

Internal democracy still a mirage

Dynastic politics, personality cults plague the political parties

MOHUDDIN ALAMGIR

With their mass rallies and processions, slogans and posters echoing the will of their electorate, Bangladesh's political parties project an air of vibrant democracy on the surface. Yet behind the scenes, democracy ends where leadership begins. Power is concentrated in the hands of a few, and internal democracy is a distant mirage.

For decades the country's political landscape has been dominated by leaders who rarely face opposition within their ranks. Party constitutions promising regular elections and elaborate MP nomination process are routinely set aside, turning leaders into de facto monarchs. They hold on to power for years, if not decades, only to relinquish control until ill health, legal troubles or death forces their hand, an analysis of 25 political parties by this newspaper shows.

This centralisation of power has fostered a cult of personality around party leaders, turning internal dissent into a taboo. The result is a hollowing out of democracy within the very institutions that are supposed to safeguard it, with far-reaching consequences for Bangladesh's political culture.

Almost all party constitutions stipulate a council, every three or four years, to elect office bearers, including the top leadership. But that remains on paper only. Political scientist Professor Rounaq Jahan says in her book "Political Parties in Bangladesh" that those who highlight the role of political parties in consolidating democracy also underscore the importance of their internal democracy. This, she says, can be measured by the process of leadership selection, candidate nomination and policy-setting.

An analysis of historical facts shows that most parties lack a democratic culture in their leadership election or candidate nomination.

"A lack of this internal democratic practice is a major obstacle to making Bangladesh truly democratic," Prof Jahan told The Daily Star recently.

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Even in the biting cold, these farmhands wake up early every day and get to work at the potato field so that they can earn the day's wages to provide for their families. The photo was taken at Balapara village in Rangpur around 7:30am yesterday.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

CYBER PROTECTION
Freedom of speech, press will be in peril
Speakers tell event on draft law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recently approved draft of the Cyber Protection Ordinance 2024 threatens the freedoms of expression and press, just like the Digital Security Act and Cyber Security Act – both of which were broadly criticised for years for the same

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SHARIFUL ISLAM

Cops want their own commission

IGP submits draft proposal to reform commission

SHARIFUL ISLAM

After facing accusations of systemic corruption and harsh criticism for furthering Awami League's political agenda, the police force has proposed an independent commission with sweeping powers to ensure accountability and neutrality of the law enforcers.

This oversight body, which will have the power to make top appointments within the police force, will also be responsible for policies on recruitment,

transfers and promotions that is expected to end a long held practice of handpicking individuals.

Bangladesh's top police official recently submitted a draft of the proposed "Police Commission" to Safar Raj Hossain, head of the Police Reform Commission, which is expected to recommend a raft of reform measures for the police.

"We have submitted a report to the commission proposing reforms,

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CA reiterates 2 possible polls timelines

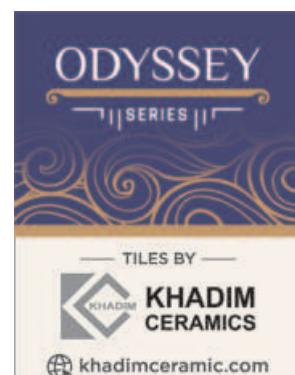
Assures visiting UK MP of free, fair polls

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has once again said the next general election will likely be held in December 2025 or by mid 2026.

He shared the two possible timelines for the election when British parliamentarian Rupa Huq, who is on a three-day visit as part of a business delegation from the UK, met Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

"The election date depends on how much



reform people want," Yunus told Rupa, while assuring her that the next general election would be free and fair.

In response, Rupa expressed willingness to return to Bangladesh to observe the election.

"People could not

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Hoping to get outpatient services first thing in the morning, patients from different districts arrived at National Cancer Research Institute and Hospital last night and went to sleep near the entrance to the building. The photo was taken early today.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

HUSH MONEY CASE
Trump to be sentenced on January 10

AFP, New York



The New York judge presiding over President-elect Donald Trump's hush money case on Friday set sentencing for 10 days before his January 20 inauguration and said he was not inclined to impose jail time.

Judge Juan Merchan said Trump, the first former president ever convicted of a crime, can appear either in person or virtually at his January 10 sentencing.

In an 18-page decision, Merchan upheld Trump's conviction by a New York jury, rejecting various motions from Trump's lawyers seeking to have it thrown out.

The judge said that instead of incarceration he was leaning towards an unconditional discharge -- meaning the real estate tycoon would not be subject to any conditions.

The sentence would nevertheless see

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CRISIS IN RAKHINE
Rohingya repatriation hope dims further

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Prospects for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar are dimming as the Rakhine state descends deeper into conflict and humanitarian crisis.

Since July 2023, more than 80,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh amid acute food shortage, prolonged farming disruptions, and recruitment drives by the Arakan Army (AA).

The ongoing turmoil underscores the escalating challenges facing both Myanmar and Bangladesh in addressing the plight of the stateless minority.

The Bangladesh government, which officially opposes accepting new Rohingya arrivals, has struggled to stem the flow of refugees entering through unofficial routes. Corruption at the border has exacerbated the situation.

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain acknowledged the government's challenges on the border. Despite Dhaka's repeated calls for a sustainable resolution, conditions in Myanmar are moving in the opposite direction. With the Arakan Army nearing full control of Rakhine, the possibility of creating a safe and stable environment for Rohingyas to return is rapidly vanishing.

The Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed group, has solidified its grip over much of the state, further destabilising the region. Reports suggest the AA is preparing to declare either independence or autonomy, intensifying clashes with other factions, including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation.

These developments, coupled with Myanmar's broader political upheaval, have rendered efforts to facilitate a dignified return for the Rohingya increasingly futile.

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