



In Sylhet city's Masuk Bazar, the silt-choked mouth of the Bashia river lies cracked and dry, halting irrigation and devastating thousands of farmers. Crop delays and rising costs are hitting both markets and livelihoods. Farmers urge urgent dredging or irrigation support, warning that if the river dies, so does farming and with it, the rhythm of rural life. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Govt has to decide on referendum time

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a public mandate solely through the lens of its own partisan position.”

He hoped that political parties would see the matter positively.

Prof Riaz said their recommendations suggest that the government immediately implement all issues that are not related to constitutional matters through ordinances, executive, and office orders.

### TWO ALTERNATIVES

About the two alternatives for implementing the reforms requiring constitutional changes, Prof Riaz said both share a common thread – the government will issue an implementation order; a new parliament will be formed through the general election; and the Constitution Reform Council will be simultaneously established with the authority to exercise “constituent power” on constitutional matters.

The first alternative suggests that the referendum question will ask voters, “Do you approve the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, and the proposals for constitutional reforms included in Schedule-1 of this order?”

The second would see the government prepare a Constitutional Reform Draft Bill based on the charter’s proposals.

In that case, the referendum question would be, “Do you approve the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, and the draft bill on Constitutional Reform included in Schedule-1 of this order?”

If the Constitution Reform Council/JS fails to complete its work within 270 days of its first sitting, the bill will automatically take effect and be incorporated into the constitution, as its contents would have been endorsed by the referendum.

### UPPER HOUSE

Both proposals call for establishing a 100-member upper house within 45 days of the council’s 270-day term ending. Members would be elected

under a proportional representation (PR) system based on total votes obtained by each party in the lower house election.

The lower house would continue under the first past the post system.

The term of the upper house would coincide with that of the national parliament.

### REFORM COUNCIL

The Constitution Reform Council would determine its own procedures for convening, proposing, and adopting reforms.

A minimum of 60 members would be required for a quorum, and all decisions would be taken by majority vote. In case of a tie, the Speaker, who will chair the council, will cast the deciding vote.

Asked if the Constitution Reform Council will have the authority to discard any proposal of the July charter after discussion, Prof Riaz said the council’s duty will be to carry out all necessary amendments and additions to translate the July charter’s commitments into the constitution.

“If matters are approved through referendum, the council must uphold both the spirit and the letter of those commitments.

“Therefore, if certain matters are debated and decided upon, and receive public approval through a referendum, it becomes the duty of the council to remain steadfast in upholding both the spirit and the letter of those commitments. That is our expectation,” he said.

### TOO COMPLEX?

Asked whether the referendum question might be too complex, Riaz responded that globally, referendums often address broad issues through a single question.

“In Turkey’s 2016 referendum, one question covered 21 constitutional amendments,” he noted. “So, if you’re concerned that people won’t grasp the details, I will ask you to have trust in the people of Bangladesh. They fought for liberation, led uprisings, and resisted fascism.”

He added that it was the

government’s responsibility to explain the issues clearly, and that all sides must accept the public’s verdict, even if the reforms are rejected.

Asked if the implementation order itself would be a constitutional order, Riaz avoided a direct answer and said the current situation is “a state of exception” requiring flexibility beyond traditional frameworks.

“The order will be issued by the government... This cannot be viewed as overreaching, nor can it be seen in a narrow way

“But we must also recognise the uniqueness of each political context. The situation we are in now is a kind of state of exception. With that in mind, our approach must be thoughtful. Everything cannot be forced in old frameworks. Some elements may need to be considered outside the box,” he said.

After the fall of the Hasina-led regime in the July 2024 uprising, the Yunus-led interim government formed several commissions to propose reforms. Among them, six commissions were on the constitution, judiciary, electoral system, Anti-Corruption Commission, public administration, and police reforms.

The National Consensus Commission, formed in mid-February 2025, was tasked with building political consensus around the proposals of these commissions. The consensus commission compiled 166 recommendations from five commissions, excluding the one on police.

After two rounds of talks, the consensus commission drafted the July charter with 84 proposals, including 48 constitutional reforms.

The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami are among the parties that have signed the charter, while the National Citizen Party, formed by student leaders of the uprising, and four leftist parties have yet to do so.

Prof Riaz said he hoped that the NCP would sign before the commission’s tenure ends on Friday.

When he woke up, he found himself at Panchagarh Sadar Hospital. He gave inconsistent statements subconsciously when locals questioned him about how he had arrived there.

Police added that his statements are still being verified. The investigation is ongoing to determine the full circumstances of the incident and whether any other individuals were involved.

Md Wahiduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Tongi East Police Station, told The Daily Star that he had no information regarding the viral Facebook video in which Mohebbullah allegedly admitted to staging his own abduction.

“High-level exchanges are of great significance to the development of Sino-Japan relations,” Wang said according to a ministry statement.

The phone call between the two foreign ministers comes as Donald Trump is visiting Japan.

Takaichi yesterday lavished the US president with praise and vows of a “golden age” of ties, and signed a deal aimed at securing critical minerals.

## Referendum on election day a plot

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people’s aspirations.

“Before that, the president should issue an order to implement the July Charter, followed by the national election. Only then will a new humane Bangladesh be established through people’s representatives elected by their votes,” he added.

Meanwhile, after a meeting with the Election Commission yesterday, Parwar said if both the national election and referendum are held on the same day, violence may erupt at polling centres.

Technical issues like the suspension of polling at a few centres could also undermine the referendum, he said.

“The national charter that is being prepared – the reforms we have

agreed upon in the July National Charter, which aim to change the existing state structure... the nation must be informed about those first. Only then can they vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If the referendum and the election are held on the same day, how will the voters even know what they are voting for?”

Over at the rally, Parwar recalled the events of October 28, 2006.

“That day witnessed brutal, barbaric and unprecedented cruelty that shook the entire nation and the world. People couldn’t even watch the horrific killing footage for a minute.”

Everyone condemned it and demanded justice, he said.

“If people can be given death sentences in false cases after 30 or 40

years, why can’t the real perpetrators of the killings 20 years ago – Hasina, Menon, Inu, and other fascists of the 14-party alliance – be brought to justice?”

Either the law ministry should revive the case, or the existing tribunal should be tasked with investigating the incident and trying Hasina at the international tribunal, he said.

Jamaat Assistant Secretaries General Maulana Abdul Halim and Maulana Rafiqul Islam Khan attended the event as special guests.

The rally was presided over by Dhaka South Ameer and central executive committee member Md Nurul Islam Bulbul and conducted by Dhaka South Secretary Shafiqul Islam Masud.

## Will sign charter if implementation order

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the coming election,” Patwary added.

He said the reform documents from the Consensus Commission have already been handed over to the law ministry. “If the reform process and justice cannot be fulfilled, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul will not be able to escape accountability.”

Patwary rejected allegations that the NCP had “sold out” the July uprising, saying the party was striving to preserve the movement’s spirit.

On the upcoming polls, he said, “BNP is ‘lau’ and Jamaat is ‘kodu’.

They have long been allies but are now pretending to be divided for the sake of election drama.”

Lau and kodu are Bangla words for two types of gourds.

In another programme at Rajshahi Tourism Motel, NCP Convenor Nahid Islam told reporters that the party would sign the July charter on the condition that the “notes of dissent” are removed and the consensus commission’s recommendations on constitutional reforms are incorporated.

“The July charter cannot contain any note of dissent during

implementation,” he said, adding that the consensus commission’s proposals for constitutional reform would be put to a public referendum, and the constitution would be amended based on the people’s verdict.

“The approved measures would then be implemented under the leadership of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, based on the legitimacy of the July uprising.”

Nahid added that if the government ensures these conditions, the NCP would sign the implementation order of the July charter.

## Commission creating further disunity

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Constitution Reform Council – was added without prior discussion. “This concept was never on the commission’s table before. There was no consensus on this matter.

“We know that members of the parliament will be elected in the upcoming parliamentary election. Now, if those MPs have to carry out the activities of the Constitution Council, that decision must be made in the parliament.”

“Even though there was no discussion on this matter, suddenly they cannot impose the decision that the next parliament will also work as the Constitution Reform Council.”

About the proposal that states

that the Upper House would be formed through a proportional representation system, the BNP leader said this decision was not made in the commission meetings.

“It was decided that the Upper House would be formed with 100 members. But there was no consensus on how those seats would be filled. Some wanted it proportional to the votes gotten in the Lower House elections, and we wanted it proportional to the seats in the Lower House.”

Criticising the decision to present all bills, except finance and confidence motions, in the Upper House, Salahuddin said since the Upper House members aren’t elected by

direct voting, they cannot deliberate on constitutional amendments and other critical matters.

Citing a proposal that states the July Charter reforms would be automatically incorporated into the constitution if the reform council fails to adopt them within 270 days, Salahuddin said, “This is ridiculous. I don’t know how these were included.”

Salahuddin urged the authorities to review the matter carefully.

“I believe the National Consensus Commission has made some suggestions just to complete its work. I hope the advisory council and the government will examine and consider the proposals thoroughly.”

## Iran demands \$170m from owner of seized Israel-linked ship

AFP, Tehran

Iran has demanded a \$170 million fine from the owner of a cargo ship that it seized in Gulf waters last year and accused of having ties to Israel, a judicial official said yesterday.

The Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of Iran’s military, intercepted the MSC Aries in April of 2024 and detained its 25 international crew members.

At the time, the official IRNA news agency said the Portuguese-flagged vessel was “managed by Zodiac, which belongs to the Zionist capitalist Eyal Ofer”.

Yesterday, Iranian judiciary spokesperson Asghar Jahangir said charges had been filed and the case was before the courts, though no date had been set for a trial.

“A fine of \$170 million has been demanded against its owner, of Israeli origin, accused of financing terrorism,” Jahangir said.

AFP, Beijing

Beijing’s top diplomat yesterday told his Japanese counterpart he sees “positive signals” from Tokyo’s new leadership, after the country swore in a prime minister long viewed as a China hawk.

Japan last week named conservative Sanae Takaichi, who has previously said that Tokyo must

“address the security threat” posed by Beijing, as its first woman prime minister.

But she has toned down her rhetoric and last week called China an important neighbour.

“China has taken note of some positive signals released by Japan’s new cabinet,” China’s Wang Yi said in a phone call with Japan’s Toshimitsu Motegi.