

Election manifestoes must go beyond rhetoric



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In the last few decades, Bangladesh has experienced a noticeable economic and social transformation. However, electoral politics and development priorities often haven't properly addressed the needs for key changes such as a skill-based education system, employment generation, poverty alleviation, social protection, and disaster management. In fact, elections have long been less about advancing national vision and more about ensuring political survival. Power, not policy, has dominated the ballot.

As the nation heads towards the 2026 polls, there seems to have been little change in this trend. This entrenched pattern has prevented the consolidation of a policy-oriented democratic culture. Unlike mature

revolve around populist appeals such as roads, bridges, or cash incentives rather than structural reforms in education, employment, or governance, for example. Until politics in Bangladesh moves beyond this short-term populism and embraces long-term planning, genuine development will remain an election slogan, not a national agenda.

Sadly, education is one area that political parties often fail to prioritise in their election manifestoes beyond, of course, routine and vague pledges. The sector is celebrated for its gains in access, but continues to be crippled by a persistent crisis of quality. The nation has achieved near-universal enrolment and gender parity in schools, but classrooms still fail to equip students with market-ready

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democracies where election manifestoes outline clear policy priorities, implementation methodologies, and timelines, our parties promise development and prosperity at sky level without explaining how they will deliver. The absence of strong policy think tanks within major parties further deepens this void, leaving campaign rhetoric to replace genuine strategic roadmaps. Once again, campaign promises in the grassroots

skills. Youth unemployment continues to rise as degrees outpace job opportunities. During election seasons, politicians pledge more schools and seats, but rarely address the real crisis: outdated curricula, weak vocational training, and low investment in research and innovation. Without bold reforms linking education to employability, Bangladesh risks producing graduates without futures.

This is already evident among the large



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number of graduates Bangladesh produces every year, many of whom remain unemployed or underemployed largely because of a lack of skills and competencies required to compete in the job market. This is particularly true for the graduates of the National University, who come from district and upazila level colleges, where there is often a severe shortage of qualified teachers, modern educational instruments, and proper academic facilities. Not surprisingly, the current system functions less as a mechanism supporting quality education and more as a machine producing unemployed or underemployed graduates—not that employment should be the only desirable career path—highlighting an urgent need for educational reform and skills development initiatives.

Skills development can be expanded using existing resources. According to the Bangladesh Technical Education Board, Bangladesh has 50 polytechnic colleges with two specialised colleges (Bangladesh Institute of Glass and Ceramic and Graphic Arts Institute) that produce a large number of

skilled diploma engineers every year. Many of these graduates are in high demand in Middle Eastern countries, especially in the fields of civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering. Unlike unskilled workers, these diploma engineers have the technical expertise to secure better-paying jobs abroad. The government could take a strategic initiative to export this skilled labour force under a structured policy. For example, workers could be sent abroad free of cost, with the condition that 10 to 20 percent of their monthly salary would be contributed to the government's fund until their migration costs are recovered. A small amount can also be charged as a service fee. This approach would not only ensure that skilled workers receive higher salaries similar to those from countries like India and Sri Lanka, but it would also increase the country's foreign currency earnings.

Capitalism, as an economic system, has increasingly shown its limitations in many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. While

it has created job opportunities, it has also intensified inequality and economic dependence, leaving large segments of the population vulnerable. In Bangladesh, the adverse effects of capitalism, especially economic inequality, social exclusion, concentration of wealth, the overreliance on wage-based employment, and the limited scope for entrepreneurship among the general population, are increasingly evident. An analysis of data on natural resources, population growth, the size of the economy, and employment generation indicates that the formal job sector is unlikely to absorb the growing number of graduates. This reality calls for a serious rethinking of the country's economic direction and the development of alternative, non-capitalist economic models that can generate self-employment and community-based enterprises.

Such a system can integrate cooperative models, social business initiatives, and targeted government support to foster a self-reliant community economy. This approach would not only lead to poverty alleviation but also strengthen social protection and community resilience against economic and environmental shocks. By promoting social enterprises, cooperative ventures, and local production networks, Bangladesh can move towards an inclusive and sustainable development pathway. This model would empower citizens as active economic participants rather than passive job seekers, transforming the economy into one rooted in equity, solidarity, and self-reliance.

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Why secular politics in South Asia still clings to family dynasties



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Why do secular parties in South Asia, despite championing democracy, cling to family names? Because in a battle against religious nationalism, emotion often outweighs ideology. Politics here is rarely about policies alone—it is about identity, history, and belonging. Across Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, religious right-wing parties have mastered mobilising faith-based sentiments. In societies where literacy is low and institutions are weak, this poses a formidable challenge for secular parties. To survive, many lean on another emotional anchor: family dynasties.

In this case, Pakistan tells a similar story. From its inception, Islamic parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami wielded religion as a political tool, often in alliance with military

and military authoritarianism. As in Bangladesh, low literacy and weak institutions make ideological appeals insufficient; voters respond to faces, not frameworks.

Conversely, Sri Lanka illustrates the other side of the coin. While the Bandaranaike family once dominated the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, recent decades have seen secular parties partially succeed without dynastic leadership, even though remnants of family influence persist in party decision-making and local politics, reflecting the continued emotional resonance of political surnames. Add to that the roles played by party organisation, patronage networks, and local factionalism. Yet the gradual shift suggests stronger institutions and higher social development, showing that dynastic politics is not inevitable. It can fade as education, governance, and institutional strength improve.

India presents a mixed picture. The Congress party relied heavily on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty for decades, drawing on the emotional capital of independence. When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose with strong religious sentiment and an extensive organisational base, Congress struggled to reinvent itself beyond dynasty politics, lacking a coherent narrative or grassroots structure to counter religious nationalism. Unlike Nehru, who championed principled secularism, Indira Gandhi increasingly used religion as a political tool—appeasing minorities for votes while signalling cultural alignment with the Hindu majority. This pragmatic shift weakened Congress's ideological clarity and made it harder to counter the BJP's rise. In this context, the BJP ascended through religious nationalism. However, in states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal, Congress was defeated not by the religious right wing but by other secular parties. These regions demonstrate that where education and social progress are strong, secular politics can thrive without dynasties or religious identity politics. In contrast, in states where Congress lost to the BJP, lower literacy, weaker social indicators, and distinct local socio-economic conditions created fertile ground for religious mobilisation.

The pattern extends beyond South Asia. Indonesia offers a striking parallel. Despite being the world's largest Muslim-majority

rulers. Secular politics, represented most prominently by the PPP, faced an uphill battle. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's populist charisma gave the PPP its initial momentum, but after his execution in 1979, the party needed a way to sustain that emotional appeal. Benazir Bhutto stepped in as the torchbearer of her father's vision, and today Bilawal Bhutto Zardari carries that legacy forward. In Pakistan's volatile political landscape, dynastic politics has served as the PPP's shield against both religious parties

country, its politics has seen the rise of Islamic right-wing movements that exploit religious identity. In response, secular and nationalist parties have leaned on family dynasties to maintain power, particularly in regional politics and even nationally, where political families dominate leadership roles. Dynastic branding in Indonesia functions much like in Bangladesh and Pakistan: as an emotional counterweight to religious mobilisation in a context of uneven social development.

Critics often dismiss dynasty politics as feudal or undemocratic. Yet

in these contexts, it serves a functional purpose. Religious rightism offers voters a sense of belonging rooted in faith. Secular parties, lacking such an inherent identity, must construct alternative emotional anchors. Family dynasties provide that anchor, linking the present to a heroic past. This is not to romanticise or condone dynastic politics—it stifles internal democracy and risks corruption. However, in societies where politics is deeply personal and institutions are fragile, dynasties are not vanity projects. They have served as survival mechanisms against religious right-wing politics.

The persistence of dynasties in South Asia, and beyond, reveals a deeper truth: democracy here is mediated through identity, not ideology. Voters do not simply choose policies; they choose stories, symbols, and legacies. Religious parties exploit faith. Secular parties counter with family. Kerala, West Bengal, and parts of Sri Lanka show that this cycle can break—but only when education, social development, and institutions strengthen. Until then, family names may remain the emotional currency of secular politics.

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Memo No. 46.02.0300.000.07.002.25-1530						
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Sl. No.	Package No.	Tender ID & Ref No.	Description of works	Tender documents last selling (date & time)	Tender closing (date & time)	Tender opening (date & time)
1	WD/DDRRIP-3HD/BAN/SADAR/VILL/W01	1178310, APP ID: 218007	Maintenance of Jowthaykhamar-Nilachal-Milanchari Road at Ch. (00-3000m), ID No. 403144038,	03-Dec-2025 17:00:00	04-Dec-2025 13:00:00	04-Dec-2025 13:00:00
2	WD/DDRRIP-3HD/BAN/ROWA/N/UNR/W02	1178387, APP ID: 218007	Maintenance of Ruma RHD Road-Meupara Via Tarasa UP Office Road at Ch.(00-5106m), ID No. 403893007;	03-Dec-2025 17:00:00	04-Dec-2025 13:00:00	04-Dec-2025 13:00:00
3	WD/DDRRIP-3HD/BAN/ALIKA DAM/UNR/W03	1178547, APP ID: 218007	Maintenance of Sonaichari R&H Road-Ruposipara Road at Ch.(1000-2140m); (Effective Length 1140m); ID No. 403943008;	03-Dec-2025 17:00:00	04-Dec-2025 13:00:00	04-Dec-2025 13:00:00
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5	WD/DDRRIP-3HD/BAN/THANC HI/UZR/W08	1178566, APP ID: 218007	Maintenance of Thanchi-Bolibazar Road at Ch.(3000-6000m); (Effective Length 3000m); ID No. 403952001;	10-Dec-2025 17:00:00	11-Dec-2025 13:00:00	11-Dec-2025 13:00:00
6	WD/DDRRIP-3HD/BAN/NAIKH ONG/UNR/W10	1178601, APP ID: 218007	Maintenance of Baishahi UPC Dochari UPC Via Longgudhu Mukh Bakkhal Road at Ch. (12000m-16800m); (Effective Length: 4800m); ID No: 403733002;	10-Dec-2025 17:00:00	11-Dec-2025 13:00:00	11-Dec-2025 13:00:00
7	WD/DDRRIP-3HD/BAN/SADAR/UZR/W11	1178610, APP ID: 218007	Maintenance of Widening of Lama-Suwalc Road at Ch. (17500m-23225m; & 27398m-27760m); (Effective Length: 6087m); ID No: 403142001;	10-Dec-2025 17:00:00	11-Dec-2025 13:00:00	11-Dec-2025 13:00:00

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