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The National Parliament Building of Bangladesh

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## The future of elections in Bangladesh



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Elections as a political game changer is a global phenomenon. The concept of election is a legitimate process of 'choosing leadership' to run a sovereign state and its government. Despite many of its limitations, democratic communities globally accepted the device of 'election' as the only viable method and governance tool for a peaceful change of power that ensures citizens' choice, voice, and participation.

Below the national level, other subordinate political institutions such as regional governments (provinces or component states), sub-national governments (local governments of different nature and types), and even private, voluntary, and professional institutions also arrange elections at regular intervals as an inherent device to democratically appoint their management. According to a 'Freedom House' assessment, approximately 70 national elections are expected to take place worldwide in the year 2024. Notably, the Indian parliamentary election scheduled for May-June and the US Presidential election in November are anticipated to be among the most significant electoral events of the year.

When discussing the future of elections in Bangladesh, two distinct discourses emerge. The

first discourse inevitably draws upon a logical analogy of the processes, consequences, and outcomes of the country's past electoral events since its independence, particularly focusing on the Tenth, Eleventh,

Through a systematic process over the years, parliaments have devolved into what can be described as a 'single party club,' and the multi-party system has been eroded with remarkable precision.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

and Twelfth parliamentary elections. Examining the current electoral stalemate necessitates a retrospective analysis of events spanning from 2011 to 2023.

The second discourse is likely to involve listing some steps that can be carefully initiated in the future to contribute towards a sound political and governance

Bangladesh's journey towards establishing an authoritarian single-party state is nearly complete. The process involves marginalizing dissenting voices from all civil spheres and gradually rendering pluralistic social and liberal cultural values irrelevant in mainstream society. Bangladeshi society, to some extent, resembles China during Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and the Soviet social and political system before perestroika and glasnost initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev. However, history has shown that people never succumb to defeat indefinitely, as individuals persist in creating avenues for self-expression.

During the Soviet Union era, people often gathered in communal kitchens where lively discussions gave rise to countless political jokes, humorously reflecting the realities of Soviet politics and its leaders. Nowadays, social media serves a similar role as a platform for dialogue and debate. However, unlike the communal kitchens of the past, social media is fraught with

socio-economic framework.

In the long term, Bangladesh cannot afford to sustain an anti-democratic regime, particularly within a burgeoning economy fueled by the aspirations of its citizens. The nation's future prosperity and stability depend on upholding democratic principles and ensuring governance that respects the rights and aspirations of its people.

We should look at the 70 elections to be held this year, especially those of India and the USA, which may teach us valuable lessons and demonstrate certain standards. In the USA, there are 520,000 positions filled through elections, including the president, governors, senators, house members, and federal and state-level judges. Elections are held under state legislations, which vary slightly from state to state, and voters are voluntarily registered. Despite the transparency of the voting system, there are complaints such as gerrymandering, registration fraud, and vote trafficking, especially in mail-in votes, which

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Over these 12 years, Bangladesh underwent significant milestones, including a major constitutional amendment (the Fifteenth Amendment in 2011), six city elections in 2013, and three highly controversial national elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024, respectively. Furthermore, all local government elections held in Zilas, Parishads, Upazila Parishads, Union Parishads, Pourashavas, and city corporations during this period warrant critical review.

It is noteworthy that all elections held since 1973 have been marred by irregularities, regardless of whether under civil or military rule. As a result, the political landscape has witnessed unprecedented events, including opposition-launched movements and government responses characterized by brutal police actions and motivated court cases.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

system while maintaining electoral governance perspectives, considering the background of both the immediate and distant past.

**ELECTION SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE ELECTION!**  
In discussions about monarchy and the British constitution, there is a saying, "The king is dead, long live the king." It implies that the monarchy exists primarily for ceremonial purposes, with its role and function reduced to a minimum. To summarize,

misinformation and fake news, which can significantly mislead society.

Despite the advent of social media, Bangladesh has faced successive elections since 2014 marked by unprecedented irregularities, irresponsibility, and opposition tactics. The gradual rise of authoritarianism is undoubtedly disheartening, threatening the nation's resilience and unity. Yet, it's crucial not to despair, recognizing that Bangladesh is intricately connected to the global community within a

are later addressed through stringent review, recount, and court cases. Interestingly, former President Donald Trump is facing court cases as a defendant of voter fraud and conspiracy to change results, highlighting the importance of accountability in democratic processes (Dennis W. Johnson, 2020; John Fund and Hans Von Spakovsky, 2021).

Our closest neighbor, India, which is the world's largest election manager, presents an interesting case to follow.

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