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CONSENSUS TALKS  
**Parties split over referendum and constitutional order**  
Commission floats new mechanism to implement July Charter provisions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Consensus talks on implementing constitutional reforms outlined in the July Charter remained deadlocked for the third consecutive day yesterday, with political parties failing to agree on how to move forward.

In a bid to break the impasse, the National Consensus Commission proposed issuing a Constitutional Order (CO) and holding a referendum on the order on the day of the next general election.

The BNP rejected the new proposal, warning that it could create "constitutional disorder" and a "bad precedent."

The Jamaat-e-Islami, by contrast, backed the proposal but insisted on a referendum before the polls, not on election day.

The National Citizen Party remained undecided, saying the party would consult legal experts.



- BNP rejects proposal, warning it could cause constitutional disorder, set bad precedent
- Jamaat supports proposal, demands referendum before election
- NCP undecided, saying it will consult legal experts

The July Charter, containing 84 reform proposals, many with notes of dissent, was agreed upon in earlier rounds of dialogue. Some of the proposals can be executed through government orders or existing laws, but a significant portion requires changes to the constitution.

After the talks, Commission Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz told reporters that experts had recommended a constitutional order and referendum as possible mechanisms to implement the reforms related to the constitution.

"They have combined these two approaches and provided a comprehensive opinion, which we have presented today to the political parties," he said.

He said several parties supported the proposal while some shared differing views. Previous proposals were also revisited during the discussions.

The commission would maintain informal communication with the parties and reconvene in early October, he added.

**THE PROPOSAL**

According to the experts' proposal, the interim government may enact a Constitutional Order under the authority of section 22 of the July Declaration, incorporating core reforms from the July Charter.

The CO would take immediate effect and later be put to a referendum, to be held on the same day as the general election.

"If the CO receives the assent of the people through a referendum, it will be validated with effect from the date of its enactment," the proposal stated.

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## Fakhrul, Taher to accompany Yunus to UNGA

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus will travel to New York next week to attend the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said yesterday.

While briefing reporters at the Foreign Service Academy, Touhid said four senior political leaders – BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, BNP leader Humayun Kabir, Jamaat-e-Islami Nayeb-e-Ameer Syeed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, and National Citizen Party leader Akhter Hossain – will join the Bangladesh delegation.

He said the chief adviser will leave Dhaka on September 22 and is scheduled to address the assembly on September 26, highlighting the interim government's reform initiatives, the aspirations of the July 2024 mass uprising, and its pledge to hold free, fair, and inclusive elections in February 2026.

Yunus will also hold high-level meetings, including a conference on the Rohingya crisis, and represent Bangladesh at several global events.

This year's UNGA is especially significant for Bangladesh, with the UN hosting its first High-Level Conference on the Situation of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar on

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Smoke rises from a neighbourhood in north Gaza yesterday as Israeli bombardment continues to pummel the territory.

## Polytechnic students block roads, rails over 4-point demand

Protests in Dhaka, several districts cause traffic chaos

**STAR REPORT**

Students from polytechnic institutes staged blockades in Dhaka and several districts yesterday to press home their four-point demands, including the introduction of a single-track system in engineering education to eliminate discrimination in jobs.

The blockades on roads and rail tracks for several hours led to long tailbacks in the capital and other major cities and disrupted railway services, causing immense suffering to commuters and passengers.

Many were stranded on roads for hours, while others had to walk several kilometres to reach their destinations.

In the capital, students of Dhaka Polytechnic Institute blocked a road at

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## Govt angling for free trade with EU

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh is seeking to sign free trade agreements with the European Union and other major trading partners to retain preferential access after graduating from the least-developed country category in November next year.

The commerce ministry sent a letter to the EU last month expressing interest in an FTA and has convened an internal meeting for September 29 to discuss the issue, Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star over the phone.

"Securing this trade deal is important as two competing countries – India and Vietnam – have already signed FTAs with the EU," he said.

Without a similar arrangement with the EU, Bangladeshi exporters will face a 12 percent duty from 2029 as the bloc has granted the country a three-year extension of zero-duty facilities.

The EU accounts for more than \$25 billion in annual shipments from Bangladesh, or over 60 percent of total exports.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has been pushing for EU's GSP Plus status, which requires ratification of 32 international conventions, including four on good governance, labour rights, human rights, and environmental protection.

Since obtaining GSP Plus appears to be difficult now, signing an FTA could be

a possible solution.

The UK has also extended duty-free access for Bangladesh until 2035 under its Developing Countries Trading Scheme, with a 25 percent local value addition requirement. Therefore, Dhaka is not seeking an FTA with Britain now.

Australia, too, has assured duty-free benefits after graduation but requires 50

**The EU accounts for more than \$25 billion in annual shipments from Bangladesh, or over 60 percent of total exports.**

percent local value addition – a condition difficult for apparel exporters reliant on imported raw materials.

Rahman said he would write to Canberra next week, requesting the threshold be reduced to 30 percent, in line with the EU.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has concluded the final round of negotiations with Japan on September 13, paving the way for an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to be signed soon.

Talks with South Korea are also advancing; the first round of negotiations

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## 'Punish those involved in July atrocities'

At ICT-1, Nahid says members of police, military, other forces should be tried along with Hasina, AL

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Nahid Islam, one of the key student leaders who spearheaded the July uprising, yesterday demanded that not only political leaders but also members of the police, military, and other state forces involved in killings and enforced disappearances be punished.

"Just as Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League are being brought to justice, those in the police, military, and other forces involved in the July atrocities and enforced disappearances must also be brought to book," Nahid told reporters after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 adjourned recording his testimony until today.

It must be clear that no one should escape justice simply because they belong to a force, he said.

Nahid, convener of the National Citizen Party and the former chief coordinator of Students Against Discrimination, appeared as the 47th prosecution witness in the crimes against humanity case filed against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, and ex-inspector general of police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who has turned approver.

He said justice must be ensured for his "martyred brothers and sisters who were killed, injured, and bled on the streets", adding that justice must set an example that anyone attempting to establish a dictatorship and harm the people must face the consequences.

Nahid recalled how the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) tried to put pressure on student leaders to withdraw programmes and reach a compromise with the government.



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## Outcry grows as Israel steps up Gaza assault

**AGENCIES**

Dozens of Palestinians were killed yesterday as Israeli troops and tanks pushed deeper into Gaza City on the second day of a ground offensive widely condemned by world powers.

Israel's military also stepped up efforts to empty the city of civilians. It said it was opening an additional route for 48 hours that Palestinians could use to leave Gaza.

Hundreds of thousands of people are sheltering in the city, and many are reluctant to follow Israel's orders to move south because of the dangers along the way, dire conditions, a lack of food in the southern area, and fear of permanent displacement.

"Even if we want to leave Gaza City, is there any guarantee we would be able to come back? Will the war ever end? That's why I prefer to die here, in Sabra, my neighbourhood," Ahmed, a school teacher, said by phone.

At least 51 people were killed across the Gaza Strip yesterday in Israel's latest strikes, local health authorities said, pushing the death toll beyond the 65,000 mark since Israel launched its genocidal assault on Gaza's population nearly two years ago.

The ministry also reported a drone attack on a specialist children's hospital, which did not cause casualties but

EU proposes sanctions, curbs on Israel trade ties

Death toll passes 65,000 mark

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