

Accept reports of the reform commissions

Chief adviser urges all

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has called upon all concerned to accept the reports of the reform commissions and come forward to implement those.

“I hope all will unanimously accept and implement those (reports),” he said while speaking at a function at the State Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka yesterday.

Public Administration Reform Commission led by Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury and Judiciary Reform Commission led by Justice Shah Abu Naeem Mominur Rahman handed over their reports to Chief Adviser Prof Yunus at the function.

Members of the commissions were also present.

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Left, Justice Shah Abu Naeem Mominur Rahman, the Judiciary Reform Commission chairman, hands over its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, while Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, the Public Administration Reform Commission chief, submits its report to the chief adviser at the state guesthouse Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Dhanmondi 32 ripped apart

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8:00pm, an hour before the planned procession. A mural of Mujib was also wrecked, witnesses said.

By around 9:30pm, the building was set on fire. A little before midnight, at least one crane and one excavator reached the spot, and by the time this report was filed around 2:00am today, parts of the building were razed to the ground.

According to some social media posts, the protest was in response to “Hasina’s anti Bangladesh activities from Delhi,” where she fled on August 5.

At the scene, protesters chanted various slogans such as “Fashi Fashi Fashi Chai, Sheikh Hasinar Fashi Chai (Hang, hang, hang – Sheikh Hasina must be hanged!); Sara Banglae Khobor De, Mujibbader Kobor De (Let all of Bangladesh know – let’s bury Mujibism!); Awami League er Pretatta, Bangladeshe Thakbe Na (There will be no place for Awami League’s ghosts in Bangladesh!); Delhi Na Dhaka? Dhaka, Dhaka (Delhi or Dhaka? Dhaka, Dhaka!); and Inquilab Zindabad (Long live revolution!)”

One protester demanded that the AL be banned. “Awami League won’t be allowed to participate in any election in Bangladesh,” he said.

Law enforcers were seen nearby the spot since the beginning. At around 12:40pm, police took position in front of Metro Shopping Mall, yards away from the scene. No firefighters reached the spot as of midnight.

Army personnel went to the spot around 9:30pm, and took position on the main street. Later, they left the area, witnesses said.

“We don’t want to keep the memory of any murderer in Bangladesh. Today, we stand against all the murderers ... We don’t need any security forces here,” one protester told this correspondent.

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner SM Sazzat Ali did not respond when this paper tried to reach them.

Meanwhile, protesters also set fire to Sudha Sadan, the Dhanmondi residence of Hasina’s late husband and nuclear scientist MA Wazed Miah, around 11:00pm.

Fire service duty officer Rakibul Hasan said they received reports that the Sudha Sadan was set ablaze around 11:30pm.

“We have also received reports of the arson at Dhanmondi 32. We are acting according to the situation,” he said.

Earlier around 7:30pm, The Daily Star spoke to Masud Alam, deputy commissioner (Ramna Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police about the security situation centring on the planned procession. He said they had no knowledge of any plan for attack on Dhanmondi 32.

DMP Additional Commissioner SN Nazrul Islam too said they were unaware of the “Bulldozer Procession”.

The announcement of Hasina’s virtual address came on Tuesday, and the calls for demolishing the Dhanmondi-32 residence soon followed in social media.

One poster, shared in a Facebook group named “Basherkella” around 3:00pm, shows a bulldozer in front of Mujib’s portrait at Dhanmondi 32. Similar posters have been widely shared across Facebook pages.

“All activists and coordinators have agreed to tear down the house number 32. A massive showdown is expected today [yesterday]. Everyone, bring your bulldozers and join in,” Ratul Mohammad, spokesperson for a platform called People’s Activists

Coalition (PAC), wrote in his Facebook page around 4:00pm.

An hour before, July Revolutionary Alliance from its Facebook page made the similar calls.

Later in the evening, Hasnat Abdullah, convener of the Students Against Discrimination, wrote in his Facebook, “Tonight, Bangladesh will be freed from the grip of fascism.”

Paris-based vlogger Pinaki Bhattacharya also made a similar call in his Facebook page. He urged everyone to head to Dhanmondi 32 and finish it off this time.

Earlier in the day, Hasnat Abdullah warned media outlets against broadcasting Hasina’s speech, saying it would amount to promoting her agenda.

“Even now, we see hesitation in naming the real perpetrators. Some media outlets still refer to her as a former prime minister. Is she just a former leader or is she the Butcher of this Motherland?” Hasnat told a press conference at the office of the Students Against Discrimination in the capital’s Bangla Motor.

Jatiya Nagorik Committee and the Students Against Discrimination arranged the press conference regarding the launch of a public opinion campaign titled “New Bangladesh Through Your Eyes”.

Hasnat said, “She [Hasina] killed 2,000 people to cling to power. Yet, the media does not call her a fascist murderer. If you fail to do so, you are still keeping the pro-Awami media spirit alive.

“If any media outlet broadcasts Hasina’s speech, it will be assumed that they are still promoting her and have taken a stance against the aspirations of the people.”

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Asked, a commission member told The Daily Star, “We are aware that this proposal may spark debates and criticisms. However, considering that local government has not been effective in the last 54 years, we believe a provincial system is the best approach to decentralisation.”

A similar initiative was considered during the Ershad regime, but it was never implemented.

The commission recommended the creation of two new administrative divisions – Faridpur and Cumilla – alongside the existing eight.

Led by Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, the commission submitted its report with around 200 recommendations to the chief adviser at the state guesthouse Jamuna. The Judiciary Reform Commission, led by Justice Shah Abu Naeem Mominur Rahman, also handed over its report there.

The Public Administration Reform Commission recommended reducing the number of ministries to 25 from 43, categorising ministries into five clusters, abolishing district councils, eliminating the cadre services, introducing an examination system for promotion to deputy secretary, and implementing a senior executive service.

The commission suggested scrapping the interest-free car loan and car maintenance allowances worth Tk 50,000 for deputy secretaries and higher officials.

“This will remove discrimination and also reduce public expenditure,” it said.

Officers of the ranks of deputy secretary and above currently get a loan of Tk 30 lakh to buy a car and a monthly allowance of Tk 50,000 to hire a driver and pay for the maintenance of the vehicle.

The commission recommended doing away with a legal provision that allows the government to force employees to retire after they have been on the job for 25 years or more.

It also recommended allowing officials to voluntarily retire after 15 years in service, instead of 25 years.

It recommended eliminating the police verification process for passport issuance to make the system more efficient and citizen-friendly.

The commission split its recommendations into short-term (six months), medium-term (one to two years), and long-term plans.

SHORT-TERM PLAN

According to the commission report, the number of ministries should be reduced to 25 from 43 and the divisions to 40 from 61. The ministries should be put in

one of the five clusters: Administration; Finance, Industry, and Commerce; Infrastructure and Communication; Agriculture and Environment; Human Resources, and Social Development.

As part of the structural and procedural reform of the civil service, the commission suggested abolishing the existing 26 cadres of officials and replacing them with 13 services.

These are Administrative Service, Judicial Service, Public Security Service, Foreign Service, Accounts Service, Audit Service, Revenue Service, Engineering Service, Education Service, Health Service, Agricultural Service, Information Service, and ICT Service.

The commission suggested the establishment of two more public service commissions – one for education and another for health. The recruitment and promotions of teachers and doctors would be done by these two commissions.

The existing Public Service Commission will deal with recruitment of officers of other services.

The reform commission put forward a guideline for officials’ promotion to secretary and proposed abolishing the existing Superior Selection Board (SSB), which oversees their selection process, and forming a new committee led by a minister.

It proposed a provision under which the government could hire qualified individuals for positions in the upper tier of the bureaucracy.

The commission recommended abolishing the zila parishad, arguing that the chairmen of the parishads have never been directly elected by citizens and that most zila parishads lack strong revenue sources.

It suggested that the mayors of the municipalities be elected by elected members of the municipality instead of direct voting. The commission also recommended abolishing the post of vice chairmen (both male and female) of the upazila parishads.

The commission suggested appointing officials equivalent to the rank of senior assistant secretary as the “secretary” of upazila parishads and relieving the upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) of upazila parishad duties.

It suggested renaming Deputy Commissioner (DC) to District Magistrate and District Commissioner, and UNOs to Sub-District Commissioner (SDC).

The commission recommended giving the District Magistrate the authority to accept complaints in criminal cases, subject to consultation with the Supreme Court, setting up magistrate courts at the upazila level, and appointing an ASP in every upazila.

It proposed transferring of the Land Registration Office to land ministry from the law ministry.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) could be divided into three separate entities – Income Tax Department, Customs and Excise Department, VAT Department, the report said.

A proposal has also been made to merge the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA), the Economic Zones Authority, and the Export Promotion Bureau into a single organisation to streamline their operations.

To ensure greater accountability in public service delivery, the commission proposed forming “District Citizen Committees” and “Upazila Citizen Committees” that would be modelled after parliamentary standing committees.

These committees will review government services and hold meetings every four months to provide necessary recommendations to relevant authorities.

MID-TERM PLAN

The commission recommended forming a “Superior Executive Service” to allow officials from various services to be promoted to deputy secretary and thus be in the policy-making level.

Under this system, 50 percent of promotions to deputy secretary will be reserved for administrative service officials, while the remaining 50 percent will be open to officials from other services through exams.

Candidates failing the exam twice will no longer be eligible for promotion, said the commission.

Meanwhile, writer, researcher and former secretary AKM Abdul Awal Majumdar came down heavily on the recommendations.

“If these recommendations are implemented, the civil service will fall into such a pit that it may no longer be possible to pull it out,” he told The Daily Star.

“The mistakes of 1972 have kept us in a hole to this day. This mistake will plunge us into an abyss. Nowhere in the world do we see a system like the one being proposed.”

LONG-TERM PLAN

The commission suggested integrating the National Climate Change Strategy into government policy frameworks.

It recommended discouraging the introduction of honours programmes in private colleges and emphasised the need for monitoring private madrasas and enhancing their efficiency through investments.

It suggested recruiting adequate number of teachers.

In the districts where a large number of criminal appeals, criminal revisions, civil appeals and civil revisions are pending.

Besides, witnesses should be allowed to testify through the internet.

It recommends more budget allocations for the financial independence of the judiciary.

To instill moral values in the society to reduce crimes, arrangements should be made to impart moral education at different levels of society, schools, colleges and religious institutions.

Tanim Hussain Shawon, a member of the reform commission, told The Daily Star that the commission held 29 meetings among themselves and 37 meetings with stakeholders before making the recommendations.

Around 15,000 people, including commoners, lawyers, judges and others gave their views on reforms to the commission so far, he added.

The eight-member Judiciary Reform Commission was formed on October 3 last year.

Members of the commission include retired HC judges Justice Emdadul Haque and Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli; former registrar general of the SC Syed Aminul Islam; former district and sessions judge Masdar Hossain; Dhaka University Associate Professor Kazi Mahfuzaul Haque Supan; and a student representative.