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**If the election is not held in February, Bangladesh will face not only internal instability but also threats to national security. I'm not entertaining any ifs or buts. That's why the political parties must now stand together.”**

Consensus Commission Vice President PROF ALI RIAZ



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**This [February election] is what the people want. All political parties also want it. The aspiration to exercise voting rights ranks first among the aspirations of the mass uprising.”**

BNP Standing Committee Member SALAHUDDIN AHMED



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**If the government does not begin preparing the ground now, a free and fair election will be unlikely. We may face another chaotic election—another cycle of bloodshed centred on the polls.”**

Ha Meem Group Chairman and Noab President AK AZAD



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**“Why hasn't there been a clear proposal for a commitment to combat corruption? For ordinary citizens, this issue is even more pressing, and it deserves to be addressed explicitly.”**

Former adviser to caretaker government HOSSAIN ZILLUR



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**“One solution is to strengthen the existing authority, enhancing its capacity so it can fulfil its core objectives... The other, if that strengthening fails, is that the authority itself may be changed.”**

Distinguished fellow at Centre for Policy Dialogue DEBARPRIYA BHATTACHARYA



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**“The ball is largely in the court of our political parties. We've achieved unity, but the question is how that unity will translate into action. The government has its own responsibilities. It must take a clear and decisive stance.”**

Consensus Commission Member BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

## Polls delay could even threaten nat'l security

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Economist Debarpriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the country is facing a political vacuum. “This vacuum is evident in the economic sphere, in rising social unrest, and in deteriorating law and order,” he said.

Social science and history, he explained, offer two solutions: strengthening the existing authority so it can fulfil its core objectives, such as holding elections and reforms; or, if that fails, changing the authority itself. “Politics is the art of the feasible. You act on what is possible. As for the impossible, one may aspire to it, but not rely on it,” he said.

He cautioned that excessive focus on constitutional reform may push issues from the political domain into the judicial system. “People are asking whether elections will happen at all. Others are asking an even bigger question: if they do happen, will they be credible?”

On the next election, Debarpriya said, “The audience is ready, but the stage is not. Citizens are prepared, but the stage itself is not set. And the lead actors, the political protagonists, are not yet ready to play their roles.”

Ha-Meem Group Chairman AK Azad, also president of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) and publisher of Samakal, said every reform proposal is both acceptable and implementable, but the government should have acted earlier. “The longer it delays, the harder it will become,” he warned.

“A duly elected government has capacities that an unelected one simply does not. We are already seeing the consequences in law and order, employment, and domestic investment. These problems are

growing by the day. Elections are inevitable. They must be held by February. There is no alternative.

“If the government does not begin preparing the ground now, a free and fair election will be unlikely. We may face another chaotic election—another cycle of bloodshed centred on the polls,” Azad said, echoing Ali Riaz's concerns about national security.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam said if a free and fair election is not held, the responsibility will lie squarely with the political parties.

Urging parties to put aside differences, even temporarily, to bring the nation to a place of stability, he said, “You have failed to reach consensus among yourselves. There are contradictions, divisions, disagreements. But why should I, as a voter, be the victim of your disunity?”

He also said that when this government came to power, it had two core responsibilities: good governance and reform. “But no matter what, if you sit in the seat of government, you must govern. You must deal with the market, with unrest, with crises. That is your duty,” he said.

In this regard, I believe the government has failed significantly. The current law and order situation is such that everyone is living in fear,” Mahfuz Anam added. “Today, it seems politicians, journalists, businesspeople, even a former chief justice, are all accused of murder. If a chief justice gave a flawed verdict, punish him for that, but he did not commit murder. Nearly 226 journalists are facing murder charges; some are in jail.”

Badiul Alam Majumdar, a member of the consensus commission, said

consensus has been reached on many issues and the focus must now shift to implementation. “The ball is largely in the court of our political parties. We have achieved unity, but the question now is how that unity will translate into action,” he said.

“At the same time, the government has responsibilities. It must take a clear and decisive stance. To ensure that sacrifices are not in vain, and to prevent any future resurgence of autocracy like Sheikh Hasina's, our political parties must fulfil their responsibilities, and the government must also play its role with integrity and commitment.”

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said his party wants the election to be held in February. “This is what the people want. All political parties also want it. There is already consensus on this issue. No one has opposed it to date,” he told the roundtable.

He said the BNP has also been positive about signing the July Charter and stressed that parties should be prepared to hold talks on the matter, “even behind closed doors,” for the sake of the country.

On justice for victims of atrocities during the July uprising, Salahuddin said it was an ongoing process that would take time. “If we impose a timeline on justice, it would amount to injustice,” he said.

If we forget the national interest in pursuit of our own party's agenda and interests, it will be suicidal for us,” he warned.

Salahuddin added that constitutional reforms agreed upon during the consensus commission talks would be implemented through the next parliament.

“However, if someone can

propose a legitimate, lawful, and constitutional method beforehand, we are willing to agree for the sake of national stability and interest.”

He cautioned against setting a bad precedent in constitutional reform.

“Two or five years down the line, others could misuse the process by saying: the constitution was changed that way before, so we can do it again.”

He said the BNP's top priority is to ensure that enforced disappearances, killings, torture, and political persecution no longer occur. “The aspiration to exercise voting rights ranks first among the aspirations of a popular uprising,” he said.

National Citizen Party Member Secretary Akther Hossen said they want sustainable reforms, but history shows constitutional amendments alone cannot guarantee that. He noted that at least 43 of the agreed issues are linked to the constitution.

“That's why we proposed a constituent assembly election, through which a durable framework could be established via a new

constitution. If we proceed with the election but fail to decide now how the country will be governed afterward, that election will not bring the success we hope for, nor lead us to the democratic transformation we aspire to,” he said.

Jamaat-e-Islami Publicity and Media Secretary Matiur Rahman Akanda warned that if the election is not held in February, the situation could become “more dire”.

He said debate over how to implement the July Charter and reforms must not be dictated by party interests. “If we prioritise what may benefit us in power, the problems will never be resolved,” he said.

Ganosamhati Andolan Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki said dialogue was the right path to resolving the crisis. He emphasised two critical areas: how reforms will be implemented and how elections will be conducted.

If solutions can be found in these two areas, progress toward broader political understanding will be possible,” he said.

Lt Gen (Retd) Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman, chairman of Osmani Centre for Peace and Security Studies, stressed the need for security sector reform. “The sooner an elected government takes office, the better. Unelected governments are often vulnerable to internal and external pressures.

“At present, Bangladesh faces several traditional and non-traditional security concerns, especially along the south-eastern border. In such a context, it becomes difficult for an interim or caretaker government to provide coherent policy guidance on national security,” he said.

Dhaka University Prof Samina Luthfa said the interim government was a “weak government” and its performance in maintaining law and order had been “not satisfactory”. She stressed that the government must work strongly to rebuild trust. “If it cannot, people are deeply concerned the crisis may intensify further,” she said.

Samina urged political parties to stop wasting time and cooperate sincerely in preparing the roadmap for the February election. “Without this, progress will not be possible,” she added at the discussion, moderated by Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sajjad Sharif.

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He recalled that the previous government had also promised to improve road safety in its election manifesto but failed to deliver.

He urged that political parties coming to power must not only make pledges but also take tangible steps to reduce deaths and injuries on the country's roads.

## Air strike kills 19 school students in Rakhine

AFP, Bangkok

A Myanmar ethnic minority armed group yesterday said that a junta air strike killed at least 19 students, including children, in western Rakhine state.

The Arakan Army (AA) is engaged in a fierce fight with Myanmar's ruling military for control of Rakhine, where it has seized swaths of territory in the past year.

The Rakhine conflict is one element of the bloody chaos that has engulfed Myanmar since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in a 2021 coup, sparking a widespread armed uprising.

The AA posted a statement on Telegram on Saturday saying the attack on two private high schools in Kyauktaw township happened just after midnight Friday, killing 19 students between the ages of 15 and 21 and wounding 22 more.

“We feel as sad as the victims' families for the death of the innocent students,” the statement said.

## Magnitude 7.4 quake strikes off Russian Far East

AFP, Moscow

A 7.4 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Kamchatka in Russia's Far East on Saturday, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) said.

There was no risk that the quake had triggered a tsunami, according to the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC).

The USGS said the quake hit 111 kilometres (69 miles) east of the Russian city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, the administrative centre of the Kamchatka region, at a depth of 39.5 kilometres.

The survey earlier gave a magnitude of 7.5 before downgrading it.

The PTWC initially warned that “hazardous” waves of up to one metre (3.3 feet) were possible along some nearby Russian coasts.

The centre later said “the tsunami threat... has now passed”.

In July, one of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded struck off the Kamchatka peninsula, triggering tsunamis up to four metres high across the Pacific and sparking evacuations from Hawaii to Japan.

The magnitude 8.8 quake was the largest since 2011, when a magnitude 9.1 tremor off Japan caused a tsunami that killed more than 15,000 people.

July's quake prompted authorities in Japan to order almost two million people to head to higher ground.

Tsunami warnings were also issued across the region, before being rescinded or downgraded.

## Shibir bags most of Jucsu posts too

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for the central positions and 443 for hall union positions.

Although the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal-backed panel boycotted the election midway, its VP candidate Sheikh Sadi Hasan came in fourth with 648 votes. Their GS candidate Tanjila Hossain Boishakhi also finished fourth with 941 votes.

With a partial panel in 11 halls, the number of posts won by the JCD could not be known immediately.

Shibir did not officially give any panel at the halls.

Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsads-backed candidates won two posts -- executive member and social welfare and human resource development -- while three independents won three posts: athlete secretary and cultural secretaries.

From the Shibir-backed panel, Ferdous Al Hasan won the assistant general secretary (male) post (2,358 votes) and Ayesha Siddiqua Meghla clinched the AGS (female) post (3,402 votes).

On September 9, the Shibir-backed Oikyabodhlo Shikkharkathi Jote won 23 out of 28 posts, including the top three, in the Ducusu polls.

The Jucsu election results were announced at the university's Senate Bhaban around 5:40pm yesterday, over 46 hours after voting ended in the last centre, by Chief Election Commissioner Md Moniruzzaman.

The announcement began with a one-minute silence in memory of JU Assistant Prof Jannatul Ferdous Moumita, who passed away while coming to count votes on Thursday night.

Around 4:20pm, Shibir supporters gathered at the building to hear the results. Once their candidates' names were announced, they cheered and chanted “Nara e Takbeer, Allahu Akbar!” (Shout forth the praise of God, Allah is the Greatest) and “Mujibbaad, murdabad!” (down with Mujibism!).

Jucsu Election Commission Member Secretary Prof AKM Rashidul Alam, while announcing the results, said that although some candidates raised allegations of irregularities and mismanagement in the media, the commission's investigation found no such evidence.

He, however, admitted that some mistakes were made. “Holding the Jucsu election after 33 years, maybe some small errors occurred here and there. When we try to achieve something big, sometimes we overlook the small things. So, if any mistakes took place, we're asking for forgiveness today [yesterday] on behalf of the commission.”

The election became further questionable when five out of eight panels -- Chhatra Dal, Sampriti Oiky, Swatantra Angikar Parishad, Songshoptak Parishad, and Socialist Student Front -- withdrew and demanded fresh polls over the same allegations.

Jahangirnagar University officially started its journey 54 years ago, on January 12, 1971, while Jucsu was established in 1972. Its first election was held that very year, and then in '73 and '74.

Later, they were held in 1980, 1981, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992. In the last 1992 polls, JCD won 105 of 107 Jucsu and hall council posts.

After voting ended on Thursday,

at 5:00pm in most centres and at 7:00pm in one due to a delayed start in voting, the commission said the results would be announced the following morning. They later deferred it to the afternoon, then Friday night, and then to yesterday. The announcement began at 5:39pm and continued for two hours.

The polls were marred by allegations of mismanagement, irregularities, and boycotts that sparked widespread concerns, especially following the resignation of Jucsu EC member Prof Rezwana Karim Snigdha yesterday afternoon. With her resignation, two out of five EC members stepped down from their posts.

On Friday night, Prof Mufruhi Sattar, another Jucsu EC member, also stepped down, claiming that the allegations were true. Besides, three teachers involved in the election process also resigned on voting day, citing similar allegations.

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under successive governments, he added, have spread traffic congestion from cities and ports to rural areas.

Mozammel also criticised the interim government for failing to initiate any reforms in the road sector despite the sacrifices of thousands of students and citizens during the July uprising for a “New Bangladesh”.

According to the Samity's data, 2022 recorded the highest casualties, with 9,951 killed and 12,356 injured in 6,749 crashes. In 2024, 8,583 people were killed and 12,608 injured in 6,259 crashes.

The Samity gathered the data from media reports. The actual number of casualties in road crashes could be much higher since many incidents remain unreported.