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# The dialogue and some questions

Let us assume the dialogue succeeds as expressed in the October 8, 2006 editorial of The Daily Star. Let us also assume that fair elections are held. Then what? Either the AL or the BNP will form the next government with the same old, known & corrupt faces. Does that change anything for this country? Instead of moving forward, we are running in circles.

We are getting excited over dialogue on wrong issues. The only dialogue & reform that is most urgently needed & should be talked about is the complete overhaul of the two huge corporations i.e. the AL & the BNP so that these two can regain their identities as political parties. Democratic reforms must take place within BNP & AL first that is the only priority for this country at the moment. If democratic practices do not take root at party level, then the parties simply cannot deliver democracy at the state level. Future democracy does not depend on the outcome of the AL-BNP dialogue, but on the genuine democratisation of AL & BNP themselves.

I still believe there is time to turn things around for this country. I urge the daughter of the Father of the Nation and wife of the

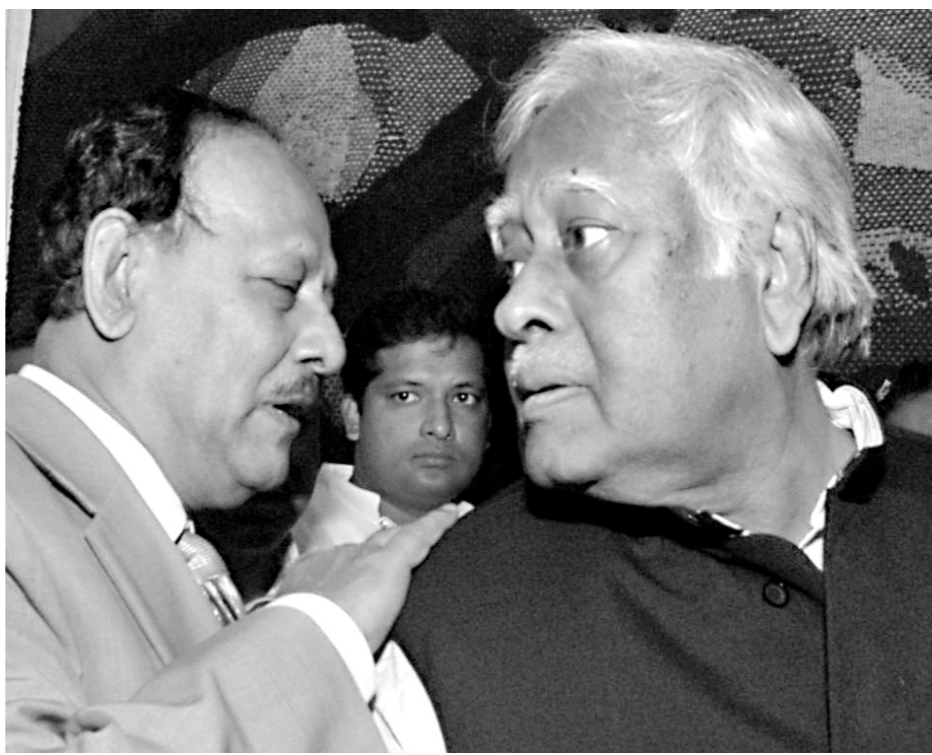
Great Freedom Fighter to put brakes on their recklessness and initiate genuine democratic reforms within their respective parties first. To them I say: free your party of corruption; let go the dynastic attitude. Both of you have miserably failed to deliver us a secure & corruption free living. If you play with the lives of innocent people, the result cannot be good.

The people of this country will be watching you, closely.

**Syed Husain, Old DOHS, Dhaka**

To the people of Bangladesh the start of the dialogue between the BNP and the AL brought immense happiness. When we saw BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil shaking hands with smiling faces, we became overwhelmed with joy.

We pray and hope that the dialogue will bring fruitful results, the ground for a free



and fair election will be laid, the issues will be settled amicably.

We expect the leaders will not let us down, people are now in a festive mood. If the dialogue fails it will be an unbearable blow to them.

**Nur Jahan, Chittagong**

After a long time, the people of Bangladesh have discovered a ray of hope again. The government and the opposition have decided to sit for a dialogue which is indeed a good augury. It is a long awaited step bringing an end to the stalemate over the reform of Caretaker Government & Election process. The people of Bangladesh have a lot of expectation from this dialogue and are looking forward to the fulfilment of the following prerequisites of free and fair election through negotiations. Firstly, there should be an effective and reliable Election Commission which is trust worthy. Secondly, removal of the flaws in the voter list. Thirdly, the appointment of an acceptable person as the chief of the caretaker government. However, the government and opposition should bear in mind that this

time people do not want to get any leap service. They want to see a positive outcome. It's as simple as that. In this dialogue, the political parties should make their mind up that they will be careful at the time of giving nomination and no criminal or black money holder should receive the ticket. Honestly, integrity and dedication to the country should be the only barometer to gauge their eligibility in getting nomination. If the nomination process is not fair then all initiatives taken for the reform of caretaker government and election process would fail to change the lot of our country. The people will be oppressed as usual and only the identity of the tormenter will be changed. We do not want such nominal change by any free and fair election where we have to choose one oppressor from many. The people of Bangladesh will not tolerate any carrot dangling before their nose as before. The commotions at Kansat and Shanir Akhra have already conveyed the message to our politicians.

So, no more tricks in the name of dialogue!

**Naomi & Robida, Dept of Law, DU**

## Introduce 'ethics'

Instead of retaining religion as a subject at the primary level, we can introduce a subject called 'Ethics' which should be based on humanity and morality. Besides there can be biographies of the great men.

Besides ethics, IT education and history should be compulsory so that in near future we can build a non-communal and literate nation, whose power will be knowledge.

**Sujan Ghosh, Khulna University**

## KEPZ

Has anyone noticed a curious fact, how two EPZs of this country now go by the same abbreviation, i.e. KEPZ? One is the Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone under the government and the other is Korean EPZ in "private" (or non-government) sector.

In this age when shortened forms are in rampant use, something should be done to differentiate between the two in all respects (mailing address, etc.), so that all concerned can be sure which one is being referred to.

**CNR, Chittagong**

## Struggle for freedom

The struggle for liberation was not only a struggle for the independence of people, but also a struggle for society having freedom, equality, tolerance, justice and democracy. The dream was to have a land blessed with diverse communities of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. There must be no profane contempt towards any religion and one must have the absolute freedom to practice one's own religion without discrimination. Such a society is defined as a secular, tolerant society.

Secularism is the founding principle of our nation and when Bangladesh's constitution was first drawn up it stated secularism as the fundamental principle of the republic. But as Bangladesh lost democracy and plunged into a dark age of military autocracy and dictatorship, secularism was banished from the constitution. General Ershad amended the constitution and

introduced Islam as the state religion. Yes, Islam is the religion of the majority but the state is accountable not only to Muslims but to all Bangladeshis including Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. After the restoration of democracy, successive elected governments have failed to restore secularism as the spirit of the Bangladesh constitution. This expulsion of secularism has given rise to religion-based politics and Islamic fanaticism. A section of the political elite has nurtured these lunatics who are today at the helm of power in Bangladesh. They do not reflect the true face Islam, which is compassionate, charitable and benevolent. Some are even war criminals who collaborated with the occupation forces in 1971.

It is my firm belief that in order for Bangladesh to progress as a mature democracy, it is compulsory for secularism to be reinstated into the Bangladesh constitution. It is essential for bringing equality and freedom to each individual citizen of Bangladesh.

**Md. Umran Bin Kamran Chowdhury, Scholastica Gulshan 2, Dhaka**

## BTTB land phone

Two months ago my Digital BTTB land phone was out of order for a few weeks. I went to BTTB many times for reviving my dead phone. But nobody helped me. Finally I paid Tk.200 to a BTTB employee to repair my phone. After that my phone became all right!

Last month, my mother's BTTB digital land phone was out of order. The phone was out of order for a month. I lodged complaints with the BTTB. But nobody came to help us. At last we paid Tk.500 to the line-man and the phone became all right again.

High officials of BTTB are claiming that they are doing a good job for improving their services. It's really funny, because nothing works until some payment is made!

**Naimul, On e-mail**



## Status of women

The situation of women in extremely patriarchal societies is marginalized at all levels of social existence; women are underrepresented in parliaments they are almost non-existent in the decision-making bodies; they make for the majority of the unemployed, they are paid less for the same amount of work and do not have equal opportunities to advance in their work. The mechanism for developing the concept of equality, even if it exists, is not functional.

Violence against women, one of the key problems that should be confronted by every society in a more serious and efficient way, is strongly present in our country. Women become victims of violence regardless of their age; mostly their intimate partners or persons known to them in their own homes assault them. They are victims of all forms of violence, but this violence is most often manifested as physical and sexual violence—they are murdered, assaulted, tortured, raped.

We hope that the authorities would sincerely deal with violence against women, and raise public awareness in order to put an end to such violence.

**Syed Nazmul Alam Gulshan-2, Dhaka**

## Justice Hasan's option

The anticipated appointment of Justice Hasan as the Chief Advisor of the caretaker government has emerged as the main contentious issue in the talks between the two leading political parties. While the appointment follows the letter of the Constitution, it does not fulfil the spirit and substance of the requirement. The presumption as well as the expectation was that the immediate retiring Chief Justice would be a neutral person and be acceptable to contending political parties as well as to the people for running the caretaker government with the sole purpose of conducting a free and fair election within three months. Justice Hasan does not fulfil this presumption and expectation as he was officially involved in a senior and responsible capacity in the BNP, the current ruling party.

His defenders including the Law Minister argued that Justice Hasan displayed impartial performance in his judicial career and there is no reason to believe that he will not be able to do the same in performing his functions as the Chief Advisor.

Two serious flaws appear in this defence. One is the factual reality that Justice Hasan can never satisfy the spirit and substance behind the constitutional requirement, based on his past association with the BNP, that he is a neutral person, at least by appearance. Second, that despite not being a neutral person he can discharge his duties impartially as Chief Advisor is a mere hope and expectation which may not be a sufficiently reliable basis for his acceptance by the opposition which has threatened to initiate a mass movement the day he accepts the job. It also needs to be noted that the context, considerations and challenges involved in judicial decision-making are far different from decision making in governing a country in a complex and volatile election time.

Justice Hasan needs to review the situation carefully taking his personal needs and the interests of the nation. He is fully aware of the judicial criteria of impartial behaviour, both in substance and in appearance. It is unfortunate for him that his past is standing in the way of serving his nation at a critical moment. But we all have to live with our past. The present government should have thought that Justice Hasan would have difficulty in fulfilling the spirit and substance of the constitutional requirement and could possibly have avoided such embarrassment for him as well as for the nation.

The practical problem that will emerge is how he will be able to run the government when the opposition parties with at least over 40 percent popular support (based on last elections) do not cooperate with him in doing his job. Besides, a perception of the cloud of partiality will always colour the assessment of his actions by the political parties and people. Because of being conscious of such perception, he himself may face real difficulty in taking balanced and correct decisions in the interest of free and fair elections.

For all these reasons and non acceptance of his selection and possible violent non-cooperation by opposition parties, the honourable thing for Justice Hasan to do is to decline the offer to become Chief Advisor and preserve his dignity.

**Dr. A. T. Rafiqur Rahman Professor City University of New York, USA**

## Rights of sex workers

Rights of sex workers have always been a very sensitive issue in our society.

I believe, a more humanitarian attitude is needed to deal with it. Judging propriety of their occupa-

tion may lead to a debate; however it is undeniable that violation of their human rights is something we all need to be concerned about. They are deprived of the basic human right of being treated as humans! On the contrary, they are branded as 'public menace', 'root of moral degradation', and 'sinners' and have been isolated from the mainstream. Human rights organisations seem hesitant to advocate that their fundamental rights be fulfilled. Radical women organisations do not bring any good as they remain busy doubting the legitimacy of the job.

The government's role can be questioned too. Even though the ill-fated women and teenage girls are forced to join this profession to have a livelihood (and not for meeting physical demand like their clients), they find it hard to get any support from the government. Our superstitious approach doesn't help overcome the problem.

I think this is high time we evaluated this matter with unbiased rationality.

**Aubhishek Xaman Boro Maghbar, Dhaka**

## A suggestion

Unfortunately, we Bangladeshis are leaving in a society where political crisis is part of everyday life.

Here, the discrepancy between the poor and the rich will remain sky high for the next 100 years, and the middle class people will be sandwiched between them. Five years is a pretty long time for the opposition parties to wait for their turn to be in power.

There is a solution to this problem. Instead of five years, let's make it two years (as in Japan). Overall, peace and development can be achieved, as the opposition won't have to wait for a long time to be in power.

**W. Islam, Uttara, Dhaka**

## For a better social order

I must say that I could not agree more with Mr. Habibur Haque Khondker (October 8) when he talks about people hiding behind the veil of an exaggerated piety and calls it escapism which may guarantee personal salvation but would not help resolve the crises of our times. I consider both practises to be extremely selfish, but alas, none of us know quite what needs to be done. But at least we can try to reach out, through words and deeds, to those who commit the worst atrocities and to those who suffer the most, with the same message and mission: 'Live and let live' rather than either ignoring it or leaving it for greater powers to deal with. All of us have a chance to shape this world, and if I might add, perhaps manifest the will of the greater powers. Why relinquish it so vainly?"

**Areader, On e-mail**

## Thoughts of new voters

I have gone through the much erudite pre-election arithmetic, explained by a respected citizen, Nazim Kamran Choudhury. With his logical insight and dexterous analysing power, he unveiled some truths before our eyes. His didactic column really charmed me and I think I should focus on some other crucial points which can be seen glowing in the next election.

It is well known that an influential number of new voters, especially teenagers have registered themselves to vote in the next poll. These youngsters possess some brand new ideas and outlooks about our nation, election process and eligible candidates which may vary from the old voters. This is the generation, who did not observe the liberation war nor did they witness BAKSAL. The information about these historical incidents may seem hazy to them as there are lots of controversies in the history and text-books. Change of

government changes the history, this is the common trend in our country for a long time. Being a 18-year-old voter, who will vote in this election for the first time in life in 2007, I am very much concerned about the whole thing and have tried to have thoughts from my fellow age-mates.

What I found after talking with hundreds of new voters is that, this new generation won't work as the vote bank for any side. They are a bit confused about what happened in the past and that is why they will vote for those who tried to make the country a prosperous one. Although, most of the new voters did not watch the liberation war, they have meticulously scrutinised the period 1995-2006 when both the BNP and the Awami League came up as the ruling party. What the new voters think is that none of the major political parties became successful to rule the country in proper way which could lead the country to the path of welfare and prosperity.

We are looking forward to some positive changes in politics.

**Shoaib M. Siddiqui Elephant Road, Dhaka**

## Holding up development

What has the world gained in the last 35 years? It gained more knowledge about space, wireless communications, life saving technologies, life-easing technologies; in short, more knowledge about science and technology! It's just sad that our country could never contribute to that matter anyhow. Some people may say that "this official" at the NASA is a Bangladeshi, I would say there is nothing to be proud of, since that man is not working for our

country anyway, and being a Bangladeshi or American does not make a difference at all. The problem lies within our nation, a nation ill governed by smart politicians who work for their own benefits. What our politicians could never understand or are avoiding is the fact that the foundation of a healthy and wealthy nation is education. Of course, the title smart was not meant to be humorous, but comes from the fact that they are actually able to make a fool out of more than 150 million people of our country.

In the last two decades, more than 50 private universities grew up like mushrooms in different parts of the capital. More surprisingly, each and every one of them was accredited.

It is somehow difficult to understand the concept of a university under a small roof, without any kind of extra curricular activities, and lacking qualified faculties. Universities offering education in the field of science and technology do not even have proper laboratory facilities to train the students practically for future references. Yet, we "MUST" understand that private universities in Bangladesh are non-profit organisations. However, state owned universities had fairly displayed their potential by providing proper facilities, but still are a dream for many students for their highly competitive admission policies. We have to understand that more than 90 percent of the population cannot afford private education. I am not trying to say that the universities should not take in students in accordance with their results, but not every student can be good in maths, and that does not mean he does not or cannot study science.

The government should run

colleges under the universities' supervision with a ranking system, with high to low-level competitiveness to ensure education for everyone. Preparatory courses under their supervision can provide a second chance for millions. Moreover, the government should not encourage private universities to build up facilities for their students, but order them to do so. Primary education in Bangladesh is very cheap and almost everyone can afford it, still we see children roaming around on the streets begging or trying to sell flowers or candies during school time. However, it's only because we have never put the law of "compulsory primary education" to practice.

We call our country "The most beautiful green place on earth", but did we ever encourage the world to come and see the beauty we own? For many years we have been fighting domestic terrorism, which is probably not at all significant when compared to corruption within the government. There is no thin line between the two problems, the line is perhaps really wide and corruption cannot be easily dealt with but terrorism can be.

The day the nation will actually start to see some development is the day when we will choose right leaders for our country.

**Moin Eusof, On e-mail**

## Facts about HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is a public health issue as well as human rights issue. AIDS is caused by HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

HIV kills the T-helper cells, which are part of the body's immune system that can fight off invasions from infection and disease. When the number of T-helper cells is reduced, the body becomes less able to fight infection and disease. It transmits from one to another. It affects individual lives as well as groups. So, HIV is a real threat to society.

HIV infection is a global problem. We are all at risk of HIV infection. Most HIV infections are contracted through unprotected sexual intercourse. However, HIV infection can be prevented. Giving up risky habits is the most effective approach to controlling the HIV epidemic. It is not possible to 'tell' if someone has HIV or an STD just by looking at them. HIV is found in all the continents. There is no 'safe' place where

HIV is not present. AIDS is the later stage of infection caused by the virus HIV. An HIV positive person can look and feel healthy for many years before signs of AIDS appear. Most HIV positive persons require life long treatment as there is no known cure. There is no vaccine to protect against HIV infection.

HIV and STDs can have serious long-term consequences for both men and women. The presence of an untreated STD facilitates the transmission of HIV. Drinking alcohol or taking harmful drugs affects judgment and behaviour, putting a person at greater risk of HIV infection. Being tattooed or body-pierced with un-sterile needles can result in infection with HIV and other STDs.

HIV can be prevented by practicing 'safe sex' in a responsible and disciplined manner.

**Khan Ferdousour Rahman, London, UK**



## Killings of Palestinians

It seems the killings in Palestine would continue unabated even when the Israeli forces stop their air strikes. The Palestinian forces have killed the protesters who took to streets demanding immediate payment of their pending wages and salaries. The salaries have not been paid for months consecutively, owing

to the bankruptcy of the Hamas government facing a financial crunch because of Israel's war with the Palestinians. The people are in distress because of the sanctions imposed on Palestine by the UNSC-5 effectively led by the USA.

The UN must forthwith pay the full salary from its resources to the striking

people and take steps to lift the dirty sanctions altogether because such sanctions only cripple the small economies.

The sanction regime must be ended just as the UNSC-5 must be wound up for good.

**Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal Jawaharal Nehru University New Delhi**

