

Bangladesh needs true leaders, not divisive or power-hungry 'netas'



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Prior to the 13th parliamentary election that takes place on Thursday, Bangladesh saw quite an intense season of political campaigns heading into the deadline of February 10 morning. Both the candidates from major political parties and the independents held rallies, made promises, and sought voter support. Political parties offered a broad menu of pledges, including sweeping job creation targets, cash support for families or interest-free loans for the jobless, and an end to corruption, extortion, and discrimination. However, there was hardly any clear roadmap on how those pledges would be fulfilled, what processes they would be carried out through, or how institutional capacity would be strengthened to deliver them. Instead, throughout the campaign period, political speeches and posturing frequently delved into the kind of toxicity that we thought we had left behind.

The July uprising briefly raised hopes that politics in Bangladesh might take a new direction—one focused on restraint, accountability, and shared national interests. Yet, instead of a fresh political culture, citizens increasingly witnessed a return to old habits. This was visible not only among traditional parties but also among some new political forces. Their campaigns often centred around revisiting or rather reigniting old, unresolved historical or political issues. Sharp accusations and recycled narratives followed. This kind of environment leaves

little room for serious discussion about the future and keeps the political environment deeply divided.

This failure is particularly alarming at a time when the country faces a long list of serious social and economic challenges. Poverty, unemployment and underemployment remain high, especially among young people. Inflation has strained household budgets, while investment and economic growth has slowed. Inequality is widening, education standards are declining, healthcare services remain uneven and underfunded, and environmental damage is becoming increasingly visible. Yet, much of the campaign energy has been spent attacking opponents rather than presenting credible and practical plans to address both short-term and long-term needs of the country.

Election after election, parties fall back on the same strategies of mobilising fear, blaming rivals, and stirring emotions. The country has never truly developed a strong tradition of issue-based politics, where ideas, evidence, and long-term planning take centre stage.

Experts have linked the use of abusive language to rising tensions on the ground. According to an estimate by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) based on media reports, some 58 incidents of political violence were recorded between February 1 and 10, leaving two people dead and 489 others injured. During this time, at least 47 journalists faced attacks around the country. By comparison, 49 incidents were reported during the last

of issue-based politics, where ideas, evidence, and long-term planning take centre stage. Issue-based politics remains weak because it is inconvenient for those who thrive on chaos and confusion. Serious policy discussion demands accountability, and accountability threatens entrenched interests.

At the heart of this disappointment lies a leadership crisis. Bangladesh has never lacked "netas," but it has consistently lacked

perceived as someone focused mainly on holding power, winning elections, and securing personal advantage. Their speeches are filled with insults, and their campaigns driven by labels such as "pro-Indian," "pro-Pakistan," "anti-Islam," "anti-Bangladesh," "anti-liberation," or "foreign-backed." These accusations are thrown around carelessly, with little concern for truth or consequence. Ordinary citizens are tired of this politics of suspicion and division.

Political statements are a normal part of politics. However, words must be chosen carefully especially when dealing with sensitive issues rooted in history, identity, and tradition. In politics, a statement can act like ammunition. What is said, how it is said, and where it is said all may carry serious consequences. While political parties may believe that labelling opponents helps win votes, they often fail to realise that such language not only divides citizens but also sends damaging signals to the world, undermining Bangladesh's credibility as a responsible democratic state.

Such divisive politics has long fractured our society into camps defined by loyalty rather than principles. It's time our politicians understood that politics is not only about gaining power or remaining in power by any means. It is also about responsibility, restraint, and respect for the people. And for Bangladesh to move forward, it does not need more self-serving *netas* skilled in shouting matches and blame games. What it needs are leaders who are willing to practise ethical politics, adopt a committed and principled approach, challenge harmful traditions, eliminate corrupt practices, and use responsible language. This election, can we choose leaders who can unite the nation and work sincerely for the welfare and dignity of all people in the country? Perhaps the more pertinent question is: can we afford not to?



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

10 days of January (January 21-31), in which four people were killed and 414 others were injured. Meanwhile, 16 journalists were attacked throughout January, the ASK report added.

This pattern is not new. Since independence, Bangladeshi politics has been shaped by a narrow set of familiar narratives. Election after election, parties fall back on the same strategies of mobilising fear, blaming rivals, and stirring emotions. The country has never truly developed a strong tradition

genuine "leaders." A true leader works for the national interest, has a clear long-term vision, listens to different views, and acts with integrity. Leadership, at its core, is the ability to guide people towards a shared objective, unite differing opinions around national interests, and act with clarity, courage, and responsibility. A true leader inspires trust, communicates honestly, and works to build institutions that serve collective interests and long-term social welfare.

By contrast, a typical *netas* is often

Can the next government build a resilient energy sector?



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As the interim government's term comes to an end, power is set to be transferred to the democratically elected leadership. While the outgoing authorities removed some of the most controversial practices of our energy sector, the long-term reforms are going to be the responsibility of the new government. One of the first tests for the new authorities will be whether they can build resilient renewable-energy institutions over the ruins of the previous authoritarian regime's mishaps and the interim era's quick fixes. This is the time to create a structured framework for green, renewable power.

One of its most decisive actions by the interim was the repeal of the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act, 2010, also known as the "Quick Rental" act. For over a decade, this indemnity law allowed shady power deals by bypassing competitive bidding and normal scrutiny. Its annulment removed a key legal shield for politically connected contracts.

The interim period also called out the habit of announcing ambitious renewable targets without the institutional capacity to deliver them. Bangladesh aimed for 10 percent renewable electricity by 2020 and later targeted 40 percent clean energy by

2041. Yet by 2025, renewables still account for only around 4-5 percent of installed capacity. Promises were made, but the groundwork was missing.

The interim government also cancelled 31 pending renewable power projects, which were approved under the Quick Rental Act. These projects were worth \$6 billion in potential investment, although they were mostly unsolicited solar deals. The energy adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan argued that many of these contracts were riddled with high tariffs and unjustified capacity payments.

However, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) warned that simply scrapping projects is only a legal clean-up, not an energy strategy. Moreover, this move sent a negative signal to foreign investors. Such ad hoc discretion is dangerous whether used to approve or cancel contracts. Only strong institutions can provide both integrity and predictability. The interim government's moves proved that without proper rules and planning, even anti-corruption efforts can create uncertainty.

Bangladesh's stagnating renewable energy adoption is rooted in persistent institutional and policy gaps. First are the regulatory complications surrounding renewable energy.

The newly drafted Renewable Energy Policy, 2025, assigns the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (Sreda) broad responsibilities to promote and oversee renewables. But licensing and approval powers are distributed among other agencies.

For example, the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) has been made the licensing authority for large renewable projects, creating overlap and bureaucratic complexity. Sreda was meant to be a one-stop agency for green energy, but it lacks the authority to go past this red tape. Meanwhile, the credibility of BERC got weakened by years of political interference and conflicting mandates. Although the interim government restored some independence in August 2024 by revoking executive pricing powers, the commission is still struggling to re-establish its credibility.

Today's elected government will inherit an energy sector partially cleared of malpractices but still lacking a clear construction strategy. The repeal of the Quick Rental Act closed a dangerous legal loophole, but legal clean-up alone does not generate electricity. The real challenge is converting this reset into predictable, bankable renewable projects.

Moreover, Bangladesh produced multiple energy plans and targets and they clash with each other. The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan had actually aimed for a 30 percent renewable energy share by 2030, while the Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) in 2023 proposed a 40 percent clean energy share by 2040, mostly through imports, nuclear and large hydro, with only nine percent coming from domestic renewables. At the same time, approvals for new fossil fuel projects such as coal and LNG-

based plants have continued.

This lack of alignment suggests that the renewable transition, for all its stated importance, has not yet been placed at the centre of national planning. Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) cautioned that without halting new fossil projects, the grid will remain over-supplied with conventional power and crowd out renewables.

Lastly, there are practical barriers to slowing down renewables. Land acquisition is a major hurdle, as many of the cancelled solar projects struggled to secure suitable land. Lengthy approval processes for environmental clearance and local permits further slow down the progress. Meanwhile, the national power grid is not yet ready for a large influx of renewables. Analysts point to the absence of a modern smart grid, limited transmission capacity, and weak distribution infrastructure

predictable, bankable renewable projects.

First, reforms must be locked in. Any return to emergency procurement laws for power would weaken investor confidence. Transparency and competitive bidding should be embedded firmly in the Renewable Energy Policy, 2025, and its implementing rules, including mandatory disclosure of power purchase agreements.

Second, institutional roles must be clarified. A clear division of labour is needed between Sreda, BPDDB, and BERC. Sreda should be empowered to coordinate renewable energy planning and project pipelines, while overlaps in licensing must be reduced. At the same time, BERC must retain full independence in tariff setting and licensing to prevent ad hoc political intervention.

Third, competitive reverse auctions should replace unsolicited deals. A multi-year auction schedule would signal that transparent competition is now the only route to market. Clear ceiling tariffs and standardised Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) would further reduce uncertainty.

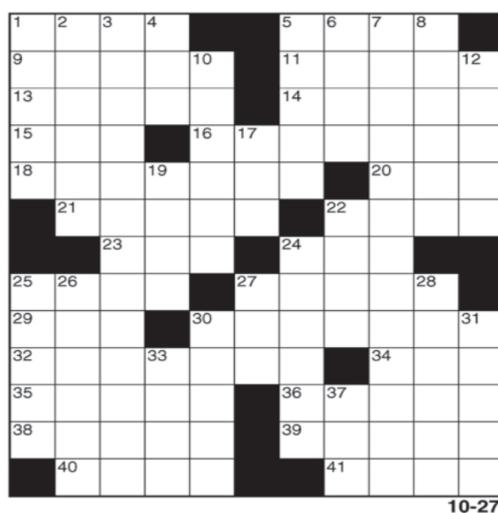
Finally, grid and land reforms must align with renewable targets. Think tanks estimate Bangladesh will need more than 35 GW of renewables by 2040, requiring coordinated investment in transmission, storage, and land access alongside generation.

The foundation of any successful energy transition is trust, from investors in stable rules, consumers in affordable service, and citizens that public money is spent responsibly. Strong institutions are the foundation of that trust, and Bangladesh's renewable transition will rise or fall on institutional strength. For the next government, the first test is not announcing new targets but building credible institutions that turn policy into power.

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BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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