

## PAPAL CONCLAVE Voting process

AFP, Vatican City

**CARDINAL ELECTORS:** 133 cardinals under age 80 gather in the Vatican, staying in Santa Marta guesthouse under strict secrecy rules.

**OPENING RITUALS:** They attend mass, gather in the Pauline Chapel to pray, then proceed to the Sistine Chapel where the conclave officially begins.

**OATH & ISOLATION:** Cardinals take an oath of secrecy and commitment, and all non-electors leave the chapel upon the command "extra omnes."

**BALLOT SYSTEM:** Ballots are distributed; electors write their chosen candidate's name anonymously and submit it in a ceremonial urn.

**VOTE COUNTING:** Scrutineers count and record votes; revisers double-check accuracy. Two-thirds majority is required to elect a pope.

**VOTING ROUNDS:** Two voting sessions occur daily. A candidate has to secure two-thirds of the votes.

■ If voting continues for three days without a winner, there is a day of prayer, reflection and dialogue. If there is no winner after another seven ballots, there is another day of pause.

■ If the cardinals reach a fourth pause with no result, they can agree to vote only on the two most popular candidates, with the winner requiring a clear majority.

**SMOKE SIGNALS:** Ballots are burned after each round—black smoke signals no decision, white smoke indicates a new pope.

**ELECTION CONFIRMATION:** When a cardinal accepts the election, he becomes pope immediately after giving his consent.

## Chequered history of papal polls

AGENCIES

Cardinals yesterday moved into the Vatican accommodation where they will stay during the conclave, on the eve of their historic, secretive meeting to elect a new pope. Following the death of Pope Francis on April 21, 133 cardinal electors will gather today in the Sistine Chapel for an election that could last hours, days, or even months. Here are some notable papal elections through the ages.

**THE DOVE DECIDES:** In 236, the Christian community of Rome was debating potential papal candidates when a white dove landed on the head of a bystander, Fabian.

"At this, everyone, as if moved by a single divine inspiration, eagerly and wholeheartedly called out that Fabian was worthy," according to Eusebius, a Church historian of the era.

The blessing was a mixed one for Fabian, who died 14 years later

a martyr, persecuted by Emperor Decius.

**LARGE-SCALE BRIBERY:** In the early Church, popes were elected by members of the clergy and the Roman nobility, and the votes were rife with meddling.

One of the most infamous elections was in 532, following the death of Boniface II, which involved "large-scale bribing of royal officials and influential senators", according to PG Maxwell-Stuart in "Chronicle of the Popes". In the end, an ordinary priest was elected, Mercurius.

In 1059, Nicholas II gave cardinals sole authority to choose pontiffs.

**LOCK THEM UP:** The idea of locking up the cardinals to encourage a quick decision began in the 13th century – the word conclave comes from the Latin phrase meaning "with key".

In 1241, when the election was dragging on, the head of Rome's

government locked the cardinals into a dilapidated building and refused to clean the lavatories or provide doctors for those who fell ill.

According to Frederic Baumgartner in his "Behind Locked Doors: A History of the Papal Elections", the cardinals only reached a decision after one of them died and the Romans threatened to exhume his corpse and have it make decisions.

After 70 days, they agreed on Goffredo Castiglioni, who became Celestine IV.

**THE LONGEST CONCLAVE:** The longest conclave in history lasted almost three years following the death of Clement IV in November 1268, held in the papal palace at Viterbo, near Rome.

From late 1269 the cardinals allowed themselves to be locked in to try to reach a decision, and by June 1270, frustrated locals tore the roof off in a bid to speed things along.

They were apparently inspired by a quip by an English cardinal that without the roof, the Holy Spirit could descend unhindered.

Teobaldo Visconti became pope Gregory X in September 1271.

**RATION CUTS:** In response to the chaos the led to his election, Gregory X changed the rules, requiring cardinals to meet within 10 days of the pope's death – and ordering that their food be reduced over time.

If there was no decision in three days, meals were to be reduced to only one of the two traditional Italian main courses. After five days, they would be cut back to just bread, water and wine, according to John L. Allen's book "Conclave". The cardinals were also barred from drawing on their incomes during a conclave.



## PAPAL FRONTRUNNERS

### CARDINAL LUIS 'CHITO' ANTONIO TAGLE, 67

Some observers believe the future of the church's leadership lies outside the traditionally elected class of Italian cardinals. Tagle, from the Philippines, might suit the cardinals who want that growth to be more visible. The country is the most Catholic in the world, with 80 percent of its 100 million people identifying as Catholics. If elected, Tagle would be the first Asian pope. Tagle currently leads the church's evangelisation programmes from the Vatican.

### CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN, 70

Italian and present Vatican secretary of state, Parolin's background and position within the church mean he has a strong chance of being considered for pope. He has held the number two position in the Vatican since 2013. With diplomatic stints for the church in Nigeria, Mexico, Spain and Italy, he is regarded as a skilled, stable hand on the world stage.

### CARDINAL PETER KODWO APPIAH TURKSON, 76

Of three prominent African frontrunners, Turkson, who hails from Ghana, is seen as the more moderate and, thus, more suited to diplomacy. The cohort of African cardinals is, in general, regarded as quite conservative, particularly when it comes to the position of women in the church and same-sex marriage. Experts previously marked Turkson as a favourite in 2013.

### CARDINAL PETER ERDO, 72

Described as cautious and risk averse, the Hungarian priest is a respected lawyer and staunch conservative who is likely to have backing from those seeking a change of approach from Pope Francis's style of leadership. The priest was viewed as a favourite in 2013, when he was 60 years old, but did not gain strong backing. At the time, observers said he was seen as too young.

### CARDINAL MICHAEL CZERNY, 78

Originally from Czechoslovakia but raised in Canada, the cardinal leads the social justice operations of the Vatican. He was appointed by Pope Francis and is, like him, a Jesuit – an arm of the church known for its focus on education, missionary work and charitable activities. The two men were considered to be close. Czerny has worked in Africa and Latin America and founded the African Jesuit AIDS Network. Experts say it is possible Czerny will appeal to progressives in the church, but there are doubts about whether the College would immediately vote for another Jesuit pope.

## 9 contentious sections shed

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A cyber security council will be formed under the act, he said, adding that if the authorities remove an online content, subsequent approval from the court must be obtained.

If the court rules that the content should not have been removed, it must be reinstated. Furthermore, the public must be informed when a content is taken down.

Prof Asif said the draft of the ordinance underwent 25 revisions following consultations at various levels. The final version was prepared after a three-hour meeting with civil society members.

Following legal vetting by the law ministry, the ordinance will be formally issued and it will be put in effect within a week, he said.

Many journalists had also been victimised under these provisions regarding defamation, he said.

Those accused of fraudulence in e-transactions, inciting religious or ethnic violence, hate speech, sexual harassment, blackmail, and publication of obscene material may be granted bail, he said.

The maximum punishment under the act will be two years in prison, he said.

"There will also be provisions

for punishment in cases of false accusations. The authorities will have measures in place to detect such cases."

Online betting will be prohibited under the act, he said.

### REDRAWING CONSTITUENCIES

The boundaries of constituencies were often drawn arbitrarily under the previous government, he said.

The Election Commission had proposed some amendments to the law, and the draft has now received final approval.

Once the ordinance is gazetted, the EC will be able to carry out the necessary activities.

## NCP for electoral college for electing president

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into the electoral college to widen democratic participation.

The party opposed the abolition of the positions of zila parishad (district council) chairpersons and upazila vice chairpersons.

While the NCC proposed that union parishad chairpersons be elected by union parishad members, the NCP supported direct elections by the people.

Regarding local government elections, Tusher said the NCP opposes the use of party symbols, arguing that such practices have led to widespread violence and irregularities at the grassroots level.

"Without party symbols, good and capable individuals from society will be able to represent the people."

Unlike the NCC, which proposed a parliamentary committee investigate post-tenure allegations against the Election Commission, the NCP disagreed, warning of politicisation of the process and recommending investigation by a Supreme Judicial Council instead.

The NCP also proposed that members of the opposition lead key parliamentary standing committees.

While this would not apply to all

ministries, Tusher noted the party supports including opposition leaders in crucial committees such as those on public administration, public accounts, planning, and home affairs.

A major component of the NCP's reform plan is the creation of a permanent National Constitutional Council (NCC), comprising respected individuals such as former justices, constitutional experts, and nationally esteemed figures with moral credibility. This body would lead constitutional reform efforts and draft proposals on matters requiring long-term national consensus.

The council would also ensure that any amendment to fundamental state principles or major constitutional provisions is preceded by thorough national consultation.

Tusher said the NCP supports holding referendums on such critical amendments, though referendums should not be mandatory for minor changes that do not impact state power or essential national issues. "It must be clearly defined which provisions will require referendums," he added.

The NCP also supports appointing the Chief Justice based on seniority.

Additionally, the NCP has proposed establishing a separate Judicial Appointments Commission to ensure the impartial and merit-based recruitment of judges.

The NCP also calls for essential services—including food, housing, healthcare, education, and employment—to be enshrined as enforceable fundamental rights.

Alongside Sarwar Tusher, the NCP delegation at the meeting included Member Secretary Akhter Hossain, Chief Organiser (North) Sarjis Alam, Zabeed Rasin, and Arman Hossain.

Earlier in the day, the delegation formally presented the party's views to the NCC.

Acknowledging the NCP's proposal, Prof Ali Riaz, vice-chair of the NCC, said, "Our goal is to establish Bangladesh as a democratic state in the future. These dialogues will help create the roadmap toward that goal. We are hopeful that this process will guide the second phase of discussions."

The NCC delegation included Justice Md Emdadul Haque, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Iftekharuzzaman, Safar Raj Hossain, Ayub Mia, and Monir Haider, Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser (Consensus).

## UN experts concerned over journo arrests

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and to explain how this is compatible with Bangladesh's obligations under international law.

They also sought all necessary steps to review and clarify the cases following international human rights standards on freedom of expression, due process and fair trial.

"Should the charges underlying their arrest and detention be unsubstantiated, we further urge their immediate release," read the letter dated March 7.

Rupa and Shakil have been in prison since August 31 last year and there has been no progress in their cases, it said.

In November 2024, Rupa was reportedly transferred to a condemnation cell, usually reserved for those sentenced to death.

"As a result, Rupa is forced to remain in her cell during the entire day, with no walks or contact with other prisoners. She has reportedly been denied her weekly phone call and has seen her lawyer only once."

The health conditions of Rupa and Shakil have reportedly deteriorated substantially since their imprisonment, it added.

Earlier on January 22, UK-based law firm Doughty Street Chambers representing Rupa and Shakil engaged the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Since Sheikh Hasina stepped down, various other media outlets have been closed and journalists fired due to ultimatums issued by the protestors.

This newspaper has found at least 266 journalists have been implicated in various cases related to the events of the July uprising.

"It is notably concerning that journalists have been accused of charges of the utmost seriousness, reportedly including murder and inciting murder, and put under provisional detention without reportedly having had any evidence of their direct participation in such acts presented," the UN experts said.

They also said twenty-eight journalists are reported to have been charged with "crimes against humanity", and an unknown number of journalists and media workers allegedly remain in detention.

"There are reports of harassment and threats against journalists and editors by non-state groups for their journalistic work which is creating a chilling effect on the wider media," the letter said.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights (ICCPR) guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression and that any restriction must be compatible with the requirements set out in Article 19(3) ICCPR.

While states have the right and obligation to prosecute alleged acts of incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, these must not be conflated with the offences of incitement to murder or murder, the UN experts said.

Any such accusation must be crafted with care to ensure that they do not serve, in practice, to stifle freedom of expression or create a chilling effect on journalists or other citizens, they said.

Any judicial proceeding must carefully respect the principles of due process, the right to a fair trial, and the guarantees of the right to defence, which are ensured under international law.

The UN experts asked the government to explain how these conditions are consistent with the standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners and with Bangladesh's obligations under international law.

The experts sought the names and numbers of journalists currently in detention, arrested, charged, or under prosecution as well as the measures taken to prevent any such harassment.

Contacted, a foreign ministry official said: "I have to check it because this involves the home ministry and other related entities."

## HEFAZAT STATEMENT Expression of regret welcome, some remarks not Say 6 legal notice signatories

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The six women, including cultural activists and NCP leaders, who on May 5 served a legal notice on Hefazat-e-Islam over derogatory remarks against women during a rally, yesterday welcomed the Islamist group's expression of regret.

They, however, voiced concerns over parts of Hefazat's press release, which included assertions saying they reject the "Western agenda of turning women into commodities" and will not tolerate any "excesses regarding religious issues".

Hefazat further alleged that "extremist feminists have been unleashed" in society.

Criticising such framing, the women, in a new statement, urged Hefazat-e-Islam to move away from such labelling.

"We respectfully urge them to engage in dialogue with women through talks or public debates. Gender equality is by no means a Western agenda.

"All must coexist in society in their own capacity; that is the norm," they said in the statement, adding that they hope Hefazat leaders will refine and sharpen their understanding," the statement read.

They also said it is inappropriate to question women's roles and create undue social pressure.

"Women played a crucial role in the downfall of the authoritarian regime. That is why we believe that, even in times of disagreement, maintaining the space for dialogue is essential and such dialogue will lead us toward a future social contract based on mutual respect and inclusion," it added.

They also said the legal notice they sent would be considered withdrawn after Hefazat informs their lawyer about its statement of regret.

"We hope the new Bangladesh will belong to all its people. We appreciate and welcome this act of expressing regret as a constructive step forward," the statement concludes.

On May 5, the six women served the legal notice on Hefazat for verbally abusing women in public during a rally on May 3 in the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan.

The rally was held to press home Hefazat's demands, which included the dissolution of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission.

Filed through Advocate Palash, the notice was signed by three cultural figures – Umme Rayhana, Umme Farhana and Camellia Sharmin Chura – and NCP leaders Syeda Nilima Dola, Dyuti Aranya Chowdhury and Neela Afroze.

The notice sought an explanation within seven days as to why a defamation case should not be filed against Hefazat-e-Islam.

In response to the legal notice, Hefazat-e-Islam yesterday expressed regret over the use of "unexpected and offensive" language by two speakers at the rally.

In an official statement to the media, the group's Joint Secretary General, Azizul Haque Islamabadi, clarified that Hefazat does not endorse such "undesirable" remarks.

## Hefazat regrets offensive language at May 3 rally

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'Jongi' [terrorist or militant], 'Moulabadi' [fundamentalist], 'religious exploiters', and 'communal' to refrain from such offensive terms."

Azizul said, "The very notion that we harbour hatred towards women is absurd. Portraying an ideological battle as 'hatred towards women' is sheer ignorance."

He added that Hefazat is willing to engage in reform efforts to protect women's legitimate rights in accordance with their respective

religious laws.

"However, from the outset, a women's affairs reform commission was formed by sidelining Islamic clerics and other religious scholars and instead including a group of NGO-fuelled feminists."

He said that Hefazat's role in expanding female literacy through free education and accommodation at Qawmi madrasas is often overlooked.

"Our work benefits thousands of underprivileged girls every year

without any government funding."

Azizul alleged that the portrayal of religious scholars as misogynists is part of a long-running political campaign.

"We believe imperialist forces are using radical feminist groups to discredit us, as our religious stance is seen as an obstacle to their agenda of commodifying women under modern systems."

He warned that Hefazat would not tolerate any excesses regarding religious issues.