

A democratic exercise restored

Kudos to all stakeholders for successfully holding Ducsu polls

A festive atmosphere, record turnout of voters, students buzzing with excitement—these are what marked the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) and hall union elections held on Tuesday. The high turnout demonstrated the level of anticipation surrounding the polls, with 78.36 percent of nearly 40,000 voters casting their ballots, much higher than the 2019 election that saw a 59.5 percent turnout. One could say this marks the triumphant return of a democratic exercise in DU that has incubated all major democratic movements in our history. For this, the administration, the candidates, the general students, and all others involved deserve to be commended.

The revived Ducsu will henceforth be headed by Abu Shadiq Kayem, SM Farhad, and Muhammad Mohiuddin Khan, elected as vice-president, general secretary, and assistant general secretary, respectively. The trio, contesting the polls from the Islami Chhatrabshibir-backed "Oikyaboddho Shikkharkhi Jote" panel, achieved a landslide victory. In fact, this panel swept the polls by winning nine secretarial and 11 executive member posts. The DU student community has spoken: they have chosen the leaders they want to represent them for the next year or so. This certainly marks a dramatic shift in campus politics.

During their campaigns, Shadiq, Farhad, and Mohiuddin pledged to bring a balance between education and politics, with plans to strengthen academia, work on student welfare, and turn DU into a "capacity-building hub." Now that they have won, they must make good on their election promises. We expect the new leadership to represent the entire student body and work for everyone's betterment, regardless of their political affiliations or ideologies. More importantly, we expect them to break free of the cycles of toxic politics where winning an election is viewed as tantamount to obtaining a free ticket to abusing power. Transparency and accountability must be upheld at every level of Ducsu operations.

The election has been described as acceptable and participatory by most observers. There were some complaints of irregularities, including allegations of rigging and breach of the code of conduct, but for the most part, students participated with enthusiasm and excitement. The allegations must nevertheless be investigated and actions taken accordingly. In the long run, we hope to see the election held on a regular basis, thus continuing the democratic practice of student politics at Dhaka University.

The same also applies to other comparable universities, with two more student elections—at Jahangirnagar University and Rajshahi University—scheduled for today (Thursday) and on September 25, respectively. We hope to see the continuation of festivity and participatory voting at these elections as well. Thus we hope to see democratic culture and healthy practices of campus politics established at all public universities, so that differences of ideas are celebrated rather than suppressed, and positions of power are used to serve the general student body, not to wield dominance over them. This hope for change, which last year's mass uprising ignited, must not be extinguished with the return of toxic campus politics.

Nepal's youth have given their verdict

Their movement a warning for countries with embedded corruption, inequality

We are amazed by how Nepal's government fell as Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli resigned amid massive youth-led protests against social media ban and government corruption. Reportedly, last week, the Oli-led government imposed a ban on 26 social media and messaging platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X. In response, thousands of mostly Gen Z protesters took to the streets across at least seven cities, including Kathmandu. What began as a protest against a social media ban quickly evolved into a nationwide movement demanding systemic change.

For years, young Nepalis have reportedly faced limited job opportunities, forcing millions to seek work abroad. This economic frustration, combined with growing anger over the lavish lifestyles of political elites, sparked widespread protests. The term "nepo kids"—used to mock the privileged children of top officials—went viral on social media, fuelling public outrage. Thus, even after the ban was lifted, the protests spread across the country, exposing deeper problems such as corruption, inequality, economic stagnation, elite privilege, and political instability.

The events in Nepal are, in many ways, similar to Bangladesh's uprising that led to Sheikh Hasina's fall last year. Here, protests over job quotas turned into a movement to oust the government. In both cases, public dissatisfaction with systems that ignored the rights and demands of ordinary citizens and favoured those in or connected to power sparked protests that ultimately led to the fall of the governments. While Nepal at least managed to control the violence relatively quickly, with clashes between security forces and protesters resulting in 19 deaths so far, Bangladesh's uprising saw over 1,400 deaths and thousands injured.

The Nepalis are now celebrating the fall of their government, but what comes next? Analysts in the country stress the urgent need for a transitional arrangement that includes leaders who still hold public trust, especially among the youth who led the movement. As a neighbour, we hope that stability is restored in Nepal soon, people's demands are respected, and the aspirations of the youth prioritised.

There are also lessons to be drawn from this recent cycle of events. When governments ignore rising inequality and corruption, and discrimination in society soars, people eventually rise up. No system can go unchallenged. In Nepal, Gen Z is leading the movement, showing that in the absence of a functional democracy, public unrest is inevitable. Therefore, to prevent such upheaval, governments must respond to the needs of their citizens, and the latter must have the ability to shape their own future.

EDITORIAL

The economic cost of delaying the election



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Bangladesh today stands at an intersection that is both economically and politically significant.

At first glance, the country has shown remarkable resilience. Despite the weight of global inflation, it has managed, against the odds, to keep prices more or less stable during the current interim administration. Though food and energy costs remain a worry for many households, a mix of subsidies, fiscal steps, and strict monetary policies taken by the interim government over the past year has helped prevent the kind of runaway inflation Sri Lanka and Pakistan experienced in 2022. Foreign exchange reserves have slowly improved, and the ready-made garment industry continues to play its part, keeping export earnings steady and supporting the balance of payments.

These are no small feats, and the government does deserve recognition for them. Officials will, in the coming months, understandably showcase these achievements as evidence of sound stewardship. A policymaker I spoke with confidently remarked that Bangladesh has "done better than its peers," and in a narrow sense, he is right. In an unstable global economy, maintaining macroeconomic steadiness does matter.

But here is the catch: macroeconomic steadiness without political stability is a fragile equilibrium. It can buy you time; it cannot buy you certainty. And in economics, certainty is often more valuable than a single quarter of good data.

The political vacuum that Bangladesh finds itself in is not just a constitutional or moral problem. It carries a price tag. Unfortunately, the rhetoric of our political parties is often about who should rule. The economic costs of the election delays are not given much thought.

Yet, the ordinary people feel it. Investors, both local and foreign, feel it. Businesses feel it. When elections are postponed or democratic clarity is absent, the economy pays. Many believe that so long as inflation is managed and exports continue, the economy is "safe." But this overlooks the less visible, longer-term damage caused by uncertainty.

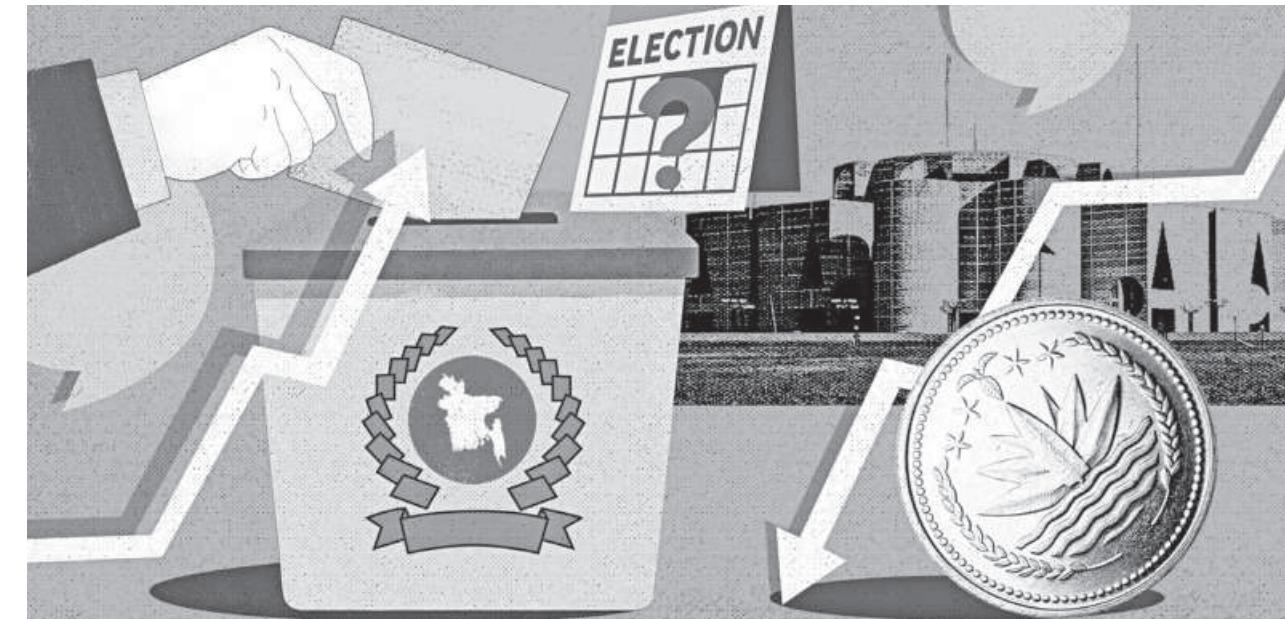
Numbers alone don't persuade investors. Capital has a political memory. It recalls past instability, delays, and voids. And it reacts accordingly.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into Bangladesh has been sluggish in recent years, despite global companies showing interest. I have spoken with representatives of major multinationals and hospitality groups who have slowed

want to know if Bangladesh is moving towards being a digitally focused economy that prioritises tech, or a manufacturing powerhouse offering stability, or a services hub. They want to understand the ethos of the political leadership. Without that clarity, their capital stays frozen.

In economics, perception is as important as performance. When people feel uncertain, they hold back. This causes families to delay purchases, businesses to stall investments, and exporters to hesitate taking long-term orders. Even if the government points to stable prices or rising reserves, mistrust among individuals doesn't go away.

Take, for example, Sri Lanka's economic crisis that came after years of denial that drained investors' confidence. Pakistan is another case



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

that shows how repeated delays and political churn keep investors wary and its currency unstable.

This is not only about investors. When garment buyers hesitate to place orders, jobs are at risk. When international hotels pause projects, construction workers and service staff lose opportunities. Visa restrictions from several countries are already making trade and travel more difficult for Bangladeshis. For our economy that depends heavily on exports, these hurdles are more than just diplomatic snubs; they translate into higher costs and tougher battles for businesses trying to win contracts overseas.

In today's globalised world, political uncertainty at home only makes things worse. When combined with

more delayed the political settlement, the more prolonged the economic hesitation. By the time data finally reflects this, much damage will already have been done.

Bangladesh still has time to avoid the paths of Sri Lanka and Pakistan. It still has the opportunity to convert today's fragile calm into genuine resilience. But doing so requires urgency. A clear, credible, time-bound return to democratic governance is not just a political necessity, it is also an economic one. The sooner political clarity is restored, the sooner businesses, both local and global, will begin investing again. The economy will not revive simply because of inflation numbers or export earnings. It will revive when confidence returns.

Returning after 33 years, what difference will Jucsu make?



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After over three decades, the Jahangirnagar University Central Students' Union (Jucsu) election is finally making a comeback. It was last held in 1992. If all goes as planned, the long awaited polls will take place on Thursday, just two days after the Ducsu election, marking a rare moment when two of the country's oldest public universities are reviving their student unions almost in tandem (to be followed by others soon).

For those of us who studied at JU, this is both nostalgic and bittersweet. It's nostalgic because Jucsu was more than a student body; it was the beating heart of the campus, a platform where students' voices mattered and democratic culture thrived.

I still vividly remember an incident when I attended the university's annual senate meeting as a correspondent for this newspaper. The senate, by tradition, was a gathering of teachers, registered graduates, and five elected Jucsu representatives, who were entrusted with carrying the voices of students into that forum. But in the absence of Jucsu representatives, those seats lay empty, and with them, the voices of students disappeared from the discussion. Their concerns and problems, too, were left largely untouched.

That day, when a teacher of philosophy boldly placed a set of

demands before the house on behalf of the students, a few journalists present in the press gallery instinctively broke into applause. It was unusual, perhaps even a protest against the silence where student voices ought to have been. Yet, those who clapped were politely asked to refrain from doing so, and reminded that this space was reserved for formal deliberation by participants.

Over the years, I have witnessed many protests demanding Jucsu elections. Students often staged demonstrations and pressed the administration to act. But in the end, those demands went unmet. Now that the long overdue election is finally being held, many hope it would mark a fresh, proper start. This is where Thursday's election also carries a bittersweet tone, as its return is being overshadowed by the troubling realities of vacant seats, uncontested posts, and a stark underrepresentation of women.

During the July uprising last year, hundreds of female students actively took part in the movement, many playing vital roles. Moreover, nearly half of the Jucsu voters are women because of the 50-50 admission system at the university. The total registered voters stand at 11,919, almost evenly split between men (6,102) and women (5,817). A total of 620 candidates are contesting 340 posts across the central

and hall unions, including 448 men and 172 women. For the 25 central union posts, 179 candidates are in the race—132 men and 45 women. The gaps in female representation are striking.

An analysis further shows that nearly 60 percent of hall posts are either uncontested or vacant. Out of 315 positions across 11 male and 10 female dormitories, 131 are uncontested and 68 remain vacant. According to a report by this daily, at least 10 female students alleged that cyberbullying, harassment, and the absence of a women-friendly political atmosphere are the main reasons behind their reluctance to join the polls. This is one of the barriers that must be removed if we are to build an inclusive student union that inspires change in the wider society as well.

This year's polls will feature contests among eight panels, including Jatiotabadi Chatradal (JCD), Islami Chhatrabshibir, Bangladesh Ganatantrik Chhatra Sangsad (BGCS), left-leaning organisations, and independents. Among them, Shibir, JCD, BGCS, and a section of leftist student groups have announced full panels under different banners, while the rest have declared partial panels. Candidates have announced ambitious manifestos, promising quality education, campus safety, cultural vibrancy, healthcare, transportation, and environmental conservation.

But manifestos mean little unless backed by genuine political will and administrative cooperation. Too often in our country, student politics has been synonymous with violence, patronage, and partisanship. The challenge before Jucsu is to prove that it can rise above these tendencies and be a union truly representative of students.

After the Ducsu polls, where the Islami Chhatrabshibir-backed panel swept most of the posts, all eyes are understandably on Jucsu, particularly in the political arena. This year, the DUCSU election was not merely an internal affair for Dhaka University students; it grew into a national issue, resonating even in rural areas.

A few days ago, while visiting my village, I was surprised to find many people actively discussing the daily developments and campaigns of the Ducsu election. This level of engagement reflects how deeply it resonated across the country. It's encouraging to see the election finally held without any major untoward incidents, barring the unfortunate death of a journalist from a private TV channel. This is a positive sign for student politics and democratic practices in our educational institutions.

Now, Jucsu is expected to break a 33-year-long silence at Jahangirnagar University. Its revival could pave the way for a more vibrant and representative student movement once again. So, despite the existing flaws and inadequacies, I allow myself some hope. A union elected after so long, however imperfect, is better than none. It offers students a chance to claim ownership of their campus, to debate ideas openly, to practice democracy in its most formative stage. If nurtured well, this can plant the seeds for a healthier political culture beyond campus walls.

The question is, will Jucsu 2025 be remembered as a milestone of renewal, or as a missed opportunity? That depends on how the winners conduct themselves, how the administration supports the process, and how ordinary students hold their representatives accountable.