

The background of the cover is a photograph of a red wall with large, stylized yellow graffiti. Above the wall is a brick building with a grid-like pattern. The title is centered over the wall.

DIALOGUE FOR DEMOCRATIC RECONSTRUCTION

DIALOGUE FOR
DEMOCRATIC
RECONSTRUCTION

Dialogue for Democratic Reconstruction

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The Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) conducts research on and facilitates collaborative efforts among the academic community, government, private sector, civil society, and development partners on governance, security, economic and human resource development, political and social order, and democratization. For details, visit: <http://cgs-bd.com>



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BACKGROUND

After fifteen years of autocratic rule, Bangladesh underwent a historic political transition with the collapse of the Sheikh Hasina regime. Weeks of protests and a tragic massacre, resulting in over 1000 deaths, led to Hasina's departure on August 5, 2024. An interim government, headed by Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, took office on August 9, inheriting a nation plagued by institutional decay, economic instability, and widespread public distrust. The mass uprising highlighted two urgent demands: immediate free and fair elections and comprehensive institutional reforms to prevent future authoritarianism.

State institutions—including the judiciary, administration, law enforcement, and electoral system—had been systematically weakened to serve authoritarian interests. The Anti-Corruption Commission and Election Commission lost their autonomy, while the banking sector and energy industry were exploited for political gain, fueling widespread corruption. Draconian laws such as the Digital Security Act (2018) and Cyber Security Act (2023) were used to silence dissent, leading to a decline in press freedom. The scale of destruction left the interim government with the daunting task of rebuilding democratic institutions, restoring public trust, and ensuring justice for past human rights violations.

Recognizing this critical moment, the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) launched the *Dialogue for Democratic Reconstruction*, a nationwide initiative to facilitate discussions on necessary reform areas and hold the interim government accountable. Drawing lessons from missed opportunities in 1991 and 2007-08, CGS seeks to ensure that reform efforts are structured, inclusive, and action-oriented. The dialogues focus on 8 key sectors requiring urgent intervention, including constitution and constitutional bodies, human rights, judiciary, civil administration, law enforcement, economic policies, and mass media.

To achieve this, CGS designed a two-tiered dialogue structure, featuring national dialogues in Dhaka and regional dialogues across Chattogram, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Khulna. National dialogues bring together experts, policymakers, and civil society leaders to discuss institutional weaknesses and propose solutions. Regional dialogues provide an open forum for citizens to voice their expectations and concerns regarding the 8 identified reform areas.



CONSTITUTION

As part of a series of dialogues organized by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) on the priority areas of reform for the interim government, a discussion on the Constitution was held on August 31, 2024 (Saturday), at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) auditorium. This dialogue explored various aspects of the existing constitutional challenges, potential amendments, and the possibility of a complete constitutional rewrite. A summary of the key discussions is presented below.

Preventing Constitutional Autocracy and Decentralizing Power

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that, for the past 15 years, Bangladesh had witnessed a dangerous concentration of power, where the ruling party and the government became indistinguishable. They noted that this led to the establishment of a personalized autocracy that eroded democratic principles. According to the discussants, amendments to the constitution were made to serve individual and party interests rather than the collective good. With unchecked authority in the hands of the Prime Minister, a one-person dictatorship emerged across all levels of governance.

To prevent such constitutional autocracy in the future, participants suggested that the constitution must include provisions that separate the roles of the head of government, the head of the ruling party, and the leader of the parliamentary party, ensuring that no single person can hold all three positions simultaneously. Additionally, they stressed the need for a term limit, restricting any individual from serving as Prime Minister for more than two terms.

To further decentralize power, several participants proposed introducing proportional representation in parliamentary elections and establishing a bicameral legislature. They argued that the country's constitution should reflect the collective aspirations of its people rather than the interests of a single party or individual.

Ensuring Judicial Independence and Transparency in Constitutional Appointments

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that judicial independence remains a constitutional promise that has never been fully realized in Bangladesh. They highlighted that, over the past fifteen years, political considerations have played a dominant role in the appointment of judges to higher courts, further eroding public trust. Some discussants pointed out that although efforts were made in 2007 to separate the judiciary from the executive branch, Article 116 of the Constitution prevents the full implementation of this principle. This provision, they noted, grants the President—who effectively operates under the Prime Minister's control—authority over lower courts, thereby compromising judicial independence.

Participants also discussed how key constitutional positions, such as the appointment of the President and the selection of the Election Commission, have historically been filled solely at the discretion of the Prime Minister. To ensure greater transparency, several participants proposed introducing a public hearing process for constitutional appointments. They argued that future appointments to these crucial positions should involve parliamentary committees, with the public being informed in advance.

Guaranteeing Freedom of Expression

According to the participants, although the constitution formally guarantees freedom of speech, various restrictions—under the pretext of “reasonable limitations”—have been used to curtail this fundamental right. They cited controversial laws such as the Digital Security Act (DSA) 2018, the Cyber Security Act (CSA) 2023, and Section 57 of the ICT Act, all of which have been used to criminalize dissent.

To ensure genuine freedom of speech, participants proposed that the constitution must provide clear protections for differing opinions and prevent the misuse of legal provisions that suppress public discourse. Some participants argued that repealing or amending these repressive laws is essential to safeguarding democratic rights in Bangladesh.



Protecting Individual Liberties, Human Rights, and Indigenous Rights

Several participants raised concerns that the current constitution has, at times, facilitated the oppression of minority groups by allowing a ruling party with a two-thirds parliamentary majority to amend it at will. They argued that this has enabled a form of constitutional majoritarianism, where the ruling party can impose its will without adequate checks and balances. There was widespread agreement among discussants on the urgent need to establish safeguards that prevent such abuses of power.

While some participants acknowledged that the constitution contains provisions to protect human rights—such as Article 44, which allows citizens to seek legal recourse in court—they pointed out that there are no binding obligations on the state to actively uphold these rights. They suggested that ensuring human rights should not rest solely on the courts but must be a constitutional obligation of the state itself.

Additionally, the participants called for the constitution to adopt a more inclusive approach to marginalized communities. They stressed that the right to freedom does not only mean freedom of speech but must also guarantee personal liberty in all aspects of life. To align with modern human rights standards, some participants proposed abolishing the death penalty and ensuring equal rights for all citizens, including indigenous communities.

Discussants also emphasized that although Bangladesh was founded on Bengali nationalism, not all citizens identify as Bengalis. They recommended that the constitution officially recognize all ethnic groups, ensuring their representation in the state's legal and political framework. This, they argued, should include providing equal representation for indigenous communities in both the hilly and plainland regions. A constitution based on equality, they asserted, would help foster an inclusive national identity.

Constitutional Reform or Rewriting?

Participants engaged in a robust debate over how to correct the flaws, inconsistencies, and undemocratic tendencies embedded in the current constitution. Two possible approaches were proposed: comprehensive amendments or a complete constitutional rewrite. Discussants emphasized that this is a subject requiring further national debate, ensuring that all segments of society have a voice in shaping the country's constitutional future.

Many participants pointed out that the expectations of 1971 and 2024 are not the same. They argued that the failure to fully realize the aspirations of 1971 led to the mass uprising of 2024. While acknowledging the historical importance of the Liberation War, they contended that the current constitution has been manipulated to serve the interests of a single political party rather than reflecting the collective will of the people.

To determine the best path forward, some discussants suggested holding a constitutional convention or a national referendum. Legal experts among the participants noted that as long as Article 7(B) of the current constitution remains unchanged, constitutional amendments will remain legally impossible. In such a case, they proposed that a national referendum could be held to gain public approval for drafting a new constitution, with a constitutional assembly overseeing the process.

Other participants argued that if a new constitution is drafted, it must reflect the will of the people while maintaining continuity with the nation's foundational principles from 1971. Another viewpoint expressed was that before rewriting the constitution, the first priority should be electing a truly representative parliament that can oversee the process democratically. Some discussants warned that if constitutional changes occur solely through legal procedures without public consultation, they risk being overturned by future parliaments. To prevent this, they stressed that any constitutional changes must be made through a broadly representative parliamentary process.

A New Constitution Does Not Mean Abandoning Everything

Several participants clarified that a full constitutional rewrite does not necessarily mean discarding the entire existing framework. They pointed out that the push for rewriting stems from the fact that the 15th Amendment made several provisions unchangeable, blocking future reforms. However, they noted that a new constitution could be drafted while preserving the fundamental structure of the state.

Legal experts among the participants suggested that if the 15th Amendment is annulled or a court issues a stay order, allowing Article 142 (which governs constitutional amendments) to be reinstated, a referendum could resolve the issue. Many discussants agreed that a broad national consensus involving political parties, civil society, and citizens must be built to shape the future of the constitution. They emphasized that if a parliamentary framework is established to debate and refine constitutional changes, greater agreement and legitimacy can be achieved.



The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were;

- **A. F. Hassan Arif**, Advisor, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism and Land Ministry.
- **Dr. Ali Riaz**, Distinguished Professor, Illinois State University, USA
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar**, Head of the Electoral System Reform Commission and Secretary of SHUJAN (Citizen for Good Governance)
- **Ikteder Ahmed**, Former Judge, Columnist and Legal Consultant
- **Nurul Kabir**, Editor, New Age
- **Dr. Borhan Uddin Khan**, Professor, Department of Law, University of Dhaka
- **Barrister Sara Hossain**, Executive Director, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
- **Dr. Manzoor Hasan OBE**, Executive Director, Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University
- **A.M. Mahbub Uddin Khokon**, President, Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association
- **Mahfuj Alam**, Information and Broadcasting Adviser
- **Habibur Rahman**, Former Student, Department of Law, University of Dhaka.
- **Advocate Z I Khan Panna**, Chairperson, Ain o Salish Kendra
- **Raja Devasish Roy**, Barrister-at-Law, Chief of the Chakma Circle
- **Dr. Dilara Chowdhury**, Professor of Political Science, Jahangirnagar University
- **Dilruba Shormin**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh



HUMAN RIGHTS

As part of a series of dialogues organized by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) on the priority areas of reform for the interim government, a discussion on human rights was held on September 28, 2024 (Saturday), at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) auditorium, Dhaka. This dialogue examined the state of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), its limitations, necessary reforms, and broader human rights protections in Bangladesh. A summary of the key discussions is presented below.

Ensuring an Independent Law Enforcement and Judiciary

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that while human rights violations occur in every country, what sets Bangladesh apart is the absence of accountability and the inability to seek justice for such violations. They pointed out that victims rarely get a chance to voice their grievances, and even when they do, their cases often remain unresolved due to systemic flaws.

A key issue raised by participants was the lack of independence within the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. Many discussants argued that without substantial judicial reforms, addressing human rights violations would be nearly impossible. They stressed the importance of ensuring that institutions serving the public remain free from political influence so that they do not become tools of repression under any future government.

Participants particularly criticized the role of the police force in human rights violations, raising concerns about how law enforcement officers were authorized to use weapons and how those weapons ended up in the hands of plainclothes officers, leading to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Several participants called for a thorough investigation into police operations to address these concerns.

Another major obstacle to human rights protection, according to the discussants, is law enforcement's history of repression. To prevent future abuses, participants argued that accountability must be enforced through exemplary punishments. They warned that if impunity persists, human rights violations will continue.

Additionally, participants highlighted the controversial role of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which has been portrayed as an elite force by the state and the media. However, they noted that international sanctions have been imposed on RAB due to human rights violations, raising serious concerns about its operations. Given this situation, many participants strongly recommended completely disbanding RAB to prevent further human rights abuses.

Enhancing the Independence and Effectiveness of the NHRC

Participants emphasized that human rights awareness should be promoted at all levels, including schools, colleges, and universities. However, they pointed out that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which should be at the forefront of these efforts, lacks independence and effectiveness. Several discussants argued that structural reforms are necessary to empower the NHRC so that it can operate as a genuine rights-protecting body.

Currently, participants identified several major limitations of the NHRC:

- **Lack of independence** – The NHRC cannot function freely without government influence.
- **Restricted investigative powers** – Although it can conduct investigations, the NHRC is not permitted to publish reports publicly. Instead, findings are submitted only to the government.
- **Inability to file lawsuits** – The NHRC does not have the legal authority to initiate cases related to human rights violations.

Additionally, discussants noted that while the NHRC has regional offices outside Dhaka, public awareness of these offices is extremely low. These offices, they argued, exist primarily for bureaucratic purposes and do not actively contribute to protecting human rights.

Participants also pointed to reports highlighting systemic discrimination against indigenous communities. Some discussants mentioned cases in which Santal and other indigenous groups face

segregation in hotels and public spaces, where they are forced to use separate utensils or are denied entry altogether. These examples, they argued, underscore the failure of institutions like the NHRC in tackling deep-rooted discrimination.



To improve credibility, participants strongly recommended legislative reforms to ensure NHRC's independence and transparency. They warned that public confidence in the commission has declined significantly, with some participants comparing it to state-run media like BTV, which many people no longer trust.

State-Sanctioned Human Rights Violations and Ways to Prevent Them

Discussants categorized state-sponsored human rights violations in Bangladesh into two main forms:

- **Killing before arrest** – Extrajudicial executions carried out without due process.
- **Killing after arrest** – The execution of detainees while they are in state custody.

Participants found the latter particularly alarming, as detainees should be under full state protection once arrested. They cited reports showing that over the past 16 years, more than 200 individuals have been killed while in custody.

To document these violations, several participants proposed establishing a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* or a similar body. They suggested drawing lessons from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which documented victim testimonies and preserved records to prevent the erasure of past atrocities. Participants warned that if Bangladesh does not properly document these injustices, future generations will not remember them, allowing history to repeat itself.

Some discussants noted that an independent group of students has already created a website to track human rights violations during the July movement. However, they argued that the government and NHRC should have taken the initiative to create such a platform. Additionally, participants pointed out that international best practices suggest establishing psychological rehabilitation programs for victims and creating platforms for public apologies from perpetrators as essential steps for acknowledgment and healing.

To enhance accountability, some participants proposed holding *public hearings*, similar to U.S. Congressional Senate hearings, where state institutions and law enforcement agencies can be questioned about human rights violations.

Empowering Civil Society and Human Rights Organizations

Participants strongly criticized the Prime Minister's Office and the NGO Bureau for imposing severe restrictions on independent human rights organizations under the guise of national security regulations. They argued that these barriers must be dismantled so that rights organizations can operate freely and contribute to accountability efforts.

Given the high number of human rights violations over the years, participants recognized that ensuring justice will be a time-consuming process. They emphasized the necessity of preserving historical documentation of these incidents through official government directives—whether from the *Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI)*, RAB, the police, or the *Detective Branch (DB)*—to ensure that records are not erased.



Some discussants suggested that reports of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings published in newspapers should also be preserved and that individuals accused of human rights violations should be banned from leaving the country.

Leveraging International Organizations for Human Rights Protection

Participants highlighted that Bangladesh has deliberately refrained from signing or ratifying several key international human rights covenants. Many argued that there must be a public demand to push the government toward adopting these agreements and ensuring compliance with international human rights norms.

Several participants emphasized the importance of engaging international human rights organizations in monitoring the situation in Bangladesh. They suggested incorporating the *UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* into a national action plan to align Bangladesh with global human rights standards.

Some discussants pointed to Bangladesh's *Transgender Rights Bill (2018)* as an example of international influence, noting that it received support and funding from the *Asian Development Bank (ADB)*. However, they criticized the government for failing to implement the bill effectively despite receiving funding. Participants urged the government to prioritize enacting policies that ensure the protection of transgender rights and other vulnerable communities.

The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were;

- **Brig. Gen. Dr. M Shakhawat Hossain**, Advisor of the Ministry of Shipping, Labor, and Employment
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Pallab Chakma**, Executive Director, Kapaeeng Foundation
- **Joya Shikder**, Trans Women Activist
- **Shihab Uddin Khan**, Barrister-at-Law, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Ashraf Kaiser**, Political Analyst
- **Bobby Hajjaj**, Chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement - NDM
- **Ilirara Dewan**, Women's Rights Activist
- **Nur Khan**, Director, Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK)
- **Sanjida Islam**, Organizer, Mayer Daak
- **Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuad**, Joint Member Secretary, AB Party
- **Dilruba Shormin**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Advocate Subrata Chowdhury**, Executive President, Gono Forum
- **Saleh Ahmed**, Political Observer
- **Rashed Khan**, General Secretary, Gonoodhikar Parishad
- **Barrister Ahsan Habib Bhuiyan**, Lawyer of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Dr. Shakhawat Hossain Sayantha**, Secretary General, Gg
- **Alena Khan**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Naima Akter Rita**, Student Leader, Jagannath University
- **Tauhid Siam**, Student Leader, Jahangirnagar University



As part of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) series of dialogues on the priority reform areas for the interim government, a discussion on economic policies was held on October 26, 2024 (Saturday), at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) auditorium. This discussion explored the key economic challenges currently facing the country and the necessary steps to overcome them. The summary of the key discussions is presented below.

Economic Crisis

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that Bangladesh's economy is currently facing severe distress. They highlighted that the dollar shortage has disrupted supply chains for import-dependent industries, causing major setbacks in securing essential raw materials. This crisis, combined with fluctuating global commodity prices and dwindling foreign exchange reserves, has led to market instability.

Discussants also raised concerns about irregularities and loan scandals in the banking sector, which they argued have further complicated the economic situation. They pointed out that rising foreign debt and financial crimes such as money laundering are exacerbating the country's economic vulnerabilities.

To build a sustainable economy, participants suggested that Bangladesh needs a strong financial policy framework. They stressed the importance of ensuring good governance in the banking sector to restore public confidence. Additionally, some participants proposed modernizing foreign exchange policies and offering special incentives for expatriate Bangladeshis to help stabilize the dollar market and boost remittances.

Unemployment Crisis

Participants identified unemployment as one of the biggest economic and social challenges in Bangladesh. They cited alarming statistics showing that 83% of Bangladesh's unemployed are young people aged 15-29 who are not engaged in employment, education, or training, significantly reducing the country's economic productivity. Several discussants pointed out that many highly educated young professionals are forced to migrate abroad due to a lack of suitable job opportunities, leading to a brain drain, while low-skilled and semi-skilled workers struggle to find stable employment.

A major concern raised by participants was the disconnect between academia and industry, which results in graduates lacking the skills demanded by the job market. To address this issue, they recommended developing a *decentralized employment roadmap* to create job opportunities in rural areas. Some participants also suggested introducing special credit programs and unemployment benefits for young people to encourage entrepreneurship and boost economic activity.

Declining Quality in Education

Participants emphasized that the lack of quality education remains a major challenge for Bangladesh's future workforce. They pointed out that universities suffer from infrastructural limitations and insufficient research opportunities, making it difficult for students to compete at an international level. Several discussants criticized the focus of most educational institutions on theoretical learning rather than practical application, leaving graduates unprepared for real-world challenges.

To improve the education sector, participants called for better budget allocation and financial transparency. They also stressed the need for increased investment from the private sector to enhance research and innovation. Additionally, some discussants proposed making technical and vocational education mandatory and implementing regular training programs for teachers to improve the overall quality of education.

Instability in the Banking Sector

Participants expressed serious concerns over the severe liquidity crisis in Bangladesh's banking sector, which they attributed to the alarming rise in non-performing loans (NPLs). They criticized the role of banking cartels and political interference in weakening transparency and accountability, which they argued has discouraged public trust and investment.

To fix the broken banking system, several participants proposed establishing a strong Banking Commission to oversee and audit banking operations. They also stressed the need for strict enforcement of banking laws and responsible financial management to restructure the financial sector.

Rising Inflation

Many participants highlighted inflation as a long-term economic issue in Bangladesh. They argued that market cartels have artificially driven up the prices of essential goods, making basic necessities unaffordable for lower-income groups. Weak government oversight and inefficient market monitoring, they noted, have further aggravated the crisis.

To control inflation, participants urged the government to enforce stricter regulations on market cartels and introduce stronger price monitoring systems. Some discussants also suggested using digital technology in supply chain management to increase transparency and stabilize the market.

Environmental Degradation

Participants raised concerns that the implementation of mega projects has often ignored environmental considerations, leading to deforestation, destruction of agricultural land, and loss of biodiversity. These issues, they argued, have been exacerbated by climate change, causing further ecological damage.

To ensure sustainable development, participants recommended that all mega projects must incorporate environmental protection policies. Several discussants emphasized the importance of actively involving local communities in project planning and implementation to minimize environmental harm. Additionally, they called for strict enforcement of environmental laws and regular monitoring.

Foreign Exchange and Remittance Challenges

Participants pointed out that Bangladesh's foreign currency crisis and money laundering have become major economic threats. Many expatriate Bangladeshis, they noted, are losing confidence in the remittance system, leading to a decline in foreign exchange reserves.

To increase foreign reserves, participants suggested strengthening anti-money laundering laws and ensuring greater involvement of diplomatic missions in attracting foreign investment. Some discussants also proposed providing investment and savings incentives for expatriates to encourage more remittance inflows.



Neglect of Women Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses (SMEs)

Participants highlighted that women entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have long been overlooked in Bangladesh's economic policies. They noted that these groups receive little policy support or financial incentives, which limits their ability to grow and contribute to the economy.

To enhance their participation, participants recommended introducing easier access to loans, tax benefits, and financial support programs. They also suggested implementing cluster-based policies and leveraging technology to expand market opportunities for small businesses. Several discussants emphasized the need for entrepreneurial training programs and access to key resources to empower women entrepreneurs and SMEs. Some participants also called for financial stimulus and targeted policy support to further boost economic productivity and enhance employment opportunities.

Economic Inequality and Marginalized Communities

Participants raised concerns about the continued exclusion of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups from mainstream economic development. To address this, they proposed introducing affirmative action policies and targeted incentives to bridge the gap. Some discussants also stressed the need for education and skill development programs tailored to these communities to increase their economic participation and job opportunities.

Political Instability and Economic Governance

Many participants argued that political instability and the centralization of power have significantly undermined good governance in Bangladesh. They emphasized that a decentralized political system and transparent elections are essential to restoring stability and strengthening democratic institutions. Several discussants noted that if the interim government can ensure political unity, democratic institutions will become more resilient and capable of withstanding future challenges.

Need for Tax Reform

Participants identified lack of transparency and modernization as key weaknesses in Bangladesh's tax system. They argued that the government must expand tax collection by bringing informal sectors under the tax net. Some discussants suggested using automation and digital technology to increase tax efficiency and improve compliance.



To boost the tax-to-GDP ratio, participants called for structural reforms in tax administration, emphasizing that an efficient and transparent tax system is crucial for long-term economic stability.

The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were:

- **Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya**, Economist, Distinguish Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Dr. Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir**, Economist, Professor, University of Dhaka
- **Parvez Karim Abbasi**, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Economics, East West University
- **Professor Dr. Sayema Haque Bidisha**,
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Dhaka Department of Economics
- **Shahidul Islam Zahid**, Professor, Department of Banking and Insurance, University of Dhaka
- **Abdul Awal Minto**, Former President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI)
- **Anwar-UL Alam Chowdhury (Parvez)**, President, Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI)
- **Muhammad Abdul Mazid**, Chairman, The Social Development Foundation, Former Chairman of the National Board of Revenue
- **Md. Jashim Uddin**, Former President, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI)
- **Shahedul Islam Helal**, Former President, Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI)
- **Asif Ibrahim**, Committee Chair, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI)
- **Abdul Haque**, President of Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association (BARVIDA)
- **Sabur Khan**, Chairman, Daffodil Group and Former President, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industries (DCCI)
- **Prasenjit Chakma**, Former Assistant Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, Chief Consultant, Padeco Co., Ltd.
- **Mir Nasir Hossain**, Former President, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI)
- **M S Shekil Chowdhury**, Chairman, Centre for Non-Resident Bangladeshis
- **Dr. M Abu Eusuf**, Economist, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka
- **Suprova Suvha Zaman**, Student, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka
- **Shadik Mahbub Islam**, Former Student, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka
- **Saleh Ahmed**, Political Observer



LAW AND ORDER

As part of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) series of dialogues on priority reform areas for the interim government, a discussion on law and order was held on December 21, 2024 (Saturday), at the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) auditorium in Dhaka. This discussion addressed the deteriorating law enforcement situation, potential solutions, and the need for an independent police commission. A summary of the key discussions is presented below.

Independent Law Enforcement Commission and Depoliticization

Participants in the dialogue stressed that a stable law and order system is essential for a country's national security and overall development. However, they argued that in Bangladesh, law enforcement agencies have become an extension of the ruling government rather than functioning as independent bodies.

Several participants pointed to the events of the *July uprising*, during which police and security forces carried out violent crackdowns on civilians, demonstrating their unquestioning loyalty to the regime rather than their duty to protect citizens. Over the past 15 years, discussants noted that opposition activists and critics of the government have faced systemic repression from law enforcement agencies, and even ordinary citizens have not been spared from these abuses.

Since law enforcement remains under direct political control, participants highlighted that public trust in these institutions has deteriorated. To rebuild confidence, they suggested adopting a community-based policing approach to create a citizen-friendly police force that serves the public rather than the ruling elite.

Additionally, participants emphasized that decentralization and depoliticization are essential to restructuring law enforcement agencies. They called for transparent recruitments, promotions, and transfers to prevent favoritism and political influence. To ensure effective oversight, several discussants proposed introducing a Code of Conduct enforced by Parliament, preventing future bureaucratic and political manipulation of law enforcement agencies.

Establishing a National Security Council

Participants proposed establishing a *National Security Council (NSC)* to oversee law enforcement agencies and ensure the decentralization of command structures. Many discussants argued that the lack of political will has resulted in security policies being designed to serve ruling elites rather than the public interest. They pointed out that due to poor coordination between law enforcement agencies, efforts to establish an NSC have repeatedly failed.

A well-structured NSC, participants suggested, would hold security forces accountable and ensure that they function in a lawful and transparent manner.

Additionally, participants raised concerns about corruption in law enforcement budgets, arguing that budget allocations must be restructured to prevent financial misconduct. Several discussants suggested that fair salaries and benefits should be provided to officers to eliminate incentives for bribery and illegal earnings. Furthermore, participants highlighted the need for physical and mental health programs to improve the well-being of officers.

Modernization of Law Enforcement

Many participants stressed the importance of modernizing law enforcement through policy reforms and the adoption of advanced technology. They emphasized that the investigation process must be restructured to ensure that suspects are treated humanely and their rights are protected.

Several discussants proposed using modern forensic tools to help law enforcement agencies conduct faster and more transparent investigations, leading to a fairer judicial process. Participants agreed that ensuring accountability and professionalism within the police force is necessary to prevent a repeat of past human rights violations.





Abolishing the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)

Participants strongly condemned the *Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)* for its extensive history of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and severe human rights violations. They pointed out that international sanctions have been imposed on RAB due to its brutality and misconduct, severely damaging Bangladesh's reputation on the global stage.

Given RAB's deep-rooted role in human rights abuses, participants overwhelmingly recommended its complete abolition. Several discussants argued that all crimes committed by RAB officers must be thoroughly investigated, and those responsible should be prosecuted.

Participants further highlighted that RAB's association with other security forces has led to the widespread normalization of violent tactics, eroding the integrity of law enforcement institutions. They warned that without comprehensive reform, RAB would remain a threat to human rights and democracy in Bangladesh.

Reforming the Police Act

Participants raised concerns about several controversial provisions in the *Police Act*, particularly *Sections 167, 54, and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)*. They argued that these legal loopholes have been used to justify mass arrests, arbitrary detentions, and false charges against political opponents.

To end these oppressive practices, participants called for reforming outdated provisions of the *Police Act*. They emphasized that law enforcement agencies must be legally bound to uphold accountability so that the police do not become a weapon of political repression.

Several discussants proposed introducing a continuous evaluation and monitoring framework to ensure that law enforcement remains aligned with democratic principles. Additionally, they stressed the need to dismantle the deep-rooted political influence within the police force.

Addressing Human Rights Violations

Participants strongly condemned the unprecedented human rights violations committed by law enforcement agencies over the past decade. Many discussants highlighted those thousands of opposition activists have been arrested, detained, and tortured in secret detention centers. They argued that the government has used forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and excessive force to silence political dissent.

Extrajudicial killings, participants noted, have become a routine practice, with opposition figures being killed in staged “crossfire” incidents. Several discussants pointed out that in many cases, individuals were deliberately shot in the legs to permanently disable them, preventing them from engaging in political activities.

Since every law enforcement agency in Bangladesh has been implicated in these violations, participants emphasized the urgent need for justice and accountability. They proposed establishing a special judicial process to investigate these crimes and ensure that perpetrators face legal consequences. Many discussants argued that holding law enforcement officers accountable would help restore the rule of law and rebuild public trust in law enforcement institutions.



The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were;

- **Maj. Gen. ANM Muniruzzaman (Retd.)**, Chairman, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies
- **Dr. M Enamul Huq**, Former IGP and member of the Law Commission from 2004 to 2007
- **Muhammad Nurul Huda**, Former IGP
- **Zahir Uddin Swapon**, Adviser, BNP Chairperson
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Ikteder Ahmed**, Former Judge, Columnist and Legal Consultant
- **ASM Nasiruddin Elan**, Rights Activist and Director of Odhikar
- **Barrister Andaleeve Rahman (Partho)**, President of the Bangladesh Jatiya Party
- **Rashna Imam**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuaad**, Joint Member Secretary, AB Party
- **Sohrab Hassan**, Joint Editor, Prothom Alo
- **A K Azad**, Publisher and Editor, Samakal
- **Shafqat Munir**, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies
- **Nurul Haq Nur**, President, Gono Odhikar Parishad
- **Advocate Hasnat Kaiyum**, Chief Coordinator, Rashtra Sanskar Andolon
- **Dr. Mahbubur Rahman**, Professor of Political Science, North South University
- **Psymhe Wadud**, Lecturer, Department of Law, University of Dhaka
- **Md. Zarif Rahman**, Researcher and Student Representative, Member of Police Administration Reform Commission
- **Kazi Rakib Hossain**, Student Representative and Activist
- **Rezwana Rashid**, Student Representative and Activist
- **Ushaton Talukder**, Former Member of Parliament, Rangamati Hill District



MASS MEDIA

As part of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) series of dialogues on priority reform areas for the interim government, a discussion on mass media was held on December 22, 2024 (Sunday), at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka. This discussion explored the challenges facing the media landscape in Bangladesh and potential reforms. A summary of the key discussions is presented below.

The Need for Media Reform

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that over the past sixteen years, the role of mass media in Bangladesh has undergone significant changes, shifting away from investigative journalism toward sensationalism and clickbait-driven content. They raised concerns that the credibility, independence, and impartiality of the media have increasingly come under question.

Several discussants highlighted that the growing reliance on political and corporate sponsorship has made media outlets hesitant to publish critical reports, weakening their ability to function as independent watchdogs. As a result, media freedom has significantly declined, and participants agreed that a major overhaul is needed to restore journalistic integrity.

One of the biggest concerns raised was the media's tendency to align with the ruling party, making news coverage biased and one-sided. Participants argued that this damages public trust and undermines the media's role in ensuring people's right to information. They emphasized that media institutions must uphold neutrality and credibility, reporting objectively regardless of which political party is in power. Furthermore, participants suggested that each media outlet should establish an internal code of ethics that includes:

- Fair wages for journalists
- Commitment to ethical journalism
- Strict editorial standards to ensure factual accuracy

Many discussants insisted that the pursuit of truth must always take priority over commercial or political interests in journalism.



Press Council and Legal Framework

Participants raised concerns that the current legal framework governing the press poses serious threats to media freedom and free speech. Several discussants pointed to restrictive laws, including the Cyber Security Act, which impose limitations on journalists and curtail press freedom. Many called for these laws to be either repealed or reformed to ensure they do not obstruct journalistic independence.

Additionally, participants emphasized that the existing Press Council must be completely restructured. Some argued that the council is currently weak, ineffective, and largely controlled by retired government officials, preventing it from functioning as an independent regulatory body. A reformed Press Council, they suggested, should be more transparent, accountable, and empowered to protect media freedom.

Several discussants proposed that the leadership of the Press Council must be composed of individuals with deep expertise in journalism rather than government-appointed officials. Many also stressed that the selection process must be democratized, ensuring that journalists' unions and media organizations play a greater role in leadership appointments. Participants agreed that political interference in media regulatory bodies must be eliminated to preserve press independence.

Media Ownership and Accountability

Participants highlighted that media ownership in Bangladesh is concentrated among a few powerful business and political entities, leading to a lack of diverse perspectives in news coverage. They pointed out that many media owners have direct political affiliations, resulting in one-sided reporting that does not reflect the interests of the general public.

To ensure a free and independent press, several discussants proposed introducing regulations to prevent:

- Monopoly ownership of media outlets by a single person or corporation
- Corporate influence over editorial decisions

Participants also suggested that a clear regulatory framework should be established to oversee both financial and ethical standards in the media industry.

Many discussants raised concerns about the poor working conditions of journalists, stating that many work without job security, stable contracts, or financial protection. They argued that this makes journalists vulnerable to editorial pressure from media owners. To protect journalistic independence, some participants proposed implementing a minimum wage policy to ensure that media professionals can work without economic insecurity or political interference.

Press Freedom and Digital Journalism

Participants noted that alongside traditional media, digital journalism and social media have revolutionized the way information is disseminated. While the rise of online platforms has increased access to information, discussants also pointed out that it has led to the spread of misinformation and fake news.

To address these challenges, participants suggested establishing clear guidelines and policies to regulate digital media without undermining free speech. Some proposed that social media platforms should implement stronger fact-checking mechanisms to ensure the accuracy of news content. Others emphasized that digital media should adopt the same ethical standards as traditional journalism, ensuring that online reporting remains factual and responsible.

Many discussants highlighted that the fast-changing nature of digital media requires a revised regulatory approach that protects freedom of speech while combating disinformation.

Foreign Investment in Media and Its Implications

Participants discussed the complexities of foreign investment in the media sector, describing it as a highly sensitive issue. Some pointed out that while international funding can improve investigative journalism and professional standards, it also presents risks. Several discussants warned that foreign influence could shape editorial policies in ways that do not align with national interests or values.



To prevent such risks, participants recommended that foreign investments in the media should be carefully regulated to ensure they do not compromise the independence or sovereignty of Bangladesh's media landscape. Many suggested that a transparent foreign investment policy should be introduced, ensuring that any external funding aligns with the public interest and does not undermine local journalism.

Establishing a Democratic and Accountable Media System

Participants agreed that the ultimate goal of media reform is to establish a democratic, transparent, and accountable press system. Many emphasized that the media should be free from government and corporate influence while remaining accountable to the public. They argued that the press should function as the fourth pillar of democracy, holding those in power accountable and providing citizens with accurate information.

To achieve this, discussants proposed that the media industry undergo a structured reform process, including:

- Strengthening regulatory bodies to ensure transparency
- Implementing strict internal ethical guidelines for media outlets
- Establishing independent oversight mechanisms to monitor press freedom violations

Additionally, participants stressed that media organizations must be held accountable for the accuracy of their reporting. Several discussants pointed out that journalists should be provided with fair compensation and job security to prevent financial or political pressures from influencing their work.

Ultimately, participants agreed that the goal of media reform is to create an environment where free, ethical, and fact-based journalism can thrive, serving the interests of the public rather than powerful political or business entities. Achieving this, they argued, will require collective efforts from journalists, media organizations, government regulators, and civil society.

The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were;

- **Kamal Ahmed**, Chief of the Media Reform Commission
- **Shafiqul Alam**, Press Secretary to the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Matiur Rahman Chowdhury**, Chief Editor, The Daily Manab Zamin
- **Abu Sayeed**, Former State Minister, Ministry of Information
- **Mahbub Morshed**, Managing Director & Chief Editor, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)
- **Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury**, Founder, Digitally Right BD
- **S. M. Shameem Reza**, Professor, Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, University of Dhaka
- **Qadaruddin Shishir**, Fact Check Editor at AFP
- **Zyma Islam**, Senior Journalist, The Daily Star
- **Masood Kamal**, Senior Journalist
- **Abu Saeed Khan**, Senior Journalist
- **Zonayed Saki**, Politician and Coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon Bangladesh
- **Parveen F Chowdhury**, NHK TV, Japan
- **M A Aziz**, Senior Journalist
- **Tuhin Khan**, Member, Nagorik Committee.



As part of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) series of dialogues on priority reform areas for the interim government, a discussion on judiciary reform was held on December 23, 2024 (Monday), at the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) auditorium in Dhaka. This discussion addressed existing problems within the judiciary, possible solutions, and the need for judicial independence. A summary of the key discussions is presented below.

The Judiciary as a Tool of Oppression

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that under the previous government, the judiciary was weaponized to suppress opposition parties, dissenting voices, and ideological opponents. They argued that the ruling regime used the judiciary to justify its governance, including the abolition of the caretaker government system, which allowed for centralized power.

Several discussants pointed out that the judicial system played a critical role in criminalizing opposition views, treating political dissent as sedition. They noted that the judiciary provided legal cover for politically motivated lawsuits, police brutality, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and systematic repression.

Ensuring Transparency in Judicial Appointments

Participants raised concerns about the lack of independence and transparency in judicial appointments, which they argued has led to widespread corruption within the judiciary. Some discussants pointed out that the extraordinary powers of the appellate division were frequently used to strengthen authoritarian rule. Even when cases reached the higher courts, many participants noted that justice remained inaccessible, as political influence undermined judicial neutrality.

Several participants stated that as the higher courts lacked independence, the lower courts also became deeply corrupt. Instead of upholding people's rights, discussants observed that both the higher and lower courts had been used as instruments of rights violations.

To address these challenges, participants proposed the following reforms:

- Establishing a *separate monitoring body within the higher courts* to oversee judicial activities and ensure that politically unbiased laws are drafted.
- Reforming the *judicial appointment process* to ensure equal opportunities for both men and women.
- Providing *regular training for lawyers and judges* to enhance professional competence and uphold ethical standards.
- Implementing *lower court reforms* to bridge the gap between lower and higher courts and improve *case management efficiency*.

Judicial Independence

Participants expressed strong concerns about the politicization of judicial appointments, arguing that it has prevented the establishment of an independent judiciary. Many discussants pointed out that the Prime Minister's control over judicial appointments has resulted in judicial decisions being influenced by political considerations.

Several participants noted that politically appointed judges have often served as enforcers of the ruling party's will, turning the judiciary into an extension of the executive branch rather than an independent institution. Some discussants also highlighted that judicial promotions and transfers have been used as tools to control and manipulate judges, weakening their ability to issue independent rulings.



To ensure judicial accountability and integrity, participants proposed that:

- The *judicial appointment process must be transparent and free from political influence*.
- The *judiciary must be free from the dominance of political parties and economic elites*.
- The judiciary should be *restructured as an autonomous institution* with a strong governance framework.
- Judicial appointments should be based on *experience, competence, and merit*, rather than political affiliation.

Reducing Judicial Backlog and Delays

Participants identified delays in the judicial process as a major factor behind public distrust in the judiciary. Several discussants noted that cases are frequently delayed due to prolonged investigations and bureaucratic inefficiencies, leading to years of legal limbo for litigants.

To address these issues, participants recommended:

- *Setting a legally mandated time frame* for case resolution to prevent delays and reduce litigation costs.
- *Easing the burden on lower courts* by reforming village courts and allowing them to handle minor disputes efficiently.
- *Making pre-action protocols mandatory* so that a significant number of cases can be settled at an early stage without requiring full trials.
- *Hiring court stenographers* to increase case processing speed and improve judicial efficiency.

Establishing a Higher Judicial Oversight Council

Participants suggested that to align Bangladesh's judicial system with international standards, a Supreme Judicial Council and an independent ombudsman system should be introduced. Many discussants proposed that the ombudsman should be responsible for monitoring judicial activities, ensuring judicial accountability and transparency.

Additionally, several participants argued that the ombudsman could oversee government ministries and public officials, ensuring that executive actions remain lawful and transparent.



Judicial Decentralization and Structural Reform

Participants pointed out that a single high court system is inadequate for Bangladesh's large population. While lower court inefficiencies have been widely recognized, they noted that no serious steps have been taken to establish a decentralized dispute resolution mechanism.

To address this, participants recommended:

- *Establishing sub-district courts* alongside district courts to handle local disputes more efficiently.
- *Creating specialized courts* to handle family disputes, labor cases, and financial disputes, ensuring faster case resolution.
- *Conducting public awareness programs* to educate citizens on their legal rights and improve access to justice.
- *Continuously reforming the legal system* to modernize outdated laws and improve the efficiency of the judicial process.
- *Ensuring judicial decisions and legal processes are made publicly available*, increasing transparency and accountability in the judiciary.

The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were:

- **Asif Nazrul**, Advisor of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Interim Government of Bangladesh
- **Advocate Nitai Roy Chowdhury**, Former Minister and, Vice Chairman, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)
- **Mujahidul Islam Selim**, Former President, Communist Party of Bangladesh
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Barrister Sara Hossain**, Executive Director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
- **Ikhtedar Ahmed**, Former District Judge, Columnist and Legal Consultant
- **Dr. Borhan Uddin Khan**, Professor, Department of Law, University of Dhaka
- **Advocate Muhammad Tajul Islam**, Chief Prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal
- **Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary**, Former Member of Parliament, Gaibandha-1
- **Ataur Rahman Dhaly**, Adviser to the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) Chairperson
- **SM Badrul Islam**, Lawyer, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Advocate Rokhsana Khandakar**, Executive Director, Khan Foundation
- **Musharaf Ahmed Thakur**, University Teacher and Politician
- **Barrister M Sarwar Hossain**, Lawyer, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Barrister Shihab Uddin Khan**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Molla Mohammad Faruque Ahsan**, Member, Jatiya Nagorik Committee
- **Didarul Alam**, Activist and Digital Security Act (DSA) Victim
- **Rafid Azad Shoumik**, Student, Law, University of Dhaka & Activist
- **Fahin Rahman Aungkita**, Graduate Student, Criminology, University of Dhaka & Activist



CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

As part of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) series of dialogues on priority reform areas for the interim government, a discussion on civil administration was held on December 24, 2024, at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka. The discussion focused on structural inefficiencies, political interference, and the urgent need for transparency and accountability in governance.

Depoliticizing Civil Administration

Participants in the dialogue emphasized that one of the most pressing concerns is the excessive political influence over the recruitment, promotion, and allocation of responsibilities within the civil administration. Many discussants argued that the existing system often prioritizes political loyalty over merit and professionalism, leading to inefficiency and erosion of public trust. Several participants stressed that the administration must be restructured to ensure that competent individuals are appointed to positions based on qualifications rather than political considerations. Many noted that depoliticization would enable civil servants to operate with greater independence, ultimately improving service delivery and strengthening democratic governance. Some participants proposed that a transparent and merit-based recruitment system would create an administration that is both effective and accountable to the public.

Ensuring Accountability and Transparency

Participants highlighted that to establish a well-functioning civil administration, there must be a robust and independent auditing mechanism to hold policymakers and administrators accountable. Many discussants pointed out that transparency in decision-making, open access to information, and structured reporting processes are necessary to ensure good governance. Some participants proposed implementing a systematic approach to accountability so that administrative misconduct does not go unchecked. Several discussants stressed that the culture of avoiding responsibility and manipulating bureaucratic processes

must be eliminated by establishing rigid frameworks that demand accountability at every level of governance. Many participants agreed that if any individual or group attempts to evade accountability, mechanisms must be in place to detect and rectify such misconduct.

Preventing Corruption and Promoting Integrity

Participants raised serious concerns about corruption, which they identified as one of the greatest challenges within the civil administration. Several discussants argued that without strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws, fair recruitment and promotion processes cannot be ensured. Many emphasized the need to implement strong integrity policies and ensure that corrupt officials are held accountable. Some participants suggested that integrity and ethics training should be made mandatory for all administrative officials to promote transparency in governance. Many discussants pointed out that in the past, individuals involved in corruption were often rewarded rather than punished, leading to widespread frustration among honest public servants. Several participants proposed that a strict monitoring system must be established to ensure that corruption is actively prosecuted rather than tolerated. Many argued that rewarding individuals for ethical behavior while penalizing those engaged in corruption would help create an environment of integrity and accountability within civil administration.

Reducing Bureaucratic Complexity and Improving Service Delivery

Participants expressed concerns that excessive bureaucratic inefficiencies have made public service delivery slow and inaccessible for many citizens. Some discussants noted that despite significant investments in digitalization in previous years, little tangible progress has been made in simplifying administrative processes. Many participants emphasized that effective digital transformation strategies must be implemented to reduce red tape and make government services more efficient and accessible. Several discussants argued that by reducing unnecessary delays and procedural hurdles, citizens would be able to access services in a more timely and cost-effective manner. Many agreed that streamlining bureaucratic processes would not only improve public satisfaction but also enhance the overall efficiency of the civil administration.



Changing Administrative Culture and Increasing Public Participation

Participants stressed that a fundamental cultural shift is required in the civil administration to ensure that public service, rather than political patronage, remains the core objective. Many discussants noted that historically, Bangladesh's civil administration has operated within a patron-client framework, where serving political interests takes precedence over serving the public. Several participants argued that moving away from this model is crucial to fostering a more efficient and citizen-centric administration. Some discussants emphasized that greater public participation in decision-making is necessary to ensure that the administration remains responsive to the needs of the people. Many participants proposed engaging civil society, youth groups, and grassroots communities in shaping administrative policies to lead to more inclusive governance. Several suggested that establishing platforms for direct public consultation and feedback would further enhance accountability and improve service quality. Many discussants strongly advocated for abolishing the practice of politically motivated transfers, promotions, and dismissals to create a stable and professional administration where individuals are evaluated based on their performance rather than their political affiliations.

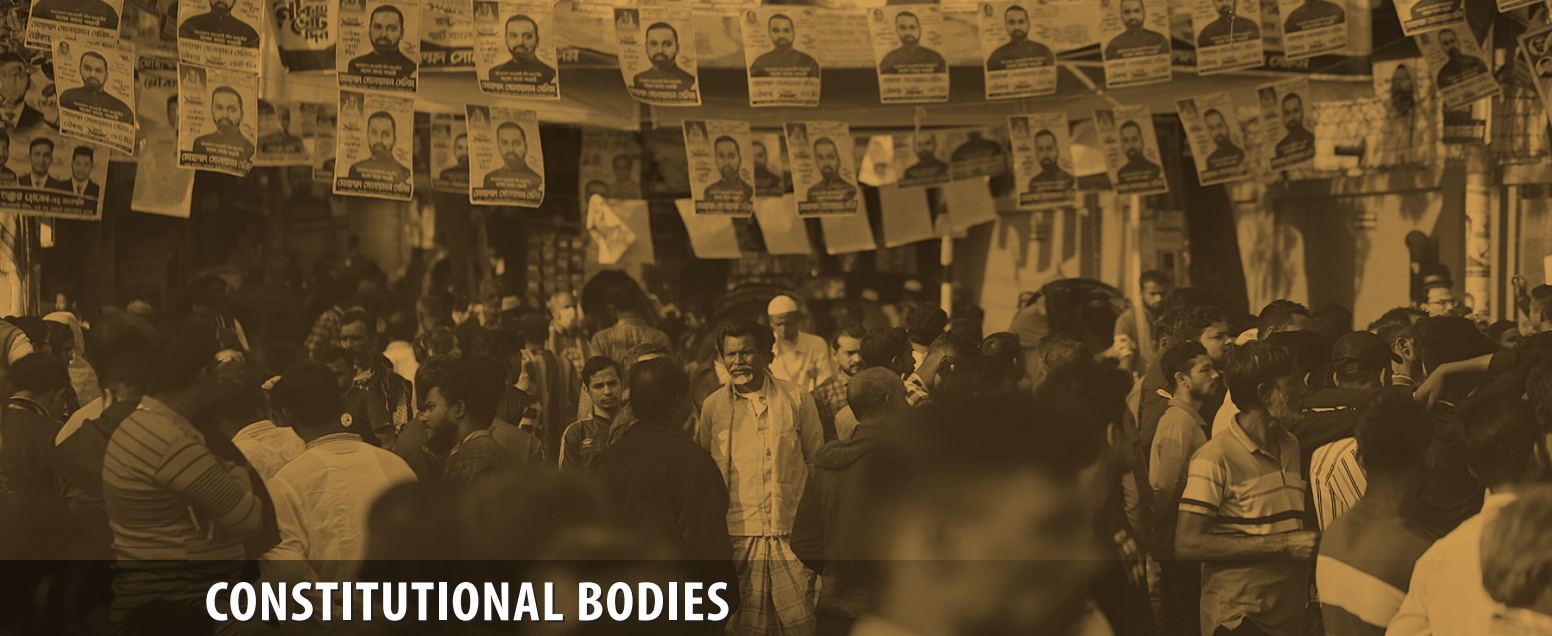
Enhancing the Role of Civil Society in Policy Formulation

Participants emphasized that to make administrative policies more inclusive and effective, the active participation of civil society in the policymaking process must be ensured. Several discussants argued that including representatives from civil society in policy discussions would make governance more transparent, participatory, and accountable. Many participants suggested that this approach would help reflect the perspectives and needs of different social groups in administrative decisions. Some discussants pointed out that a government that genuinely seeks input from various stakeholders would be better positioned to address the diverse challenges of governance and build a more resilient administrative structure.



The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were;

- **Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman**, Economist,
Former Adviser to the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh
- **Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar**, Head of the Electoral System Reform Commission and
Secretary, SHUJAN (Citizen for Good Governance)
- **Dr. Muhammad Abdul Mazid**, Former Chairman, National Board of Revenue
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Advocate Subrata Chowdhury**, Executive President, Gono Forum
- **Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury**, Former Mayor, Chattogram City Corporation and Former MP
- **Abdullah Hil Rakib**, Former Vice President,
Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)
- **Mir Nasir Hossain**, Former President,
Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industries (FBCCI)
- **Major Gen. (Retd) Amsa Amin**, Organizer, Noitik SAMAJ Bangladesh
- **Major Gen. A L M Fazlur Rahman**, Former Director General of the Bangladesh Rifles (BGB)
- **Dr. Jamal Uddin Ahmed**, Economist, Former General Secretary, Bangladesh Orthoniti Shomiti
- **Mojibur Rahman Manju**, Chairman, AB Party
- **Dr. Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah**, Professor, University of Dhaka
- **Sultana Afroz**, Former Secretary
- **Bobby Hajjaj**, Chairman of the National Democratic Movement (NDM)
- **AKM Abdul Awal Majumdar**, Former Secretary
- **Ibrahim Khan**, Former Secretary
- **Eiffah Assariah**, Student, Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka
- **Tahmid Al Mudassir**, Co-ordinator, Anti-Discrimination Student Movement



CONSTITUTIONAL BODIES

As part of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) series of policy dialogues on priority reform areas for the interim government, a discussion on constitutional bodies was held on January 30, 2025, at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) auditorium in Dhaka. This discussion highlighted critical flaws within these institutions and proposed reforms to restore their autonomy, efficiency, and accountability.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability in Administration

Participants in the dialogue raised concerns about the absence of transparency and accountability in Bangladesh's administrative system. Many discussants argued that political interference in government institutions has led to widespread corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency. Several participants pointed out that the recruitment process for public officials has been compromised by political favoritism, resulting in the appointment of unqualified individuals. Many also noted that the lack of transparency in decision-making has fueled public dissatisfaction and increased opportunities for misconduct.

To address these issues, some participants proposed introducing a neutral and transparent recruitment process. Many argued that a separate independent commission should oversee the appointment of civil servants and judges, ensuring that selections are merit-based and conducted through an impartial examination process. Several discussants emphasized that all constitutional bodies must be free from political influence, with their personnel appointments overseen by an independent committee.

To enhance administrative transparency, participants suggested introducing a digital tracking system for government operations to minimize corruption. Many also called for an independent audit committee to conduct regular assessments of government activities, while some proposed the establishment of a separate investigative body to handle complaints against public officials.

Ensuring the Independence and Effectiveness of the Election Commission

Participants emphasized that although the Election Commission is a vital constitutional institution, its neutrality and effectiveness have been widely questioned, particularly after recent elections. Several discussants noted that the appointment of election commissioners is currently controlled by political parties, which they argued undermines the commission's ability to function independently. Many also pointed to concerns about the partiality of law enforcement and administrative bodies during elections, further eroding public trust.

To safeguard the commission's autonomy, some participants proposed that a judicial-led selection committee should be responsible for appointing election commissioners. Others suggested that the commission's budget and administrative operations must be independent to prevent external influence over its decisions. Several discussants emphasized the need for a fixed term of office for election commissioners, with reappointment based on expertise and experience rather than political considerations.

A transparent electoral system, participants argued, requires strict measures against vote-rigging and election fraud. Many proposed that the Election Commission must have full control over the administration during elections, ensuring that law enforcement agencies remain neutral. Some suggested that deploying military personnel and independent observers during elections could enhance credibility and fairness.



Judicial Independence and Reform

Participants strongly emphasized that judicial independence is a prerequisite for democracy and justice, yet Bangladesh's judiciary has become highly politicized. Several discussants noted that the appointment and promotion of judges are often influenced by political considerations, undermining their ability to function independently. Some also pointed out that the judiciary lacks decision-making power in administrative matters, further restricting its role in ensuring justice.

To resolve these issues, participants recommended the establishment of a separate Judicial Secretariat to oversee judicial operations. Many proposed that the appointment and promotion of judges should be conducted by an independent Judicial Commission. Several discussants stressed that the judiciary must be provided with autonomous administrative structures and a dedicated budget to function without executive interference.

To enhance transparency, some participants suggested encouraging open court proceedings and streamlining judicial processes. Others argued that ensuring judicial security and freedom from political pressure is essential for an effective justice system. Many discussants also proposed establishing an independent investigative body within the judiciary to help combat corruption and irregularities in the legal system.

Reforming the Public Service Commission and Recruitment System

Participants expressed deep concerns about the failure of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) to uphold transparency in government recruitment. Many discussants cited allegations of political influence, exam paper leaks, and corruption, which they argued have tainted the credibility of the PSC. Several participants noted that as a result, unqualified individuals have been appointed to key positions, while a shortage of skilled and professional personnel has weakened the civil service.

To reform the recruitment process, some participants proposed that all government job examinations must be merit-based, with strict measures against question leaks and corruption. Many suggested establishing a separate oversight committee to monitor the recruitment process and prevent political interference. Several discussants also called for the enactment of stringent anti-corruption laws to ensure fair and transparent hiring practices.

To enhance administrative efficiency, some participants recommended introducing mandatory skill development programs for civil servants. Others emphasized that performance evaluations should be based on objective criteria, and a neutral examination and monitoring system should be implemented to ensure fairness.

Misuse and Ineffectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission

Participants criticized the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) for failing to act effectively in combating corruption. Several discussants pointed out that instead of taking firm action against corruption, the ACC has often been used as a political weapon, where opposition figures face rigorous investigations while government allies enjoy immunity. Many participants noted that despite having the authority to investigate high-ranking officials, the ACC has been largely ineffective due to political influence and bureaucratic obstacles.

To address these concerns, some participants proposed that the organizational structure and operational framework of the ACC must be overhauled to ensure that it functions as a genuinely independent body. Many suggested that the appointment process for ACC members should be transparent, with an independent selection committee overseeing recruitment to prevent political interference. Several discussants recommended the creation of a separate ACC cadre, where investigators are trained and serve exclusively within the commission to build long-term expertise.

Participants also emphasized that the ACC must be provided with financial and administrative independence, freeing it from executive control. Many called for the introduction of an open complaint and investigation tracking system, allowing citizens to monitor the progress of corruption cases. Some discussants proposed establishing a special anti-corruption tribunal to ensure that corruption-related trials are conducted efficiently and fairly.

Financial Independence and Sustainability of Constitutional Bodies

Participants raised concerns that many constitutional bodies remain financially dependent on the government, limiting their ability to operate independently. Several discussants noted that because these institutions rely on government funding, their decisions and activities are often influenced by political pressures. Many argued that the Comptroller and Auditor General's office should play a stronger role in ensuring financial oversight.

To safeguard the independence of constitutional bodies, some participants proposed the establishment of a constitutionally mandated budget allocation system. Several discussants emphasized that these institutions should receive fixed funding directly from the national budget rather than relying on discretionary allocations from the executive branch. Many participants also suggested forming an independent financial oversight committee to ensure transparent budget management for each institution.



The dialogue was moderated by CGS's Executive Director, **Zillur Rahman**, and featured several distinguished speakers. The speakers were;

- **Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar**, Head of the Electoral System Reform Commission and Secretary of SHUJAN (Citizen for Good Governance)
- **Dr. Muhammad Abdul Mazid**, Former Chairman, National Board of Revenue
- **Ambassador M. Shafiullah**, Retired Diplomat
- **Dr. Fahmida Khatun**, Economist, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue
- **Munira Khan**, Chair, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)
- **Zahir Uddin Swapon**, Adviser to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson
- **Ikhteder Ahmed**, Former District Judge
- **Abdul Haque**, Founding President, Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association (BARVIDA)
- **Advocate Subrata Chowdhury**, Executive President at Gono Forum
- **Barrister Shihab Uddin Khan**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- **Dr. Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah**, Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka
- **Dr. Zahed Ur Rahman**, Political analyst and Adjunct Faculty Member at Independent University, Bangladesh
- **Parvez Karim Abbasi**, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Economics, East West University
- **Masood Kamal**, Senior Journalist
- **Abu Saeed Khan**, Senior Journalist
- **M. A. Aziz**, Senior Journalist
- **Sohrab Hassan**, Senior Journalist, Joint Editor, Prothom Alo
- **Mojibur Rahman Manju**, Chairman, AB Party
- **Zonayed Saki**, Coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon Bangladesh
- **K. S. Mong**, Member, Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council
- **Munmun Mahjabin**, Student Representative, University of Dhaka
- **Muhammad Khalid Khan**, Student Representative, University of Dhaka



REGIONAL DIALOGUES

The regional dialogues held in Chattogram, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Khulna were designed to ensure inclusivity in the reform process, capturing the concerns and expectations of citizens outside the capital. Unlike the national dialogues, which focused on specific reform areas with experts, the regional discussions were open-ended, allowing participants to freely express their views on governance, justice, economic policies, and institutional reforms. This approach provided a bottom-up perspective, ensuring that policy recommendations reflect not only the views of centralized decision-makers but also the lived experiences of people across Bangladesh.

Participants included students, politicians, grassroots activists, business owners, civil society members, lawyers, journalists, local professionals, and community leaders, representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The discussions revealed common frustrations and aspirations, reinforcing the need for a decentralized, accountable, and transparent governance system. Issues such as trust in democratic institutions, justice and human rights, judicial independence, economic stability, and media freedom were raised repeatedly across all four cities.

Unlike the national dialogues, where each reform area was addressed in separate chapters, the regional discussions covered multiple topics simultaneously. Given that the concerns and recommendations from all four cities overlapped significantly, presenting them as separate chapters would have resulted in redundancy and repetition. Instead, this chapter consolidates insights from all four dialogues into a single, cohesive analysis of regional perspectives. By structuring the recommendations in this way, the report ensures that the voices of local communities are fully integrated into the broader reform agenda while maintaining clarity and avoiding unnecessary duplication.

To avoid repetition and redundancy, this chapter consolidates the key concerns and recommendations from all four regional dialogues into a cohesive, thematic analysis. By structuring the findings topic-wise rather than city-wise, this approach ensures a clear, inclusive, and comprehensive policy framework that reflects the aspirations of people from different parts of the country.

Constitutional Reforms and Electoral System

Across all regional dialogues, there was a strong demand for constitutional amendments to prevent the concentration of power in the executive branch and to restore democratic balance. Participants emphasized the need to repeal Article 70, which currently restricts the ability of Members of Parliament (MPs) to vote against their party's decisions. They argued that this article limits legislative independence and weakens the role of parliament in holding the executive accountable.

Additionally, participants proposed shifting to a proportional representation electoral system to ensure fair political competition and prevent any single party from gaining unchecked power. Many advocated for a bicameral parliamentary system, where an upper house could provide additional checks and balances. Another key demand was the formation of an independent Election Commission, with a transparent and inclusive selection process, ensuring neutrality and preventing political interference.

Judiciary and Law Enforcement Reforms

Concerns over judicial independence and law enforcement accountability were widespread across all four cities. Many participants criticized the politicization of the judiciary and the delays in case processing, which have eroded public trust in the legal system. They proposed the establishment of a separate Judicial Secretariat to ensure administrative independence from the executive branch. To address the backlog of cases, participants recommended increasing the number of judges, modernizing court procedures, and implementing an alternative dispute resolution mechanism.





Law enforcement agencies were widely criticized for their excessive use of force, human rights violations, and lack of accountability. Participants called for an independent oversight body to monitor police activities and ensure that law enforcement agencies serve public interests rather than political agendas. The abolition of politically motivated promotions and transfers in the police force was also a key recommendation.

Human Rights and Press Freedom

Concerns about human rights violations were dominant in all discussions. Participants highlighted the need to investigate past extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and unlawful detentions, ensuring justice for victims. Many urged Bangladesh to ratify the UN Convention against Enforced Disappearances and to introduce laws that explicitly criminalize such acts.

The Digital Security Act (2018) and the Cyber Security Act (2023) were heavily criticized for suppressing free speech and being used as tools for political repression. Participants demanded the repeal or significant revision of these laws to prevent misuse against journalists and activists. There was also a strong push for legislative protections for journalists and whistleblowers, ensuring that media professionals can operate freely without fear of harassment or imprisonment.



Civil Administration and Decentralization

The inefficiency and political control over civil administration were major concerns raised in all regional discussions. Participants called for a merit-based and politically neutral public service, where appointments, promotions, and transfers are determined by professional competence rather than political loyalty. There was also strong advocacy for greater fiscal and administrative decentralization, ensuring that local governments have real authority and resources to manage their regions effectively.

Many participants emphasized that local governance bodies should be strengthened to reduce dependency on the central government. The creation of regional administrative hubs and empowering elected local representatives were suggested as ways to improve service delivery and governance at the grassroots level.

Economic Policies and Regional Development

The economic challenges faced by different regions highlighted the need for balanced economic policies that reduce regional disparities. Many participants criticized the over-centralization of economic activities in Dhaka, arguing that it has led to neglect of industrial, agricultural, and infrastructural development in other regions.

In Khulna, participants emphasized the need to revive closed jute mills and introduce alternative industries to boost employment. In Rajshahi and Sylhet, concerns were raised over the lack of investment in agriculture and small businesses, with participants calling for greater financial incentives for farmers, easier credit access for entrepreneurs, and subsidies for rural businesses.

Many also pointed out the corruption and inefficiency in the banking sector, which has resulted in high levels of non-performing loans while small businesses struggle to obtain financing. Stronger financial regulations, SME-friendly policies, and greater transparency in banking practices were identified as necessary reforms.





Education Reform and Youth Empowerment

All four dialogues identified the education system's failure to equip students with market-relevant skills as a key issue. Participants criticized the inequality in access to quality education, particularly the divide between urban and rural institutions, public and private universities, and general and technical education. There was a strong call for increased budget allocations for education, teacher training, and the integration of vocational training into mainstream education.

Participants also demanded structural changes in university governance, ensuring merit-based recruitment of faculty and freeing academic institutions from political interference. Another key concern was the lack of student representation and democratic practices in universities, with calls for restoring student union elections to promote leadership development among youth.



PARTICIPANTS



Chattogram Regional Dialogue

- **Dr. Moinul Islam**, Economist, Former Professor, Department of Economics, University of Chattogram
- **Professor Nizam Uddin Ahmed**, Parliamentary Affairs Researcher, Former Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Chattogram
- **Shahajahan Chowdhury**, Ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami, Chattogram Metropolitan City
- **Azizul Haque Islamabadi**, Joint Secretary-General, Hefazat-e-Islam, Central Committee
- **Advocate Zia Habib Ahsan**, General Secretary, Bangladesh Human Rights Foundation, Chattogram
- **Freedom Fighter Dr. Jobiul Hossain**, Presidium Member, JSD (National Socialist Party) (Rob)
- **Siddiqur Rahman**, Joint Convener, AB Party, Chattogram Metropolitan
- **Ashok Saha**, President, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Chattogram
- **Arman Hossain**, Political Coordinator, State Reform Movement, Chattogram
- **Russell Ahmed**, Coordinator, Students Movement, University of Chattogram
- **Pushpita Sen**, Coordinator, Student Movement, Private University, Chattogram
- **Jasim Uddin Akash**, Divisional Coordinator, Gono Odhikar Parishad, Chattogram
- **Advocate Md. Nizam Uddin Chowdhury**, President, Chattogram District Bar Association
- **Anwara Shahriar Rinu**, SME Entrepreneur, Chattogram
- **Professor Zafar Ahmed**, Former Principal, Rangamati Government College, Chattogram
- **A.D.M Aruchur Rahman (Aruch)**, Lawyer, Chattogram Judge Court
- **Shafiuddin Kabir Ahmed**, Convener, Bangladesh Socialist Party (BSD) (Marxist), Chattogram
- **Saleh Uddin Md. Reza**, President, Chattogram Press Club, Bureau Chief, Ittefaq

Additionally, around 150 people from various professions, including media representatives, attended the event, which was broadcast live on Facebook and other social media platforms.



Khulna Regional Dialogue

- **Professor Dr. Muhammad Masud**, Vice-Chancellor, KUET (Khulna University of Engineering and Technology)
- **Sheikh Mohammad Abdul Aziz**, Former President, Khulna District Bar Association
- **Azizul Bari Helal**, Information Secretary, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)
- **Advocate S.M. Shafiqul Alam Mona**, Convener, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Khulna Metropolitan City
- **Professor Mahfuzur Rahman**, Ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami, Khulna Metropolitan City
- **Shafiqul Alam Tuhin**, Member Secretary, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Khulna Metropolitan City
- **Advocate Jahangir Hussain Helal**, Secretary, Khulna District Jamaat-e-Islami
- **Minhajul Abedin Sompad**, Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, Khulna
- **Shamima Sultana Shilu**, President, Khulna Women's Chamber of Commerce
- **Ehteshamul Haque Shawon**, Assistant Secretary-General, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists
- **Advocate Babul Howladar**, Former General Secretary, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Khulna
- **Muhammad Nasir Uddin**, Vice President, Islami Andolon Bangladesh
- **Kazi Motahar Rahman**, Nagorik Oikya
- **Advocate Kudrat E Khuda**, SUJAN (Citizen for Good Governance) Secretary, Khulna
- **Akhtaruzzaman**, President, AB Party, Khulna Metropolitan City
- **Mujibur Rahman**, Convener, Khulna Metropolitan Workers Party
- **Belal Hossain**, Gono Odhikar Parishad
- **Nuruzzaman**, Vocal Person, Adhikar, Khulna
- **Swapan Kumar Das**, Executive Director, Dalit
- **Kazi Rina**, Entrepreneur, Khulna
- **Akhi Roy**, Member, Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, Khulna

Approximately 150 people, including members of the media and various professionals, attended the event, which was streamed live on Facebook and other platforms.



Rajshahi Regional Dialogue

- **Dr. Md. Main Uddin**, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Administration), University of Rajshahi
- **Dr. Md. Main Uddin, Safiuddin Ahmed**, President, SUJAN (Citizen for Good Governance), Rajshahi District
- **Md. Mizanur Rahman Minu**, Adviser to BNP Chairperson, Former Mayor & Former Member of Parliament
- **Advocate Abu Md. Selim**, Naye-e-Ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami, Rajshahi Metropolitan City
- **Tasnin Khan**, Female Student Coordinator, Rajshahi University
- **Salahuddin Mintu**, Joint Convener, Jatiya Party, Rajshahi Metropolitan
- **Murad Morshed**, Convener, Gonosonghoti Andolon, Rajshahi District
- **Mir Shahjahan**, Vice President, Gono Odhikar Parishad, Central Executive Committee
- **Mahmud Zaman Kaderi**, Freedom Fighter, State Reform Movement, Rajshahi Division
- **Shafiqul Rahman Baber**, Organizational Secretary, JSD (National Socialist Party), Central Committee
- **Nasira Khanom**, Chairperson, Maulana Bhasani Followers Council
- **Maulana Abdullah Talha**, Executive Member, Hefazat-e-Islam
- **Shahana Parveen**, Female Journalist
- **Md. Mahbub Siddiqui**, River Researcher, Political Analyst, Author, and Thinker
- **Advocate Md. Mostafizur Rahman**, Vice Principal, Rajshahi Law College
- **Sultana Sagarika**, Former Female Councilor
- **Miss Mohona**, President, Din-er Alo Hijra Sangha, Rajshahi
- **Ganesh Mardi**, General Secretary, Jatiya Adibashi Parishad

More than 100 participants from various professions and the media attended the event, which was broadcast live on social media.



Sylhet Regional Dialogue Participants

- **Professor Kamal Ahmed Chowdhury**, Sociologist, Former Dean, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST)
- **Emad Ullah Shahidul Islam Shahin**, Human Rights Activist, Former President, Sylhet District Bar Association
- **Abdul Kaiyum Chowdhury**, President, Sylhet District Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)
- **Rezaul Hasan Kayes Lodi**, Sylhet Metropolitan Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)
- **Abdul Ahad Khan Jamal**, President, Sylhet District Volunteer Party
- **Mostafizur Rahman**, Organizing Secretary, Sylhet Metropolitan Chhatra Dal (BNP Student Wing)
- **Md. Fakhru Islam**, Ameer, Sylhet Metropolitan Jamaat
- **Dr. Hossain Ahmed**, Organizer, National Citizen Committee, Sylhet
- **Azhar Uddin**, Member, District Search Committee, Nagorik Committee
- **Nazmul Hasan**, Convener, Sylhet District AB Party
- **Omar Faruq**, Convener, Sylhet Metropolitan AB Party
- **Arif Khan**, Member, State Reform Movement, Sylhet
- **Anwar Hossain Suman**, General Secretary, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Sylhet
- **Abu Jafar**, President, BSD (Bangladesh Socialist Party), Sylhet
- **Ronen Sarker Roni**, Bangladesh Socialist Movement
- **Monisha Wahid**, President, Sylhet District Student Union
- **Tanjima Begum**, Organizer, Democratic Student Council
- **Maleka Khatun**, Spokesperson, Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, Sylhet
- **Niggar Sadia**, Organizer, Gono Songhoti Andolon, Sylhet

Approximately 150 participants, including members of the media, attended the event, which was streamed live on social media.



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