

## Let more professionals participate in the process

DR MAHMED

**F**RUSTRATING political climate has dumfounded the conscientious citizens, particularly those who have changed their nationality three times in more than last five decades (i.e. British Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi). Many of my generation coming out of the greatest seats of learning at home and abroad and rendering their services to the development of humanity in both national and international arena cannot compromise with the behaviour of our politicians. I should better say politicians. Instead of the welfare of the masses, the politics has become one of the most lucrative professions to make quick money. A very common person with no known profession could become *crorepati* in couple of years in the country either as politician or goon of political godfathers. No where on earth exists a country like ours where a group of neo-rich have emerged so fast through corruption, intimidation, terrorism, nepotism, unabated plundering of national wealth and transferring them to so-called safe havens.

Every time one watches television or reads the newspapers finds statements of our political leaders in the name of people. Do they ever think who have given them the authority to speak on behalf of the masses? Do they

ever bother about the country or the masses after winning elections? They do not.

It is established fact that the number of poor people are increasing. Our international recognition as most corrupt country and one of the poorest nations does not bring fame or solace rather than shame to the informed and enlightened citizens at home and abroad. The corruption and intimidation has crept from the city to the village level. The people are not fools but they are afraid to speak out. They could remain naive for some time but not all the time as our politicians think. Country could not achieve an average growth of Asia and the Pacific in 2005 (The DS March 31, 2006, page 8). Then why is there so much fanfare of remarkable achievements? It is the conscious group of the civil society which has to take some initiative to save the country from further decadence. Otherwise we will be accountable to our future generations. The initiative of CPD, The DS and Prothom Alo, in association with some of the most enlightened and famous sons of the soil, is praiseworthy and timely before the election of 2007. It is the moral responsibility of the non-political group of our intelligentsia to come out of their isolation and speak out.

The Civil Society dialogue on March 20, 2006 floated a

Citizens Group consisting of 24 members drawn from all sections of the society. The convener of the Group is Professor Rehman Sobhan and secretary Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya. All the members are the most respected persons of the Civil Society. The people could expect a productive contribution from the Group to take initiative in steering the politics of the country in right direction. To check further mess in the country in future, it is going to prepare a mid-term development vision and launch a campaign for electing honest competent candidates in the next elections. Professor Yunus, an outstanding personality in the country, has proposed a 12-point formula that includes nominating symbolic candidates in the constituencies by the Group in the election 2007. Following the Dialogue reports and editorials appeared in DS and Prothom Alo mostly welcoming such initiative. Although one may not agree to all of the points of Prof. Yunus which is quite natural, they are constructive and thought-provoking. In one article direct participation of Prof. Yunus and Mr. Abed was suggested (Zafar Sobhan, The DS, March 24, 2006). Many may not like the idea of their becoming a party to the politics, but a representative of the civil society where they will participate in a more significant way. Mr. Mondol in his article "Cam-

paigning for clean candidates" (The DS, March 31, 2006) analysed the 12 point formula of Prof. Yunus and gave some suggestions. They deserve serious consideration. I am sure The DS call (May 31: Announcement) for further contribution will be responded by the Civil Society.

The Group is going to produce a vision paper. The conscious citizens of the country both at home and abroad will definitely be interested to read it and send their comments. Through internet the paper could be circulated. Those who are interested could be given a time limit to submit their comments/suggestion/recommendations. In fact in a website all the activities of the Group could be made available for the information of the people. The wider circulation will not only encourage wider participation of the citizens but also will achieve the objectives of the Citizens' Group in pressurizing the political parties to nominate clean candidates for a fair and credible election in 2007. A large portion of our professionals are silent. Let the Citizens Group invoke them and ensure their participation in the dialogue for a better Bangladesh in future, rather remaining spectators on sidelines.

Dr MAHMED is a former UN official

## A few good men

SHAWKAT HUSSAIN

**T**HE first thing that the members of the civil society ought to do, I think, is to get down from their SUVs (forgive me if you don't have one), and out of the air-conditioned comfort of Five Star Hotel, and spill out into the streets. It is time to get their hands dirty. Enough pontificating and posturing and platitudinising about 'The-Condition-in-Bangladesh' question! We all know what the problems are. Now, the civil society must become visible if it wants to make a difference. Witness how the civil society reacted in France recently to a hugely unpopular employment legislation. Hundreds of thousands of French citizenry poured into the streets of Paris and protested loudly and angrily against the legislation. These are not lumpen or hired

voters and demonstrators; my understanding is that these are conscious citizens spontaneously and self-consciously protesting measures that go against their interests. Can we do something similar? If we can, then there is a likelihood that the recently formed citizens' committee might make a difference. Bangladesh now has a sizable educated middle class. If even a fraction of this section of the populace can be seen on the streets, if teachers and lawyers and engineers and doctors and businessmen and NGO workers and all others who form part of this nebulous civil society make themselves both audible and visible, there is just a chance that the government might sit up and take notice. If the roundtable leaders can lead us into the streets all this talking might be

meaningful. You do not have to be a genius to understand that we need clean and competent leaders to lead the nation. Yet, the roundtable must be applauded a little for articulating this need forcefully and placing it before the readers of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo. However, you do have to be a genius to come up with a mechanism, given the nature of our political parties, that can ensure the nomination of such candidates. Dr Eunos, the mogul of micro-credit, has offered a formula by which good candidates may be selected and offered for nomination by the political parties. While I am still trying to figure out what this formula entails and whether it is workable at all, I have this to suggest: assuming that all the members of the new committee are

clean and competent, for starters they should offer themselves as candidates to parties of their choice, or be up for grabs by whichever party wants them. To show that I am not being facetious, I would like to offer myself as a candidate: I'm relatively clean, educated, I care about my country, and I speak Bangla and English fairly well -- the latter a little better than the former, just like the convener of the committee. However, I can wager that my cousin, less clean and less educated than me, but much much richer ( he can spend the one-crore that is necessary), will be given the nomination. Can any formula stop this from happening?

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## Let's not put the cart before the horse

CAPT HUSAIN IMAM

**T**HE civil society's initiative supported by CPD, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo for an accountable development process in the context of the upcoming national election is most welcome. Having said that I must also say that the way they want to achieve this goal, specially the way Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the architect of 'Clean Candidate Andolon' wants it, seems to me rather unrealistic. I personally believe that politics is not a cup of tea for the civil society. By saying so I do not mean the civil society have no say in the political matters of the country. They do have, but in a different perspective and certainly not by fielding a candidate of their own independently.

As we understand, the civil society's role is to raise voice against oppression, tyranny and injustice in the society, work as a pressure group to guard against wrong doings of the politicians and at the same time help them in carrying out development work of the country by giving their honest and constructive opinion and suggestion from their respective positions. They must not get themselves mixed up with politics, lest they lose their identity. Let the politicians do that job.

I also believe that politics is an art more complex than any other art, science or technology. For a person to be an elected member of parliament and for that matter a politician,

he should be first a politician, second a politician and then a businessman, a professional or an academician. Mere honesty and integrity is not enough for a true politician. He has to have a political vision, an ideology and patriotism and he must know the art of politics. More importantly, there has to be congenial political atmosphere and proper electoral process for a clean candidate to come out successful. Let us for arguments sake say that we have found a clean candidate with all the qualities of a good politician and have decided to field him as an independent candidate to contest against some unclean candidates of the mainstream political parties. Given

the present political scenario and the electoral process where money, muscle and vicious intrigue rule the roost, can he come out successful? The answer is a big NO.

Let me cite one or two examples. No body will deny that the veteran Awami League leader Matia Choudhury's honesty, integrity and her commitment to the people are legendary. Her performance as Agriculture Minister during the last Awami League rule was outstanding, to say the least. Yet she could not win in the last general election. Can any body question Dr. Kamal Hossain's honesty, integrity, sagacity and his contribution to the society? Yet, if I am not mistaken, he had

lost his earnest money (Jamanat) in one of the national elections, the reasons in both cases being, the entire election process was corrupt and faulty.

So, let us not put the cart before the horse. Before we look for clean candidates, let us put all our effort in helping the political parties, who are now in the process of engaging themselves in a dialogue for reform of the entire electoral process including the Caretaker Government, to reach a fruitful conclusion so that we can have a free, fair and credible election in the first instance.

## Few patriots among too many politicians

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

**G**OOD and a right move, although belated. The proposals made are certainly in the right direction, but to me it looks too utopian. Putting the burden of selecting honest and deserving candidates, in the present day context of confusion and disillusionment in the entire society, may turn out to be a tall order. On the other hand the entire proposal lacks details, besides any proposal to be workable should also have dealt with the longstanding flaws prevalent in the two major parties in the coming elections. In political terms one also has to remember that selecting and putting up honest and proficient

people alone will not ensure a reversal of the process. It is particularly difficult when you come to consider the decades of corrupt culture in the entire process of elections. Tagging the present day problems facing the country about accountable and credible process of national elections merely to selection of "right" candidates is perhaps oversimplifying the entire issue.

Creating a social movement as I have hinted above is bound to be a long drawn and difficult process taking the civil society into confidence particularly in its present state. There is no denying the fact that today much of our civil society stands divided; the

intellectuals, the various groups of professionals too are somehow tagged to one of the two major political parties.

At the backdrop of the above it is my conviction that the stress should be more in hitting out at the Administrative machinery as a whole, the office of the election commission etc, all agencies who are directly involved in the election process in an effort to making them more accountable. We should target our efforts to streamline the present system not just for this forthcoming election alone but also aim at creating a viable legacy for the future ones too. With malice towards none and charity for all let me also say this:

many of the key participants of the dialogue are not above suspicion in as far as their alleged affiliation to one of the two major political parties are concerned and hence the members of the civil society they are addressing may hesitate to respond one way or the other.

The problem with us is that we have too many politicians but few patriots.

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## It's the values and morality that matter

MD. SHAHIDUL ISLAM ZAHID

**D**EVELOPMENT is the integrated indicator of quality life. It does not mean merely increase in the GDP or increase in the single variable like quality education, or decrease in the level of poverty. Development must ensure the value of life. Accountable development will ensure the quality of life along with the improvement in the law and order situation which is the prime need for the success of democracy.

World had experienced so many 'isms' to run the affairs of state but democracy is the only proven way to the success of a state. As a young nation, we are yet to develop a democratic culture in our socio-economic and political arena. Democracy is the system where the oppressed can vow for their rights, can express their choice by exercising their voting rights and the humanity will not be on the backburner. There may be opinion after opinion, but the leaders of the state in politics, economy and society must tolerate the opinions of others. It is true that we are marching towards success of democracy, towards development. The last three general elections indicate that our political patience, culture and norms are developing.

Election is the system where the accountability of the political leaders is exercised. The mass people can come close to the leaders and vice versa. The national leaders promise the development programme along with their commitment to imple-

ment the same. Deceived section of people of the nation can take their revenge upon the fraud leadership. On the other hand, leaders find their way to the power only through the election. Election is the process where both have their interest. Another party that also to find interest is the rest of the world. The influential international forces always try to see their nominees in power to safeguard their interest. This is the malpractice of the world powers and gives no fruit to the victim nation. It is a matter of regret that our leaders are always busy to see the world powers smiling at them.

The success of the upcoming national election of 2007 also depends on the political motives of the international powers and national lobbies. Money plays a vital role in the elections and the main supplier of the 'election fund' is the 'businessmen-cum-politicians.' These businessmen-cum-politicians see the election as a profitable project for investment. Either they become candidate themselves or make someone their candidates. After the poll they implement their motives and throw out the commitment made to the nation to wind. They are certainly not 'clean candidates' for the election. Think tank of the political parties should be cautious about these selfish chameleons. Otherwise in the long run the country will face great problem. We should remember that, nation needs 'full time politicians' who will be visionary and either will create or support the ways to an accountable development process.

Political parties must nominate clean candidates who must be patriots.

Clean candidates/leaders are the integral part of development. But the question is, where they will be found? The answer is, they live among us, but are silent and fear the push in culture of others. They prefer to work independently. They are not ambitious for power but the development of whole nation. They do not consider election as the profitable project but the stage to give accounts to the nation. They know the nation but nation does not. Bad leaderships have driven out the clean leaders out of the election process. But for the sake of our national interest, we should find them out. We should provide them courage that we need them. The educated scholars should come forward to create mass awareness about the 'need for clean candidates.'

After all national development depends on national leaders. And the national leaders will come out through the general elections. If the political parties become able to nominate the clean candidates, then they must get the public support. Election will be free and fair and acceptable to everybody. Win or loss in the national election of any candidate will matter little as the nation will prosper ultimately.



MH BARI

**P**OLITICIANS as well as political parties particularly in advanced democratic countries generally try to outwit the opponents in their political campaigns. Situation in Bangladesh is totally different. Here we see political vendetta. During the last 35 years we never witnessed any real peaceful political environment. We find the negative traits of our political leaders, politicisation of bureaucracy, free utilisation of non-student cadres and trade unions for power politics and patronisation of loan defaulters. In such a pitiable situation it is really praiseworthy that an initiative has been taken by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Prothom Alo and The Daily Star inviting inputs from individuals from all walks of life to make our next national election meaningful.

I do not consider that this movement will be successful for electing clean candidates. We have observed that many clean candidates lost their election deposit in the past. Our people are not so much conscious about their rights as yet and they are mostly guided by the whims and caprices of their local leaders. It would be more practical if our civil society steps forward pressurising the alliance government to pass a bill in the parliament for making election fruitful considering the

following points so that the system itself would control us.

1. Registration of political parties with the Election Commission: Though provision for registration of political party with the Election Commission has been made under the Representation of the people (2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment) Order, 2001, registration has not been made compulsory. It is my considered opinion that for the sake of transparency and better electoral process registration of political parties with the election commission may be made compulsory.

2. Determination of cut off-point for public support: The aims and objectives of our major political parties are almost identical. This existence of so many parties is hardly justified. It is generally believed that so many parties only contribute to creation of confusion and anomalies. It appears that political parties must obtain at least 15 per cent of the votes polled in the national election for their survival.

3. Party council: To make the parties more democratic in their approach it appears that it would be good for party to hold party council every two years. This will widen the scope of culminating the democratic norms inside the party. Additionally such practice will help bring some balance in the party leadership.

4. Restriction on the election of party chief: The existing practice of

making one the chief of party as permanently must be discontinued. It is certainly against good political culture. If election of the party chief is restricted strictly to two terms it will create scope for evaluating the honest and benevolent leaders in the party.

5. Audit of fund of the political party: Sources of party fund and its utilization must be properly audited. At present due to lack of transparency in the utilisation of party fund the system of sale and purchase of leaders is thriving. If proper audit can be started the influence of black money and musclemen of the party will definitely be reduced to a great extent.

6. Student and labour politics: It should not get any party affiliation.

7. Code of conduct for politicians: At present we see some politicians change their party loyalty too easily and too often. Their motive is only to grab power by any means. Some process must be evolved to check such motive.

8. Electronic voting: This must be introduced though it may cost much initially.

People of Bangladesh fought for independence and sacrificed lot. It was their general expectation that they would be able to lead a better political and economic life in an independent country.

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## We need a good governance system

SOHEL/SADIA

**B**ITTER pill to swallow. I would like to wholeheartedly thank The Daily Star, Prothom Alo and CPD for arranging this vital discussion about the future direction of the nation. I believe that electing a clean candidate would be a one-leg strategy for Bangladesh because once they are elected how would they overcome institutionalized corruption, deeply rooted culture of greed, a system built on intolerance, incompetence and gross disregard for the laws of the land?

I strongly believe that in order to succeed, we definitely need "clean candidate" plus a good governance system (which would be based on accountability, transparency and check and balance between executive, legislative and judiciary). We need liberal democracy where majority can govern with the consent of minority. I think one way to

do that is taking out opportunities of involving in corruption by MPs from the current miserably failed system and this may be achieved by the following ways:

1) Rescind current monetary and non-monetary compensation packages for MPs for first three years and these include salary, housing, car, telephone, red passport and of course cheap food. After three years if the country can meet the predetermined objectives in economic, social and development areas they would receive their due package plus bonus.

2) MPs would not be allowed to go to the executive branch or meet/call government officials/bureaucrats under any circumstances personally. If they have to meet any government employee, they need to write to the parliament's ethics committee and after the approval they are able to meet only in presence of a third party and minute of the meeting should be

publicly available.

3) Any relief/VGA/assistance should be distributed by the non-partisan government employees not by the MPs.

4) While forming bi-partisan ethics committee with real power to review MPs' ethical conducts, also constitute standing committee to review PMO's activities because one should not be above the constitution.

5) Once individuals are elected, they should put their current assets under blind trust and immediately sever ties with entity that may create conflict-of-interest or influence their decision against public interest.

6) Political parties' financial statement should be audited yearly by the independent auditor and their source of funds should be disclosed publicly.

7) No individual should be able to become PM for more than two consecutive terms.