

Students' party by end of Feb

Says Akhter of Nagorik Committee



With the interim government having completed six months in office, the calls for a national election have intensified. Meanwhile, several reform commissions have submitted reports to the government. Regarding these developments and more, **Akhter Hossen**, member secretary of Jatiya Nagorik Committee, a civic platform formed in the aftermath of the uprising, recently spoke to 's **Ashik Abdullah Apu** and **Sirajul Islam Rubel**.

TDS: When the Jatiya Nagorik Committee was formed, you described it as a pressure group against the government. How would you evaluate the past six months since the government took office?



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Akhter: Six months in, there's been no significant improvement in the law-and-order situation. However, the government appears committed to reforms across various sectors, aligning with public expectations.

The investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the numerous killings by Awami terrorist forces have yet to make substantial progress. Many perpetrators remain unaccountable, highlighting a major failure of the government.

On a positive note, there've been no major financial crimes, such as money laundering, reported over the past six months.

Overall, there's been no situation that needed the imposition of military rule, even though there could've been -- I see this as a great success of this government.

TDS: Why do you think the law-and-order situation hasn't improved? Were the government's measures adequate? If not, what else could've been done?

Akhter: During the protests, the police turned against the people, leading to a sense of guilt and moral distress within the force that has yet to be overcome. As a result, the police lack the moral strength to ensure significant law enforcement improvements.

While the government has initiated some reforms within the police force and other law enforcement agencies, these are insufficient. We recommend strict departmental and legal action against officers involved in the killings during the protests. Apart from structural reforms in the force, large-scale recruitment of new police personnel is required.

On another note, the military has been given magistracy power. Some unfortunate incidents have already occurred. The army has struggled to show its effectiveness against criminal syndicates and extortion rackets.

TDS: What actions of the government do you consider positive, and where do you believe they've failed or need to focus in the future?

Akhter: The government has provided a liberal and democratic environment for political parties, allowing anti-fascist forces to operate freely. The freedom of expression has largely been upheld, and despite criticism, there's been no widespread arrest, torture, or persecution of dissenters, as was common under the previous regime.

However, the government has struggled to control syndicates that monopolise essential commodities, leading to rising prices. Additionally, its efforts to rehabilitate the families of martyrs and the injured have been inadequate.

TDS: Previous governments often reshuffled the Cabinet. Do you think the current advisory council requires any changes or restructuring?

Akhter: After the formation of the interim government, there were some internal changes, with new advisers added. However, considering the scale of the government's responsibilities, I believe additional advisers are needed.

TDS: Do you think this government is struggling to connect with rural people?

Akhter: The advisory council is relatively small, which presents challenges. Like previous administrations, this government is entangled in bureaucratic constraints. To truly connect with the people, the interim government must overcome these barriers and engage more effectively with the public.

TDS: How far along is the formation of your political party? What will be its core principles and ideology?

Akhter: Since the uprising, we've been discussing the formation of a new political party. We're hopeful of officially launching it by the end of February.

We've already consulted with people across the country regarding the party's name, symbol, ideology, and manifesto. Over 100,000 people have shared their opinions online. We're now working on drafting the party's constitution, declaration, and agenda, while also consulting with experts and seasoned political observers.

TDS: Reports suggest your party aims to contest the next national election. Which voter groups are you targeting, and what's your approach towards Awami League supporters who weren't involved in crimes?

Akhter: Our primary focus is Bangladesh's youth. We also aim to attract voters who've been dissatisfied with the bipolar politics of Awami League and BNP, and are seeking a new alternative.

We also want the support of senior citizens and long-time political observers who've witnessed the country's political trajectory.

Regarding traditional Awami League supporters, there are two groups: one has supporters who've been involved in corruption, vote-rigging, extortion, and even violent crimes, and another has those who've historically voted for Awami League but weren't involved in criminal activity.

For those in the first group, justice is non-negotiable -- they must face trial. For those in the latter, if they acknowledge the crimes committed by Awami League, the public might forgive them.

TDS: There's mounting pressure from political parties for the government to hold an election. Meanwhile, the government has initiated several reforms. What should its priority be?

Akhter: While most parties are focusing on polls, those who actively participated in the uprising want systemic reforms. The interim government must present a clear roadmap for reforms and begin implementing them before an election, and the next elected government should continue these reforms.

TDS: In the past, numerous reform initiatives were undertaken but never fully implemented. What do you think is the future of the current initiatives?

Akhter: Past failures have raised concerns. This is why we strongly demand that the implementation of reforms begin under this government, ensuring the next one cannot deviate from this responsibility. We urge all parties to align with the people's aspirations and avoid disappointing them. As a pressure group, we'll remain active on the streets and, if necessary, take tougher steps to translate these aspirations into reality.

TDS: You had initiated the announcement of the July uprising proclamation. Why couldn't you announce it?

Akhter: We wanted the proclamation to be based on a consensus among all political parties, which is why Students Against Discrimination chose to step back to avoid division. The government has taken up the responsibility to announce the proclamation with consensus among all parties, and we're hopeful of it fulfilling this responsibility.

TDS: Attacks on shrines and places of worship of religious minorities have been reported. The government claims these reports are exaggerated by the Indian media. How does your platform respond to such incidents?

Akhter: The Jatiya Nagorik Committee has expressed concern over the attacks. While some arrests have been made, the threat of further incidents remains. However, certain reports by the Indian media about attacks on minorities are not only exaggerated but outright false.