

# MPs should not boycott parliament

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**Prof. Muhammad Jainal Abedin Khan**

The initiative you have undertaken, keeping in view the forthcoming election, has given rise to some uncertainties. One is doubtful if ever the differences between the opposition and the ruling party will be resolved with regard to the caretaker form of government. Therefore, the doubt over the fate of the election continues. On the other hand, doubts have been expressed over the nature of your role with regard to your movement for electing honest candidates. Admittedly, the civil society will have the support of the common man but this has certainly put the two political parties against each other. This has made the political scenario in the country extremely volatile. We thus expect clear guidance from you as to how to overcome the stalemate. The Nagorik Committee is hoping to create a vision document for Bangladesh. I believe this will be based on the prevailing state of the country, in the form of national manifesto. My question is, will the document include critical issues like the establishment of secularism and elimination of terrorism?

**Kazi Rana**

Since this noble venture that you have embarked on is trying to select honest people as candidates involving a cross section of the toiling masses, I propose that instead of making this city based dialogue, let it be a rural based one.

**Principal Mukarram Hossain**

If the election expenses are borne by the government this will put a stop to misuse of money.

**Advocate Shibbir Ahmed Liton**

Today I am happy to see that amongst those present here are well-known businessmen and industrialists Mr. Manzur Elahi and Samson H. Chowdhury. Should they have so wished, they too could have been elected by buying votes with money. Instead, they have joined hands with this initiative of the civil society in order to find out ways and means for bettering the future of the country. Meanwhile, I would like to echo Sultana Kamal that we have to bring about the changes in our political culture with the help of the politicians themselves. Apart from everything else, let us not forget that we all must be prepared to perform our individual responsibilities as outlined here.

**Syed Manzur Elahi**

Sometime back I came across a feature published in the Time magazine. My discussion is based on that article. There are two pillars on which democracy stands, the media, that is freedom of expression, and the other, a strong civil society. These two can ensure democratic practices. No democracy can work if these two factors are absent. The problem with our civil society is that we have confined ourselves to the limits of our living rooms where all we do is express our regrets like who has stolen what and how the country is going to the dogs. We do not know how to make speeches since we do not have politicians amongst us. I believe there is hardly a nation that has manpower as strong as ours. Day after day, year after year, all we do is tolerate and once in a while we take to the streets.

I believe that the mere holding of discussions, 64 dialogues in 64 different districts, will not safeguard democracy. Democracy is a continuous process. I believe under the present conditions we may not be able to attain a perfect form of democracy, but we should continue to strive. The civil society should join hands with the NGO community, often described as a parallel government. We should wake up and only then we may be able to achieve some success. We should not hold high hopes. Democracy is a continuous process and one has to be working on it all the time.

**Shaikh Siraj**

Had we been able to call the prevailing state of the country as democratic, it would not be necessary to hold such a dialogue. There has been no definite planning for development of the country since our independence. I believe that what is happening in the name of politics is, politics for

politics' sake.

The majority of our population live in villages and they are totally unaware of the state of our governance and democracy. These simple village folks, in an indirect way, are being used as tools of the political process and the state. The media has to play the role of building awareness amongst these people.

**Advocate Anisur Rahman Khan**

We believe that the caretaker system of government is against the core principle of democracy. The caretaker system is the outcome of mistrust between political parties. Proposal for reforming the system is the most talked about issue in the political arena. Today, this has made even the judiciary controversial. The only way out of this situation is to make the Election Commission fully independent and strong.

**Prof. M. Shamsul Islam**

An Election Commission comprising of individuals who are above reproach, beyond any suspicion, and personalities who are bright and strong in character, and not weaklings, must conduct election at all levels.

Election manifestoes have to be made public at least three months prior to actual holding of the election and it should be considered as a social contract between the political parties and the public. If the pledges, as embodied in the manifestos, are not kept, then the concerned individuals should be considered as unfit for contesting future elections. This provision could be included in both the Constitution and elections rules of procedures. Following the Supreme Court Ruling of 24 May 2005 all necessary documents have to be submitted along with respective nomination papers. We have to ensure that no loan defaulter, or convicted person, is allowed to contest elections, whether as an independent or a party nominated candidate. No civil servant should be allowed to contest at least within five years after retirement from service. The candidate seeking nomination must submit a detailed account of acquired property and assets over the past five years, including those of the candidates near relations, their earnings and expenditures and these details should be made public. Electronic voting system has to be introduced. All the offices concerned with conducting election should be fitted with close circuit security cameras.

**Prof. Abidur Reza**

Having heard all that has been said by various speakers I am of the opinion that your 'wishes' cannot be implemented in Bangladesh today. The reason for this is that a nation is governed by a Constitution. Under the present Constitution of Bangladesh we cannot achieve our targets through a democratic process, despite the fact that elections have been held as many as twelve times. Elections alone do not guarantee democracy. The precondition for the flourishing of democracy in a country is secularism. A secular country can be democratic, a state based on religion cannot. By making Islam the state religion and inserting "Bismillah" in the Constitution we cannot achieve democracy. The Nagorik Committee has to be united on the issue.

**Dr. Shah Monowar Hossain**

Right from the days of the Pak regime we have seen that no public representative ever received so many perks like our MPs today. The media should clearly list the perks enjoyed by our lawmakers and the ministers today, and bring these to the knowledge of the public. We see a clear picture of all corruption in the media and yet nobody is brought to justice. If this could be done many aspiring candidates would quit the idea of contesting. The executive powers vested with the MPs have to be curtailed and their role should be confined to the limits of being the people's representatives only.

**Rajat Chowdhury Joy**

Those of us who are unemployed have to give bribes to get a job. How can you expect us to be honest? We are unable to give bribes. It is the public representatives who are encouraging us to be dishonest.

**Reza Ali**

There is no doubt about the fact that the civil society is doing a good job.

We want honest candidates everywhere. The idea propounded by Dr. Yunus appears to be somewhat different from the current political trend, particularly when men like him are not going to contest elections. Debapriya Bhattacharya has said that the opinions expressed by Dr. Yunus are purely his personal views. I wish to see your deliberations to be precise and transparent. Let people understand clearly as to what you mean by honest and good people. At the same time you shall not be able to achieve anything until and unless you are able to bring about basic changes in the procedural system of the elections. I am yet to have a clear statement from you with regard to the Election Commission.

**Principal Muhammad Jalal Hossain**

One of the major topics of discussion at this forum has been opposing black money. But the sad part of it all is that this good move has been turned into failure by the grace of the finance minister who created opportunities for turning black money into white. It is my belief that if Prothomo Alo, the Daily Star and CPD take up the matter in the court of law, then it may not be possible for the government to continue with the system.

**Ariful Isalm**

As one belonging to the new generation I wish to ask what we understand by competence? Is it educational, financial or is it professional? The other question is, what do we mean by a civil society? A majority of the speakers who spoke so far are politicians. My suggestion is let us create a monitoring cell. Everyone in the city knows who are honest. Taking them into the fold, we can establish a monitoring cell and then we can turn such seminars into a public platform.

**Prof. Mujibur Rahman**

I am now retired over 10 years. One of my students is a Secretary. One day I asked him whether he, too, was becoming corrupt? He replied by saying that I should not worry about the fate of the country and that one could not survive without being dishonest. These were indeed painful words. My question, is there anything worthwhile we have that we can offer to this generation? I am not saying that such dialogues are meaningless, surely some day we shall reap the benefits. If we are able to inject these ideas amongst the public all over the country, including its remote corners, then there is possibility for today's movement gathering momentum.

**Monira Begum Onu**

Had the civil society played its due role then we would have been spared the cruel realities now persisting in the society today, at the same we could effectively get rid of the sickening trend in politics and at the same time do away with corruption. What we really need to do is bring about qualitative changes in the main factors that determine the development of the society. Mere election will not be able to resolve this longstanding problem, because the social crises at present are no longer apolitical.

**Priyotosh Biswas Babul**

CPD has initiated this dialogue keeping in view 2007 election. My request would be that you should publish the life sketches of the candidates in your newspapers instead.

**Md. Gholam Mostafa**

I knew Mr. Abbas Ali, former Chairman of the Dhanmatakpur Union under Domar Police station of Nilphamari. He had a small business and was an honest man and the people of the locality made him the chairman. It was the people who made him the chairman but soon after being elected he was beaten up and his house was set on fire. However, the people of the village stood beside him and came to his rescue. He used to visit the TNO's office in a lungi and a pair of torn slippers. People of his locality were not provided with any development project. Matters continued like this for a year, after that he told the people of the locality that he was no longer interested in the chairmanship.

We are interested in electing honest people to enter the parliament but there should be a clear direction as to how they should conduct affairs once

elected. I believe even matters like these should also be discussed.

**Prof. Lutfar Rahman Khan**

During the election of 2001 you published the dialogues in the form of a publication. Following that election, where 330 candidates were elected, is did you subsequently carry out a survey as to how many of them were honest and competent? If not I propose that this be done in the future. My second point is that your initiative is worthwhile and a good one. If you could carry this down to the grass roots levels, continually hammering on the importance of electing honest people, then there is possibility that people will accept your ideas, for the simple fact that the entire country, today, is looking for honest people.

**Advocate Pijush Kanti Sarkar**

The judiciary must be separated from the Executive. Second, elected representative should have no executive authority over distribution of wheat amongst the local people, including appointment of teachers. Third, the newspapers are often seen giving coverage to black money holders more than the honest people who are generally modest and often poor. We have seen that many of our journalist friends have formed syndicates; in one instance at least 12 seats were mutually shared based on the understanding that a particular candidate would be covered more than others. This is indeed very unfortunate.

**Abdul Quayyum**

Please let us know as to who are the people and where have they formed a syndicate. If the information is correct I give you my word that we shall take action against them.

**Advocate Abdul Mottaleb Lal**

CPD is a research organization and hence I propose that instead of preparing a list of honest and competent candidates prepare a comparative list from amongst the 900 candidates consisting of those elected and their closest opponents.

**Anwar Abedin Tuhin**

Unlike in the case of members of the Parliament there is an age limit of 60 for those who work in government offices and autonomous bodies. I believe there should also be an age limit fixed in the case of the members of the parliament.

**Hassanul Alam**

There are a number of organizations within the country capable of carrying out independent observations of our election, and yet we invite members from donor countries to do this. I wish to have an answer to my question through the columns of your newspapers.

**Prof. Jatin Sarkar**

Those who are called members of the civil society I wish to call them Brahmins of the society. Like the Brahmins they should perform the duties of a Brahmin, perform the duties of a priest, not become rulers. But first we have to determine as to what is to be the role of the rulers. In the times gone by, the Brahmins used to promulgate the laws and, Khatriyas used to run the affairs of the kingdom. At present the Khatriyas are no longer allowed to rule. From time to time their powers have been snatched away at gunpoint by the darwans. Now those who rule over the country are Baisyas. I say this since 48 percent of those nominated by Awami League came from the business community while in the case of BNP it was 59 percent. It is clearly stated in our Constitution that to the people belongs the state. Now it is the duty of this civil society to see whether or not people are capable of defending their rights. The civil society has to undertake that responsibility.

I wish to say with emphasis, the one and the only duty of those elected to the parliament, should to formulate laws. Let us all unite and together propagate this all around with loud voices. The other issue is related to decentralization of the administration. The people of the villages themselves should form their own Assembly and utilize the provisions of the budget; this in turn may give us an opportunity to be involved in the democratic process in a direct way.