

## NEWS

## ‘BNP’s 31-point charter embodies public will’

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“Such an imbalance is uncommon in other democracies and could undermine effective governance.”

The suggestion to change the country’s name in Bangla appears to be a symbolic gesture rather than a substantive reform.

“Such changes may not address the core issues affecting citizens’ lives and could divert attention from more pressing matters that require practical solutions, and the name ‘Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea’ can be an example.”

Changing the voting age to 16 years is another suggestion that the party opposed. Only a handful of countries in the world including Argentina, Brazil and the Channel Islands have that as the voting age, Amin said.

The constitution reform commission proposed a four-year term for the prime minister. The BNP maintains that it should be for five years, following the norm in the Westminster parliamentary system followed in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and others.

The four-year tenure of the presidential system that is followed in the US and some Latin American countries is not suitable here, Amin said.

In its landmark 31-point charter, the BNP said none should be the prime minister beyond two consecutive terms, a position the party has stuck to. However, the commission proposed an individual cannot be the prime minister for more than two terms in their lifetime, following the US practice.

“If we look at the best cases of Westminster style democracy, there is no cap on the prime minister’s tenures. As the most liberal political party in the country, we are still proposing it – and we were the first to do it. The logic was to develop and allow leadership to grow but at the same time allow the previous democratically elected leader who did a good job to get another shot, reflecting the wishes of the people.”

It is unfortunate that reforms and elections have been made mutually exclusive, he said, while recalling the discussions that took place between the party leadership and the other stakeholders between August 5 and August 8 last year before the formation of the interim government.

The main deliverable of the interim government back then was to organise polls after implementing the election-related reforms.

From day one of the interim government, the party insisted on reforms in four areas: election commission, law enforcement, bureaucracy and judiciary.

The issue of wholesale reforms, which has now become a tool to linger the

election procedure, was not discussed then, Amin said.

“We see new tools and mechanisms popping up to prolong the duration of the interim government and one may ask if it goes with the aspiration of the mass uprising that we saw. The main job of the interim government is to fulfil what we saw people discuss leading up to the 5th of August and that was the lack of agency and opportunities, which is a by-product of an unelected government where people were deprived of their voting

roadmap after eight months as a case in point.

“As a deep-rooted political party with public engagement, we understand people have the common interest to have an election as soon as possible. It is about time that the interim government looks beyond the urban-centric narratives that are disconnected from the grassroots or real-world problems.”

The leisurely pace of the trial for atrocities committed during the July uprising and the lack of support of victim

a specific timeframe and then an elected government will come – does that mean the elected government will not do any reforms? Does the country become static? It never works that way.”

The BNP views reforms as a holistic exercise that would not only ensure checks and balances in the government but also correct the system to enable the development and welfare of the people, said Amin, who has been instrumental in giving form to Rahman’s vision of a progressive, tolerant and rules-based Bangladesh, which has been in the works for about a decade and a half.

His association with Rahman goes back to 2011, when the latter was engaging with bright Bangladeshi minds in British academia to give intellectual and practical heft to his vision.

A PhD student of management studies then, he was inducted into Rahman’s team to work on inclusive development policies and state reforms and was subsequently made his adviser in 2014.

“I particularly appreciated the opportunity he gave me to work on the contextual application of the best practices of the Westminster-style democracy in Bangladesh. That was a whole different world in 2011, 2012, 2013 – no one could think of such a massive shift in the political culture back then but Tarique Rahman thought about it. That was the vision.”

Specifically, Rahman was fascinated with the bicameral parliament system; establishing the independence of the judiciary; creating a balance of power between the executive branch, the parliament and the judiciary; and creating a balance of power between the head of state (president) and head of government (prime minister).

Rahman’s vision was articulated in what became the 31-point charter unveiled in 2023, which his teams in Bangladesh and abroad put together from countless brainstorming sessions with relevant professionals, experts and pro-democracy stakeholders; empirical research and grassroots feedback.

The charter accommodated the views of all like-minded political parties involved in the movement against the previous regime and was adopted by them, too.

Each of the 31 points came about through an iterative process, Amin said.

“Our 31-point reform agenda not only attempts to ensure accountability and transparency in the state structure, it also attempts to financially empower people regardless of profession and background and to solve problems in their regular life. The BNP’s biggest pride is that whatever discourse there

rights for 16 years.”

Asked if the party miscalculated when it passed on the chance to be part of a national government after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government, he said that would have been betraying the values and motivations of the party’s decade and a half fight, which was to restore democracy in Bangladesh and the caretaker system for conducting elections.

When the interim

families and the injured have been disappointing, he said, adding that the BNP is trying to support the victims with limited capacity, but the state has “all the resources to cover each case”.

“And despite the trust and belief that they would not be running in the election, someone has come out of the interim government and formed a political party.”

That political party is getting state patronage for its

**“At least two of them remain in the government and we don’t know yet if they will run in the election. We see student representatives in almost all ministries and there is an inherent conflict of interest: are they representing their political party or the interim government?”**

**“We have seen many rags-to-riches stories since the 5th of August among other stakeholders but we saw no visible action against those individuals. In a departure from the culture of impunity indulged by the political parties in Bangladesh, the BNP is the only party that is investigating all incidents and has expelled about 2,000 members after allegations against them proved true.”**

government was formed, there was a segmentation: the traditional political parties who had fought over the last 16 years and wanted to run in the election; and the non-political stakeholders who had a notable role in the July uprising but had no intent to run for office.

“We had an understanding that those who would go to the interim government would organise a free, fair and credible election as soon as possible, Amin said.

“As part of a changing political culture and a fair political landscape that we want to create together, we urge them to remain over and above any political controversy.”

Both reforms and elections are dynamic, continuous processes in a democracy, he said.

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expansion, Amin said.

“At least two of them remain in the government and we don’t know yet if they will run in the election. We see student representatives in almost all ministries and there is an inherent conflict of interest: are they representing their political party or the interim government?”

That conflict of interest should be resolved as soon as possible, Amin said.

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the target head on, going all guns blazing right from the word go, with captain Hayley Matthews (70 off 29), Qiana Joseph (26 off 12) and Chinelle Henry (48 off 17) keeping them on course for an incredible chase.”

However, despite failing to achieve the first two targets with the score at 162 for four in 10.4 overs, West Indies were still in with a chance to get to 172 runs off 11 overs with a boundary off the next ball and a six off the final delivery.

But former captain Stefanie Taylor, perhaps unbeknownst of the equation, hit a six off the fifth delivery of the over, sealing the victory but in the process allowing

Bangladesh (net run-rate of 0.639) finish ahead of West Indies (0.626).

Earlier in the day, Bangladesh put on their worst batting display against Pakistan, managing only 178 for nine in 50 overs, with Ritu Moni’s 48 and Fahima Khatun’s unbeaten 42 helping avoid utter humiliation.

In reply, Pakistan, powered by Muneeba Ali’s 69 and an unbeaten 52 from Aliya Riaz, chased down the target in 39.4 overs and with six wickets in hand, leaving Bangladesh with a rollercoaster ride of emotions over the next few hours till the West Indies-Thailand fixture arrived at a dramatic conclusion.

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where their hometowns are so that they do not have to live too far away from their families.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in a statement urged city dwellers not to be afraid about the flash processions of banned organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and several like-minded groups.

These groups were attempting to create panic, the DMP said.

It said the BCL activists watch out for police movement and march for a minute or two before disappearing from the scene. They later share the photos and videos of these processions on social media.

“Although it is not always possible to arrest these miscreants on the spot, many have been apprehended later,”

said Amin, who shared how Rahman worked round-the-clock to see the movement to its finishing line.

With Rahman’s direction, dedicated backend teams are working to fine-tune the working procedure for each of these reform and development policies.

So much so that if the BNP forms the government at this moment, Rahman has a concrete plan for what would be done in the first 100 days, 180 days and 360 days.

“Our leader is very confident of delivering those – and he is promising only as much as we can deliver.”

The teams and the roadmap would be unveiled before the election, Amin said, adding that a glimpse of the party’s plan for the economy and businesses was shared during the Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025.

“How do we create jobs? How can we empower women and ensure their safety? How do the labourers and farmers get fair compensation for their efforts? How can we provide quality multilingual education and healthcare for all? How do we solve the traffic problem? How can we keep inflation at a tolerable level? Our leader has worked on those and has targeted policies.”

This leads to the question of the BNP’s involvement in the epoch-making July uprising, which has created the ground for the party’s second coming. The BNP – and particularly Rahman – was more involved than what it publicly takes credit for, according to Amin’s version of events.

About 1,400 died during the uprising, according to the estimates of the UN’s fact-finding mission – and more than 500 of them were BNP party workers, Amin said. About 5,000 of the party’s members were arrested, including the top brass, while its central office was raided and district offices were vandalised, according to reports.

However, the party does not want unilateral recognition for toppling the Goliath Awami League-led government.

The BNP as the main opposition party was always in the field against the Hasina regime, but when a ruling party loses its nature and becomes a human rights violator and takes a turn towards fascism, it cannot be toppled through a political movement – a mass uprising is needed.”

This is what happened in the July uprising.

“For the first time in 16 years, people from all walks of life at home and abroad came out and participated in their own capacities, on the internet and the streets. And the BNP leaders and activists ensured the numbers on the ground and were prepared for the ultimate sacrifice,”

said Amin, who shared how Rahman has zero tolerance for such activities and does not the harshest punishment if credible proof of the offences is obtained “as there is a lot of misinformation and disinformation”.

The conversation then veers towards the BNP’s preparedness to lead the government after so many years in the wilderness.

“We have the capacity and the technical human resources and most importantly, the commitment to the country’s development, as demonstrated by the past BNP governments of President Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.”

And stumping out corruption will be the single overarching ethos of the BNP government.

The party will commission a white paper in all ministries to unearth the length and breadth of corruption over the past 16 years and start an ombudsman, a system through which people can lodge complaints against any government official and

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the fundamental democratic values, which are freedom of expression, human rights and rule of law.”

In a BNP-led government, press freedom, safety and security of journalists and freedom of expression will be ensured, he said.

However, the party will have zero tolerance for extremism, terrorism and separatism.

“Living in a multicultural environment and pluralistic society for so long, our leader Tarique Rahman’s vision is to replicate that setting here, where different beliefs and ideologies coexist.”

Asked how pragmatic that vision is in the Bangladesh context, he said: “He is aware of the ground reality and will work to educate and engage people through awareness campaigns and school curriculum.”

Besides, the political ideology of the BNP is “Bangladeshi nationalism”, which means ensuring the ownership of people and that every Bangladeshi has the same rights and freedom irrespective of creed, religion, ethnicity and beliefs.

This ideology informs any BNP government’s foreign policy, which is based on “equality, fairness and justice”.

The underlying philosophy is that Bangladesh will forge sustainable relations at bilateral and multilateral levels that will take no masters but only friends. The BNP-led government will not side with a camp at the cost of our national interest and instead focus on policies of mutual interest. We like to foster global integration through trade and investment and ensure that we play a responsible actor in this integrated world.”

This then leads to the million-dollar question: when would the party’s leader Tarique Rahman be coming back given that there is no legal bar to his return to Bangladesh?

“Arrangements are being made for his return as we speak – it’s just a matter of time. He is eager to be among his people and the people of Bangladesh and fight for the rights of his activists who are still in jail or have fake politically motivated cases on them.”

## REFORMS BNP ASKED FROM INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Structural, personnel changes within civil administration, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, election commission

Removal of politicised individuals aligned with the previous regime

Supreme Judicial Council

Judicial independence to acquit millions of fabricated cases Confirmation of constituency delimitation

Strengthening of the independence and functioning of constitutional bodies

members of parliament in a transparent manner.

It also proposed an all-party parliamentary committee to vet recruitment for key posts in state institutions such as the heads of the Anti-Corruption Commission, law enforcement agencies, the Election Commission as well as the judiciary.

Amin maintains that the BNP is committed to media freedom, as has been the case since the party’s inception.

“As the largest victim of curbs on freedom of speech, the BNP commits to the nation that this sort of vengeance would not be tolerated. We commit to build a Bangladesh based on

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