



# CITIZENS' DIALOGUE-RANGAMATI

## 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 Rangamati on 7th July, 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 comments of all the participants.*

-- Editor

### Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

This is the sixth Nagorik Dialogue, being held at Rangamati, under the joint sponsorship of the Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Channel I and CPD. Under the present system Nagorik Dialogues are held at specific locations and cities of relative significance. We have observed that often little effort is made to reach the voices of religious minority and the ethnic groups to the people in general. In that context today's dialogue here at Rangamati is of considerable significance. Prior to the election of 2001 we prepared a document with the help of task force composed of experts, as to what should be done, from the point of view of the civil society. This document was subsequently handed over to the elected government. The reports were discussed at various forums. In 2003 we took a similar step in order to find out as to how many of the recommendations were implemented.

We are not saying that the country has not progressed, as a matter of fact there has been an increase in the income per head, productivity has increased, there has been an increase in the rate of education and a reduction in child mortality. However because of an undesirable twist in the pace of development, the fruits of development have not reached the common people. As a matter of fact, whatever little that reached them could not go down to the people living in the remote areas of the country. The gap between the rich and the poor has considerably increased, as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the people affected by the river erosion and the people living in the Char areas. The gap between the religious minority and the poor has also increased manifold. The gap in the quality of lives of the people in villages, and those in the cities have further widened. In the same way the gap between the villages and the cities have widened manifold. This has been the overall prevailing scenario of our development over the past 15 years. Based on the experience gained over the past 15 years we tried to visualize as to what would be the scenario in the country in the next 15 years when Bangladesh would attain the age of 50. Keeping this in mind we formed a Nagorik Committee comprising of a number of well-known individuals from the civil society. We have already made some progress in making a framework with the help of this committee. We have termed this as our "vision". A one page list of aspirations of this "vision" has already been distributed to you. Please give us your views indicating as to how much are you in agreement with it. We have stated very clearly that the main spirit behind people's aspirations in Bangladesh is the spirit of our great war of liberation of 1971. Our basic values stem from that spirit and that will play the main role in shaping the future of the country. We therefore urge you to read this paper with care. Please do tell us if you wish to make changes, additions or revision including a change in the style of the language.



### Matiur Rahman

Greetings and welcome to all. I express my thanks to all of you who have joined us here today braving the incessant downpour. You have heard about our initiative from Dr. Debapriya and have learnt about it from newspapers and the television. We have carried out similar initiatives in Mymensingh, Jessore, Comilla, Barisal and Sylhet involving public representatives, politicians and conscious citizens of the respective localities. This is a continuous process. Reports of the meetings you can see in Prothom Alo and also in television, particularly through Channel I. Our message is brief and precise. 35 years have passed since we gained our independence, but we still have innumerable problems and we must find ways to solve them. We are, at the same time, hoping to resolve the problems facing the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I can confidently say that we are in full agreement with your rights, aspirations and struggle. We are with you today and shall be beside you also in the future. We hope that you shall not only participate but also give your support.

### Habibur Rahman Habib

As we turn our attention to the national politics we find that we stand divided on ideological grounds, and are also divided on partisan considerations. Today we are going round the country looking for honest candidates. Supposing we find the right candidate and yet he or she fails to obtain nomination of the party, what would happen then? If there is no fixed criteria for selecting a candidate after due survey at field levels then people will reluctantly put the seals on mere symbols. This is how we have built a group of people in the country that is based on mere symbols. It will be difficult for us to elect a competent candidate so long as the political parties do not give nominations to the right candidates after careful assessment and scrutiny. On the other hand consider this; even if we were successful in electing a competent candidate following the initiatives of Prothom Alo, the Daily Star and Channel I

there still exists a law in the Parliament that the concerned member would lose his or her seat if he or she casts vote against the party's decision. Thus, the good man I voted for is driven out since he voted against the party's decision driven by dictates of conscience. The civil society is quick to criticize the member whereas the individual is a mere victim of a system.

People of the Hill Tracts region have long been cut off from the mainstream politics at the national level. They were integrated in the national politics after 1997, but the Peace Accord is yet to be implemented. Neither the past government, nor the present, did anything about it. At one stage people of the locality were in doubt about this accord. On the other hand there are many who are trying to make political gains by taking advantage of the Agreement. The Peace Accord has since been accepted in principle. Many a times we refuse to recognise the truth due to political considerations. I sincerely hope that this will create the due awareness amongst the people of the country and, hopefully, we shall see a reflection of that in the coming election.

#### Recommendations from the dialogue (in brief)

##### Election Commission

1. Fixing the minimum level of education for the Election Commissioner
2. Resignation of the election commissioners.
3. Cancellation of the present voter list
4. The number of polling booths in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have to be set up based on distance and not on population.
5. Registration of politicians in order to stop changing of party affiliations.
6. In accordance with the provisions of the Accord there has to be three separate voter lists
7. Code of conduct for election
8. The candidate should be the yardstick for assessing competency, and not the particular election symbol.
9. Civil servants to join a political party five years after retirement, nominations to be given five years thereafter.
10. Individuals to contest in election only from their respective constituencies
11. Written commitment has to be obtained from each of the MPs requiring them to be present at the Parliament at least 90 percent of the time, or else their Membership will be rescinded.
12. Instead of having reserved seats for women at the Parliament arrangements should be made for direct elections.
13. Children should not be used directly in election process.

##### Political reforms

14. Frequent changes in national policy should be stopped.
15. Removing of existing inequalities in education at city and village levels.
16. There has to be a system of accountability for those violating the very basic covenants of democracy.
17. Proper and viable development projects have to be undertaken keeping in view the national interests.

##### Area based issues

18. Expedient implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.
19. Immediate implementation of government's commitment for free power supply to the affected localities due to the setting up of the Kaptai hydroelectric project.
20. Arranging supply of safe drinking water.
21. Introduction of digital telephone system
22. Introduction of mobile services.
23. For proper dispensation of justice, and working of the Judiciary, District Judges should be employed forthwith.
24. Transparency with regard to expenditures incurred for development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
25. There has to be proper policy planning for development of fisheries.
26. Alternate job opportunities for those who have become unemployed due to cessation of felling of trees and prevention of fishing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
27. Development of the educational institutions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
28. Speedy implementation of the people's representation in the administrative systems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
29. Zilla Parishads and regional Parishads have to gear up contact with the people.
30. Withdrawal of Martial Law from the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
31. Ensure complete security of women.
32. Introduce a national policy aimed at protecting the rights of the Adivasis.
33. Removal of discrepancies and inequalities

##### Kazi Nazrul Islam

To the best of my knowledge as many as nine education commissions have been constituted in the country so far, but none of these has seen the light of day. Today there is discrepancy in the level of education between the villages and the cities, education has gone out of reach for the people of the villages. It would be useful if this matter finds explicit expression in the "vision" document. Today, while we are discussing about the development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, most of the areas do not have electricity. There is acute shortage of safe water. Despite the fact that there is much talk about attracting tourists, it is most likely that the water of the Kaptai Lake is most polluted. What I wish to reiterate is that electricity must be provided to every household, and also safe drinking water. Where is all the money that is supposed to be utilised for the development of the locality? We know that the locality is rich in natural resources which are not being exploited in a planned way.

##### Alo Rani Aich

Today an all round awareness is seen due to the various initiatives, but has there been any awareness amongst the politicians? Why do we come across barbaric oppression of women by the police? We wish to see those who will be elected by us in 2007 as honest, wise and capable individuals. You should also acquaint them with the proposals being submitted by CPD to the government, and how the proposals are being assessed. We have innumerable problems in the Hill Tracts. We are not allowed to cut trees, or go for fishing, so some arrangements have to be made for livelihood of the people of the region. Educational institutions will have to be developed.

##### Sunil Kanti Dey

There are three Zilla Parishads at Rangamati. If elections are held these Parishads could have proper public representation. Referring to the voter list of the Hill Tracts many people have asked why there should be two voter lists in the same country? Clear guidelines already exist in the laws enacted by the Parliament related to the three Zilla Parishads stipulating as to who would be the voters. Hence how can it be unconstitutional if the list is prepared based on the acts passed by the Parliament? At the same time I would like to request you to include in your agenda the issue of the constitutional rights of the religious minority and the indigenous peoples. We have to know why we shall not be allowed the use of mobile phones despite the fact we are as much citizens of the country as any one else, then why this discrimination?

##### Rocky Chakma

To date I have voted three times on my free will. Let me say from that experience that all the three times we have been deceived. What is needed is for the Zilla Parishads to be fully operational. Whereas a Parishad should have 34 members, headed by a Chairman it has a total of five members and they are elected through fax communication. Therefore there is always a doubt as to whether they are truly elected people's representative or not. They usually become hostage to different parties and their interests. I wish to tell our future Members of the Parliament that if they are unable to protect our rights then they should simply restore our basic rights. I wish to see proper representation of the small ethnic groups in the Parliament.

##### Advocate Dulal Kanti Sarker

Today we are talking about capable candidates whereas all capable candidates are being murdered one by one. In number three of the list on Nagorik's Aspirations we have indicated about the equal rights for the religious minority and various ethnic groups. I would like to replace the word "equal rights for "rights on priority basis". I would also request that a process of accountability be set for the bottlenecks that stand in the way of institutionalizing the democratic process.

##### Priyadarshi Chakma

How can there be proper election of people's representative in the region without the voter list prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Peace Accord. I believe as per terms of the Peace accord, those who are currently representing us in the Parliament or the Municipal Committees do not legally represent us.

##### Lakshmi Prasad Chakma

We have not been recognized by the constitution. Due to this crisis of identity our rights are yet to be recognised. Through this forum I propose that arrangements be made so that we are given due identity in the next session of the Parliament. The Peace Accord signed between the Government and the Janshanghati Samity in 1997 was created for establishing Local Government system. Whereas with Operation Uttororn still continuing, whether it is general administration or the regional Parishads, none of the systems is able to function. I, therefore, appeal to all the members of the civil society, and the political parties, to arrange withdrawal of Martial Law from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. At the same time let the Zilla Parishads be reorganised, and a voter list prepared as per provision of the Accord.

##### Jamal Nazrul Islam

One of my books under the title Shailpo, Shattiya O Samaj was published in 1998. I would like to read out some excerpts from that book since they are relevant to what is being discussed here today. It also talks about the Hill tracts. "1947 saw the end of the colonial rule, preceded by the Pakistan Movement, then came the Language Movement and finally, even after our success in the War of Liberation there has been little change in the overall condition of our poor. So much so, that we failed to reach the benefits of education in our own mother tongue, Bengali, to the villages and remote areas of the country. Our poor continue to be deprived in matters of education, medical facilities, access to courts and judicial services. I do not think lack of resources to be the main cause for it. With the right kind of attitude, and proper initiatives, we could still do a lot for the poorer section of our population within the available limited resources. I believe that neglecting the poor is a common ailment in each of the countries of the sub-continent. The tribal people, like the Kohls Beels and the Santals, were being neglected from time immemorial, whether during the Hindu Rule, the Muslims or the time of the British Rule. They were not only neglected, but were often subjected to oppression. They were considered as subhuman. By now a number of these groups of people may have become extinct. We have, indeed, much to learn from their lifestyles and culture."

between the people of the mountainous region and the Bengalis.

34. Constitutional recognition and protection of basic rights of the People of the Hill Tracts have to be guaranteed.

28. There has to be allocation of seats in the Parliament for the Adivasis.

29. Demand for removal of the DC of Khagrachari before the forthcoming election.

30. Rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons.

31. For passing of any law concerning any tribal people prior consultation with the concerned tribe has to be undertaken.

32. Improvement in power supply alongside development of various related infrastructure.

33. Equal rights for the tribal people and the Bengalis proportionate to the number of people

34. Political leaders to travel to the Chittagong Hill tracts.

35. Separate Ministry for the Adivasis.

36. Immediate cessation of Operation Urtton and land grabbing under the leadership of the army.

37. Security of the Adivasis and the minority should be ensured once the election is over.

38. Neutrality of the security forces.

39. Establishment of a tribal language institute.

and the economists should look towards the changes taking place around the world. A country has to have two resources for it to prosper: Fuel and Strength. Today India is having friendly relations with Pakistan. China's relations with India is getting better. All these are taking place based on economic factors.

I am now coming to the issue of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. " This is a complex problem that requires concerted and coordinated efforts of all concerned. It may take a longtime before the Accord can be implemented, for which we need to have an environment backed by patience, tolerance and cordiality. It may so happen that a particular tribe has not accepted the Accord in full. Here what may be needed is free and frank discussions amongst various tribes and other ethnic groups irrespective of their cast, creed or party affiliations. The tribal and the non-tribal people of the Hill Tracts belong to the same family. We have to find solutions from amongst ourselves. If we are to bring the tribal people close to us then we ought to mingle with them, learn their language, and even sing their songs and acquaint ourselves with their lifestyles, history and culture. ... The huge burden of accumulated foreign debt should not be thrust on these people. We have somehow been able to withstand the burden but they may not be able to." I have said before also that the World Bank, IMF, and ADB must leave this place.

#### **Monishapan Dewan**

By development we often understand building of bridges and culverts and construction of roads etc. But the essence of development is, in effect, more comprehensive and diverse. From that angle we are still lagging behind. To arrive at that stage of development we need the combined efforts of all. As a factor amongst other third world countries, we are yet to decide as to what kind of benefits we should look for, Party, self or the country. To this effect we are lagging behind since we do not have the required strength of character and commitment. Therefore, in order to overcome the crisis of leadership we need to strike at its root cause. Without the reformation of the entire society this will not be possible. We shall have to reform the Judiciary befitting the modern day world..

No midterm or long term planning of our overall economy has been undertaken during the past 35 years. Whatever growth in the GDP has been achieved, we are not being able to use it for the benefit of the service sector in a planned way. This is mainly due to mismanagement, corruption and various irregularities. Today, we are being compelled to follow the dictates of the World Bank. The World Bank, in effect, is a multinational company of sorts that looks after its own interests. I say that our politicians

This Hill Tract Region is an important resource of the country. If the indigenous people who live in these hilly areas are given proper exposure then, from here alone, millions of dollars could be added to the country's economy. Therefore we should ensure survival of these small groups of people with appropriate development planning initiatives. At the same time the politicians have to think about their security. If we plan to utilize the resources that lie beneath this land then we must ensure peace in the region.

I have named the present political culture of the country as ' Political Kabadi culture'. In the game of Kabadi after the first one is downed the rest swoop on him. It is the same situation here. If one plans to be involved in the development activities of the country everybody pounces on him. I believe that here, too, we have to prepare yet another extensive document like that of the PRSP. I have named the document "Mental poverty eradication strategy". In order to eradicate mental poverty we have to have a long- term strategic plan. If this is not done where will you get those people with wisdom and foresight who will come forward with pragmatic midterm and long term planning so that the problems we are facing could be resolved step by step. Today we are facing a crisis of good people in the country. The general members of the public are not capable of thinking at the same level at which I am thinking today. Everybody wishes to have ready returns. Your initiative is a good one, but it would be difficult to reap its benefits overnight. You are proceeding with a task that will take a long time to accomplish, however, step by step, this will bring a change in the society.

#### **Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya**

On different occasions it has been suggested that two different kinds of training should be undertaken for the politicians: one on Social Behavioral Change and the other on Total Quality Management, and now Monishapan Dewan has suggested preparing a paper on Mental Poverty Eradication Strategy.

#### **Shukumar Dewan**

Alongside the registration of the political parties the politicians should also be registered. There should be a provision for debarring the politicians who change party affiliations for a second nomination in the next five years. The Election Commission has to be duly informed about the change in party affiliation. A law must be introduced so that civil servants and members of the armed forces shall not be allowed to participate in elections within five years of their retirement. I believe every one should contest from within his or her own constituency. If he contests the election from a different constituency then the rights of people of the area are undermined.

#### **Shagarika Roaza**

In order for a country to prosper we need to establish equal rights for both, men and women. We therefore need to have direct elections for the seats reserved for women. Amongst these seats there should be special allocation for the tribal people. We have to ensure that the indigenous people are able to enjoy all the rights applicable to a citizen of the country. The right to land for the tribal people has to be guaranteed by the constitution.

#### **Hangshaddhaj Chakma**

In order to conduct an election the Administration has to be neutral, whereas it is meting out step-motherly treatment to us. I wish to cite here an example. In a book written by the Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachari, the Chakmas, Marmas and the Tripuras have been described as infiltrators, and the Bengalis have been described as the earliest settlers of the region. Can there be a free and fair election in the presence of such a biased Deputy Commissioner? I, therefore, demand that the Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachari be removed before the election. Election in the three Hill Tract districts should be held after a proper voter list is prepared. Members of the Administration known to be partisan should be removed.

#### **Shantoshito Chakma**

I am talking about Chittagong Hill Tracts. Over the past two decades thousands have been rendered homeless. Over 70 thousand people took shelter in neighboring India. Internally 9028 families became destitute. Over a dozen incidents of genocide took place. Those rendered destitute during that time have not been rehabilitated, either during the Awami League government or by the BNP led present regime. No proper voter list has been prepared, therefore there cannot be a proper election, and anyone elected cannot be a true public representative. The voter list has to be prepared as per provision of the Peace Accord, taking into consideration those who are permanent residents of the locality. Why should government servants, the police and members of the armed forces cast their votes in the local and national elections of the region? In Chittagong Hill Tracts there is considerable distance between the residence of the voters and polling centers. In such cases the centers should be rationally relocated, or else the voters will not be able to cast votes according to their wishes.

#### **Shudatta Bikash Tanchunga**

I would like to talk about some specific issue. First, the MPs should be engaged only in framing laws. Second, before a law is passed by the parliament adequate advance notice should be given so that there is ample opportunity to comment upon it. Third, no children should be "used" during the election. Finally I would like to add a point to no: 3 of the Nagrik list of aspirations that, a law be enacted guaranteeing the rights of tribal people.

#### **Shishir Chakma**

As we are discussing matters here, there are many amongst the Seeks who are going hungry. They are neither given the right to cultivate Jhoom nor are they given their rights to the land. They are not even receiving any aid from the government. No matter what we may say in public we shall cast our votes for either Awami League or BNP. This is the prevailing culture in Bangladesh. This Peace Accord has not been signed and agreed upon by Awami League alone, but also by the governments. BNP is not sincere in implementing the treaty. No matter what, as long as political decisions are not implemented there can be no solution to such issues of reforms and accountability.

### Zahir Ahmed

I would like to differ with the speaker who spoke before me and said that BNP was not thinking about the Peace Accord. The handing over of the Administration at the division levels to the various Zilla Parishads is a proof of BNP's concern for implementation of the Accord. Thousands of problems do exist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I have seen that in the Nagorik's list of aspirations mention has been made of ensuring equal rights for the people of the region. To this I wish to add that this should be proportionate to the total population of the region. The president of today's discussion session is the former Chairman Rangamati Zilla Parishad who I voted for with the objective of establishing peace. Whereas the Peace Accord states no Bengali could be a candidate. Recently I visited Indonesia where similar problems exist in the province of Kalimantan whose Governor happens to be a Christian, whereas the Vice Governor and the Deputy Governor are Muslims. I would, therefore, suggest that similar posts be introduced here, too, and opportunities be created for the Bengalis to speak also. So long as this opportunity is not made available I do not think that there can be any solution to the existing problems.

### Dilip Deb

Today the country is administered on the prescription of the World Bank and IMF. The US Ambassador and the High Commissioner of India tell us how to conduct our election. I do not think there is any need for it, it is our election and we should conduct it ourselves. I would like to ask whether our MPs have ever stood up on the floor of the Parliament and asked for constitutional recognition of the tribal people? For all round development there has to be a development of the socio-economic infrastructure. The Zilla Parishads have to be activated. Everybody has to come forward whether he is a Bangali or a Pahari.

### Maulana Muhammad Shahjahan

In order to bring peace in Bangladesh we have to make the two leaders sit together. I believe it is true even in the case of the Hill Tracts. There is no alternative to voter ID cards for a successful election. There are many institutions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts like the Regional Parishad, the Zilla Parishad, the Municipality and the district administration but, unfortunately, there is no coordination amongst these agencies. Coordination has to be geared up.

### Shuresh Kumar Chakma

The oldest institution in Bangladesh is the Union Parishad, whereas during the various regimes, through entanglement in various bureaucratic complications, this has been totally ruined. The Union Parishads and the local administrative systems have to be revived and empowered. The voter list should be prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Accord. The Adivasis have to be given constitutional recognition. There has to be a separate ministry for the Adivasis.

### Firoz Al-Mahmud

There can be no proper election if the Election Commission is not in order. It is really painful to hear the kind of language used on the floor of the Parliament. I therefore feel that it is not enough to elect honest candidates only, but a healthy environment inside the Parliament has to be there also.

### Saktipada Tripura

I wish to emphasize that alongside inclusion of "withdrawal of Operation Uttoron" the implementation of the Hill Tracts Accord should also be added to point no: 3 of the Nagorik's list of aspirations. My proposal with regard to the rights to land for the Tribal people is that arrangements also have to be made for exposure and spread of the language and culture of the indigenous people. The Nagorik Committee has to play a firm role so that the Rohingas are not listed as voters. The forceful occupation of land in the Hill Tracts, with the assistance of the members of the armed forces, has to be stopped.

### Raja Debashish Roy

Doing good deeds for those who are deprived of state sponsored benefits of the society is neither unconstitutional nor against the principles of basic rights. The representatives of the Chittagong Hill Tracts all along have played the role of back benchers in the Parliament. Therefore, if we are unable to establish democracy in the real sense of the term we shall not be able to change the situation. First, just because you are Adivasis it is not necessary that you have to live there for thousands of years, and the rest will ride on their rights, such is not the case. It is neither in the Constitution of Bangladesh, nor in the International Human Rights. Second, human rights does not necessarily mean that all of us will behave the same way. On the contrary, it means that even if we differ in the way we behave each of us shall enjoy equal rights. There are different tribes and groups of people who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts; they too have their rights. This should not be confused with communalism. Sometimes we come across leaders who have a tendency to give a twisted meaning to this. If any group of people are deprived of their rights, and they are given that right through enactment of a special law it cannot be against the concept of equal rights.

Here I would like to join the group of mobile phone owners. Mobile phones should be introduced here. We could begin with the army headquarters with the initial capacity ranging between 3 and 5 kilometers. Not all bad people will use mobile phones, there will be good people too. I wish to say two things in relation to the Hill Tracts. Proper arrangements should be made for rehabilitation of the internally displaced people of the region. In respect of voting centers, they should not be selected on the basis of population alone, consideration should also be given to the geographical aspect in selecting a location. The Sajek Union in this area is larger than many of the districts. The neutrality of the security personnel and government officials have to be ensured. The process has to commence right from now, and not just on the day of voting. Those who have not been enlisted in the voter list have to be assisted by the Nagorik Committee and the political parties for their inclusion. Conducting a proper election in this region is a big challenge for us. I am in full agreement with you with regard to electing honest and wise people.

### Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

Wherever we have gone we have discussed the issue of competent candidates. However, no extensive discussions of the kind took place with regard to the voter list. However, I have all along felt that with regard to preparation of the voter list for the Chittagong Hill Tracts we have to take special care compared to any other area. From here onwards I am also joining the mobile camp along with Raja Debashish Roy. I also demand that the mobile network be introduced in the region before the forthcoming election.

### Ching Kew Roaza

I would like to say two things here. The inscription on the banner here reads: Civil Society's Initiative for Accountable Development. To me accountability means, first to say something then act upon what has been said, and finally lay open the results. I believe I belong to the entire world, all the people are my relations; serving humanity is my only religion. This should be the guiding spirit in every sphere of our lives.

### Jatirindra Bodhipriya Larma

Whatever we may say, it is perhaps natural to allow us the environment needed to discuss things with an open mind, particularly here where Martial Law is still in force. As a matter of fact, not only in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, such an environment persists all over the country. Today, people's lives have become unbearable due to terrorism, corruption and all forms of dictatorial acts.

### List of participants

1. Gautam Dewan - (President), Former Chairman, Rangamati Pourashava and President, Forest & Land Preservation Movement
2. Motiur Rahman -- Editor, Prothom Alo
3. Habibur Rahman Habib -- Chairman, Rangamati Pourashava.
4. Kazi Nazrul Islam -- President, Rangamati CCI
5. Alo Rani Aich -- Former Vice-Principal, Rangamati Government College
6. Sunil Kanti Dey -- President, Rangamati Press Club
7. Rocky Chakma -- General Secretary, Red Crescent Society, Rangamati
8. Dulal Kanti Sarkar -- Lawyer
9. Priyadarshi Chakma -- General Secretary, Central Committee, Hill Student's Council
10. Mamunur Rashid Mamun -- President, Rangamati Chhatra Dal
11. Binota Moy Dhamai -- Joint General Secretary, Bangladesh Adibashi Forum
12. Laksmi Prasad Chakma -- Joint President, PCJSS
13. Mahbub Alam Chowdhury -- Commander, Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Rangamati
14. Najia Afreen -- Jonipop
15. Jamal Nazrul Islam -- Professor Emeritus, Mathematics and Infrastructural Science Research Centre, Chittagong University.
16. Monishwapan Dewan -- Deputy Minister, Ministry of CHT Affairs
17. Sukumar Dewan -- Secretary, Tribal Social Forum
18. Sagarika Roaza -- Chairperson, Supra
19. Hangshadhaj Chakma -- President, Khagrachhari Nagorik Committee
20. Shantoshito Chakma -- Secretary, Jumma Refugee Welfare Committee
21. Shudatta Bikash Tanchanga -- Social Worker
22. Shishir Chakma -- Educationist and Cultural Activist
23. Zahir Ahmed -- General Secretary, BNP, Rangamati
24. Dilip Deb -- General Secretary, Bangladesh Communist Party, Rangamati
25. Maulana Mohammad Shahjahan -- Vice Chairman, Central Committee, Jatiya Party
26. Fazle Elahi -- Executive Director, Global Village, Rangamati
27. Shaktiman Chakma -- Lawyer
28. Dr. Kanishka Chakma -- Physician
29. Bimal Kanti Saha -- Former Assistant Headmaster, Rangamati Government High School
30. Shuresh Kumar Chakma -- President, Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum

The dream we talk about, the aspirations we have about development; is it really possible to achieve those in the prevailing social systems? The world we live in is called the developing world that is influenced by the thinking of socialists, neo-capitalists people belonging to the middle class. Therefore, can we really expect good governance and development living in this environment?

Politicization is the ultimate reflection of our election. In election what is important is not the competency of a candidate, instead what is of consequence is the party. Whichever party comes to power will form the government. During the past 35 years only a few parties have influenced the lives of the people of this country, but we have not seen any real development initiatives undertaken by the major parties. The real objective seems to be holding onto power by any means. I am yet to come across any real effort on their part to protect people's basic Human Rights. The rate of literacy being low in this land of 14 crores is the reason that parties get the preference; as a result no role of the lawmakers in building a democratic, non-communal society is visible. As a result terrorism, corruption and strife continue to violate the basic human rights of the people..

There can be real development of the people by eradicating oppression from the society. Admittedly, however, we cannot have such a society overnight. Today there is no peace in the minds of either the majority or the minorities of the society. The scenario with the poorer section of the people and the Adivasis is even worse. In order to come out of this state of affairs people with conscience have to come forward. The various deliberations made at this forum have revealed the fact that there are considerable gaps in our thinking. In order to stop the have-nots from being suppressed by the rich we have to bring about a revolutionary change and close the gaps in our thinking, or else how can we build a beautiful country? People who contest elections in the country belong to the upper and the rich class of the population. The poor, and those belonging to the labor class, are not able to contest in the election. Against this background how should we view the election 2007? Is it divided into two mainstream or otherwise? I would like to place this question to the members of the present forum. I believe that no development in the society if can be achieved if the rich are involved in politics. I wish to emphasize that if we want to improve upon the quality of our lives through the outcome of the election 2007 then there should be no politicking. We may not get such a government, but we should continue with our lofty efforts.

Here, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts the Bengalis of the area are caught in the web of terrorism by the Military. I do not know if anyone else in Bangladesh lives under such fear and uncertainty. Here, I have a few friends like Matiur Rahman, Dr. Debapriya and Prof. Jamal Nazrul Islam, who understand our predicament fully, whereas, I have talked to thousands others who are not even acquainted with the cruel realities that exist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The very government that signed the Accord with us has betrayed us. This government had three years and eight months of its tenure still left, and I believe given the will and sincerity it was possible to implement the Accord in full. But I believe this is beyond the culture of the major parties. The realities I am facing after being the Chairman of the Regional Parishad are rather fearful. I cannot imagine how a fair election can be held here? Under such circumstances, how the spirit of the Accord can be upheld? Through implementation of the Accord we wish to preserve the conscience of the nation, the rights to our land and our culture. We want to have a democratic Administration through which we are able to utilize the resources of the region for the benefit for the country.

#### **Gautam Dewan**

Through the lively and worthwhile discussions that took place here today it has been established that living in this Chittagong Hill Tracts we all are cut off from the mainstream population of the country. We first voted in 1945, and then in 1960, in the election of the local governments. Prior to this we had no voting rights. Against this backdrop we are proud to be a part of this discussion today. It was good to see that many diverse proposals were made, and at the same time doubts were expressed as to whether the politicians would listen to their voices. Sometime back Prof. Zafar Iqbal, at the dialogue held in Sylhet, had said that if any demands are to be achieved, then you have to explain to the people and keep them informed, therefore it is important to build public opinion. The political parties are a part of us, and there is no attempt whatsoever to undermine them, or make them our competitors any way through this dialogue. We may not reap immediate benefits out of this dialogue, but it is not going to go in vain. It is, indeed, our duty to look for honest people. I thank the sponsors and all those who participated.

31. Firoz Al Mahmud -- Commissioner, Rangamati Pourashava
32. Shaktipada Tripura -- Chairman, Khagrachhari District Headmen Association
33. Aung Shaw Prue Choudhury -- Chairman, No. 1 Betbunia UP
34. Lalit C Chakma -- Secretary, Supra, Rangamati
35. Raja Debashish Roy -- Chakma Raja and Member Nagorik Committee
36. Goutam Kumar Chakma -- Member, Rangamati Regional Council
37. Syed Mahabub Ahmad -- Journalist
38. Sushil Prashad Chakma -- District Representative, The Daily Jugantor
39. Md. Mustafa Kamal -- Executive Director, Centre for Hill Information Development and Resources
40. Sakhawat Hussain -- District Representative, The Daily Purbokon
41. Biplob Chakma -- Joint President, Supra, Rangamati
42. Mohammad Akhteruzzaman -- Secretary, Bandhu Shava, Rangamati
43. Manosh Kumur Chakma -- Member, Jhum Aesthetics Council
44. Mohammed Ali -- Executive Director, Shinning Hill, Rangamati
45. Gyasuddin Khokon -- Entrepreneur
46. Jahangir Alam Munna -- General Secretary, FEMA, Rangamati
47. Mokhtar Ahmed -- Lawyer
48. Shupal Chakma -- Lawyer
49. Nurul Afsar -- Assistant Scouts Commissioner, Bangladesh Scouts, Rangamati
50. Chingkw Roaza -- Politician and of Chairman, Rangamati Zilla Parishad
51. Mathura Lal Chakma -- Member, Advisory Council JSS
52. Noor Mohammad -- Teacher
53. Advocate Jewel Dewan -- Coordinator, BLAST
54. Nanda Kishore Chakma -- Programme Coordinator, Social Advancement Society
55. Chirojyoti Chakma -- Ex Municipal Commissioner
56. Shimul Chakma -- Development Worker
57. Jamaluddin -- Journalist
58. Md. Omar Faruk -- President, HSDO
59. Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Chakma -- President, CHT Regional Council

Coordinator: **Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya**