

## A new chapter for the nation

Submission of four commission reports brings momentum in reform process

We welcome the submission of reports by four reform commissions to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday, bringing momentum into the interim government's state reform drive as it can now engage with key stakeholders based on the framework provided through these (and other upcoming) reports. As Prof Yunus has aptly called it, this marks the beginning of "a new chapter" for Bangladesh. In the coming days, the proposals submitted by the commissions on constitution, elections, police, and Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) are expected to be discussed and debated at length to ensure consensus, with the talks with political parties likely beginning in mid-February. One hopes all this will lead to an outcome desired by citizens by the end of the drive.

The first signs, however, are encouraging, as the four reports propose sweeping changes targeting the systemic flaws that facilitated unchecked executive power, electoral manipulation, and institutional decay. Among the most crucial proposals are those aimed at restructuring the constitution and the electoral system. Expanding people's fundamental rights to include food, clothing, shelter, education, internet, and voting, the Constitution Reform Commission has proposed replacing "nationalism," "socialism," and "secularism" with equality, human dignity, social justice, and pluralism as state principles, with democracy the only core principle retained from the 1972 constitution. Key proposals also include a bicameral parliament, two-term limits for president and prime minister, allowing MPs to vote against party line (except in finance bills), decentralising the judiciary, forming a National Constitutional Council, stronger opposition-led parliamentary oversight, etc.

Meanwhile, the Electoral Reform Commission has recommended significant changes to enhance the Election Commission's powers and ensure its accountability. Key proposals include empowering the EC to suspend elections for up to 90 days with Supreme Court approval, disqualifying individuals accused of serious human rights violations from elections, holding all elections under a caretaker government, requiring political parties to conduct internal elections, banning their student, teacher or labour wings, online voting by expatriates, etc. The reform commission also called for the reintroduction of the "No Vote" option. Similarly, the reports of the commissions on police and ACC lay down pathways to address systemic flaws in these vital institutions and ensure accountability.

At the heart of this process lies a singular goal: to restore democracy in its true form and prevent the return of authoritarianism. The success of these recommendations, therefore, must be measured not by their adoption alone, but by their faithful implementation. If we are to build a future where state power is exercised in service of the people rather than against them, any reforms must be pursued with an unwavering commitment to public interests. This is where the role of political parties—who will be tasked with implementing the reforms after the next elections—becomes crucial. They must credibly demonstrate their commitment to this process, including by undertaking intra-party internal reforms, while citizens too must actively take part in it. Without the collaborative efforts of all, the change sought through the July uprising will remain unfulfilled.

## The new Bangladesh must be inclusive

Attack on Indigenous rights activists deeply alarming

We strongly condemn Wednesday's attack on an Indigenous group and its supporters while they were protesting the removal of graffiti from textbooks featuring the word *Adivasi*. The assault, which left at least 20 people injured—including three Indigenous persons in critical condition—goes against the very spirit of the July uprising. We commend all, including student leaders, who unequivocally denounced this act of intolerance.

The incident reportedly occurred when the group "Aggrieved Indigenous Student-Masses" gathered in front of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) office in Motijheel to protest the textbook revision. Meanwhile, the attackers, under the banner of "Students for Sovereignty," had already taken position at the site. At one point, they swooped on the Indigenous group, hitting them with cricket stumps. One student, Rupaiya Shrestha Tanchangya, who had actively participated in the July uprising, was beaten so severely that she later required 12 stitches on her head.

According to a report by *The Daily Star*, the violence could have been prevented had the police acted decisively. An eyewitness told *Prothom Alo* that police neither intervened to protect the Indigenous protesters nor restrained their attackers. However, just a day later, police were rather quick to deploy water cannons and sound grenades against activists marching toward the home ministry to protest Wednesday's attack. This raises the question: does everyone enjoy the same rights in the new Bangladesh?

The NCTB authorities, for instance, pandered to the whim of the "Students for Sovereignty" group when they demonstrated on Sunday for the removal of *Adivasi* graffiti from textbooks, making the change the very next day. They did not even see the need to consult all stakeholders before taking such a decision. Should this be the norm in a country where over 90 percent of the population belongs to the majority ethnic group? Should we not show greater responsibility in including minority voices and ensuring that their rights are protected—rather than deciding for them what they should or should not be called?

The attitude displayed by the attackers and police disturbingly echo the tendencies of the fascist regime which represents of all ethnicities, religions, and genders united to overthrow just months ago. We urge the government to take a firm stance against anyone who fosters division, spreads false narratives against minorities, or violates the rights of others. It must hold Wednesday's attackers accountable, and protect the rights and dignity of ethnic minorities.

# EDITORIAL

## We never got a chance to reform our state and politics like now



### THE THIRD VIEW

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#### MAHFUZ ANAM

This may turn out to be Prof Muhammad Yunus's most lasting legacy. He gave a chance to the poor to break out of the shackles of poverty through microcredit. He is now giving Bangladesh a chance to break out of all its political, governance, and institutional shackles to march forward with democracy, equality, justice, and tolerance. With one stroke, he is literally opening up a rare chance to carry out fundamental reforms in some of the vital areas that we have been unable to do over the last 54 years.

While we congratulate the chief adviser and his team for this grand work, we must not forget to thank the real heroes who opened the door for all these reforms for us: the students, a section of teachers, intellectuals, civil society leaders, a section of the media, and, of course, the general public.

Independence in 1971 gave us the first opportunity to build a democratic and egalitarian state. We got a second chance when Gen HM Ershad fell and democracy was restored after a coordinated mass uprising led by the alliance of political parties. We missed both these opportunities. Now, historically, the students' nation-building role is not new; they played pivotal roles in the Language Movement of 1952, and the democratic and anti-military movements of the Pakistan period in the late 1950s and 1960s. Their role, including that of our rural youth, during our *Muktijuddho*, was the most glorious. They were at the forefront of the anti-Ershad movement in the 1990s, and then the student-led mass movement in July-August 2024 that has given a new opening to build the Bangladesh that was the dream of the Liberation War martyrs.

When Sheikh Hasina fell, instead of going for an immediate election, instituting a self-corrective process was the right—and historic—decision. The idea to form reform commissions was a most appropriate one. The choice of areas to concentrate on were right. The selection of individuals to head the commissions received general acceptability, though the relative absence of a woman head of commission (except one) marked a serious lapse. Finishing the work of four commissions within the stipulated time also testifies to their efficiency and sincerity.

Our initial study of the reports of the four commissions, submitted on January 15, indicates that the recommendations are quite substantive, though some seem based more on emotion than clear judgement.

Recommendations of the Constitution Reform Commission are very significant. We support the introduction of the bicameral system,

limiting the tenure of a prime minister to two terms, introduction of the National Constitutional Council, and reintroduction of the caretaker government system. However, we think holding elections after every four years may be counterproductive as it shortens the tenure of an elected government to implement their plans and projects. Also, elections are a hugely expensive affair and involve massive logistical tasks, which a country like ours may find burdensome.

Reforms of the election system and Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) are vital. We want to emphasise police reforms because, of all the state

commissions, and others that are expected to follow, must be subject to a genuine national debate. The first thing that needs to be guaranteed is openness. There should be no name-calling and "tagging" because of the views expressed, which will prevent the type of genuine discussions that we need. The chief adviser has correctly focused on discussions with political parties. We think an additional attempt should be made to engage think tanks, specialised rights groups, religious and ethnic minorities, etc. The media should reach out to its readers and viewers and try to expand both the depth and reach of the discussion.

As for the political parties, they should approach the reform proposals with national interests in mind, and not that of their parties. There is no denying the fact that after the restoration of democracy in 1991, Bangladesh has been ruled by only two parties—the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—though both had allies while in power. With Sheikh Hasina's fascist rule, we may be tempted to forget that

practically had none till 1991—was the main cause of our failure. The notion that the opposition is considered the "government in waiting" or the "shadow government", and as such commands a place within the power structure, had no place in the thinking process of the treasury bench. On the other side, the opposition thought that making the government dysfunctional by never cooperating with them in parliament was their objective, which terribly weakened the system. Let's not forget the public suffering and damage to the economy that were caused by incessant and irrational hartals.

This newspaper has published dozens of reports, editorials, and op-eds pleading with the ruling party to give due respect and status to the opposition, while begging the opposition not to boycott the House. It was all to no avail. The result was the gradual weakening of the parliament, the parliamentary system, and finally democracy.

While reforms of so many state institutions are under discussion, we cannot miss the fact that we need to



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus with the heads of the four reform commissions that submitted their reports on January 15, 2025.

PHOTO: PID

institutions, the police, in our view, have been maligned and misused the most. A study conducted by the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) and Tech Global Institute (TGI), which was released on January 14, showed how our police force was turned into a brutal, inhuman and bloodthirsty force, which proves the urgent need to totally transform the force from an anti-people institution to a pro-people one. The most difficult task will be changing the mindset of the police members. They have been conditioned to hate demonstrators and consider every protester as an "enemy." They have little training on crowd control, except to beat them up or shoot to injure or kill.

All recommendations of the four

BNP ruled us for 10 years since Ershad fell.

The basic mistake made by both AL and BNP during the period of 1991-2006 is that they did not consider the parliament to be the House of the People, but rather as an extension of the ruling party, because the treasury bench had the majority. The fact that even as the minority of few, the parliament offered a much better chance for the opposition to voice dissent. But in our case, the unfortunate trend was to boycott parliament. It would always start with a walkout for hours, followed by boycott for days, then weeks, then months and finally resignation. Our lack of experience in operating within a parliamentary form of constitutional structure—we

reform our political parties too.

Prof Yunus's move to set up a consensus commission is a highly commendable one. Dialogue with all political parties is the way to go forward. However, there is also the critical responsibility of the political parties to take the whole process seriously and honestly. We urge them to bring their concern to the table, argue with facts and logic, but finally come to a consensus. Once we are able to do that, political parties must pledge publicly that whichever party is voted to power by the people will honour their pledge, and through resolutions in the new parliament, they will bring them all into our governance structure through amending both the constitution and the relevant laws.

## Remembering Satyendra Nath Bose

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### GOLAM NEWAZ and ANIQUE NEWAZ

This month, we remember the great physicist Satyendra Nath Bose, an outstanding academic at Dhaka University (DU) in 1921-1945. Known in Bengal as Satyen Bose, he was born in then Calcutta on January 1, 1894. Bose was hired as a reader in physics in DU's inception year. At that time, he had five journal publications; three of them were in *Philosophical Magazine* published in England, and two were written with Meghnad Saha, his friend and classmate. His most significant contribution to physics was on Planck's radiation formula. His work gave new insight between the old quantum theory of Planck, Einstein, Bohr and Sommerfeld, and the new quantum mechanics of Heisenberg, Dirac and Schrödinger. In June 1924, the first research paper Bose wrote in DU was sent to Albert Einstein, who recognised its merit and translated it into German. The paper was titled, "Planck's Law and the Light Quantum Hypothesis." It was published in the *Zeitschrift für Physik*, the premier journal in physics

in those days. The publication of this paper, which was only four pages long, immediately raised Bose's profile as an international scholar of repute and his association with Einstein remained a beacon of light throughout his life as a physicist. He was only 30 years old when he published this paper.

Meghnad Saha was Bose's good friend. Both attended the Presidency College and graduated together in 1913 and 1915 with BSc in physics and MSc in mixed mathematics from the University of Calcutta. In both examinations, Bose stood first and Saha second, and later they were selected by the University of Calcutta to teach advanced physics courses, a monumental task then as most journals on physics were in German or French. Only the *Philosophical Magazine* was in English. These journals were difficult to obtain in Calcutta. Saha learnt French and German and Bose learnt some German. They struggled to obtain Einstein's papers on Special Theory of Relativity

(1905) and General Theory of Relativity (1916) and translated them from German to English. They managed to publish the translated works and used them to teach advanced physics and other related subjects to postgraduate students in the University of Calcutta.

SN Bose's recruitment at DU was by the institution's first vice-chancellor, PJ Hartog. Hartog wanted to hire faculty members, who had an interest and capability in research to build Dhaka University more than just a teaching institution of higher learning. Bose felt that at the new university, he would be away from the more crowded University of Calcutta and have a "freer" hand to pursue his interests in physics. Hartog ensured support for a study leave that Bose sought, and DU gave him a handsome grant for his study leave to Europe. Special funds were also provided to secure Bose's family needs in Dhaka. Bose visited reputed laboratories in Europe and met many luminaries, including Einstein in Berlin in 1925.

Prior to his return from Europe, a professorship in physics opened up at DU. Bose applied for it. Einstein wrote him a recommendation letter, so did Prof Sylvain Levy from France. Bose did not have a PhD, so Dr DM Bose from the University of Calcutta was offered the position. When he declined,

SN Bose was offered the position. He led the Department of Physics as a professor and chair from 1927. He also served as the dean of the Faculty of Science in the 1930s. He provided leadership in the foundational years to develop the physics department at DU into a strong research department and to organise the science faculty into an admirable branch of the university. Curzon Hall became the epicentre of research at DU. In 1945, prior to the 1947 Partition, he left Dhaka and took up the Khaira Professorship at the University of Calcutta and retired in 1956. He passed away in Calcutta in 1974.

The paper Bose had sent to Einstein in 1924 provided the basic framework for the existence of Bose-Einstein condensate. The experimental verification came much later in 1995 in laboratories in the US. American physicists Eric Cornell, Wolfgang Ketterle and Carl Wieman were awarded the Nobel Prize in 2001 for proving the existence of the Bose-Einstein condensate. Bose leaves a remarkable legacy in quantum physics for his work at DU. In November this year, Dhaka University organised a three-day international conference on Bose-Einstein statistics to celebrate 100 years of his achievement and legacy.