

Seminar on Democracy Held at North South University

Dhaka, 02 June 2025: The South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), in collaboration with the Private University Teachers' Association of Bangladesh (PUTAB), hosted a national seminar titled **“Democracy in Bangladesh: Crisis and Pathways Forward”** at the Syndicate Hall of North South University (NSU). The session was moderated by **Professor Dr. Md. Taufiqul Islam Mithil**, Professor of the Department of Political Science and Sociology (PSS) at NSU and President of PUTAB.

The event brought together a distinguished panel of academics, political leaders, and civil society members who engaged in a critical discussion on the current state of democracy in Bangladesh. Among the prominent participants were **Professor Sk. Tawfique M. Haque**, Director of SIPG; **Professor Dr. Mahbubur Rahman**, Chair of the Department of History and Philosophy (DHP), NSU; **Dr. Shibli Ahmed Khan**, Professor of Management at AIUB and Secretary of PUTAB; **Zonayed Saki**, Chief Coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon; **Professor M. Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan**, Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University; **Professor Dr. A B M Obaidul Islam**, Vice-Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University; **Professor Md. Nurul Islam**, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the National University; and **Mr. Bobby Hajjaj**, Chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement (NDM) and Senior Lecturer at NSU. In addition Mir Mustafiz Rahman the father of July martyr Mir Mugdho, and Mr. Kabir Hossain the father of July martyr Jabir Ibrahim was present.



The keynote address was delivered by **Professor Dr. Mahbubur Rahman**, who critically examined the applicability of Western democratic models in the Bangladeshi context. He highlighted the cyclical nature of democracy and authoritarianism in Bangladesh's post-liberation political history and questioned whether liberal democracy—often modelled on Western experiences—adequately addresses the country's unique structural challenges. Referencing democratic theorists like Robert Dahl, Schmitter, and Karl, he pointed to

institutional constraints such as Article 70 of the Constitution and the concentration of executive power as major hurdles. He concluded by reiterating the importance of citizen resistance against autocratic tendencies and emphasised the necessity of reclaiming democratic ideals rooted in the country's own political history.

Chief Guest Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan, Member of the Standing Committee of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), remarked that while democracy is not a perfect system, it remains the best mechanism to uphold justice and protect people's rights. Reflecting on the day's discussions, he emphasised that democracy is not bound by geography and cannot be distorted in the name of local context to justify authoritarianism. "True democracy," he said, "respects diversity of thought and voice." He warned that the concentration of power, erosion of institutional balance, and suppression of truth are serious threats to democratic values.

Special Guest Advocate Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, Senior Joint Secretary General of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), stated, "Today's discussion was deeply theoretical and intellectually rich. I sincerely thank all those who made this event possible and acknowledge how much I have learned from this dialogue." He continued, "Democracy is not merely about institutions—it is about internalising values and exercising restraint. History provides us with powerful contrasts. Napoleon was an admirer of George Washington and even kept his portrait in his chamber. Yet, when offered imperial power, Washington humbly declined and stepped down after two terms, strengthening the spirit of republican democracy. In contrast, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor, ultimately betraying the revolution he helped lead."

In his closing remarks, **Professor Dr. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury**, Vice-Chancellor of NSU, thanked all participants for their valuable contributions. He emphasised the importance of open dialogue between academia and policymakers to address democratic challenges and reaffirmed the university's commitment to civic engagement, ethical governance, and evidence-based policy discourse.