



If reforms are not completed, the election may be in danger, and some people may not participate in it. But what is not clear is which reforms must be carried out."

PROF REHMAN SOBAN, noted economist

"The people whose sacrifices in the uprising made changes possible are excluded today. That is simply unacceptable."

HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN, former adviser to a caretaker government

"We have held press conferences and even given alternative proposals. But is anyone listening to us? Clearly not. Whenever the chief adviser sits with political parties, not a single woman is present. So, should we only depend on so-called women-friendly men?"

RASHEDA K CHOWDHURY, educationist and a former adviser to a caretaker government

"We must now focus on making this election free, fair, and acceptable. Election reforms must be a priority."

BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDER, head of Election Reform Commission

"Although there were many disagreements within the National Consensus Commission, there was complete consensus on one point -- that women shouldn't receive more than five percent additional nominations. This is very disappointing."

SHAHEEN ANAM, executive director, Manusher Jonno Foundation

"I don't think we have heard the word 'reform' so many times in the last 54 years. But what has been the result? Inequality has increased, unemployment has increased, poverty has increased, and violence has increased. The government's position is one of strange indifference."

PROF ANU MUHAMMAD, noted economist

"Discussions were mostly with political figures, leaving out ordinary citizens. As a result, reform proposals could not move forward."

DEBAPRIYA BHATTACHARYA, noted economist

'Reforms not going beyond report writing'

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through the Cabinet Division's Reform and Coordination Wing.

Labour Reform Commission Chairman Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed stressed that essential reforms, such as ensuring minimum wage and workers' rights, should already have been implemented. "We didn't expect reforms overnight, but at least some activities should have begun. That hasn't happened, which is deeply frustrating."

Election Reform Commission chief Badiul Alam Majumdar said attention must now shift to the upcoming polls. "Political parties must reach a consensus within two weeks. There can be no further extension for the National Consensus Commission. Either reforms happen within this period or not at all. The government's top priority now should be the election."

Members of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission also voiced dissatisfaction. Nirupa Dewan said, "Among all the commissions, the Women's Affairs Reform Commission is in the weakest state. Over the past year, women's rights have not been established, nor has violence against women declined. In some areas, particularly the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the situation has worsened."

Chairing the event, Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, questioned the current reform discourse, noting that

while the government had referred to dozens of reforms -- later narrowed to 84 -- the public has little knowledge about their content or priority.

"The fact that you [the government] want to implement 84 reforms means that no one is going to take you very seriously," he said, stressing that real reform requires prioritisation, legislation, and effective implementation.

With polls scheduled for February, Rehman expressed doubt about the possibility of substantive reform. "If you had any reforms that you wish to implement, presumably this should have been articulated six months ago."

Recalling CPD's past involvement in reform monitoring, he said that earlier agendas, including those set under caretaker governments before the 2001 and 2006 elections, largely failed to produce outcomes.

He added that the absence of a credible reform process results from parliament's inability to debate, legislate, and monitor reforms. This gap, he said, has forced civil society to assume a role it has never played before.

Rehman urged NGOs and CSOs to break out of silos and mobilise citizens at the grassroots. "Until we demonstrate this capacity for collective action and to mobilise people -- not just to come and participate occasionally in seminars and dialogues but actually in each

district -- I'm not really sure that we'll have delivered what we set out to do."

Drawing on his pre-independence experience, he reminded participants that civil society once played a transformative role in shaping the Six Point Movement.

He called on Bangladesh Reform Watch and civil society to take on this responsibility. "It isn't just about documenting which reforms should be implemented but also about tracking how they are progressing and mobilising citizens to demand accountability."

Former caretaker government adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman mentioned the aspirations behind reform demands: dismantling authoritarian structures; restoring representative politics through free and fair elections; ensuring welfare in education, health, and law enforcement; creating a fear-free, inclusive society; and moving away from an oligarch-driven economy.

He said the number of commissions was not the real measure of progress, as some were poorly conceived while key public concerns were ignored. He also identified two major obstacles: weak assertion of governance and personal biases of reform actors. "Power is not just a legal mandate; it's about asserting authority in society," he said, citing how a police commissioner could block a major road for an hour without consequence.

Zillur criticised the tendency to dismiss ordinary citizens in reform debates, saying the process has become confined within the "walls of Jamuna."

Noted economist Prof Anu Muhammad said no meaningful change has come despite repeated talks of reform. While the state exercises extensive surveillance over citizens, people must also create mechanisms of counter-surveillance and accountability. "Without such pressure, no meaningful change will be possible."

He added that there have been no signs of reform in the police, courts, or other state institutions.

CPD Distinguished Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya questioned why the government's initiatives had stalled, saying committees lacked representation from marginalised groups, minorities, and disadvantaged people. He added that the interim government appears to have "lost its path" amid political events and election preparations.

Describing the situation as a "storm sweeping across Bangladesh -- touching the economy, politics, culture, and social life", he said the country's greatest asset is the anti-discrimination spirit born from the July uprising. "The challenge now is to embed that spirit in the state, society, and politics."

He emphasised citizens' role, saying, "Technical solutions exist, but without citizens' demand for accountability, they cannot be implemented. That demand must unite the voices of citizens, politicians, and social movements."

Rasheda K Chowdhury, educationist and former caretaker government adviser, said women's voices are being ignored. On education, she said children are being treated like guinea pigs. "Frequent policy changes are confusing students, while coaching centres and guidebooks are replacing ethics, values, and creative thinking."

She also pointed to the struggles of domestic workers, saying many face eviction and insecurity as political groups fight over control of slums.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, added that Bangladesh is unlikely to meet the SDGs, as inequality, poverty, child abuse, violence, and attacks on minorities are on the rise.

She urged Reform Watch and civic groups to embed marginalised voices in the process, saying climate-induced migration is increasing the number of disadvantaged people with no roadmap to address their needs.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, urged stronger measures to ensure

women's direct participation in politics. "Half of this country's population is women. No party can win elections without their votes, yet when we demand 100 directly elected seats for women, leaders say it isn't possible... Women at the grassroots want to make decisions and participate at every level, but corruption, money, and muscle power block their path."

She added that the election must be about taking Bangladesh forward, not about seat-grabbing. She also called for the inclusion of women from all backgrounds, including those with special needs.

Political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan said civil society should prioritise a few key reforms, track them closely, and form alliances with reform-minded actors inside politics, business, and bureaucracy. "Our reports shouldn't remain on paper. Without continuous, collective movements, reforms cannot be realised."

At the event, CPD Research Fellow Taufiqul Islam Khan gave a PowerPoint presentation on the newly launched Bangladesh Reform Watch.

Academics, including CPD Distinguished Fellow Prof Mustafizur Rahman, Dhaka University Prof Selim Raihan, leaders of political parties, businesses and marginalised communities, along with tech entrepreneurs, also spoke.

Acting director of hospital sued over rape of employee

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

The acting director of Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital in Kishoreganj was sued yesterday over the rape of an employee.

The victim, who has been working at the hospital temporarily, filed a complaint with Kishoreganj Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-1.

The tribunal directed the officer-in-charge of Kishoreganj Sadar Model Police Station to register the complaint as a first information report and take legal action accordingly, Public Prosecutor of the tribunal Md Jalaluddin confirmed.

On August 26, the accused attempted to rape her again at his office room in the hospital.

According to the FIR, the accused Helish Ranjan Sarker, 50, had been stalking the victim. On August 21, he called her to his house saying he needed to discuss something important with her.

Once she went there, her raped her and threatened to kill her if she disclosed the incident to anyone.

On August 26, the accused attempted to rape her again at his office room in the hospital. But his attempt was foiled when some of the hospital's staffers rushed there hearing the victim's screams, said the case statement.

Contacted, Helish denied the allegation and said he is a victim of conspiracy.

Kishoreganj Sadar Model Police Station OC Abdullah Al Mamun said he would act as per the court's directive.

Xi rejects hegemonism

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Putin used his speech to defend Russia's Ukraine offensive, blaming the West for triggering the three-and-a-half year conflict that has killed tens of thousands and devastated much of eastern Ukraine.

"This crisis wasn't triggered by Russia's attack on Ukraine, but was a result of a coup in Ukraine, which was supported and provoked by the West," Putin said.

"The second reason for the crisis is the West's constant attempts to drag Ukraine into Nato."

After the summit, Modi shared a ride with Putin in the Russian leader's armoured Aurus limousine en route to their bilateral meeting.

"Conversations with him are always insightful," Modi wrote on X. At the bilateral meeting, Putin addressed Modi in Russian as "Dear Mr Prime Minister, dear friend."

In opening comments before their meeting, Modi praised the "special and privileged strategic partnership" with Moscow.

"India and Russia have stood shoulder to shoulder, even in the toughest situations," he said.

China and India are the biggest buyers of crude oil from Russia, the world's second largest exporter. Trump has imposed additional tariffs on India over the purchases, but not on China.

Little known outside the region, the Beijing-headquartered SCO was formed more than two decades ago as a regional security bloc. China, Russia, India, and four Central Asian states are founding members. Later, it was expanded to 10 members. India joined in 2017.

The 10 members are China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus. It also included two observer countries -- Afghanistan and Mongolia -- and 14 dialogue partners, including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bahrain, Egypt, Cambodia, Qatar, Kuwait, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey,

and Sri Lanka.

Despite expectations, Xi yesterday did not set out any concrete measures in what he called his "Global Governance Initiative", the latest in a series of policy frameworks from Beijing geared to promoting China's leadership and challenging the US-dominated international organisations that took shape after World War Two.

Earlier, Xi also pushed for what he described as more inclusive economic globalisation amid the upheaval caused by Trump's tariff policies, touting the SCO's "mega scale market" and economic opportunity.

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PUTIN

Putin, whose country has forged even closer economic and security ties with China amid the fallout from the Ukraine war, said the SCO had revived "genuine multilateralism", with national currencies increasingly used in mutual settlements.

"This, in turn, lays the political and socio-economic groundwork for the formation of a new system of stability and security in Eurasia," Putin said.

He added, "This security system, unlike Euro-centric and Euro-Atlantic models, would genuinely consider the interests of a broad range of countries, be truly balanced, and would not allow one country to ensure its own security at the expense of others."

The member states signed a declaration yesterday, agreeing to

strengthen cooperation in sectors such as security and economy, China's Xinhua news agency said.

They also said they oppose trade measures that violate WTO rules and principles. The countries are concerned about measures that disrupt the stability of global supply chain, and call for "dialogue and cooperation among all parties," the statement said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also said that the SCO has agreed to establish a development bank to cater to the development needs of its members. It would be a major step towards the bloc's long-held aspiration of developing an alternative payment system that circumvents the US dollar and the power of US sanctions.

China will also build an artificial intelligence cooperation centre for SCO nations, which are also invited to participate in China's lunar research station.

Xi held a flurry of back-to-back bilateral meetings with leaders, including Modi, who is on his first visit to China since 2018.

Modi told Xi that India was committed to taking "forward our ties on the basis of mutual trust, dignity and sensitivity".

In turn, Xi said that their countries are development partners, not rivals, and discussed ways to improve trade.

The world's two most populous nations are intense rivals. A thaw began last October, when Modi met Xi for the first time in five years at a summit in Russia. Their rapprochement deepened as US President Donald Trump pressured both Asian economic giants with trade tariffs.

Separately, Xi will preside over a massive military parade on Wednesday in Beijing, where he is expected to be joined by Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

That parade -- to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War Two -- will feature China's latest military technology in a show of force that analysts say will aim to intimidate and deter potential rivals.

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Ducusu polls stay on schedule

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that the polls be held on September 9 as scheduled.

Around 3:50pm, the HC bench of Justice Md Habibul Gani and Justice Sk Tahsin Ali, after a primary hearing of a writ petition, stayed the Ducusu election process and final voter list until October 30.

The court directed the writ petitioner, BM Fahmida Alam, Liberation War and democratic movements affairs secretary candidate from the left alliance "Aparajeyo 71, Odommyo 24" panel, to file a complaint with the DU's election tribunal regarding the political background of SM Farhad along with all relevant documents within 15 days.

In the petition, Fahmida alleged that Farhad was involved in the now banned Chhatra League and appealed to stay his candidature.

The HC also issued a rule questioning the legality of allowing Farhad, general secretary candidate from the Islami Chhatra Shibir-backed panel, to contest the Ducusu polls.

It ordered the DU's election tribunal to dispose of the complaint and submit a report before the court by October 21.

Lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua argued for the petitioner while lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir, assisted by Saddam Hosseini, appeared for the DU during yesterday's hearing.

Following the appeal, Justice Farah Mahbub stayed the HC order around 4:30pm. The chamber judge also asked the DU authorities to file a regular petition with this court against the HC order.

The judge said the stay order on the HC directive would continue till filing of the petition by DU authorities. With the SC chamber judge's ruling, there is no legal barrier to holding the Ducusu elections on September 9, said DU's lawyer.

Shibir-backed panel "Oikkoboddho Shikkharti Jote", after learning about the HC order postponing the polls, said the elections should be held on the announced date.

Later, they took out processions

protesting against the HC decision.

By that time, students from different halls brought out processions and started gathering in front of the VC residence. They were chanting slogans like "Ducusu Amar Odhikar, Rukhe Dwar Shaddhyo Kar", "High Court na Ducusu, Ducusu, Ducusu", and "Guest Room na Ducusu, Ducusu, Ducusu".

VP candidate from Boishommo Birodh Shikkharti Sangsad panel Abdul Qader, general secretary candidate Abu Baker Majumder, VP candidate from Chhatra Odhikar Parishad-backed "Ducusu for Change" panel Md Bin Yamin Mollah and independent VP candidate Shameem Hossen were seen there, among others.

Abdul Qader at a briefing said they had fears over the elections over the last couple of days.

"Those fears have materialised today... But