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Local polls possible by June

Says reform commission, insists it requires consensus among all stakeholders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Local Government Reform Commission has proposed a major overhaul of the system to ensure decentralisation of governance.

It also observes that the local polls can be held within June this year, only if the interim government, political parties and the Election Commission reach a consensus on the matter.

Besides, the zila parishad elections in the hill tracts are also possible, it adds.

The commission, led by local government expert Tofail Ahmed, submitted its report to the interim government on February 19. It was released to the press yesterday.

The local government bodies refer to union parishad, upazila parishad, zila parishad, municipality, and city corporation. Elections to these institutions may be held under the same election schedule in order to save time

The reform commission surveyed 46,080 households and found that three-fourths of the respondents did not prefer political parties' participation in local government elections.

and cost.

All relevant laws should be amended by April, it says, leaving a short time to make the reforms.

Currently, the local government bodies have overlapping roles. There are wards in union parishads, a chairperson and two vice-chairs are elected from the same constituency in upazilas, and no direct elections are held in zila parishads.

The election system of union, upazila and zila parishads should be streamlined by bringing them under one common law, says the commission.

Similarly, the municipality and the city corporations should be brought under one law. At present, each of these entities is governed by separate legislations.

The reform commission surveyed 46,080 households and found that three-fourths of the respondents did not prefer political parties' participation in local government elections.

The commission recommends that the deputy commissioner's office act as the central government's representative and become the main authority for land management in a district.

The zila parishad, under the leadership of a chairperson, will be in charge of the development projects. A joint secretary will act as the chief executive officer of the district.

The zila parishad will be the main planning unit where all development and service-related planning will take place.

The upazila parishad will receive the plan for its specific geographical boundary and implement it using its union-based bodies.

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Bangladesh firm with 2 people got \$29m from US

Says Trump

STAR REPORT

US President Donald Trump said that a US funded project to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh worth \$29 million had gone to a firm with just two people that nobody had ever heard of.

The newly elected US president was speaking to US governors at the White House on Friday.

During his speech, Trump spoke about a string of USAID projects that were being axed upon recommendation from the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) headed by Elon Musk.

"\$29 million to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh. Went to a firm that nobody ever heard of," said the US president. "Can you imagine you have a little firm. You get 10,000 here, 10,000 there, and then we get \$29 million from the United States government. They had two people working in that firm, two people, I think they're very happy, they're very rich."

Trump then mentioned, "They'll be on the cover of a very good business



On February 21, the International Mother Language Day, people pay tributes at the Central Shaheed Minar in memory of the 1952 Language Movement heroes. But the next day, people walk all over the altar with their shoes on. Only a woman and a boy are barefoot in the photo taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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SILENCE OF THE SHRINES

Devotees, khadems still living in fear, months after the first wave of attacks last year

TARUN SARKAR

For nearly half a century, the Alimuddin Chishti Mazar in Narayanganj's Rupganj was alive with devotion and music. Every Thursday night, the shrine would light up with mahilis, where Baul singers would pour their hearts out in mystic melodies.

People from all over the town and beyond gathered here, drawn by faith, tradition, and the promise of a spiritual connection.

But on the night of September 11, 2024, everything changed.

The shrine was silenced by a mob attack.

Since then, the gates remain locked, while the mosque inside still bears the scars of vandalism. The tin-and-wood house of late khadem Abdul Haque stands in ruins.

Khadem, in traditional Sufi terms, means a caretaker or servant who serves or looks after a religious site or shrine.

The reporter visited the shrine on October 8 and November 10,



The Dewan Sharif Khan shrine, a heritage building in Narsingdi's Palash upazila, was attacked and vandalised on August 5, 2024.

2024, and then again on January 22, 2025.

During the first and last visits, no one was available for comments. However, during the second visit, Bahauddin Naqshbandi, a young local devotee, said that all khadems, imams, and devotees have been avoiding the place for

fear of further attacks.

After Sheikh Hasina fled the country on August 5, 2024, in the face of a mass uprising against her dictatorship, the country saw a different kind of mob attacks -- the kind never seen before on such a scale.

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JULY UPRISING PARTY
Activists consider more top posts to minimise discord

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The July uprising activists are considering increasing the number of top posts in their political party to ensure the representation of all the stakeholders of the movement amid a discord over leadership.

The new party, likely to be launched at a rally on Manik Mia Avenue in the capital on February 26, will have 10 or 12 major positions. These include convener, member secretary, joint conveners, chief organiser, and spokesperson.

The uprising activists are now mulling the creation of new positions like senior joint convener, senior joint member secretary and two spokesperson posts to "accommodate" all quarters involved in the uprising, said sources in the Jatiya Nagorik Committee and the Students Against Discrimination.

Different factions placed several proposals during last Wednesday's meeting, including on the top leadership structure of the party, two Nagorik Committee leaders told this newspaper.

Some proposed creating a super-ten or super-twelve style top structure. The matter has not been finalised yet, according to the leaders.

Sources in the two platforms said that there was consensus among all from the beginning regarding Information Adviser Nahid Islam taking on the post of convener. He is likely to resign on February 25 from the adviser role to join the new party.

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Concentration of power stifles democracy

Rehman Sobhan tells SANEM conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

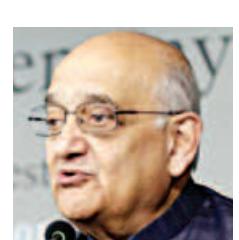
Renowned economist Rehman Sobhan yesterday criticised the dominance of dynastic leadership within major parties, the growing influence of money in politics, and the escalating political violence, stating that these issues have severely undermined democracy.

The political analyst made the remarks at a session titled "Building Democratic Political Order in Post Insurrection Bangladesh: Putting Citizens in the Driver's Seat" on the second day of the 8th SANEM Annual Economists' Conference, held at the auditorium of the capital's Brac Centre Inn.

He said the political parties in Bangladesh are not merely organisations but entities deeply embedded in society. "In every village, you'll find someone associated with either the Awami League or the BNP... The root cause of the democratic decline in the country lies in the dynastic nature of the leadership within these parties."

"The concentration of power within a few families has stifled the internal democratic processes of these parties," he said, adding that the influence of money in politics is one of the growing challenges facing Bangladesh today.

"Politicians are using their positions not for public



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