

There's no need for constituent assembly

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out this constitutional responsibility. However, due to the exceptional nature of the current situation, the Election Commission will need to rely on the interim government to act in this regard.

TDS: Are you seeing any visible initiatives from the government towards holding the elections within the time frame?

SA: A few days ago, I mentioned at an event that people want to see visible steps towards holding the elections by December. So far, the chief adviser has only stated that a dialogue process has begun under the leadership of the National Consensus Commission. This dialogue has a specific time frame, and within the time frame, they aim to establish a broader consensus. This will require several months.

The first meeting, held on February 15, may be termed the first visible step. By now, they have provided us with reports (of the reform commissions), which we are currently reviewing. There

initiate the reforms, but implementing consensus-based reforms requires significant time. That is why we are continuously pursuing them to expedite the transition to a democratic process so that an elected government can be formed and a national parliament can be established where all necessary discussions on reforms could be held and a greater consensus over the reform proposals could be made. However, they are yet to do the expected job.

Meanwhile, some political parties and groups are seemingly trying to delay this process. The purpose and expectation of the mass uprising – which led to the fall of fascism – was to achieve one goal: remove undemocratic forces permanently and establish a strong democratic nation by carrying out reforms in the constitution and all other state institutions.

This goal cannot be achieved through holding local government elections. Therefore, we believe that those pushing for local government elections first intend to delay the transition to a democratically elected political government.

TDS: What is your take on the newly announced student-led political party, the National Citizen Party (NCP)?

SA: We welcome any political party with a democratic nature that enters the political arena. We believe in democratic politics because our party's founder, the martyred President Ziaur Rahman, was the proponent of multi-party democracy. We have welcomed them. We always hope for a participatory political environment. Beyond that, we have no immediate reaction. They will conduct their activities based on their ideology and strategy. However, we hope they will play a role in establishing a stable political government through national parliamentary elections as soon as possible. That is our expectation.

TDS: Leaders of NCP have spoken about a Constituent Assembly and a Second Republic. You have said that those advocating for these ideas are either knowingly or unknowingly prolonging the existing undemocratic structure. Could you explain this further?

SA: Let me start with the Constituent Assembly first. A Constituent Assembly is only necessary when a new state is created with no written constitution. So, to draft a new constitution, a Constituent Assembly is needed in that newly-born country. To prepare a draft of the constitution, a drafting committee is formed. For example, a Constitution Drafting Committee was formed after the creation of Bangladesh. Similar committees were formed in India and Pakistan as well after their independence. Dr Kamal Hossain was the chairman of the constitution drafting committee in Bangladesh. The job of the Constituent Assembly is to draft a constitution, which will then be adopted.

Now, do we have any context for a Constituent Assembly here? We are already an independent country – a sovereign, independent state – and

we call ourselves a democratic state. However, the question arises as to whether we truly are a democratic state, as our democracy has been compromised by the past fascist regime on their behalf. Country comes first, then sovereignty and the state, and only after that comes democracy. Now, I am not sure if the new political party that brought forth the idea of this Constituent Assembly truly understands this. They have submitted extensive proposals to the Reform Commission for constitutional reform, and so have we and other parties. There will be discussions on those proposals, and through comprehensive deliberations, a democratic amendment to the present constitution will be made. And it is the work of the parliament. I think there has been some overlap in their thinking between the work of the parliament and the work of the Constituent Assembly. Because the parliament makes amendments to the constitution while the Constituent Assembly is tasked

Republic?

SA: We are already a republic established through the 1971 Liberation War. It is not desirable to undermine the republic, which we earned at the cost of the past fascist regime. A republic can be formed by having an independent state, and we have an independent state and a republic that has been established through the formulation of a constitution. The essence is that a republic functions through elected representatives, chosen to express the will of the people. These representatives are elected and replaced through subsequent elections. This is a republic where the head of state is either elected or a nominal head of state. We already have such a republic.

Now the question arises: Is our republic still in the same state as the first one we established? I would say that there have been changes. The first republic was fundamentally altered in 1975 through the introduction of BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik

and Jamaat is now quite noticeable. Why has this gap widened? Has BNP organisationally been harmed by forming an alliance with Jamaat?

SA: The political party you are referring to has its own ideology, and they have their own strategy in relation to the upcoming elections. They will proceed with their own approach and continue their ideology-based politics.

It's quite common in many countries for various political forces to form alliances before elections. However, the formation of an electoral alliance with them is not on our discussion table right now. Instead, we can contest the elections by forming alliances with those who were part of our simultaneous movement against fascism. And if, in the future, the people entrust us with the responsibility of governing, we will implement our reform proposals through the formation of a "government of national unity" with them.

With regard to the question of whether we were harmed organisationally due to the alliance, I would say one thing: In politics, various strategies are applied at different times for political movements, struggles, and elections. The question of gains and losses is ultimately determined by history and the people of the country.

TDS: There has been a discussion about banning Awami League. What is your opinion? Do you want the Awami League to participate in the upcoming elections?

SA: The mass killings during the July uprising were carried out as per the Awami League's political decision and under the orders of the party chief, fascist Sheikh Hasina, who was an illegitimate prime minister at the time. The Awami League is organisationally responsible for crimes against humanity, massacre, and mass killings. In line with this, the student organisation of the Awami League has already been banned under a specific law. Now, the question arises whether the Awami League itself, as a political organisation, should be brought under judicial proceedings for genocide and crimes against humanity. This is a demand of the people, and the government must decide on this matter. Now, the ball is in the court of the interim government.

Fascist Sheikh Hasina, her ministers, MPs, and the political leaders of the Awami League – who are responsible for genocide and crimes against humanity – must be brought to justice and face trial. The issues of whether the Awami League could do politics and elections in Bangladesh would be decided by the people of the country. The government also has responsibility here.

TDS: The interim government has now completed seven months in office. What is your comment on the government's performance?

SA: Seven months is a sufficient period to assess a government's performance. Our overall assessment is that, due to inexperience, this government has failed to meet public expectations, even after these seven months. People had expected that

commodity prices would come within their purchasing capacity, law and order would give them a sense of security, and the market situation and political situation would stabilise. However, the government could not handle any of these areas successfully or control the situation effectively. Perhaps they took charge of the government on the ruins of a collapsed system. Or perhaps their lack of experience played a role in this. However, we have always cooperated with them and will continue to do so. We expect that they will govern properly for the remaining days of their term through discussions with all relevant stakeholders, ensuring that their actions align with public expectations.

TDS: According to AIN o Salish Kendra's report and media reports, 40 BNP leaders and activists have been killed in the past seven months due to internal conflicts. At the BNP extended meeting on February 27, the acting chairman issued strict directives against such conflicts. Despite that, clashes have

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occurred in several districts. What is your view on this?

SA: I have doubts about how credible this statistic is. However, political rivalries do exist in a large political organisation. As the elections approach, this kind of competition and rivalry can be seen among the supporters of various candidates. Some incidents may have happened, and those are undesirable. We are making efforts to control such incidents with firm hands, and our efforts will continue.

There have been allegations that some leaders and activists are involved in extortions. We have investigated many cases. In our findings, it appears that those involved have no real connection to the BNP or any political party. They operate like a professional extortion ring, using the names of political parties whenever it benefits them. In some cases, it's been revealed that activists of the fallen fascist Awami League and miscreants are involved in doing all these crimes with malafide intention in labelling the name of BNP. We have to say that as a party, we have become victims of this situation. At the grassroots level, out of 100 incidents, investigation reveals that in 98 percent of the cases, those involved had no direct political affiliation, but they are using the party's name for their own benefit.

TDS: Thank you very much for your time.

SA: Thank you as well.

"The political party led by students wants a new constitution through the Constituent Assembly. At the same time, they are also saying that they have made proposals for constitutional amendments. These are self-contradictory statements. If they have proposed a major constitutional amendment, as we have, and others have as well, then a parliament will be required to consider those, not a Constituent Assembly."

with drafting and adopting a new constitution in a newly born country. We are already in a "self-determined nation state" with a constitution, but we cannot fully accept it because its democratic nature has been altered by an autocratic regime. That's why a measure democratic amendment to the constitution is required again.

Meanwhile, the honourable High Court has already scrapped several provisions of the 15th amendment to the constitution. It, however, kept several provisions for the next parliament to consider and recognise that parliament is the proper forum to amend the constitutional provisions. It's our commitment to have the existing constitution amended as per the people's desire and the aspirations of the July uprising.

Presently, we have made extensive reform proposals for the independence of the judiciary. Through these amendments, the original and democratic nature of the republic could be restored. The nature of the republic will be democratic, and the constitution will be amended according to the aspiration of the people. If we want to call this the Second Republic, this is anyone's liberty. But a republic is a republic. We can bring back the democratic nature of the republic through constitutional reforms in the future, but that does not mean we call it a new republic, a second or third republic, and so on each and every time the constitution is amended.

TDS: What about the Second

Awami League) following the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution. However, that republic was restored in 1979 through the Fifth Amendment. President Ziaur Rahman reintroduced multi-party democracy and replaced the parliamentary system with a presidential system of governance. In 1991, we shifted to a parliamentary system [Westminster type of government] again. In 1996, we introduced a neutral caretaker government provision for having free and fair elections. But we cannot term all those major changes in constitution as a new republic each and every time.

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TDS: The distance between BNP

and

night and March 6 morning.

The child was taken to Magura 250-bed hospital in an unconscious state by her sister's mother-in-law around 11:30am on March 6.

She was transferred to Faridpur Medical College Hospital for better treatment that afternoon. Later that night, she was moved to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

By March 7 night, she was placed on life support. As her condition remained critical, she was moved again from Dhaka Medical College Hospital's PICU to CMH the next day.

research. However, he declined the award, saying, "It is not possible for me to accept this award."

Notably, a draft list of the awardees included the name of MAG Osmani, the commander-in-chief of the Mukti Bahini during the Liberation War.

However, his name was not included in the list that was published yesterday.

The Chief Adviser's press wing yesterday said his name was dropped as he had already received the Swadhinata Padak in 1985 and that there were no precedence of one being given the award twice.

According to IQAir, only seven countries met WHO air quality standards in 2024. Researchers warned that tackling smog would become even more challenging following the United States' decision to shut down its global air quality monitoring efforts. IQAir reported that only Australia, New Zealand, the Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Estonia, and Iceland met the WHO's air quality standards last year.

India saw a 7% decline in its average PM2.5 levels, bringing it down to 50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. However, the country still had 12 of the world's 20 most polluted cities.

Bynihat, an industrial town on the border of Meghalaya and Assam, was the most polluted city, with an average PM2.5 level of 128 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

The study analysed data from over 40,000 air quality monitoring stations across 8,954 locations in 138 countries, territories, and regions. The WHO recommends PM2.5 levels of no more than 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ – a standard met by only

17% of cities worldwide in 2024. Significant data gaps, particularly in Asia and Africa, obscure the global picture. Many developing nations have depended on air quality sensors installed at U.S. embassies and consulates to monitor pollution levels. However, the U.S. State Department recently ended this program due to budget constraints, removing over 17 years of data from the government's official air quality monitoring website, AirNow.gov.

"Air pollution remains a critical threat to both human health and environmental stability, yet vast populations remain unaware of their exposure levels," said Frank Hammes, Global CEO of IQAir. He emphasised that the U.S. has recognised access to clean air as a universal human right.

According to WHO, 99% of the global population lives in areas that fail to meet recommended air quality levels. Air pollution is the second leading global risk factor for death and the second leading cause of mortality among children under five, following malnutrition. In 2021 alone, air pollution was responsible for 8.1 million deaths, with 58% of these attributed to ambient PM2.5 pollution.

Exposure to PM2.5 is linked to numerous health conditions, including asthma, cancer, strokes, and lung diseases. Additionally, exposure to high levels of fine particulate matter during pregnancy and early childhood has been associated with congenital heart defects, eczema, allergic diseases, cognitive impairments, neurodevelopmental disorders, and mental health issues.

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Harassment against women, girls, and children is a gross violation of human rights," said the organisations.

They also called for safe mobility, civic freedom, and digital safety for women and children, alongside the establishment of a comprehensive child protection mechanism.

The NGOs advocated for the immediate prosecution and exemplary punishment of perpetrators, ensuring that justice is swift and survivor centred.

Furthermore, they emphasised the need for legal reforms to strengthen protections, eliminate loopholes, and guarantee the safety and dignity of survivors and their families.

"Any form of violence, abuse, and

Bangladesh air second worst

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by Pakistan (73.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (58.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), and India (50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) in fifth place.

The data also revealed Dhaka was the world's third most polluted capital in 2024, with an average PM2.5 level of 78 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. The Indian capital, New Delhi, was the most polluted (91.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), closely followed by N'Djamena, the capital of Chad (91.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (58.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), ranked fourth, while Pakistan's capital, Islamabad (52.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), came in fifth.

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Minimum fitra

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room in Baitul Mukarram.

According to Islamic Shariah, Fitra can be given in the form of wheat, barley, raisins, dates, or cheese.

If paid in wheat or flour, one must give 1.65 kg or its market value of Tk 110.

For barley, 3.3 kg or its equivalent market value of Tk 530 must be given. If paid in dates, 3.3 kg or its value of Tk 2,310. For raisins, 3.3 kg or Tk 1,980 must be given, and for cheese, 3.3 kg or its market value of Tk 2,805 must be provided.

Individuals can pay their Fitra using any of these items or their equivalent market value based on their financial capacity.

The meeting was presided over by Mufti Abdul Malek, chairman of the National Sadaqatul Fitra Determination Committee and Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

It was also mentioned in the meeting that local retail market prices of these items may vary, and Fitra will be considered fulfilled even if paid at the local market rate.

Fifth AL leader dies</h2