

FROM OLIGARCHY TO CITIZEN'S REPUBLIC

Reforming the executive branch



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The absence of rule-based functioning of the state led the country into an oligarchy during the previous regime. The erosion can be attributed to collusion between rule-makers (politicians) and a section of money-makers (business elite). Complexity also arises from the country's inherited bureaucratic structure, originally designed by the British for colonial resource extraction.

The task of state-building is to establish an executive branch, comprising two distinct yet interconnected components: elected executives (politicians gaining office through democratic elections) and career executives (civil servants appointed based on merit and expertise). This division can strike a delicate balance between democratic representation and administrative efficiency. However, in Bangladesh, the crucial distinction between elected and career executives has unfortunately never truly gained a foothold.

The tripartite patronage of business, politics, and bureaucracy forms the bedrock of the oligarchic structure, where business elites fund political campaigns and gain legislative favours, while simultaneously securing the cooperation of career executives in implementing policies beneficial to their interests. This involves a complex web of informal understandings and quid pro quo arrangements, blurring ethical boundaries and diverting state resources for private gain. Thus, civil service appointments and promotions are frequently influenced by loyalty to the ruling party rather than by merit or professional competence.

Another significant factor is the decay of institutions designed for checks and balances. Critical independent bodies, such as the judiciary, parliamentary oversight mechanisms, the Election Commission,

the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG), and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), are struggling to operate with autonomy. Their powers are frequently curtailed or their appointments influenced, ensuring that they primarily serve the interests of the ruling elite rather than acting as genuine bulwarks against abuse of power. Without robust checks and balances, the distinction between the elected mandate and bureaucratic implementation fades into a unitary, self-serving apparatus, where power remains concentrated and largely unchallenged.

A demarcation between political appointees and career bureaucrats

The historical development of the executive branch highlights different approaches to political accountability and administrative competence.

In Europe, the emphasis has been on establishing a professional and impartial civil service. The United Kingdom, through its Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854, initiated a merit-based civil service to ensure continuity in governance irrespective of changes in elected leadership. France adopted a centralised, elite bureaucracy under the Napoleonic system, operating independently to implement policies set by elected officials. Germany, with its Weberian model, has a non-partisan, rule-bound bureaucracy.

The US grappled with the "spoils system" in the 19th century, where elected leaders appointed loyalists, often leading to corruption. The Pendleton Act of 1883 marked a turning point, introducing merit-based recruitment. Today, the US executive branch is a blend of political appointees, such as cabinet secretaries, and career civil servants who are largely protected from

partisan removal.

Many Asian and African developing countries inherited colonial bureaucracies. These countries have witnessed civil service appointments turn into tools for patronage, undermining institutional autonomy and efficiency. Botswana, in Africa, stands out as a notable exception, with a relatively meritocratic bureaucracy. Singapore is a beacon of a merit-based bureaucracy.

There is also a need for a whistleblowing law. Establishing a truly independent Public Service Commission is essential for appointments and a senior selection board for promotions on merit.

Public money accountability framework
The country's accountability framework for public money and revenue rests on three constitutional pillars: legislative authorisation for any expenditure,

enhancements, there are concerns about executive influence. Notably, any rules or agreements with foreign or international bodies now require government approval—a move that might constrain the CAG's operational independence and conflict with Article 128(4) of the constitution, which prohibits external direction or control over the CAG's duties.

Additionally, while the ordinance permits audits of revenue receipts credited to the consolidated fund, it excludes audits of the accuracy of tax and non-tax revenue assessments, creating an accountability gap in revenue collection processes. This could open avenues for collusive fraud in revenue assessment. It also deviates from the Supreme Court's directives on comprehensive audit coverage.

To curb undue influence, strict laws on campaign finance must be enacted and enforced to limit recorded and unrecorded donations and lobbying. Mandatory disclosure of politicians' business interests, similar to the US's Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge (STOCK) Act, could enhance transparency and accountability, helping to identify potential conflicts of interest.

The ACC needs to be significantly empowered with genuine autonomy and resources to effectively investigate collusion amongst politicians, bureaucrats and business elites. Furthermore, robust judicial oversight is necessary to review arbitrary executive decisions and ensure adherence to legal and constitutional norms.

In the grand mechanism of a state, the elected executive is the engine, and the career executive is the transmission.

For Bangladesh to truly navigate the road of progress, these two vital components need to work in harmonious and seamless coordination, transcending its colonial bureaucratic past.

Without reforms to depoliticise the civil service, install local self governments, and enforce transparency and accountability, the nation risks an entrenched system that hinders the journey towards public welfare. A transformed, effective, and strong executive can only champion rule-abiding state-building and uphold the social contract for a citizens' republic.



FILE VISUAL: MAHIYA TABASSUM

In Latin America, countries such as Brazil and Argentina have experienced cycles of politicisation, where new governments frequently replace bureaucrats with loyalists. In contrast, Chile has developed a more stable civil service.

Key reforms are needed, particularly in the "rules of business," to transform the executive branch for state-building towards a citizens' republic.

A critical step is to legally protect career executives from arbitrary transfers and dismissals. The US's Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, the UK and France's principles of a merit-based, autonomous civil service, and Germany's Länder system can offer insights. Botswana's experience provides a model for effective anti-patronage bureaucratic reforms.

independent audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) under Article 128 of the constitution and the Comptroller and Auditor General (Additional Functions) Act, 1974 (now replaced by the Public Accounts Audit Ordinance, 2025), and parliamentary scrutiny through the Public Accounts Committee. Together, these mechanisms can establish a robust foundation for fiscal transparency. Yet, certain provisions in the 2025 ordinance require a revisit to safeguard the OCAG's autonomy to ensure that audits of revenue assessments are fully integrated to preserve the integrity of public financial management.

The 2025 ordinance formalises audit procedures by vesting the performance audit mandate in the CAG. Despite institutional



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these women endure? What is the weight of the hidden burden they carry while navigating exclusion and microaggressions instead of focusing fully on productivity? What emotional and mental labour is demanded simply to maintain composure in predominantly male environments?

Another incident gave me a very similar realisation. It took place at a university debating club where a group of senior alumni—both men and women—were seriously discussing the state and its power. Suddenly, one guy said, "Let's change the topic. This is going over the heads of these girls." These were educated professionals working in important national and international roles. Yet, they still believed that some topics were too difficult for women to understand.

Lastly, and perhaps most uncomfortably, we must also reflect on how women in national political leadership—both seasoned figures and the newcomers—are treated in our public discourse. The nation has witnessed, time and again, how the focus shifts from their political work to their appearance.

Their sarees, eyebrows, and even undergarments have become topics of discussion and viral memes. This speaks volumes about our collective tendency to trivialise women's contributions by reducing them to objects of scrutiny and mockery.

For too long, researchers and policy experts have generalised that women's voices are absent in rural, economically disadvantaged, and less-educated population settings. They have confined women's lack of agency to blue-collar (jobs involving manual labour) sectors. But the examples cited above are within the boardrooms, conference tables, auditoriums, and lecture halls of urban Bangladesh, the so-called "progressive spaces." Our narrow focus has led to an overestimation of progress in establishing gender equality in urban, white-collar environments, where women's empowerment is often portrayed as being complete.

It is high time we examined the root causes of these persistent exclusions beyond simply attributing them to patriarchy. While patriarchy is deeply embedded in society and shapes

people's behaviours and attitudes, this explanation alone is insufficient. Undoubtedly, a big part of the failure also lies in our education system. It teaches the rules of inclusion but doesn't change mindsets. It produces skilled female graduates but doesn't

prepare men to work with women as equals.

Symbolic gestures and headline-friendly policies are no longer enough. What is urgently needed is systemic transformation. Structures that enable women to not just be

present, but to belong. To not just speak, but to be heard. To not just perform, but to lead freely without fear of invisibility. Until then, we will continue to ask ourselves: are we truly in the room or just in the photo?

শিল্প আৰ্থিক প্রযোজন গৃহীত কৰিবলৈ আৰম্ভ কৰা হৈলৈ		বিদ্যুৎ ও জ্বালানী নিৰাপত্তা সৰ্বোচ্চ অধিকাৰ
বাংলাদেশ পেট্রোলিয়াম এক্সপ্লোরেশন এন্ড প্ৰোডাকশন কোম্পানী লিমিটেড (বাপেক্স)		বাংলাদেশ পেট্রোলিয়াম এক্সপ্লোরেশন এন্ড প্ৰোডাকশন কোম্পানী লিমিটেড (বাপেক্স)
BANGLADESH PETROLEUM EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION COMPANY LIMITED (BAPEX)		(A Company of Petrobangla)
Foreign Purchase Department, Administration Division, BAPEX Bhaban (Level-4), 4 Kawran Bazar C/A, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh		web: www.bapecx.com.bd
Invitation for International Tender		
1. Ministry /Division	Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources/ Energy & Mineral Resources Division	
2. Agency	Bangladesh Oil, Gas & Mineral Corporation (Petrobangla)	
3. Company	Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration & Production Company Limited (BAPEX)	
4. Procuring Entity Name	General Manager, Administration Division, BAPEX	
5. Procuring Entity District	Dhaka	
6. Invitation ref. No.	BAPEX/ADMIN/INT/TEN-1299/2025, dated: 13-07-2025	
7. Invitation for	Procurement of Wireline Logging & Related Services for Rupganj #01 workover Cum drilling and Semutang #06 workover wells.	
KEY INFORMATION		
8. Procurement Method	One Stage Two Envelope Tendering Method (OSTETM)	
FUNDING INFORMATION		
9. Budget and Source of Funds	BAPEX Own Fund (Under Cash Foreign Exchange)	
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
10. Division/Project Name	Well Services Division/Rupganj #01 workover cum drilling and Semutang #06 workover wells	
11. Last Selling Date of Tender Document	07-09-2025 at 15.00 hrs. (BST)	
12. Place of Tender Selling	a) Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration & Production Co. Ltd. (BAPEX), Accounts & Finance Division (level-3), BAPEX Bhaban, 4 Kawran Bazar C/A, Dhaka-1215. b) Petrobangla, Petrocenter, 3, Kawran Bazar C/A, Dhaka-1215. c) Titas Gas T & D PLC, 105, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Kawran Bazar C/A, Dhaka-1215.	
13. Tender Closing Date & Time	08-09-25 at 11.00 Hrs. (BST)	
14. Tender Opening Date & Time	08-09-25 at 11.30 Hrs. (BST)	
15. Place of Tender Receiving & Opening	Foreign Purchase Department, Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration & Production Co. Ltd. (BAPEX), BAPEX Bhaban (Level-4), 4, Kawran Bazar C/A, Dhaka-1215.	
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER		
16. Eligibility of Tenderer	i) The Tenderer shall have overall 10 years and minimum 7 years specific experience of relevant field. ii) Bonafide Service Providers or their authorized agents of all countries except which Countries do not have any diplomatic relation with Bangladesh.	
17. Brief Description of Goods	Procurement of Wireline Logging & Related Services for Rupganj #01 workover Cum drilling and Semutang #06 workover wells.	
18. Price of Tender Document	Bangladeshi Taka 5,000.00 or USD 45.00 (Non-refundable).	
19. Procuring Entity Details	General Manager (Administration) BAPEX	
20. Address of the Official Inviting Tender	Level 5, BAPEX Bhaban, 4, Kawran Bazar C/A, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh.	
21. Special instruction	a) Tender must remain valid for 120 (one hundred twenty) days from the date of closing of the tender. b) Time for Completion of Delivery: for Rupganj #01 workover cum drilling is 90 (ninety) days and Semutang #06 workover is 45 (forty five) days. c) Amount of tender security for USD 14,000.00 or BDT 17,00,000.00, or any equivalent amount of freely convertible currency in the form of Bank Guarantee or Pay Order issued by a scheduled bank in Bangladesh or from any reputable foreign bank duly endorsed by a scheduled bank in Dhaka with full obligation and liabilities. d) The tender security must remain valid for 148 (one hundred forty eight) days from the date of closing of the tender. e) If tender opening day happens to fall on any Govt. holiday or any unavoidable circumstances such as strike, Civil Commotion, Lockdown etc, tenders shall be opened at the same hours on the first subsequent working day. f) This tender notice will also be available at BAPEX Website: www.bapecx.com.bd and Petrobangla Website: www.petrobangla.org.bd and BPPA Website: www.bppa.gov.bd	
22. This tender will be conducted as per the PPA-2006 & PPR-2008.		
23. The procurement entity reserves the right to accept or reject in part or full of any or all tenders at any stage without assigning any reasons whatsoever.	General Manager (Admin.)	