



CITIZENS' DIALOGUE-JESSORE

NATIONAL ELECTION 2007

The Daily Star

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Accountable development initiatives- role of the civil society

A citizens' dialogue on, 'National Election 2007: Role of the Civil Society in Accountable Development,' was held in Jessore on May 13th 2006 under the auspices of the CPD, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo. The dialogue was participated by representatives of different professional groups, political leaders and members of Citizens' Group. We publish the proceedings of the dialogue in this supplement

-- Editor

Objectives behind the initiatives undertaken by the Committee of the Civil Society Forum:

1. Legacy of our long and protracted War Of Liberation
2. The spirit, inspiration and unifying force behind our War Of Liberation.
3. Rights and privileges as of citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution; political, economic and social.

Our target

Making citizens aware of their rights in these spheres, and our expectation is that all conscious citizens will take appropriate initiatives and due measures in their respective localities making people aware of their rights, so that a due awareness is set in motion.

Summary of the rights under the Constitution

Ensure democracy in the political process: electing competent, honest people's representatives irrespective of party affiliations and ensure undertaking of development projects that are destined to improve the future of the people at large.

We believe and wish to declare in no uncertain terms

The political parties alone can be the driving force behind all democratic processes and that there is no alternative to it. At the same time what is needed in order to protect the interests of the people are political parties founded and run on the principles of democracy and are transparent and accountable.

The broad description of what constitutes people's interest

Establishing the voting rights of for all citizens, free to vote and the programs and development projects undertaken should be within the framework of the constitution and not based on partisan considerations. In order to achieve that objective what is needed is to ensure good governance, proper enforcement of the rule of law and administrative machinery that is completely independent and non-partisan. A pre-requisite in achieving the above objective is an environment of healthy and honest political activism based honesty and ethics.

I am certain that you will agree that corruption and good governance cannot run side by side irrespective of whichever party is in power, as we have experienced during the past two decades. Establishing good governance and containing a volatile environment under control with the help of the Police, BDR, Army and RAB etc is not the same thing. Good governance has long-term ramifications.

Despite the fact that there has been an upward trend in the growth of GDP over the past 15 years, it has proved to be inadequate in our efforts towards eradication of poverty. There has been a steady increase in the country's overall resources, a near self-sufficiency in food production has been achieved, increase in exports has taken place, there has also been an increase and extension in health and the education sectors including a considerable increase in remittance from our wage earners from abroad, all these factors have helped the overall upward growth of our economy. Despite all these however, there has been an increase in economic disparity in the society. There has been a decline in the qualitative aspect in the management systems of health and industry. Over 40 percent of the population is still living below poverty line. A large section of mothers are still suffering from malnutrition. Lack of good governance and corruption is preventing us from achieving the expected growth rate in GDP; on the other hand Government is unable even to meet the bare minimum of daily needs of the people whether it is electricity, water, gas or agricultural implements.

If we reflect for a while we shall find that behind whatever has been achieved the major share of the credit goes to the agricultural farmers, the women workers of the garment sector and those of our people working abroad as wage earners.

We therefore wish to see an economic policy that reflects and recognises the contributions made by these people, decrease the prevailing inequalities in the society, increase investments in all sectors like agriculture, education, health and various infrastructures at the village and urban areas. Foreign investments may be welcome only after maximum utilisation of national resources particularly in the case of development of industries and expansion of exports.

The pattern of development we are visualising through our initiatives, the essence of which is embodied in the list of citizens' "hopes and aspirations". Of special significance amongst them is further empowerment of women

We believe that we could achieve a better growth in GDP, once corruption is curbed, good governance is established and proper utilisation of national resources and foreign assistance is ensured.

We believe that in order to succeed in our goals we need to have: a free and fair election and nominating honest and credible candidates. In this regard among others the much debated and controversial issue of preparation of the voter list should be resolved on a top most priority.

We sincerely hope that the leading political parties and their leaders will come forward and find due solution to various emerging issues based on logical digression with a view to preservation of rights as provided under the constitution. These issues are preparation of duly corrected voter list, reform of the Election Commission and the Caretaker Government etc.



Introductory remarks by Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

Please accept our greetings for joining this 2nd round of discussions. At the beginning I shall attempt to clarify some of the questions and doubts expressed about the objectives of this discussion programme.

Prior to the elections in 2001 Center For Policy Dialogue (CPD) took the initiative of formulating a framework for national development in consultation with a team of 18 Task Force Groups. We had discussed those reports presented by the task force in different cities of the country under joint sponsorship of the Daily Star and Prothomo Alo. This created the opportunity of meeting you about 5/6 years ago. In 2003 CPD put together the recommendations of these experts and handed it over to the Government in October 2001.

During that time we also held meetings at different cities and did seek your opinion. Later, through holding of national convention the recommendations made by the people were forwarded to each of the Ministers in Charge.

Now, prior to the forthcoming national election in 2007, we found that Bangladesh has passed through a democratic form of administration. Bangladesh will be 50, 15 years from today, in 2021. We would like to leave behind a vision for Bangladesh for the coming generation based on your hopes and aspirations. It is therefore imperative that for us organisers we must have a clear vision. In order to formulate this "vision" we have today amongst us 7/8 well-known national level personalities. We are particularly happy that one of these distinguished personalities is Ms. Angela Gomes, winner of the coveted Magsasay Award. We are grateful to her for joining us. We have already presented before you the outlines of the "vision". Following this we shall prepare the "vision" document and then the road map for implementation. As we proceed with the preparation of the document and begin handing over of the document to those responsible for its implementation we should also be aware of their honesty, dedication of sticking to principles including professional competence. If they do not have any concept of the Vision and its objectives we shall not be able to achieve our objectives. Therefore it is only but natural that the citizens present here today may like to deliberate on whom we shall entrust the responsibility of implementing the "vision". We sincerely hope that the political parties include this document also as a part and parcel of their national campaign strategy and manifesto.

We shall also talk to Government departments like the National Board of Revenue, Anti corruption Commission, after due consultations with politicians, as to how to keep black money away from being used in the election through utilising the suggested frame works. In order to achieve that aim we have teamed up with two of the most well known Dailies of the country, namely, Prothomo Alo and The Daily Star. Today's meeting here is the second one. You would recall that on March 20 we had our inaugural meeting in Dhaka. The booklet published following that meeting is now with you.

At the very outset let me say that this is purely a national level initiative and is neither inspired nor supported by any foreign funds. Whatever we have been able to accomplish is through the assistance of these organisations and our own labour.

The proceedings of our inaugural meeting were published in various dailies and as many as 200 related write-ups. We have preserved all these writings and features containing many valuable opinions of the people for future review. Having due respect to the write ups I would like to take this opportunity of responding to questions raised. Many of you have raised the questions as to who comprises this civil society? Without going into the technical aspects of it all let me say that "civil society consists of those who are outside the Government are not directly serving the government in any way". These are people who are a part and parcel of the civil society with the spirit of patriotism. We are not a part of the Government and we are not involved in partisan or any other form of politics.

We believe that all who have gathered here from various Zillas and Upazillas are educated people and who care for the country and are not involved in collective partisan politics. This does not mean however that we have no connection with the political parties; on the contrary we do have good relations with political parties, in fact the civil society itself think and work for the political parties. We should bear in mind that ultimately it will be the political parties who will be finally responsible for implementing the "vision".

Many of you raised the question as to whether or not we are involved in politics, the answer is no. We are not interested in presenting ourselves as an alternative political entity. Bangladesh believes in a political system that is representative and democratic in nature. It is the business of the politicians to run the country.

We are merely trying to strengthen the hands of the politicians. We are not planning to nominate any candidate. We hope that particularly the major political parties will field honest and competent candidates and we shall vote for them.

We do not think we have in any way tried to undermine the politicians and have no reason to do so. As a matter of fact as we look at the politicians we do find that many of them have put in considerable labor and sacrifices as we have gone through the rise and fall of our struggle through democracy; some of them even suffered jail. We are in fact working towards enhancing the image of the politicians and return of people's trust in them.

We are often asked if we were planning to launch a third party by bringing NGOs under our umbrella. We must emphatically say no. I believe this allegation is totally baseless and irrelevant. It is important that we come out of these suspicions, and the sooner the better. Our main objective is to present a framework of Vision for future Bangladesh.



A question has also been asked as to who is a competent candidate? In the final analysis we believe that whoever is elected is the right candidate and should be accepted by all. What we are trying to do is provide some parameters for them to judge the competency of the prospective candidates and believe that those should be placed in a logical way.

We are aware that only last year a high court Bench passed a ruling on the Election Commission saying that the submission of nomination papers of each of the candidates must also provide details of his/her educational qualifications, profession, source or sources of income, description of assets and properties including those of the dependents. The reason for that is, often many maintain their properties under different names as their custodians or nominees. The ruling also stipulated that the concerned candidate must also provide details of bank transactions including whether or not he/ she is a loan defaulter etc. On the other hand if he or she is engaged in any public service organisation or activities a record of that also has to be submitted along with a statement of taxes being paid including a record of changing party affiliations so that people come to know who were in which party and for how long; giving them an idea of the individual's possible future conduct. Recently we visited the National Board of Revenue led by Mr. Sayeeduzzaman

where we have said that the statement of assets and properties to be submitted is rather inadequate. We however agreed with the Chairman that the standard annual tax returns as submitted by individual citizens might be submitted to the election commission instead. We have also at the same time urged that there should be a legal provision for canceling the membership of an elected candidate should he or she be elected by providing figures in the statement that are false and also for withholding pertinent facts. In other words, we believe that in the final analysis, it is the right of the people to assess and judge the individual candidate.

Many of you have questioned as to why we are deliberating so much on candidacy but not enough on the electoral process? We have already said that even if there were to be a competent candidate and the electoral process is faulty we shall not be able to get the right candidate elected. Conversely it is true that even if there is a proper electoral system and the candidate is a poor one he or she can still be elected.

We have a specific objective in our mind as we insist strengthening the fact sheet. Take for example a wealthy person who buys a nomination spending about 5 crores or plan to win the elections spending a sum of 10 crores would hesitate to stand for elections since he would not like to go into the risky hassle of submitting a detailed statement of his or her total assets. This is how we are trying to bring pressures on aspiring candidates.

The Election Commission has said that the implementation of High Courts directive is not binding upon them. We had hoped that the Commission would readily take advantage of this directive and proceed with its work in order to establish the rights of the people. We observe with regret that far from implementing the directive, the Commission has completely ignored it. We all know that there is a statutory provision that requires each of the candidates, once elected, to submit a detailed account of his or her election expenses within a year after being elected. It is, however, unfortunate that not a single statement of account has been submitted to the Commission to this day by any of the candidates elected in 2001.

We believe that all the political parties of Bangladesh should be registered. It is important here to note that nearly each and every association or an enterprise is required to obtain a license or a registration in order to carry on with whatever activities it is they are engaged in, for instance, a trading house, an industry, a voluntary non-profit organisation or a commercial enterprise, where as, if you are floating a political party you are not required to obtain any such document. This in effect helps the political parties to be non-transparent and unaccountable. People are thus unable to question the party leadership in the case of its failure to abide by its declared manifest. Our political parties have no list of members as such and hence any government official is able to join any party right after the day of his or her retirement from service and finally in no time stands as a candidate. Year after year no general body meetings are convened and there is none to question. There is no transparent financial auditing. Without these reforms we shall not be able to progressively move forward in the coming days. To this extent I have insisted time and again that we need to simultaneously undertake the task of reforming both political parties and the electoral systems. Many have asked us if we would be able to achieve this objective by the year 2007?

I believe it will not be possible, but we have certainly made a beginning. If we are unable to attain our objective by 2007, we hope to achieve it by the year 2012, if not, by 2017. This is a process and we have to carry it forward with the combined efforts of hundreds of other like-minded organisations, only then we would succeed. Many have said that we seem to wake up all too suddenly during the election time alone, and election alone appears to be the main target. You have noticed that CPD holds various discussion programmes, particularly on financial systems analysis in order to create a public awareness on accountability including the budget and beyond. The Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, through their papers on a regular basis, publish discussion proceedings on a variety of issues starting from violation of human rights etc. The allegation therefore does not hold good. However we do take the opportunity of the election time especially for the fact that this is the time when the politicians try to come into close contact with the public and we too also try to tell them about our vision and expectations for the future.

You have already with you a copy of the suggested framework of our vision, please go through it and should you agree please lend your support. On the contrary should you feel that something more should be added, please do let us have your comments in writing. We shall deeply appreciate if you let us know your views as to how you wish to see Bangladesh in the coming 50 years. We plan to hold completely free and open discussions. There is but very little scope for making speeches here; this will be a platform for putting forward specific suggestions. There will be three categories of individuals who will be speaking here: those who are sitting on the dais, those who have been especially invited by us including a few selected persons amongst the audience and some honored guests.

I thank all of you for being present here today. I am hoping that together you will make this discussion program meaningful and worthwhile.

Mahfuz Anam

We are grateful for your response to our call. What we are trying to do is to make this function a truly discussion and dialoguing forum of the people. Our endeavor is aimed at talking in one voice by assimilating the opinions of all. One might ask as to the need for such moves now. To me the answer is simple.

You are aware of the many rise and falls in our efforts to build a Sonar Bangla through the War of Liberation. However we have a democratic process in place for the last 15 years. Today's initiatives is aimed at finding ways and means for strengthening that process further as we go along and fulfill peoples' aspirations and find out ways and means towards emergence of a government that is truly democratic. I see no harm in such an initiative since democracy is a continuous process. In every country where there is functioning democracy it has been established through a gradual process. We have passed the first step and I am proud of the fact that Bangladesh happens to be a democratic country compared to many other countries of the world. At the same time we are also aware of the fact that our existing democracy is faulty in many ways. We have crossed a few hurdles and have the potential of crossing many more. Over the past 15 years we have witnessed that there has been change of governments through proper and fair elections. One important aspect of Bangladesh's democracy is that change of government does take place. In all our elections we have seen the defeat of the government in office. This presents us with the evidence as to how fair are the elections and also bears testimony as to how "free" our electorate is. However it is observed that the newly elected government often has failed to translate into action any of our hopes and aspirations, where the next election is already here. The main cause for it is the limitation and lack of freedom of actions of the elected lawmakers, both at party and state levels.

The fixation of taka 3 lakhs as election expenses for individual candidates by the Election Commission has now become a joke. We all know including the voters and the entire nation that this is but a farce and meaningless. People say that expenditures now run into crores. These are people who are extremely wealthy. We are thus right from the start entering into a culture of election of the rich. It is not possible for an ordinary citizen to contest elections spending such huge sums of money. On the other hand, from the moment one begins preparations for contesting the elections, the person develops a mindset that the money spent has to be realised subsequently. This means that the very electoral process has this built-in weakness. We believe that the citizens themselves have an important role to play here. We believe now is the time. We want a free and fair election and hence there is a need for bringing in changes in the election process. There is an entity called "Electoral Election Tribunal" where any individual can lodge a complaint and the responsibility of this agency to ensure proper redress of the grievance/s. But it takes nearly 5 to 6 years before the tribunal settles the matter. This often allows the accused to walk out freely with the tenure of office being over by then.

We would therefore certainly ask for reformations of the electoral process and the electoral tribunal.

A few days back the Election Commission has termed its office as a post box, the question that arises is, where lies the actual authority?

There has been considerable controversy over the voter list. Besides, we also need to ensure that the role of the Returning Officer is transparent and neutral. In order to overcome all these hurdles we need to empower the people.

We are not saying that one should come and vote every five years but the voter should also have the right to monitor as to how their elected representatives are running the affairs of the country and working towards realisation of people's rights. We should no longer be happy with such limited rights of merely being able to fill in a voter form presented to us and cast our votes. We do not wish to be mere "stupid" voters but one that are well informed, backed by facts and dictated by wisdom. We need to know as to who is seeking our votes and why, what are their background and their identity? Our main objective today is to find out ways and means to set in motion this spirit of enquiry and inquisitiveness amongst the people. In our country there is a tendency of our political parties and the politicians to give credence to the voice of the people when the election approaches, once the

election is over they do not have any connection with the voters. We also have with us the questions as to what is the role of the honourable lawmakers, what is their relationship with the voters and how much are they answerable to the voters? We believe that through this platform of citizens we shall carry forward our vision through effective dialoguing and discussions and firmly establish the rights of the voters in comprehensive terms.

S. M. Kamruzzaman Chunnu

I believe the broad outlines of the vision document presented by the Citizens' Committee keeping in view of the election 2007 is indeed praiseworthy.

Aside from the subject under discussion may I inform the audience that I am connected with the local government. Both local and central government authorities since our independence have emphasised the need for providing more powers to the local government apparatus so that they are able to provide better civic amenities to the people of the respective regions and localities. As a matter of fact the local government all along had considerable authority to operate more independently and effectively, but despite assurances, successive governments through various government circulars and directives have systematically curtailed their authority. As of now local governments have to depend on the central government for over 90 percent of their activities. This poses a serious problem for running the local governments.

We hope that this discussion concerning fielding of honest candidates is transmitted to the political parties throughout the country as a strong message from the people at large. It should not be confined to mere discussions, instead, due steps should be taken in order to also actively involve those who are present here today along with you.

R.M. Khairul Umam

I support the initiative. The way the public representatives are competing in ruining this country a way should be devised to free the country from this crisis.

I believe that there should be a definition provided by the Committee as From page 25 to who is an honest and a committed candidate. We often come across a situation where an employ that takes 10 takas of graft describes his boss who takes 100 takas, as corrupt. A trader who sells adulterated oil calls one who sells adulterated sugar as dishonest. Therefore there should also be a clear definition as to who is corrupt and who is not.

The reason for this is that we often come across bank loan defaulters who have accumulated considerable wealth and property from loans taken from banks are often well placed in the society. Are they honest? Are the bureaucrats honest?

Once these definitions are firmed up the public then can apply the criteria and be able to select or choose the right candidate.

Chowdhury Shahidul Islam Nayan

CPD's move today is a very noble one, but I have my doubts as to whether or not their endeavor will succeed. They are perhaps trying to achieve their goals during the elections in 2007, but their initiatives may bear fruits in 2012 or by 2017.

From the emerging guidelines here, we are perhaps visualising an election in 2012 that will be free from terrorism, will ensure public safety and security, establish a public administration that is accountable and forward looking and free from partisan influence. Let the rule of law be established on the basis of constitutional provisions through separation of the judiciary from the executive and a workable and an effective independent Judiciary.

Prof Afsar Aliy

From the discussions on the proposal we find that there are inconsistencies in our election systems and other related processes. These inconsistencies should be regulated. If the citizens are able to play that role effectively we should be able to forge ahead.

I believe that the civil society has definitely a role to play but the question is, whether they should be from outside political parties and the related political process? The civil society believes that they are certainly not outside the political arena. They also believe that healthy politics will be able to bring about ultimate desired changes for the country. We also hope that they succeed but it should be remembered that it is the politicians who are responsible for carrying forward and realising our hopes and aspirations. The main objective of the discussions we are having here today should therefore be, the strengthening of the guiding principles of the political process.

I do not think those present necessarily subscribe to the same political philosophy. They all have their different opinions. If our political parties and their leaders are able to implement the policies effectively and reach the common man, then only we can hope to see our aspirations fulfilled.

I beg to differ with Mr. Mahfuz Anam's contention that if proper elections were held much of our problems would be resolved. I believe that the electoral process should be bettered so that the opinions of the people are better reflected.

Angela Gomez

We achieved our independence in 1971. Now let us see how far have we progressed since then? We should make an assessment of the progress made so far and analyse failures as to why and how. That should be the base for our discussions with the entire civil society and the politicians. We should find out as to why adequate progress could not be achieved and proceed from their onwards keeping in mind the reasons and explanations offered by them. And then our objective should be to go ahead from the level of success achieved so far. It is our opinion that each individual has to be a good man. Each individual, whether a politician or belonging to the grass root levels, must strive to build a healthy civil society. We have to find out as to what resources we have and do not have, and what remains unutilised. I wish to express my gratitude to the politicians for moving the country towards the path of progress undergoing considerable undue tortures and oppression. Their manifestoes should be compatible to our society, the development perspectives of the country, and they in turn must be promise bound to carry forward the declared agenda. As you may know I had been living in this area for over 30 years. I had been subjected to unjust litigations, hands of those who supported me were cut off and some of them were even killed. Today I bow my head in extreme gratitude to Sharif sir. I had the privilege of having thousands like him with me for the past 30 years. I am glad to be alive despite all these. Sharif sir has often been insulted for joining with me working in the villages. He has been condemned for doing business with an unmarried Christian woman. Many of my community have been subjected to extreme harassments. Yet over 7 lakh members of the civil society today look up to me for support. This is my achievement and I believe that behind this achievement I have been greatly assisted by the civil society. If we really love our country and wish to see it progress then we should all unite rising above our petty differences and work together.

Fakir Shawkat

I do not agree that the political parties should be registered as proposed by Dr. Debapriya Bhattachariya and Mahfuz Anam. You may already be aware as to the complications caused due to the registration of the trade unions in the country, giving rise to yet another platform for bureaucratic red tape. It has also created another avenue for corruption. I am against registration of the political parties aimed at regulating their activities. This proposal should therefore be stricken off. You have also talked about black money, honesty; educational qualifications of a candidate and the same time have requested people to vote for the candidate of their choice. Instead of this, to my mind the most logical thing would be to create a legal entity whereby a corrupt



candidate can be identified and legal proceedings can be drawn. I would therefore urge that unless proven otherwise we should not pin point any individual having black money or money earned through illegal means. You shouldn't make any superficial or irresponsible statement that may not be acceptable to the people. This matter of black money therefore should be further examined.

It is also worth mentioning that if during these years those of you, who claim to be the representatives of the civil society, been able to identify the lawmakers who have amassed wealth and money through illegal means during these past five years, this would then have given you an opportunity to point fingers at those particular individuals and those lawmakers in turn would not have appeared before the public.

Although you have indicated that our politics and the elections do have an impact on the international scene but you have not focused on the issue of the principle of our foreign policy? You may have done this knowingly in order not to earn the displeasure of the influential. No country in the world today is outside the international order of things including Bangladesh. Today, there are a few powerful countries of the world that are dictating the political philosophies of the lesser ones, throughout the world.

We are aware that they occupy a sovereign land, kill people and children, occupy their oil resources and yet you say nothing about it. You also represent the civil society of the country and thus should have clear standing on this issue. The nation also expects a guideline framework as to what should be the basis of our foreign policy. You have talked about accountability of the political leaders. In this context you would do well to remember that, we who live in the villages and townships know the political leaders living in our localities more than you know of the political leaders living in your cities and respective localities. A political leader has to look after the interests of a rickshaw puller of his constituency as much as one caught in a legal case. Therefore a mere honest person may not be able to do all that. For a voter the right candidate and the right party is the one who will be able to protect his overall interests. Our political process is dominated by two major parties. If any one wishes to put forward a third party then one has to command a greater public following. They have to go to the people frequently. They must be well acquainted with their problems and the solutions thereof. It is now over 35 year since we gained our independence and we are yet to see any proper, realistic and comprehensive development program. Dhaka was once a district town and then it became a provincial town and now the capital of the country and yet we could not build it into a planned modern city. All our rivers are on the road to destruction and yet we have not been able to take adequate measures to save them. We have systematically ruined many of our agricultural products including fisheries. We have not been able to build a single one of our vital institutions worthy of an independent country.



A very important aspect of Bangladesh politics remains unresolved even to this day: Bangladeshi Nationalism versus Bengali Nationalism. This becomes an important issue during the elections and it divides the people into two different camps. It is important that the entire nation is united under one basic political philosophy and therefore it imperative that we should have a clear standing on the issue.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

I wish to say that all in at various platforms. Today at Jessore we are discussing the civil society's hopes and aspirations. We shall then proceed to Barisal, Comilla, Khulna and Sylhet where one of the issues we shall discuss is the issue of our Foreign policy and national unity. The second question is the issue of black money, which was also raised by Manzurul Isalm Manzu, Office Secretary BANDHUSHABHA, along with Fakir Shawkat who wanted to know if the civil society would identify those having black money and release the list to the media. Our position in this regard is that in order to publish any such list we need to have credible facts and data without which such a list cannot be published on hearsay alone, otherwise it will tantamount to harassing people and we may be unduly entangled in litigations. What we have said is this, that once these facts are placed with the Election Commission and if the Commission once recognises the facts presented, there will then be no need, no real need for publication of a list for good or for worse. Those facts alone would then be sufficient for people at large to arrive at their decisions.

I also wish to point that no one has said that educational qualification is a critical criteria for a candidate. However, if you care to look at the form to be filled in by prospective candidates there is also a specific column pertaining to educational qualifications. It is relevant to remember here that the elected member will also be required to be a member of a lawmaking body at the national level. The last point I wish to raise is that, those of us who have talked about registration of the political parties in no way did mean to make the political parties hostage to bureaucracy. The deliberations made are certainly well thought out which we are happy to acknowledge.

Prof. Nargis Begum

We have in front of us the vision document of 2006 placed by the Nagorik Committee with the sincere hope that that this will meet the target of what Bangladesh should be by the year 2021. The speakers, while presenting the document, had also mentioned that in order to achieve all that we shall have to secure our sovereignty. The document however has left this point out.

There is a news item in today's dailies that India and Myanmar are secretly working for obtaining gas connections for their countries from the bottom of the sea. We have seen time and again that border forces of our neighbor have killed many of our innocent farmers. The very first thing we want is to secure our borders through firm political will and added support of the people.

We often hear about black money, many think that it is the politicians who are destroying this country, but let us not forget that it was the politicians who brought about the independence of the country. Therefore if tangible changes are to be made it has to be through the efforts of the politicians. Let us not forget that behind whatever successes we have achieved so far in the fields of education, family planning including the health sector, driving force behind them was a political force of whichever shade it may have been. We could not have achieved these successes had there been no political commitment behind it. There may have been a few individuals who have faltered, for that it will not be proper to make blanket condemnation of all politicians.

We the people however would like to see that no known ill reputed individuals of the society are involved in the development initiatives in their respective localities.

I would also point out that those who retire from the government services as secretaries and straight way enter into politics, through a process should be required to work as a member of any political party for at least a period of five years and then if he or she receives the nomination of any of the main political parties he or she will be eligible to stand for elections, this will then be fair to all those who have been in politics right from the beginning. A point has been raised at this platform that the reputation of the politicians have become questionable and is at their lowest and that they should make efforts to retrieve it. I, however, do not agree with the contention. A question has come up in the civil society with regard to dictating of terms by the powerful countries and their agencies about running the affairs of the country as per their prescription in almost all spheres of our economy and administration including as to how to hold the elections. I believe if the politicians can unite on this particular issue we can then tell them that we shall not accept any such unsolicited interference in our internal affairs.

Debapriya Bhattacharya

Let me say this that this that this Committee is also of the same opinion.

Advocate Syeda Masuma Begum

I would like point out that the outlines provided by this Committee does not have anything on the Agriculture sector.

Asaduzzaman



The voters listed at present are mostly young students from colleges and universities. As new voters they have a right to know of their rights. In what way this Committee can assist in the voting process.

Suraiya Sharif

It is but natural that half of those who are engaged in any initiative by the civil society should consist of women. But it is often seen that there is a kind of reluctance in this regard, particularly with regard to the increase in women seats in the parliament. I wish to draw the attention of those who will occupy the seat of power to give ample attention to this contentious issue.

Nurjahan Islam

People who are above self-interests and are willing to serve the country only should be nominated for the elections in 2007 and 2011. Often industrialists and ex-bureaucrats are given nominations. I believe by nominating them we cannot hope to achieve any real progress for the country.

Fazlul Haque

Dr. Debapriya has raised the issue of what kind of Bangladesh should be in his framework outline 50 years hence. He has given a description of his vision and has also raised the relevant issues with great care.

People are the source of all power. They should be provided with due opportunities. The nation is passing through a critical stage of its existence as the election 2007 approaches. We are currently discussing various reforms including the Caretaker Government. Although the political parties have agreed on the issue but there still exists a bottleneck due to the prevalence of intolerance amongst them resulting into ineffective coordination and cooperation. Therefore since CPD represents the civil society, it should also give its due attention to this matter.

Now a days lawmakers view winning election as their ultimate achievement. They do not consider themselves as people's representatives responsible for looking after their individual interests. On the contrary, taking advantage of their position soon engage in the business of money making and fill up their pockets. In this regard there should be a system of accountability side by side legal provisions for due punishment of those found guilty.

Nayan Shikder

We have not brought into our consideration the aspect of student politics, which is usually in the hands of poor quality students who act as lackeys of political parties. Had the student community been well informed and well educated there would have been no need for raising this question of electing honest persons through such forums. Capable leaders have to come from within the political parties and at the same time a considerable awareness has to be built amongst the civil society. There is no point in blaming the politicians alone.

Srabani Shur

We want such candidates who have no black money, do not indulge in muscle flexing and are secular in spirit. A non-secular individual may also be honest but he may not be a natural lover of humanity as a whole. On the other hand an individual who is secular in spirit will also be generous and democratic in his outlook.

Mostafa Anwar Pasha

Jhikargacha Pourashava is an old institution. In the light of that experience I believe what is first and foremost is building awareness amongst the people. Most of the people are not aware of their rights and what to expect of us. They are also inexperienced in electing their leaders.

Bangladesh has been branded as the most corrupt nation in the world for as many as five times. My question is: is it because of the politicians alone or the blame should also be on the shoulders the officials of the government?

Prof. Muazzem Hassain

I believe in today's context if we are to make any real changes in the society we need to develop our own individual character first of all. As a teacher I believe this is the main cause behind our being rated as the most corrupt nation of the world. To me it appears that many of us are mere actors.

I am not acting. I have come to see the drama. Many people who are today described as member of the civil society are frequently seen on the TV screens. I wonder about their background. 35 years have passed since we gained our independence and yet we have not achieved our goals. I believe the main reason for this is the poor state of our politics. Many of our members of the civil society present here are well placed. They have gathered here to talk about bringing "changes". I have seen a teacher owning a house valued between two and three crores. A politician owns crores. An ordinary employee has millions.

A. Mannan Mia

Any one who will be heading a political party or wishes to form a political party should be at least a graduate and has to have experience in participating in the elections at the local level at least once.

Shaihidul Islam

There is no denying the fact that black money plays an important role in the politics of Bangladesh. However, what I wish to find out if those who are fighting these black money holders are themselves free from that curse. Let me be more specific I wish to know as to whether or not, the Director of Channel I is holder of black money? Let him give a declaration in front of this very forum as to how much money between now and then he has acquired, so that we can proceed with a clear idea about him? I am expecting a detailed statement from Mr. Matiur Rahman too as to how he became the Editor of Prothomo Alo from the very beginning. The aim and aspiration with which I joined the Liberation War, today I see no reflection of that anywhere. Is it because of the play and influence of black money in the society? We should take a hard look to the sources of this black money. Businessmen also control today's politics amongst others. Most of the ministers in the cabinet and MPs are businessmen. In the past those who were involved in politics were lawyers, educationists and they were honest. But gradually the control on politics has been taken over by the rich and the wealthy. Money plays an important role everywhere. If you are contesting elections you will find that people are always thronging in front of your door. They too want money for one reason or the other, someone wants money to meet expenses for his daughter's marriage, and another wants money to meet medical expenses. But I am happy to say that during the last elections a very rich man who was contesting elections spent so much money that entire Jessore was dancing behind him, but fortunately he was not elected. It was estimated that he spent as much as one crore. But he still managed to get 20 thousand votes apparently those of the floating population.

We do have the need for honest people in politics. You have my fullest support for all the issues you have raised here today.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

I convey my thanks to Mr. Shhidul Islam. I do realise that there is extreme anger and frustrations in the minds of the people and hence they are likely to raise questions of that nature wherever and whenever an opportunity presents itself. I do not think it is the responsibility of this forum to answer the questions raised by you. I run a research organisation; The Daily Star and Prothomo Alo are merely a component of that process from the media. They carry out a function from a social standpoint. It is not a part of their core responsibilities. You have unduly ventilated all your anger and frustrations on us. I am in no way taking it otherwise; on the other hand I too also nurture similar sentiments.

You have accused some people directly by wanting to know the source of their incomes. I cannot answer on behalf of others. I have said earlier that it will be highly irresponsible of us to accuse someone of dishonesty or corruption based on hearsay. The allegation has to be based on hard facts. Each individual has a place where he or she is accountable. For example I am answerable to my board of directors, Similarly, systems are in place for even those present here. On top of all these set systems there is the Board of National of Revenue. We cannot answer for each and every one. It is for this reason we have the necessary framework provided by the state. However, be rest assured that the day I decide to stand election I shall be the first one to ask for the sources of incomes of both Mahufz Anam and Sheikh Siraj. I am, however, of the firm opinion that whoever is seeking to be the leader of the society must be above reproach. Only then he or she shall have the right to establish the ideals for the society. Let me say with all humility that had

we not had the moral courage we would not have appeared before you today.

Sayeduzzaman

I am happy to be in Jessore today. I have many old memories linking Jessore. My first posting was here in Jessore as early as 1956 when I joined the Pakistan civil service. I was appointed as assistant magistrate and collector after receiving two years of training within the country and abroad. At that time Mr. Ruhul Quddus was the district magistrate. During those days we were instructed to maintain a cordial relationship with the local elites. It was due to this I had the opportunity of knowing many personality of the locality, one of them was Khan Bahadur Lutfur Rahman who was once MSD in India, and many others like Nawsher Ali, Bazlur Ala, Abdur Huq, and Ahmed Ali Sardar. Today I recall all of them. I was able to build a cordial relationship with all of them and they grew fond of me.

I feel I should also mention one other incident. I was here on the 3rd of October in 1958 and Martial Law was declared four days after, on October 7. Many of you may recall that following the declaration of Martial law the Parliament was disbanded including many of the local government systems built by local initiatives. At that time Jessore District Board Chairman Mr. Roushan Ali was removed from service. I was appointed as Administrator in his place. My tenure of service was coming to an end; I took the responsibility with utmost seriousness. It is then I realized that given the governmental authority and adequate backup of resources and manpower one can be quite effective.

You have said that the local governments have to be strengthened. The Nagarik Committee is in full agreement with you. We have also discussed at length both our thoughts and your views regarding the forthcoming election in 2007.

At the very outset I would like to remind you of the three objectives behind our initiative: these are our political, economic and social rights as embodied in the Constitution.



Our objective is to make all citizens aware of their rights. At the same time we would hope that all conscious citizens would actively work towards building that awareness in their respective localities. The very first right as embodied in the Constitution is the establishment of a political system based on principles of democracy. Second, ensuring election of public representatives who are honest and men of principle irrespective of their party affiliations. Third, ensuring a development programme that is transparent and accountable, aimed at uplifting the economic welfare of the people.

We wish to reiterate that the political parties alone can be the only driving force behind a democracy. There is no alternative to it, alongside this we have to ensure that that political parties too have to be transparent and accountable committed to protecting the rights of the people. We have already heard about this in details from the previous speaker. By people's rights we mean establishing their voting rights, freedom to vote and eradication of poverty through appropriate development programmes. The gamut of all such activities has to be based on provisions of the constitution. In order to achieve this goal we have to have an administration that is nonpartisan, ensure establishment of rule of law and good governance.

I am certain that you will agree with us that good governance and corruption cannot exist side by side. It has not worked at least during the past fifteen years irrespective of whichever political party was in power. We have observed some success being achieved through the police, BDR and RAB, but this does not qualify for good governance. Good governance has long- term impact.

Ladies and gentlemen, There has been a rise in the growth of Bangladesh's GDP, side by side there has been an increase in our resources. We have achieved near self-sufficiency in food. There has also been an upward growth in exports including an increase in inward remittances from wage earners abroad. Everyone has made contributions towards these positive developments. But what is most noticeable is that, side by side there has been an increase in economic disparities in the society. If we take a closer look we shall see that whatever we achieved so far is due to the contributions made by our farmers, the women workers of the RMG and the our wage earners abroad. In the future we wish to see an economic From page 26 order that recognises and supports the contributions made by the people at large giving them due recognition, an economic policy that will have provisions for adequate investment in all sectors aimed at removing economic disparities where there will also be provisions for due investments in such sectors like industry, agriculture, infrastructures including electricity, water, gas and also aimed at strengthening and establishing a meaningful and effective local government systems.

We believe that for this what we need is an election process that is free and fair, ensures election of honest and acceptable candidates. Should we be able to make a minimum contribution towards building that awareness amongst the people we shall consider our efforts successful.

Some on amongst you have raised the question that while have talked about the responsibility of the politicians but said nothing about responsibility of the government officials. My answer to this would be: in order to establish good governance what we need most are the politicians, ministers, MPs. The terms of reference and the responsibilities of the government officials be duly defined, based on Constitutional provisions. It is my belief that if there were well-defined terms of reference for the politicians and government servants then much of the allegations against them would no longer be there.

Manzurul Haque

From today's discussions it is clear to me that the prevailing injustices today are deeply rooted and we are looking for good men to help us come out of this scourge. What we need to do is to find out a person to stand up as a candidate. My question is why this frustration, surely there are good people within the civil society? The truth is, the civil society itself is divided into two or three groups. People do not have the intelligence of identifying from amongst the civil society those who are neutral.

An MP's jurisdictions extend only to formation of laws. At the same time this very MP is using his influence in the society for his personal gains. On the other hand the government itself, through official circulars, is allocating wheat for distribution including funds for flood rehabilitation to these very MPs. As a matter of fact it is the state machinery, which is creating the ground for them to indulge in corruption.

We have to work through the political parties to meet all our objectives yet there is little trust in the people themselves so we have no other alternative but to depend on political parties to determine the future of our country. Most of our people are poor and lack education and therefore the politicians operate the way they please.

It is belief that the only way to bring about a change in our political culture is to bring about a political awareness amongst the people.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

I have in my hand a written statement from Anandadas Zohoor; let me read it out to " you have talked about the need for individual courage in respect of accountability. I believe that our politicians do possess that courage and hence they are able to face the people time and again to get elected more than once. Dr. Younus, Chairman of the Grameen Group collected deposits/ securities worth 5 to ten lakh takas in 2001 to expand the operations of his organisation all over the country, where as Michael Computer of Jessore could not obtain an agency even after he had deposited a sum of taka 5 lakhs. On the other hand he has not received his money back in full as yet. Who would answer to this question?" I am giving you



my word that I shall reach this letter to Dr. Younus

Habiba Sefat

It is difficult to establish this accountability without recourse to elections. In past years we have observed the sprawling of prices, in religious fundamentalism and terrorist acts and yet we continue to work for the politicians during the elections. We now need to seriously consider as to whom should we vote for and elect. On behalf of the Mahila Parishad and the women community at large I wish to point out that half of Bangladesh's population consists of women. The voter ratio is about the same. Based on that we had demanded direct elections for the reserved seats and yet the seats have been filled through nominations based on partisan considerations. We want equal participatory rights for women in the political process right from the grass root level. Because of a number of private channels we find that women are being beaten up by the police since the political leaders are pushing them up to be in front lines of protest marches. Where as when nomination is sought they are ignored. The reason for this is that women do not have either muscle power or the required financial backing. A woman is born poor and does not have access to black money and hence she is not capable of contesting elections. I am appealing to all the political parties that each of them gives nominations to at least 30 women. It is my firm belief that it the women who can lay the foundations of an efficient and an honest administration. Question however may arise as to why are we asking for more when both our PM and the leader of the opposition are women? The answer to this is that they are merely representing their parties where as the real power lies in the hands of men.

Bimal Chandra Roy Chowdhury

When we gained independence in 1971 through the War of Liberation the population of Bangladesh were seven and half cores. They were neither Hindus, nor Muslims, nor even Christians they were all known as Bengalis. We now have reached a stage that it has given rise to many questions in the minds of the people of today. I do not wish to go into that. All I wish to say is that the Enemy Property Act could be have been scrapped by the then Bangladesh Government way back in 1972, but it was not done. Later many other provisions have been added in Bengali changing the word "Enemy" In 1982 however, a civic resistance committee was created to stop acquisition of the so-called enemy property. As you can see the root cause for creation of such can be traced back to 1972. This ultimately compelled us to form the Puja Parishad subsequently Bangladesh Hindu, Boudha, Christian Parishad. Being a freedom fighter, although I am connected with this organisation, but as an individual I do not personally like to be associated with the organisation. On the other hand we have seen that things are not decided on the basis of merit. The Government previous did not have a single one as cabinet minister.

Since we are described as belonging to the minority community hence in the future nominations we wish to see that the Hindus, the Christians and the Buddhists are duly represented in the Cabinet.

Mujtaba Shamim

In April we hade organised a discussion session on "In search of honest men". How can you define a good man in this country when the security money of a man like Dr. Kamal Hoasin was confiscated?

Dr. Sanjay Pathak

Today any one who heads an organisation and a state having huge resources we call the individual or the state as developed. My question is if a person, or a state, who has acquired wealth and resources by whatever means is recognized in the world as developed, then why should a person strive to be honest?

Shimul Azad

I lead an educational cum cultural outfit here. Yet despite having acquired high education I could not get a good government job. I am on way of being age-barred. Under the circumstances what good can I hope from this country? I am a political worker, whatever little respect and devotion I had I have already lost it. What you call accountable development program, is it a part of the democratic process? We believe that democracy is governance by the illiterate and there is no room for educational competence?

Janab Abul Hossain

May I ask, will it be ever possible for us to find an honest and competent candidate? I do not believe so. If the political parties themselves are not honest it will never be possible to field an honest candidate. On the other hand we the left leaning on our part have been extremely vocal against corruption, grafts and poverty for long, but we find that you have not cared to praise or recognise our efforts.

Panna Lal Dey

My question is if all of us agree with the propositions put forward by CPD then why things continue to be still so complicated? Our appeal would be that each one of us should work towards realisation of CPD's proposals from wherever we may be.

Gulnazar Begum

Different political parties are supplying weapons to the members of their respective student organisations. How can any one expect to see an honest politician in the future? I am appealing to all political parties to desist from this practice.

Harroonur Rashid

There is a popular saying that people are the source of all power but is it really true? We have often seen a candidate nominated by a political party presents himself as a people's representatives during the elections. Then once elected he becomes a member of the party having no connections with the electorate. This situation has to change and that change should be done through pressures brought upon by donor agencies. In recent times it has become a culture amongst our lawmakers particularly those belonging to the Opposition to abstain from working sessions of the Parliament despite the fact that they continue to enjoy all the perks and benefits provided by the state. There should be a specific law against this practice like possible cancellation of one's Parliamentary Membership.

Prof. Masudul Huq

Effective steps have to be taken to eradicate corruption from all sections of the society. But this may not be possible if we are unable to make political parties to stand by the resolutions we have reached here. After all, it is the political parties who will be nominating the candidates. The entire civil society has to take the imitative in this regard.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

I can assure that in addition to us there are a number of other organisations at grass root levels that are working on various issues relating to election. We are working on issues of principles. We shall also make every effort to reach your suggestions to the highest level of the political parties.

Elahi Dad Khan

Through the discussions held so far, CPD has provided us with the "vision" of Bangladesh for the year 2021. But what remains to be elucidated is to how to achieve the stated goals. Since no one can be free from some imposed rules of procedures and restrictions, therefore there should be mandatory formulae. Bangladesh has already provided the lawmakers with those parameters. The people should place before the local government their problems and they will implement them and subsequently this will strengthen the local governments. The MPS should be engaged only in formulating laws through the Parliament. I think it is not appropriate that the lawmakers will formulate laws and at the sometime be involved in implementations of the development programmes; CPD has placed before us a formula of election through full participation of the people. While the political parties will place their candidates before the people and they in turn scrutinise the list of candidates and in turn select the candidates they think are most deserving. This is the only way we can hope to see a parliament that is based on honesty of purpose. Candidates elected during the past years did not keep their promises to the people, on the contrary, in respect of some of the vital issues like separation of the Judiciary from the Executive, they have expressed their reluctance to implement, where as, in respect of liberalisation of the state media, they have either simply declined to do so or have said that it would "take time"

Advocate Abdus Shahid

The 54 Huq- Bhashani- Suhwady Coalition won ' 54 elections based on the 21 point agenda presented to the electorate. Any one nominated under this banner would have been elected. Similarly the '70 election had the backing of Bangabandhu's Six Points and 11 points presented by the seven party coalitions. Similarly the candidates were elected without recourse to spending any money as such. The other parallel example we can cite is the result of the recently held elections in West Bengal. The lesson we can take from this is, given a proper manifesto backed by serious commitment one need not spend crores to get elected. What is needed is a firm democratic culture within the political parties. If you ask some one on any critical issue he or she says that their Netri knows it, similarly a BNPTe says "our Netri" knows the answer. If the culture of democracy is practiced within the parties a democratic environment will automatically follow. Black money then cannot come into play. In 1970 only seven businessmen were elected to the Parliament. It will be the responsibility of the civil society to ensure that the hands of the spirit of the War of Liberation is upheld and the hands of those who believe in the spirit of liberation are strengthened and give their special attention so that more and more individuals representing various professional groups come forward and contest elections.

Advocate Kazi Munirul Huda

Today's organisers wish the people to dream of a happy and prosperous country. But the way they are going about it they cannot succeed in their objectives. The system is ingrained here in such way that even if an honest candidate is elected and sent to the Parliament he or she can no longer remain honest. Hence your proposals tantamount to turning an honest person into a dishonest one. 35 years ago we gained our independence aimed at establishing a democratic state. But have we achieved our goal? Today's organisers have raised a vital question, that the people of the country wish to know the truth about their rights and what should their role be. There are considerable pressures on the country by foreign capitalists who are taking millions out of the country. You are appreciative of your initiative, but we are yet to see any detailed news covering this aspect in the dailies. It is they who are responsible for destroying our national economy.



Amirul Alam Khan

To begin with I am in agreement with Munirul Huda with regard to his observation of flight of our resources from the country and the inadequate role played by our media to put a check to it. I also agree with him that it is the politicians who have to undertake the responsibility of building an environment for honest people in the society. In the entire process of building awareness we shall have to turn our attention to "Education". This country has more private universities than primary schools. It does not appear logical to me to have so many universities, where as, there is only one primary school against a thousand. So long as we are unable to ensure primary education no awareness can be built in the society. Whichever party goes to power must have commitment in its election agenda like education for all within its tenure of office, and that the program is implemented region-wise. There should be provisions for punitive measures against those who fail to keep their commitments based on individual performance. Since all the major political parties have betrayed our trust it is the Caretaker Government who has to undertake the responsibility of separating the Judiciary from the Executive. Similarly the ACC also has to be free and independent. Since the political parties are unable to agree on the issue of how to curb corruption it is again the Caretaker government that has to undertake necessary measures in this matter. The civil society can only act as a pressure group and not more.

Prof. Najmus Saadat

Today corruption is widespread in the parliamentary systems all over the world. According to the Transparency International the parliament and the judiciary are listed as number 1 and 3 respectively amongst the most corrupt institutions. Our country is enveloped in corruption, however we are all trying our best to do all we can. Whether we are successful in our endeavour or not, only time shall tell. However we welcome the imitative undertaken by this forum. So long CPD'S activities were in and around the capital, but we are now happy to see it has also come to the villages too.

Sheikh Hassan Imam

It was my earnest desire to be acquainted with activities of CPD right from the start of its work. Those who are present here need no introduction you already know them through their writings and the TV and through his very forum

The forum has talked about good governance and accountability. The questioning is who is to be accountable and to whom? We need bureaucrats to run the government. While the bureaucrats will be responsible to their superior and they in turn be answerable to the political leaders then to the respective ministers, but if these bureaucrats are employed on partisan political considerations then the politicians lose all capacities to control them. When that happens these bureaucrats become isolated from the mainstream public and the politicians resulting into disastrous consequences like what happened in Kansat, Narayanganj and Sahnir Akhra. While IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank are providing us funds it must be remembered that a child who is born today carries with him or her debt burden of 3000 dollars. On the other hand what the multinational companies are giving with their right hand are being taken away with their left hand. Let me now dwell on the issue of corruption. Corruption is universal, but in other countries it is carried out with some restraint and with a feeling of shame and guilt, but here in Bangladesh it has crossed all boundaries in everyway. Only 15 percent of us live in the comforts of a good house, eat and dress well but this does not mean that we all always be in this safe haven. None of us will be safe until measures are taken on a more permanent basis to eradicate the prevailing inequality and injustice. In order to bring to justice the corrupt people including those who are elected to the parliament we had seen the emergence of the Anti Corruption Commission formerly known as the Anticorruption Bureau. This organisation has been made inoperative. We must expose the responsible. With regard to black or illegal money I wish to refer to an example as to how the neighbouring country is trying to regulate rising incidences of corruption. There one has to fill in a special deposit form even for sum of taka 25000 indicating the source of acquisition. Constitution is the symbol of people's aspirations and an instrument for protection of individual's civil rights. Judiciary has been described as the highest social order and justice in any society. The very judiciary has been desecrated through extra judicial killings. Justice Habibur Rahman made an important observation that, what is of greater concern is that even the educated section of the community has endorsed the murders. No people's management per say is administered by individuals, it is managed through a "system" In 2021 I wish to see a Bangladesh where one can stand erect with head high as a human being where there will be no need for foreigners to come and resolve our disputes and interfere in the management of our people, a country that no longer stretches its hands asking for gratis from outside sources, where women will have full security of their lives, a manpower that are educated and empowered.

Ekramuddowla

Today, because of a few corrupt political leaders, people have lost confidence in the community of politicians as a whole. Because of the failure of our elected representative to keep their promises to the people, we have seen the emergence of such people's unrest like in Kansat and Shanir Akhra.

Institutions for curbing the rise of black money already exist but they are not effective since they are not allowed to exercise their responsibilities freely. We have to identify those who stand in their way. Once that is done, the individuals planning to amass money through illegal means will automatically refrain from doing so. We have to imbibe in the people the spirit of our War of Liberation. Once we are able to revive the Constitution of 1972 the issues raised in clause 3/A will automatically cease to exist.

Rabiul Alam

If we carefully analyse the manifestoes of the various political parties we shall find that many of the points raised in the Bangladesh vision 2021 document already exist in the said manifestoes. The civil society representatives present here today has the questions once again considering the continued suffering that the entire civil society is still undergoing. We find that Mr. Sayeeduzzaman was once a Finance Minister some twenty years ago and he too made way for amassing illegal wealth and black money.

We need to modernise the National Board of Revenue and the entire taxation system so that we are that able to put a halt to black money. There is hardly any effective system in place to punish even known black money holders.

The way businesses are conducted here can well be described as looting. On the other hand taking is also a form of looting. On the other hand the corruption by the politicians that too is looting. The private mobile companies are making profits ranging between 1400 and 1600 percent; it is simply robbery and our state machinery is responsible for it. I believe that in order to materialise the vision we need to change the present system of the state management including reforming of the constitutional provisions including administrative and political systems. We also need to create a secular environment in the society.

Sayeeduzzaman

I wish to refer to the previous speaker who said it was I who paved the way for turning black money into white while the Finance Minister. It is not true. I was Minister for Finance from December 1984 through 1987. General Ershad came to power in 1982 and it was he who created the opportunity to turn black money into white.

Advocate Enamul Haque

I have come here most reluctantly directed by leader Muzaffar Ahmad. I wonder from where these civil society representatives came? In my 40 years of experience in politics I have seen that a political party generally merges based on its prevailing economic conditions. I believe those who are representing the civil society here today have gathered supporting the current economic order. Dr. Barua knows that a political party of the country is based on its economic framework. Today they are of the opinion that the various prescriptions provided by, IMF, World Bank and other forums, which virtually are running the affairs of the country. They are simply misleading the people. You will find much more high sounding words in party manifestoes. Looks like he has not read it. You see there is Mr. Sayeeduzzaman. He was a minister in Ershad's cabinet. Then we had plenty of money and fake elections.

Dr. Kazi Rabiul Haque

We are tired of discussing; I would like to raise three specific issues only. First, democracy in Bangladesh. The core issue behind our independence was establishing a democratic form of administration with its character based on the principle of secularism where each will have right to practice his/her religion under one state. But history tells us that democracy in the country was short-lived. It was only since 1990 that changes in the government was through parliamentary system of elections. Prior to that changes were effected through murders. Therefore our democracy is essentially only 15 years old. Democracy is not confined to changing guards in the government alone but establishing a democratic culture in the tiers of the society. That is why the question has come up as to what role the civil society should play. Two specific issues have surfaced concerning the forthcoming elections, first a transparent process of conducting elections that are being conducted by various political parties and then electing honest and capable candidates for which the civil society is working; a part of that process is this discussion session organized by CPD. The civil society should look for honest candidates in collaboration and understanding reached with respective political parties. We should also strive to bring about a democratic culture within the political parties. Each party has its own constitution including rules of procedures for running the party. With malice towards none may I ask as to how many of you present here representing various political parties have read the your respective party's constitution. I believe there are few since you can hardly lay your hands on a party's constitution even after considerable efforts. It is important to have access to these constitutions in order for the people to know that the nominations are based on respective party's constitutional provisions. There should be a legal provision to take actions against those who violate the process. If one can be prosecuted for violating the provisions of the constitution of the country then why not when constitution of a political party is violated? While the civil society will present the political parties will be responsible for translating that vision into reality. There are many issues, which have merged here; I wish to say that it will take more hand for dreams to materialise all those. While agreeing with all of the points I believe in achieving those targets the first and foremost is to create a proactive awareness amongst the people across the country.

Shaikh Siraj

I wish to talk about agriculture, the farmers and management of the agriculture sector. I have been working in the agriculture sector for the last twenty years and it is my belief that we cannot move forward without development of agriculture and the farmers. We all are sons of the farmers. My grandfather and the generation before him were all farmers. I am certain many of you come from the same background. The population of Bangladesh was 7 crores in 1971 and today it is 14 crores. Today we are meeting food requirements from the food grains produced within the country. It is sad that many of us undermine that achievement. Working with television I believe that the media is capable moving the people ahead towards progress. I have seen if we can motivate people many of them get interested in investing in agriculture. A classic example is the poultry farms. There are one lakh poultry farms in the country today and over 50 percent of those are owned by once jobless young people. I believe if we are able to change the fate of the people at the grass root level only then we can dream of a prosperous Bangladesh. A question has been raised here in this platform about our honesty of purpose explanation to which has already been provided by Dr. Deavapriya Bahttacharya. Let me say this, had we not been honest we would not be able to stand before you.

Shah Hadiuzzaman

We are a free sovereign country. But are we really so? Mr. Sadequee a Bangladeshi American comes for a visit to Bangladesh and American police comes, arrests him and whisks him away from the country. There is no extradition treaty between Bangladesh and USA. If that is the case one wonders as to how the killers of Bangabandhu are roaming freely in USA, Canada and India?

Aninda Islam Amit

A considerable controversy exists today with regard to the initiatives undertaken by the Nagorik Committee. I believe one way to effectively dispel that would be for CPD and many of you, who maintain a cordial relationship with the donor agencies with their co-operation, seek assistance in stopping foreign interventions in our internal affairs by many countries of the developed world. We could ask for their assistance and support in putting a stop to "looting" of our gas, water oil resources.

Nur Jalal

Those who change parties should be barred from contesting election for 5 years.

Zahiduzzaman Tokon

I am acquainted with Sahaikh Siraj through the TV screen, but to my mind it has not been proper for him to say that he has totally committed himself body and soul to the land and the people of this country.

Binoy Krishna Mallik

This endeavor can only succeed if those connected with the state join hands with the civil society. We should hold these discussions at Upazilla and Union Parishad levels from where we can get even better suggestions.

Engineer G.C. Majumder

I invite you to hold your next meeting at Narail. We are with you and we shall remain with you.

Champa Shaha

Opportunities for higher education in the country should be open to all particularly in Medical, Engineering and other national level Universities.

Fakhre Alam

I feel that this discussion forum is more political in nature than an initiative of the civil society. You have failed to be neutral. You have not discussed anything about regional development. There is neither a medical college nor an agriculture university here. The government earns about 1200 crore annually from the services of land port here but the people of Jessore are yet to see any real development.

Shubhankar Dutta

Complete freedom of expression of their views should be given to the print and the electronic media including the various cultural organisations.

Aminul Islam Rontu

Having due respect for the aspirations of the civil society I am restraining myself from saying anything.

Abu Naim

I wish to draw the attention of Mr. Mahfuz Anam. We have witnessed the success of the Kansat movement and all had recognised the significance of it, at the same time two days following that incident saw yet another kind of movement which led to breaking and damaging over two hundred public and private vehicles. Many in this country are out to make political gains through so-called movements but often they fail. I would earnestly request Mr. Anam to expose the source of this movement through the columns of his Daily.

Saifur Rahman

My question is, if we call the people who lend money against interests as moneylenders, how should you then address Dr. Younus.

Zahid Babu

Not only political leaders but also civil servants, the police including custom officials are amassing black money. I wish to know as to why they cannot be resisted.

Aftabur Rahman

We have seen such disacussion sessions being conducted for the last 5 years. I invite the Committee to coordinate its activities with Proshika.

Advocate Delwar Hossain

Those of the Judicial and Administrative services are also engaged in making black money and corruption including secretaries and ministers. A strong and independent Anti Corruption Commission may be able to put an effective check to all this.

Muhammad Shahidul Islam

I am in full agreement with Mr. Shaikh Siraj. We have to develop and improve the conditions of the farmers first since they constitute the largest segment of our voters, without them no tangible national development is feasible. In the manifestoes of the political parties in the forthcoming national election the rights of the farmers should be clearly defined.

Dipankar Das Ratan

We want Bangladesh to be a success story in the field of sports.

Sukumar Das

Religious fundamentalism should be banned forever from this country. We often observed that unprecedented oppression is carried out in this country just before the election. If this oppression continues let the government take away our rights to vote.

Nabi Newaz Md. Mujibuddowla Sardar

Your 21-point agenda has taken into consideration the spirit of our War of Liberation and a secular Bangladesh. You have indicated that any one elected will automatically be the people's representative. I beg to differ with you since the black money holders and oppressors of women can never be public representatives. CPD should be involved in the process of preparation of the draft voter list.

Farazi Shad al Hussein

If the proposals for reforming the Election Commission are ignored what will be your stand at that time? The nation is divided into two, one consisting of those who believe in the Bengali nationalism based on our independence achieved through the sacrifices of three million shaheeds and the other on Bangladesh nationalism and the killing of Bangabandhu, would you kindly tell us as to which one you subscribe to?

Wahiduzzanman Ork

This Nagorik Committee has a long way to go.

Hafez Tarfdar

For accountable development efforts we need to develop a democratic culture amongst the people themselves. What are your plans towards that goal?

Kaniz Fatema

As a member of the civil society I invite the attention of all to be aware of the time.

Jayanta Biswas

We should include, the spirit of liberation, communal politics, reformation of the electoral process and culture a part of the 12 point agenda.

Kazi Gholam Mostafa

In the forefront of all the centers of power in Bangladesh that have frequently caused harm to the democracy in this country lies the Army; you have not included them in your 21point list of discussions. .

Bappi Roy

If any political party nominates a dishonest candidate, in that case can we boycott the election?

List of Speakers

1. Prof. Sahrif Hossain, Former Principal, Micheal Madhushudan College, Jessore. (President of the Dialogue).
2. Mahfuz Anam, Editor, the Daily Star
3. S.M. Kamruzzaman Chunnu, Chairman Jessore Pourashava.
4. R. M. Khairul Umam, President, IDEB, Jessore.
5. Chowdhury Shahidul Islam Nayan, President District BNP, Jessore.
6. Prof. Afsar Ali, Member Central Committee, Workers Party.
7. Angela Gomez, Member, Nagarik Committee 2006.
8. Fakir Shawkat, President, Jessore Press Club.
9. Nargis Begum, Principal, Jessore City College.
10. Advocate Syeda Masuma Begum, Judges Court, Jessore.
11. Asdauzzaman, Student, M. M. College, Jessore.
12. Suraiya Sharif, General Secretary, Mahila Parishad, Jessore.
13. Nurjahan Islam, President, Zilla Mahila Awami League, Jessore.
14. Enamul Huq Babul, Chairman, Noyapara Pourashabha, Jessore.
15. Fazlul Haque, Coordinator, Citizens for Good Governance (SUJON), Jessore wing.
16. Nayan Shikder, Publicity Secretary, Prothomo Alo.
17. Alamgir Kabir, student, S. M. College, Jessore.
18. Srabani Shur, Cultural Personality
19. Mostafa Anwar Pasha, Chairman, Jhikargacha Pourashabaha, Jessore.
20. Prof. Muazzam Hossain, President Sadar College Teachers' Association.
21. A. Mannan Mia, District Representative, UNB, Jessore.
22. Shahidul Islam Milon, President Jessore Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
23. M. Sayeeduzzaman, Former Minister for Finance and Chairman, Bank Asia.
24. Manzurul Huq, Eminent Lawyer, Judges court, Jessore.
25. Habiba Sefat, Mohila Parishad, Jessore.
26. Bimal Chandra Roy Chowdhury, Eminent senior citizen.
27. Mujtaba Shamim, Director, SHAPNA, Voluntary Organization, Jessore.
28. Doctor Sanjay Pathak, Manirampur Health Complex, Jessore.
29. Shimul Azad, Director, Shilpa Kendra, Jessore.
30. Abul Hossain, General secretary, CPB District

Debapriya Bhattacharya

This question has come up before also. If any voter finds the candidate not up to his expectations then he can cast a "no vote". This practice is in vogue in many countries like England. If that "no vote" exceeds 50 percent of the total vote; the entire election has to be rescheduled with new nominations.

Prof. Gholam Mustafa

There is a culture of intolerance in our politics. There should be a dialogue on this issue.

Tarapad Das

Elected representatives are basically the controlling agents of the country. They hold the key to the nations development. We need to ask for the past records of all prospective nominees relating to their patriotism and humanitarian activities. Once this is obtained, nomination of candidates will be finalised after due process of scrutiny of the records.

Mostafa Ruhul Quddus

In order make this endeavour succeed what is needed is the good will of the politicians. If the politicians nominate competent candidates, then they will be elected any way whether or we want them or not.

Benzin Khan

I am against the caretaker system of government.

T. I. Tariq

We have to improve the quality of education and make due reforms.

Jahngir Alam

School and college going students often hear of such misleading and false terminologies as crossfire and encounter. I solicit your opinion in this regard. We often here about toll collectors and terrorists but there are hardly any discussion about bribe takers and corrupt civil servants. This aspect should also come into the purview of your discussions.

Advocate Monirul Islam

This vision document can only be materialised though the Election Commission and the Caretaker Government. I believe that the parliament of 2007 can be only be effective if CPD's Executive Director Devapriya Bhattacharya and M. Zillur Rahman, convener of the third force both are inducted into the position of Deputy Speakers. This will in turn nullify Opposition's excuse to refrain from joining the parliament on grounds of the Speaker being partisan.

Mostafizu Rahman Kabul

I want the "vision" to talk about the development of those who are directly involved with development. I believe there is no need for a new vision document. Our main single agenda should be the spirit of our nine-month struggle for freedom of 1971.

Shakila Akhter

The practice of putting up dummy candidates in national election must stop.

Advocate Sabhia Khanam

The 21point agenda has not taken into consideration the issues of woman and child repression.

Enamul Haque Babu

About two days back through an interview in Television I learnt that no one is nominated more than twice in West Bengal. Even after Budhadev's departure Joyti Basu continue to give him all-out support. Such a thing is rare in Bangladesh, Those who are not connected with politics or away from the seat of power they become isolated and kept in abeyance. Two other questions have come up here about the business community and the bureaucrats. It has become a culture in this country that any one having two to ten crore taka, he has the opportunity to serve the people. My question is that having one crore taka he could help in poverty alleviation and spread of education and much more, without going through the Parliament. I believe after having retired at 56 or 57 years of age all he would be capable of is roaming around in a flagged car, he cannot be of any service to the country. I believe a politician who has been in active politics for ten years should be considered as one having the requisite qualification for being elected.

Alamgir Kabir

In my opinion we should approach the issue of student politics with a clear and firm vision.

H.R. Tuhin

I wish to ask you about nominating those politicians who are holders of black money as against the educated and lawyers, after all, it will be they who make the framework of our legal systems working through the Parliament.

Muhammad Itimuddowla

I learnt from the newspapers that the name of Prof. Muzaafar Ahmed has been omitted from the voter list. While you talk on how to get rid of black money and muscle power, the representative of the 14 parties Opposition Coalition present here has not raised this point. In this regard I would like to draw the attention of Mr Mahfuz Anam.

Kazi Abdus Salam

I propose that CPD in collaboration with its three major collaborators in the media should embark on a serious dialogue with the Parliament Members in an effort to see the implantation of the proposal put forward by the civil society keeping it within the existing legal framework.

Debapriya Bhattacharya

We have carried on our discussions for 2 hours 45 minutes. I see all of you are still sitting under bright lights with the cameras of Channel I still covering the proceedings. I believe you are here not because of the Cameras of Channel I are still on but because you believe in the objectives of our discussion / dialogue. On behalf of CPD, Channel, Prothomo Alo and The Daily Star I wish to express our sincerest thanks to all of you. Nearly a hundred individuals have expressed their opinions freely.

Committee, Jessore.

31. Pannalal Dey, Organizing Secretary, UDICHI, Jessore.

32. Gulnagar Begum, Retired Principal, Government Women's College, Jessore.

33. Harunur Rashid, Executive Director, Al Miraj Foundation, Jessore.

34. Prof. Masudul Huq, Executive Director, Banchte Shekha, Jessore.

35. Elahi Dad Khan, President, CPB, Jessore.

36. Advocate Abdur Rashid, Gonoforum, Jessore.

37. Advocate Kazi Munirul Huda, General Secretary, BNP District Committee, Jessore.

38. Amirul Alam Khan, Controller of Examinations, Jessore Education Board.

39. Abdus Samad Biswas, Chairman, Keshabpur Municipality, Jessore.

40. Advocate Najmus Saadat, Retired Professor.

41. Sheikh Hassan Imam, Lawyer. Convener TIB Citizens' Awareness Committee, Jessore Branch.

42. Ekramuddowla, Editor Dainik Kallayan, Jessore.

43. Rabiul Alam, President, JSD, Jessore.

44. Advocate Enamul Haque, General secretary, NAP, Central Committee.

45. Doctor Rabiul Haque, Cultural Personality and former President, BMA, Jessore.

46. Shaikh Siraj, Director, Transmission, Channel I.

47. Shah Hadiujjaman, former member of Parliament, Jessore-4.

48. Aninda Islam Amit, Executive Director, Dainik Lok Samaj, Jessore.

49. Nur Jalal, President, District NAP, Jessore.

50. Zahiduzzaman Tokon, Secretary, District Red Crescent Society and Press Club, Jessore.

51. Binoy Krishna Mallik, Executive Director, RIGHT, Jessore.

52. Engineer G.C. Majumder, Workshop Super, Polytechnic Institute, Jessore.

53. Champa Shaha, Udichi, Jessore.

54. Fakhre Alam, Poet and Journalist, Jessore.

55. Shubhankar Gupta, Convener, Bhabatotosh Pani Nishkashan Sangram Committee, Jessore District wing.

56. Aminul Islam Rontu, Columnist, Jessore.

57. Abu Nayeem, General Secretary, Kingshuk, Jessore.

58. Saifur Rahman Shaikh, General Secretary, Shnagbadik Union, Jessore.

59. H.R. Tuhin, Representative, the Daily Jugantar, Jessore.

60. Zahid Babu, sportsman, cultural activist, student, Jessore.

61. Aftabur Rahman, Zonal Coordinator, Proshika, Jessore.

62. Advocate Delwar Hossain, Zilla Ainjibi Samity, Jessore.

63. Md. Shahidul Islam, Unnayan Dhara, Jhinaidaha.

64. Dipankar Das Ratan, General secretary, TIRJAK, Jessore.

65. Skumar Das, General Secretary, Udichi, Jessore.

66. Nabi Newaz Md. Mujibuddowla Sardar Kanak, President, Zilla Ainjibi Samity, Jessore.

67. Farazi Shahadat Hossain, Vice President, Jessore District Awami League.

68. Wahiduzzaman Ark, Writer and Businessman, Jessore.

69. Hafez Tarafdar, Student M.M. College, Jessore.

70. Kaneez Fatima, Student, Public Administration, University of Dhaka.

71. Advocate Md Itimuddowla, Judges Court, Jessore.

72. Jayanta Biswas, Convener, DOTANA, Cultural organization, Jessore.

73. Kazi Golam Mostafa, Asst. General Secretary, Bangladesher Communist Party, Jessore.

74. Bappi Roy, student and cultural activist, Jessore.

75. Prof. Golam Mustafa, retired Principal.

76. Tarpada Das, retired teacher, Shamlini School, Jessore.

77. Kazi Abdus Salam, Student, M. M. College, Jessore.

78. Mostafa Ruhul Quddus, District Representative, Dainik Sangram, Jessore.

79. Benzin Khan, RTV, Representative for Jessore.

80. T. I. Tariq, Student, Government City College, Jessore.

81. Jahangir Alam, Lecturer, A.F. Women's College, Kaliganj, Jhenaidah.

82. Advocate Manirul Islam Muneer, President, Abul Islam foundation, Jessore.

We believe in the participatory process. Pertinent aspects of each of the speakers have been duly recorded from which a transcript will be prepared based on which a supplement will be published by The Daily Star and Prothomo Alo. and subsequently it will be telecast by Channel I. A summary of the proceedings will also be forwarded to the Nagorik Committee. We have not gathered here with conspiratorial intentions or with any ambitious programme or any personal agenda. Bangladesh is in critical juncture of its existence now. Although the country has made considerable progress over the past one and half years however but there has not been an equitable distribution of the benefits amongst the people at large. We have come to you today with the objective of speeding up the process of development during the next 15 years so that the common man is further benefited. The precondition to that is the presence of a political environment that will ensure building up of a workable and an effective Parliament and that is what is our ambition. We have come here have come here imbibe people with that spirit. I believe if we are able to transform make Bangladesh into a country of midlevel economy. All our attention is focused towards that goal. I would now like to close this meeting thanking you all with a request to Mr. Sharif Hossain, who had kindly agreed to preside over this session, to make his concluding remarks.

83. Mostafizur Rahman Kabul, General Secretary, Sramik Federation, Jessore District.
84. Shakila Akhter, Representative, JANIPOP.
85. Advocate Sabia Khanam, Judges Court, Jessore.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, CPD (Dialogue coordinator)

Prof Sharif Hossain

Our society loves to maintain a status quo and normally slow to change. This hall where we have just concluded our meeting is called BD Hall, a name that was given to it during the time of Ayub Khan, even the organisers called it BD Hall. You have embarked upon an important task and hence as you should proceed with caution keeping in view the ultimate limitations. We often talk about the farmers who till the land, the weavers and the fishermen, but we do not have any concrete plan to deal with them. We have made considerable success in many fields but the farmers are still reeling under levies. We must strive to bring about a change in this state of affairs. Without referring to any other specific profession all of us here are some kind of agents. For example all of you here are our guests. Debapriya Bhattacharya is an economist and many of you and your compatriots also have worked towards many noble causes. You have talked about the multinational companies but do you know that the most important organisation / institution of Bangladesh? Harry K Thomas in Bangladesh became an unconstitutionally elected member representing all those companies and we had given him that opportunity. I shall not forget that I am a Bangladeshi and a Bengali but we have made serious mistakes by deviating from the principle that gave us the right to retain and practice our individual religious faith living as one nation. I was in a meeting the other day where at one stage all stood up and began to clap, when suddenly some one stood up and declared that, " clapping" was for bidden in Islam. Our youth are misguided and are on the path of ruin. I would like CPD, which is well connected with various large and important agencies/organisations, work with the main producers. Second this dialogue should be taken to the doors of our youth. We need more dialoguing and opposition. I am now 73. I have seen people who are cultured and sober have achieved but little, whereas many young people who crossed the border to the other side of the world have contributed substantially to the development of the country. As for me, using the state resources I have stayed back with the elites of the country and have arranged a retirement pension for life. It will be up to the CPD to take into confidence these people who I have just talked about or else their efforts may become futile. I would like to end my deliberations with the prayer that may Allah help us to be calm and be steadfast in our faith, refrain from abusive language and pass through this turmoil as a unified committed soul.

Photo: CPD