

Full reports of 6 reform commissions made public

UNB, Dhaka

The government has published the full reports of the six reform commissions.

The full reports of the Electoral Reform Commission, Police Reform Commission, Judiciary Reform Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission Reform Commission, Public Administration Reform Commission, and Constitutional Reform Commission (Part One) were published on the website of the Cabinet Division (<https://cabinet.gov.bd/>) yesterday.

The reports of the commissions on constitutional reform, electoral reform, police reform, and ACC reform were submitted on January 15.

Later, on February 5, the reports of the Public Administration Reform Commission and the Judiciary Reform Commission were submitted to the chief adviser.

Five commissions, except for the Constitutional Reform Commission, were formed on October 3 last year.

The Constitutional Reform Commission was formed on October 6.

All the commissions were given 90 days to submit their reports. However, they all got several extensions.



Homeless people, many of whom are labourers, sleep near the entrance to the Kamalapur Railway Station. The photo was taken close to midnight when the area becomes relatively quiet.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Citizens still in fear for safety

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compared to 396 robberies, 160 kidnappings, and 859 burglaries during the same period of the previous year.

The number of murder cases in these months last year stood at 947, just slightly down from 956 in the same months of 2023.

Deaths resulting from mob beatings saw a sharp rise, with 128 fatalities recorded in 2024, including 96 from August to December. The number of such deaths in 2023 was 51.

Many incidents of attacks on Sufi establishments were also reported. On January 23, the Global Sufi Organisation held a press conference alleging that over 80 mazars (shrines) and darbar sharifs (Sufi centres) were attacked by extremist groups across the country in the past six months. The government also confirmed that at least 40 such sites had been targeted in 44 separate attacks since August 4.

Yet, little action has been taken against the perpetrators.

The release of some top criminals after the political changeover last year, followed by a rise in reports of extortion, fuelled concerns over crimes in the city, said police officers and victims.

For instance, in November 2024, a contractor had to pay Tk 3 lakh to local gangs linked to top listed criminals to continue the Tk 16.5 lakh demolition work on a building in Dhaka's Moghbazar.

In January, top criminal Imamul Hasan Halal alias Pichchi Halal's brother Wahedul Hasan Dipu was among two computer traders who were hacked allegedly by another top criminal Sanjidul Hassan Emon's gang on Elephant Road for refusing to pay extortion money, according to the case statement filed over the incident.

Halal was previously named in a murder case filed at Mohammadpur Police Station on September 21, 2024, shortly after his release from jail.

With a good number of similar incidents reported in recent months, a climate of fear permeates the business community of Dhaka. Contractors in the construction sector are being forced to pay or stop work under threat, while businesspeople in other sectors are targeted with abduction or

attacks.

CCTV footage has shown criminals firing near an under-construction building in the capital's Hazaribagh area, apparently to intimidate the builder.

An automobile businessman from Beribadh, Mohammadpur, told these correspondents that he has never faced such a situation in his 30 years of business. Criminals extorted Tk 10 lakh from him after August 5 and demanded more, he alleged.

"Muggers have been attacking people openly in the Rayerbazar and Beribadh areas and fleeing through the nearby graveyard. After seeing some incidents with my own eyes, I now fear to move alone," said the businessman.

Petty criminals have also become more reckless, carrying out muggings on roads and alleys with machetes, even in broad daylight in several parts of the capital. Many videos of such incidents are circulating on social media.

In Mohammadpur, The Daily Star spoke with seven victims of mugging incidents that took place last month. Six of them chose to file general diaries, citing these as loss of valuables, instead of cases as they fear legal complications. One victim opted not to file a complaint at all.

City residents wonder why such crimes continue even after six months under the current government, which deployed joint forces, including members of the armed forces, across the country to maintain law and order.

Criminologists say that criminals perceive the current environment as favourable for carrying out illicit activities, given the demoralised state of the police and other law enforcement agencies.

Omar Faruk, a professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said the deterrents to crimes were no longer sufficient because the criminals believed they would not face significant consequences.

"This lack of fear among the criminals has emboldened them further," Prof Faruk said.

"From the start, there was a lack of trust between the police and the public. Now it has deepened into a crisis of trust on both sides."

Many officers are not actively participating in their duties, and there is a noticeable lack of motivation within the force, Prof Faruk said.

Moreover, arms and ammunition looted during the uprisings have fallen into the hands of criminals. As a result, the severity of crimes has increased, Faruk added.

The Daily Star talked to several police officers about the persisting lack of morale within the force.

The officer in charge of a police station in the capital, who wished to be anonymous, said that people no longer fear the police. Even for trivial reasons, they behave aggressively toward law enforcers. As a result, many officers are reluctant to go on patrol.

A traffic constable from Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Ramna Division said that some traffic violators often refer to the "blood on the hands of the police" when the police try to penalise them.

Another police officer said, "We accepted that no cases were filed over the deaths and injuries of police personnel during the July protests or on August 5. But in Chattogram, an OC was publicly attacked and beaten in broad daylight in front of hundreds of people. The video of the incident spread on social media, yet no case was filed against anyone. This is disheartening."

Police officers said that the police themselves still feel insecure. As a result, they are reluctant to go on patrol or conduct searches. Many officers are unwilling to take risks during investigations or arrest operations.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Baharul Alam earlier said that they were working to help the force regain confidence.

Before the uprising, he said, the police had become a tool of a "fascist government", leading to widespread public anger against them.

The current challenge is to structure the police effectively, make them acceptable to the public and ensure that they never revert to an anti-people stance," he added.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury recently told reporters that the government was not 100 percent satisfied with law and order, but efforts were underway to improve it.

leaders of Students Against Discrimination and Jatiya Nagorik Committee demanded the attackers be arrested within 24 hours.

"If those responsible for the attack on students in Gazipur are not arrested by tonight [Saturday], we will take a stand against the government and the police," said Sarjis Alam, central coordinator of the Students Against Discrimination.

The joint forces, comprising the armed forces, BGB, Coast Guards, Police, Rab, and Ansar, have been deployed across the country since September 4 to recover illegal firearms and maintain law and order. Yet, the law-and-order situation saw little improvement.

After the fall of the Hasina-led government on August 5 last year amid a mass uprising, mobs looted firearms and bullets from different

police stations and establishments across the country.

In response, the government deployed the joint forces.

On September 17, the interim government gave the power of magistracy to commissioned army officers in order to improve law and order.

An officer with magistracy power has the power to arrest people and take them in custody. In self-defence and extreme need, the officer can open fire, according to the law.

Security measures at the Supreme Court were beefed up yesterday morning.

SC Public Relations Officer Shafiqul Islam said, "There is a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the Supreme Court premises. That's why the security has been beefed up as a precautionary measure."

completed within a month."

Nazrul added that the government has already taken some steps towards reforms even before getting the commissions' reports. "Some issues, such as appointing court officials through a judicial service commission, have already

been considered as these are good for all."

He also said that the constitution reform commission has not yet given any timeline for implementing reforms as all it will be dependent on political consensus.

FROM PAGE 1

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"There is probably no other case in history where a government was formed in an electoral system before any vote was cast."

On the other hand, the biggest example of election manipulation to secure victory was the 2018 general election, dubbed the 'night vote'.

"The ballot boxes were already sealed the night before election day -- an extremely rare occurrence in world history."

For the 2024 elections that were boycotted by the opposition parties, the Awami League violated its own party constitution to artificially create an atmosphere of competition by allowing its allies and associates to contest against it.

The election became a rigged game played among candidates of the boat symbol and other candidates supported by the AL and its associates.

Against the backdrop, the reform commission recommended empowering the Election Commission to suspend the election for 90 days after showing reasonable cause if democratic processes are at risk due to controversial elections like those of 2014, 2018 and 2024.

But it should be done with the approval of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division through the president, the report said.

The commission proposed an "Election Commission Law 2025" to hold election commissioners

accountable for failure to perform, financial irregularities or breach of oath as it looks to usher in accountability for disputed and unacceptable elections.

A bipartisan parliamentary committee should investigate the issues and recommend appropriate action to the president.

If there are serious allegations of misconduct after the EC's term ends, a parliamentary committee should investigate and refer the matter to the president for action.

Besides, the reform commission also proposed having a rule on the "Code of Conduct for CEC and ECs".

If any participating political party is dissatisfied with the fairness, credibility and acceptability of an election, they can file a complaint with the National Constitutional Council or the Appellate Division within 48 hours.

The complaint must be resolved within a maximum of seven working days.

The role of the executive during elections in Bangladesh is often contentious, particularly under a party-government system, where the ruling party's influence and misuse of administrative power have led to controversial and unacceptable elections.

So the reform commission proposed that the executive would require prior approval from the EC for any actions that could influence elections.

It also proposed appointing returning and assistant returning officers from the EC's own staff on a

priority basis, stating that in recent years, civil service appointments, particularly in the last 15 years, have become increasingly politicised.

It is nearly impossible for a politically appointed district commissioner to maintain neutrality during elections."

The report also proposed barring individuals accused of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, inhumane torture and attacks on journalists or human rights activists from contesting elections if the charges are accepted by an International Crime Tribunal.

The reform commission proposed an integrated 'Election Commission Law' with provisions to ensure the appointment of honest, capable and reputable individuals as CEC and EC.

To strengthen the EC as an institution, it should be given the full authority to finalise election candidates and limit judicial powers, the report said.

The recommendations have been made to establish a system that would hold the EC accountable while simultaneously being empowered to hold free and fair elections, said Badul Alam Majumdar, the reform commission's chief.

Implementation of the recommendations will depend on four key stakeholders: the interim government, the Election Commission, political parties and the people.

"Ultimately, the extent of implementation will largely depend on the willingness of political parties," the report said.

Election rigging was catastrophic

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OC suspended as students protest all day

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"I have heard that OC responded to your call after two hours. I want to say that those who have conspired with these fascists cannot be allowed to be in the force," he said.

He also assured that the police would not allow those who have oppressed the country for years "to raise their heads again".

The official said the government has already taken strong steps "to combat Awami fascism" and added that 16 people have already been arrested for their alleged involvement in Friday night's incident.

SARJIS WANTS ACTION

Also speaking at the rally, Jatiya Nagorik Committee Chief Organiser Sarjis Alam said, "We want to clearly say that the criminals involved in the attack must be arrested by tonight [Saturday]. We don't believe in empty promises anymore. Rather, we want to see visible action."

At least 18 people were injured as alleged Awami League activists attacked a group of protesters who gathered near the ancestral home of former Liberation War Affairs minister AKM Mozammel Haque in Gazipur on Friday night.

"I want to say that the entire Bangladesh will rise again if any of our fellow activists is hurt. The students and people are being patient.... But our patience has a limit. If the administration crosses that limit, Bangladesh will see another revolution."

Arif Sohel, a student leader, said,

"Our brothers are still being attacked. Fascist Awami League groups are attacking houses, businesses, and religious institutions in different places, and then trying to put the

blame on us."

He urged people to be alert and resist what he said was a concerted effort to frame the uprising leaders.

Ali Rasel Khan, the platform's central organiser, demanded the cancellation of Awami League's registration as a party.

"The officials who failed to maintain law