

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF BANGLADESH**  
*Representation and Accountability*

*CPD Dialogue Report 104*

Publisher

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**Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)**

House 40/C, Road 32, Dhanmondi R/A

Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh

Telephone: (+88 02) 8124770, 9141703, 9141734, 9145090

Fax: (+88 02) 8130951

E-mail: [info@cpd.org.bd](mailto:info@cpd.org.bd)

Website: [www.cpd.org.bd](http://www.cpd.org.bd)

Blog: [www.cpd.org.bd/Blog/](http://www.cpd.org.bd/Blog/)

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The **Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)**, established in 1993, is a civil society initiative to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. Over the past years, CPD has organised a series of such dialogues at local and national levels. CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as international dialogues to pursue for the LDC interests in various fora including WTO, UN and other multilateral organisations. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition frontbenchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in the civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. CPD seeks to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well-being of the country.

In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research areas of CPD include: *Macroeconomic Performance Analysis; Resource Mobilisation and Fiscal Policies; Poverty, Inequality and Social Justice; Agriculture and Rural Development; Trade, Regional Cooperation and Global Integration; Investment Promotion, Infrastructure and Enterprise Development; Climate Change and Environment; Human Development and Social Protection; and Development Governance, Policies and Institutions*. CPD also conducts periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and issues of developmental concerns. With a view to promote vision and policy awareness amongst the young people of the country, CPD is also implementing a *Youth Leadership Programme*. CPD maintains a broad network with institutions working in common areas of interest, and has partnered with some of these in organising international events both in Bangladesh and abroad.

It may be of interest to note that in recognition of its track record in research, dialogue and policy influencing, CPD was selected as one of the awardees under the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) through a globally held competitive selection process. TTI is supported among others by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), and is implemented by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.

Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. Pursuant to this CPD maintains an active publication programme, both in Bangla and in English. As part of CPD's publication activities, a **CPD Dialogue Report Series** is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre.

The present report contains the highlights of the dialogue on ***National Parliament of Bangladesh: Representation and Accountability*** held on 13 October 2011 at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The dialogue was organised under the CPD-CMI Research Cooperation Programme.

**Prepared by:** *Hasanuzzaman*, Senior Research Associate, CPD

**Assistant Editor:** *Anisatul Fatema Yousuf*, Director, Dialogue and Communication, CPD

**Series Editor:** *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Chairman, CPD

## THE DIALOGUE

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), in association with the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norway, organised a dialogue on 13 October 2011 titled *National Parliament of Bangladesh: Representation and Accountability* at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The keynote paper was presented by *Professor Rounaq Jahan*, Distinguished Fellow, CPD. *Dr Inge Amundsen*, Senior Researcher, CMI presented some examples of good parliamentary practices from the global perspective. The Hon'ble Deputy Speaker, *Mr Shawkat Ali, MP*, attended the session as the Chief Guest. *Mr Suranjit Sengupta, MP*, Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and *Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, MP*, Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment were the Special Guests at the dialogue. The Designated Discussant for the CPD-CMI dialogue was *Barrister Manzoor Hasan*, Advisor, Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), BRAC University. The dialogue was chaired and moderated by the Chairman of CPD, *Professor Rehman Sobhan*.

*Professor Sobhan* started the session by observing that there is no better option than democracy amongst the various political systems. He hoped that the discussion would engage concerned citizens and members of parliament (MPs), who are after all the practitioners of democracy.

Following the welcome address from the Chair, the Executive Director of CPD, *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* extended his appreciation to the guests at the dialogue. He informed the audience that the CPD-CMI has jointly undertaken a three-year research programme on key areas of Bangladesh's socioeconomic development. The presentation on the Parliament of Bangladesh was part of the 'Good Governance' programme which will be followed by a study on *Political Parties in Bangladesh* in 2012. After the keynote paper presentation, the floor was opened for discussion. Participants included MPs, academicians, journalists and other professionals. This report offers a succinct summary of the presentation and the exchange of views among the participants during the course of discussion (a list of participants has been annexed at the end of the report).

## THE KEYNOTE PAPER

### **Professor Rounaq Jahan, Distinguished Fellow, CPD**

*Professor Rounaq Jahan* stated that a democratic parliament is necessary to promote parliamentary democracy. She observed that in the post-1990 scenario all general elections have been keenly contested by political parties, but participation in parliament remained relevant for the winning party. The two major parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have rotated in power and in opposition, but each embraced only the role of the ruling party and abdicated responsibility of the opposition in parliament. In her introductory remarks she put forward the puzzle as to why the losing parties show no stake in the system despite regular rotation of power?

## **Development of Bangladesh Parliament**

The keynote speaker divided the history of Bangladesh parliament in two phases: 1972 to 1990 and 1991 to 2011. In the former, there was rotation between democracy and military rule, and parliamentary and presidential systems of government. She recalled that though the first parliament started under parliamentary rule, the fourth amendment of the constitution in 1975 introduced a one-party presidential system. The subsequent second third and fourth parliaments were under military rule and presidential system and elections under such a system were always alleged to be rigged. Moreover, none of the parliaments, first-fourth, could complete their full tenure.

Since 1991, there has been gradual move toward greater institutionalisation of parliamentary democracy. *Professor Jahan* discerned two interesting trends from the last 40 years of Bangladesh parliament's history – (a) ruling party always won elections under incumbent government and always lost under the Non-party Caretaker Government (NCG); and, (b) two stable political parties/alliances have emerged after the restoration of democracy in 1991. She observed an increasing trend of disappearance of smaller parties in parliament which raised doubt about the prospects of a third voice sustaining in the Bangladesh political system. With regard to the functioning of Parliament, she affirmed that boycotts have increased from 34 per cent in the fifth parliament to 74 per cent in the current parliament though opposition members participate in committees and other activities, e.g. delegations abroad.

## **Structure, Roles and Functions**

The basic structure of the Bangladesh Parliament is a single chamber (unicameral) body comprising 300 directly elected members from single territorial constituencies through the 'first past the post' (FPTP) system. In addition there is a provision of women's reserved seats (50 at present) in parliament who are to be elected by the 300 general MPs. She pointed out that this system of indirect election for the women's reserved seats drew opposition from various women's groups who demanded direct elections for women's reserved seats. The constitution stipulates conditions for qualifications and disqualifications of being an MP and for vacating seat in parliament. The most contested provision is Article 70 which imposes a strict party control on MPs and restricts their freedom of expression.

Following a quick review of the basic structure, *Professor Jahan* highlighted the key roles of the parliament which is the main focus of the study. The first role of the parliament is representation which can be conceptualised in three different ways, viz. representation of popular will, social diversity and constituency. The second role is to ensure vertical accountability of the parliamentarians to the electorate. The third role is to provide horizontal accountability, i.e. holding the executive branch of the government accountable. She outlined the techniques available to an MP to scrutinise the activities of the executive. These include questions (to Prime Minister and ministers), discussions (half-an-hour discussion, discussion on matters of urgent public importance for short duration, discussion on principles of bills, and general discussion of the budget), and motions (motions for adjournment on a matter of public importance, motion of no-confidence, motions for impeachment of the President and his removal).

### **Representation and Vertical Accountability**

The keynote speaker defined representation from three aspects: popular will, social diversity (women, religious/ethnic minorities and resource poor) and constituency. She highlighted that the FPTP electoral system creates majority in parliament without majority vote share and that the discrepancy between vote share and seat share is gradually widening. To illustrate, in the fifth parliament, with 30 per cent votes Awami League secured 88 and BNP 140 seats. *Professor Jahan* observed that all governments since 1991 were formed with minority vote share, except the current government which received 57 per cent of votes cast.

In terms of social diversity, though women constitute 50 per cent of the population, they are severely under-represented notwithstanding the adopted special measures of reserved seats. At present, there are only 19 directly elected women in the parliament and in previous parliaments the number of women was never more than 10. Similarly, Hindus represent 10 per cent of the population but there are only nine directly elected MPs. What is of interest here is that of the 24 Hindus elected since 1991, only one was from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), she noted. It is encouraging that the ethnic minorities (*Adivasis*) are represented in proportion to their population size. The eminent political scientist perceived representation of the resource poor to be a key challenge in all democracies in view of the increasing cost of election campaign that has led to the dominance of wealthy people in parliament. In Bangladesh, also there is an increasing trend of MPs with business/industrialist background (34 per cent in the first parliament and 59 per cent in the ninth parliament).

*Professor Jahan* elaborated on the issue of representation of constituent interest. She opined that MP's electability is dependent on their ability to represent their constituency interests. As a result, top priority is given to development work in constituency and in a TIB survey, 90 per cent of the respondents wanted MPs' involvement in infrastructure development. *Professor Jahan* confirmed that more than 40 per cent of the total motions raised in the House were geographically focused on local activities, and 32 per cent sought benefits for locality. Referring to a recent study by Lewis and Hossain (2008), the keynote speaker informed that the MP's allocation of Tk. 3 crore per year for development work in constituencies, coupled with his/her role as a gatekeeper of allocation of all public sector benefits, has created scope for corruption and nepotism, alongside conflict between MPs and elected local government representatives.

*Professor Jahan* defined vertical accountability from two aspects: (a) mechanisms for rendering account; and (b) code of parliamentary conduct. She pointed out that rendering accounts to the electorate involves various mechanisms, e.g. elections, complaints procedure, legal redress, etc. In Bangladesh, personal access remained the most frequently used mechanism, and in a TIB survey, 80 per cent of the respondents wanted MPs to serve personal needs. The keynote speaker informed the participants that the CPD-CMI undertook a visit to a constituency in order to better understand the role of MPs at the constituency level. The constituency visit illustrated the myriad demands made on the MP and also his role in settling intra-party contestations for various elective offices in the constituency.

With regard to code of parliamentary conduct, *Professor Jahan* stated that though there are regular allegations of misconduct made against the MPs in the media, no investigation is carried out by the government or parliament. Furthermore, the media has reported on several cases of conflict of interest of MPs serving in the parliamentary standing committees which again have not been addressed.

### ***Horizontal Accountability: Lawmaking, Budget and Oversight***

The keynote speaker informed the audience that the ninth parliament is performing well with more than 18 bills being passed per session. This, however, also means that there is little deliberation and debate in both the legislation and budget-making processes. With regard to questions to the Prime Minister and ministers, *Professor Jahan* affirmed that the latter has performed relatively better with an increasing rate of questions being answered. A large number of questions are rejected on procedural grounds for Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQT), though the number is declining in case of ministers. The number of *Tamadi* questions has, however, increased for both the criteria, she observed.

*Professor Jahan* pointed out that neither adjournment motions nor half-an-hour discussion motions were allowed since the seventh parliament. Many of the notices received were rejected on procedural grounds which raised the questions of neutrality of Speaker and the quality of orientation programmes of MPs which are supposed to explain parliamentary procedures. Finally, with regard to the performance of the parliamentary committees, the keynote speaker observed that there is more activism in the ninth parliament. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has so far met 76 times and prepared two reports.

Before presenting her concluding remarks, *Professor Jahan* called upon *Dr Inge Amundsen* to provide some good practice examples for Bangladesh from the global perspective.

## **GLOBAL GOOD PRACTICES**

### **Dr Inge Amundsen, Senior Researcher, CMI**

*Dr Inge Amundsen* underlined the importance of transparency in the budget process. He mentioned that in the Open Budget Index (OBI), South Africa was one of the new countries added in the top list. This was because the government of South Africa provided extensive information on the central government's budget and financial activities for public viewing. He informed the audience that reforms have strengthened the legislature and the supreme audit institution, and also created opportunities for citizens to engage in the budgetary process. He then cited the example of Development Initiatives for Social Human Action (DISHA), a civil society organisation in India, which has succeeded in holding state governments accountable for the construction works. In Uganda, the Deepening Democracy Programme (DDP), a multidonor basket fund, has supported parliamentary committees and the 'shadow cabinet' which has improved the quality of debate and submissions in the plenary sessions. In case of Norway, all 'white papers' (legislation and policy formulations) are publicly accessible, he noted.

Some of the other best practices mentioned by *Dr Amundsen* related to the chairmanship of financial oversight committees, where he suggested that such committees should be headed by a member of the opposition party; the Speaker should resign from his party and abstain from voting; allowing floor-crossing; and, freedom of information in order to promote transparency in both the budget-making and implementation processes.

*Dr Amundsen* then invited *Professor Jahan* to conclude the keynote paper presentation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### Professor Rounaq Jahan, Distinguished Fellow, CPD

The keynote speaker divided her suggestions into two parts – procedural/technical and political. She first presented the procedural/technical suggestions. She offered various suggestions to strengthen the institutions of parliament. She argued that the Speaker's neutrality can be ensured in two ways: he can resign from the party and seek re-election as Speaker following the British model, or the Speaker can be elected on the basis of all party consensus and he/she should recuse from party affairs as is the custom in India.

She agreed with *Dr Amundsen* that the financial committees should be headed by the opposition members. In order to empower the committees, she recommended that a time-limit should be prescribed to make it mandatory for ministries to respond to the recommendations of the committees following the UK and Indian examples. In order to reduce the conflict between MP's public and private interests, a screening system should be put in place to select MPs for serving in different committees. Finally, she suggested that the parliament secretariat should be empowered with adequate material and human resources to provide scope for professional development of staff.

Secondly, with regard to the functions of parliament, she suggested amending Article 70 to relax party control and to allow MP's freedom of expression, except in a no-confidence motion. The time for discussion for PMQT may be extended to reduce the volume of *Tamadi* questions and a random selection of PMQT notices introduced through a computer shuffling system. She suggested establishing the principle of 'no bills/budgets without committees' and asserted that standing committees on ministries should be allowed to scrutinise budget, as is the case in India. In order to promote transparency, *Professor Jahan* affirmed that civil society and citizen's engagement should be encouraged with budget work for technical support as well as transparency. She was of the opinion that 'opposition days' could help to engage the opposition in the parliament on a formal basis and suggested that the Speaker should consult with the Leader of the Opposition in setting the House and budget agendas.

*Professor Jahan* then elaborated several suggestions which required strong political will. On the representation issue, in order to overcome the representation deficit, she suggested that political parties should assume the responsibility of grooming future leaders from hitherto excluded groups, i.e. resource poor, women, minorities and at the same time, introduce party quota systems to ensure election of candidates with diverse background. She called for transparency and accountability in expenditure of local development funds and in implementation of local development projects. She opined that there is a need to



demarcate roles and responsibilities between MPs and elected local government representatives to avoid conflicts over control of local development funds.

On the more critical topic of vertical accountability, *Professor Jahan* suggested for more systematic public accounting, e.g. annual report of activities by MPs, mechanisms for citizen scrutiny of these accountings, and a more institutionalised procedures for redress of grievances. With regard to the issue of conflict of interests, the keynote speaker suggested that there should be a registry detailing all professional and financials interest of MPs as is done in many countries, and the registry should be updated on an annual basis. Alongside the Registry, there should be other mechanisms to scrutinise where the MPs' are engaged in activities involving conflict of interest.

In her concluding remarks, *Professor Jahan* underlined the two top challenges facing the nation today: (a) organisation of free and fair elections; and (b) addressing the issue of the boycott of the parliament. Though organisation of credible elections is recognised as the first step to institutionalise democracy, the next election has again become contested. The government wants to hold elections under the incumbent government going in a caretaker mode with an independent Election Commission. On the other hand the opposition wants restoration of an NCG. With regard to parliamentary boycotts, the keynote speaker confessed that she found no rational answer to explain what is gained by the tactics of boycott. She asserted that there is no technical solution of the above mentioned two challenges. Both will have to be solved politically by the two major parties and their leaders through discussion, compromise and trust.

#### **COMMENTS FROM THE DESIGNATED DISCUSSANT**

*Barrister Manzoor Hasan* congratulated Professor Jahan for presenting a comprehensive paper. He strongly felt that the study would make a great contribution to the academic research on the Bangladesh Parliament. Referring to the second chapter of the paper, *Barrister Hasan* divided it into twenty-two phases – the first twenty years of the parliament marked by different political systems ranging from democratic (prime ministerial and presidential) to undemocratic (military and autocratic), and the next twenty years democratic political system with some exceptions. He raised the question whether Bangladesh Parliament and the political system have moved on from the psychology of undemocratic government prevalent in the first twenty years or the mindset remains the same, notwithstanding the years of democracy since 1991. He considered lack of democracy within the political parties to be the key element creating undemocratic mindset.

*Barrister Hasan* identified the performance of parliamentary committees, high voter turnout and female participation at the national elections as success stories in the second phase of the history of Bangladesh Parliament. He raised the issue of boycotting parliament and asked whether there was a sense of impunity among the opposition parties. In other words, does the opposition feel confident about getting re-elected despite boycotting the parliament? Is their marginalisation in the parliament's composition due to the FPTP electoral system? *Barrister Hasan* mentioned PMQT as another success story although he felt that the technique lost some legitimacy due to incessant boycotting of the parliament by the opposition. He proposed for an 'Opposition

Leader's Question Time' to make the opposition interested to participate in the parliament proceedings. *Barrister Hasan* supported the idea of parliament secretariat recruiting its own staffs through a separate civil service.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

*Dr Asif Nazrul*, Professor, Department of Law, Dhaka University cited Pakistan as a case study for solving the problem related to floor crossing. He argued in favour of amending Article 70 to allow members to vote against their own party in cases of budget-making and no-confidence motions. He recommended bi-cameral parliament for solving the problem of lack of representation from all the sectors of the society. *Dr Nazrul* criticised political parties for the lack of minority representation within the parties. He considered presence of business community in the parliament as a reflection of high costs for election financing. *Dr Nazrul* disagreed with Mr Hasan's point on the parliamentary committees by referring to their authoritative shortcoming in summoning witnesses. He differed with the keynote presenter's suggestion to make the committee proceedings public, and argued that it would take away the freedom of the lawmakers to express their opinions, and make the committee meeting the same as the plenary session where MPs are more interested in praising their leaders rather than perform their core functions such as oversight of the executive.

*Advocate Tarana Halim*, MP expressed her dissatisfaction over the parliamentary boycott by the opposition MPs. The ruling party lawmaker opined that lack of democratic practice within the political parties led to boycotting of the parliament. There is a strong will among the opposition MPs to attend the plenary sessions but they cannot do so as top party leadership is opposed to it. She strongly criticised Article 70 and stated that the MPs' right to freedom of expression has been thwarted by this Article though parliament is meant to be the paramount place for the people's representatives to express their opinions.

*Mr Fazle Azim*, MP agreed with Advocate Tarana Halim on the lack of freedom of speech and political commitment towards democracy both in the parliament and political parties. However he disagreed with several other speakers on the point of Article 70. He argued that Article 70 does not prevent the MPs from criticising their own party's policies or taking part in debates and discussions against their own party within the parliament. He indicated that MPs are abstaining from such exercise for fear of being punished by the party high authorities. The independent MP felt that the Speaker should be the guardian of the House, but his role has been compromised by his constant dependency on the Leader of the House. *Mr Azim* argued that the increasing presence of business community reflected popular will. He disagreed with the quota system for reserved female MPs in the House since it violated the non-discriminatory spirit of democracy.

*Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah*, Former Anti-Corruption Commissioner and Former Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University explained the reasons which contributed to the boycotting of parliament by the opposition. The oath taking ceremony of the opposition was not telecasted by the national television media (Bangladesh Television). He referred to the controversy between the treasury bench and the main opposition regarding the seating arrangement in the House as well as the rejection of all the resolutions moved by the

opposition in the current parliament. He also highlighted the abusive language used against the opposition within and outside parliament.

*Professor Ali Ashraf, MP* identified the extra-constitutional interventions in the political system as the main obstacle in the path of consolidating democracy. He highlighted the role of think-tanks and civil society organisations in building awareness on the importance of participation among the citizens in a democratic society. Regarding the boycott culture of the parliament, the veteran ruling party lawmaker believed that people should make the MPs accountable and compel them to participate in the parliament. At the same time, civil society should ask questions and express their concern over the code of conduct issued for the MPs, he opined.

Former State Minister for Ministry of Foreign Affairs *Mr Abul Hasan Chowdhury* expressed his disagreement over the suggestion to remove Article 70. On the representation issue, he termed the MPs as 'one man institution' since they have to carry out multifaceted functions ranging from development to legislation. Amidst parliament boycott he considered the parliamentary committee activism as a major success as their meetings were participated both by the treasury bench and the opposition. He opposed the idea to hold the meetings in public, which might be counterproductive, though he entertained the idea of revealing the outcome of the meetings to the media.

*Mr M Hafizuddin Khan*, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Former Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh mentioned the trend of taking politics as part of business where money becomes the key factor to get nomination and win national elections. He put forward a proposal for banning parliament boycott through an Act of Parliament.

*Dr Dalem Chandra Barman*, Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Dhaka University identified the centralised structure of the political system as the major obstacle for carrying out representation role of the MPs. He stated that most of the MPs either live within the capital or do not spend quality time in the constituency.

*Mr Md Golam Maula Rony, MP* pointed out that there is a lack of mutual respect among the political parties and leaders, and that politics is not being pro-people.

*Ms Munira Khan*, Former Member, Human Rights Commission opined that the political parties are keen to participate in the elections and voters also show an interest in giving their opinion on the polling day. Yet, opposition continues to boycott the parliament which is not expected by the electorate.

*Dr M M Akash*, Professor of Economics, Dhaka University pointed out several factors hindering the representation role of the MPs, which are also contributing to the boycotting of the parliament. He perceived mobilising expenses for the election and re-election to be the major priorities of the MPs.

*Ambassador M Humayun Kabir*, Vice President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) referred to the views presented by Barrister Manzoor Hasan and opined that both the first

twenty years and the last twenty years of Bangladesh were dominated by bureaucracy. He questioned whether the current political system is capable of representing the people.

*Mr M K Anwar, MP* disagreed with the authors of the study on several points. He indicated that extra-constitutional government was in place in 1975 when BAKSAL was formed by the then government. He pointed out that notwithstanding reintroduction of democracy and prime ministerial system in 1991, the political system remains the same as the presidential system since the executive power has been centralised in the Prime Minister. On the issue of parliament increasingly becoming a 'rich man's club,' the opposition lawmaker argued that number of businessmen has increased proportionately to the population, and hence this trend is to be expected. *Mr Anwar* identified an interesting trend in case of the low voter turnout in local government elections compared to general elections. He emphasised the role of media as watchdog over the executive, and mentioned that media has come under pressure from the government whenever the executive's actions get criticised in media. He did not entertain the idea of participating in the current parliament sessions since he considered that the opposition is denied a role to play there. *Mr Anwar* mentioned that though all the experts invited by the committee to review the constitution expressed their opinion in favour of keeping the NCG system, this was not accepted by the committee. He agreed with the suggestion that 'opposition day' should be introduced to strengthen the opposition's role in the parliament.

#### COMMENTS BY SPECIAL GUESTS

*Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, MP* discussed the issue of NCG and informed the dialogue participants that though the Prime Minister earlier wanted retaining the NCG in the 15th amendment, the court verdict compelled the government to repeal the NCG system out of the constitution. He suggested that the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) should be strengthened through getting their funds and logistics. *Barrister Mahmud* proposed for a structured process to choose the Election Commissioners through a common understanding among the political parties. Speaking on Article 70, he agreed with others to allow floor crossing where the MPs can vote against their party with exceptions in the cases of motions related to national budget, national security and no-confidence motion.

He also touched upon the issue of Proportional Representation (PR) system and though he was in favour of introducing such a system, the *Barrister Mahmud* suggested further study of the implications of the system on the politics of Bangladesh. He disagreed with the idea of introducing direct election for female MPs in the reserved seats as this will lead to double representation. On the issue of committee activism and its freedom of work, he identified one of the major obstacles as the dependency of the committees on the very executive for data and information that they are meant to oversee. He advocated strengthening the secretariat of the committees so that they can perform their designated role. He agreed with the Deputy Speaker on the issue of disbursement of the discretionary grants at the constituency level, where MPs select the projects for their constituencies and Ministry of LGRD (Local Government and Rural Development) conduct the spending as the line ministry. He highlighted the need for strengthening the voice of civil society who can then exert pressure on the government.

*Mr Suranjit Sen Gupta, MP* referred to the issue of parliament boycott where he felt all major parties had contributed towards its sustainability. He indicated that the process required for institution building of a democracy was thwarted by the first twenty years after independence, when there was military rule, and this legacy has continued in the next twenty years. There is lack of respect for the constitutional institutions, he observed. *Mr Gupta* also identified intolerance, centralisation of power and confrontational politics as the dominant trends of the political culture of Bangladesh which are hindering democracy. He posited that the Bangladesh parliamentary committee system is one of the best systems since there are as many as 48 committees for oversee of the executive's action. He lamented the fact that though the 1972 Constitution provides for an Ombudsman, no step has been taken so far to implemented this provision. He highlighted the importance of institution building for taking the democratic process to the next level in Bangladesh, where strengthening the Bangladesh Election Commission should get the top priority. This is required for reducing the scope of extra-constitutional interventions.

### **COMMENTS BY THE CHIEF GUEST**

The *Chief Guest*, Hon'ble Deputy Speaker *Shawkat Ali, MP* disagreed with Dr Asif Nazrul on the lack of legislative power of the parliament. Regarding the high percentage of rejected adjournment motions in the current parliament, he explained that the notices submitted did not conform to the Rules of the House. The Hon'ble Deputy Speaker expressed disappointment over the lack of debates within the House. He spoke about the Petitions Committee which he believes to be a link between the parliament and general people, where anyone can bring any grievances, issues or proposal signed by an MP. The notices are considered by the Speaker and he decides whether to raise these in the parliament for discussion. The Hon'ble Deputy Speaker clarified that the annual discretionary grant (Tk. 3 crore) allotted to each MP, is not received directly by the MPs. The money goes to the executives and they spend the money at the constituency levels, and the MPs only choose the projects for spending the grant, he explained.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR**

*Professor Sobhan* thanked all the participants for actively taking part in the discussion. He gave special thanks to the keynote speakers for their presentations which initiated creative thinking into policy debates and provoked serious discussion. *Professor Sobhan* registered his deep appreciation towards the Hon'ble Deputy Speaker and other Special Guests for taking some time off their busy schedules in order to be present at the dialogue.

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(in Alphabetical Order)

*Dr Tofail Ahmed*  
Local Government Advisor  
Local Governance Cluster  
UNDP Bangladesh

*Dr M M Akash*  
Professor of Economics  
University of Dhaka

*Mr Rezwan-ul-Alam*  
Director  
Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)

*Colonel (Retd) Shawkat Ali, MP*  
Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of  
Bangladesh

*Mr Mahfuz Anam*  
Editor and Publisher  
The Daily Star

*Professor Ali Ashraf, MP*  
Member  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on  
Ministry of Finance and  
Former Deputy Speaker of the Parliament

*Mr Md Ashrafuzzaman*  
Programme Officer  
Macro-Economics  
Royal Danish Embassy

*Mr M Fazlul Azim, MP*  
Chairman, Azim Group

*Dr Dalem Chandra Barman*  
Professor  
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies  
Dhaka University

*Mr Abul Hasan Chowdhury*  
Former State Minister  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and  
Managing Director, KMS Consultants

*Advocate Tarana Halim*  
Hon'ble Member of the Parliament

*Barrister Manzoor Hasan*  
Advisor  
Institute of Governance Studies  
BRAC University

*Mr Mohammad Jahangir*  
Executive Director  
Centre for Development & Communication

*Mr Ahmad F Kabir*  
Trustee  
Poribesh Bachao Andolon

*Ambassador M Humayun Kabir*  
Vice President  
Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI)

*Ms Munira Khan*  
Former Member  
Human Rights Commission

*Mr M Hafizuddin Khan*  
Member, TIB Board of Trustees  
Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and  
Former Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh

*Ms Ayesha Khanam*  
President  
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

*H E Ms Ragne Birte Lund*  
Ambassador  
Royal Norwegian Embassy

*Mr Alnoor Maherali*  
First Secretary (Political, Economic and Public Affairs)  
Canadian High Commission

*Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, MP*  
Former Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Managing Director, Shasha Denims Ltd.

*Dr Badiul Alam Majumder*  
Member Secretary, SUJAN and  
Country Director, The Hunger Project

*Mr Hasan Mazumdar*  
Country Representative  
The Asia Foundation - Bangladesh

*Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah*  
Former Commissioner  
Anti Corruption Commission and  
Former Vice-Chancellor, Dhaka University

*Dr Md Gyasuddin Molla*  
Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka

*Dr Asif Nazrul*  
Professor  
Department of Law  
Dhaka University

*Dr M Rahmatullah*

Former Director  
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for  
Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP)

*Mr Md Golam Maula Rony, MP*

Patuakhali 3 Constituency  
Bangladesh Awami League

*Mr Suranjit Sengupta, MP*

Chairman  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on  
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs

*Ambassador Farooq Sobhan*

Former Foreign Secretary and  
President, BEI

*Professor Rehman Sobhan*

Chairman  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

*Mr Mahfuz Ullah*

Secretary General, CFSD and  
Regional Councilor, IUCN

*Dr Arne Wiig*

Senior Researcher  
CMI

## LIST OF JOURNALISTS

(in Alphabetical Order)

*Mr Rakib Ahmed*  
Staff Correspondent  
The Daily Star

*Mr Shamsuddin Ahmed*  
Staff Reporter  
Daily Ittefaq

*Mr Shibli Reza Ahmed*  
Senior Reporter  
ATN News Ltd.

*Ms Jimi Amir*  
Reporter  
Independent Television Ltd.

*Mr Abul Kalam Azad*  
Staff Reporter  
Somoy Media Limited

*Mr S M Babu*  
Special Correspondent  
ATN Bangla

*Mr Faiz Ullah Bhuiyan*  
Senior Reporter  
Daily Naya Diganta

*Mr Rasel Bhuiyan*  
Reporter  
Newsagency24.com

*Ms Muktasree Chakma Sathi*  
Staff Correspondent  
New Age

*Mr Burhan Uddin Faisal*  
Staff Reporter  
Mohona Television Limited

*Mr A N M Faiz*  
Staff Reporter  
Daily Destiny

*Mr Ismail Hossain*  
Staff Reporter  
The Financial Express

*Mr Monzur Hossain*  
Reporter  
Radio Today

*Mr Ishtiaq Husain*  
Senior Correspondent  
banglanews24.com

*Mr Rasel Imran*  
Reporter  
newsagency24.com

*Mr Didarul Islam*  
Senior Reporter  
Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)

*Mr Abul Kalam*  
Cameraman  
Bangladesh Television (BTV)

*Mr Reza Khan*  
Chief Reporter  
Arthokatha

*Ms Tamanna Momin*  
Staff Reporter  
ABC Radio

*Mr Monir Patwary*  
Assistant Cameraman  
Bangladesh Television (BTV)

*Mr Obydur Rahman*  
Staff Reporter  
barta24.net

*Mr Sadequr Rahman*  
Staff Reporter  
Daily Sangram

*Ms Senjuti Rahman*  
Staff Reporter  
Boishakhi Media Limited

*Mr Abdulah Raihan*  
Reporter  
ETV (Ekushey Television)

*Mr Harunur Rashid*  
Reporter  
Bhorer Kagoj

*Mr Harun Al Rashid*  
Senior Reporter  
Prothom Alo

*Mr Ahmed Sagar*  
Special Correspondent  
NTV

*Mr Niaz Zaman Shajib*  
Staff Reporter  
RTV



*CPD Dialogue Report 104*

*Mr Kazi Shohag*  
Senior Reporter  
Daily Manab Jamin

*Mr Khawaza Main Uddin*  
Chief Reporter  
Daily Sun

*Mr Asad Zobayr*  
Staff Reporter  
Banglabazar Patrika