

A questionable move by DMP

Giving security guards police power raises concerns

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police's (DMP) decision to empower private security personnel with the power to detain individuals suspected of crimes has raised concerns. While its objective—to bolster security during Ramadan and Eid—seems reasonable, the delegation of such powers to untrained private guards risks creating more problems than it solves. Under this initiative, as revealed by the DMP commissioner recently, guards deployed in shopping malls, residential areas, and markets—potential crime hotspots during festival/holiday seasons—will serve as members of an “auxiliary police force,” wearing official bands and having the power to make arrests if necessary. The process of appointing 500 such police assistants is said to be underway at present.

The question here is not about the legality of the move—which is being taken under the DMP Ordinance, 1976—but rather its security and accountability risks. First of all, the move blurs the line between trained law enforcement officers and private security guards, whose primary role is to monitor and report incidents, not to enforce the law. Unlike police officers, private guards do not undergo the same rigorous training, ethical scrutiny or legal oversight. Granting them the authority to arrest people without proper training invites the possibility of abuse. The question is: how will the DMP prevent this scenario, especially when those will be unaccompanied by police?

The DMP commissioner has stated that auxiliary officers will be “legally protected” like police officers, but does that mean they will also be held to the same accountability standards? If an auxiliary officer makes an unjust arrest or uses excessive force, will they face the same consequences as a regular officer? There's a potential legal grey area that could lead to chaos and further insecurity. We must say that this decision reflects poorly on the DMP's capacity to do its job. The commissioner has cited the limited number of police personnel and the need to grant officers leave for Eid as justifications for the move. While we acknowledge the resource constraints amid increasing street crimes, the answer is not to outsource policing, however temporarily, to private security personnel.

The DMP should be credited for boosting security measures in the capital in recent days. According to its media wing, 667 patrol teams have been deployed and 71 checkpoints have been set up to tackle crimes. While this has likely stretched the force thin, the decision to delegate police powers to private guards is as troubling as the Awami League government's move to grant similar powers to Ansar shortly before the 2024 election. Instead of hastily delegating arrest powers, what the DMP should do is focus on strengthening its own capacity.

Arresting rapists is not enough

More must be done to prevent violence against women and children

Everything that is wrong with our society's approach to women is reflected in the recent rape of an eight-year-old in Magura. As revealed by reports, the alleged perpetrators and abettors of this abominable crime are the child's relatives—her sister-in-laws. They not only tried to cover it up by denying the victim immediate medical attention, but the sister was also physically assaulted by her husband to prevent her from speaking out. Even the sister's mother-in-law tried to mislead doctors about the child's injuries after taking her to hospital. Meanwhile, the sister herself previously faced sexual violence threats from the alleged rapist—she had returned to her parents' home in fear of being attacked only to be sent back to her in-laws, this time with her younger sister. Every aspect of this crime or its build-up reeks of the toxic patriarchy entrenched in our society.

Even on International Women's Day, as protests swept across the country demanding punishment for the perpetrators of the above case, five more rape allegations involving girls aged between 4 and 10 emerged from four districts. It is deeply alarming and shameful that not a single day passes without the fear that a girl/woman, regardless of how young or old, will fall victim to sexual and physical violence in this country. According to the Human Rights Support Society, at least 6,305 women and girls were raped in the past five years—an average of more than three rapes per day. A separate analysis by this newspaper, based on Ain o Salish Kendra's data, found that one woman is raped every nine hours, and three out of every five victims of sexual violence are children or adolescents. Even the most recent Violence Against Women Survey Bangladesh 2024 has revealed that adolescent girls are more vulnerable to both intimate and non-intimate partner violence than older age groups.

Against this backdrop, simply arresting perpetrators is not enough—they must be punished, too. As per a report by this daily, convictions occurred in only 1.48 percent of the 20,914 violence against women and children cases filed through 14 One-Stop Crisis Centres between 2001 and July 2024. Clearly, without overhauling the judicial process, perpetrators will continue to commit crimes with impunity. Moreover, there must be robust education and awareness programmes to teach boys and men about respect and proper behaviour towards women. The government's initiative to set up 130 camps across the country to ensure women's and children's safety sounds promising, but it must not become just another underutilised programme like the helplines. It must deliver results.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Mukti Songram Somonnoy Committee formed

On this day in 1971, leftist forces in exile formed the Bangladesh Jatiyo Mukti Songram Somonnoy Committee (Bangladesh National Freedom Struggle Organising Committee) in West Bengal, India. Meetings were held at army headquarters in Rawalpindi in West Pakistan to apparently figure out how to tackle the Non-Cooperation Movement that was taking place in then East Pakistan.

What the Democracy Index tells us about Bangladesh



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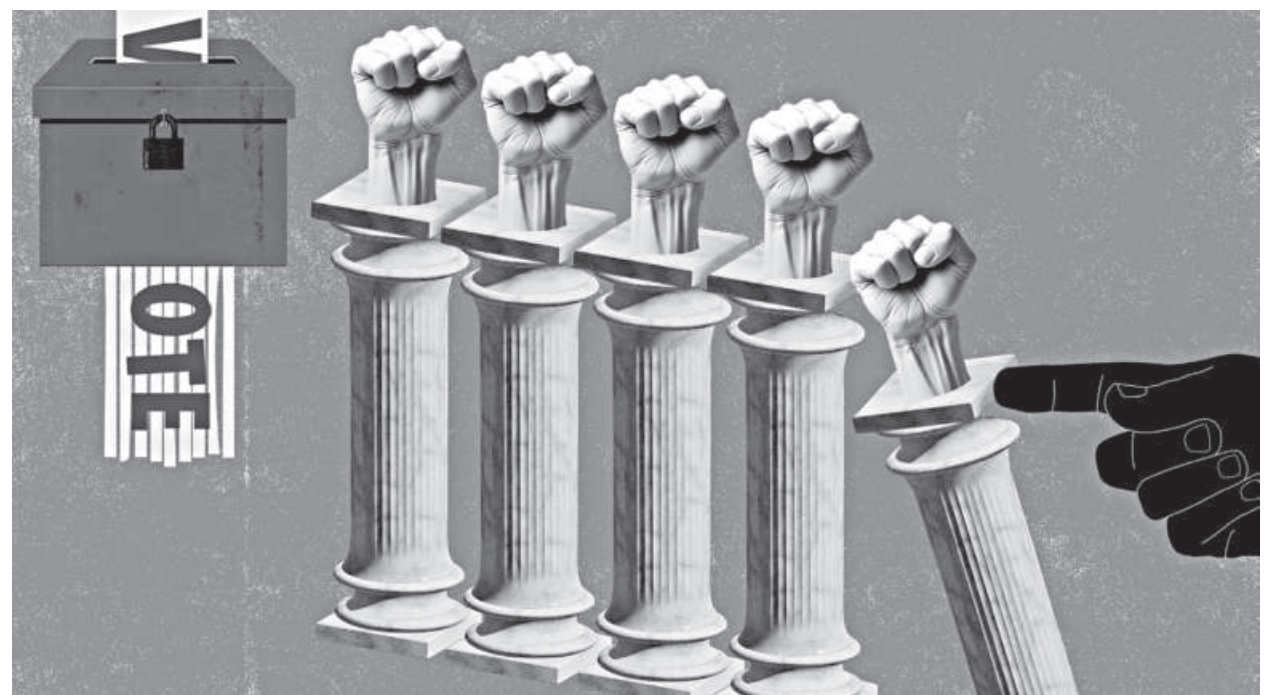
The Democracy Index by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) is out. Out of 167 countries—165 countries and two territories included in the index—Bangladesh now ranks 100th, closer to the lower end of the classification. Bangladesh's ranking has also seen the steepest decline globally. The country lags behind India (41st) but is well ahead of Pakistan (124th). In fact, Bangladesh shares the 100th position in the Democracy Index with Benin, one of the poorest countries in Africa. Assessing the overall results of the index, it seems that the world's democracies are struggling.

This year, Norway tops the Democracy Index ranking. Nine of the top 10 countries in the ranking are in Europe, with New Zealand, placed second, being the only exception. Among the worst performers in the ranking are Pakistan, South Korea, Kuwait, Georgia, Qatar, Romania, and Guinea-Bissau. Bangladesh, which ranked 73rd in 2023, dropped to 75th in 2024 and slid down to 100th this year. One insightful exercise would be to compare the Democracy Index of these countries with their Human Development Index (HDI), which is a composite index of people's physical well-being in terms of longevity, knowledge, and standard of living. Even though countries like South Korea, Qatar, Kuwait, and Georgia belong to the very high human development category—implying that they have ensured the physical well-being of their people—their low rankings in the Democracy Index indicate that the voice and autonomy of their people are restricted.

Democracy is not a perfect political system, but it is the best we have. Democracy is intrinsically valuable, like human rights, and given that, it is a moot question to ask whether democracy fosters economic growth. If it facilitates economic growth, well and good. But even if it does not, it is invaluable for its own sake. Democracy has been found to solidify human rights, provide people with voice and autonomy, and facilitate equity. History tells us that famines have never

occurred in countries where democracy prevails. The struggle for democracy embodies the spirit of democracy.

Given this broader context, a relevant question is: how critical is the Democracy Index? Should we take it too seriously or should we take it with a grain of salt? Is the Democracy Index a true measure of democracy or is it a statistical gimmick? Regarding the first issue, yes, we should take note of it as it serves as an indication—



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

however imperfect—of the democratic environment of a society. Furthermore, by ranking countries, the Democracy Index encourages healthy competition among nations. At the same time, however, we should take it with a grain of salt, as it has many nuances. Regarding the second issue, it is part of a contemporary, thriving index business that is mushrooming globally. It may not always represent what it claims to measure. In a strict sense, it is not a definitive measure of democracy.

A concept is always broader than its measures. Any measure, however

a grain of salt.

Based on this index, countries have been categorised into four groups: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes. Bangladesh has never been in the “full democracy” category. In 2006, it was in the “flawed democracy” category. Between 2008 and 2024, the country moved to the “hybrid regime” category. A hybrid regime is defined as a system where free and fair elections are often obstructed. In this regime, the ruling party puts opposition parties under pressure, and the judiciary is

and democracy in Bangladesh are government functioning and citizens' freedom. Since Bangladesh is undergoing a series of reform processes, these issues should be prominent in those reforms.

In the context of Bangladesh, the EIU report concluded that, on the one hand, the interim government is under pressure to hold the national election quickly, but on the other, it is prioritising reforms to restore democratic institutions. This tension could delay the most anticipated election in Bangladesh.

Let's aim for a future built on equality, inclusion



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Envision a world where equality is not a hope but a reality, where every individual, regardless of gender, has the freedom and opportunity to shape their future. A world where leadership is defined by vision, not bias, and where inclusivity is the foundation for progress. Imagine!

Leadership is not a privilege bestowed upon a select few; it is a responsibility, a force that shapes the course of history. And yet, for centuries, half of humanity—women—have been systematically denied their rightful place at decision-making tables. If we are to build a future that is sustainable, where prosperity is shared, and development is a right and not a luxury, we must confront this imbalance with urgency.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) speak of equality, justice, and a world where no one is left behind. But how can we claim progress when women remain underrepresented in leadership across sectors—political, corporate, and social? The percentage of women in legislatures globally was just over 27 percent in 2024, while just 6.6 percent of CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies are occupied by women. Even in countries that pride themselves on progressiveness, representation remains dismal. The United States, despite its global

influence, has never had a female president.

It is not a question of whether women are capable. They are. Yet, systems are not designed to include them. Women receive much less mentorship than men in professional settings. Women have been told, generation after generation, to wait, to prove themselves, to work harder. And even when they do, the doors remain closed. The issue is not the lack of talent; it is the lack of access.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that women are not just participants in change—they are its drivers. In Bangladesh, during the July uprising, women fought alongside men. In times of crisis, in movements for justice, and in community-building, women lead. But when the dust settles, they are pushed back to the margins. The same world that benefits from their strength refuses to acknowledge their leadership.

This contradiction is global. We are told to be patient, to celebrate token inclusions, to be satisfied with incremental progress. But progress is not real until leadership by women is expected instead of being considered an anomaly.

Our understanding of leadership, strength, and power itself needs to evolve. For too long have these concepts been framed through a predominantly male lens, rooted in

dominance, control, and hierarchical authority. True leadership, however, must be redefined beyond these narrow constructs. Strength is not about exerting power over others; it is about resilience, collaboration, and the ability to nurture and uplift. As Vandana Shiva and other thinkers have argued, the dominant global paradigms often impose external values on women, rather than recognising and amplifying the strength inherent in their own cultures, traditions, and ways of knowing. We need to move away from seeing leadership as a contest of supremacy, and instead embrace a more holistic, inclusive, and humane vision of power.

Girls from the most unaddressed communities, from the chars of the Brahmaputra, once lacking even basic services, are now leading and representing their people on global platforms. This transformation—from survival to ambition—has taken over two decades of our role in nurturing their leadership within communities. Their success proves that true empowerment lies in confidence, dignity, and the ability to change mindsets. Friendship has supported young women in accessing higher education, amplifying their voices in global climate forums and policymaking. These women are not just beneficiaries of change; they are its architects, shaping policies and proving that leadership flourishes when women are given the chance to rise.

However, empowerment must also be about enabling women to lead on their own terms, not forcing them into predefined roles dictated by external perspectives. Real empowerment means allowing women to build leadership based on their own belief systems, cultural identities, and lived experiences. It is not about making

them fit into an existing mould, but about giving them the tools and space to create their own.

Some argue that leadership should be about competence, not gender. And I agree. But the reality is, women are not given the same opportunities to become competent in the first place. Leadership is not just about raw talent; it is also about training, mentorship, networks, and experience. And for generations, women have been systematically excluded from these channels of growth. We do not seek special treatment; we seek the same opportunities that men have always had.

To balance eons of imbalance, we still need quotas, reserved seats, and deliberate interventions. The goal is not to keep these interventions forever, as we see that companies with at least 30 percent women in leadership roles are on average 15 percent more profitable. The goal is to create a world where they are no longer needed. When we fail to include women in leadership, the world loses more than just numbers. It loses vision, perspective, and a different way of thinking. Studies have shown that women in leadership prioritise long-term stability over short-term wins, and that they are more collaborative, more inclusive in decision-making.

This is not about replacing men; it is about completing the circle of requirements, especially in leadership. We cannot continue with a world where decisions are made by only one half of humanity. Structural change is needed, with more investment in women's leadership, mentorship, and access to power. Young girls must grow up seeing women in leadership as a norm, not as an exception. Because leadership does not happen by accident; it happens by preparation.