The Daily Star recently organised a roundtable titled 'Vision of the Youth.' Students from various universities across the country, who led the quota reform movement, participated in the event to share their vision for a new Bangladesh. Below, we present a summary of the discussion.

# What do the youth really want?

























#### **Mahfuz Anam** Editor and publisher, The Daily Star

Today, we want to hear your visions. You have achieved what once seemed impossible. When we had almost lost hope of freeing ourselves from an undemocratic government, you have taught us to dream again. Throughout my long career

in journalism, I have witnessed the erosion of democracy, the suppression of free expression, and countless human rights abuses. Acknowledging the efforts of my colleagues, we have strived to practise free journalism even in the most challenging times. Yet, much has remained unsaid, or we have self-censored due to concerns for the safety of our reporters or junior colleagues. With many considerations in mind, we chose to refrain from writing about certain issues. But you have dismantled that an internal system of checks and walks of life. oppressive environment, and we in balances, the entire structure will the media are particularly grateful to

The government has changed, opening up new opportunities. However, the path forward is far more complex than simply replacing those in power.

After your revolution, we are beginning to see signs of deviation and a tendency to enforce certain decisions, such as entering the Secretariat or cancelling exams. While these actions might seem iustified to vou, it is crucial to reflect on these matters when guiding a state and fulfilling its associated dreams. We live within a societal structure that requires certain disciplines.

In reality. I must say that the political parties that suffered under the Awami League (AL) have now merely replaced the previous ruling party. The faces are new, but the actions are the same—abusing power in the name of your revolution. You must consider how to safeguard your achievements because this is a slippery slope. You are standing on a mountain peak, surrounded by

It is incredibly difficult to maintain an environment where true freedom of expression prevails. Freedom of expression means that criticism may be directed at anyone. We have laws to address; whether such criticism is based on facts or not. Attacking journalists or vandalising newspaper represent freedom of expression.

Your voices have given me hope, making me believe in the possibility

> aim is not to simply Nazifa Jannat **replace it with any** Organiser, East West University other political party. stressed.

of a Bangladesh we have aspired to since its birth. To achieve this vision, you must foster a culture of tolerance. You have set many examples already, examples in this regard as well.

Shuchismita Tithi Sub-editor, The Daily Star, and moderator of the Session

The movement started as a studentled demand for quota reform but the general public. quickly expanded into a wider protest against the government's managed to remove the Awami suppression and oppression. Initially, League regime, but our aim is not students called for the Prime Minister to simply replace it with any other to retract her speech. In response, the political party. This point must be student wing of the Awami League, stressed. In the process of restoration, the Chhatra League, launched an political parties must prioritise attack on the University of Dhaka, the public interest when selecting prompting students to protest mandates and formulating policies. against the Chhatra League itself. If political parties can reconnect with Gradually, the movement evolved the people, it will become evident to demand the Prime Minister's which party offers the best approach

# WHAT KINDS OF REFORMS SHOULD TAKE PLACE WITHIN

**Masud Rana** Organiser, Raishahi University

The greatest strength of any political Over the past 15 years, a fascist party is its opposition. The mistake regime has rendered the constitution the Awami League (AL) made was increasingly irrelevant in ensuring trying to consolidate its own power the proper functioning of the state, while simultaneously attempting to as evidenced by the removal of the suppress other political ideologies. For example, why did the opposition from the constitution. members of parliament flee after the government fell? This suggests that the regime frequently makes they either considered themselves rhetorical references to the 1972 to remain politically active, are part of the AL or were conditioned constitution. However, the drafting fundamentally undemocratic and to behave as such. However, the AL process of the 1972 Constitution authoritarian at their core. They are could have been stronger if it had allowed opposition parties to retain crafted by a small group of lawyers conform to their views and, in fact,

University

was itself undemocratic; it was quick to dismiss anyone who does not without sufficient consultation with are the original proponents of cancel parties must be the diverse groups involved in the culture, which is fundamentally at

WHAT KIND OF CONSTITUTIONAL August mass uprising, it is both REFORMS DO WE WE NEED? Arif Sohel

Organiser, Jahanairnagai

In this context, it is notable

Contemporary political parties in Bangladesh, or those trying

timely and essential to demand a new constitution or substantial reforms to the current one. Without this, any future democratically

elected government could once is said that a justice's performance than winning the election itself, as it again devolve into a fascist regime; is observed for two years before was often assumed that whoever won therefore, serious reforms to the present constitution are imperative. Prapti Taposhi Organiser, Jahangirnagar

juridical power to remove a prime Mozammel Haque minister from office.

process of appointing justices, the most recent one, securing the which is fraught with problems. It a decision is made on whether they will be granted a permanent position. This process often leads to justices feeling compelled to cater to the ruling regime's whims and sectarian demands.

The role of the ombudsman, as outlined in Article 77, is another corrupt practices must be stopped. I provision worth discussing. The ombudsman is meant to act as a mediator between the bureaucracy laundering participating in elections. and the general public, serving as a check and balance on power.

contentious because it was internally. Without Liberation War—people from various odds with true democratic political essentially designed to prevent a vote culture. Whichever party comes to of 'no confidence' against the Prime power routinely uses repressive legal Minister. A possible modification

Another significant issue is the Looking at past elections, especially nomination seemed more important the nomination would automatically win the election.

Those who had more money wielded more muscle power, utilised the media for propaganda, and exploited the bureaucracy were more likely to secure a nomination. These involved in corruption and money Such practices must be banned.

In countries without proportional

Meghmallar Basu

representation, elections often end up doing more harm than good. In such systems, voters are left with no choice but to vote for one major party to remove the other—BNP to oust AL and vice versa. Even when we campaigned for a leftist party or candidate, the most common response was: "Your candidate is good, but if we vote for you, it will be wasted." This sentiment arises because, if a vote does not cross the 50 percent threshold, it doesn't count, which is fundamentally undemocratic. Without proportional representation, the fear of a wasted vote drives people to choose between the two largest political parties,

thereby hampering political plurality. Another important issue i that, according to media reports, 90 percent of former parliament members were millionaires. We want representation from different groups, such as religious minorities and millions represent someone whose fundamental class interests are different from theirs?

In my opinion, the two most critical factors are implementing proportional representation and strictly regulating the amount of money spent in elections and the sources of that money.

Prapti Taposhi

We must not overlook the fact that political influence is not the only factor corrupting the Election Commission; powerful businessmen and industrialists also play a significant role in this.

Moreover, the 13th Amendment stipulated that there should be five members in the Election Commission, including a woman, to create an rarely have any real scope to voice their opinions. They tend to serve as mere puppets or showpieces, which raises the question: How logical is it to keep women members in the EC under such circumstances? This is something we must critically examine.

**Arif Sohel** In the 1991 and 2001 elections, the

EC acted transparently under the caretaker government, serving as an intermediary among various elite groups. It established a mechanism to balance the interests of pro-Awami and pro-BNP factions, ensuring that elected officials could assume their positions and those who were not elected would remain secure. To effectively realise the people's democratic will, we must begin at the grassroots level. We need an election that includes the millions who are not part of these elite groups. While this will be a challenging task, it is essential to prevent the mass uprising from being in vain.

It is also crucial to recognise that our election practices are still influenced by a colonial mindset. inherited from British rule. The British established the framework for our elections, and this outdated approach continues to shape our understanding of democracy and democratic election process.



its own cultural framework, which is advocates of a new constitution, one especially within the AL and BNP. crucial for any political organisation. founded on equity, human dignity, accountable. For example, the AL has Meghmallar Basu **Through our** not democratically selected any of its representatives in the last 15 years. movement, we have The nomination process was entirely managed to remove undemocratic. We, the students, **the Awami League** urge existing political parties to be as **regime. but our** democratic as possible.

a fundamental weakness: their of the colonial state. disconnection from the common clear path forward. Similarly, other vet celebrates cultural pluralism. and I am confident you can set parties, such as the Communist rights. This resulted in a significant

> Through our movement, we have from a policy-making perspective.

when every layer of it is held of our Declaration of Independence.

# Organiser, Dhaka University

The Digital Security Act, which was later revised and renamed the Cyber Sabah Anjim Farabi Security Act, serves as a case in Organiser, BRAC University point. It is important to recognise that this act can be traced back to the AL formed the government, the colonial-era Special Powers Act it quickly moved to abolish the of 1860. Thus, it could be argued The former ruling party and that, over the years, we have merely **This point must be** the opposition parties shared reproduced the repressive apparatus

The framework of our current people. Their laws, mandates, and constitution is undoubtedly party comes to power, it often overall governance were not people- influenced by this colonial discourse, centric. The main opposition party which is incompatible with a party office, frequently justifying its spent much of its time in protest but sovereign nation like ours—one that failed to lead effectively or provide a is largely homogeneous in its nature

The religious fanaticism and To uphold the spirit of the 2024 Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and leftist dehumanisation we are witnessing uprising, we need an entirely new groups, were unable to secure the today can be directly traced back to constitution. While it is important mandates needed to protect people's this colonial repressive apparatus. to acknowledge that the 1972 Additionally, the severe human rights Constitution includes inclusive breakdown in their connection with violations faced by certain ethnic principles, such as socialism and minorities in the Chittagong Hill secularism, and is not merely a Tracts (CHT) are often a consequence mindless duplication of the Indian of the colonial legacy that continues constitution, its fundamental to shape our current constitution.

Umama Fatema

Organiser. Dhaka University There is considerable debate about it. As students and leaders of this the constitution. In light of the July the constitution that provides the elections.

women have long been denied agency and rights. Additionally, we must move away from the factionalism that dominates our society.

After the 2008 election, when caretaker government, a step taken by amending the constitution. This action subsequently impeded the decentralisation process in Bangladesh. Whenever a political

turns the entire country into its actions through the constitution. 2018 election with votes cast the This culture needs to changed.

organising principles are still heavily rooted in colonial ideology. The creation of a new constitution would require a constituent assembly.

Certain clauses in the current whether we need a new constitution, constitution need further reform the existing one, or amend elaboration. For instance, Article 33 of the judiciary must be guaranteed. allows for the indefinite detention of Without an independent judicial

or TV channel offices does not eventually collapse. Every party has people, to become the architects and provisions to suppress opposition, could be to allow MPs to vote against their party in all instances, We can also anticipate some form except in cases of 'no confidence', A party becomes culturally strong and social justice—the core principles of reform in inheritance laws, where without losing their membership in parliament. Although I believe Article 70 should be open in all inclusive body. However, this is not cases, if there is a concern about reflected in our current EC. The stability, this exception could be women in the EC often lack agency and

WHAT SHOULD BE THE AND HOW SHOULD THE **ELECTION COMMISSION (EC)** 

Mustafiz Rahman Organiser, Jagannath University

First, we must consider the context of the last 16 years to understand the nature of elections conducted under the Election Commissionthe 2014 election by selection, the night before, and the 2024 dummy election. Reflecting on these three elections, it is clear that reforming the Election Commission is essential to ensure transparency and

Secondly, if we are moving towards an election, we must analyse the history of the past 16 years to implement necessary changes through an interim government and guide the country toward improvement. It is also crucial to determine how long the interim government can remain in power according to the constitution. Furthermore, the independence

movement, we must closely consider individuals. Additionally, it is crucial system, Bangladesh will never be law. The EC must move beyond this the people's aspirations concerning to note that there is no provision in able to establish a foundation for fair colonial legacy to ensure a truly

#### Nazifa Jannat

The latest Election Commission Act was passed in 2022. According to this Act, the Chief Election Commissioner and three other individuals will form the Election Commission, with a six-member search committee proposing their names. It is essential for the search committee to publish their meeting minutes and resolutions as public notices. This transparency would ensure public participation by keeping people informed about system of checks and balances. The media can also play a crucial role in keeping the public updated and

#### HOW DO YOU VIEW THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN POLITICS?

Sabah Anjim Farabi When discussing religion-based politics, it's crucial to consider the role of religion itself. As a Muslim, I which teaches that Islam does not condone interference in the that individuals of all faiths are fails in this responsibility, it should be held accountable.

Prapti Taposhi

Political parties based on religious ideologies often promote extremism and are prone to rejecting differing viewpoints. This issue is compounded in countries a particular religion can limit everyone should have the right to inclusivity.

### Arif Sohel

The concept of religion-based politics is often misunderstood. Political parties that are associated with religion-based

theocracy, yet religion encompasses from some linguistic differences. objective should be to unite as and hindered the development of 1980s. DUCSU elections were more some might describe their approach as Shariati politics. Additionally, Maulana Bhashani's politics, rooted in Hukumat-e-

Rabbania, played a crucial role in Bangladesh's independence. By adopting an inclusive mindset, the state would naturally evolve from the community rather than imposing itself upon would be reflected in both rural the EC's activities and fostering a and urban areas, continuing limitations of theocracies focused holding the EC accountable. History demonstrates that of both religion and secularism.

Meghmallar Basu speak from an Islamic perspective, In theory, religion-based politics could be progressive, as illustrated by the Maulana Bhashani's politics. practice of other religions. It is However, in Bangladesh, parties the government's duty to ensure like Jamaat-e-Islami and Khilafat Mailis, which engage in religion protected, and if the government based politics, often present themselves as protectors. This raises the question of why individuals from other religious communities would seek protection rather than

evaluate political systems that lack

It is crucial to recognise that the longstanding policy of banning these parties has been with an official state religion, ineffective. Despite 15 years of where those who align with the repression, Jamaat-e-Islami has national religion and engage in not disappeared; rather, such parties. despite their differing on Islam-based principles. Every ideals of law-abiding politics. participate in politics, it is vital views. They reached a consensus to political party, in some way, adheres for political parties to embrace exclude such politics from campus, to its own 'dharma' globally. Even

# political struggle.

voter base. This religion-based this country equally, with equal politics is not grounded in genuine rights and opportunities. religious philosophy; instead, it functions merely as a tool for where students, youths, and the

others through its rules and rituals. Pranbad or Stewardship, these a tradition of coexistence. ideas have minimal presence on specific rituals or obligations. governance could create a genuine space for discussions on religiongenocide has occurred in the name based politics, fostering more meaningful engagement. People underscoring the need to critically

> The current state of student politics requires thorough reassessment. The traditional structures and characteristics are no longer effective, as evidenced

by the growing disillusionment among both youths and the general public in Bangladesh.

#### should have the freedom to choose which ideas they accept.

Sabah Anjim Farabi and any attempts by Shibir to those who are anti-religion in their enter were collectively thwarted. politics can inadvertently create a It represented both a social and new form of ideological influence.

Nazifa Jannat

In 2024, mass murders occurred,

securing votes. Moreover, it seems elderly people were killed by that religion is being weaponised state apparatus under the Awami by political parties to suppress League government. However, we must not forget the events of 1971 While some city-based study or alter the established historical groups discuss concepts like narrative. While condemning the 2024 genocide, it's also important not to forget Jamaat-e-Islami's role Communities can overcome the in rural areas. Given the state's as war criminals in 1971. repressive nature, a shift in HOW DO YOU VIEW STUDENT

# **Mustafiz Rahman**

POLITICS IN EDUCATIONAL

What we have consistently observed before and during the July massacre is violence against student movements. The student wing of the Awami League, Chhatra League, has been disruptive even during As emphasised, student politics This group exerted significant should primarily serve the interests control over students, frequently of young people. Upholding this commanding various aspects of principle is essential if we are to their lives. Many activists would skip prepare Bangladesh for modern, lectures to attend political meetings internationally recognised political and participate in processions. This dominance has made us increasingly pessimistic about university-level Meghmallar Basu politics in Bangladesh, which is why I support the idea of making student politics illegal.

When student politics leads to be highly polarised. I support the practices such as extortion and terrorism, it becomes a serious concern. At Jagannath University, demands are part of a broader student politics, we must focus such activities have been prevalent, narrative advocating for a ban on the condition of student repression often enhances the It's crucial to recognise that setting a poor example for with the principles of secularism, party's image as a symbol of no politics is entirely free from academic institutions. Student resistance. In the 1980s, Shibir religious influence. The Awami politics must be banned as it has it would not necessarily end of student politics were upheld inclusivity. Such a bias towards was not banned outright but was League centres its politics around already been corrupted and is at challenged through a collective Mujib-dharma, the BNP around risk of further being influenced by agreement among active student Zia-dharma, and Jamaat-e-Islami propaganda, leaving behind the might feel marginalised.

#### Masud Rana

always been relevant. A recurring inevitably impact student politics. issue with youth-based political Political actors in Bangladesh groups is that final approvals must confront this issue and

more than just theocratic rule; Since most people are religiously Bangladeshi citizens, ensuring student leaders. Student politics regular at that time, and student inclined, these parties exploit equal rights for everyone without should be for students and should leaders had to demonstrate their religious rhetoric to build their categorisation. We all belong to not be exploited by major parties effectiveness. In recent decades, like the AL and BNP to extend their however, political figures have increasingly neglected the need to

gain approval from the masses. Certain regulations from The current state of student politics 1990s require revision requires thorough reassessment. The traditional structures and should not be allocated based on characteristics are no longer political affiliation. Such practices effective, as evidenced by the disadvantage ordinary students growing disillusionment among by prioritising those with specific both youths and the general public deological or organisational ties. Ensuring fair access to We currently lack successful accommodation would support

models for student politics that

University-level politics

Bangladesh, involving both

students and teachers, tends to

Student politics is influenced

the development of progressive truly address the needs of the student politics. people. To rectify this, we must first focus on developing effective Prapti Taposhi policies and mobilising resources A university should be a haven for to meet political aspirations. free thought. I envision Bangladeshi Practical experience is crucial educational institutions where and should be given serious students are granted the liberty to consideration. Only through this express themselves openly. Issues approach can we build a solid such as U.S. imperialism, Indian foundation for student politics aggression, and both local and that is recognised nationally. international politics are crucia

#### debate and understand. Mozammel Haque

The pressing need is for corruption free youth politics. To achieve this, we must ensure transparent and equitable processes for accommodation facilities and student elections. University administrations need to be both

subjects that students need to

## recent calls to eradicate corruption Umama Fatema

from student politics. These Before addressing the legality of

campus polarisation. Instead, new despite widespread rigging. The divides could emerge, as groups 28-year hiatus of DUCSU suggests loss of essential ethical standards. Today, it is crucial for students by societal dynamics. Divisions with genuine intentions to step Student politics in Bangladesh has and discrimination within society up. Banning student politics would only create unnecessary obstacles.

