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"The university administration aims to complete the groundwork for the election by December and prepare to conduct the polls either at the end of January or mid-February next year," DU Proctor Prof Saifuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star.

He added that DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan met Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus recently where the latter assured of extending all possible cooperation for conducting the polls to the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu).

Prof Saifuddin said the election is essential to facilitate communication between the university administration and students and to ensure students' rights.

"If there is no formal platform for students, who will the administration consult while making important decisions? Having a common platform is crucial for this."

The last Ducsu election was held on March 11, 2019, breaking a 28-year hiatus.

A special committee, formed by the DU authorities to make recommendations and give the university administration guidance on the nature of political activities at DU, is now talking to the stakeholders to speed up the process of the polls.

Prof Abul Kashem Fazlul Haq, a member of the committee, said, "We are working on how the polls can be held and what the challenges are."

Prof Sayema Haque Bidisha, DU pro-VC (admin), said that forming the committee, initiating discussions, and addressing administrative and logistical procedures naturally took them some time.

"Since this process has already begun, and they [committee] have also prepared their plan for consultations, we can hope that they will provide us with concrete recommendations within a reasonable time," she told this newspaper.

"Based on the recommendations, it will become easier for us to hold the election and carry out other related tasks. Accordingly, an approximate deadline for the polls has been set," she added.

With the university authorities preparing for the Ducsu polls, student organisations gave mixed reactions to the plans.

During a meeting on Wednesday, leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and 29 other student organisations demanded elections to Ducsu and student unions at other universities

and colleges across the country by late January or early February.

"We have reached an agreement that elections to student councils at all universities and colleges, including Ducsu, should be held by the last week of January or the first week of February," Hasnat Abdullah, convener of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, told reporters after the meeting.

"For over a decade, campuses were dominated by Chhatra League through a type of authoritarian political culture. This created a sense of fear among a generation about student politics. Also, debates have surfaced across educational institutions since August 5 about whether to allow student politics and in what form," Hasnat said.

He added that the student leaders agreed to address the negative aspects of past politics to establish non-partisan, student-council-based politics on campuses, ensuring representation of students.

However, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the pro-BNP student body, opined that elections to Ducsu and students' unions at other educational institutions should not be held hastily.

Nasir Uddin Nasir, general secretary of the JCD central committee, said, "Student council elections should be held on all campuses, but not hastily. Student organisations should work on creating student-friendly atmosphere and building popularity among students through meaningful activities before the elections."

He added that after the mass uprising, student bodies have regained the freedom to engage in normal political activities and are now working to rebuild their image and change negative perceptions of student politics after years of dominance by BCL.

Nasir added that the student bodies should be given more time to change the negative perceptions about students' politics.

This interim government has banned the BCL, the pro-Awami League student body, amid demands from the student movement against discrimination.

Gonotantik Chhatra Jote, an alliance of seven left-leaning student organisations, said the Ducsu charter should be amended before holding the elections.

"The charter mandates supreme power to the university VC, who can make any decision at will, which is an undemocratic practice. This must be changed before the polls," said Rafikuzzaman Farid, coordinator of the Jote.

DU VC is the ex-officio president of Ducsu.