

Regional dialogue in Ctg told

FROM PAGE 1
criticised it for killing people without trial and giving the opportunity of self-defence.

The dialogue was the seventh in a series of discussions styled "National Election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development".

CPD Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya moderated the dialogue held at Hotel Peninsula in the Port City while eminent educationist Prof Sikander Khan presided it over. Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Abdullah Al Noman and former minister MA Mannan addressed the dialogue as special guests.

The speakers at the dialogue demanded an end to torture on the minority community before and after election, immediate resignation of the chief election commissioner (CEC), massive reform and strengthening of the EC, reforms in the political system, registration of political parties, ban on candidature for more than twice, and provision of casting no-confidence vote.

They also demanded publication of the political parties' annual audit reports for transparency.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed and Prof Jamal Nazrul Islam spoke on behalf of the Nazorg Committee formed for preparing a vision paper for Bangladesh in 2021.

The debate on the Rab started when Alamgir Mohammad Sirajuddin, former vice chancellor of Chittagong University, urged the civil society members to raise voice against its activities for "killing people in the name of crossfire".

Khurshid Jamil Chowdhury, general secretary of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Chittagong, strongly opposed him, saying, "The civil society should appreciate the role of Rab because it has brought back peace in the country."

SM Nurul Haque, acting president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Emdadul Haque Chowdhury, leader of Peshajibi Songram Parishad of Chittagong, supported the view.

Civil society member Mujibur Rahman said, "We are living in peace because of Rab but we should think whether the peace should come through Rab or a democratic process."

Ward Commissioner Rehana Kabir Ranu said there should not be two laws in one country. "On one hand, you are speaking for rule of law, and on the other, you are allowing extrajudicial killings."

Former minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury observed that there is no need of Rab if the country is ruled peacefully. "But the Rab played a positive role in the perspective of the existing law and order in the country," he said.

Cashing in on common people's belief and support, major political parties are often seen nominating candidates of their choice whereas another candidate who is uncompromising about honesty and people's right often fails to earn party nomination, the dialogue observed.

The speakers said both the ruling and opposition parties of the country have now appeared to agree in principle regarding reforms in the EC, making some changes in its members, particularly replacing the "controversial" CEC.

They underscored the need for developing the culture of practising democracy inside all political parties.

Minister Abdullah Al Noman called for strengthening the civil societies to voice against all the odds and help the political parties become transparent and accountable.

He urged the civil society members to strongly put forward the opinions and demands of the people to help the country's politics get rid of the black money holders and criminalisation.

He observed that a cross-section of people should be invited to discuss and participate in the process of policymaking.

He said corruption and corrupt persons in different institutions should be identified and checked at the same time.

AL leader and former minister MA Mannan said in many cases there were misgivings between the political parties and leaders. He invited constructive criticism to bring back the faith in each other.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury MP in his speech observed that no changes could come from the inside of a party and called for developing critical masses to help the political parties in this respect.

The parliamentary standing committees should be made stronger and more functional. The meeting of the parliamentary standing committee should be telecasted live to make people become aware of whatever is going on there.

He also emphasised on the participation of different civil society bodies and groups in the process of the standing committee's making decisions.

Debapriya Bhattacharya in his speech emphasised on introducing a fifteen-year plan for targeting development until 2021 when the country would be celebrating its 50 years of independence.

He said the country developed in many fields in the last fifteen years after the restoration of democracy. But, the benefit of the development could not be distributed equally and the people of the remote areas were deprived of the benefits.

Debapriya underlined the need for commitment of political parties to bring transparency and accountability in them.

A scope should be created for the people to make writ petitions against any political party if it lacked transparency, he observed.

There were laws to hold loan and bill defaulters and black money holders back from contesting parliamentary elections. But, the EC has failed in implementing the rules.

Editor of Dainik Prothom Alo Matiuur Rahman in his speech

referred to the present state of democracy and development of the country and said the political parties were responsible for inviting undesired 'advocacy' and 'interventions' of foreign diplomats and donor agencies.

Criticising the political parties he said they hardly ever implement the electoral commitments.

Pankaj Bhattacharya in his speech observed that the holding of free and fair elections by the current EC was impossible. Suggesting reforms in the EC, he said it would be very tough for the next caretaker government to tackle the situation which may develop if reforms in the EC were not implemented.

He said the black money holders are now dominant in the elections. Unless the political parties are made accountable, there would be no real public representation in the governance.

Former vice-chancellor of Chittagong University Alamgir Md Sirajuddin said in the absence of democracy practice neither political organisation nor leadership could flourish in the country.

He said the political parties are being turned into family organisations. It is encouraging autocracy and politicisation of the government.

The politics and political parties in Bangladesh are now turning into family assets, due to this we often see an autocratic rule running a government where a single person used to decide everything within the party, Sirajuddin added.

"Both the major parties failed miserably to follow the basic ideologies of democracy honestly and they also lack transparency and democratic practice in recruiting new members," he alleged.

Sirajuddin further alleged the civil society is also divided and their movement is aristocrat-based. He urged the leaders of civil society to go to the villages and make rural people become aware of their voting right.

General Secretary Khurshid Jamil Chowdhury of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) Chittagong unit in his speech observed that the ruling party would be compelled to practice democracy within itself if all other parties practice the democracy internally.

Jamil criticised some of the newspapers for exploiting its rights in the name of press freedom and alleged that a few newspapers run target-base reports.

"Certain policies are needed for the press to get rid of unjust reports," he suggested.

The BMA leader lauded the role of Rab and urged the civil society to appreciate it.

Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed said the political parties remain busy mostly in pleasing the party high-ups. The public leaders lose their voices and freedom once they are sent to the parliament.

The legislators are compelled to speak in favour of his party decision even though he might disagree with it.

He underlined the need for creating an atmosphere suitable for all the legislators to express his own thoughts and beliefs in improving the nation.

Talking about accountability in political parties, he said if we could attain this, dictatorship inside the parties would be removed.

Women rights activist Mustari Shafi said, "We must establish gender equality and regain secularism to have credible general elections."

Acting President of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry SM Nurul Haque asked for a policy to bar a candidate from contesting parliamentary elections more than twice.

"We want to see honest and competent persons in parliament who would speak in favour of economy, society and people," he said.

As long as people are hungry, the message of such dialogue to be 'good' and 'honest' would come to no use, Chittagong District Bar Association President advocate Khairul Islam said.

A sound economy is badly needed to have a sound democracy, he said.

Dr Imran Hossain, professor of history at CU, said, "Many of our representatives in parliament have little or no knowledge about law, society, state machinery, local government and other aspects."

Urging the CPD to come up with a 'project for honest voters and candidates', Prof Zia Haider of CU Fine Arts Department said, "We will be able to get a fair and credible election if we can have honest voters and candidates."

Senior lawyer and leader of Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad Rana Das Gupta said ill treatment to the minority community is the main cause of the Hindu minority's leaving the country.

"Now the percentage of religious minority in the country is only 10.7, whereas it was 20.6 in 1971. This shows that our claim to have achieved a democracy is not at all true and none of us ever investigated the reason why the minority people left their own country in such a large number," he said.

Emphasising the need for registration and annual audit of political parties and introduction of voter ID cards for free, fair and credible elections, President of Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, Chittagong chapter engineer Ali Ashraf said, "Mysteriously the two major parties are not sincere about the voter ID cards."

He suggested live telecast of parliament proceedings and urged all to launch a hatred-campaign against the politicians who are engaged in mischief in the name of politics.

"The martial law governments have weakened the politics and politicians of Bangladesh," commodore (rd) AZ Nizam said, adding that

the armed forces should be kept out of politics.

Criticising the extra-judicial killings by Rab, Ward Commissioner Rehana Kabir Ranu said, "When we talk about the rule of law, we can't accept such killings."

Architect Zarina Hossain said all the development initiatives should involve the larger section of the society.

"State mafia" in collaboration with 'street mafia' is now running the country, Chittagong district General Secretary of CPB Shah Alam said, adding, "Hartal and people's agitation must prevail as long as autocratic governments exist in the name of democratic governments."

Jatiya Party (Ershad) leader Mozharul Haque Shah Chowdhury said the politicians of the country are now held hostages in the hands of party chiefs.

"How can we find democratic practice when there is no democracy in the political parties including that of mine?" questioned Swapan Sen, Chittagong city vice-president of Gonojantri Party.

Among the other participants were Delwar Majumder, Nurul Alam Masud, Abdul Awal, Sanjib Barua, Dr AQM Sirajul Islam, Sonjoy Acharya, Montosh Barua, Sultan Mahmud, MA Latif, Brigid Diaz, Kofil Uddin, Jahangir Alam, advocate Emdadul Islam, Nurul Islam, Prof Mohammad Sirajul Haque, Monwara Begum Moni, Sumima Yasmin Sumi, Mahbub Ali, Joinal Abedin, Shamsul Alam Tagore, Nurul Alam Manik, Shamsul Hossain, Durjoy Dey, Akinchon Barua, Dr Gazi Saleh Uddin, Nazimul Haque, Shahriar Hasan, Shahnewaz, Zobaer Shikder, advocate Abu Hanif, Hannana Begum, M Salehuddin, Abul Kalam Azad, MA Naser, Rezaul Karim, Nurun Nahar Begum, Sadia Musa, advocate Ratan Kumar Roy, SM Jamal Uddin, Rasheedul Amin, Omar Kaiser, Akhter Kabir Chowdhury, Noman Faruqi, Nazmul Huda, Shahed Anam, Sheikh Itefkar Saimul, Golam Haider Minto, Shahidul Alam, Adnan Mannan, Pulak Debdas.

Israeli leader

FROM PAGE 16
Gaza. Israel has largely held the Hamas political chief, Syrian-based Khaled Mashaal, responsible for the soldier's kidnapping.

Israel has said it would not engage in direct negotiations with the Islamic militant group, but Israeli officials said they were open to an Egyptian compromise proposal that would free Shalit without conditions and have Israel free some Palestinian prisoners later as a goodwill gesture.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said Hamas must release the soldier and halt rocket attacks on Israel as a first step.

"Anyone who ignores these two fundamental issues cannot hope to solve this crisis," he said.

Cabinet minister Ofir Pines-Paz said Israel hopes to go beyond those two immediate objectives and eventually negotiate a comprehensive truce.

"We have a great interest in changing the rules of the game," Pines-Paz, a member of the moderate Labor Party and of Israel's Security Cabinet, told Israel Radio.

"If we reach a situation in which there are no kidnappings, no rockets, no tunnels, no raids into our territory, certainly Israel will have to reciprocate."

The latest round of fighting, which claimed the lives of 35 Palestinians and an Israeli soldier over the past three days, began two weeks ago with a cross-border raid in which Hamas-allied militants seized the Israeli soldier and killed two of his comrades after sneaking through a tunnel.

Troops initially entered southern Gaza where Shalit is being held. Hamas said Friday he is being treated well, and a senior Israeli defence official, Amos Gilad, said Saturday that Israel also believes the soldier is alive.

On Saturday morning, dozens of tanks drove toward Gaza City, taking up positions about 500 yards from the outlying neighborhoods of Shajaiyeh and Zeitun. The army said forces were sent to the area to search for tunnels being dug by militants for possible attacks on soldiers.

The air force fired missiles at militants gathered at the outskirts of Shajaiyeh. Two Hamas gunmen were killed in the area, hospital officials said. Also, a Palestinian died of wounds sustained in earlier fighting.

The majority of the Palestinians killed since Thursday were gunmen, but one of the civilians killed was an 11-year-old boy. Also, 65 US citizens, many of Palestinian origin, left Gaza in a convoy escorted by US consular officials. The visitors had asked to leave Gaza because of the fighting.

In northern Gaza, troops pulled back from Beit Lahya on Saturday. Tanks driving through narrow streets had shorn off outer walls of buildings, torn down electricity polls, carved up asphalt. Facades of buildings were marked by bullet holes.

Bulldozers had torn up fields near homes, knocking down trees and greenhouses. As Palestinians picked through the wreckage Saturday, removing a dead goat from one heavily damaged dwelling, a UN truck arrived with drinking water.

Palestinian farmer Aref Sultan, 45, used the brief lull to move his wife and seven children, ages 2-16, to a relative's home further away from the fighting. Sultan said he and his family had been pinned down in their Beit Lahya home during the past day. "We went through 24 hours of terror," he said as the family loaded food and clothing into a pickup truck. "Shots were coming from all directions ... and the tanks were approaching our house. The children, and especially my 2-year-old son Samir, were screaming all the time."

Israeli military commentators have said it would be difficult for Israel to extract the soldier in a military operation. However, Israel also does not want to be seen as cutting a deal with Hamas.

Teachers strike

FROM PAGE 1
Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Jote, a platform of seven BNP-backed organisations led by Selim Bhuiyan started indefinite strike on last Thursday.

Seven ruling BNP-backed organisations of non-government teachers and employees under the platform of Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Jote led by Prof Shariful Islam will also go for indefinite strike from today.

However, the teachers and employees decided to keep the HSC practical examinations out of the scope of their strike.

The main demand of the four platforms of non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas is providing 100 per cent of their basic salary from the government coffers while their other demands include increase of house rent and medical allowance and implementation of various Unesco and ILO recommendations.

As the budget for fiscal year 2006-07 was passed without allocating fund for meeting their demands, they decided to go for stern action programme like indefinite strike.

All the non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas of 26 districts were kept under lock and key while most of the educational institutes in other districts remained closed on the first day of their indefinite strike yesterday. Kazi Faruque, chief co-

ordinator and convenor of the Front, said at a press conference.

Oikya Parishad Convenor Prof MA Awal Siddique said they had already formed upazila and district committees that will hold rallies and bring out processions on two days in every week to press home their 17-point demand.

The district and upazila committees will also arrange views exchange meetings with guardians, journalists, members of managing committees of the educational institutions and all other professionals to draw support from them, he said.

Oikya Jote President Prof M Shariful Islam urged all teachers and employees of non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas to observe indefinite strike at the educational institutions.

Selim Bhuiyan, chief co-ordinator of another faction of Oikya Jote, demanded resignation of the finance minister.

About five lakh teachers and employees of over 30,000 non-government schools, colleges and madrasas earlier observed different programmes including demonstrations, rallies, work abstention and hunger strike from June 9 to press home their demands.

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1
authority in Bangladesh," it said, adding, "The Chairman visited Abu Dhabi alone."

OUR REPLY
The Daily Star sent the report twice for BTRC chairman's comment. He never replied.

In the rejoinder, the BTRC has completely failed to respond to the points raised in our report. We said nothing in our report about the bidding process of issuing the sixth mobile licence to Warid. Therefore, the BTRC claim of being "very open and transparent" is irrelevant.

The BTRC has not answered why it issued the mobile phone operating licence to the Abu Dhabi-based Warid Telecom International LLC in the first place. It has created the only-of-its-kind multifarious telecoms regulatory crisis in Bangladesh as the regulator has granted a unique immunity to Warid.

No aggrieved subscriber can lodge any complaint with the BTRC against the Abu Dhabi-based Warid Telecom International LLC as the operator is located beyond the territory of Bangladesh. Similarly, neither the BTRC nor the Bangladesh government can legally touch this UAE company in the event of any possible non-compliance.

Since the mobile phone operating licence has been issued to Warid Telecom International LLC of Abu Dhabi, the BTRC is bound to issue the frequency only to the licence holder. But, it has issued the frequencies to "Warid Telecom International, Apartment No. 4/A, 12 Park Road, Baridhara, Dhaka". This entity neither has the said licence nor did it even exist at that time.

According to section 56 of the telecoms law, the SMC is merely a recommending body that functions as per BTRC directives.

All roads lead to Berlin

FROM PAGE 1
who retires after the match with his reputation as one of the game's greatest long-assured but who craves the ultimate leaving gift.

Italy go into the game under the cloud of the domestic match-fixing scandal which might yet see half the squad playing second division football next month but which has also helped mould them into a formidably spirited unit.

They are also seeking revenge for the agony of the 2000 European Championship when the title seemed theirs before France snatched an injury-time equaliser then won it with David Trezeguet's golden goal.

While Zidane's departure seems to demand victory, Italy can point to a similarly neat and equally deserved last page scenario that would see their superb captain Fabio Cannavaro lifting the trophy on the occasion of his 100th international appearance.

However, all the historical twists will be forgotten today when the destination of the trophy will be decided not according to some grand design but more likely by a moment of inspiration or a fatal loss of concentration.

It seems certain that the match will be in keeping with the rest of the tournament as a cagey affair with little likelihood of a feast of goals.

That was certainly the case in their last World Cup meeting in the 1998 quarterfinals when France advanced on penalties after a goalless draw.

Five of the side who played in that game and went on to win the trophy and then beat the Italians again in the Euro 2000 final are in the squad -- Fabien Barthez, Lilian Thuram, Trezeguet, Henry and Zidane -- but only Cannavaro and Alessandro Del Piero survive for Italy.

The grey edge to the French side was one of the reasons so few people gave them a chance in this competition but they have countered the critics with performances of increasing confidence as they dispatched Spain, Brazil and Portugal.

Italy too have every reason to back themselves. Their superb defence, fighting spirit and a coolness in front of goal that has produced 10 different scorers of 11 goals, took them deservedly past Australia, Ukraine and Germany.

Another question is why should the BTRC chairman visit Abu Dhabi at the invitation of the higher education and scientific research minister of that country. The answer is, according to the Warid Telecom's website, www.waridtel.com, its Chairman Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan is also the UAE education minister.

We stand by our report.

Cricket WC 2011

FROM PAGE 1
Pakistan and Sri Lanka in May won the rights to hold the World Cup, beating a joint bid from Australia and New Zealand. However, the ICC executive board made it official in this week's meeting.

"This is a big responsibility for us now to upgrade the accommodation and other facilities in the next four years in an effort to make the opening ceremony a memorable one," Asghar said.

AFP adds from Karachi, Pakistan Cricket Board director Abbas Zaidi, releasing details of the mega event, said, "Pakistan and Sri Lanka will stage the semifinals."

India will host 22 matches with Pakistan staging 16, Sri Lanka nine and Bangladesh six, he said.

"It was a unanimous decision and since Pakistan hosted the 1996 World Cup final it was India's turn on a rotational basis," said Zaidi.

The quadrennial World Cup was initiated in 1975 with England hosting the first event. England also played host in 1979 and 1983 before Pakistan and India jointly staged the event in 1987.

Australia and New Zealand co-hosted the event in 1992 before it returned to the sub-continent with Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka staging the 1996 event.

The 2007 World Cup will be held in the West Indies.

3 US soldiers

FROM PAGE 16
of 10 women and children and an elderly man in a wheelchair, "senior officers failed to follow up on inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the initial reporting of the incident that should have raised questions."

The report said Chiarelli faulted senior staff of the Second Marine Division commanded at the time by Major General Richard Huck and the Second Regimental Combat Team headed by Colonel Stephen Davis and "recommended unspecified disciplinary action for some officers."

If the officers were to be disciplined, they would be among the most senior American military personnel punished since the Iraq war began in March 2003, the report added.

On Friday the military said Chiarelli had "completed his review of the investigation conducted by Major General Eldon Bargewell into reporting, training and command climate as it related to circumstances surrounding the deaths of 24 Iraqis in Haditha on November 19, 2005".

Bargewell was asked to determine how the Haditha killings were reported up the chain of command and to see if there had been a cover-up.

The report said Chiarelli has recommended that all US forces in Iraq must receive more counterinsurgency training, first in the United States before deploying and again in Iraq.

The US Marine Corps initially reported that 15 civilians and a marine were killed by a roadside explosion in Haditha.

But the military opened an investigation after Time magazine reported in March that witnesses, backed by a videotape of the scene, said the marines went on a rampage after a roadside explosion killed one of their comrades.

The marines allegedly went house to house deliberately killing men, women and children. Five unarmed men in a taxi near the site of the bombing also were killed, according to accounts leaked to the press.

On Saturday the US military said Chiarelli's review report was being studied by General George Casey, the chief of the US-led coalition forces in Iraq.

The US military is battling a series of other abuse allegations in the last few months -- the most recent being the alleged rape and murder of an Iraqi woman in March.

The military meanwhile announced the capture of two men it said were leaders of the Iraqi insurgency but did not identify them.

One was captured Friday in Baghdad's Shiite stronghold of Sadr City after a running gunbattle with militias loyal to firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the other was nabbed south of Baghdad on Thursday.

Residents of Sadr City and several Internet bulletin board suggested that the man captured in Sadr City may have been a shadowy and brutal militiaman called Abu Deraa, who is accused of kidnaping and killing Sunnis in the ongoing sectarian bloodshed ravaging the country.

Sahib al-Amiri, an official in Sadr's movement, said Friday that US forces had also detained Adnan al-Oneibi, a Shiite imam from Mahawil, south of Baghdad.

The military only said it had captured an insurgent leader in Babil province on Thursday believed "responsible for weapons smuggling, including surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles (and) espionage activities for Iran."

On Saturday Iraq freed at least 368 detainees as part of a national reconciliation plan announced by premier Nuri al-Maliki.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 1
He said although the president will start attending office from Sunday (today), a limited number of visitors will be allowed to meet him as per doctor's advice.

"In the circumstances, we will make arrangement on priority basis for the opposition leader's meeting with the president," he said.

Pakistanis held

FROM PAGE 16
Nazrul Islam of Habiganj and Imran Akhter of Noakhali.

Lal Mia, Khadem of the Gorosthan Mosque near Jhalakathi District Jail, said that the arrestees, who were wearing similar dresses, came to the town Friday morning and took shelter at the mosque.

Their movements being suspicious, the mosque authority informed Jhalakathi Public Prosecutor Advocate Haider Hossain, who later talked to them. As they failed to give satisfactory information about their identities and activities, he contacted the police who arrested them at about 8:00pm.

Some Islamic religious books, stickers and household utensils were seized from them.

Police arrested Kazi Nazrul Islam of Barisal yesterday morning, when he came to meet them.

Showing them arrested under section 54 of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), police sent them to Jhalakathi Sadar Upazila magistrate court yesterday with a seven-day remand prayer for further interrogation. But the hearing could not be held, as the first class magistrate empowered to hear remand was on leave.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees claimed that they are followers of "Kaderia Tanika" and their "Pir" (religious master) is Yusuf Aktari of Punjab.

Golam Sabir said that he had visited Bangladesh twice earlier and came from Pakistan with a valid passport and visa adding that he had been working with the Tabligi Dawat in Dhaka, Chittagong, Syedpur and Rangamati for the last two and a half months.

He, however, failed to show the original passport, claiming that it has been kept in Dhaka.

Belal Afsar said that he came to Bangladesh 18 years ago and had been staying here since then.

Draft voter list

FROM PAGE 1
list to allow the people to make sure their names were correctly registered and no fake names were included," he told The Daily Star last night.

Former election commissioner Justice Naimuddin Ahmed yesterday told reporters, "Provisions in the Electoral Rolls Ordinance 1982 and Electoral Rolls Rules 1982 clearly state that a draft list must be published before a final list."

"The entire procedure for revising the voter list will become illegal unless a draft roll is published," he added.

Rejecting the EC's claim regarding the amendment, he said provisions in the existing laws already provide for revising the voter list by visiting doorto door.

"The Commission has again caused a stir over the voter listing by amending a provision that is not even applicable at this stage," he added, referring to the EC's controversial move to prepare a fresh voter list ignoring the opinion of the two election commissioners and the High Courts directives.

Another former election commissioner, AK Mohammad Ali, echoed Naimuddin's views and said the EC is obliged to comply with the existing laws.

"But in the