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CHAUBEY: My name is Varanya Chaubey, and I am speaking with Brigadier Shakhawat Hussain, who is Commissioner at Bangladesh Election Commission. Today is February 17th, 2009. I'd like to thank you first of all for agreeing to participate in this interview.

HUSSAIN: *Thank you very much.*

CHAUBEY: I'd like to begin by asking a little bit about your personal background. So would you describe the position you hold now?

HUSSAIN: *I am one of the commissioners of the Bangladesh Election Commission. The Bangladesh Election Commission presently is comprised of three commissioners, one of them is the Chief Election Commissioner and two are the commissioners. So three make the commission. The commission functions as a body who is responsible for whatever happens regarding the election, running the commission itself, election management and management of the commission and all other related tasks it could be given by the government. It has four mandatory works as far as the constitution is concerned. One is the presidential election, another is the parliamentary election, preparation of voter list and delimitation. These are the four musts for the Election Commission as per the constitution.*

Then again, the Election Commission can hold other elections or any other task given under law by the government. So it is an independent body which very recently has been made totally disassociated from the government organization. So it is an independent—for the first time I would believe it is fully independent now, functioning in Bangladesh. This commission was reconstituted after all the political turmoil that we had gone through in 2007.

We were nominated by then caretaker government, SARS Panel. From there, it was approved by the President, and then we were appointed. My appointment came on the 14th of February 2007. Two others were appointed on the 4th of February 2007. So in fact, all of us have completed two years now. Since we are reconstituted as a commission, this commission had done so much of the job and so much of reforms on each of the sectors of the election management. Perhaps no other Election Commission in Bangladesh did undertake so much of a task at a time, within the span of two years, holding three major elections with all these reforms done.

So this was, I would say achievement-wise, if I put it in an index, it is give-or-take 98%. The task is not finished yet, because we, right on day one, what we are trying to do is put everything in database form, use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has been maximized, and our future plan now, which we are working at, is taking the facilities of ICT to the lowest unit of the Election Commission. That's the sub-district level. So we would be able to furnish and give services to the voters, right from his or her doorstep, like voter registration, updating, preparation of identity cards. So everything would be done with the help of ICT. We've already installed a central server, but we are yet to connect up with the facilities at the grass-root level. Work is on. So that is our future perspective.

Having said that, the reforms that we had done, I would categorize them in three parts: one is the legal side, the other one is the administrative side, and another one is the political side. Now sometimes it is very difficult to really separate those three categories. Sometimes there is overlapping. So when I talk to you, unless otherwise, we will specify it may be overlapping or it may not be sequential. So

that is what I would say, that is what I am doing, and we haven't finished our business yet.

The tenure of the Election Commission, as per the constitution, is five years, and the Chief Election Commissioner, after the lapse of five years, cannot be appointed by government to any other government posts. The commissioners have the same, but the only avenue left is to become Chief Election Commissioner. So that's the mandate given in the constitution. And the Election Commission is part of the constitution.

CHAUBEY: You mentioned that quite recently the Election Commission here has become more independent than it has ever been. So would you describe how that independence has come about?

HUSSAIN: *What has happened is the Election Commission, as per the constitution, the Commission is independent. There are just two parts: one is the Commission, one is the Secretariat. And in fact, the Secretariat is the lifeline. If the Commission is the head, then the rest of the thing is the Secretariat, the heart which pumps the blood and whatever it is. The Commission was not per se ever under the government, but the Secretariat was. First of all, it was with the presidential secretariat, when the presidential form of government came. And then it became part of the Prime Minister's secretariat.*

CHAUBEY: When did that change come about?

HUSSAIN: *That was in '91. Therefore, what happened is that the government could interfere in the secretarial business, and it did. Then of course, once you interfere with the secretariat, then it automatically turns on the Commission. So the Commission was not able to function very independently. Many a time, the Commission was not even consulted while posting the secretaries and the other staff, which were coming from the government side. The Commission's other officials, they were totally dependent on the secretariat and the secretariat to the government. So that became a big issue in Bangladesh. Civil society had a movement, and the many political parties, including the present party in power, were very vocal that the commission should be made independent. It should have its own secretariat, which should be independent.*

So this debate and public uproar and seminars and writings went on and on. Then during the last caretaker regime, through an ordinance, it was separated from the government. So now the Election Commission which has all the right to reject or accept anyone who is sent on deputation—there are deputation posts—and the other election officials now would be responsible to the Commission, though we deliberately kept the recruitment at the Public Service Commission level, which is also supposed to be an independent body as per the constitution.

So we are already, through the rules of business, connected with the Ministry—we didn't like to go with the Ministry of Law. We suggested that we should be with the Ministry of Establishment. The résumés, you have to have some connection with the government, because who is going to speak on behalf of us? There is a question in Parliament, and you cannot go to the Parliament and answer. So there has to be somebody, or some organization through which we route to the government. So that is why we kept sort of a liaison with putting in the rules of business, taking out for the Prime Minister's Secretariat with the establishment, not establishment, cabinet division.

So I would not exactly remember, would you also like to know the ordinance details?

CHAUBEY: Yes.

HUSSAIN: *Only yesterday, the cabinet had approved this particular ordinance, promulgated during the caretaker government.*

CHAUBEY: For the last election, though, when you were preparing, what was the status of the Secretariat?

HUSSAIN: *The ninth parliamentary election?*

CHAUBEY: Yes.

HUSSAIN: *By then it was separated from the government. In fact, during the caretaker government we functioned independently. So we really didn't feel that—but then we realized that once the political government comes, then probably there could be some interference. So that was done. The proposal was there for a long time, but the ordinance came out some time in 2008. I will exactly give you the date when it was gazetted. So that's it.*

CHAUBEY: And how does the Secretariat get access to funds at this point?

HUSSAIN: *Oh yes, okay, regarding the funds, we give our annual budget for the function of the Secretariat, and a separate budget is made for elections. So that comes from the revenue budget. Then there is a special allocation for—that is also, of course, the revenue budget comes from the revenue budget. That is for the election purpose. For example, we estimate, we send a budget of how much money will be required. Now the ensuing election, the next election probably will be involved in a few by-elections, and then one of the bigger ones is the Dhaka City corporation election. We are still left with the municipality election, left with the union council elections, if you understand what the union council is. I'm sure you read it. It is the lowest tier of the units of government.*

So there are about 6000 of them. So it's a huge sort of election, countrywide. So this budget comes separately. But the revenue budget for running the Secretariat is separate. So the budget is made every year before the national budget is announced and the money, whatever we ask, government is bound to give it. So far we haven't had any problem, but now we'll see how government reacts to the budget we send.

I would not say that we would be answerable to the government for the expenditure, no, not at all. We can change the head, but of course if we give an expenditure to the audit section of government they would do that. The auditor general of course has the prerogative to ask for the audit report and all these things.

CHAUBEY: Would you describe some of the political reforms you mentioned that have taken place in the last two years?

HUSSAIN: *In fact, the part of political reform, I would not say it is a political reform; that's a very sensitive issue. As far as the politicians are concerned, they always think that political reform would be done by themselves, party reform would be done by themselves. What we have done is, through the electoral law reforms, we brought the political parties into some kind of accountability.*

For example, Bangladesh has as of today, according to our count, about 112 or 113 parties. It can run into 150, I don't know. I said 112 because they applied for registration with the Election Commission. There was no provision of party registration with the Election Commission. There was no provision. In 2001, while the caretaker government wanted to make this party registration mandatory, two big political parties opposed it. They threatened to boycott the election if it was made mandatory. So the Article, the Chapter, could not become mandatory. It was optional, and not many people paid any heed to it. Many parties didn't bother except a few smaller parties.

So this time, the last three years, three to four years, there was a steady growth of a civil movement, should I say, on electoral reforms. A lot of writings have gone in, a lot of seminars all over the country were conducted. A lot of workshops were done, lectures, discussion, TV talk shows. Fortunately, I was also part of it. A bit of a contribution, I also wanted. So that movement somehow definitely has gone into the political parties as well. The political parties remaining totally unaccountable from the public purview is not good for a deep-rooted, deep-seated democracy in Bangladesh.

So that became a big issue. So when we came here, the first thing we were looking at were the reforms that we wanted to do. So we had all the inputs from civil society. We had inputs even from political parties. We had inputs from the media. So we sat there, and we decided at this time we should review the registration policy, and it has to be made mandatory for all political parties who would like to participate in elections. But that, however, does not mean that except the registered political parties, no one is allowed to do. It's not a political party-controlling sort of ordinance or regulation.

There were a lot of misgivings. We said no, you can do politics outside. You can float a political party. We have nothing to say about it. But, should you think of running into any kind of election, you have to register with the Election Commission fulfilling the terms and conditions.

So this, I would say, is one of the political reforms we could do, what we aimed at. The aim of registration was, in a larger frame, accountability. So we stressed two things. One is the financial accountability. Two is the democratization within the political party. Now you are seeing that upheaval within Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP; grassroots level is saying have elections to have the committee. This is exactly in the party registration... After we finish, I would give you it in English so it will be easier for you to read, it is known as the Representation of the People Order (PRO). So that was one big task that we had to do, because there were a lot of conditions which I would say yes, are somewhat strict.

In does put some sort of regulation on it. A bit of quality control or monitoring or overseeing.

CHAUBEY: How did you decide that these were the two areas you wanted parties to be accountable in?

HUSSAIN: *I'm coming back to that. This is known as Election Commission Secretariat Ordinance 2008. It is in Bangla.*

CHAUBEY: I can get a copy. I can get it translated. [end of file 1]

HUSSAIN: *Oh, I see, we did a bit of a home task. Some, as I said, there were certain inputs which we had from the civil society, from those researchers who'd been writing, of course from the media and of course my own participation, interaction with the civil society. On top of it we also studied the various countries' laws on registration. For example, the Indian system, Pakistan, because they were more relevant, being within the subcontinent and almost having a similar kind of problems and similar kind of scenario. The last was Nepal. So having studied that and, as I said earlier also, they had a chapter on it, but it was not mandatory, so we carried out some kind of a study, bit I would say, not delivered, but a bit of research, and then we had interaction with the political parties. We had interaction with the senior journalists. We had interaction with the civil society. So we discussed all the research itself, the modalities and the aim, objectives and the conditions. So these were all discussed with, I would say, people from all walks of life.*

CHAUBEY: Were there any changes made or any specific conditions built in based on your discussions with civil society or political parties?

HUSSAIN: *Yes, mostly I would say. For example, as I said, our intentions were mainly to have the transparency, that is the financial transparency and the democratization within the party. These were the two factors which were the cry of the civil society. And though political parties were not very much interested in it, they were pressurized by these pressure groups, and they had to ultimately succumb to that. So these are the two major areas that we discussed with all people. Then some of the requirement that we ourselves, as I said, having studied and analyzing, finding which is more suitable for Bangladesh and required, so we put that. So one of the—I would not say it is an achievement, but one of the requirements that we put, keeping in view the social condition of Bangladesh, like the deprivation of women and participant politics. So we then decided to take a cue from the other countries, and how they have done it.*

So we kept one condition that 33%, minimum of 33% women representation has to be there in political parties, in all committees. This is one part that took, I would say, hard negotiation with political parties. You would be surprised. It is not the religious parties alone or religious-based parties alone. Even the so to say secular parties were vehemently opposed to putting any figure like that.

CHAUBEY: What were their objections?

HUSSAIN: *Well, their objections, why 33%, don't mention 33%, it could be 100%, we can do it. I said yes, I know it could be 100%. You can do it, but the point is that we would like to begin somewhere, minimum 33%.*

CHAUBEY: How did you select 33% as the figure?

HUSSAIN: *It was not much research, I would say. It was looking at we have now. I won't say social taboo, but I would say the political, somehow, it is a kind of political taboo on women. Very few are given a chance to participate in the elections. Nominations are very selective and very few. For the first time, we have 19 directly-elected members of Parliament in the Bangladesh Parliament. Always it has been two, three or a few prominent leaders. So we thought that whatever minimum we can entice political parties. We knew that 50% was not going to work. So we kept to 33%.*

We did discuss with the organizations, which were fighting for equal rights here in Bangladesh, and a lot of women's organizations like NGOs were promoting these

causes. So we had long, long discussions with them. Somehow we agreed to start with the 33%. And keeping also practicality in mind that 33% getting at a grassroots level women participating in politics would be very difficult. So however, we had a very hard negotiation on this issue. Then ultimately we came down accommodating all views, 33% okay, but cannot be done immediately, so we gave a long sort of time to them. It is 2020. By 2020 the political parties have to achieve 33%.

I would say it has a rippling effect. We could see, for example, that the first time there were about 19 women members of Parliament apart from two ladies and one or two more prominent leaders. There were 19 new faces there in the Parliament, and very recently I heard the General Secretary, who is now a Minister, saying that in the next Parliament we should have 100 seats for women which will be totally for direct election. So if it is 300 seats with 100 seats, I think it is a fair start. Of course, then that will open seats as well.

The other thing, which as I said, it is a rippling effect. It is the first time in sub-district elections, upazilas we call, there is a specific post for a woman vice-chairman. So that means we have 481 upazilas where there are 481 vice-chairmen. So sure, once they are elected, they would become political players anyway, either from this party or that party. So that encourages us in saying that the goal is achievable. So much so that the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is known to be ultra-rightist political party, had to change their constitution. We forced them to change. They have to say that 33% women's participation will be there. They had a women wing which was separate. They had to amalgamate within the main party. So it is taking effect, definitely.

There was so much talk. The one thing that we did, whenever we conceived some changes or reforms within the law, we gave it out to the press at the conceptual level, so that it is debated, discussed. Whatever limitation at that time we had on open discussion, things like that, but the media was free. So there were a lot of discussions on it. We could find out whether this would be workable or not. So that was one big advantage that we had. You will see after this time all this media would be here. So every day, almost every day I had to say something. I would give out that this provision is coming. So that would be debated the whole night. So that was one advantage that we took.

The other very debatable, a hard bargain, two or three areas, was the fund audit of the political party fund. That again became a hard, burning issue with the political parties. They said you're trying to control us. We said no, we're trying to help you. You have to be transparent, where are you getting funds from? How are you spending, how much are you spending? That all has to be reported because these are public funds in one sense. You said that you are taking donations from people. Where this money is going? No one knows. So people have the right to know how the political party is functioning. We are going to—the political party does not remain a personal club, it becomes public properly because people are voting for you. They have the right to know how you are running, where the party comes from. So we put certain restrictions like no foreign donations.

We made some sort of effort to specify from where they can get donations, and how much they can get donations, how much through open check, how much personal contribution. So we tried to address as much, as they can digest, the financial matter. They are supposed to give their fund-audited papers by December each year. We said if you do not produce it in time, we will warn you. Second warning and third warning, you will be fined. If you fail to give it to the

Election Commission consecutively three years, your registration will be canceled.

So this is one area, the financial side, I'm talking about political parties. So this is one area where you can say a bit of reform has been made.

CHAUBEY: How closely was this followed by the parties?

HUSSAIN: *Not yet, this is the first time.*

CHAUBEY: So for the previous December they didn't have to?

HUSSAIN: *No, they have to give it in December 2009, this December. The previous December it was not mandatory. It became mandatory from 2008; therefore, the year will close in June. So the audit report had to be given in December. Hopefully we will get it in 2009 December. Then the other area of political reform is the practice of democracy within the party. That the parties have promised they are going to do, and it is in the registration or the condition of the registration that you have to let us know whenever you have election of your new committees, that they're elected.*

Awami League, their constitution, the party constitution, mentions about elections, but elections are very selective. BNP, the other major party, had no provision of elections. For the last 14 years, they had no political party council. So having seen all this, we set conditions that you have to do it. Now you see people are talking about it at the grassroots level. The other thing is to empower the grassroots workers of the political party whom we thought to be the mainstream, the blood flow of the political parties. These people have been deprived because there was no consultation, no democracy at that level. So what we said in the registration part of it, that political parties must have a pre-qualified person for nomination. That means there has to be election or suggestion coming from the grassroots level for the constituencies, whom they want to be nominated.

So their recommendation has to come into the center and the center will select out of these recommendations. So this could be direct elections; this could be indirect elections. Something like US primaries. So happily the Awami League, this time at least, tried to do it that way. Previously they used to be central domination.

So why we did it? There were a lot of allegations that nominations were sold and bought, and that was very evident in the last parliamentary election. So we were thinking how to regulate it if we can, discourage doing. So this was one way of doing it. This was also very much vehemently opposed by the political parties. Nobody wants to lose their control and grip on the thing. We said, "no, you can still have options, you can put your one or two percent, but then they have to be, somehow, ratified by ground-level people." Then they came out with "Oh, you wanted to stop this, no selling, the nomination business." As the town coined in Bangladesh. That can also happen at the grassroots level. I said okay, fine. Let those poor guys get some money, not you. However, these are a few prominent changes that we brought in the registration policy. Many others with that.

We set criteria, which the political parties can get registration so that to minimize the spurious parties, who create problems with the election booth. So we wanted to control that as well. With that, the registration was done. We said, "Nothing doing. We will not allow you to participate in the election without registration." So

they had to do it, even the ultra-rightist parties had to amend their party constitution because we kept a few provisions like no party can be based on one particular religion, no discrimination between religions, no discrimination between sects, colors, whatever. So they had to change a bit of it.

I would say this is one of the major achievements that this Election Commission can claim. So talk about political reform through electoral laws, this much we could do. I think it is a good beginning, a good start.

CHAUBEY: I'd like to talk a little bit about the context in this election, particularly the December 2008 election. Until ten days before the election, you were operating in a state of emergency.

HUSSAIN: Yes we were.

CHAUBEY: So would you describe some of the challenges of operating in that context and how you got around the obstacles.

HUSSAIN: *In fact, if you ask me, the emergency which was in place in Bangladesh, for us it was no difficulty in operating, because it did not restrict any kind of movement except the political movement and the open political activities. That was one challenge only. The rest of the things didn't bother us much. Rather, I would say, in hindsight, that if peaceful election were possible because of the last two years, that the law and order situation was much better. So it did not deteriorate on election day because it was only ten days before that it was lifted.*

Apart from that we didn't face much of a problem. But yes, there was perception by the political parties that any time people there can be harassed and a certain law which empowered the law-enforcing agencies to arrest and to pick up people without being accountable. That was one challenge that we had, because political parties had been demanding to us that if we want to participate in the election, you have to lift the emergency. You tell the government to lift. So we have been talking to the government for a long time.

Then at one stage we stopped talking because we knew that the government was not going to do it immediately. They will do it, but not much before election. They were definitely skeptical about that. The political scenario in 2007 people saw, that might come back again. Then, the other question was, a lot of corrupt people were on corruption charges. They were sentenced. Frankly speaking, we were also interested that these people should not come back in the election because they are ill-reputed people. If they get a chance to come back in this election, then it will be very difficult to hold this election in that free and fair manner because these are moneyed people. They have political goons with them, and they may be operating—then there's a public perception of these people.

So that is one reason why the government didn't want to lift it before the closure of nomination submission, that we knew. But yes, that was a challenge, because all the political parties were demanding that we had to negotiate with the government, and they reassured us, and then we suggested doing it after the nomination dates, finalization dates are over. So even then if these people come back and get bail and come out or get a stay, they are not participating in the election.

That was one big challenge that we had, and the other challenge that we faced was public perception. It's nothing tangible, but it had a lot of intangible effects.

Because in a third-world country, in a scenario like this, where it is not a direct military intervention, but sort of indirect military intervention, an unelected government staying for two years, supported by the military, one could term it as a quasi-military regime. In a third-world country it is a rare example where such a regime has voluntarily left, and we had gone through, in the past, at least two such regimes. It did not disembark from the tiger, but it kept on riding, until either the tiger has eaten it up or threw it from the back. So this was one perception that people had, and it was very difficult for even us to reassure them that that is not the case.

We almost gave them all kinds of assurances. So people remained skeptical. Some of them, even the day before election. You know in a poor country like this and country where the literacy rate is so low, few people can change the opinion of the vast majority. So they keep on listening to these people, and they also have that perception, "Oh my God, the educated people are telling... political scientists..." and blah, blah. So they must be telling the correct....

So even the major political parties, even the people of ruling parties, also had a lot of cynicism, I would say. So that was one of the challenges that we had to face almost every day, the same question repeated by the media. We at one time, I, personally, I said I am the last person to answer it. Then I had to tell them, "Look here, the day I stop coming to the office, that is an indication there will be no election. As long as I'm in the office, I can assure you that there will be an election." So that is how these challenges, these two challenges.

And the third challenge, in fact, I would say the first challenge that we had taken to ourselves was the preparation of the voter list. Though I was pretty confident that we can do it, but at the same time we were skeptical, at least I remained very skeptical at times, that whether we can finish it in time and hold the election, as promised by us and by the caretaker government by the end of 2008, because that became an international commitment. Therefore, whether it devolved on me or not, I took a lot of personal interest in seeing this preparation of voter list through. I traveled almost 75% of the country when this list was being prepared. I went to the villages with them. I saw the work in the field. Sometimes I directed, sometimes I listened from them their difficulties. I came back, discussed in the Commission. Things changed.

So in fact, I would say that I was pretty deeply involved from day one because I was insisting that it is only the Bangladesh army which we can trust, because of the organizational capability, the huge logistic support that was required, which in fact we really didn't know how much logistic support would be required. I always say that we started sailing in absolutely an unknown ocean, and we didn't know where we were going. So with this, my involvement was slightly more than others in organizing it in the field. So that was one of the biggest challenges. So much so that now that everything is over, even the United Nations Development Project (UNDP), those organizing funds, the country coordinator said we were all skeptical about it.

Even then people said "Okay, fine, but we're not really sure that this project will end at all in time."

CHAUBEY: What were the reasons for the skepticism?

HUSSAIN: *What I could understand is that many countries tried. For example, in Nigeria they'd abandoned, perhaps in the Congo they had abandoned halfway through.*

Even in this country there was an attempt taken to make voter identity card that was abandoned.

CHAUBEY: Was that in 1996?

HUSSAIN: Yes, in '95-'96. That was abandoned.

CHAUBEY: Why was that abandoned at the time?

HUSSAIN: *I'll come to it later if you want to ask me. That's where we took the lesson from. Then in India, when we were going through, actually we took three months to study it, we brought some people from West Bengal. We thought that because it was a similar social economic condition, let us see—. You know that India is also trying now to go to a photo voter roll. They told us that last year they were trying; they have not achieved even 60%. So having read and heard all this, I think we were also skeptical about—. You see we were talking about, we were targeting, as per the previous voter list, 90 million people spread all over the country in places which were inaccessible, in places where 15 km takes about four to five hours to go, in boats, in rickshaws, on foot and all these things. You have the experience of rural India, and if you come towards the east rivers and how is it called, velds and all these things. Then we had a very inaccessible area, along the hill track. So it was an enormous sort of challenge that really bothered us.*

So I would say that that was one of the biggest challenges that we really faced. I, to be very frank, even halfway through, I really didn't know whether we could meet the time or not. So that is a chapter that we can discuss later. Should we have a break?

CHAUBEY: Sure. [end of file 2].

We were speaking about the voter list.

HUSSAIN: *Yes, this is one. I would term it to be total revolution in this country. I always say that a silent revolution which has taken place in this country is the photo voter roll. It is very commonly known as voter list. In fact, you know, there was a lot of discussion on it previously also. When this political education movement was going on, I'm don't want to go into detail because that's a different chapter altogether, then the opposition party and their allies demanded that there has to be a photo voter list before these elections are held.*

CHAUBEY: This was in January 2007?

HUSSAIN: *Yes, January 2007. Having realized little what it means, they made up a demand. They themselves knowing that it's not possible in such a short period, but this is the sideline that I'm talking about. Many of them confided that this was a ploy to put pressure on the government. They said make new voter lists, not only new, it has to have photographs. The idea was that people would give their photograph, and we would just paste it on the voter list. But that's not functional. So that is where probably the people picked up, something that, as I said, most of the people started talking about photo voter roll, photo voter roll. Least knowing how it is to be done.*

That's how I think the concept came in. And as I said, when we were reorganized here, the caretaker government also picked up this issue. They wanted to make—there were two projects. In fact the project was not photo voter roll, but national identity card. So they wanted the national identity card to be prepared

and given in this, whatever period they are in. In fact, a committee also met, the national committee who would recommend how to make this identity card. It was headed by one of the experts in Bangladesh in ICT.

So we were called to attend that cabinet meeting. There a presentation was given. People talked about a national identity card and also talked about, as a byproduct of a national identity card, photo voter roll is also possible. There were two presentations, mainly national committee presentations which said it can be done, and financed—. The time stipulated, they said about two years time. Then there was a presentation of the army. We said that we can do this national identity card project with international experience, like peacekeeping in African countries and others, and within this country given that identity cards. So they said they can do it.

They also said that we can try and do the photo voter roll. And it was then decided that we should try to do the photo voter roll. Interestingly there is a high court order as well. This caretaker government took it to the high court, that the elections, since the 22nd January elections were put to hold, then the high court gave the decision not to proceed with anything of the election, holding it, when the emergency was proclaimed.

After the emergency there was another verdict from the high court that having reformed electoral law, introduction of transparent ballot box, preparation of the photo voter list and all other connected reforms done, only then are elections to be held. So that was probably to give a breathing space to the caretaker government. So that I can understand.

Since this was the major demand from the opposition parties, not realizing what it really involves. So now the high court comes and gives its verdict. Do this first, then hold a free and fair election. Now there was a catch-22 situation for particularly the Awami League and its allies: neither can they deny—so, anyway, that's a different story altogether. So that was the background of it.

Then we were told that if we want we can study it further and we should come up with a recommendation. So we took two to three months first of all to conceive, understand it. I went through a lot of web sites. I read about photo voter lists, whatever was available. By then, there were twelve countries that had this one and their voter size was very tiny as far as Bangladesh was concerned. I think the countries like Panama and some of the African countries. Then I was reading about the Indian one, what were the problems, how were they doing, what were the conditions.

So having read all this, we had a project, the United Nations Development Project they were coordinating that we inherited, withstanding of Election Commission. So we had some money left. The Chief Election Commissioner said lets have a consultant who would better understand the IT side of it. So we brought in a consultant.

CHAUBEY: From the UN?

HUSSAIN: *From the UN fund. Then we started looking at the experience of various countries, the modality, how they would do it, the organization, who will do it. So the three things were involved. The first question was can it be done in the given stipulated time. Two, what is the technology involved in it, which we're looking at. Three, the organization, who should execute it. So we had options like giving it—we could not do it ourselves because we don't have that manpower. Technology*

was involved which was not known to us. So we started consulting a few of the local and some of the foreign firms who came to us. In fact, we didn't call them, they just came. Probably they just found there was some business coming up.

So there was representation from Siemens. Some people from IBM came; it was IBM India I believe that came. Then we called the West Bengal...I think it is Weber or something, who were working for the West Bengal Election Commission. Then there were a lot of individual connection presentations. Then came the army, two organizations of the army. They came and first gave a presentation that they can do it because of the methodology and then they came up with some evolved technology supported by, I believe, some software company who prepared software in Bangladesh.

So it took us some time to see the performance and presentation after presentation. Then we decided if we had to do it, we would take the help of the army. So I in fact had a lot of informal meetings with the army people, particularly with a general who had the technical know-how on this, and he was made the point man.

CHAUBEY: That's General...?

HUSSAIN: *Shafik (Major General Shafiqul Islam). He was made the point man as far as I was concerned. Then we saw the methodology. It was discussed with UNDP and then the foreign assistance was promised. Mostly the person who worked very relentlessly on this issue was Mr. Anwar Choudhury, the British High Commission. He was very enthusiastic about it I would say. The other name that I would remember as well is the [Indecipherable], she was also very enthusiastic about it. They did encourage us. The promised funds came.*

We decided to go with the army. Particularly, I had faith in them. I had two reasons. One is that it's the organization that Bangladesh has. The second was slightly political. I wanted to engage them in a commitment that elections would be held in December 2008, and I wanted to involve them in the process. This is the first time I'm telling you. I wanted to involve the army so that they remained committed, that the elections would be held in 2008. That is what exactly was one of my reasons.

Then I did express it when I was being inducted here, and I had a very heart-to-heart talk with army chief. My background, my being senior to all of them, so I had the advantage of talking very openly. So that was two of the things. One is the organization, the other one is that I wanted them to get committed to it. Then we chose the armed forces, in fact, for their logistics, for their commitment. In Bangladesh only they could mobilize people.

We did not. We had a lot of pressure, not from the government but pressure from the business community, that we engage the private organizations. We did not, mainly for one reason — that a project in 1996 failed because it involved the private companies. Remember in 1996, there were hardly any private companies that could handle it. There was a lot of corruption in distributing the jobs. These were given to the most incompetent people who had never done it. They were not supported by the people. They went to the villages and people didn't come. Remember they were only producing identity cards. Then it ended up into a fiasco. At one stage, it had to be abandoned. I think half way through it had to be abandoned, because the execution was not taking place. It failed because these organizations were incapable of handling such magnitude things.

So this is one lesson that we took. The other lesson we had, why it failed, because of people mobilization. Basically it failed because people could not be mobilized by the private contractors. You know in that part of the world there are a lot of social taboos as well, religious and social taboos. I was reading the Indian thing, this was one of the biggest hurdles, religious and social taboos. People are not interested, disjointed. They don't even go for voting or to talk about—. And there was stiff criticism from the government, from the people, that this is an impossible task they have taken. They want to kill time and, as I said, skepticism.

Anyhow, so this is the reason that we involved the army and the army was very willing to do it. We funded them. We bought equipment for them. They were so keen that we were getting late in getting the equipment so they started begging the companies, and they started to do it. So we had a pilot project done in Dhaka somewhere. We saw the modality. Having done that pilot project again, we changed, we sat down, and we defined the modality. Then we started from Rashae.

CHAUBEY: Could you describe some of the changes that may have come about if you can remember?

HUSSAIN: *Oh yes. The first thing was, the first debate was how do we bring people, how do we mobilize people. One of the biggest drawbacks of our electoral roll preparation is that the people are not involved in it. It is done in a bureaucratic way. Schoolteachers and others are appointed. They go door-to-door. So the public representative doesn't know what is happening. They don't know. When we talk about people, we talk about the average representative at the grassroots level.*

So we thought that if even the army had to mobilize, they had to mobilize through somebody. The army cannot go door-to-door and say, "Come here, come here. If you don't come we'll—." No. So we set the rules that, at the grassroots level, the chairman of the union council, the members of the union council would make the committee. To ensure it is nonpartisan or bipartisan, we said, "Okay, the chairman and his nearest rival should make a committee and this committee would facilitate recognizing the voters, that they are of so and so village and so on.

They became the party to the whole mobilization and the photo voter roll making. So that's how we went to the grassroots level. Then we had a number of discussions with the religious leaders. We knew that in our country there were places where women would not come for a photograph. There was adverse talking also that photographs are Haram and things like that in religion; it's taboo. So we, in fact, I initiated the discussion with the Imams, their organization. They were convinced. We said okay.

I requested Mr. Anwar Choudhury to please look after them. Give them some funds so that they can go around and talk about it. He did, and it was so effective that every Juma prayer, there is to be a sermon on this in the villages and everywhere.

Then there were NGOs. We had a lot of discussion, so the mobilization takes place. So the, and of course the army logistics. So this was the whole of the mobilization scheme that we did. Now, for example, we didn't know what should be the methodology. Should we take a laptop and this camera and all these things house-to-house? Or, we should call people in the center? Then there was a lot of hue and cry. The political people said they were all novices; they're all

idiots. These three people, they're a bunch of nincompoops. They don't even know the country, they don't even know the psychology of people. People don't come for vote, why should they come for registration. So it really dawned on us, why should they come for registration?

So we said okay, the photo voter roll is the identity card. So we said, identity card. You come, you get an identity card. Then we developed the methodology that we visit house-to-house and then we also bring people to the center, because it would be ridiculous to carry a laptop from house-to-house. It would take years. Some people would be found, some would not be found, and then you'll go switch on and switch off, carry the battery and somewhere you'll carry generators. It's an impossible task.

So we struck a deal in between. We said okay, business as usual. An enumerator will go. They'll fill out the forms. They'll hand over a chit that you come at so-and-so time to so-and-so place for your photograph for the identity card and the electoral roll. So the pilot, we tested it, and we found that it works. Once the people found their identity card, you didn't have to say anything. So we started promulgating, "Get it and get the identity card, and the identity card would give you this facility." So that's how we mobilized.

The changes that we had to bring is the methodology, how we do it. Then we also mixed it that anybody who was sick, in the hospital, in the jail, the mobile team would visit. So we had a mobile team, which we would do at the end, and we also had center-based. All these centers were used, all the voting centers were used, which people knew for ages that's their voting center. The motivation was the identity card and the motivation was a changed voter roll.

So that's how we did it. The entire logistics of the army were used, the entire logistics, whatever was required, the air force and navy were used for executing the task. Where our own officers, people from the administration, in fact, you can say it was almost a mobilization of the whole country. So we finished it in record time. In eleven months the photo voter list was finished. According, all the details you have had, or you want to hear my voice as well?

CHAUBEY: I can take that brochure with me.

HUSSAIN: *I'll give you that brochure. We have recorded, about 80 million, as I said, 80.10 million I can say. In our own towns, 80,100,058,698 people have been on the voter list with their photograph and fingerprint. So this is what we started. We finished in July 2008, and after that, the legal process went in. If you want to take it... and we could eliminate 12 million fake voters from the previous 2006 list. This is the accuracy, which was worked out, surveyed, 0.05%.*

CHAUBEY: How was that determined, the accuracy?

HUSSAIN: *That was determined by a separate organization, A.C. Nielsen, one of the most reliable survey firms, of USA I believe.*

CHAUBEY: Okay, A.C. Nielsen, okay.

HUSSAIN: *So they did it in a limited space. Another one is going on now. They did it in Rashae. So the other one is going now, we haven't got the result. 3% plus-minus is very acceptable, but it was even less than that, not even 1%, not even 0.50%. So that's the accuracy, but there are mistakes like the spelling of the name, the date of birth. So now that we have the largest database, we can do it*

in our own time but that we have to do very fast for the purpose of the election. As I said, our future project is that this database will be stored and then it will be available at the doorstep, that is at the upazila level, so that the voters can come and verify.

We are also planning to change, if they need to change their photographs, because this was done in a hurry and it was not very right ambience for photographs, but somehow we had to do it. We can replace these photographs; you know that if data is there, you can do lot of things. So all these projects are in hand, and we are working on it. The best part of it is that having completed it, we tested first in a very small-scale election. Out of four city corporation elections and nine municipality elections with this new roll. In that election there were only two or three complaints of fake voting. I won't call it fake voting, probably that was by-mistake voting. The people are so enthusiastic in one municipality 94% vote was cast. All told, that was probably 82% vote was cast, a little less than in the national election that we had.

People were so interested. People then realized that they could vote, they could get their own vote still intact which people didn't believe previously. A lot of people didn't come because by the time they come they've heard they've already voted. Now that they know that their photograph is there, they can go and challenge. So in this one, the turnout was so heavy. A lot of people then said, "Oh, because of an emergency people have come and all this thing." So it was repeated in the national election. The national election had 87.2% turnout. In places it was 93 to 94%. This is not what I'm saying, this is what the international observers and everybody is saying. So we were also surprised, 94%. But I can understand why people have come. Faith in it, one, and secondly, something new, the whole thing has changed, the scenario of the previous elections have changed. We have introduced translucent ballot boxes, right in front of you. So all these changes, as I said, it is totally revolutionizing, at least in the context of Bangladesh, the election process, electoral reform, whatever you want to say. It is on, it is not finished. So that's how.

CHAUBEY: This database, who is managing it now?

HUSSAIN: *Now it is being done by a project director. Since the project is still on, it is a three-year project. Once the project is over, it will be handled by our own trained manpower. They will handle—we are training them simultaneously as we have connectivity, once we place the connections, so it will be our people. Of course there will be some consultants still that we will need, but at this moment the project director is doing it. If you are interested you can go and visit them. If you need transport, I can arrange; he can take you around and show you.*

CHAUBEY: I have one other question about—

HUSSAIN: *I think once we've finished, the data I have here. This is what was on the mid-, when we had finished 50%. So the photographs, you'll find what kind of challenges and what kind of mobilization—you don't have to look at the web site, you can have mine—. Interestingly this time, women voters surpassed men voters.*

CHAUBEY: Why did the upazila elections turn out so differently from the national elections?

HUSSAIN: *First of all is the political intervention. In places where the members of Parliament wanted to dominate it and they wanted their own man to be elected. So they had to meddle in it. They dominated, they influenced the local administration, which*

they do all the time. I told them, on television, this is what has happened. So see the difference between this election and that election? We wanted to hold this election before the national election; however, so, this was initial, 80 million or so much. But later on, some more people were added, so it came down to that.

Here, this will give you pictorial—difficulties and challenges and mobilization. If you want you can make a slide out of it for your—. You wanted to ask me something else. This is naturally an oral form of it.

CHAUBEY: I've gone over a lot of questions, and you've given me a lot of your time, but I'd like to ask you if there are, in conclusion, a couple of innovations that you came across here or that you have found worked very well that you would advise your counterparts in other countries to try and what are the contexts in which they—?

HUSSAIN: *Innovation? I would say, as far as the law is concerned, there are all different perceptions in every country, practical and non-practical. But what we—from the law point of view what we did, I'd say in the registration part of it there are certain innovations. Like one innovation we did, I forced it, to give the option to the voter of rejecting the entire ballot.*

CHAUBEY: That was your initiative?

HUSSAIN: *Yes, that's the no-vote, and I fought with the political parties.*

CHAUBEY: Why did you decide to put that on?

HUSSAIN: *The reason is that if I don't like anyone, I don't go to the voting center, I don't go; I sleep in my house. I'm wasting my voting power. At least to express my annoyance that you have put all the goons and I don't like it. How do I do it? Sitting inside my house? One. Second is that political parties must know that there are people who didn't like what they had given to the people, particularly in the context of Bangladesh. One of the reasons why BNP has failed is because they put those goons back. Everybody was talking, "My God, these are the people? Again they're coming back? What options do I have? Not going to the voting center. Oh, don't go to voting center. Why shouldn't I go to the voting center? I have become a voter with so much time spent. It is not sitting in my cozy chair I became a voter. I had to visit there; I had to give my photograph, to give my fingerprint. Not to sit in my house. So what options are you giving me except these few goons that I see? If I don't like them." The easier option is don't go to the voting center.*

So there were two things I thought that we should do, because I was reading in many places, none of them—and there were also a few cries from the civil society. I in fact took part in a seminar first, I first coined that I have not gone to the voting center because I didn't like these goons. So that is one.

The other one, we thought that it would put some indirect pressure, psychological pressure on the political party to see that they choose their candidates a little better. Of course there is one very senior—there yesterday also was the chief election commissioner with a very senior member of PNP (People's National Party) who has been Finance Minister so many years. He said, "My, These 3000 no-votes have made all the difference." Why did you do this no-vote? So we said "What was the guarantee that if there were no no-vote, these 3000 people would have voted for you? These 3000 people might not have gone.

So the habit of going to the voting center and expressing my dissatisfaction has to be there, that's my democratic right. You are not catering for me, the political party is not catering for me, Election Commission is not catering for me. I'm disenfranchised because I don't like these people. That is the psychology, one. The second one I said, not that we did—we didn't propagate because the Election Commission thought we would propagate go and no-vote and people will think—so it would be a social movement. There were certain movements, but we told them take it easy.

In one of the [Indecipherable] constituency, 38,000, the highest, 38,000 no-votes in one constituency. What we did, we also kept—.

CHAUBEY: No-vote or I choose no one?

HUSSAIN: *I choose no one. That's in short, talking about no-vote means none of the above. We also kept in the provision that in any constituency, if "none of the above" crosses 50%, there would be a fresh election. So we kept a higher threshold. So this year, I believe, is about—[interruption]. Where was I?*

CHAUBEY: None of the above.

HUSSAIN: *None of the above, about 38,000. All told, there were about 300,000. Three lakh, 81,000 something no-voting in total in the country. But since it was not promulgated, lot of people didn't know what it is. At one time these young voters were very thrilled about it. They said we all will go and give no-vote. Then they said no, no, we'll select some better out of worse.*

CHAUBEY: Did you face objections from—?

HUSSAIN: *We did, we did, not a single political party agreed to keep it. I told them, I said please put forward a reason why not. If you convince me, it was only me who was fighting. If you convince me in the meeting of the political party dialog. The Chief Election Commissioner almost gave up, the other commissioner was [Indecipherable]. I said nothing doing. You give me the reason why should we not have it. You convince me, we'll not have it. They couldn't come up with a solid reason. They only had the psychology that this would put pressure on this, and then they said "Well, one can conspire."*

I said, if they conspire and the people listen to him as people listen to you to vote for you, and if the people listen to him that he is a bad guy, don't vote for him, good enough, that's the democracy. So this is one innovative thing that we did, and I believe, we now believe, that it gives a democratic right to a person to go to the voting center. What am I offering him? I'm offering you an option. This is one.

Then the whole thing innovative was the photo voter roll. It was totally an indigenous methodology that a simple laptop with a web camera attached to it and the fingerprint attached to it was doing the job. It was nothing very high-tech, manageable, and the most revolutionary thing that has happened—what we did, we employed, let me tell you how many, a total of how many enumerators and operators we recruited. We had one lakh, 4000 computer operators, all are young kids. They were given only three to four days training.

CHAUBEY: By the Election Commission?

HUSSAIN: *By the Election Commission, by the army. The technical side was handled over to the army. We had our own man there. So they had three to four days training,*

and we ensured that we recruit locally. If locally was not available, then within the district. So wherever they went, they recruited locally. They were trained three to four days, and payment was made at the end of the day. We said, so many you do. At times we had to tell them that not beyond this. Seventy per head per day, not more than that. Because they tried to be very fast and they did commit mistakes.

CHAUBEY: They could earn on the basis of?

HUSSAIN: *On the basis of per voter. We paid them six taka per voter. So one could end up getting 500 taka per day. So this was also an employment generator for that one year. However, the innovation was the technology that we did. The innovation was the methodology, how we did, and of course, the whole thing was very innovative. So I cannot specify a particular thing: the technology is locally suited, everything could be produced locally; everything could be arranged locally. You didn't have to bring high-tech from outside. You didn't have to hire people.*

Then second was the methodology we did. It was a long-drawn process. So we sent the people door-to-door as done everywhere, fill out the form. Then they were given the appointed time to come back. So the methodology was also sort of, I would say, innovative. Of course, the whole operation was innovative.

CHAUBEY: Did you recruit these enumerators through the Election Commission or through the Public Service Commission?

HUSSAIN: *No, they were locally picked by the—these are not permanent places, only for that particular time, particular purpose. So they were not, per se, employed by the Election Commission as such. They were temporarily engaged by the local Election Commission office with the help of the technical people who were working on the technical side of it. The enumerators were not recruited, but they were engaged by the Election Commission, by the government order, because that's a part of the Election Commission function. But this was done not by the government order, by the decision of the Election Commission as to be taken and recruited. They were recruited. Some of them, now we have given some employment because we would be having one operator part upazila and some head and some of the project. So some of them are finding some permanent job. But the rest of the trained people, they could be employed by anyone else. They were all kids from the schools and colleges, and they were very thrilled doing this job.*

CHAUBEY: Okay, well you've given me plenty of information. To conclude—.

HUSSAIN: *The very important thing that probably you might find in some places is that money and muscle was one problem which is still being faced in supporting it. Candidates spend money, you never know how much money they're spending. So we brought some changes in the conduct rule, where we tried to minimize the expenditure by putting a lot of embargo on a lot of things. Like you will not find any wall-writing.*

CHAUBEY: These things were also part of the 2001 Code of Conduct, the no color posters and no wall-writing.

HUSSAIN: *It was there, no color poster was there but wall-writing was not there. So the wall-writing we stopped, no color posting and posters not to be pasted on the wall.*

CHAUBEY: By candidates.

HUSSAIN: By candidates. Still, you can still find some posters hanging. Then we stopped. We stopped unlimited, so-called, election offices every nook and corner. We limited them, total limit. We stopped—that you cannot make any arches or anything, things like that. There were 300 arches. The biggest thing that they used to, there's a word, I don't know if you're familiar with it, short arm. Candidates going for nomination—entire road is blocked with 200 trucks following with his supporters and band parties and motorcycles and what not and what not. He'll end up spending on the first day 15 to 20 lakhs. So we said if anyone does that, his nomination will be canceled right then and there. We allowed only four people to go with him. Only four persons will go and submit your nomination and come back.

So there were a lot of stringent measures with the Code of Conduct. You are right, in 2001 these were there, but some changes we brought like mic timing, use of these kinds of office, erection of gates, not shutting the posters in the wall, no wall-writing at all. So all these, and the short arm. These are all new, innovative inclusions and this worked.

CHAUBEY: Were any parties fined for any infractions?

HUSSAIN: Not on these accounts. Not on these accounts. Some were warned, not parties, candidates were warned. We didn't want to be very harsh right in the beginning. We wanted to go down to the people's perception that yes, this can be done. And in Dhaka city you find—otherwise you would have found that every wall is absolutely, totally littered. So we were very happy that this was done, and this, more or less, will become a culture. People were very happy: they said we don't hear miking all the time. So we limited it, two to eight and three at a time, not more than that. So it did hold.

The basic reason why it did hold was that we had a lot of consultation with the political parties while bringing this as a law. But photo voter roll we didn't discuss. So we talked to the political party a number of times, four times, a structured discussion with them. That we came into some kind of agreement except one or two places. We kept one a stringent law with us which is the giving empowerment to the Election Commission for canceling the nomination. Candidates, if found that he is violating grossly the laws, but then, of course, it has its own process. It is not draconian, it is all a process. So that Damocles Sword was on their heads so that prevented a lot of notorious people from showing their color.

All in all, I think, at least I can take pride that in two years I have contributed in a small way in changing the political culture a little bit, not all, it has not changed the bigger scenario, but election culture has changed. The process we've tried to change. We tasted it now one, two, three elections. But booth capturing and this doesn't—it all falls within the election process. It depends on the people on the ground, the administrative support that we get, the police we get.

Now we will experiment, these bye-elections not involving civil administration that much and key appointment. We're very limited though. We're trying out giving the key appointment to the Commission officials. Let us see.

CHAUBEY: This is a bye-election for some constituencies—?

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- HUSSAIN: Seven constituencies. There will be no deputy commissioner, no other government official. It will be Election Commission officials who would be returning officers and assistant returning officers.*
- CHAUBEY: This is because the candidates won from more than one constituency?*
- HUSSAIN: Yes, that also we limited, we limited from five to three.*
- CHAUBEY: Why was it three that you selected?*
- HUSSAIN: Three, that's a very pertinent question. Three because our constitution says that one can contest not more than two, not more than two. Sorry, not less than two. Sorry, two or more. One can contest from two or more. That's the language. When you interpret legally, two is mandatory, or more, it has to be or more. But how many? The constitution doesn't say. So from five to three. That's how it came down to three, otherwise we wanted to make it two. But since the constitution says two or more, two means that two is very much constitutional, the constitution allows, and it also gives you another one. That was the interpretation of the legal people. I was fighting with it, and they said no, no, no, if somebody goes to the court it might not stay. So that's why it came down to three.*
- In India it is true, the Indian Election Commission for the last ten years, they are fighting to bring it down to one. Now, having said all this, we had Sark observers here, and I also went to observe the Nepal election. The Nepal Chief Election Commissioner was here. One ex-election commissioner of India was here, one ex-President of Mauritius was here. These two chief election commissioners said that it is a nightmare what you have done because the Indian election commissioner, the ex-election commissioner said, we must salute to the law because we have been trying for the last ten years but you know to go through the Parliament, and these political people don't even listen or anything.*
- We said that we were fortunate enough to have a non-party caretaker government. Now when it goes to the Parliament, we'll see a lot of people crying, not this, not that, not that. So we had that period to carry out this reform. A lot of innovation, innovative things came out from the Commission itself. Not that all we took from civil society and others. So all-in-all, I can't talk about myself, but I think if anything was achieved in the last two years, this election commission shows what was achieved. To hold it, we will do as long as we are ahead, and we hope that it will be held.*
- Yes, we had a very bad, I wouldn't say very bad, but mixed sort of experience of upazila, which we thought would probably change; it has not changed, so we have to be very, very careful next time, and we have to be very strict about it. You know already the history-making case against the minister?*
- CHAUBEY: What is that?*
- HUSSAIN: We have lost a complaint in the court, and one minister is being indicted for violating the Code of Conduct, the first time in the history of Bangladesh that the Election Commission has complained about a minister in the court. Yesterday the witnesses started appearing in the court. We do not know what is going to happen, but as far as we're concerned, we said, look here, even a minister and everything, go to the court, there is a case against a member of Parliament. Now there is a case against a minister. And we have withheld the result of thirteen upazilas where we have instituted judicial inquiry. If any more lawmakers are*

found we will institute a case against them. We wanted to find out whose fault it was for all this mess up. So it is the first time that the Election Commission has taken all these steps. So we're not leaving it. Be it government or no government. People were stunned.

On the 22nd of January, media got hold of me. I was outside in a place known as gazebo I said, "yes I've heard all these things". They said, "Who are doing it?" I said "Of course, the people who have influence". They said, "No, Sir, please name which party is doing it". I said "Awami League, the ruling party is doing it". The whole media was surprised and said, my God, never heard an election commissioner accusing the sitting political party in Bangladesh. In India, yes. I said "I don't mince my word, I mean business. They are doing it; their people are doing it. So if somebody is annoyed, I couldn't care less".

The same thing was repeated by the Chief Election Commissioner in the evening. So all in all, they also know that we're not going to leave them. So that's it. If you have any further specific questions?

CHAUBEY: I think that has covered nearly everything, so thank you so much!

HUSSAIN: *This was all impromptu. I didn't have to go through anything, because I was very much involved in the whole thing.*

CHAUBEY: It has been a very, very informative conversation. Thank you so much.