

# Serving humanity should be our guiding principle

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## Zahir Ahmed

I would like to differ with the speaker who spoke before me and said that BNP was not thinking about the Peace Accord. The handing over of the Administration at the division levels to the various Zilla Parishads is a proof of BNP's concern for implementation of the Accord. Thousands of problems do exist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I have seen that in the Nagorik's list of aspirations mention has been made of ensuring equal rights for the people of the region. To this I wish to add that this should be proportionate to the total population of the region. The president of today's discussion session is the former Chairman Rangamati Zilla Parishad who I voted for with the objective of establishing peace. Whereas the Peace Accord states no Bengali could be a candidate. Recently I visited Indonesia where similar problems exist in the province of Kalimantan whose Governor happens to be a Christian, whereas the Vice Governor and the Deputy Governor are Muslims. I would, therefore, suggest that similar posts be introduced here, too, and opportunities be created for the Bengalis to speak also. So long as this opportunity is not made available I do not think that there can be any solution to the existing problems.

## Dilip Deb

Today the country is administered on the prescription of the World Bank and IMF. The US Ambassador and the High Commissioner of India tell us how to conduct our election. I do not think there is any need for it, it is our election and we should conduct it ourselves. I would like to ask whether our MPs have ever stood up on the floor of the Parliament and asked for constitutional recognition of the tribal people? For all round development there has to be a development of the socio-economic infrastructure. The Zilla Parishads have to be activated. Everybody has to come forward whether he is a Bangali or a Pahari.

## Maulana Muhammad Shahjahan

In order to bring peace in Bangladesh we have to make the two leaders sit together. I believe it is true even in the case of the Hill Tracts. There is no alternative to voter ID cards for a successful election. There are many institutions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts like the Regional Parishad, the Zilla Parishad, the Municipality and the district administration but, unfortunately, there is no coordination amongst these agencies. Coordination has to be geared up.

## Shuresh Kumar Chakma

The oldest institution in Bangladesh is the Union Parishad, whereas during the various regimes, through entanglement in various bureaucratic complications, this has been totally ruined. The Union Parishads and the local administrative systems have to be revived and empowered. The voter list should be prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Accord. The Adivasis have to be given constitutional recognition. There has to be a separate ministry for the Adivasis.

## Firoz Al-Mahmud

There can be no proper election if the Election Commission is not in order. It is really painful to hear the kind of language used on the floor of the Parliament. I therefore feel that it is not enough to elect honest candidates only, but a healthy environment inside the Parliament has to be there also.

## Saktipada Tripura

I wish to emphasize that alongside inclusion of "withdrawal of Operation Ustoron" the implementation of the Hill Tracts Accord should also be added to point no: 3 of the Nagorik's list of aspirations. My proposal with regard to the rights to land for the Tribal people is that arrangements also have to be made for exposure and spread of the language and culture of the indigenous people. The Nagorik Committee has to play a firm role so that the Rohingas are not listed as voters. The forceful occupation of land in the Hill Tracts, with the assistance of the members of the armed forces, has to be stopped.

## Raja Debashish Roy

Doing good deeds for those who are deprived of state sponsored benefits of the society is neither unconstitutional nor against the principles of basic rights. The representatives of the Chittagong Hill Tracts all along have played the role of back benchers in the Parliament. Therefore, if we are unable to establish democracy in the real sense of the term we shall not be able to change the situation. First, just because you are Adivasis it is not necessary that you have to live there for thousands of years, and the rest will ride on their rights, such is not the case. It is neither in the Constitution of Bangladesh, nor in the International Human Rights. Second, human rights does not necessarily mean that all of us will behave the same way. On the contrary, it means that even if we differ in the way we behave each of us shall enjoy equal rights. There are different tribes and groups of people who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts; they too have their rights. This should not be confused with communalism. Sometimes we come across leaders who have a tendency to give a twisted meaning to this. If any group of people are deprived of their rights, and they are given that right through enactment of a special law it cannot be against the concept of equal rights.

Here I would like to join the group of mobile phone owners. Mobile phones should be introduced here. We could begin with the army headquarters with the initial capacity ranging between 3 and 5 kilometers. Not all bad people will use mobile phones, there will be good people too. I wish to say two things in relation to the Hill Tracts. Proper arrangements should be made for rehabilitation of the internally displaced people of the region. In respect of voting centers, they should not be selected on the basis of population alone, consideration should also be given to the geographical aspect in selecting a location. The Sajek Union in this area is larger than many of the districts. The neutrality of the security personnel and government officials have to be ensured. The process has to commence right from now, and not just on the day of voting. Those who have not been enlisted in the voter list have to be assisted by the Nagorik Committee and the political parties for their inclusion. Conducting a proper election in this region is a big challenge for us. I am in full agreement with you with regard to electing honest and wise people.

## Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya

Wherever we have gone we have discussed the issue of competent candidates. However, no extensive discussions of the kind took place with regard to the voter list. However, I have all along felt that with regard to preparation of the voter list for the Chittagong Hill Tracts we have to take special care compared to any other area. From here onwards I am also joining the mobile camp along with Raja Debashish Roy. I also demand that the mobile network be introduced in the

region before the forthcoming election.

## Ching Kew Roaza

I would like to say two things here. The inscription on the banner here reads: Civil Society's Initiative for Accountable Development. To me accountability means, first to say something then act upon what has been said, and finally lay open the results. I believe I belong to the entire world, all the people are my relations; serving humanity is my only religion. This should be the guiding spirit in every sphere of our lives.

## Jatindra Bodhipriya Larma

Whatever we may say, it is perhaps natural to allow us the environment needed to discuss things with an open mind, particularly here where Martial Law is still in force. As a matter of fact, not only in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, such an environment persists all over the country. Today, people's lives have become unbearable due to terrorism, corruption and all forms of dictatorial acts.

The dream we talk about, the aspirations we have about development; is it really possible to achieve those in the prevailing social systems? The world we live in is called the developing world that is influenced by the thinking of socialists, neo-capitalists people belonging to the middle class. Therefore, can we really expect good governance and development living in this environment?

Politicization is the ultimate reflection of our election. In election what is important is not the competency of a candidate, instead what is of consequence is the party. Whichever party comes to power will form the government. During the past 35 years only a few parties have influenced the lives of the people of this country, but we have not seen any real development initiatives undertaken by the major parties. The real objective seems to be holding onto power by any means. I am yet to come across any real effort on their part to protect people's basic Human Rights. The rate of literacy being low in this land of 14 crores is the reason that parties get the preference; as a result no role of the lawmakers in building a democratic, non-communal society is visible. As a result terrorism, corruption and strife continue to violate the basic human rights of the people.

There can be real development of the people by eradicating oppression from the society. Admittedly, however, we cannot have such a society overnight. Today there is no peace in the minds of either the majority or the minorities of the society. The scenario with the poorer section of the people and the Adivasis is even worse. In order to come out of this state of affairs people with conscience have to come forward. The various deliberations made at this forum have revealed the fact that there are considerable gaps in our thinking. In order to stop the have-nots from being suppressed by the rich we have to bring about a revolutionary change and close the gaps in our thinking, or else how can we build a beautiful country? People who contest elections in the country belong to the upper and the rich class of the population. The poor, and those belonging to the labor class, are not able to contest in the election. Against this background how should we view the election 2007? Is it divided into two mainstream or otherwise? I would like to place this question to the members of the present forum. I believe that no development in the society if can be achieved if the rich are involved in politics. I wish to emphasize that if we want to improve upon the quality of our lives through the

outcome of the election 2007 then there should be no politicking. We may not get such a government, but we should continue with our lofty efforts.

Here, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts the Bengalis of the area are caught in the web of terrorism by the Military. I do not know if anyone else in Bangladesh lives under such fear and uncertainty. Here, I have a few friends like Matiur Rahman, Dr. Debapriya and Prof. Jamal Nazrul Islam, who understand our predicament fully, whereas, I have talked to thousands others who are not even acquainted with the cruel realities that exist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The very government that signed the Accord with us has betrayed us. This government had three years and eight months of its tenure still left, and I believe given the will and sincerity it was possible to implement the Accord in full. But I believe this is beyond the culture of the major parties. The realities I am facing after being the Chairman of the Regional Parishad are rather fearful. I cannot imagine how a fair election can be held here? Under such circumstances, how the spirit of the Accord can be upheld? Through implementation of the Accord we wish to preserve the conscience of the nation, the rights to our land and our culture. We want to have a democratic Administration through which we are able to utilize the resources of the region for the benefit for the country.

## Gautam Dewan

Through the lively and worthwhile discussions that took place here today it has been established that living in this Chittagong Hill Tracts we all are cut off from the mainstream population of the country. We first voted in 1945, and then in 1960, in the election of the local governments. Prior to this we had no voting rights. Against this backdrop we are proud to be a part of this discussion today. It was good to see that many diverse proposals were made, and at the same time doubts were expressed as to whether the politicians would listen to their voices. Sometime back Prof. Zafar Iqbal, at the dialogue held in Sylhet, had said that if any demands are to be achieved, then you have to explain to the people and keep them informed, therefore it is important to build public opinion. The political parties are a part of us, and there is no attempt whatsoever to undermine them, or make them our competitors any way through this dialogue. We may not reap immediate benefits out of this dialogue, but it is not going to go in vain. It is, indeed, our duty to look for honest people. I thank the sponsors and all those who participated.

## List of participants

1. Gautam Dewan - (President), Former Chairman, Rangamati Pourashava and President, Forest & Land Preservation Movement
2. Motiur Rahman -- Editor, Prothom Alo
3. Habibur Rahman Habib -- Chairman, Rangamati Pourashava.
4. Kazi Nazrul Islam -- President, Rangamati CCI
5. Alo Rani Aich -- Former Vice-Principal, Rangamati Government College
6. Sunil Kanti Dey -- President, Rangamati Press Club
7. Rocky Chakma -- General Secretary, Red Crescent Society, Rangamati
8. Dulal Kanti Sarkar -- Lawyer
9. Priyadarshi Chakma -- General Secretary, Central Committee, Hill Student's Council
10. Mamunur Rashid Mamun -- President, Rangamati Chhatra Dal
11. Binota Moy Dhamai -- Joint General Secretary, Bangladesh Adivashi Forum
12. Laksmi Prashad Chakma -- Joint President, PCJSS
13. Mahub Alam Chowdhury -- Commander, Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Rangamati
14. Najia Afreen -- Jonipop
15. Jamal Nazrul Islam -- Professor Emeritus, Mathematics and Infrastructural Science Research Centre, Chittagong University.
16. Monishwapan Dewan -- Deputy Minister, Ministry of CHT Affairs
17. Shikumar Dewan -- Secretary, Tribal Social Forum
18. Sagrika Roaza -- Chairperson, Supra
19. Hangshadhaj Chakma -- President, Khagrachhari Nagorik Committee
20. Shantoshito Chakma -- Secretary, Jumma Refugee Welfare Committee
21. Shudatta Bikash Tanchanga -- Social Worker
22. Shishir Chakma -- Educationist and Cultural Activist
23. Zahir Ahmed -- General Secretary, BNP, Rangamati
24. Dilip Deb -- General Secretary, Bangladesh Communist Party, Rangamati
25. Maulana Mohammad Shajahan -- Vice Chairman, Central Committee, Jatiya Party
26. Fazle Elahi -- Executive Director, Global Village, Rangamati
27. Shaktiman Chakma -- Lawyer
28. Dr. Kanishka Chakma -- Physician
29. Bimal Kanti Saha -- Former Assistant Headmaster, Rangamati Government High School
30. Shuresh Kumar Chakma -- President, Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum
31. Firoz Al Mahmud -- Commissioner, Rangamati Pourashava
32. Shaktipada Tripura -- Chairman, Khagrachhari District Headmen Association
33. Aung Shaw Prue Choudhury -- Chairman, No. 1 Betunia UP
34. Lalit C Chakma -- Secretary, Supra, Rangamati
35. Raja Debashish Roy -- Chakma Raja and Member Nagorik Committee
36. Gautam Kumar Chakma -- Member, Rangamati Regional Council
37. Syed Mahabub Ahmad -- Journalist
38. Sushil Prashad Chakma -- District Representative, The Daily Jugantor
39. Md. Mustafa Kamal -- Executive Director, Centre for Hill Information Development and Resources
40. Sakhawat Hussain -- District Representative, The Daily Purbokon
41. Biplob Chakma -- Joint President, Supra, Rangamati
42. Mohammad Akhteruzzaman -- Secretary, Bandhu Shava, Rangamati
43. Manosh Kumar Chakma -- Member, Jhum Aesthetics Council
44. Mohammed Ali -- Executive Director, Shinning Hill, Rangamati
45. Ghasuddin Khokon -- Entrepreneur
46. Jahangir Alam Munna -- General Secretary, FEMA, Rangamati
47. Mokhtar Ahmed -- Lawyer
48. Shupal Chakma -- Lawyer
49. Nurul Afsar -- Assistant Scouts Commissioner, Bangladesh Scouts, Rangamati
50. Chingkew Roaza -- Politician and of Chairman, Rangamati Zilla Parishad
51. Mathura Lal Chakma -- Member, Advisory Council JSS
52. Noor Mohammad -- Teacher
53. Advocate Jewel Dewan -- Coordinator, BLAST
54. Nanda Kishore Chakma -- Programme Coordinator, Social Advancement Society
55. Chirojyoti Chakma -- Ex Municipal Commissioner
56. Shimul Chakma -- Development Worker
57. Jamaluddin -- Journalist
58. Md. Omar Faruk -- President, HSDO
59. Jyotindra Bodhipriya Chakma -- President, CHT Regional Council

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