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Civil society role in building citizen awareness

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PRIOR to the recent parliamentary elections, large numbers of print and electronic media journalists went to the nooks and crannies of the country and interviewed many citizens from all walks of life. One thing remarkable about these interviews was that almost all who were asked about the elections stated unequivocally that they would vote for only clean candidates. More specifically, they would not vote for anyone who was not honest, competent and dedicated to public service, and, if necessary, they would cast negative votes. Large number of citizens also forcefully stated that they would vote against religious extremists and war criminals. They would support only those who wanted reforms and changes from the status quo. Such was the sentiment of a large segment of our citizens irrespective of their age, education, location and social standing, which ranged from uneducated housewives in distant villages to urban elites.

Similar voter assertiveness, it must be noted, was visibly absent even a few years ago. Even the issues of corruption, clean candidates, war crimes etc. were not relevant in the past they became important only in recent years. In fact, until recently most citizens, except the diehard supporters of political parties, were quite resigned. Many of them thought that their views and opinions did not matter and they themselves did not count. Unfortunately such dejected views became an increasing phenomenon over the years.

How did this change a clear and assertive stand of many voters on important issues before the recent elections come about? What caused issues, rather than personalities or slogans to become important? Also, who are these voters with such forceful opinions?

There is little doubt that the media played a central role in molding public

opinion and gave voice to many citizens. In the last few years, more than half a dozen private satellite television channels entered the market and they had to scramble for contents to fill the airwaves. Consequently, they designed many new programs, including regular newscasts, midnight talk shows such as "Tritiyio Matra" and free-flowing discussions on various issues using formats like the "BBC Sanglap". In fact, watching talk-shows and discussion meetings on various issues has become a favorite pastime for many citizens in recent years. Even Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television entered the foray during the Caretaker Government. BTV not only aired talk shows but also allowed programmes like "Janatar Katha," which performed the role of a citizen's parliament. Some private FM radio stations joined them in recent years. In the print media also there was intense competition in the last few years with some prominent entries into the market using the financial backing of large corporate houses. Such competition forced all newspapers to look for new contents and pursue own niches.

The almost unhindered freedom that the media in Bangladesh enjoyed over the years allowed them to experiment with new types of programmes. The experiment included in-depth coverage of issue-based discussions such as seminars and roundtable meetings and pursuing campaigns, sometimes in partnership with civil society organisations, on social and political issues such as the clean candidate campaign. In fact, media activism has become an important phenomenon in the last few years.

Non-partisan citizen groups such as SHUJANCitizens for Good Governance, Nagorik Committee, TIB and many distinguished individuals provided contents for the media which the latter readily used, although sometimes with partisan twists by some media houses. These contents came out in the process of many civil society interventions. Sometimes con-



tents were developed in partnership with the media. Contents also came from political parties, although they were viewed by many as mere political rhetoric and hence enjoyed less credibility.

One of the first significant civil society interventions for creating mass awareness on electoral issues dates back to 2002 when a group of us formed the Citizens for Fair Elections (CFE) with the intention of helping elect clean candidates in the impending Union Parishad (UP) elections. Based on consultations with many voters, we developed a questionnaire to seek information from candidates regarding their background such as education, profession, income, criminal records, assets and liabilities etc. Using the questionnaire, the CFE volunteers collected information from candidates and used the information to prepare candidate profiles, which they turned into posters and leaflets for distribution among the voters. The volunteers then arranged "Candidate-Voter Face-to-Face" meetings where candidates had a chance to present their election "manifestos" and voters had the opportunity to ask them questions. Despite the warning that seeking such information would put our volunteers' safety at risk, the exercise was successfully carried out in 55 UPs, and the work received a great deal of acclaim from various quarters. A subsequent survey also showed that a significant proportion of voters changed their voting decisions based on the information they received. The same exercise was subsequently conducted in several Paurashava elections.

Another far-reaching initiative toward creating mass awareness was the launching of a campaign for political reforms in Bangladesh in September 2004. It was launched jointly by SHUJAN (which is the new name for CFE) and The Daily Star. Later The Prothom Alo joined the campaign and in a subsequent joint roundtable discussion held in April 2005, a comprehensive set of reform proposals was presented. The proposal detailed reforms of the electoral process, the Election Commission and political parties, and also the requirement for the disclosure of antecedents of candidates. Subsequently similar roundtable discussions and workshops on reform issues were held all over the country, which have been continuing to-date. Rallies and human chains in support of such reforms were also held throughout the country. In addition, SHUJAN launched unique initiatives like "Election Olympiad" and "Electoral Debates," abridged versions of which were televised by Channel-i as part of its public service initiative. All these initiatives helped identify issues which were highlighted by the media leading to public education and awareness. In fact, all these efforts helped foment a movement for change from the status quo.

One milestone event in molding public opinion was the High Court judgment of 2005, in response to a writ petition filed by a group of lawyers, which required candidates for parliament elections to disclose a set of personal and financial information about themselves and their families. An appeal was filed against the judgment on behalf of an imposter named Abu Safa, using fraudulent means. SHUJAN unearthed the fraud and brought it to the attention of the Court, and, after much drama in the highest judiciary, the judgment was upheld. The Court proceedings invited much publicity which created mass awareness and a strong public sentiment in favor of the issue of clean and competent candidates.

Following the initial Court judgment, efforts were

made by SHUJAN volunteers to implement it in five by-elections, despite non-cooperation by the EC led by Justice M.A. Aziz. The summaries of affidavits submitted by the candidates were distributed to voters by SHUJAN volunteers and "Candidate-Voter Face-to-Face" meetings were arranged in three constituencies. These activities, after much persuasion, received significant media attention, contributing to the mass support for disclosures as a means to identifying clean candidates. In the course of these initiatives, it may be noted, SHUJAN units cropped up in many parts of the country and it truly became a platform for those who wanted to change the status quo and were willing to take actions to that end.

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বৃহৎ নির্মাণে বিশ্বাসী বসুধা বিস্তার

চট্টগ্রামে

আকর্ষণীয় ও অভিজাত এলাকায় সুন্দর সুন্দর লোকেশনে নির্মাণ করছে অত্যাধুনিক এপার্টমেন্ট লাতজনক ও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ স্থানে গড়ে তুলছে বৃহৎ সব মার্কেট ভবন।

বৃহৎ মালি ২৫,০০০/= বাকীটা সহজে কিস্তিতে

ক্যাপ পেয়েই ১০% এবং কিস্তিতে ৫% কিসকট্ট। সুযোগ সীমিত

বিশ্বস্তি ১ ভরি সোনার হার ৫৯১১

বিশ্বস্তি বসনের সোফা, মেসন-সুপার শপ, ইলেকট্রনিক্স, মোবাইল, ফোনকারিঞ্জ, গার্মেন্টস, কসমেটিক্স, জুতা, জুয়েলারী, শাড়ী, ধান কাপড় ব্র্যান্ড শপ, শো-রুম, ফাই ফুড, স্ট্রেটজি, অফিস স্পেস, আন্তর্জাতিক মাসের শিও পার্ক, সিনেমা হল ও হাসপাতাল ইত্যাদি।

যোগাযোগ: ঢাকা অফিস: বাড়ী # ৫৫/সি (মিচতলা), বোড # ৯/এ, মালমতি, ঢাকা-১২০৯ ফোন: (৮৮-০২) ৯১৪৮৮০৩, ৮১৪২১৪৬, ০১৮১৭-২২২৪৭৩, ই-মেইল: bosudha.bd@yahoo.com

চট্টগ্রাম অফিস: বসুধা বিস্তার সিনিয়র সেবার, ১৯, টেনন রোড, (বিক্রয়/সি-১৬ টিক লিপস্ট্রেট) হাটমার ফোন: (৮৮-০৩১) ২৮০৪৩০১-০২, ২৮০৪৮৮০৩ ফ্যাক্স: ০৩১-২৮০৪৮৮০৪ ০১৭৩০-০১২১৭৩, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২০২, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২০৪, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২০৬, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২০৮ ০১৮১৭-০১২০২১০, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২১২, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২১৪, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২১৬, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২১৮, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২২০, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২২২, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২২৪, ০১৮১৭-০১২০২২৬

বসুধা বিস্তার লিমিটেড

শুভ হলের শক্ত সিলিং

সঞ্চয়ই সমৃদ্ধি

আপনার সঞ্চয়িত অর্থ উত্তরা ব্যাংকে বিনিয়োগ করে অধিক লাভবান হউন

দ্বিগুন মুনাফা ভিত্তিক হিসাব

- জমাকৃত টাকা ৬ বৎসরে দ্বিগুন হবে।
- যে কোন প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক বাংলাদেশী কমপক্ষে ১লক্ষ টাকা দিয়ে এ হিসাব খুলতে পারবেন।
- এ আমানতের বিপরীতে আমানতকারী ৮০% পর্যন্ত ঋণ গ্রহণ করতে পারবেন।

মাসিক আমানত হিসাব

- যে কোন প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক বাংলাদেশী ৫/১০ বৎসর মেয়াদে এ হিসাব খুলতে পারবেন।
- এ আমানতের বিপরীতে আমানতকারী ৮০% পর্যন্ত ঋণ গ্রহণ করতে পারবেন।

৫ বৎসর মেয়াদ কাল		১০ বৎসর মেয়াদ কাল	
মাসিক জমার পরিমাণ	মেয়াদান্তে টাকার পরিমাণ	মাসিক জমার পরিমাণ	মেয়াদান্তে টাকার পরিমাণ
৫০০.০০	৪১,২৪৩.০০	৫০০.০০	১,১৬,১৭০.০০
১,০০০.০০	৮২,৪৮৬.০০	১,০০০.০০	২,৩২,৩৪০.০০
২,০০০.০০	১,৬৪,৯৭২.০০	২,০০০.০০	৪,৬৪,৬৮০.০০
৩,০০০.০০	২,৪৭,৪৫৮.০০	৩,০০০.০০	৬,৯৭,০১৭.০০
৪,০০০.০০	৩,৩০,৩৪৪.০০	৪,০০০.০০	৯,৩০,৩৪৪.০০
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বিস্তারিত তথ্যের জন্য ব্যাংকের নিকটস্থ শাখায় যোগাযোগ করুন

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আবহমান বাংলার ঐতিহ্যে লালিত

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