

# Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development

A Regional Dialogue on: "National Election: 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development," was held in Khulna on 22 July, 2006 under the joint sponsorship of CPD, The 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 discussions. The names and identities of the participants are published below. Due to constraint of space we are not able to publish the comments of all the participants. -- Editor



**Debapriya Bhattacharya**  
What would be the future of Bangladesh. Bangladesh does not have any mid-term plan to implement the concepts of future development. There is a revolving three-year plan. It is called PRSP. But it is a three-year plan. We think if a nation does not have a mid-term plan than it would not feel encouraged to go forward with a long-term plan. But now the big question is, who would implement this plan. It became obvious that those who will go to parliament after the national election will be the main architects of the plan. But if the architects are not skilled, competent and honest than our plan will be of no use. This brought forth the issue of electing honest and competent candidates.

We have said this before a number of times, and we shall say it again the problems of Bangladesh will have to be solved by the Bangladeshis. If the people of this country cannot understand and analyse the problems of the country and come up with solutions then it cannot be expected that people from other countries will come and do the same for us. We feel the people of this country will have to talk initiatives to solve the political and other problems. I want to make it clear here this organisation in no way is associated with the foreign donors. To maintain transparency we haven't taken any money from anyone. We are meeting the expenses of these meetings from the funds of CPD. We are happy that Prothom Alo and The Daily Star are giving input and Channel i broadcasting the entire programme. Prothom Alo and The Daily Star are publishing the reports totally with their own finance, on their own initiative and from their own social commitment. In our country a great deal of suspicion remains associated with money and power. People do not trust each other. I want to tell you this quite clearly.

Many people asked whether this would end here. You are doing it before the elections and afterwards you would stop everything. I give a simple answer. If we had taken this initiative one year before you would have said that there is no news of election but you want to discuss the issue. That means you want a mid-term election, don't you? So, that would have created some confusion. That's why we have come here now. Here are members of parliament leaders listen to us before the elections. This is the season of listening. We want make the best use of this season. We want to tell you that on the basis of the talks held on last two days we have submitted a 37-point letter to the prime minister and the leader of the opposition. We have also given a copy to you all. We want to give it to them as citizens' wish. Because wherever we have gone people have said you do not need to make us understand anything. Go back to Dhaka and try to make the two leaders understand. If you can then make the two leaders sit together.

We do not have the audacity to ask the two leaders to sit together. We want to place before them the desire of the people and the civil society. Civil society members are not only in Dhaka, they are everywhere. You are apart of that society.

**Matiur Rahman**  
This discussion organised by CPD, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star is about the civil society members. We have been doing such discussion meetings or opinion sharing meetings for the last four months. We had organised similar programmes in 2001 and 2002 and we had named it round table meeting. This time it is not a round table or a seminar. This time it is being organised in a bigger setting where we want to hear your opinions and prepare a set of recommendations. All these are being said by the political parties and include in their manifesto. But the reality is they do not abide by them. Before and after the 1990 revolution, the demand for making radio and television autonomous was quite strong but no one talks about it now. We have become used to such a system. You know that judiciary was supposed to be separated from the executive. Both the major parties talk about it but do not materialise it. It was supposed to be done during the tenure of the last caretaker government and it had taken some steps. But those who came to power after the elections had told them not to do anything because they would complete the work after coming to power. Today, five years have almost passed but the government could not separate judiciary from the executive yet. Such incongruity in talks and work, in manifesto and implementation, is only making us more frustrated. We want to form public opinion to create pressure on the political parties. We have said this before and we want to say it again that we have no political ambition. We have no special agenda. We want welfare of the people; we want welfare of the country. We want to see that people's rights have been established. Whatever some may say...we have no secret agenda or interest in it. What we want from the politicians is they should listen to the people. This is the purpose of this initiative this discussion and publicity. Politicians, please implement what you say. We do not want to see that you will promise something, put it in your manifestation, but you will not implement it. We want the politicians to live in peace, and we hope they would also help people live in peace.

**Sheikh Ashraf-uz-Zaman**  
Though we are living in an age of information technology, yet all sorts of problems are being created regarding the voter list. My specific recommendation is, birth and death will have to be registered. In this regard, law has to be enforced like a military government. Registration has

to be done within one hour of birth or death. According to that one will become a voter after attaining the age of 18. Everything cannot be done in all the areas. Every area does not contain all the potentials. For the last 34 years we have observed that there are many potentials in many areas of Bangladesh. Some of them are more than regional potential. When a new government comes to power it often allocates money from a productive sector to some unproductive sector. For this reason a bill has to be passed in parliament so that we may file a suit if someone entertains such activities.

**Anwarul Kadir**  
Two things are being discussed here. One is reform of the electoral process or political process and the other is preparation of mid-term plan.

Regarding the first issue all the people of Bangladesh have reached a consensus that the chief election commissioner and his two deputies should resign. I believe that caretaker government system is a bad example in our politics. Regarding mid-term plan, I would like to draw your attention to the preparation of the national budget. In preparing the national budget, importance should be given to regional issues. We want to see a separate parliament for all the citizens of the country so that we may build an economically strong Bangladesh.

**Mohammad Hafizur Rahman**  
Alongside honest and competent candidates, we should also look for honest and competent voters. Because if there are no honest and competent voters then their representatives will also lack honesty and competence. I want to ask one question to all. Can we implement secularism keeping state religion Islam in its place?

The second one is, separating judiciary from the executive. This issue is on hold for a very long time. Had this been done, we would not have suffered so long. Courts could have been given solution to many of our problems. But lower courts are under direct control of the government.

**MM Mujibur Rahman**  
Election Commission secretary has said that there was instruction from the law ministry to overlook the high court ruling on preparation of voter list. How could this have been done when there was clear order from the court? The civil society has to protest about this issue. The bench that had given the order to EC to follow the old list, its power has been taken away within

### Recommendations from the dialogue (in brief)

- If according to Article 70 of the constitution it is prohibitive for MPs to cross floor, then it should also be prohibitive for independent MPs to join any political party.
- Through amendment of Rules of Business, instead of the secretary, the elected minister should be made the head of administration.
- For the implementation of national policies, regional Nagorik Parliament (Citizen's Parliament) has to be formed to collect people's opinion.
- Political parties should be encouraged to give nomination to women in fifty percent of the seats.
- The ongoing civil society movement has to be given a permanent and institutional form.
- To make parliament only a place for lawmakers to make laws and policies, leave all developmental works to the local governments instead of the MPs.
- To maintain neutrality, both the speaker and deputy speaker have to resign from their respective parties.
- No matter which party they belong to, local MPs must work together.
- People should have the right to bring no-confidence proposal against an MP who fails to perform.
- People should be made aware of their constitutional rights.
- MPs will not have the right to place any bill suggesting increase of their salary and other benefits instead of doing the same for the other professional groups.
- Some seats will have to be kept for giving nomination to the freedom fighters.
- To encourage real politicians instead of 'professional politicians' particulars of wealth have to be submitted before requesting for nomination.
- Direct election of women to reserved seats has to be introduced.
- President has to be elected by an 'Electoral College.'
- President must have the right to send any important bill directly to parliament for re-evaluation.
- President will give priority to the list prepared by the senior most three judges of the Supreme Court while appointing heads of any commission.
- The birth and death registration system has to be implemented strictly and voter database has to be updated according to the record.

three days. When a list of 900 false voters was asked to be submitted in the court its power was taken away within five days. The civil society has to be vocal about such regular interference in High Court's dispensation of justice.

**Rezaul Haque**  
This area has turned into a dead city. Once upon a time people used to make a living by selling and exporting jute. Now there is shrimp. But it is not free from conspiracy either. Since politics in our country is under the control of individual and party, proper development is being thwarted. Accountability in politics is the main key to economic development. The administration should be free of political pressure in order to ensure production and development. At the moment corruption has permeated every office in this country, but we have not seen any political party starting a movement against this evil. I believe that through the political platform this can be prevented.

**Rasu Akhter**  
There should be an explanation of 'equality of man and woman' in every sphere of our national life. Our parliament is going through an undemocratic process. That is why we do not see reflection of the power of half of the population. There is no clear position in many political parties about the equal rights of women. There is no specific initiative as to how women can get involved in politics. My suggestion is there should be a written clause in every political party's constitution regarding nomination of women as per male-female ratio. If election becomes free of black money, muscle power and loan defaulters then I feel many women would be elected on their merit basis.

**ASM Shahjahan**  
Questions are being asked about democracy. As far as caretaker government is concerned, I feel it would be better if this undemocratic system comes to an end. However, it may require some specific time frame. While talking about honest and competent candidates, the issue of honest and competent voters is coming up. I feel honesty; values and public interest are three words that are slowly vanishing in thin air. Voters' honesty is essential.

People should learn about honesty and values from their families and schools. If a police officer has to be given a posting somewhere then that should be done keeping public interest in view. Public interest is getting least priority everywhere, especially in education and administration. Greater responsibility will rest on the next caretaker government. On one hand, there is initiative from the civil society for development; on the other hand, there is uncertainty and crisis surrounding the coming elections in 2007. We have to talk about these. We notice that there is not enough practice of democracy in the big political parties. Democracy is not counting heads only. It does not also mean breaking of heads. But now we see it is more about cracking open heads. We do not want a democracy that is only dependent on elections. Democracy is not for a day, it is a long-term system.

**Sardar Motahar Uddin**  
Whatever party we may belong to; there is no practice of democracy in any party. In the big parties one may get nomination if one has money, one is blindly loyal to the leader and one must not speak the truth. Those of us who do politics at the grassroots level, we only agree on certain broader aspects. This has to end. Real politics is about the people. In my opinion, like the ACR system in office containing personal information and marking for promotion, political parties should also introduce a system of marking and grading.

**Mia Ataul Gani Badsha**  
For democratic practice in the party, leaders from the grassroots level should go to parliament and become ministers. Unless this system is introduced no one will feel comfortable in doing politics. Dynastic rule in politics has to be stopped. Practise democracy in party and discard dynastic politics. Do not nominate any anti-liberation person. There should be a quota in every party for freedom fighters and women.

**Advocate Feroze Ahmed**  
I want politics to be free of dynastic rule. Save our gas and oil from the clutches of multinational companies. Hospitals, public universities and banks should be saved from privatisation to save the nation. Those who will contest the next elections they should mention about discontinuing the deals signed with various multinational companies. Religion cannot be utilised to get vote. Our Liberation War is our greatest achievement. This achievement must not be used to divide the nation. This must be used to unite the nation. Those who love this land and believe in the spirit of our liberation, they will be honest and competent citizens. They should go to power. Not the owners of black money and killers of 1971.

**Kazi Sekander Ali**  
People remain in frustration regarding the coming elections. Because chief election commissioner and his two deputies have failed to carry out their responsibilities. People demand their resignation believing that they will not be able to hold a free and fair election. There has to be reforms of the caretaker government system and everyone including the civil society has to play a role to make the next elections free and fair. Everyone has to come forward to develop the country in the spirit of our Liberation War. Parties will have to implement the promises given in their manifesto and for this purpose a strong forum needs to be created from amongst the civil society. Civil society must not work for honest and competent candidates only, they will also monitor whether the government and the opposition are performing their duties properly.

**Rafiqul Haque Khokon**  
If we want to look for competent candidates to practise democracy, firstly we shall need democracy of partnership. That means everyone in society will have to be given the right to democracy of partnership. Only then we shall find honest and competent candidates. In the present elections, we see domination of black money, motorcycle and musclemen. In order to stop these, candidates will have to be selected on the basis of profession. Our elected representatives remain engaged in making money for themselves instead of making laws. That is why if candidates are selected on profession basis then he/she will talk about the people of various professions and talk about the nation as a whole. I think it would be beneficial if there were recall system in voting system. That means, the right to recall votes should also be guaranteed alongside the right to give vote. This would not help by blaming the politicians only. Dishonesty cannot be patronised in a political party. But it happens because of the existing system.

If we want to see something good done, then the existing system has to be changed. If required then the constitution has to be amended. Through this we shall get honest candidates and be able to uphold healthy democratic practices.

**Prof. Krishnapada Das**  
If we can find honest and competent candidates for local government elections and create mass awareness then we shall be able to reach our desired goal. Today, our discussion revolves around the political persons. But at the state level only politicians do not play a role, government officials and businessmen also have roles to play. We have seen that in the three months between the handing and taking over of two governments mostly government officials run the affairs of the country. Even during that period many immoral things happen. In the end I want to say that the system of ..... should be abolished.

**Nazrul Islam Manju**  
For any changes in the state level we have to go through the political parties. For that reason, pressure has to be created for implementation of recommendations that will come out of such dialogues. One thing worth

noting, whenever we fail we accuse the civil society. On the other hand, when politicians fail to perform and civil society points those out we get annoyed. We impose ban on them. I am a member of this Nagorik Shomaj. I am a politician and member of a political party. But I am also an individual, one of the people; I have my own opinion, a different opinion. I have fought against black money, against dishonest politicians. Now the conflict is between honest and dishonest politicians, like honest and dishonest businessmen. My opinion is we are not outside these two streams of politics or politicians. To return to healthy politics, politicians will have to work all over again.

How can election be transparent? It is not possible to conduct a strong election with a system. We need some changes here. The system has to be made stronger. At the same time the give and take of money has to be stopped once and for all. One must not be allowed to spend any money excepting printing one poster only. There should be a condition that no one will give any promises.

**Advocate Enayet Ali**  
No politician in last 35 years has made attempts to educate the people about the constitution. The reason is that no one knows that there is a constitution written in Bangla as well. Constitution has not been printed in last five years. There is no copy of the constitution in the market. Constitution has been kept hidden from the eye of the people. The first responsibility of the civil society would be to inform the people about their constitutional rights. If we do not about our constitution then it would not help organising civil society dialogue. I agree with the suggestions given here in yellow paper. If necessary, the recall system has to be introduced. In order to ensure accountability of the elected representatives, rules of business have to be remodeled. And all sorts of administrative activities have to be done on the basis of written orders of the representatives. This will be done by the representatives themselves and not by their secretaries or any staff. The election of the president should not be limited within the parliament members. It should be done through forming an electoral college with the participation of all the elected representatives in the country.

**Majeda Ali**  
Instead of running after money you should raise your children as good human beings. Unless they are properly raised, how shall we see the implementation of the dream of the civil society in 2021? We have walked on the wrong path since our liberation. It happened because of lack of right planning. These days everyone is running after money. This has to end somewhere.

There are numerous plans on paper but nothing in reality. If there were some, then the nation would not be where it is today. The jute mills would not have closed down. Where will all these unemployed people go? They are forced to go in the wrong direction. All these people will get lost in darkness and take the country that way with them.

**Gazi Shahidullah**  
The country has problems of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, health and environment. Because of these problems good governance could not be ensured in the country. To ensure good governance, accountability has to be ensured. There are eight pillars of democracy, such as, judiciary, anticorruption commission, election commission, government ombudsman, ombudsman, chief accountant general and controller, tax ombudsman. If these eight departments can be made independent then 80 per cent of the problems would be solved. In the Supreme Court, competent persons should be given appointment instead of persons selected by the government in power. Fresh appointments in the eight



departments should be given after making them independent. The senior two judges in the supreme judicial council will determine how many judges are required. They will make a list and send it to the president. President will discuss with the prime minister and law minister before giving approval. There will be no violation of this system. A rule of business has to be followed for giving such appointment for the next fifteen years. The prime minister may hold discussion with the leader of the opposition and five judges before giving appointment. If they cannot do it then it would be decided by majority vote. The election commission and chief election commissioner will have to abide by this system. If all appointments, excepting for judiciary and anticorruption commission, are given through consensus among the prime minister, opposition leader and supreme judicial council, then I believe there would be less complications.

If any MP remains absent for 90 days without prior permission of the speaker then his/her membership should be cancelled. This article of the constitution should be amended to reduce the days to 20 days.

**Mollah Saifur Rahman**  
We have seen that when every time voter list is prepared party members get their names included. But this list should be prepared irrespective of party affiliation. That is, anyone attaining 18 years of age will be included in voter list. When someone will die, his/her name will be taken out of the list. We have to take part in two elections. One is at local level and the other is at national level. Those who work at national level cannot be with the people in their respective constituencies all the time. But those of us, who are with the people all the time, comparatively enjoy very little facilities. In other words, greater cooperation less facilities and less cooperation greater facilities.

**Advocate Kudrat-e-Khuda**  
There is one difference between nagorik shomaj and political parties. Political parties want to hang on to power and nagorik shomaj wants to guide them in the right direction. They want democracy to be successful; they want peace and security in the country. After 35 years, civil society is speechless. The politicians they had trusted have become autocratic.

**Mohammad Golam Mostafa Sindani**  
Everyone has the right to have information. But we cannot find out information about those who get nomination in elections. There should be a law or rules to ensure the right to have information.

**Ponchanan Biswas**  
Instead of the kind of parliamentary democracy that was supposed to have taken root in this country, there is something else that we find unacceptable. And you all are trying to circumvent that situation.