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CRAFTING THE PATH AHEAD

Reform has been a catch phrase since the interim government took over, following a mass uprising more than five months ago. Of the six focal reform commissions, those on constitution, electoral system, police and anti-corruption submitted their proposals to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus yesterday, recommending measures to strengthen accountability and transparency in their spheres of governance.

CONSTITUTION REFORM

- Equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism, democracy in preamble
- Bicameral parliamentary systems with tenures of 4 years
- Introduction of National Constitution Council
- Reinstating caretaker govt system and referendum for amending constitution
- 2-term limit for presidents, prime ministers
- Minimum age 21 years for eligibility to run for parliament
- Repeal of article 70 allowing MPs to vote against party line



Sweeping changes in constitution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expanding the fundamental rights to include food, clothing, shelter, education, internet, and vote, the Constitution Reform Commission proposes to replace nationalism, socialism, and secularism with equality, human dignity, social justice and pluralism as fundamental principles of state policy.

The only core principle retained from the 1972 constitution is democracy.

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ELECTORAL REFORM

- EC can postpone polls to avoid questionable election
- Re-election if turnout under 40 percent
- Introduction of online voting, recall system
- Election commissioners can be probed for failure to perform duties
- Allowing expats to vote via app
- Disqualifying people accused of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings from running for office
- Changing definition of law enforcement agency to include armed forces division



More powers, accountability

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Electoral Reform Commission has recommended increasing the Election Commission's power to postpone national polls and introducing methods to hold election commissioners accountable for failing to do their constitutional duties.

The reform commission submitted its report to the government yesterday and recommended an

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ACC REFORM

- Recognise ACC as a constitutional institution
- Allow ACC to file cases against judges, civil servants without govt approval
- Appoint ombudsman as per constitution
- Stop legalising black money
- Increase ACC commissioners to 5 from 3
- Reduce commissioners' tenure to 4 years from 5 years
- ACC commissioner search body to have treasury, opposition representatives



Structural, legal overhaul stressed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Reform Commission yesterday proposed significant changes to the ACC's structure and operations, while also recommending some constitutional amendments to stop power abuse by the government of the day.

The reform commission also wants elimination of provisions for whitening black money.

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POLICE REFORM

- Reassess the need for Rapid Action Battalion
- Police's use of force has to be precise, appropriate and last resort
- Rules of engagement for UN peacekeepers be used for police's use of force
- Bodycams, GPS trackers for police during raids, arrests
- All-party body in each police station to monitor police activities
- Clear-walled rooms for interrogating suspects
- Court order required for arresting suspects not mentioned in FIR



Tight rein pitched for police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Police Reform Commission has recommended extensive measures to rein in the police and considering the abolition of Rapid Action Battalion.

In its report submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday, the commission stated that the police's use of force against civilians will have to be the last resort and will

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Chiefs of four reform commissions pose for a photograph with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at his Tejgaon office during handing over of reports of the commissions yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

So, what's a bicameral parliament?

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Simply put, a two-house parliament provides for better checks and balances, through more discussions and debates.

A bicameral parliament, one of the novel constitutional reform proposals, has two chambers -- an upper house and a lower house.

A bicameral system can ensure representation of diverse groups more effectively.

However, this system can slow down decision-making as a bill needs approval from both houses. Typically, it increases public expenditure also since two houses increase administrative and operational expenses. Also, an unelected or indirectly elected upper house member may not be as accountable as the lower house members.

Currently, Bangladesh has a unicameral parliament with 350 seats, including 50 reserved seats for women.

Ali Riaz, the constitution reform commission chair, told The Daily Star yesterday that they proposed

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A new chapter for the nation begins

Says Yunus upon receiving reports from four reform commissions; talks with political parties mid-February

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said a new chapter has begun as the reform commissions have charted a course for a Bangladesh long aspired by its people.

He made the observation while receiving reports from the reform commissions on constitution, electoral, police, and anti-corruption commission at the Chief Adviser's Office in Tejgaon around 11:30am.

"Many reports are prepared, I receive them and do the formalities. Today's [Wednesday's]

event goes beyond such formalities. This is not just a formality; it is a historic moment," said Prof Yunus.

"The vision of a new Bangladesh that we aspire to build rested on your shoulders [members of the commissions]. You have drafted the framework for the dream, marking the beginning of a new chapter.

"We will discuss this with everyone, assess whether it resonates with everyone and evaluate if we are on track to make good on the commitments we have made. Simultaneously, you have provided us with the foundation for our discussions, and you will lead the talks," he added.

Prof Yunus

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