

Use of black money in election must be prevented

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Prof. Zinatunnisa Talukder

The citizens' dialogue as arranged today is definitely a good and important initiative. Some good points are coming out of the discussion. These are stirring our conscience. There is an inner urge in many of us for accountability. This is cleansing our soul as well. I feel if we can arrange such talks at district and thana level then it would help stir up the minds of the people. This will give us strength to fight against injustice.

By competent candidate we mean a person who has acceptability among the people. Another quality of a competent candidate is humility and tolerance. The economic condition should not be a factor. Election has to be fair. If the election commissioners resign and if there is reform of the caretaker government then we believe we shall get competent candidates.

Adv. Mohammad Kamrul Monir

Everywhere in the world civil society works as a pressure group. As a pressure group in the political party; pressure group in the government.; pressure group in the parliament. It is recognised all over the world. The more powerful the civil society will be come the more effective democracy will be in our country. I have the right to observe whether the election is fair, whether the people of Rajshahi can cast their vote properly. We are talking about making the election free and fair.

Democracy does not give guarantee of a fair election. The Nazis were elected too. The guarantee of democracy is accountability. In every step there has to be accountability and that is the guarantee of democracy. If there is no opposition in parliament then it cannot be called a parliament. That would be one party rule. In such system bills get passed too easily. In other countries parliamentary committees invite civil society members. They remain accountable to civil societies. If the opposition cannot join parliament then that is shameful for a nation. As Mr. Debapriya said when the nation would celebrate 50 years of independence we hope to see that our dreams have been fulfilled.

Prof. Saidur Rahman Khan

The first requirement to form a democratically elected and accountable government is neutral and independent election commission. Time is running out so if the reforms of the election commission do not take place then we can see that the country is heading on a collision course. The civil society can play an important role in the reforms of the election commission and caretaker government. We have no magic bullet to force the government or the opposition parties. We may create public opinion. We have no problem there. We can tell the people what is the truth, what needs to be done at this moment. Whether the government or the opposition will entertain this is their affair. I feel that we may create strong public opinion under this banner so that the government and the opposition sit for a dialogue immediately. This citizens' committee should demand resignation of the CEC and the two election commissioners. An election commission has to be formed that will be acceptable to all parties which will be free from the executive power of the government.

Sardar Amjad Hossain

In Debapriya's paper it has been shown that the percentage of people living below poverty level in Rajshahi has come down to 38% from 48%. But actually 62% of the people live below poverty level. There are famine-hit areas here. There are areas where hunger is dominant. There are areas hit by river erosion. There are areas devoured by the Padma including Nababganj. So, we see that Rajshahi is lagging behind in development. The one time glorious capital is suffering from various problems now. Rajshahi is called the silk city. But no silk industry is being set up here. There was a government silk industry in this silk city. Today it remains closed. The workers of silk city are passing their days in misery. Every now and then we are told that the silk industry will start soon. But silk of Rajshahi is not being developed. Silk sari is available in Dhaka. On the label it is written Rajshahi Silk. But silk is being controlled by a handful of people. Silk is not cultivated in Bholahat anymore. The 'tut' cultivation

that used to go on all over Rajshahi is not done now.

This time there has been 40% less cultivation of irri-boro rice in Rajshahi. Because of that there is draught going on now. Farmers are not cultivating anything now. I hope in the vision that will come out from this dialogue the problems of Rajshahi will find their due place.

Fazle Hossain Badsha

In the recent times Rajshahi came under media focus for various reasons. We have to mention the name of Kansat to show respect to the people who took part in the movement. The villagers of Kansat had proved that the people of greater Rajshahi know how to fight. In Nepal the

king had to relinquish power after the death of 19 people. In Kansat 20 people had died for electricity. No political party gave leadership in Kansat. But shall we not call that our revolution? We have to find answer to that question. The whole electoral system is being questioned today. There is no alternative to reforms. Many commented that the decision has to be taken before the election. I want to stress that I want to be assured before casting my vote that the electoral system will give the correct and neutral result.

Everest Hembrom

Before national and local elections we have seen that pressure is created upon the adibashis and they are subjected to intimidation. Even after elections they are subjected to physical and mental torture. It has been seen that the workers of the defeated candidates take back the money they had paid the adibashis before election. On the other hand if we go to the candidate who has won for some work he says, you people have not given me vote. Adibashis are considered as supporters of one or two political parties and also as vote bank. This has to end. Such mindset has to change. The seats in the adibashi areas need to be preserved and they should have the opportunity to come as elected representatives.

Golam Arif Tipu

The idea behind this dialogue is that we all should be aware of our responsibility and duty and spread the messages among others. It is not possible for CPD to go to every thana or village to hold meetings. We have to perform our duties properly. We should be able to cast our votes judiciously in the coming election.

Hassan Azizul Haque

I want to divide today's dialogue in two parts. One was description of the present situation. You have given a scary picture of Bangladesh as it looks today as a state. There is no doubt about it. What happened in the past? Where do we stand today? What has happened to our rights? What has happened to our freedom? What has happened to our country? How has the society evolved? How is the state power working? We have discussed these issues. I feel that a holistic picture of our society has come out today. But we do not want a society or a state like this. We want every citizen of Bangladesh should live without fear and in a safe environment; and the resources of Bangladesh should be distributed equally amongst all.

I want to know, how much we shall be able to do through this dialogue. Our effort should not end up as mere rhetoric. We have to think about the process of how we can implement these. We are saying that this is a pressure group. Now we have to see whether this pressure group is able to give sufficient pressure.

Tajul Islam said black money is not a major problem. Maybe he said this out of anger. Black money is problem indeed. But bigger problem is our bureaucracy, as Tajul Islam said. Now, what can we do about this big problem? Can we throw the bureaucrats out of jobs? We know it very well that it would create various problems. There will be corruption. There are bureaucrats who have been given posting here on various considerations. Can they be taken back? Can we start a movement for their removal? I have no answer. I believe that unless we can face these problems nothing substantial will happen.

We may talk about going to the ruling party with our proposals to discuss. We may go to the opposition party to discuss. They will tell us on our face that you people are intellectuals and you wear white shirts. But we have to go to the fields to do politics. We do not have time to listen to you. In that case everything will come to an abrupt end. If this happens then I feel there is no need for this dialogue. I have to find out how the dialogue can be made effective in such circumstances; how can this may be made mandatory. Others have thanked the organizers profusely but I do not want to do that. I want to congratulate them.

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