

## Civil service must not repeat past mistakes

### High number of supernumerary promotions raises concerns

It is quite disturbing that the problems that plagued the administration under the ousted Awami League government continue to persist despite promises of change following the mass uprising. According to a report, since the interim government took charge, the number of officials in the upper echelons of public administration has ballooned to over three times the number of approved posts. Thanks to the surge, there are now 467 officers against the 150 additional secretary posts, 861 officers against 250 joint secretary posts, and 1,599 officers against 450 deputy secretary posts. The surplus is largely due to unchecked supernumerary promotions without actual vacancies, which have made the administration further top-heavy. While most of the new promotions may have been intended to address grievances from the AL era, it has ended up creating fresh challenges.

Besides disrupting hierarchy and balances in the administration, this practice causes various logistical challenges, inefficiencies, as well as inter-departmental discord, thanks to feelings of deprivation by other officers. It also means increased burden on the tax-paying citizens. Meritocracy and accountability are the two biggest casualties in such a situation, which is totally unacceptable. Currently, the public administration has 26 cadres. Among them, administration, foreign affairs, and police cadre officers get supernumerary promotions, with the first receiving the majority of promotions. In contrast, officials from other cadres are promoted only when positions are vacant.

Recovering from the fallout of supernumerary promotions may take years as promotions, once given, cannot be taken back. While addressing past grievances over deprived benefits and promotions is important, it must not be at the expense of meritocracy and accountability. Our report cites some cases where officers, once punished for corruption, have been promoted after August 5. The committee formed to address grievances among administration cadre officers deemed to have been deprived in the past also recently recommended compensations, including retrospective promotions, for 764 of them. Surely not all grievances are justified, or deserving of selective intervention, especially if it involves providing unethical benefits or forgetting past transgressions.

Compounding this issue is the controversy surrounding the recent recommendations of the Public Administration Reform Commission. The commission's proposals—including introducing exams for promotions to deputy secretary and joint secretary positions, and ensuring a 50:50 ratio between administration and non-administration cadres for deputy secretary promotions—have sparked outrage among various cadre groups. While these measures aim to promote fairness and competence, resistance from entrenched interests threatens to derail the ongoing reform drive.

This calls for decisive but carefully-thought-out interventions from the authorities, including the reform commission which must prioritise the interests of citizens while formulating policies. The higher authorities also must resist the temptation to appease any interest group, and undertake comprehensive reforms in public recruitment and promotion processes to restore trust in the civil service.

## Identify all martyrs of the mass uprising

### How else can we honour them for their sacrifices?

The delay in identifying hundreds of individuals killed during the July-August uprising is quite disappointing. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, 80 unclaimed bodies were buried in July and 34 in August at the burial ground adjacent to the Rayerbazar Mass Killing Site Memorial by the volunteer organisation Anjuman Mufidul Islam. Despite clear evidence that some of the graves at the cemetery contain the remains of those killed in the uprising, the exact number remains unknown.

Anjuman Mufidul Islam reported burying 515 unclaimed bodies between January and November, an average of 47 per month. In July, however, the number surged to 80. In August, 34 bodies were buried, with no burial requests made during the first 11 days due to the unrest. Identifying those who died in the protests requires investigation and DNA testing, but progress has been slow. As a result, many protest victims buried in Rayerbazar remain unidentified, leaving their families unable to locate their loved ones' graves or claim compensation. While some families have confirmed through personal efforts that their relatives were buried as unclaimed bodies at Rayerbazar, they remain unable to identify the specific graves.

One such victim is Mahin Mia. His brother, Abdul Jabbar, recounted that they had both participated in a protest at Town Hall in Mohammadpur on July 18. When Mahin did not return home, Abdul searched police stations and morgues in surrounding areas before learning, through photographs from Anjuman Mufidul Islam's office, that Mahin had been killed and buried in Rayerbazar. Fifteen days after Mahin's death, his wife gave birth to their only child. Unfortunately, such heartbreaking stories are quite common, but we are yet to have a comprehensive list of those killed during the uprising.

As of December 18, the Health Directorate's website listed the names and identities of 860 individuals who were killed. Earlier, the health subcommittee for the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement reported 1,581 deaths based on available data. This discrepancy suggests that nearly half of those killed remain unidentified. It is crucial for the government to preserve the graves of the martyrs, including those at Rayerbazar, to allow families to identify them. The government established a Special Cell on the Mass Uprising to create a final list of the deceased, and on November 10, it issued a public notice requesting relatives of individuals who were killed, went missing, were buried as unclaimed, or died during treatment between July 15 and August 5 to register their names. However, as an official from the cell has noted, no significant applications have been received.

Therefore, it is high time the government stepped up efforts to identify those killed. Preserving the memories and graves of these martyrs is essential to honour their sacrifices and provide closure for their families.

# Election in first half of '26 is not unreasonable, but Dec '25 is doable

The chief adviser should consider the first option

## THE THIRD VIEW



Mahfuz Anam  
is the editor and publisher of  
The Daily Star.

## MAHFUZ ANAM

prove to the world.

Both can be achieved within the next 12 months.

All the main six reform committees, the most important ones as stated by the chief adviser himself, are scheduled to submit their reports by the end of 2024 or maximum by January next



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

year. The chief adviser's suggestion about the formation of a consensus commission is, in our view, a brilliant innovation that will help us move towards a stable future. The consensus commission will engage with all the political parties to reach consensus on which recommendations are to be implemented by the interim government—through ordinance—and which are to be left for the elected government. Achieving a consensus among all parties will be a major political goal, which has not been achieved since the all-party charter during the fall of the Ershad government in 1990. Since the chief adviser himself will chair the consensus commission, we feel confident that a positive outcome will certainly emerge.

Coming back to the timeline, if the commission starts its work following the submission of reports by December-January, the interim government will have nearly 10 months to move towards the election.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin said on Tuesday that the Election Commission has been preparing for the election from the day of their taking office, and it is ready

of the reduced prospect of natural disruptions like rain, floods, cyclones, etc must not be overlooked.

The actors in the political field today are Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, and numerous smaller political parties. The new entry, which is likely to be a significant player, is the political party of the student groups that played a decisive role in toppling the old regime. They have declared their intention of forming a political party within a very short time, with its own student wing.

BNP is the party waiting at the doorstep of assuming power. Therefore, its eagerness to push for the earliest timetable for the election is predictable. The speech by Tarique Rahman, the party's acting chairman, on December 18, urging his party members to focus on "reforms and not revenge" deserves commendation. He further said, "If you want to respond to the injustice, oppression and suppression done to you, you should not imitate what they [Awami League] have done. If we do so, there will be no difference between them and us." This is a highly refreshing and welcome position, and a very powerful and

farsighted one.

Even before the submission of the constitutional commission's recommendations, Tarique has said he and his party will recommend two terms for the prime minister, to be fixed by the constitution. As the person who may hold that position, if voted so, he was in fact putting restrictions on his own possible future tenure—a most appreciable and hitherto unprecedented gesture. He also expressed his support for a bicameral legislature for the future. Both these suggestions have far-reaching political consequences for us, and clearly shows that the acting chief of today's BNP is thinking ahead.

The party's 31-point programme, which was prepared some time ago, lays out clearly what the BNP proposes to do once in power. However, we are used to our political parties promising the moon before the election and then forgetting everything once in power. But given the July-August uprising, we hope things will be different this time.

Jamaat has extended a conditional support to the chief adviser's polls plan, with the secretary general saying, "Despite our initial reluctance regarding the delay, we will remain patient as long as the chief adviser honours his commitment to hold elections... we are ready to cooperate with him." This clearly shows that Jamaat is not in any hurry. The reason is obvious: the more time it gets, the more will Jamaat, as the second biggest party right now, be organised when the election comes.

It is our view that smaller parties will acquiesce to the chief adviser's mid 2026 timeline as they may not expect too much from the election and are better off now in terms of being treated on an equal footing with all others.

Among the most interesting political developments that are likely is the new party planned by the students. It will be interesting to see them emerge as a political force, get voters' support by joining the election, and participate in the governance process, being elected MPs. The new party may bring about a refreshing change in our political scene with new and bold ideas aimed at removing discriminations from our society. However, they would prefer more time to be able to organise themselves better, and hence are opposed to an early election.

Whatever the differing stances of various political parties may be, people in general would, we think, prefer to exercise their franchise to elect their government, something they have been deprived from for the last 15 years.

# The hidden cost of workplace oppression



Taslima Tinni  
is a human rights activist.

## TASLIMA TINNI

Beneath the surface of professional relationships lies a troubling culture of psychological oppression, domination, and exclusion. Workplace intimidation remains pervasive and deeply entrenched. Unlike physical violence, this invisible sadism leaves no bruises but profoundly impacts mental health, career progression, and organisational well-being. Alarming, such dynamics are not exclusive to male supervisors; women in authority often perpetuate these behaviours, inadvertently upholding patriarchal systems that resist genuine gender equity.

Workplace violence is often narrowly defined as physical altercations or blatant harassment. Yet its most insidious form manifests through psychological harm rooted in power imbalances and gender oppression. This systemic violence festers in environments where dominance is normalised, dissent discouraged, and authority unchecked. It corrodes not just mental well-being but also the broader integrity of workplace culture.

At the core of professional hierarchies lies an unequal relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Supervisors, regardless of gender, often misuse power through harmful behaviours shaped by societal conditioning and organisational structures. Male supervisors may wield psychological violence to

reinforce patriarchal dominance, while female supervisors may adopt authoritarian methods to align with patriarchal leadership standards. This misuse of authority, cloaked as "tough love" or "professional rigour," creates what can be termed "invisible viciousness"—subtle, pervasive, and difficult to challenge.

This harm manifests in various ways: silencing employees, undermining contributions, blocking career advancement, or perpetuating microaggressions that erode confidence. The psychosocial toll is immense, leaving victims grappling with stress, diminished self-worth, anxiety, and depression. These emotional wounds often go unacknowledged, extending far beyond the workplace and impacting broader organisational potential. As long as these behaviours remain overlooked, true equity and inclusion will remain elusive.

Workplace violence is an extension of societal patriarchy. Historically, workplaces were designed by men, for men. Despite progress, gendered power structures persist, with male supervisors dominating not just through overt acts but also through systematic exclusion of women and gender minorities from decision-making, career development, and leadership opportunities.

For women, this psychological

violence has severe consequences. Being undermined in meetings or dismissed sends a message that their voices do not matter. Such experiences foster a culture of silence and fear, stifling ambition and creating long-term mental health challenges. Women are often made to feel lucky to have a seat at the table instead of empowered to lead it. This diminishment chips away at confidence, amplifies stress, and fuels burnout, yet it is rarely addressed in workplace policies.

One significant arena for this invisible violence is participation in decision-making. Women frequently find their ideas sidelined or accredited to male colleagues, their expertise dismissed, or their efforts blocked. For supervisees under patriarchal leadership, this violence takes the form of micromanagement, constant monitoring, or outright dismissal of their capabilities. Such domination fosters isolation, silences dissent and discourages victims from speaking up due to fear of retaliation.

Internalised patriarchy compounds these issues, as societal norms pit women against each other as competitors rather than collaborators. Women leaders face a double bind: labelled "too soft" or "too aggressive," they often adopt harsher leadership styles to prove their competence. Studies show women managers are 40 percent more likely than men to face criticism for their leadership approach, prompting authoritarian behaviours that perpetuate patriarchal systems.

Organisational blind spots further enable harm. Emotional harassment is addressed in only 20 percent of global workplace policies, and accountability is often weak unless scandals emerge. In patriarchal cultures, leadership is equated with dominance, silencing supervisees—particularly women—

who are labelled "difficult" for challenging authority. This toxic cycle sustains inequality and undermines workplace well-being.

Despite moral and legal obligations to address workplace violence, existing safeguards are ill-equipped to handle gender-based psychological violence. Policies typically focus on overt harassment, ignoring subtler forms of harm. Worse, reporting mechanisms often retraumatise victims, especially when the accused is a supervisor with institutional backing.

To create truly inclusive and safe workplaces, organisations must adopt a holistic view of violence. Safeguards must extend to subtle oppression, holding supervisors accountable for exclusion, favouritism, or verbal abuse. Anonymous reporting systems, gender-sensitivity training, and external audits are essential to identify and address systemic power abuses.

Real change requires acknowledging the prevalence of psychological violence and dismantling its roots in patriarchal power structures. It is not enough to celebrate token achievements or count women in leadership roles. The real work lies in confronting the invisible barriers perpetuating harm, particularly in supervisor-supervisee relationships.

True gender equality demands more than policies—it requires a cultural shift in how power is understood, shared, and exercised. Only by addressing the systemic violence woven into workplace hierarchies can organisations create environments that foster equity, inclusion, and collective well-being. Without addressing these psychosocial dimensions, the cycle of invisible violence will continue to sabotage the progress we desperately need.