami League and BNP -- will sit down and talk to each other not just about the next election but to have an acceptable framework for future elections.

She laid emphasis on building trust between the two political parties to see a shift in ‘political culture’, saying “obviously we would like to see a space for people to have peaceful protests.”

The Canadian High Commissioner emphasised breaking the ‘cycle of violence’ before each parliamentary election and mentioned that due to violence the country’s GDP suffers, people die and people cannot work.

Cruden said she has been impressed by the resilience of Bangladeshis. “The many disruptions of the last year were a testament to this resilience, as Bangladeshis throughout the country continued to work, live and carry on with their lives despite all the challenges.”

Replying to a question on the repatriation of Nur Chowdhury, a convicted killer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she said the assassination of Sheikh Mujib and his family was a terrible crime.

Cruden mentioned that she had visited the museum where Sheikh Mujib was gunned down and the place evokes very powerful emotion and memory.

She said Canada understands Bangladesh's interest in repatriating Nur Chowdhury. "Privacy laws restrict me commenting on any specific case."

The diplomat said democracy is about much more than elections and it requires strong independent institutions, including the judiciary and the election commission.

"It requires space for media and civil society to be able to constructively criticize the government and to hold it account," she added.

The Canadian envoy also laid emphasis on social and economic developments in the hill tracts apart from building social security there.

Responding to a question on Gaza issue, she said Canadian the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister had been quite very vocal on these issues and they made a number of statements clearing their positions.