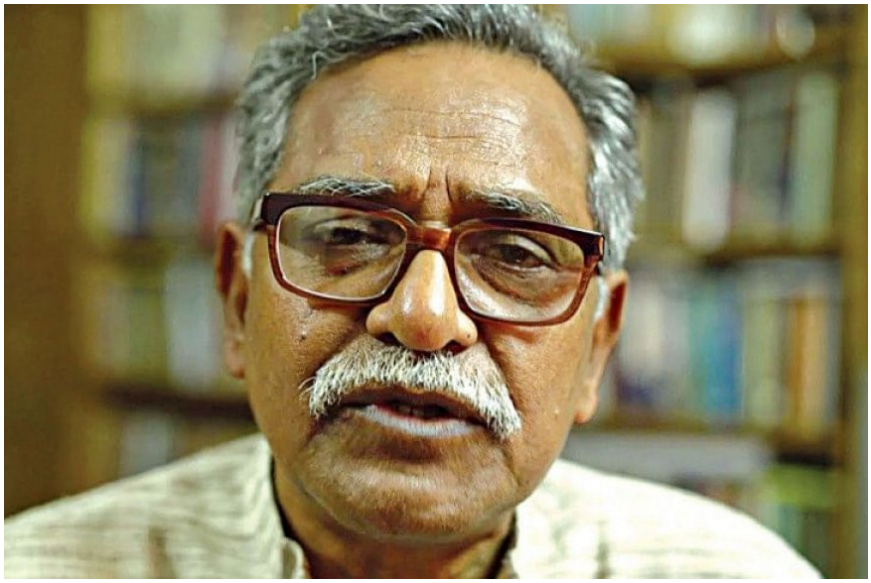
Reforms must start from within political parties



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Speaking at the event, noted economist Anu Muhammad said, "There should be a retirement age for political leaders. A leader should not hold the position permanently. Democracy should exist at every level, and the party's main leaders should not decide on the future leadership. A national political party must represent all religions, nations, and genders. At least one-third of the representation in a political party should be women."The discussion included a presentation titled "Social and Economic Reforms and Democracy" by Dr MM Akash, former professor at Dhaka University and chairman of the university's Bureau of Economic Research.

Akash said, "There have been many good suggestions for state reform in the past, but neither the BNP nor the Awami League government took the initiative to implement them. Therefore, the question remains: how far will the current reform journey progress? Will it falter halfway?"

Speakers also criticised the constitutional reform commission's proposal to replace the state principles in the constitution, terming it "immature".They argued that the proposed principles lacked logical and historical context and called for detailed discussions before altering the constitution's foundational principles.

Currently, the constitution's state principles include nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. The reform commission has proposed replacing them with "equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism, and democracy".

Dr Nazrul Islam, former chief researcher at the UN Development Research Department, presented a paper on "State Reform and Electoral System Reform".

He said while some recommendations were acceptable, others required further scrutiny or should be discarded outright.

Islam supported recognising non-Bangalee ethnic groups in Bangladesh and their right to use native languages, saying, "Converting fundamental rights into a charter could be a good proposal, but many of the new rights suggested by the commission are already included in the constitution."

He also questioned the necessity of the commission's most significant proposal: introducing a bicameral parliament to replace the unicameral system. He warned that a second chamber could complicate decision-making and unnecessarily increase parliamentary costs, burdening taxpayers.

However, he acknowledged the importance of proportional representation in the electoral system. He argued that it should be applied to the lower house elections, rather than the proposed upper house, to ensure the benefits of proportional representation are realised.

Other notable speakers included economist Mostafizur Rahman, Communist Party President Shah Alam, and General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince.