

## EC must not allow any fake observer

Guidelines should be applied diligently in the screening process

Investigations conducted into the authenticity of election observers provisionally registered by the Election Commission (EC) by two Bangla dailies—*Prothom Alo* and *Samakal*—have been quite revealing. These investigations expose a startling failure of the EC to properly verify the expertise and capability of aspirant poll-monitoring organisations. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, the EC received 300 applications for enrolment as election observers. After initial scrutiny and some field-level verification, it published a preliminary list of 73 organisations deemed eligible for registration.

But barring a handful of exceptions, as both newspapers reveal, most of these organisations do not fulfil the required criteria for becoming election observers. Some exist only on paper; they could not be traced at their listed addresses. Quite a few are linked with political figures, which is clearly against the EC's prescribed preconditions. Unfortunately, this echoes the scandals of fake observers seen during the last three elections held under the previous regime of Sheikh Hasina. It may be recalled that in those elections, the phenomenon of fake observers was not confined to national boundaries but extended to groups imported from abroad.

The EC's guidelines on election observation clearly state that organisations registered with the government and engaged in promoting democracy, good governance, and human rights are eligible to apply for accreditation as poll monitors. They are also required to submit reports of their organisational activities over the past two years. The media probes show that the EC did not rigorously apply its own guidelines when compiling the preliminary list of observer organisations, whether due to its lack of capacity or negligence. Neither is acceptable, and this must be rectified immediately. Bangladesh cannot afford to let fake observers again distort the credibility of its elections.

There is little doubt that election observation by neutral monitors with expertise in detecting manipulation, undue interference, and partisan behaviour of polling officials is crucial for ensuring electoral credibility. The infiltration of fake observers into election processes is not unique to Bangladesh—it has become a global problem. National and international actors with vested interests often use fake observers to influence public perception of the fairness and quality of an election. As such practices pose a serious threat to democracy and may legitimise manipulated outcomes, a number of leading international and regional bodies have developed toolkits to detect and counter fake observers. The EC should consider seeking technical assistance on detecting such groups from international organisations, including the United Nations and the European Union.

Since 1991, Bangladesh has experienced both the best and the worst of election monitoring. With the weakening of democracy and rise of authoritarianism, we witnessed staged elections and the proliferation of fake observers. Following the student-led mass uprising of 2024, we hoped that such practices would not be repeated. We, therefore, urge the EC to diligently scrutinise the suitability and integrity of any potential poll monitoring organisation.

## Protect children from abuse, violence

State must ensure our children grow up in a safe environment

We are alarmed by how our children are increasingly becoming victims of physical and sexual abuse despite there being enough laws and policies to protect them. According to the Local Education and Economic Development Organization (LEEDO), child rape cases rose by nearly 75 percent in the first seven months of 2025 compared to the same period last year. Between January and July, 306 girls were raped, up from 175 in the same period of 2024 and already exceeding the year-total of 234, according to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). Moreover, there have been many instances of children being murdered or suffering abuse, including physical assault, sexual violence, and corporal punishment.

The recent rape of a teenage girl in Khagrachhari, the sexual assault of a 7-year-old madrasa student in Cumilla, and the rape of a 12-year-old domestic worker in Gaibandha are just some of the cases reported in the media. The list goes on. The question is: how long must our children grow up in such an unsafe environment?

Children are being abused not only outside but also within their own homes. According to UNICEF, nine out of 10 Bangladeshi children aged 1-14 experience violent discipline at home at least once a month, which is quite troubling. Unfortunately, such harmful practice of parental violence is rarely discussed in our society. Moreover, online abuse has also increased alarmingly with the growing internet usage among children. Incidents of children being exploited to create online content have also emerged in the media. Meanwhile, a 2025 study by SpringerLink found widespread physical abuse among child labourers in rural informal sectors. Additionally, child marriage remains a major driver of both physical and sexual abuse. The situation is disturbing.

We, therefore, urge the government to take decisive steps to reduce all forms of abuse and sexual harassment of children. It must ensure safe environments and counselling support in schools, implement effective monitoring to prevent domestic abuse, end child labour by providing families with social protection and alternatives, and prioritise the investigation and speedy trial of child sexual abuse and rape cases. Raising awareness among parents, teachers, and employers is also essential. Equally important is the role of the media in promoting child rights and protecting children's identities while covering incidents of abuse. With online abuse on the rise, cyber laws must also be strengthened, and child-friendly helplines established to prevent further harm. Without such decisive actions, the safety and future of our children will remain at grave risk.

# How to overcome the impasse on July Charter



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The idea of what we now call the July National Charter was born of collective sacrifice. In the July uprising in 2024, many people gave their lives and many more were injured or braved the risks of repression and mortal danger, for nothing more radical than what should have been theirs by right. For 15 and a half years, their voices had been stifled, their votes suppressed, and their futures mortgaged by an extractive state. Through their sacrifices, they hoped that democracy could be restored, not as a hollow form but as a living practice.

Another suggestion is for the charter to be enacted through a decree or "constitutional order" by the interim government. While superficially appealing, such an approach suffers from a legitimacy deficit. International experience demonstrates that extra-constitutional decrees often backfire. In Pakistan, the state's repeated resort to constitutional orders by military-backed regimes eroded democratic institutions. In Latin America, presidential decrees imposed without parliamentary oversight triggered prolonged constitutional crises.

**Constituent power of the people**  
The interim government, with the Supreme Court's advisory reference under Article 106 of the constitution, operates under the doctrine of necessity, since power cannot remain in a vacuum after the fall of a discredited regime. The constitution remains in force, neither suspended nor abrogated. This is, therefore, not a revolutionary government.

The constituent power lies with the people, and it is through elections that this power is to be exercised. Any attempt to bypass electoral and parliamentary legitimacy would contradict the very spirit of the July uprising, which sought to reclaim democracy, not dilute it. A durable settlement, therefore, requires a return to the ballot box.

Therefore, a decent way forward is to place the charter before the people. There could be a referendum on the consensus points, which would give it unassailable legitimacy, after which the next parliament could

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