

Ensure constitutional rights

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel i jointly organised the dialogue as part of the civil society initiative for national election 2007 and accountable development.

CPD Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya moderated the dialogue chaired by prominent educationist Principal Mohammad Zafar Imam.

Former chairman of Khulna municipality Gazi Shahidullah, Principal Majeda Ali and Advocate Enayet Ali were the special guests at the regional dialogue held at the Zia Hall in the town.

Editor of Prothom Alo Matur Rahman addressed the dialogue on behalf of the organisers while former adviser to the caretaker government ASM Shahjahan spoke on behalf of the Nagorik Committee formed for preparation of a vision paper for Bangladesh in 2021.

Lawmakers Nurul Islam of ruling BNP and Panchanan Biswas of main opposition Awami League, and Khulna District Bar Association President Advocate M Mujibur Rahman also spoke at the programme.

Seventy persons took part in the general discussion that continued for more than seven hours beginning at 10:00am.

Local political leaders, lawyers, teachers, NGO workers, cultural activists, businessmen and social workers also expressed their views at the discussion.

They thanked the organisers for holding the dialogue in "neglected and underdeveloped" Khulna.

Advocate Enayet Ali, who was involved in formulating the country's constitution, said full implementation of the constitutional rights is the only way to ensure good governance.

He alleged that the political parties have never wanted to make people aware of their constitutional rights. "Copies of the constitution are not available in the market as it has not been reprinted recently," he said.

Enayet Ali proposed to form an electoral college comprising representatives from all tiers to elect the president.

Principal Majeda Ali held lack of proper planning responsible for the closure of mills and factories. She stressed the need for a social research to find out the causes of decay in the society.

She proposed bearing at least half of the cost of a female candidate by the government. She also emphasised the necessity of forming a 'youth nagorik forum' for saving the young generation from drug addiction and other criminal activities.

If eight independent constitutional bodies function independ-

ently, 80 per cent of the problems can be solved, said Gazi Shahidullah.

The constitutional bodies including the Election Commission, Anti-corruption Commission, judiciary and the office of the ombudsman should work independently but they cannot.

He suggested appointment of judges following the recommendations of the Supreme Judicial Council.

Shahidullah also proposed cancellation of parliament membership for remaining absence for more than 20 days at a stretch instead of existing rule for 90 days.

He also suggested cutting salary of the parliament members for remaining absent in parliament. Shahidullah observed that there should be a provision that people working in four sectors -- medical, power, communication and ports -- can not call hartal or strike making the general people hostage.

There should be special tribunals for hearing the sufferings of those emergency professions and resolving their demands and requirements, he added.

In his presidential address, Principal Zafar Imam observed that black money and terrorism have polluted the country's politics.

Registration of the political parties and following some basic rules are needed, he said. He also demanded separation of judiciary and independence of the Anti-corruption Commission.

Nazrul Islam Monju, immediate past general secretary of Khulna city unit of BNP, said a balanced regional development is needed, lack of which leads to the demand of regional separation.

He stressed the need for bringing in honest and competent persons in politics.

Holding free and fair elections cannot be possible with the weak election management, he said.

Demanding stoppage of terming the business leaders 'hoarders' and 'black money holders', Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Shaaruzzaman Martuza said businessmen's image is often tarnished in different ways without any valid reasons.

Panchanan Biswas MP demanded budgetary allocation for strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission. He also called for scrapping of the constitutional provision for state religion saying that the country cannot remain secular keeping the provision in the constitution.

Executive Director of CPD Debapriya Bhattacharya said the civil society is deeply concerned at the current political situation.

People have lost confidence in the Election Commission (EC). They want a free and fair election which is impossible if held under

influence of black money, he said.

He said political and electoral reforms are a must for smooth functioning of democracy. An illiterate man must not get nomination to contest the parliamentary election.

In his address, he paid homage to slain journalists Manik Saha, Humayun Kabir Balu, Shaikh Harun-ar-Rashid and Shaikh Belaluddin.

Debapriya said a number of policy guidelines and 16 recommendations of a task force formed by CPD were handed over to the government ahead of the national election in 2001. "Then in 2003, we reviewed those recommendations," he added.

He said it is the people who will have to take the initiative to solve their problems. "We must learn how to be self-reliant and build up our country without borrowing money from outside," he said.

Editor of Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman said people have doubt whether the next general election will be free and fair under the present EC.

He said the nation is going through a critical time as political unrest is growing, adding to the frustration of the people.

He said, "It has become a political culture in our country not to concede defeat in the elections. The tendency leads to political crisis, thereby creating room for the foreigners to talk about our internal affairs."

Matiur said political parties do not implement their election manifestos after going to power. "This is quite unfortunate," he observed.

He said democracy cannot be institutionalised through calling hartals. The country seems to be hostage to the whims of ruling BNP and Awami League, he observed.

He regretted that the judiciary has yet to be separated from the executive.

The Prothom Alo editor said nepotism must be stopped once and for all and political vandalism must not be encouraged in the interests of the country.

Secretary General of Greater Khulna Development Action Coordination Committee Shaikh Ashrafuzzaman, noted columnist professor Anwarul Kadir, President of Khulna Shacheton Nagorik Committee Md Hafizur Rahman, Principal Wahidur Rahman, leader of Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association Humayun Kabir, Convener of Shacheton Khulnabashi Alhaj Rezaul Huq, Secretary of Khulna Mahila Parishad Rashu Akhter, Headmaster of Rupsha High School Rabiul Islam Palash, Director of Paribar Kalyan Samity Shamima Akhter Shimu, General Secretary of Khulna Puja Udjapan Parishad Advocate Krishnapada Das, Chairman of Bangladesh Kinadergarten Association Rehana Akhter and student of Daulatpur Govt BL University College Animesh Chandra Hari, Advocate Kudrate-Khuda, Mollah Saifur Rahman, and engineer Azadul Haque were among others who spoke at the discussion.

Robbers

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jumped out of the slow-moving train and made off with cash and valuables," said Faruq Ahmed, one of the six injured passengers.

The robbers broke into their reserved cabin when the train reached Teigaon, said Faruq who along with six of his relatives was coming to Dhaka from Kulara.

"When we put up resistance, they attacked us with sharp weapons. We shouted for help and soon passengers from other compartments came to our rescue and captured two of the robbers," he added.

The injured, who were taken to the DMCH for treatment, are Mohammad Helal, 26, his brother Sohail, 20, his sister Romana, 17, and uncles Faruq Ahmed, 40, Lutfor Rahman, 42, and Hekmat Ali, 43.

Lutfor filed a case with GRP Police Station at Kamalpur, mentioning that the robbers knifed them and took away Tk 41.5 thousand in cash and valuables.

2 PCJSS men

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An hour later, the group attacked Baraitali of the same upazila and killed another PCJSS activist Kaya Prue Marma, 35.

Security forces later searched the village but could not arrest anyone.

PCJSS Khagrachhari district Unit Information and Publicity Secretary Bihhu Ranjan Chakma demanded exemplary punishment of the UPDF activists for the killings while UPDF Khagrachhari unit coordinator Samari Chakma said their party men were not involved in it.

Earlier on Friday, UPDF activist Kalapa Chakma was killed and two persons including a jawan of Bangladesh Rifles were injured in clashes between the two rival indigenous groups and consequent attack by security forces.

Tension is prevailing in the area following casualties in sporadic gunfights between the PCJSS and UPDF during the last three days.

SC Bar asks CEC

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free and fair general election. After the roundtable, the SCBA president announced the decisions taken collectively at the meeting.

Amir-UI Islam said the SCBA would write to the president of Bangladesh, prime minister, EC and the chief justice, who heads the Supreme Judicial Council, notifying them of their demands.

The SCBA also urged both the ruling BNP and opposition Awami League to immediately sit for a discussion on reforms in the EC and in the caretaker government system.

Speaking at the roundtable, Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said, "To ensure a free and fair general election, we need a citizen-watch committee. Before and after the elections, there should be the initiative to protect the minority groups so that they can cast their votes without any fear or intimidation."

Prof Rehman Sobhan pointed out, "It is globally recognised that the caretaker government system is a major achievement in democracy. But if the two main political parties do not have consensus for a free and fair general election, nothing will be of any use. To ensure a fair election there should be a forum for the voters," he said.

Dr Kamal Hossain placed emphasis on the resignation of the CEC and the two election commissioners. "If the people can not exercise their voting rights, they become powerless and helpless. If somebody is not loyal to the constitution and loyal to certain people or a party, it creates a crisis," he stated.

Justice Naimuddin Ahmed observed the EC should be made independent and beyond control of the prime minister's office.

Former cabinet secretary Mujibul Haq said, "A judge is a respected neutral person. But CEC Justice MA Aziz is failing to maintain that stature. If there is no election, the country will face anarchy and will fall prey to a third force."

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud pointed out that there cannot be a free and fair general election under the present election commissioners and the CEC. They should immediately leave. Otherwise, they should be removed through the Supreme Judicial Council.

Former finance minister Saiduzzaman noted that the EC should ensure that the people can exercise their right to vote given by the constitution.

Dengue menace

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they cannot afford repellents or any other mosquito-preventing measures. He said he can hardly remember when he saw a DCC employee spraying insecticide in their area.

Commissioner of Ward-43 Haji Abul Hashem Hashu termed the DCC drive as a face saving move. He said the drive is going ahead but the DCC employees are not active.

"Mosquitoes are stinging us as usual. If the insecticides were sprayed carefully, why should the mosquitoes be there? Shouldn't they be dead?" he asked.

Mohammad Abdullah, caretaker of an apartment at the posh Dhanmondi area, said he has not seen anyone spraying in the last 20 days. He said around two months ago two were diagnosed with dengue at his workplace in Dhanmondi.

He said at night it becomes very hard for him to carry out his duties due to the relentless mosquito bites.

Ganesh Chandra who runs a nursery at Dhanmondi also echoed Abdullah saying he also did not see any DCC men spray larvacides to kill mosquito larvae.

A number of residents on Azimpur Road, Azimpur Amtoll and Azimpur Sapra Mosque areas alleged they did not even see any DCC employee walking through the area with the sprayer let alone spraying insecticides.

Dr Naseem-Us-Seraj, senior entomologist of the DCC, said their drive in the eight 'high-risk' wards including the above three is still on.

When asked about the locals' complaints, he said he would look into the matter when the office reopens today after the weekend

Siddhirganj power

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evaluated substantially responsive bid, such differences should be fully explained in the body of the bid evaluation report."

The ADB also noted in its June 20 reply, "Some parts of forwarded documents are in Bangla." But the ADB guidelines demand all documents relating to the procurement should be prepared in English.

But the EGCB next day again sent its recommendation, which the ADB found inconclusive like the previous one.

On June 22, ADB officials discussed the matter with the EGCB managing director and director technical. They provided the EGCB with a copy of the ADB Guide on Bid Evaluation, 2005, so that it can prepare and submit revised financial bid evaluation report in "proper format in English along with required supporting documents".

The ADB formally responded to the EGCB letter on July 5 and the EGCB sent yet another set of inconclusive recommendations to the ADB on July 6.

As in all its previous bids, Harbin had quoted a very low price. The project's Dutch consultant Kema International found that Harbin in its financial offer hid cost of spares worth Tk 22 crore, which is 17.5 per cent higher than its initially quoted price of Tk 90 crore.

The ADB guidelines allow lack of price quotation of some materials but that should not exceed 15 per cent of the bidder's initial quotation. Early in June, consultant Kema declared Harbin's bid as non-responsive as per the ADB

guidelines and suggested the EGCB to begin negotiations with the other bidder, Indian Bhel.

Using similar tactics, Harbin had earlier won bids for the 80 MW Tongi plant, 150 MW Chandpur plant and 90 MW Fenchuganj plant. It has completed Tongi plant that fails to operate properly, and it is now asking the government to give it additional funds for spares which it always forgets to quote, sources said.

Tongi plant tripped more than 75 times within one year of its operation.

An analysis of the draft contract with Harbin for the Chandpur project, which the Power Development Board (PDB) is set to sign soon, shows that it contains hundreds of legal loopholes and hidden costs of \$15.56 million. The contract documents left out 4,448 spare parts of 476 categories from Harbin's original offer.

BDB
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have been demanding electoral reforms. The statement reiterated the BDB demands of resignation of the incumbent chief election commissioner and two commissioners of the Election Commission (EC) and immediate steps to separate the EC from the prime minister's secretariat to make it an 'independent body'.

"We also believe other organisations of the civil society will come up and take proactive roles to bring positive changes in the lives of the people," said the BDB leader.

Rice to try to isolate Iran, Syria during ME trip: Bush

AFP, Crawford

US President George W. Bush said yesterday that one of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's chief goals on her upcoming Middle East trip would be to try to isolate Iran and Syria.

Bush also urged Israel to exercise "the greatest possible care" in avoiding civilian casualties as it pounds targets in Lebanon in an effort to wipe out the Hezbollah Shiite militia that has been firing rockets into Israel.

At the same time, Bush blamed Hezbollah for touching off the crisis and said in his weekly radio address: "I believe sovereign nations have the right to defend their people from terrorist attack, and to take the necessary action to prevent those attacks."

The US president's comments came after Rice announced that she would travel to the Middle East, to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas, before heading to Rome for an international conference on the violence paralysing Lebanon.

"Secretary Rice will make it clear that resolving the crisis demands confronting the terrorist group that launched the attacks and the nations that support it," Bush said.

He said Syria was "a primary sponsor" of Hezbollah and has given the Shiite militia Iranian-made weapons, and he criticized Iran's "ambition for nuclear weapons and aid to terrorist groups."

"Their actions threaten the entire Middle East and stand in the way of resolving the current crisis and bringing lasting peace to this troubled region," said the US president.

"Were also concerned about the impact the current conflict is having on Lebanon's young democracy," he said. "Hezbollah's practice of hiding rockets in civilian neighborhoods, and its efforts to undermine the democratically elected government, have shown it to be no friend of Lebanon."

"By its actions, Hezbollah has jeopardized Lebanon's tremendous advances and betrayed the Lebanese people," said Bush, who added that Washington would join efforts to get humanitarian aid to the Lebanese people.

JP activists

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Railway Junction around 6:00am. The JCS men took the copies to the Rajbari field and put on fire.

A general diary (GD) was filed with Joydevpur Police Station in this connection.

The Gazipur Press Club condemned the incident.

Meanwhile, our Magura correspondent reports: A group of JP (Ershad) activists burnt at least 11,000 copies of several dailies, including the Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, and threw them into the Nabaganga river near Magura town.

Police and witnesses said the JP men barricaded the Magura-Dhaka Highway at the Dhaka bus stand in the town and snatched the newspaper bundles from the microbuses carrying them. They burnt down some copies and threw others into the river.

Sagar Gazi, supervisor of the microbus, filed a case with Magura Sadar Police Station accusing JP district unit General Secretary Advocate Hasan Seraj Suja and 70 others.

JP leaders admitted the incidents and said the Prothom Alo report was baseless and intended to tarnish the image of Ershad.

Pakistan rejects

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Mumbai attack."

The statement came in response to Indian External Affairs Ministry Spokesman Navtej Sarna's demand for deportation of Ibrahim and Salahuddin and a ban on Jamat-ud-Dawa, political wing of Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist outfit, a day after Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf offered to help in the probe into the blasts if India gave proof.

The Foreign Ministry statement said India made similar demands and allegations after the attacks on the Parliament and Chattisinghpura massacre of Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Pakistan rejects the rehash of baseless allegations made by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesman while commenting on the President's offer to help in the Mumbai blasts investigations," it said.

"This has become a routine with India. On earlier occasions, similar Indian accusations were belied by independent enquiries such as in the case of Chattisinghpura incident of March 2000 and the December 2001 attack on Parliament which exposed involvement of elements internal to India," the statement said.

Voter list update

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Tk 39 crore for voter list updating. EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar yesterday told The Daily Star that they did not get any such allocation.

Meanwhile, many assistant officials yesterday collected forms from election offices in different districts and said they would start work today, reports from our correspondents said.

"Updating the voter list began in five upazilas out of eight in my district. I could not start work on Friday as assistant registration officers (AROs) were not available on the day," a district election officer said yesterday.

Asked about remuneration of the assistant officials, he said, "I assured them that they would get it. I hope they would now gear up their work."

Chittagong district election officer Dulal Talukdar said he completed distribution of forms for the job yesterday.

Many of the AROs monitoring the task in the capital yesterday said assistant officials were still unwilling to do the work. They expressed doubts if it would be possible to complete the task by August 10 as scheduled.

"We personally persuaded them to carry out the task, saying they would be provided with remuneration," said one ARO, also Thana election officer.

Some AROs in the capital said

Moderate quake

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Xinhua said the damage was spread across 13 townships, with residents evacuating from the worst-hit area of Dousha.

Yanjin's 350,000 residents are especially vulnerable to earthquakes as most live near hillsides, the agency said.

Local authorities sent money, 500 tents, 1,000 quilts and 500 blankets to the affected areas while several hundred workers had joined the rescue effort.

Power supply and communications had largely been restored by Saturday evening, Xinhua said.

The agency reported earlier that a team from the State Seismological Administration had left Beijing to help in assessing the damage and "maintaining social order".

Plan to form

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forces in the grand alliance.

AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah also said they have not taken any decision to include the Islamic parties into the grand alliance. They are just observing the activities of some 'pro-Liberation' Islamic parties, he added.

The AL high-ups think that the grand alliance should be formed after the caretaker government takes charge in October so as to avoid harassment by the BNP-Jamaat government during its fag end.

The AL also wants to bring the BNP's renegade leaders into fold.

In the 2001 parliament elections, the ruling four-party coalition bagged 47.05 per cent votes against around 41 per cent of AL.

Israeli troops

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recovered anti-tank missiles, a launcher, and other weapons used by Hezbollah. The army said that more than 150 Hezbollah targets in Lebanon had been attacked.

The raid was part of Israel's wider strategy of running a "limited" ground operation aimed at destroying Hezbollah's tunnels, hideouts and weapons stashes in south Lebanon.

Hezbollah has fired hundreds of rockets at northern Israeli towns from north of the Lebanese border, killing 16 civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands of Israelis to repeatedly flee into bunkers.

On Saturday, at least 42 rockets struck Karmiel, injuring two people, while rockets also fell on Kiriyat Shemona, Nahariya and smaller communities such as Bet Hillel, Mayan Baruch and Mashov Am.

Air raid sirens sounded several times in Haifa, Israel's third-largest city, but no rocket strikes were reported.

Israel's army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, on Friday said the military would conduct "limited ground operations as much as needed in order to harm the terror that harms us" leaving it unclear how deep and how powerful the Israeli punch into Lebanon would be.

Israel's goal is not to create a buffer zone as it did during its occupation of southern Lebanon from 1982 to 2000, said a senior military official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the topic's military sensitivity.

Instead, Israel wants to weaken Hezbollah to make it easier for the Lebanese army to move into areas previously controlled by the guerrillas, possibly with the aid of a stronger international peacekeeping force, the official said.

An Israeli ground incursion,

assistant officials threatened to stop work unless the EC Secretariat clarifies the issue of their remuneration by this week.

"EC Secretariat officials have assured that the remuneration issue would be resolved by this week," ARO Tofazzel Hossain told reporters.

Another ARO in the capital, Aminul Haque Bhuiyan, said he could not complete recruitment of assistant officials because of the lack of interest in updating the voter list. "Of the 20 assistant officials required, I have recruited 16 and they are now working," he said.

A number of AROs and assistant officials in the capital said they are facing difficulties in updating the voter list as a large number of people were not found at the addresses on the existing voter list.

They also feared the updated list for the capital might show an unusual rise in the number of voters as people want to get listed as voters but refuse to fill up forms for deleting names of voters who do not live at their previous addresses.

Karnaphuli

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Technology.

The RHD has signed an agreement with the China Bridge Company on July 15 last for constructing the bridge within the 38 months with an estimated cost of Taka 336 crore. The Kuwait government has agreed to finance Tk 372 crore out of the total estimated cost of Tk 550 crore for the project.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia laid the foundation of the bridge on April 19 in 2004.

The RHD fixed August 7 as the date for starting physical construction work of the bridge through a ground-breaking ceremony.

Eng Muktadir said the proposed bridge of six concrete pillars, two at shore and four in the water, in no way would pose a threat to the navigability as the existing Shah Amanat Bridge with many concrete pillars would be lifted after the new one is constructed.

Moreover, the project director said it is impossible to construct a suspension bridge without at least two pillars. Pillars of that type of bridge are usually of extra width and big in size than the normal bridge which might have an adverse threat to the port channel, he added.

"Because of saline water flow that welcomes rust with steel structure, soil condition of the port city, particularly in selected area of the bridge and the area very much inside the danger cyclone zone, do not allow and match well with a hanging bridge," Muktadir said quoting the experts.

For example, he said, big portion of the present Shah Amanat Bridge was collapsed when a vessel recklessly hit the bridge during devastating tidal surge and cyclone struck the coast on the night of April 29, 1991.

Possibility of collapsing of a suspension bridge is much more than a concrete structure one during natural calamities like cyclone or earthquake as Chittagong is very prone to cyclone and tremor.

however, could dramatically increase the pain in Lebanon. More than 400,000 people live south of the Litani River, north of which Israel wants to push Hezbollah. Though tens of thousands have left, many are believed still there, trapped because roads were damaged by Israeli bombs or afraid of being caught in the airstrikes on thoroughfares.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will visit the Middle East on Sunday, her first trip to the region since the crisis erupted 11 days ago even as she ruled out a quick cease-fire as a "false promise."

Rice was headed to Rome for meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the Palestinian president and US allies, before heading to the Middle East.

In Beirut, ships continued to arrive at the main port, part of a massive evacuation effort to pull out Americans and other foreigners.

France, the United Nations and Red Cross demanded Israel open humanitarian corridors to allow life's necessities shelter, food, water and medicine to reach the swelling numbers of displaced people an estimated half-million.

Responding to a US request, Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz said French aid would be allowed into Lebanon's port of Sidon.

The Lebanese health ministry reported 362 deaths in Lebanon so far in the onslaught, an increase of 55 since it release figures on Thursday. Thirty-four Israelis also have been killed, including 18 soldiers and an air force officer killed Friday in the collision of two helicopters.