

# Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development

A Regional Dialogue on: "National Election: 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development," was held in Comilla on May 20 under the joint sponsorship of Daily Star, Prothom Alo and Channel I. Members of the Citizens' Committee, leaders of various political parties, people belonging to various professions and from all walks of life joined the dialogue. This supplement contains the summary of the dialogue. The names and identities of the participants are also published. Due to constraint of space we are not able to publish the comments of all the participants.

-- Editor

### Debapriya Bhattacharya

This regional dialogue in Comilla, third in the series, on "National election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" has been organized by Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Channel I and Centre for Policy Dialogue. On behalf of the sponsors I extend my sincerest greetings to all of you for attending this dialogue despite your busy schedule.

We re-established the democratic process in 1991 through a successful movement against an autocratic regime. Thereafter the country was governed by three elected governments. This period, covering a decade and half, is of special significance, which we often call as one and half decades of democracy as well as of development for Bangladesh. During this period Bangladesh has achieved considerable progress. I would like to remind you that during this period Bangladesh's GDP increased by one and half times. There has been a five-fold increase in exports, one and half times increase in food production including a marked rise in food security, and rise in the literacy rate. At the same time our country has progressed well in industrialization. There is no denying the fact that during this decade and half substantial progress in a host of other areas including development in the overall quality of life and improved upon the national average on mortality, both in the sphere of children and adults. Despite all this, however, there exist some structural deficiencies. We have identified corruption as the main factor standing in the way of our development.

In 2001 we handed over to the Government a number of policy guidelines and recommendations of a task force formed by the CPD. In 2003 we reviewed the status of those recommendations and found that while the Government had implemented some it did not implement many others. Now that 2007 is approaching we felt that we should yet present another "vision" document that will give us a clearer picture of the future. In order to formulate the document we have gathered a few renowned personalities who are specialists in various fields in their own right. The document is being prepared. We intend to include in this document, based on your comments, about what the future government should do in the first 100 days of its coming to office followed by the next 3 months.

We have given you a list of our targets in a blue paper. You will notice that we have not indicated any order of priority, since we are envisaging a poverty free society, closing the rich-poor gap, that at the same time can also ask for a few other matters ranging from equitable distribution of wealth to employment opportunities for the youth. It is therefore difficult to decide on a priority. We wish to have your explicit opinion on these specific issues which we will subsequently handover to the Committee.

### Mahfuz Anam

We are against all kinds of black laws and laws that are opposed to our freedom. We believe in freedom. We believe in democracy. We believe in the rights of the people and in their economic development. Now the question is why are we living in a state of remorse?

Our political leaders never keep their promises once they are elected, not only that, they often work contrary to the promises made. We are approaching yet another election. Many have raised the question if we are involved in politics?

Let us remember that first and foremost I am a voter, a citizen and a taxpayer, certainly I have the right to deliberate on how the politics of the country is being conducted.

Election is the right of the people, I am thus going to judge as to who comes to power and who goes out of power, but that will come later, first I wish to lay my claim on holding of free and fair elections, simply because this is the only time I get the opportunity every five year. You have seen that



today journalists are not allowed to approach the office of the Election Commission. And even if they are allowed to enter no one is ready to talk to them. In that case who will answer the public's concerns. Politics today stands vandalized and corruption has become a central issue. Today election is driven by black money. Who is going to ensure that the identity under which one is contesting election is the right one, and who is going to determine the correctness of information, particularly with regard to the educational qualifications and sources of funds of the candidates? Under those circumstances you and I certainly have the right to raise questions on these issues. We believe that through this dialogue, the television and the news published in the newspapers, awareness will be increased amongst the public across the country, so that everyone talks about honest candidature.

### Gaziul Hassan Khan

Where as there is corruption in politics there is opportunism in the civil society. I have said this particularly because of the fact that the civil society has not talked with any seriousness about the people in the villages, the farmers and the day laborers. In order to realize people's dreams the civil society has to stand beside the people.

### Ahmad Omar Farooq

Today, black money holders, terrorists, opportunists and a coterie of evil people are eating up the vitals of the society. Many of us who are participating in this dialogue took part in our War of Liberation. I wish to emphasize that even today there are many scholars and politicians who are working relentlessly towards realization of our dreams for which we fought the War of Liberation. We need to discuss the way the Army and the defense forces and the Election Commission are being used. There is no clear picture about the situation in the Election Commission.

### Dr. Zobayda Hannan

Apparently both the civil society and the politicians are simultaneously engaged in building the country. But the civil society has a considerable role to play. In 2007 we will be holding our national election, an election that is likely to be marred by violence since none of the major political parties is willing to compromise and concede.

### Najmul Alam Chowdhury Noman

Many speakers have said that we have made considerable progress since independence. To my mind if one calls it progress then those of us who used to drink water from a tube-well are now drinking mineral water, those who once wiped their faces with the torn ends of a lungi or a sari are now using facial tissues. These are the ways we have made progress i.e. if you want to call it progress. On the other hand we have deteriorated in the fields of human rights and oppression of the minorities. An extra-judicial organization of the kind of RAB was created. The truth is that the politicians are not interested in establishing the rule of law.

### Shah Muhammad Selim

This is a good venture but it will succeed more if you can involve the people of the villages, where most of our people live, in the process. I also feel that the political parties should be more democratic in their character.

### Jahnara Begum

Although it is proceeding at a slow pace there is definite progress in the field of development of women. And though more women are engaged in artisan work, with bamboo and other types of indigenous material, we need to educate and train them even more.

### Mominul Huq Chowdhury

Bangladesh is a land of opportunities. Finally, it is the politicians who are entrusted to implement the task. However, it will not be proper for them to consider the civil society as their opponents or competitors.

### Zahirul Huq Dulal

I realised the importance of this initiative only when the political parties started opposing it. The tradition of our political parties is to indulge in creating discord and disunity. At times, however, I have observed that there was no lack of agreement between them on the question of buying duty free cars especially for their party lawmakers. Over the past 30 years our politicians have been 100 percent successful in eliminating all educated and patriotic people from the political arena. Black money, muscle power and non-politicians are dominating politics today. If this is the culture that prevails in a political party then the civil society has to come forward. I am not referring to any particular party. However, I hear no one talk about the lack of our democratic culture.

### Advocate Salma Ali

I believe that we can achieve some positive results if we play our individual roles from wherever we are. Can you not stand behind and support people who are working for the country and development of women and for all of us but are not being able to obtain nominations. If you so wish we shall also join hands with you. We respect all parties. But we have experienced that whenever a businessman is given a nomination there comes another businessman fighting for his or her nomination. And you can see ex-secretaries are getting nominations everywhere. We have experienced that once they are elected they get totally isolated from the public. They are running the affairs of their respective localities using their party cadres comprised of young students. The other thing is that the civil society, through the senior politicians, has to relentlessly work towards ascertaining a democratic culture within the parties themselves.

### Nur-e-Alam Bhuiyan

The effort of the civil society at this juncture is praiseworthy. Today's politics is oriented towards attaining power and not for the welfare of the state. Let us work together to fulfill the aspirations for which the country was

liberated.

### Zohra Anis

The election in 2007 is of paramount importance. If this election is not free and fair and we fail to elect and induct honest people into the Parliament, it could lead to disastrous consequences for the country. We extend our full support to your venture. We consider the points raised in the Nagorik Committee's "vision" for Bangladesh in the year 2021 are all valid. Although there is the system of local government in place, are they really effective in any way? Although women are elected representatives they are unable to perform. We shall have to create the opportunity for them to be able to play their roles effectively. We have to ensure a unified, non-communal, quality educational policy. In order for us to select competent candidates we simply must put emphasis on education on a priority basis.

### Ali Hossain Chowdhury

Everyone talks of democracy but it should be remembered that the prerequisite of democracy is good governance, which is totally absent in our democracy. The dialogue has also raised the issue of electing competent candidates. It is through this forum we must continue to strive to elect such candidates who will represent us in the parliament.

### Mahmuda Islam

One of the most important aspects of the election in Bangladesh is the voter list. It was the civil society who first raised the question of credibility of the draft voter list and through careful mathematical analysis had proved that no credible election can be held with the present draft voter list. In the same way the civil society can create adequate pressure on the political parties with regard to nominations. I believe the most important criteria for an individual seeking nomination should be educational qualification, personal resources and professional background.

If a political party plans to nominate a wealthy person having little connection with the people of the locality and then people rise against such an individual it will not be possible for him or her to win the election. In order to achieve this purpose we have to be highly committed and proceed with a pro-active networking and a clear vision.

### Hasne Ara Minu

I am going to request your support for direct elections to the women's seats in the Parliament. I fail to understand what is the problem with regard to holding direct elections? Do you think that our women have acquired such capabilities that if direct elections are held they might win all the seats in the parliament? I am also concerned about yet another issue and wish to draw the attention of Mr. Debapriya Bhattacharya regarding the minorities of the Hill Tracts. A large section of the population there are victims of human rights violations. They are being driven out of their homes and whichever government comes to power is not even willing to listen to their problems.

### Zamiruddin Khan Zompi

People in this forum are discussing electing honest candidates. I have been elected a number of times being voted by the people. Under the existing system a candidate is elected based on the "conduct chain" that is through the presiding officer and security etc. on party lines. In the last election I had seen that a particular party had gone from booth to booth collecting list of those who were to be in charge of respective booths so that it could plan a strategy to make its candidate win. Candidates of the opposition party were arrested overnight. Therefore, mere selection or nomination of an honest candidate will not be adequate for holding a free and fair election, what we need to do is to break this vicious chain in the process of conducting elections. Nowhere in the world is a member of the Parliament directly involved in development activities. It is my belief that because of this, an MP in our country is turning into more of a businessman than a people's representative. I request that in the future wherever you are holding the dialogue, let it begin with our national anthem.

### Shah Muhammad Alamgir

I believe this dialogue will be a success only if we, along with all laborers and professional groups could, in a loud voice, from the nearby open ground adjacent to the Town Hall, express our indignation against all those black money holders who get themselves elected spending between Tk.5 and 10 crores, against those who purchased individual voters at Tk 100 and 200.

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Prof. Ameer Ali Chowdhury, Educationist (President)
2. Mahfuz Anam, Editor, the Daily Star
3. Ghaziul Hassan Khan, Chief Editor, BSS
4. Alhaj Omar Farooq, Convener, Comilla Zila Krishak League
5. Dr Zobaidah Hannan, physician
6. Najmul Alam Chowdhury Noman, President, Bangladesh Human Rights Enforcement Committee, Comilla Branch
7. Shah Muhammad Selim, Joint secretary BNP Comilla Branch, General Secretary Shilpakala Academy.
8. Jahanara Begum, Jahanara Cottage Industries.
9. Prof. Shermin Quader, Executive Director, DRISHTI
10. Rupa, student, Bandhushabha, Prothom Alo
11. Nripendu Kumar Chatterjee, President Shammilito Shankskritic Jote.
12. Dr Triptish Chandra Ghosh, heart specialist, Secretary General Heart Care Foundation
13. Prof. Mominul Haq Chowdhury, President Shujon
14. Zahirul Huq Dulal, President, Shachetan Nagorik Committee.
15. Advocate Salma Ali, Executive Director, Bangladesh Women's Lawyers Association and Vice President FEWA.
16. Nur-e-Alam Bhuiyan, Commander Mukti Jodha Sangsad, Comilla Command Council.
17. Zohra Anis, retired professor, Comilla Government College.
18. Dr. Ali Hossain Chowdhury, writer and researcher.
19. Mahmuda Islam, Prof. Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka.
20. Hasne Ara Minu, Executive Director, PEZARD
21. Mashuk Ahmed Chowdhury, Staff Reporter, Samakal.
22. Zamiruddin Khan Zompi, Comilla Pourashabha.
23. Advocate Muhammad Mahbubur Rahman, Convener, Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee.
24. Prof. Nirmal Chandra Das, Chandina Mohila Degree College.
25. Shah Muhammad Alamgir, President, Comilla District Shop Owners' Association.
26. Yasmin Rima, Editor, Weekly Bamapath.
27. Bahaduruzzaman, Chairman, Barura Pourashabha.
28. Shafig Shikder, President Udichi.
29. Dr. Muslehuddin Ahmed, former President, BMA, Comilla.
30. Muhammad Liaqat Ali, student, Comilla Victoria College.
31. Ruman, student, Comilla Victoria College.
32. Abul Hasnat Babul, Editor, Weekly Abhithadan
33. Muhammad Saiful Islam Bhuiyan, student Comilla Victoria College.
34. Ashok Kumar Barua, journalist.
35. Advocate Afzal Khan, Convener, 14 Party Alliance and President Comilla Chamber of Commerce and Industries.
36. Mafizuddin Ahmed, President, Communist Party, Comilla.
37. Advocate Kari Najmus Sadat, Public Prosecutor and Secretary, Cooperative Affairs, Jataiyabadi Ainjibi Forum.
38. A.K. M. Bahauddin Bahar, former Chairman, Comilla Pourashabha.
39. A.K. M. Mafizur Rahman, President, Comilla Press Club.
40. Shafigul Alam Shikder, Joint Convener, Awami League, Comilla.
41. Abdullah-hil-Baki, educationist.
42. Ghulam Farooq, Advocate, Supreme Court.
43. Advocate Syed Abdullah Pintoo, President District Ainjibi Samity.
44. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, former Advisor to Caretaker Government and Vice Chancellor, BRAC University
45. Muhammad Salahuddin Ahmed, Executive Director Sheba Manabik Unnayan Kendra and General Secretary FEWA, Comilla
46. Sadrul Hassan Majumder, Co-coordinator BNELA
47. Muhammad Abdul Halim, Proctor, Degree College, Sharondi, Chandpur.
48. Pappi Basu, President, FPAB, Comilla
49. Zahidur Rahman Babu, General Secretary, Shammilito Sanskritic Jote
50. Prof. Hasan Imam Majumder Fatik, Principal, Nazrul Academy
51. Advocate Prohlad Devnath, Convener Bangladesh Ganatantrik Ainjibi Samity.
52. Shakir Majumder, Vice President, Comilla Bitarka Parishad
53. Sheikh Farid Ahmed, General Secretary, Udichi, Comilla
54. Bahaduruzzaman, Bir Pratik
55. Syed Abdul Qayyum, Principal, Shashidal Alhaj Muhammad Abu Taher College, Brahmanbaria
56. Shahidullah Maji, representative Naya Diganta, Comilla
57. A.G. Mahmud, principal Coordinator, Dairida Durikaran Shamajik Karjya Kram.
58. Fakhru Huda Helal, poet and organiser
59. A. R. Majumder Saki, Joint Secretary, Nazrul Parishad, Comilla
60. Sameer Majumder, cultural activist
61. S. A. Mannan, Freedom Fighter
62. Hafez Muhammad Jane Alam, President, Bangladesh Khelafat Movement.
63. Mubarak Hossain, voter
64. Tariquul Huq, Joint secretary, Comilla Zila Jubo League
65. Tariquul Islam Jewel, Amra Muktiyodhar Shantan, Comilla Branch
66. Bashir Ahmed, Comilla Victoria College.
67. Freedom Fighter Shahidul Huq Selim, Vice President, Comilla Press Club.
68. Muhammad Mafizuddin Bhuiyan, Chairman, Comilla Pourashabha.
69. Muhammad Ali Murtaza, Masud, organiser, Communist Party of Bangladesh.
70. Kazi Mahtab Sumon, General Secretary Shammilito Sangskritic Jote.
71. Abdul Momin, Deputy Commander, Muktiyodha Sangsad.
72. Muhammad Abdul Awal Hena, Joint Secretary, Dr. Akhter Hamid Khan Foundation.
73. Zakir Hossain, Publicity Secretary, Shammilito Sangskritic Jote.
74. Muhammad Khaliluddin Akhand, Principal Bangabandhu College, Nagil, Brahmanbaria
75. Arif Ibn Atiq, Bakhrabad Gas
76. Abul Kalam Hassan (Togor), General Secretary, Comilla Mobile Traders Association
77. Moshed Alam, Executive Officer, Gono Grameen Bima Delta Life.
78. Shibli Noman, Comilla.
79. Nilofar Yasmeen, Executive Director, Mohila Hastashilpa
80. Tapan Sen Gupta, Khelghar, Comilla Zila Committee.
81. Muhammad Abdul Hye Babul, Vice Principal, Victoria University College.
82. Muhammad Alamgir Talukder, Executive Director, Bhorosha, Brahmanbaria.
83. Abdul Qayyum, Joint Editor, Prothom Alo.

### Coordinator

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, CPD.

### Bahaduruzzaman

Which party will nominate whom in the 2007 election? The faces are too well known, millionaires and plunderers of our national wealth. I know that from my constituency alone, 16 millionaires will be seeking nominations from both the parties. These individuals do not represent the people in any way. Incidentally, they do not belong to the civil society as such. Go to the villages. You will find

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### REPLY TO A COMPLAINT RAISED AT THE CITIZENS' COMMITTEE'S DIALOGUE HELD IN JESSORE

The summary of the dialogue held at Jessore was published in Prothom Alo in the form of a supplement on 3 June 2006. This dialogue has been arranged under the joint sponsorship of Prothom Alo, the Daily Star, CPD and Channel I. The dialogue is participated by people of all walks of life. One Ananda Das, a participant, made a complaint on behalf of Michael Computer against Dr. Muhammad Yunus and chairman of Grameen Software. The complaint was published in the supplement. As per promise made on the day Dr. Debapriya of CPD brought the matter to the notice of Dr. Yunus, and after extensive queries it was found that the accusation was unfounded.

The allegation was that in 2001 a sum of Taka five lakh was deposited to Grameen Software for an agency for a V-sat which was never provided to Michael Computer and that no refund of the money has been made even to this day. After going through the facts it was established that as per agreement between Michael Computer and Grameen Software a sum of taka 5 lakh was in effect given to Grameen. This was however a part payment of the contracted amount totaling Taka 27 lakh for supply and installation of a V-sat equipment. Since Michael Computer failed to deposit the balance of the money, Taka five lakh was not refunded as per terms of the contract. As per terms of the contract Michael Computer failed to pay the balance sum by January 2002 and finally informed its inability to avail of the equipment and the service connection. The allegation, therefore, is false and baseless. On top of it, although as per clause 2.2 of the contract, Grameen Software was under no obligation to refund any part of the deposited sum of taka 5 lakh, yet between June 2003 and 13 May 2006, Grameen Software has returned Taka 4 lakh 50 thousand to Michael Computer. For the remainder of Taka 50 thousand there is constant communication between Michael Computer and Grameen software. Grameen Software has submitted copies of all the payment receipts to the office of CPD.