

For stability, holding the national election should be prioritised



THE STREET VIEW

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The debate surrounding the timing of local government elections in Bangladesh has intensified in recent weeks, with some advocating for holding them before the national election. Doing so, however, may not lead to more harm than good, as organising and completing local elections could delay the national election, which may further deteriorate the country's already fragile law and order situation and its political instability.

One of the most pressing concerns is the time and logistical complexity of conducting local elections. With over 4,500 union parishads, municipalities and city corporations across the country, the process would take approximately one and a half years to complete. That would inevitably push back the national elections, leaving citizens

government remains in power.

Furthermore, local elections in Bangladesh have historically been plagued by violence and unrest. The competitive nature of local politics, often driven by major political parties, frequently turns these elections into battlegrounds, where violence is more of an expectation than an exception. Party-backed candidates, eager to assert control over local resources and power, often resort to muscle power, intimidation, and financial influence to secure victory. Given the current volatile political environment, it seems unlikely that this trend will change.

Therefore, holding local elections now, before the national election, would place additional strain on the already overburdened law enforcement agencies who are struggling

the opposition amid accusations of voter suppression and unfair practices. If local elections are allowed to take precedence, it would be a dereliction of duty to the people who have waited far too long for a fair and transparent national election.

Moreover, the interim government is not mandated to oversee local elections. Its primary responsibility is to conduct parliamentary elections, which are the

allow for robust local governance. In reality, however, these institutions have been reduced to ceremonial bodies with little real power. Local governments should ideally be self-governing, capable of managing resources, delivering services, and addressing the needs of their communities. Instead, they are often rendered powerless due to the centralisation of authority in Dhaka.

This centralisation, where bureaucrats

governments would erode their control over the population. Over time, local governments have become tools for political patronage, used to secure votes and political support for national elections. This manipulation of local government, coupled with entrenched corruption and weak institutions, has made the prospect of free and fair local elections an anathema to the political establishment.

There is no doubt that local governments must be empowered and freed from political interference. However, just holding local elections is not enough. It must be ensured that local governance bodies have the autonomy, resources, and authority to serve their communities effectively. Empowering local governments is not only necessary for improving governance but also for upholding the moral obligation enshrined in Bangladesh's constitution, which mandates elected representatives with local governance. The continuation of centralised power is a violation of this principle and undermines the democratic foundations of the nation.

Given that the major political parties in Bangladesh have promised to focus on national governance and reconciliation, it may be more judicious to hold local government elections after the parliamentary election is concluded. This would allow the formation of a stable national government, thereby reducing tensions related to local elections. The priority should be to stabilise the national political environment. Besides, the people of Bangladesh have waited long enough to vote, and the longer they are deprived of this right, the greater the risk of deepening social and political discontent.

While local governance is critical for ensuring effective and accountable government, holding local elections before national elections would only delay the democratic process and worsen political instability. Bangladesh cannot afford to sacrifice the national election process for the sake of local elections. The national election must be held first, followed by the empowerment of local governments in a manner that ensures peace and stability.



The competitive nature of local politics, often driven by major political parties, frequently turns local elections into battlegrounds.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

Local elections in Bangladesh have historically been plagued by violence and unrest. The competitive nature of local politics, often driven by major political parties, frequently turns these elections into battlegrounds, where violence is more of an expectation than an exception. Party-backed candidates, eager to assert control over local resources and power, often resort to muscle power, intimidation, and financial influence to secure victory.

waiting even longer to elect a new government. Considering Bangladesh's current situation, such a delay could be dangerous: it risks disillusioning voters, prolonging an already tense political situation, and extending the period during which the unelected interim

to improve the law and order situation across the country. Bangladesh is already in the midst of a prolonged political crisis. Citizens have been deprived of their right to vote for over a decade, with elections in 2014, 2018 and 2024 either boycotted or contested by

only legitimate way for the people to restore democratic legitimacy. Prioritising local elections before national elections risks undermining the role of the interim government and further delaying the democratic process.

The deep structural issues facing Bangladesh's local government system must also be addressed. The country's local governance framework is dysfunctional at best and entirely ineffectual at worst. Bangladesh has a multi-tier system of local government—comprising district, upazila, and union councils, along with municipalities and city corporations—which theoretically should

frequently control local councils, has stunted the development of local governments and their capacity to serve citizens effectively. Essential services that should be delivered at the community level, such as healthcare, education and infrastructure, are often delayed, disrupted or simply remain unavailable. Although elections are held every five years, the imposition of unelected officials and the central government's pervasive control over local councils frequently lead to a breakdown in local governance.

The root cause of this dysfunction lies in the vested interests of major political parties, who fear that empowering local

Two cats in the yard



LETTERS FROM THE UK

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GEOF WOOD

Over the years, I have been in debt to Neil Young, the American songwriter and performer with a social heart. (With David Lewis and Rick Gregory, I once published *Trading the Silver Seed* [1996] about aquaculture in Bangladesh.) It is time to use him again with "two cats in the yard." Angela, my wife, and I have had two cats in our house in Bath, with an interval between them. Fudge died of old age (19 years) in December 2023; I was in Bangladesh and grieved quietly. We acquired Clover in May 2024; I was in Bangladesh and rejoiced quietly.

But Fudge and Clover tell a story between them. In common, they were both rescue cats, formally adopted by us. Fudge reflected a strong story of security and happiness, including in the garden surrounded by other cats and wildlife (badgers, foxes, squirrels). She managed the cat flap well, so she could choose her outside and inside timings. And she delivered many presents of beheaded rats to thank us for being in her service. Clover, by contrast, was found as a stray, in a sad condition, at just over a year old. She was brought back to physical health by the rescue home before being adopted by us. But was she restored to mental health, after her feral period, abandoned in the streets of Bath? She is intensely wary, highly alert to danger, suspicious of the cat flap to the garden, nervous and on her guard outside, and she needs safe spaces inside for lengthy periods of introversion and sleep—her version of "under the duvet."

It occurs to me that this feline contrast is an allegory for our times, as we move into 2025 with many heightened uncertainties immediately ahead of us. Security undermined for the erstwhile comfortable, a need to be constantly alert, sniffing the winds, searching for the cues, strategising in the context of political lunacy globally, while watching our more national and local leaders needing to tread a narrowing path of options for our well-being and welfare. Bangladesh is on the frontline of these dilemmas, while the UK is also on a tightrope albeit at a higher general standard of living but with high inequalities and

uncertain prospects with dangerous men (mainly men) lurking in the dark shadows of the dark web as well as neighbourhoods and corridors of power. There seems to be an overwhelming desire among near anarchic populations, an outcome of decades of alienating neoliberalism, to do harm to others. This desire in itself reflects inequalities—rich plutocrats controlling media platforms and tabloid newspapers to fire up street-level goondas with oversimple populist messages, to back up their divisive language

As we face this increasing prospect of right-wing autocracy around the world, so it seems these people will treat any part of the world as playthings, acting as bullies in the playground just for self-gratification. Panama, Greenland, Canada—nothing is off the table, just because you can, at the very least, intimidate and demonstrate your menace. Is it just narcissists showing off, needing to impress us with their toys, valorising their wealth, however gained, through anti-social teasing, just because they can? Is it this shallow, or can we find a deeper, more sinister purpose?

To be honest, with global inequality already so high and obvious, I am not sure there is much deeper self-interested purpose to be discerned. But the knock-on effects of these occupants of the pram, sensualising their short-lived power, are of course massively dangerous and consequential for the

The Southport killings of children in the UK last summer prompted riots all over the UK, mindlessly unconnected to those murders, but hitching a ride on racial othering before the identity of the perpetrator even emerged. Self-appointed vigilantes following plutocratic cues to terrorise grieving communities.

A reinforcing cause for concern is a recent poll among Gen Z and Millennials in Britain, which found that 21 percent agreed with the proposition that the best system was a strong leader without elections, contrasted to only eight percent above the age of 55. And this sentiment is strongest among men than women.

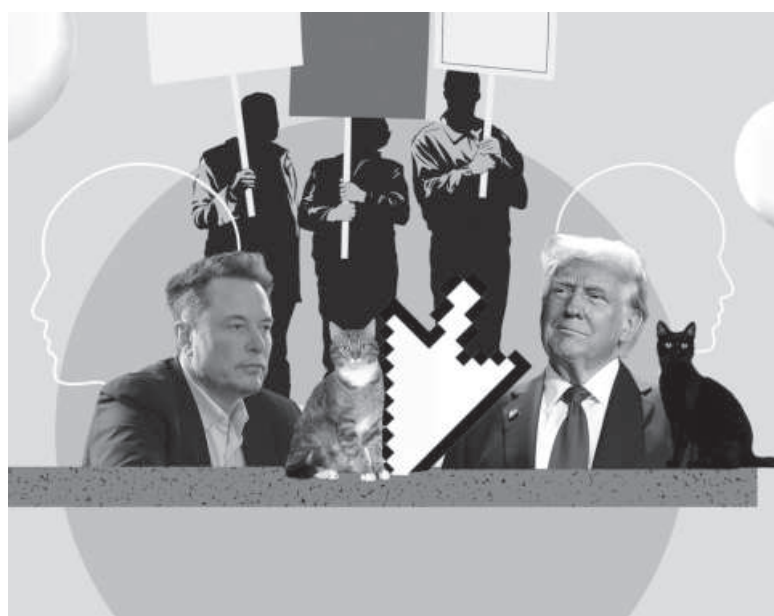
Where might we find the pushback to these tendencies? Where might a renewal of decency be found and nurtured? I have been reading Will Hutton's *This Time Make No Mistakes: How to Remake Britain*. The reference to "this time" is the incoming Labour and Starmer

government with a big landslide—albeit more artificial this time than Blair in 1997. Hutton writes for *The Observer* in the UK—a left-of-centre, influential newspaper among socially progressive thinkers and activists (rather like *The Daily Star*), and has long advocated pragmatic social democratic politics, steering a course between individualist neoliberalism and over-dogmatic collectivism. He is a pragmatist with a social conscience. He lays out the room for manoeuvre in the present world to offer security and decent work with hope via state leadership to invest in productivity while protecting those disrupted by the innovation and changing labour markets, which is embedded in even socially acceptable capitalism. His agenda is the pursuit of the Polanyian critique that while capitalism might provide the bulk of livelihoods, the humane principle of welfare supports for disrupted humans cannot be left solely to the commoditised labour

market. There needs to be an element of decommodification through regulation and social insurance.

But as Bangladesh moves further into an industrialised and services economy, described by some like Debapriya Bhattacharya as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and away from the Faustian bargains of pre-capitalist agrarian relations, so the arguments encapsulated by Hutton will have more relevance and force for a country like Bangladesh. I would have his book on the reading list of any social science degree course around the world.

So, despite the gloom of advancing autocracy, I support the complex optimism of Hutton. He writes about the "We" society rather than the "I" society. Let us push these narcissistic disruptive forces to the margins and allow Clover, the new four-legged member of our household, the confidence to venture out with trust in the world around her to give her the secure space to be herself.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

with envious thuggery, frequently othering racial and ethnic minorities. Sometimes, this process appears as culture wars classifying thought and action between woke and anti-woke, the latter deploying the dystopia of free speech in an uber-libertarian sense to attack inclusive common sense. In the UK at present, we are experiencing an exaggerated version of this process through a Californian plutocrat attacking the very people who have done the most to address child abuse over the last two decades, while displaying a weird combination of ignorance and some compulsive desire to disrupt and upend responsible discourse.

rest of us. Disaffected and alienated global brownshirts, vicariously living out the plutocratic dream through beating up people and their institutions. January 6, 2021, in Washington DC, was a case in point with no prospect of redress. The US Constitution, designed in a different era of genteel elites (albeit content with slavery or its Jim Crow version) who could never imagine a degenerate in the White House, cannot prosecute a sitting president. Has Donald Trump in effect brown-shirted the US? And does this liberate other puppets and proteges around the world to do likewise? It seems to have already given out that licence.

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These are online Tenders, where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP portal and no off line/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

e-Tenders are invited in e-GP system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by the Executive Engineer, RHD, Jamalpur Road Division, Jamalpur for the procurement of below mentioned work :

Tender ID	Package No.	Name of works	Tender Security Submission Date and Time	Last Selling Time	Tender Closing Time
1069151	25 e-GP/Sup/JRD/2024-2025	Supplying of 196.00 Nos Skilled & 550.00 Nos Unskilled Labour for Routine Maintenance Work of Different Roads of Jamalpur Road Sub-Division-1, Under Road Division Jamalpur during the year 2024-2025.	20-02-2025 11.30	19-02-2025 17.00	20-02-2025 12.00
1069169	36 e-GP/JRD/2024-2025	Installation of Traffic Sign/Signal at Different Chainages of Jamalpur-Chachua -Muktachacha Road (R-462) and Jamalpur (Nandibazar)-Dhanua Kamalpur -Raumari -Datbhanga Road (R-464) of Jamalpur Road Division During the year 2024-2025.	20-02-2025 11.30	19-02-2025 17.00	20-02-2025 12.00
1069170	37 e-GP/JRD/2024-2025	Manufacture & Installation of Traffic Sign-Signal at different location of Joydebpur-Tangail Jamalpur National Highway (N4) under Jamalpur Road Division during the year 2024-2025.	20-02-2025 11.30	19-02-2025 17.00	20-02-2025 12.00

28.01.25
(Md. Nawajish Rahman Biswas)
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