DHAKA FORUM INITIATIVE

REPORT ON POLICY DIALOGUE

YOUTH VOICE, NATIONAL VISION: CO-CREATING BANGLADESH'S FUTURE

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The Dhaka Forum Initiative (DFI), in partnership with the Youth School for Social Entrepreneurs (YSSE), hosted a national youth policy dialogue titled "Youth Voice, National Vision: Co-Creating Bangladesh's Future" on December 5, 2025, at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) Complex, Farmgate, Dhaka.

The dialogue created a neutral and non-partisan platform where young Bangladeshis directly shared their perspectives on national priorities with political leadership. At a time when the gap between young citizens and policymakers had continued to widen, the event shifted the narrative from traditional political mobilisation to evidence-based, constructive policy conversation.

Senior members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) attended the session and listened to the voices of young participants. The event was graced by Mr. Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Member of the BNP Standing Committee and Former Minister of Commerce, as the Chief Guest, and Dr. Mahdi Amin, Adviser to BNP's Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman, as the Special Guest.



KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND DISCUSSIONS

THE SHIFT FROM 'PATRONIZED' TO 'DEMOCRATIZED' ECONOMY

The discussion focused on Amir Khasru's critique of what he described as a patronized economy, a system where economic benefits are concentrated among a small group supported by political power. In contrast, he presented a broader and more inclusive vision: the democratization of the economy.

According to Amir Khasru, democratization cannot be limited to politics alone. Real progress requires opening up the economy so that all citizens have equal access to opportunities. The goal is to create a level playing field and move away from crony capitalism toward fair, transparent, and inclusive economic growth.



Mr. Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Member of the BNP Standing Committee

THE PILLAR OF 'SERIOUS DEREGULATION'

One of the most important takeaways from the session was the call for serious deregulation. Amir Khasru highlighted how excessive bureaucracy harms the private sector. He pointed out that in Bangladesh, where he was born, starting a business often requires up to 19 separate approvals and long waiting periods. By contrast, in places like Dubai or Singapore, the same process can be completed in as little as ten minutes.

He described Bangladesh as an overregulated economy and argued that meaningful reform must focus on cutting red tape. His proposed reforms included the following:

Contactless Governance: Digitizing government services to eliminate physical interactions, thereby reducing bribery, harassment, and delays.

One-Stop Solutions: Streamlining permits so that entrepreneurs do not need to visit multiple offices to start or operate a business.

A 24/7 Business Environment: Declaring Bangladesh fully business-friendly at all hours by removing arbitrary time restrictions on commercial activity.

UNLOCKING THE $10 BILLION IT POTENTIAL

The discussion also highlighted the urgent need for international payment gateways in Bangladesh, particularly in response to the challenges faced by the country's growing freelancer community.

Amir Khasru argued that there is no justification for freelancers earning foreign income to face obstacles in accessing their earnings. He stated that global payment services such as PayPal would be introduced and that existing limits on earnings would be lifted.

This vision points toward a significant expansion of IT export revenue. While countries like India and the Philippines earn approximately 40 billion and 20 billion dollars respectively from IT-based services, Bangladesh currently generates around 1 billion dollars. The proposed roadmap aims to raise this figure to 10 to 15 billion dollars by strengthening internet infrastructure and ensuring reliable, continuous power in rural areas. This approach would help decentralize the technology sector and extend growth beyond Dhaka.

THE CREATIVE ECONOMY: A NEW GDP ENGINE

The discussion marked a refreshing shift from traditional economic narratives by placing strong emphasis on the creative economy as a key driver of GDP. Sectors such as arts, sports, theatre, and culinary industries were highlighted as critical contributors to economic growth.

According to Amir Khasru, GDP is not limited to manufacturing alone. Activities like watching a film in a cinema or playing football in a stadium also generate economic value.

His proposed roadmap for the creative economy includes the following initiatives:

Cultural Hubs: Establishing theatres, art galleries, and comedy clubs in Dhaka and major divisional cities to support a vibrant night economy.

Sports Infrastructure: Developing sports complexes in every upazila, with the dual goal of nurturing talent and creating local economies around sporting events.

Rural Creative Exports: Adopting models used in countries like Thailand to brand, package, and sell unique village crafts on global platforms such as Amazon and Alibaba, enabling rural artisans to become exporters.

EDUCATION REFORM: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Dr. Mahdi Amin outlined a comprehensive reform agenda for the education sector, arguing that the current system remains outdated and poorly aligned with the needs of today's generation. He noted that many curricula still reflect thinking from the 1980s, while students are expected to compete in a 2020s global economy. His key reform commitments included the following:

Increased Budget Allocation: A pledge to allocate 5 percent of national GDP to education in order to improve quality, access, and outcomes across the system.

VAT Withdrawal: A commitment to remove VAT on private universities to make higher education more affordable and accessible for students.

Technology Integration: The proposed One Teacher, One Tab initiative aims to equip all 6.5 lakh teachers with tablet devices to ensure standardized training and access to digital resources. In addition, the introduction of Connected Classrooms for students in Class 6 and above would allow learners in rural areas to attend lectures delivered by the country's best teachers through remote technology.



Dr. Mahdi Amin, Adviser to BNP's Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman

HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The speakers noted that a demographic dividend cannot be realized without adequate health care and skills development. To address this, the policy vision proposes allocating 5 percent of GDP to the health sector.

A central focus is decentralization, with the aim of ensuring that citizens can access basic treatment without traveling to Dhaka. This would be supported by the recruitment of 100,000 health workers nationwide, with particular emphasis on employing women.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE Q&A SESSION

The Q&A session explored artistic freedom, education reform, and public welfare. Filmmaker Shahnawaz Khan Siju raised concerns about lingering censorship, while Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury emphasized that democracy is meaningless without artistic freedom, citing BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman's tolerance for political cartoons. Abul Kalam Azad called for decentralized cultural infrastructure, prompting Chowdhury to propose theater districts in divisional cities to combine art with a nighttime economy.

Participants also highlighted the gap between academic degrees and market needs. East West University student Farhan Ibtesham Joy questioned the emphasis on CGPA over practical skills, and Dr. Mahdi Amin proposed a "Brain Circulation" strategy to bring back diaspora academics for short-term projects. Research councils were also announced to fund practical projects addressing local challenges like traffic and agriculture.

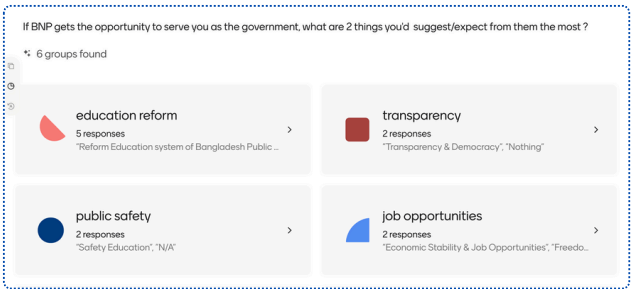




RUET graduate Afronul Alam Tanoy stressed earthquake preparedness, while Suchita Faruk Shirsho suggested including animal welfare in school education, which Chowdhury linked to fostering a humane Bangladesh. On journalists' security, Chowdhury proposed a Matching Fund to ensure financial support without compromising editorial independence.

LIVE SURVEY





The session engaged participants through a live online poll. When asked which policy needs the most reform, education topped the poll, followed by freedom of speech. Participants also shared their expectations from BNP if it comes to power, highlighting priorities such as education reform, zero corruption, transparency, economic stability, civic engagement, women's safety, and job creation.

