



CITIZENS' DIALOGUE-MYMENSINGH

NATIONAL ELECTION 2007

The Daily Star

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Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development

A Regional Dialogue on: "National Election: 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development," was held in Mymensingh on 29 April, 2006 under the joint sponsorship of CPD, The Daily Star, Prothom Alo and Channel-i. Members of the Citizens' Committee, leaders of various political parties, people belonging to various professions and from all walks of life joined the dialogue. This supplement contains the summary of the discussions. The names and identities of the participants are published below. Due to constraint of space we are not able to publish the of comments of all the participants.

-- Editor

Debapriya Bhattacharya

As you are aware, Prothom Alo, The daily Star, Channel I and CPD have organized this dialogue. I am now placing before you in brief its background, main objectives and significance.

Prior to the 2001 election CPD formed eighteen task forces, to provide direction to the newly elected government. In order to undertake this task as many as two hundred specialists were brought together as a result of which a comprehensive report was produced. At a later time the report was discussed with the people's representatives and the government; several dialogues at regional levels were also held. During that time Prothom Alo and the Daily Star were also with CPD. Thereafter, we felt that the mere handing over of a report to the politicians and the government was not enough, what we needed to do was to keep the matter under constant review and monitoring. Or else people were likely to forget. We therefore requested all the 18 task forces to get together and evaluate the progress of implementation of the recommendations submitted by us for speeding up the development process in the country. This task was accomplished. The booklet that you have with you has, in brief, the details of what we had done during 2001 and 2003.

As the election 2007-draws close we began to think as to what could be done on behalf of the people and the civil society? We arrived at some conclusions based on our experience of 2001 and 2003. One of the conclusions we arrived at is that the recommendations we made were in effect based on the framework of the Five Year Plan development strategies of the country, that is, what should be the short term, mid term, long term development strategies, but we find no indication as to where Bangladesh will stand in terms of long term development. Formerly, even the mid-term planning was prepared for a period of 15 to 20 years, which is no longer the case now. This practice has been abandoned after the introduction of PRSP. We have found that the country has made good progress through democratic process, particularly in the last 15 years, and yet the rich-poor gap has widened in many fields, resources have been centralised, the gap between the rural and urban development has further widened. There is a marked difference between Gulshan of Dhaka, and Khulna or Mymensingh.

Therefore, it is necessary to think about what will happen to the state of our health, economy, job opportunities, unemployment, poverty eradication etc. Thinking on those lines we brought together a number of intellectuals, experienced and successful individuals from amongst the civil society, in order to formulate a vision document for Bangladesh. This is the result of that process.

Abdul Quayum

Greetings to all. Prothom Alo, along with The Daily Star, CPD and Channel-i, has gathered here today so that we are able to duly focus and present before you the hopes and aspirations of the people and implement the same for Bangladesh in the coming years.

When we were students in the 60s we saw students from Malaysia and other neighboring countries come to study at the Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College and BUET, and now our labour forces are unable to obtain jobs in Malaysia. We have no dearth of resources and yet we are lagging far behind. On the other hand, we are also ready to sacrifice and make serious commitments and are ready to dream.

I do not think we, who are with the Nagorik Committee, either understand or know of everything. What we need to do is to project the views of the common man of the country. We shall also visit and hold similar dialogues in various other places of the country. I, like the others, am here to listen to you and not to lecture.

Delwar Hossain Khan Dulu

Every government has its failures and successes. If we are able to properly analyse the causes behind the failures then only we would be able to help the people. A competent citizen can only talk about an honest and a capable candidate. Men like me who contest elections have been accused of resorting to all kinds of lies, not keeping pre-election promises and working away from the party manifesto, and that our only objective is to win elections. Citizens across the country should be made aware of these issues. It is not possible for a government to carry out all the tasks assigned to it. We therefore believe that there should be some structural changes in administrative management of the state. For example, under the existing system, the functioning of the state is vested in a government formed by a political party having majority in the parliament. The government in turn is ruled and guided by yet another government within, whom we call the bureaucracy, there could be the Election Commission, the DC, the Police Super or even others occupying various seats of administration in different capacities. These people in turn have their individual philosophies of administering, some work based on his or her personal thinking while others work on party lines.

I believe that the first and foremost thing is to stop this business of use of excessive money by candidates to win elections.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

The real yardstick of honesty is the man and his honesty is proved through the process of election. The fact of the matter is that, based on certain facts and figures we call fact-based empowerment, if the people vote for the individual we shall accept their verdict and that is what democracy teaches us. We shall have to accept people's verdict. We wish to see the manifesto of a political party as a social contract between the people and the concerned party.

Principal Matiur Rahman

Personally I wish to see an honest man elected. I have so far contested for the chairmanship of the municipality for five times, three times for membership of the parliament and am, thus, fairly experienced in this matter. No matter what amount of money a candidate spends in an election he, or she, may not be elected. It is not easy to influence public opinion, and their decisions, with money.

I do not understand what you mean by 'non-political' since there is none who is non-political. One who is not connected with active politics also votes for a candidate belonging to a particular party and hence he, too, subscribes to the party's political philosophy. No one can remain fully neutral. We have achieved independence after unprecedented sacrifices made by the people and I hope that we will now come forward to make sacrifices in order to build this country.

Advocate Mahmud-Al- Nur Tareq

We gained our independence some 34 years ago and are yet to have a proper judiciary, or an administrative system for running the country. To this day not a single "institution" has been fully functional.

I have seen a nephew of a Malaysian minister studying at the Mymensingh Agricultural University, and now see the progress and development that have taken place in Malaysia since then. We continue to lag far behind, despite the fact that we are about the only country in South East Asia for the independence of which unprecedented sacrifices were made.

Today we are facing criticism from all corners. One of the most important instruments of a state is its judiciary, but we find irregularities exist even there with regard to appointment of judges. These high profiled individuals are above everything, where as the minister himself has said that over 30 percent of our lawmakers are corrupt.

Dr. Mufakkharul Islam

We are currently more concerned about finding a competent candidate rather than merely an honest one. What we have to decide upon is a criterion for a competent candidate, particularly with reference to what kind of qualities the particular individual must have before he becomes a member of the parliament. I believe that a good deal of that responsibility of finding that right candidate should rest with the government. The government should fix a ceiling on the amount of money one is allowed to spend while contesting an election and that expenditure should be borne by the government and no one should be allowed to spend any money beyond what has been fixed. The candidates should not criticise one another. There should be a system in place making this binding on the candidates. On the other hand we find that there still exists a controversy amongst the big parties as to whether we are Bengalis or Bangladeshis. This matter should be settled outside the parliament.

Dr. Marufi Akhter Khan

The civil society should ponder the extent of the role of the minority community in the coming election. Moreover, money should not determine the suitability of a candidate. It is difficult to find an honest person, yet we continue to hope.

Abdul Quddus

The main factor in the process of locating an honest individual is an administration that believes in democracy. Even here we find that the verdict of the people is not duly reflected. What we need to do is to hold a few fair and independent elections and that alone will drive the corrupt elements out of the process. In this regard we should follow the example of our neighbor, India.

Capt. Mujibur Rahman Fakir

Today no one from the younger generation wishes to enter politics. They are not ready face the trials and tribulations that a politician has to undergo. Besides, the civil society and the intellectuals have sidelined the younger generation, yet we have to be with the people and join them in the streets and revive our past achievements. There are only 52 of us in the Parliament and when we arrive at the Parliament we find that the session still falls short of the quorum required for the session to begin. More than half of the senior lawmakers are out of the country. They are out on "business" trips. A point has been raised about fixing a criteria in order to qualify as a competent candidate. I believe that educational qualification is an important factor. As for the loan defaulters, all you have to do is look at the fleet of cars following a VIP going abroad. These are the people who constitute the majority of loan defaulters. We support the call of the 14 party- Alliance for scrapping of all the existing governing bodies of schools and colleges, including reformation of the caretaker system of government. If we want to see a reflection of the people's wishes we have to undertake reformation of the caretaker system of government and the electoral process.

Manzurul Huq

I wonder why no one is talking about the role of the political parties in order to ensure healthy growth of politics in the country? Political parties have cheated the people in many ways.

It is the responsibility of the civil society to lay open the facts that the parties who will provide nominations have themselves deceived the people in many ways and at different times. Each of the political parties is in politics with the sole objective of being in the seat of power. They are not concerned about the competency of a candidate. All they are concerned about is to how to allure voters. Nomination is also based on this particular criterion. In all nominations the dominating factors are money, muscle power and one's standing in the society based on his family background. What we have to do is to work against this legacy.

Advocate Sultana Kamal

Many belonging to our class do not perform our duties and fulfill our obligations. Of the 14 crore the larger section of the population, the toiling masses, with its dedicated service is helping the country to move ahead starting from food production. The GDP that Dr. Debapriya refers to is, in effect, the direct outcome of the labor that these people put in. We have to be respectful to them, but instead we are constantly taking advantage of them and squandering the fruits of their labour. As a state, Bangladesh is not a failure. It is us, who are in charge of administering and distribution of our resources who have failed. I wish to point out one more thing, which is that, it is easy to criticize the politicians but one must not forget that it is they who steer the country forward facing all sorts of criticisms and harassments. I am respectful to these people. Today, we have gathered here to see our roles in the civil society and at the same time seek advice from the politicians on how best we can extend our hands of cooperation to them. Except for a handful of the collaborators, all of us participated in our War of Liberation. We know all those who fought for our liberation and those who opposed it.

I wonder why we don't speak out when our women are sold out in the Middle East, when RAB kills people right in front of our eyes leaving behind the dead body, when people like Bangla Bhai come out in the open, along with the police, with guns hanging from their shoulders? Why the spirit of the Kansat movement remains confined to the limits of Kansat only? Incidents like these had been taking place spread over a period of nearly 35 years. Why are we, the civil society, not standing up in protest against all such oppression and miscarriage of justice? If we want our elected representatives to be honest and committed we, too, have to act the same way. I, therefore, believe that it is incumbent upon us to be honest.

Advocate A. H. M. Khaliqzaman

Over 50 percent of the members of the Parliament are businessmen. It is seen that many retired members belonging to the police service and engineers contest elections by dint of their ill-gotten wealth. If the major political parties refrain from giving nominations to such people then the politicians who are dedicated to the welfare of the country will get an opportunity to be nominated and elected. Today, there has been a realization amongst the civil society that those who are representing us in the parliament are the ones who are ruining this nation and do not represent the extended civil society. These people belong to a special breed who are plundering our national resources. If we are to drive out bad people from the election arena then we need to undertake reforms of the electoral process; this in turn will free elections from the influence of black money and muscle-power.

Dr. Md. Ali Siddiky

We hope that prior to this election, political parties will nominate honest individuals and that they would be elected through a process of free and fair election. In this context we are not thinking of individuals only. You have often seen that an independent and an honest candidate is not able to contribute much inside the parliament and, hence, we are also thinking about the parties the candidates will be representing. It is not enough for a candidate to be honest and capable, his colleagues must also be likewise. The parties nominating the candidates must also be imbued with the same spirit. The guiding spirit of a party should not be confined only to its manifesto.



Dr. Dabirul Hossain Bhuiyan

There are good and bad businessmen in the society. I am told that 93 percent of the politicians are businessmen. If politicians are businessmen then this is bound to be so. You will find that the number of honest businessmen is very meager. It is the dishonest politicians who nominate dishonest businessmen in exchange for money. This must stop.

Shahadat Hossain Himu

My suggestion is that a reform proposal be tabled here whereby an individual who loses in an election once should not be allowed to contest in future elections. On the other hand, a candidate who wins shall not be allowed to continue in office for more than two terms. This will pave the way for new leadership. Contrarily, the candidate who has failed once may ultimately return elected, but by then he, or she, might have lost all zeal and strength to fulfill his or her obligations.

Samiya Tarannum Anannya

As a member of the present generation I wish to raise a question at this forum. Let us suppose that in a democratic election out of 100 voters 70 cast their votes and 30 refrained from voting. Out of the 70, 40 voted for the successful candidate and the rest voted for the other candidates. In that case, it can very well be said that the winning candidate does not carry the majority of the electorate.

We constantly hear of honesty. My question is what do you mean by honesty? Is it honesty in money matters or the overall character or the individual's mentality? On the other hand what is meant when you talk of competency or qualification, do you mean educational qualification or something else?

Farhana Ferdousi Newaz

Like every individual has an election symbol there should be a provision of a "no vote" in the ballot paper so that we can put a tick mark on the specified space against a particular candidate who we do not wish to see elected.

Abdul Matin Sarker

Sponsors of the forum have said that the country is moving forward and succeeding. I wish to ask them in what way? During the past government the country was once identified as the most corrupt nation of the world whereas, during the four years of this government, Bangladesh has again topped the list of corrupt countries of the world. Is this the way we are progressing?

There are twelve constituencies in Mymensingh. We are twelve elected representatives working here belonging to different political parties. It is quite possible to make a survey of individual properties and their assets and find out who is corrupt and who is not. The deliberations made here should reach the politicians. Then only this forum will achieve success and will be result oriented.

Prof. Rokeya Begum

If we are able to talk freely as in this forum, we shall achieve success. If we all abide by obligations and commitment to our individual professions, whatever they may be, the country will progress. Alongside, there is one important factor we should take note of, which is, the need for a congenial environment in order to meet one's professional obligations.

Engineer Md. Shamsul Huq

I wish to say that I agree with the comments made by the honorable member of the parliament, Mr. Delwar Hossain, as to how one can have an honest administration if there are no honest citizens in the country? Second, he has also said that it would be unfair for a pourashabha chairman to be sacked. I am also in agreement with him. If an engineer is a chairman, then he or she should be removed from the position only with the consent of the people.

Fakhru Islam

I liked very much the framework presented by Dr. Muhammad Yunus. The proposal put forward by him had two distinct components. First, the Nagorik Committee was to prepare a list of honest people from amongst the conscious members of the civil society. Second, take measures so that they can be nominated. Now it appears that the Committee has shifted from that position. I wish to ask why? Are they afraid? Frankly, it is indeed a difficult task to nominate an honest candidate since it is linked to economics and power.

Sujit Barman

There has been much talk about honesty of candidates at this forum but I wish to point out that this is also dependent on the political philosophy of the party nominating the candidate. No one here has commented on that aspect. If, today, a candidate is otherwise honest but opposes our independence should we call him an honest person? A person who has little regard for our Constitution, and does not believe in protecting human rights, can be anything but a competent candidate.

Imdadul Huq Milon

There have been many arguments and counter arguments on the speech made by Dr. Muhammad Yunus but the fact remains that you have succeeded in bringing about pressure on the political parties for nominating honest candidates. This is certainly a good beginning. If a candidate is nominated about 6 months to a year ahead of the election, the scope for squandering money becomes less and less. This in turn narrows down the scope for indulging in corrupt practices. If the process of nomination is set in motion well ahead of time, there will be less chances of money coming into play.

Advocate Nurul Islam Chunnun

As per Article 70 of the Constitution no MP can speak against his, or her party in the Parliament. If he or she does make a move then there is every possibility that the MP's membership may be scrapped. I think there should be a call from this platform informing the public about the need for an amendment to this Act.

Let me now say few words on the caretaker system of government. In the year '96, when the 3-Party Alliance Government came to power, it was unilaterally passed into Act by that government. There was hardly any scope for the opposition parties to express their points of view. We now find that this system has led to politicisation of the Judiciary. It has thus led to politicisation of administration at every step of recruitment, from appointment of a temporary judge down to the Chief Justice.

As for corruption, nearly all leaders of all the political parties are involved in corruption.

Ameer Ahmad Chowdhury Ratan

Following the downfall of the autocratic regime in 1991 we embarked on a movement for electing honest people through creating public awareness. As a part of that venture we have visited each of the district towns and cities.

We had positive response everywhere. You have more opportunities and access to reach the doors of the political leaders compared to us. You have to go to them and influence them to nominate honest people. Only then you will succeed in your endeavor.

Prof. Muhammad Jainal Abedin Khan

The initiative you have undertaken, keeping in view the forthcoming election, has given rise to some uncertainties. One is doubtful if ever the differences between the opposition and the ruling party will be resolved with regard to the caretaker form of government. Therefore, the doubt over the fate of the election continues. On the other hand, doubts have been expressed over the nature of your role with regard to your movement for electing honest candidates. Admittedly, the civil society will have the support of the common man but this has certainly put the two political parties against each other. This has made the political scenario in the country extremely volatile. We thus expect clear guidance from you as to how to overcome the stalemate. The Nagorik Committee is hoping to create a vision document for Bangladesh. I believe this will be based on the prevailing state of the country, in the form of national manifesto. My question is, will the document include critical issues like the establishment of secularism and elimination of terrorism?

Kazi Rana

Since this noble venture that you have embarked on is trying to select honest people as candidates involving a cross section of the toiling masses, I propose that instead of making this city based dialogue, let it be a rural based one.

Principal Mukarram Hossain

If the election expenses are borne by the government this will put a stop to misuse of money.

Advocate Shibir Ahmed Liton

Today I am happy to see that amongst those present here are well-known businessmen and industrialists Mr. Manzur Elahi and Samson H. Chowdhury. Should they have so wished, they too could have been elected by buying votes with money. Instead, they have joined hands with this initiative of the civil society in order to find out ways and means for bettering the future of the country. Meanwhile, I would like to echo Sultana Kamal that we have to bring about the changes in our political culture with the help of the politicians themselves. Apart from everything else, let us not forget that we all must be prepared to perform our individual responsibilities as outlined here.

Syed Manzur Elahi

Sometime back I came across a feature published in the Time magazine. My discussion is based on that article. There are two pillars on which democracy stands, the media, that is freedom of expression, and the other, a strong civil society. These two can ensure democratic practices. No democracy can work if these two factors are absent. The problem with our civil society is that we have confined ourselves to the limits of our living rooms where all we do is express our regrets like who has stolen what and how the country is going to the dogs. We do not know how to make speeches since we do not have politicians amongst us. I believe there is hardly a nation that has manpower as strong as ours. Day after day, year after year, all we do is tolerate and once in a while we take to the streets.

I believe that the mere holding of discussions, 64 dialogues in 64 different districts, will not safeguard democracy. Democracy is a continuous process. I believe under the present conditions we may not be able to attain a perfect form of democracy, but we should continue to strive. The civil society should join hands with the NGO community, often described as a parallel government. We should wake up and only then we may be able to achieve some success. We should not hold high hopes. Democracy is a continuous process and one has to be working on it all the time.

Shaikh Siraj

Had we been able to call the prevailing state of the country as democratic, it would not be necessary to hold such a dialogue. There has been no definite planning for development of the country since our independence. I believe that what is happening in the name of politics is, politics for politics' sake.

The majority of our population live in villages and they are totally unaware of the state of our governance and democracy. These simple village folks, in an indirect way, are being used as tools of the political process and the state. The media has to play the role of building awareness amongst these people.

Advocate Anisur Rahman Khan

We believe that the caretaker system of government is against the core principle of democracy. The caretaker system is the outcome of mistrust between political parties. Proposal for reforming the system is the most talked about issue in the political arena. Today, this has made even the judiciary controversial. The only way out of this situation is to make the Election Commission fully independent and strong.

Prof. M. Shamsul Islam

An Election Commission comprising of individuals who are above reproach, beyond any suspicion, and personalities who are bright and strong in character, and not weaklings, must conduct election at all levels.

Election manifestoes have to be made public at least three months prior to actual holding of the election and it should be considered as a social contract between the political parties and the public. If the pledges, as embodied in the manifestos, are not kept, then the concerned individuals should be considered as unfit for contesting future elections. This provision could be included in both the Constitution and elections rules of procedures. Following the Supreme Court Ruling of 24 May 2005 all necessary documents have to be submitted along with respective nomination papers. We have to ensure that no loan defaulter, or convicted person, is allowed to contest elections, whether as an independent or a party nominated candidate. No civil servant should be allowed to contest at least within five years after retirement from service. The candidate seeking nomination must submit a detailed account of acquired property and assets over the past five years, including those of the candidates near relations, their earnings and expenditures and these details should be made public. Electronic voting system has to be introduced. All the offices concerned with conducting election should be fitted with close circuit security cameras.

Prof. Abidur Reza

Having heard all that has been said by various speakers I am of the opinion that your "wishes" cannot be implemented in Bangladesh today. The reason for this is that a nation is governed by a Constitution. Under the present Constitution of Bangladesh we cannot achieve our targets through a democratic process, despite the fact that elections have been held as many as twelve times. Elections alone do not guarantee democracy. The precondition for the flourishing of democracy in a country is secularism. A secular country can be democratic, a state based on religion cannot. By making Islam the state religion and inserting "Bismillah" in the Constitution we cannot achieve democracy. The Nagorik Committee has to be united on the issue.

Dr. Shah Monowar Hossain

Right from the days of the Pak regime we have seen that no public representative ever received so many perks like our MPs today. The media should clearly list the perks enjoyed by our lawmakers and the ministers today, and bring these to the knowledge of the public. We see a clear picture of all corruption in the media and yet nobody is brought to justice. If this could be done many aspiring candidates would quit the idea of contesting. The executive powers vested with the MPs have to be curtailed and their role should be confined to the limits of being the people's representatives only.

Rajat Chowdhury Joy

Those of us who are unemployed have to give bribes to get a job. How can you expect us to be honest? We are unable to give bribes. It is the public representatives who are encouraging us to

List Of Participants

1. Prof. Jatin Sarkar, (Chairperson), writer and cultural personality .
2. Delawar Hossain Khan Dulu, MP, Mymensingh Sadar.
3. Prof. Matiur Rahman, President, District Awami League, Mymensingh.
4. Advocate Mahmud-al-Nur Tarek, Chairman, Mymensingh Municipality.
5. Dr. Mufakkharul Islam, Principal, Community based Medical College, Mymensingh.
6. Dr. Marufi Akhter Khan, Professor, Shaheed Nazrul Islam College, Mymensingh.
7. Abdul Quddus, Principal Officer, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, Mymensingh.
8. Captain Doctor Mujibur Rahman Fakir, MP, Gouripur.
9. Monzurul Huq, General Secretary, District BNP, Mymensingh.
10. Advocate Sultana Kamal, Executive Director, Ain O Shalish Kendra.
11. Advocate A. H. M. Kamruzzaman, Convener, SHUJON, Mymensingh.
12. Dr. Md. Ali Siddiqui, General Secretary, BMA, Mymensingh.
13. Dr. Dabirul Hossain Bhuiyan, President, Mymensingh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
14. Shahadat Hossain Himu, President, FEMA, Mymensingh Branch.
15. Samiya Trannum Anannya, student, Mumenuunnessa College, Mymensingh.
16. Frahana Ferdousi Newaz, Supervisor, JANIPOP.
17. Abdul Matin Sarkar, MP, Trishal and General Secretary, District Awami League.
18. Rokeya Begum, Professor, Teacher's Training College, Mymensingh.
19. Md. Shamsul Huq, Engineer, Bangladesh Power Development Board.
20. Fakhrul Islam, Presidium Member, Jatiyo Party.
21. Shujit Barman, Secretary, Workers Party, Mymensingh.
22. Imdadul Huq Milon, General Secretary, CPB, Mymensingh.
23. Advocate Nauru Islam Chunnel, Joint Secretary, JSD, Mymensingh.
24. Amir Ahmed Chowdhury Ratan, Convener Shammilito Shanskritic Jote, Mymensingh.
25. Md. Jainal Abedin Khan, Prof. Mymensingh Agriculture University.
26. Kazi Rana, Convener, BNP, Mymensingh Town Committee.
27. Md. Mukarram Hossain, retired Prof. Teachers Training College, Mymensingh.
28. Advocate Shibir Ahmed Liton, Joint Secretary General, Gonotantrik Ainjibi Forum.
29. Syed Manzur Elahi, former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Chairman, Apex Group.
30. Shaikh Siraj, Director, Transmission, Channel-I.
31. Advocate Anisur Rahman Khan, District Nagorik Unnayan and Sangarm Parishad.
32. Prof. Md. Shamsul Islam, Shachetan Nagorik Committee, Mymensingh.
33. Abidur Reza, Professor, Mymensingh Agriculture College.
34. Dr. Shah Monowar Hossain, former Deputy Director, Directorate of Health.
35. Rajat Chowdhury Joy, cultural activist.
36. Reza Ali, Member, Advisory Committee, Bangladesh Awami League.
37. Principal Md. Jalal Hossain.
38. Ariful Islam, student, Department of Economics,

be dishonest.

Reza Ali

There is no doubt about the fact that the civil society is doing a good job. We want honest candidates everywhere. The idea propounded by Dr. Yunus appears to be somewhat different from the current political trend, particularly when men like him are not going to contest elections. Debapriya Bhattacharya has said that the opinions expressed by Dr. Yunus are purely his personal views. I wish to see your deliberations to be precise and transparent. Let people understand clearly as to what you mean by honest and good people. At the same time you shall not be able to achieve anything until and unless you are able to bring about basic changes in the procedural system of the elections. I am yet to have a clear statement from you with regard to the Election Commission.

Principal Muhammad Jalal Hossain

One of the major topics of discussion at this forum has been opposing black money. But the sad part of it all is that this good move has been turned into failure by the grace of the finance minister who created opportunities for turning black money into white. It is my belief that if Prothomo Alo, the Daily Star and CPD take up the matter in the court of law, then it may not be possible for the government to continue with the system.

Ariful Isalm

As one belonging to the new generation I wish to ask what we understand by competence? Is it educational, financial or is it professional? The other question is, what do we mean by a civil society? A majority of the speakers who spoke so far are politicians. My suggestion is let us create a monitoring cell. Everyone in the city knows who are honest. Taking them into the fold, we can establish a monitoring cell and then we can turn such seminars into a public platform.

Prof. Mujibur Rahman

I am now retired over 10 years. One of my students is a Secretary. One day I asked him whether he, too, was becoming corrupt? He replied by saying that I should not worry about the fate of the country and that one could not survive without being dishonest. These were indeed painful words. My question, is there anything worthwhile we have that we can offer to this generation? I am not saying that such dialogues are meaningless, surely some day we shall reap the benefits. If we are able to inject these ideas amongst the public all over the country, including its remote corners, then there is possibility for today's movement gathering momentum.

Monira Begum Onu

Had the civil society played its due role then we would have been spared the cruel realities now persisting in the society today, at the same we could effectively get rid of the sickening trend in politics and at the same time do away with corruption. What we really need to do is bring about qualitative changes in the main factors that determine the development of the society. Mere election will not be able to resolve this longstanding problem, because the social crises at present are no longer apolitical.

Priyotosh Biswas Babul

CPD has initiated this dialogue keeping in view 2007 election. My request would be that you should publish the life sketches of the candidates in your newspapers instead.

Md. Gholam Mostafa

I knew Mr. Abbas Ali, former Chairman of the Dhanmatakpur Union under Domar Police station of Nilphamari. He had a small business and was an honest man and the people of the locality made him the chairman. It was the people who made him the chairman but soon after being elected he was beaten up and his house was set on fire. However, the people of the village stood beside him and came to his rescue. He used to visit the TNO's office in a lungi and a pair of torn slippers. People of his locality were not provided with any development project. Matters continued like this for a year, after that he told the people of the locality that he was no longer interested in the chairmanship.

We are interested in electing honest people to enter the parliament but there should a clear direction as to how they should conduct affairs once elected. I believe even matters like these should also be discussed.

Prof. Lutfar Rahman Khan

During the election of 2001 you published the dialogues in the form of a publication. Following that election, where 330 candidates were elected, is did you subsequently carry out a survey as to how many of them were honest and competent? If not I propose that this be done in the future. My second point is that your initiative is worthwhile and a good one. If you could carry this down to the grass roots levels, continually hammering on the importance of electing honest people, then there is possibility that people will accept your ideas, for the simple fact that the entire country, today, is looking for honest people.

Advocate Pijush Kanti Sarkar

The judiciary must be separated from the Executive. Second, elected representative should have no executive authority over distribution of wheat amongst the local people, including appointment of teachers. Third, the newspapers are often seen giving coverage to black money holders more than the honest people who are generally modest and often poor. We have seen that many of our journalist friends have formed syndicates; in one instance at least 12 seats were mutually shared based on the understanding that a particular candidate would be covered more than others. This is indeed very unfortunate.

Abdul Qayyum

Please let us know as to who are the people and where have they formed a syndicate. If the information is correct I give you my word that we shall take action against them.

Advocate Abdul Mottaleb Lal

CPD is a research organization and hence I propose that instead of preparing a list of honest and competent candidates prepare a comparative list from amongst the 900 candidates consisting of those elected and their closest opponents.

Anwar Abedin Tuhin

Unlike in the case of members of the Parliament there is an age limit of 60 for those who work in government offices and autonomous bodies, I believe there should also be an age limit fixed in the case of the members of the parliament.

Hassanul Alam

There are a number of organizations within the country capable of carrying out independent observations of our election, and yet we invite members from donor countries to do this. I wish to have an answer to my question through the columns of your newspapers.

Prof. Jatin Sarkar

Those who are called members of the civil society I wish to call them Brahmins of the society. Like the Brahmins they should perform the duties of a Brahmin, perform the duties of a priest, not become rulers. But first we have to determine as to what is to be the role of the rulers. In the times gone by, the Brahmins used to promulgate the laws and, Khatriyas used to run the affairs of the kingdom. At present the Khatriyas are no longer allowed to rule. From time to time their powers have been snatched way at gunpoint by the darwans. Now those who rule over the country are Baisyas. I say this

A. M. College.

39. Prof. Mujibur Rahman (Retd).

40. Monira Begum Onu, teacher, Mukul Niketan High School.

41. Priyotosh Biswas Babul, teacher, Dhahiripar High School, Mymensingh.

42. Md. Gholam Mostafa, field worker, RDRS, City Project, Mymensingh.

43. Lutfar Rahman Khan, former Prof. teacher's Training College, Mymensingh.

44. Pijush Kanti Sarkar, lawyer, Judge's Court, Mymensingh.

45. Abdul Mottaleb Lal, lawyer, Judge's Court, Mymensingh.

46. Anwar Abedin Tuhin, General Secretary Zilla Krishak League.

47. Hassanul Alam, student, A. M. College, Mymensingh.

48. Abdul Qayyum, Joint Editor, Prothom Alo.

Coordinator

Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, CPD.

since 48 percent of those nominated by Awami League came from the business community while in the case of BNP it was 59 percent. It is clearly stated in our Constitution that to the people belongs the state. Now it is the duty of this civil society to see whether or not people are capable of defending their rights. The civil society has to undertake that responsibility.

I wish to say with emphasis, the one and the only duty of those elected to the parliament, should to formulate laws. Let us all unite and together propagate this all around with loud voices. The other issue is related to decentralization of the administration. The people of the villages themselves should form their own Assembly and utilize the provisions of the budget; this in turn may give us an opportunity to be involved in the democratic process in a direct way.

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