

Consensus commission denies pressure over reform

Awaits BNP, NCP's response

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Consensus Commission yesterday dismissed concerns of political influence over the timing of electoral reforms.

Speaking to journalists at the commission's office in the National Parliament building, Prof Ali Riaz, the commission's vice president, said, "There is no pressure on us. Let me remind you that the Chief Adviser of the National Consensus Commission is Dr Muhammad Yunus. In that case, the question of pressure on the commission does not arise."

He added that while political parties will naturally express their views, the commission's role is to present reform proposals and engage in discussions.

Responding to questions, Prof Riaz

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



A father shields his daughter from the rain by holding a bag over her head. The two had just finished shopping and were on their way home when a sudden shower began. The photo was taken in the Hatirpool area yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

SUSTAINABLE DEV GOALS

61pc of child-related indicators lagging: report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's progress on child-related Sustainable Development Goals is experiencing significant setbacks, with 61 percent of indicators showing minimal to no progress, according to the National SDG Report (VNR) 2025.

The report highlights that 39 percent of child-related SDG indicators are on track or have met targets, while 12.5 percent of crucial indicators continue to lack essential data.

Additionally, the country has fallen 40 places in the Global Gender Gap Index, now ranking 99th, with concerns that without changes, this decline will continue.

The report, presented at a forum organised by the Citizens' Platform for SDGs at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Center in Agargaon of the capital yesterday, pointed to alarming reversals in key areas like child mortality.

Zafar Sadique, adviser (Investment in Children) at Save the Children Bangladesh, said neonatal and under-five mortality rates have risen in recent years, indicating a troubling trend in health outcomes.

Neonatal mortality increased from 16 per 1,000 live births in 2021 to 20 in 2023, while under-five mortality rose from 28 to 33 in the same period, according to the SVRS survey, he revealed.

Updated data on anaemia and mental health in children remains unavailable, creating critical gaps in

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

State must move away from excessive surveillance: TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has turned into a surveillance-based society, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman yesterday.

Citing a United Nations report on surveillance, he said such practices violate fundamental human rights if not aligned with international standards.

He also said the state must move away from excessive surveillance, while speaking at a press conference organised by Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) at the MIDAS Convention Centre in Dhanmondi.

The UN report calls for the dissolution of two institutions – Rab and NTMC – and recommends restricting the activities of DGFI, which, he emphasised, should function solely as a security intelligence agency, not one that infringes on people's rights.

"Similarly, military authority (wing) within Ansar VDP must be abolished," he said.

Iftekharuzzaman stressed the need for justice and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Reform process facing internal, external resistance

Prof Ali Riaz tells roundtable discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Both internal and external forces are attempting to obstruct the reform process, National Consensus Commission (NCC) Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz said yesterday.

He described the reform process as the first major opportunity since the 1971 Liberation War to transform the state into an accountable institution.

Speaking at a roundtable discussion titled "Political Consensus and Citizens' Thinking in State Reform" at the capital's CIRDAP auditorium yesterday, he emphasised the need for public participation in the process. The event was organised by Shujan—Citizens for Good Governance.

"Moving forward is impossible without the participation, pressure, and inclusion of citizens," he said. "While political parties represent a large segment of people, they do not represent everyone. Citizens' opinions will be incorporated in parallel with discussions with parties."

Prof Riaz said that Bangladesh's institutions had been severely weakened over the past 16 years due to one-person-centric rule.

"The judiciary has been practically destroyed, and other institutions have been deliberately dismantled. Without establishing an accountable state system, including electoral reforms, the situation will remain unchanged," he said.

He warned that the current structural system would be unable to prevent future autocratic rule.

Addressing queries about constitutional amendments, he defended the proposal to replace secularism with pluralism while retaining the term "state religion".

"Secularism has become the principle of a single political party, which the people have already rejected," he said. "Pluralism is a broader concept that includes all religions and castes under one umbrella."

He acknowledged that the provision for a state religion clause remained a divisive issue. "Multiple governments have upheld this provision since its inclusion. There is a political reality behind it," he said.

Over 40 percent of 190 countries

While political parties represent a large segment of people, they do not represent everyone. Citizens' opinions will be incorporated in parallel with discussions with parties.

PROF ALIRIAZ
Vice President, National Consensus Commission

globally have similar provisions, he added.

Shujan Secretary and NCC member Badiul Alam Majumdar outlined the interim government's three key responsibilities: preventing the return of autocracy, prosecuting crimes against humanity, and transferring power to elected political parties.

"These tasks can proceed simultaneously. Some reforms must be implemented before elections, while others can follow.

The Election Commission must be independent and accountable, and a neutral government is essential during elections," he said.

Another NCC member Justice Emdadul Haque reiterated that judicial reform was a critical issue, noting that commissions had already submitted reports.

"Reforms are an ongoing process that will be enriched further by citizens' opinions," he said.

Former Jahangirnagar University Professor Dilara Chowdhury stressed that over 90 percent of people support state reforms, and political parties are aligning with this demand.

"Though parties have their flaws, a country cannot function without them. Reforms must begin within the parties themselves, and necessary changes should be implemented before elections," she said.

Journalist Abu Saeed Khan argued against removing secularism while retaining "state religion", calling the proposal illogical.

"Secularism was not just an Awami League concern; it was a collective movement," he said. He also warned that the constitution should be amended, not rewritten, as the 1972 version was created through national consensus.

Dilip Kumar Sarker, central coordinator of Shujan, presented the keynote paper.

"Following the people's uprising, there is hope that authoritarian or fascist rule will not return and that democracy will be institutionalised," he said. "The ultimate goal is a society based on equality, human dignity, and justice. To achieve this, state reform and a change in political culture are essential."

Man to die for rape, murder of 7-year-old girl

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday sentenced a man to death for the rape and murder of a seven-year-old girl in the capital's Jatrabari area in 2017.

Judge Rokhsana Begum Happy of Dhaka's Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-3 delivered the verdict in the presence of the lone accused, Md Rafiqul Islam.

In the verdict, the judge observed that the convict has no right to live, as he posed a threat to the safety of children and women. Considering the gravity of his crimes, he was given the capital punishment.

Earlier, the prosecution and defence completed their arguments, and the tribunal recorded statements from 12 prosecution witnesses, including the complainant.

According to the case statement, the girl left

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

New party 'Jonotar Dol' unveiled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new political party named "Jonotar Dol", comprised of ex-military personnel, was unveiled yesterday at a programme in the capital.

Led by Brig Gen (ret'd) Md Shamim Kamal, the party said its ideology is to prioritise Bangladesh's interests.

"We will look neither left nor right. It is not our aim to serve the interests of any individual or vested groups," said Kamal, the chairperson of the party, in his speech.

"We won't get involved in unresolved issues about history – we want to look towards the future," he added.

When asked about their stance on Awami League, Kamal said, "We don't want to criticise any person or organisation. We want to criticise the system. Fascism existed in this country before Awami League as well. But we will not support

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Several local polls observers likely to be excluded: EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Many of the local election observer organisations are likely to be excluded from the upcoming 13th National Parliamentary Election.

However, no final decision has been made yet, said Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarkar at a press briefing in the capital yesterday.

The EC said, "We have prepared a draft. It will be presented in the commission meeting. A decision will be made after discussions and reviews. Some organisations will indeed be cancelled."

Currently, there are 96 registered local election observer organisations in Bangladesh.

When asked about the decisions taken in the draft, the EC said they cannot be disclosed at this moment, adding that it is difficult to say anything before it was finalised.

When asked if the organisations would be excluded under the existing observer policy, the EC said, "We are moving forward through detailed discussions on

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



The Palestine Solidarity Committee, Bangladesh rallied in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday. They demanded an immediate stop to the genocide taking place in Gaza, violating the recent ceasefire deal between Israel and Palestine.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

PRY SCHOOLS

Govt halts new admissions to grades 6-8

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has decided that no new students will be enrolled in grades six to eight at government primary schools where these grades were introduced on a trial basis. As part of the 2010 National Education Policy, classes six to eight were initially launched on an experimental basis in 729 government primary schools.

However, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education last week issued the directive to the Directorate of Primary Education to halt new admissions to these grades, said Masud Akter Khan, additional secretary (School) of the school division at the ministry.

He said that schools have been instructed to make

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

We Deeply Mourn

Mr. Khan Mohammed Ameer (Biltu), one of the most successful and prosperous industrialists of independent Bangladesh, and the founding chairman of Padma Group of Companies, passed away at the age of 82 on Sunday 16 March 2025 at 8:02 AM while undergoing treatment at the United Hospital in the capital (Inna lillahi wa Inna Ilaihi rajiun).

On behalf of the family of the deceased and the Padma Group of Companies, we express our gratitude and thanks to all the kind-hearted individuals, banks, insurance companies, business houses and financial institutions who sent condolences on the passing of Mr. Ameer, a patron of artistic painting and renowned photographer, and to those who attended the funeral and expressed their prayers, remembrance and deep condolences to the family.

The Kulkhani will be held today 21 March 2025 at 4:00 PM at the late's residence in Dhaka, House No. 14, Road No. 48, Gulshan 02. We request all the friends, relatives, and well-wishers of the late to attend the event.

The family of the late and all the officers and employees.

Padma Group of Companies