

## HC verdict on caretaker govt system due today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today, the High Court is set to deliver its verdict on two separate writ petitions challenging the constitutionality of the 15th amendment of the constitution that scrapped the non-party caretaker government system and introduced significant changes to the charter.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Debasish Roy Chowdhury will deliver the judgement on these two petitions.

On December 5, the bench fixed today as the date for the announcement of the judgement after concluding hearings on the petitions. The court has heard arguments on the petitions for 12 working days.

One of the writ petitions was filed by Mofazzal Hossain, a freedom fighter from Narayanpara, Naogaon.

On October 19, the HC bench led by Justice Farah Mahbub issued a rule asking the government to explain why the Constitution (15th Amendment) Act, 2011, should not be declared unconstitutional. It also questioned why actions taken under the amendment should not be invalidated.



A cultural programme was held at Chhanayanaout Shangskriti Bhaban to mark the 54th Victory Day of Bangladesh yesterday.

PHOTO COURTESY: CHHAYANAUT

## BISWA IJTEMA

### Tabligh factions sue each other over attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Both factions of Tabligh Jamaat have filed cases against each other on charges of attacks, as they vie for control over organising Biswa Ijtema, the second-largest congregation of Muslims.

Tongi West Police Station Officer-in-Charge Iskander Habibur Rahman told The Daily Star that the followers of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi filed a case on Friday while the other case Maulana Zubair Ahmad's supporters was filed on Sunday.

The two factions have been organising the Ijtema in two phases over the past few years due to the conflict between them.

This time, the first phase of next year's Biswa Ijtema is set to be held from January 31 to February 2, followed by the second phase from February 7 to 9.

The followers of Zubair held a five-day Jor Ijtema at the Ijtema field in Tongi from November 29 to December 3. When the Saad faction is planning to hold their Jor Ijtema on December 20, the Zubair faction is opposing it.

On December 12, when news spread that Saad's followers were attempting to enter the Ijtema field, Zubair's followers started protesting and blocked the highway at Station Road in Tongi around 1:00pm, accusing the Saad faction of being

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## Four eminent citizens hail polls timeline

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have to work out their programmes within this timeframe, he added.

An election roadmap has long been demanded by various quarters, said renowned economist Anu Muhammad.

"If a roadmap were not in place, the other essential tasks would have been difficult to execute. Even the reform work could not be carried out properly without an electoral roadmap," he said, while commending Yunus for announcing a tentative timeline for the polls.

He, however, said the government should aim to hold the elections by the end of 2025.

"If they work actively, they would be able to complete the necessary reforms to ensure proper elections," he said, adding that the Election Commission will finalise the details through its activities.

Elections are one of the most important pillars of democracy and without elections, it is not possible to have a government that truly

represents people's diverse opinions, said human rights activist and former caretaker government adviser Sultana Kamal.

"This government is interim, and the government itself acknowledges this. One of its key responsibilities is to hold elections, so elections must take place."

The interim government said they would consider recommendations for their reform agenda, she said, adding that the elected government can also implement the proposals.

"Now, we can ask them how they plan to arrange the elections. What preparations are they making? Since they announced a tentative timeline, we can ask them on what basis they determined this timeframe. These are valid questions to pose now," she added.

The announcement partly reflects the interim government's provisional assessment in consultation with stakeholders about the time needed for making measurable progress

towards reforms, at least in a few strategic areas consistent with the vision of the anti-discrimination movement, said Ittekkharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

The timeline, however, appears ambitious when viewed in the context of the true spirit of 'new Bangladesh' and the aspired state reforms, he said.

"Yunus's announcement of the election also seems to be in response to the growingly impatient pressure from some political parties to hold elections as early as possible to the extent that election is to be treated as a much higher priority than creating the basic minimum foundations for reform," said Ittekkharuzzaman, also the chief of the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission.

In any case, the announcement also indicates that the interim government has no intention to stay in power any longer than what is needed for reform initiatives to be meaningful, he added.

## Student leaders for polls after reforms

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must be done before holding elections.

Nasir Uddin Nasir, central general secretary of the JCD, told The Daily Star, "The BNP has not proposed a specific timeline for the elections. However, the ongoing reforms must progress swiftly, and the responsibility for governing the country should be handed over to elected representatives as soon as possible through elections. Reform is an ongoing process, and it should continue."

Abdul Hannan Masud, chief organiser of the Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement, said, "We view the interim government's electoral timeline positively. Elections should be held as

soon as possible. However, we have also demanded a clear roadmap for reforms before setting the election timeline."

Suggesting the chief adviser's speech might be a hint to the reform roadmap, he said carrying out the reforms within this timeframe might be possible.

"If the election timeline is set between late next year or early the following year, so be it. But reforms must precede elections. Elections should only follow after the reforms," he added.

Mahir Shahriar Reza, president of the Bangladesh Students' Union, also stressed that reforms should precede elections.

"We believe that the existing

electoral system in Bangladesh needs reforms. We have called for the introduction of a proportional representation system, depoliticising the Election Commission, and enacting the Election Commission Act. If the interim government can implement these necessary reforms and hold elections by 2025, we will applaud the effort."

He added, "We also believe that prolonged rule by an unelected government is not beneficial for the country's democracy. Therefore, we want the reforms to be carried out swiftly, followed by elections as soon as possible."

"Reforms should come first, followed by elections," he said.

## BNP seeks specifics, Jamaat okay to wait

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said the sooner the election is held, the better it will be for the interim government and the people of the country.

After the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, Prof Yunus delivered a total of five speeches, which BNP leaders criticised for lacking a clear election roadmap.

Some BNP leaders warned that delays could invite conspiracies and harm the election process.

"The country's economy is in a dire state and soaring commodity prices are suffocating people. Until an elected government is in place, these issues cannot be resolved," party's Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas told reporters after paying tribute to Ziaur Rahman on the occasion of Victory Day.

Attending a programme, BNP Joint Secretary General Syed Emran Saleh Prince said, "Wasting time in the name of reforms will only create opportunities for domestic and foreign conspirators."

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a Standing Committee member said, "Following Tarique Rahman's speech on Sunday, we

are waiting for the government's response. Today, the chief adviser's speech provided an idea about the timing of the polls but did not specify a date or outline the process. Once our secretary general is fit, we will announce the party's stance."

Besides, in reaction to the chief adviser's speech, leaders of the Gono Odhikar Parishad, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Ganosamhati Andolon also said the announcement is an indication of progress, but it lacks clarity and details.

Rashed Khan, general secretary of the Gono Odhikar Parishad, said, "This is not a formal roadmap; it's merely a verbal timeframe addressed to the nation by the chief adviser today. It lacks a specific plan for the national election."

"In my opinion, this announcement seems more like a consolation statement for the political parties that have been demanding an election date or a concrete roadmap."

Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said, "In my view, it is a positive step. However, in his speech, he used terms like 'if,' 'but,' and 'maybe,' which failed to address

the confusion surrounding the timing of the elections. At the very least, he could have announced a specific timeframe, such as a month, which was the expectation of the citizens. This expectation remained unfulfilled."

He further said, "...currently, we need only minimal reforms to conduct a national election. If they engage in discussions with political parties, it should be possible to hold a free and fair election by 2025, even after implementing necessary reforms."

The chief adviser and his advisory panel should take this route to eliminate all uncertainties, Ruhin added.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of the Ganosamhati Andolon, said, "Primarily, we welcome the indication given by the chief adviser. We expect them to hold discussions with stakeholders and present a more specific roadmap."

"Such discussions with political stakeholders could help finalise the election dates, outline required reforms, and establish a detailed plan. It would also contribute to achieving political stability."

## Junta scares aid groups

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researchers, according to people familiar with the matter. The detentions haven't been publicized. Reuters was unable to determine what happened to the researchers.

The secrecy surrounding hunger research in Myanmar has hindered relief organizations' efforts to raise money for humanitarian aid because they can't use their findings to spotlight the severity of the problem, according to a diplomatic source. The UN's humanitarian response in Myanmar is one of the world's most severely underfunded. The UN has sought nearly \$1 billion from donors for Myanmar aid this year but has received just 34 percent of the goal.

"I've not worked in many contexts like Myanmar where it's been so scrutinised that people have a fear of talking about an issue like food security and nutrition," the diplomatic source said.

Reuters also uncovered at least four examples of how the junta blocked aid distribution or seized food supplies intended for the hungry. One such spot is the western state of Rakhine, where there has been a surge in violence in the past year following the collapse of a ceasefire between a powerful rebel group called the Arakan Army and the military. In Rakhine, home to the persecuted

Rohingya Muslim minority, the military in recent months has prevented the delivery of food and medicine to severely malnourished children in an area gripped by cholera, according to aid workers.

Hunger in Rakhine is so severe it is partly responsible for an exodus of 70,000 refugees this year to Bangladesh, almost 50 percent more than previously reported. In November, the United Nations Development Program warned that Rakhine is on the brink of an "acute famine," putting more than two million people at risk of starvation.

Tom Andrews, the UN's special envoy for human rights in Myanmar, told Reuters that the junta is "systematically restricting" humanitarian aid access, contributing to the spread of cholera and other infectious diseases. He said he has received reports that many of the hundreds of thousands of needy people cut off from international assistance "are on the brink of starvation."

The junta's rule has had a "catastrophic impact on agriculture and food supply," a spokesperson for the British embassy in Yangon said. "People are going hungry daily, children are malnourished, and millions are being plunged into poverty."

For the full report visit [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net)

## We'll form a political party

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general polls until "all the Awami League miscreants" are tried for their role in the civilian killing spree during the July-August uprising.

The country has a history of holding elections without trying the killers of peaceful anti-government protesters whenever a forcible regime change occurs, he said, while urging all to work towards ensuring justice against the AL.

"...Even after 1971, we have not yet been able to hold trials for those who stood against the people of Bangladesh in 1971. We have not yet seen justice for those killed in 1990. Taking lessons from 90 and 71, there will be no elections before the trial of 2024," he said.

He further said if there is an election before the trial of 2024, the 2,000 martyrs and millions injured will not get any justice.

"To this end, we call on all parties, factions, and groups to be active in the judicial process and fulfil the dream of Bangladeshis," he said.

Through the July-August uprising, the country also gained independence from Indian hegemony, Nasiruddin said, while cautioning the young generation to stay active against conspiracies being hatched by New Delhi and the AL.

## The nation celebrates Victory Day

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The president laid the wreath at the altar of the National Memorial with the rise of the sun at 6:34am followed by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus.

He was accompanied by his Timor-Leste counterpart who also paid rich tributes to the martyrs by placing wreaths at the National Memorial.

A contingent drawn from the Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force presented the state salute on the occasion.

Injured valiant freedom fighters and their family members, advisers to the interim government, foreign diplomats, invited guests and high-ranking civil and military officials were present on the occasion.

## Election likely by mid-2026

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the voter roll.

"After a long time, many young women and men will be voting for the first time in their lives. They were deprived of those rights in the past. Their participation will make this election a historic and memorable event."

He hoped that nearly 100 percent of the first-time young voters would cast their votes and create a new tradition. The chief adviser urged the EC, political parties, and social organisations to take creative initiatives to ensure close to 100 percent turnout among first-time voters.

"If we can achieve this, no future government will dare to undermine the people's right to vote."

Yunus also reiterated the government's commitment to enabling Bangladeshi expatriates to vote, a promise that has been made repeatedly in the past but never implemented.

He called for the creation of a reliable system to facilitate this process.

### CONSENSUS COMMISSION

Yunus said Prof Ali Riaz, chief of the Constitution Reforms Commission, will be the vice chairman of the new commission for national consensus. The chairmen of the five other commissions will be members of the new commission.

These five commissions were formed for reforms to the electoral system, judiciary, police administration, Anti-Corruption Commission and public administration.

The consensus commission would be able to start its work next month after getting the recommendations of the six reform commissions, Yunus said. He hoped that the six reform commissions would submit their final report soon.

The new commission's task will be to exchange views with all stakeholders, including political parties; to identify the issues on which consensus will be required; and to make recommendations for implementation, Yunus said.

### ECONOMY TURNING AROUND

Yunus said the people have entrusted the interim government with many responsibilities apart from conducting the election and reforms.

He said when the interim government assumed office, the economy was on the verge of a collapse, but the situation has seen significant improvement in the last four months. No banks have had to shut down, no matter how weak they were; measures have been taken to

ensure their survival.

He said exports reached \$16.11 billion during the July-November period of 2024, up by 12.34 percent from \$14.34 billion in the same period last year.

He said the government decided to raise the wages of garment workers, one of the main driving forces of the economy, by 9 percent upon consultation with labour unions and the owners, considering high inflation.

Yunus, however, admitted that the government has not yet achieved the desired success in controlling runaway inflation despite various measures like increasing supply, reducing duty on imports, reducing the influence of middlemen and through market supervision.

He said if the extortion in the transport sector is stopped fully, the prices of essentials will come down further.

The chief adviser sought everyone's cooperation to keep commodity prices affordable in the upcoming holy month of Ramadan.

If anyone tries to profiteer by creating an artificial crisis, the government will take strict action against them, he said.

### WHITE PAPER 'SHOCKING'

Yunus said revelations by the White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy left people in "shock" and "disbelief".

"In broad daylight and under everyone's nose, thousands of crores of taka were siphoned off from banks. No one spoke up. No one saw. Those who plundered the money faced no resistance," he said. "Massive projects were undertaken with borrowed money, under the guise of which enormous sums were looted."

He said the White Paper Committee revealed in its report that almost half of the annual development expenditure was looted and a crony-capitalist system was established, benefiting the authoritarian regime and its allies.

"This stolen money is now being used to create unrest in the country and to make their return to the country. You can clearly see how this money is being spent on propaganda against the unity in the country."

He said the Bangladesh Bank is trying its best to bring back the siphoned off money. He said the task is daunting because the legal framework surrounding such matters is stringent.

### 'UNIMAGINABLE BRUTALITY'

Yunus said the first volume of the report of the commission for inquiry into

After paying tributes to the war heroes, the president, also a valiant freedom fighter, exchanged greetings with the injured freedom fighters and their family members.

When the president and the chief adviser left the National Memorial premises, people of all strata were allowed to pay their tributes to the 1971 martyrs by placing wreaths.

enforced disappearances is actually a "chilling document" and it details the "unimaginable brutality" that humans can inflict on one another.

This report will remain as an immortal historical record of the most despicable chapter of the previous government, he said.

The report cannot be made public for the safety of the many families of victims, he added.

### TRIAL OF FALLEN AUTOCRATS

Yunus said the trial of fallen dictator Hasina and her allies involved in the July-August massacre is progressing. He said the International Crimes Tribunal Act has been amended.

For transparency of the trial process, the accused have been allowed to appoint foreign lawyers. The trial process has been kept open to journalists, human rights activists and other observers.

The chief adviser said that at a recent meeting, he had informed the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Karim AA Khan, that Bangladesh would file a case against the perpetrators of genocide during the uprising with the ICC for crimes against humanity.

'REMAIN UNITED' Yunus recalled the supreme sacrifices of the freedom fighters during the Liberation War. He also thanked President of Timor-Leste José Ramos Horta, also a Nobel Peace laureate who joined the celebration of Bangladesh's Victory Day.

"Let the month of victory be the month of reaffirming the pledge to build a new Bangladesh, keeping in mind the uprising of the students and masses."

He urged all to build a society, where minority groups would not be afraid of the majority, women would not be afraid of men, the poor would not be afraid of the rich and the people would not be afraid to express their views.

He also called upon everyone in Bangladesh — regardless of party, ideology, ethnicity, religion, caste, or age — to remain united.

"We were able to oust a powerful authoritarian government through national unity. They are still trying with all their might to divide the nation. They aim to destroy national unity through communal politics, inciting one group against another. Do not, under any circumstances, allow their vile efforts to succeed."