

BACKLASH AT THE BALLOT

# Why women are being shut out of politics



**Tasmiah T Rahman**  
works at Innovision Consulting and is pursuing a joint PhD programme between SOAS University of London, UK, and BRAC University on the political economy of development.  
Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

TASMAIH T RAHMAN

Bangladesh is not short of women in leadership, be it in business, government offices, or academia. It is short of women in electoral politics.

Over the past two decades, women's presence across public life has expanded steadily and measurably. Girls now outnumber boys in secondary education. Maternal and child mortality have declined sharply. Women's economic agency has grown through microfinance and the ready-made garment sector, both of which rely overwhelmingly on women's labour. These gains were not incidental, but the result of sustained state policy, long-term NGO engagement, and deliberate investment in women as economic and social actors.

Women's representation has also grown within the state itself. Bangladesh has 495 upazilas, and today roughly one-third of all upazila nirbahi officers are female. Women now serve across administrative tiers: as assistant commissioners, additional deputy commissioners, and senior field-level officials—roles that were overwhelmingly male a generation ago. This shift matters because it shows something crucial: when institutions are rules-based, women advance at scale. But when it comes to party politics and elections, the numbers collapse.

After the closing of the nomination withdrawal deadline last week, with the exception of two constituencies, women made up just over four percent of general-seat candidates, while 30 registered political parties nominated no women at all. This is not a pipeline problem, but a structural divergence: women are increasingly present



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

in governance and service delivery, but systematically excluded from competitive political power. This divergence tells us something important: that in Bangladesh, women have been professionalised for growth, but not politicised for governance.

Despite a proposal by the National Consensus Commission requiring individual political parties to nominate women candidates in five percent of general seats, most political parties failed to follow through. BNP nominated only 3.5 percent women candidates and Jamaat-e-Islami nominated none (*Prothom Alo*, January 22, 2026). Smaller parties initially nominated a few women but withdrew some of them afterwards. Former women's affairs reform

commissioners and women's rights activists criticised the parties for failing to honour promises and limiting women's political participation. This highlights a broader trend of women being underrepresented in Bangladeshi elections despite prior agreements and advocacy efforts.

Ironically, the country has been governed by women at the very top of the political hierarchy. That visibility created

particularly consequential. With an interim government led by Dr Muhammad Yunus—globally recognised for pioneering microfinance as a pathway to women's empowerment—there was a reasonable expectation that women's political representation would be institutionally safeguarded. That has not happened. Despite its reformist mandate, the interim government has not meaningfully intervened to protect or expand women's presence in political decision-making, whether through transitional arrangements, nomination frameworks, or implementation mechanisms. This failure now risks setting women's political participation back further, particularly at a moment when party structures are actively narrowing access.

The exclusion of women from electoral politics is often explained away as culture, conservatism, or lack of "electability." But what we are witnessing can be better understood as a political backlash. As women's social and economic agency expanded through education, income, public authority and visibility, their potential political presence became harder to ignore. Rather than absorbing this shift, party structures responded by retrenching. Women are being redirected to reserved seats. Competitive constituencies are deemed "too risky." This backlash is as ideological as it is procedural and strategic.

A recent episode inside the National Citizen Party (NCP) illustrates this clearly. When senior male leaders chose to pursue an alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami, several women leaders left the party in protest. Their exit was not symbolic. It revealed how strategic decisions about ideology and alliances were made without women. It was clear that women's participation was conditional.

The digital sphere continues to reinforce this exclusion. Women who speak politically face disproportionate online harassment, moral policing, and character attacks. Parties interpret this hostility as electoral liability, using it to justify their reluctance to nominate women. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle:

women are excluded because politics is hostile, and politics remains hostile because women are excluded.

The regional comparison sharpens the diagnosis. In Nepal, constitutional mandates and electoral restructuring produced women's representation at scale, with women holding around 41 percent of local government positions and roughly one-third of parliamentary seats following enforced quota systems. These outcomes did not emerge organically, but were the result of institutional compulsion that reshaped party behaviour. Bangladesh's reliance on voluntary reform has delivered symbolism, not power.

The contrast is telling. In the civil service, where entry and promotion are rule-bound, women now occupy leadership roles in significant numbers. In politics, where access depends on discretion, loyalty networks, and informal bargaining, women remain marginal. This is the result of institutional design, rather than a failure of capacity, ambition or preparation.

Women's expanding economic space has been demonstrably virtuous for Bangladesh. As of December 2024, over four crore people have accounts with microfinance institutions, 90 percent of whom are women. Meanwhile, women's labour sustains the export-oriented RMG sector that underpins national growth. These gains were achieved through decades of negotiation—between the state, NGOs, civil society, and women themselves—to normalise women's visibility, mobility and authority in public life.

But the backlash we are now witnessing threatens to arrest that trajectory at the threshold of politics. If women's negotiated space continues to stop at economic participation and bureaucratic service, without extending into electoral power, Bangladesh risks institutionalising a ceiling it once claimed to dismantle. Curbing this backlash is not just about symbolism or fairness, but also about ensuring that the country's curve of investment in women does not stall at the most consequential question of all: who gets to govern.

# The Board of Peace is just the latest fig leaf for Israeli impunity



**Jamal Kanj**  
is the author of 'Children of Catastrophe: Journey from a Palestinian Refugee Camp to America,' and other books. He writes frequently on Palestine/Arab world issues for various national and international publications.

JAMAL KANJ

The so-called ceasefire in Gaza was a cynical ruse to secure Israeli captives while giving Israel free rein to starve, murder and assassinate Palestinians at will. The world was duped into swallowing yet another Zionist deception, orchestrated by Israel first Americans, financed with US taxpayer dollars, and drenched in Palestinian blood.

Since the ceasefire was announced, north of 1700 people have been murdered or injured by Israeli fire. In one day this past week, Israel murdered 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including three journalists and children. By the numbers, this ceasefire has been a misnomer, amounting to an average of 17 Palestinians killed or injured every day over the past 100 days. Some were shot or bombed. Babies died more quietly, but no less violently, freezing to death. Infants die of hypothermia not because winter is unforgiving, but because Israel has destroyed their homes and continues to block the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) from bringing safe shelters, winterised tents, and adequate housing into Gaza. This is clearly part of a sinister Israeli policy.

Meanwhile, Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, and Donald Trump remain sanguine, insisting the ceasefire has "held" since early October 2025. One can ask, would they make the same assertions if only ten Israeli Jewish children had been killed? The answer is self-evident. This is plain racism—a blood soaked moral order, a Western and Jewish supremacist calculus that renders Palestinian babies disposable while using a radically different lens for Jewish children.

At the centre of this deception is the so-called yellow line—an ill-defined military boundary marking Israel's partial withdrawal as part of phase one of the supposed ceasefire. The yellow line has become a trap, a moving frontier. Israel shifts it in the middle of the night, and mows Palestinians in the sunlight,

without oversight and without warning. Palestinians believed the ceasefire meant a chance to return to inspect their damaged homes, recover belongings, or forage for wild plants to feed their children. Instead, they find their homes erased, not in battle, but methodically by an enemy with insatiable hatred.

Parallel to this, aid is not allowed to enter Gaza in accordance with the "ceasefire" agreement. The siege has not been lifted. It was refined. Convoys are delayed. Medical equipment is rejected over technicalities. Fuel, shelter materials, and prefabricated housing are blocked or restricted. Hospitals go without medicine not because of unavailability, but because Israel has revoked the licenses of 37 aid organisations, including Doctors Without Borders,

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preventing them from sending staff or bringing aid in.

As Israel's atrocities in Gaza continue, Israeli mobs terrorise Palestinian villages, torch homes, and assault civilians with near-total impunity, and as new Jewish-only colonies expand across the occupied West Bank, Israel is escalating regional tensions with calculated intent. A familiar display of chicanery designed to provoke a wider confrontation—shift headlines, playing the victim, and drowning culpability in the noise of a larger war. To that end, Israel is openly goading a confrontation with Iran in a bid to draw the US into another made-for-Israel war—one to serve Israeli political interests

only, while exacting catastrophic costs on the region.

The US remains Israel's main enabler for laundering war crimes through diplomatic language. Europe's wishy-washy position is no less cynical. In late 2025, the European Union debated punitive measures, including suspension of the preferential trade agreement over Israel's violations of international humanitarian law. Those measures were shelved the moment the fictional ceasefire was announced. By halting accountability in exchange for a supposed ceasefire, Israel's allies granted it another pass. It understood the message, adjusted its tactics, and the violations intensified. Demolitions continued, aid strangled, and children died not only by bullets or bombs, but freezing to death.

Now we hear echoes of Trump's archetypal diplomatic hubbub, cynically sold to the world as a "Board of Peace." A "Board" that includes among its membership an indicted war criminal, who skips Davos' signing to evade arrest and the International Criminal Court (ICC), is not peace, it's a farce at the highest level. A "Board" supposedly created for Gaza, yet it excludes Palestinian representation and has morphed into a billion-dollar club with lifetime memberships, governed by a charter that cannot even bring itself to name Gaza, Palestine, or any credible path to self-determination.

At the launch of his "Board," Trump ignored the continued Israeli killing of Palestinians in Gaza. Instead, he dwelled on his fixation with recovering the body of an Israeli soldier and on disarming the occupied. If this inauguration speech is any indication, the "Board of Peace" will be nothing but a performative shell, not a pathway to human justice. What emerges, in reality, is something closer to a Jared Kushner real-estate venture run by a self-appointed dictator with no mandate and answerable to no one.

Palestinians do not need another peace circus. There can be no "peace" that erases Palestinian agency while entrenching Israeli criminal impunity. What Palestinians demand is self-determination and the right to live in a secure, sovereign state of their own. Anything less is not peace; it's an international management of

subjugation and oppression.

What Gaza needs is legal redress for sustained Israeli repression and subjugation. It must be granted unimpeded ingress and egress by land, sea, and air. Gaza must not be condemned to survive as a managed humanitarian dependency, rationed by aid and policed by donors. The

international community must reclaim the primacy of international law by allowing the ICC to prosecute indicted Israeli political and military leaders for war crimes and genocide—without American coercion, Western exceptionalism, and moral fraud of double standards.

A ceasefire that leaves infants

freezing to death is not peace. A "Board" that grants itself the authority to "acquire and dispose of ... property," while Israel violates agreements in Gaza and Jewish mobs terrorise communities in the West Bank, is just a new phase in the normalisation of mass dispossession and genocide.

**Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission**  
Plot#E-5/A, Agargaon Administrative Area, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.

### Invitation for Enlistment

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH	
1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Post and Telecommunication Division
2. Agency	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
3. Procuring Entity Name	Mohammad Rohol Amin Director (Admin) Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Plot#E-5/A, Agargaon Administrative Area, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka
4. Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
5. Invitation for	<b>Enlistment for Vehicle Repairing Workshop</b>
6. Invitation Ref No	14.32.0000.000.400.07.0013.25-110
7. Date	25/01/2026
8. Period for enlistment	<b>01 April 2026- 31 March 2027 (01 Year)</b>
KEY INFORMATION	
9. Procurement Method	<b>Limited Tendering Method</b>
PARTICULAR INFORMATION	
Date Time	
10. Application Closing Date and Time	19/02/2026; Time: 5.00PM
11. Name & Address of the Office(s)	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Plot#E-5/A, Agargaon Administrative Area, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.
Application Form Availability	26/01/2026
Receiving Application Form	22/02/2026 Time: 2.00PM
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT	
12. Eligibility of Applicant	a. Must have updated Trade License b. Must have updated TIN c. Must have updated Bank Solvency Certificate (As per Terms & Condition). d. Must have updated VAT Registration certificate e. Must have minimum 05 (Five) years of experience in Workshop/Garage and related work. f. Security Amount (As per T&C after enlistment.) g. Experience Certificate (As per Terms & Condition).
13. Price of Application Form (Tk)	500/-
14. Enlistment / Renewal Fee (Tk)	5000.00 for Enlistment (Excluding Vat) 2000.00 for Renewal of Enlistment (Excluding Vat)
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS	
15. Name of Official Inviting Application	Director (Admin)
16. Designation of Official Inviting Application	Director (Admin)
17. Address of Official Inviting Application	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, Plot#E-5/A, Agargaon Administrative Area, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka
18. Contact details of Official Inviting Application	Phone: +88 222217120 Fax: +88 02 222217168 Email: diradmin@btrc.gov.bd
19. The Authority may change/amend/revise any conditions and reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal in whole or in part without assigning any reason.	

Mohammad Rohol Amin  
 Director (Admin)  
 Email: diradmin@btrc.gov.bd

25/01/2026

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