STUDENT protest spilling onto the streets. A city besieged. Chaos and curfew. We've been here before it seems...

My husband has termed it the "umbrella uprising."

Not to make light of it ... God forbid!

But to highlight how it is that over such mundane objects, historical forces can come into conflict.

An umbrella, giving shade to one group of people, obstructs the view of another group of people at a neighborhood football match. An exchange of angry words ... a tussle ... a fight ensues.

Not uncommon. Happens everyday, or something very like it, in every corner of the world.

But in this case, the group holding the umbrella was comprised of university students, while the group objecting to their view being obstructed was army personnel. And the neighbourhood, of course, was the campus of Dhaka University.

Just two groups of individuals, in a fistfight at a football match! But fighting with all the historical baggage that comes from their predecessors having played such significant roles in the making of a nation. With the added tension of a face-off in a space forever burdened with the weight of its own place in those historical battles.

And so the stage was set...

Given the stirrings of discontent within an already fraught and fragile political impasse, it didn't take a whole lot to light the fuse for violent protest.

But let's step back for just a minute, to ask: What was the protest for? Was it really simply the case that students were unhappy with the encampment of army troops within university campuses? And did the protest really spread from campus to the streets only because of the 'rising price of essentials'?

Of course not, the malaise lies deeper. But how deep?

I have a feeling we are unsure ourselves where and how deep the malaise lies.

What we are sure of is we've had it bad before, and we appear to have it bad now. We can no longer see beyond the bad. Bad has been the status quo for so long, we can't imagine anything better for the future.

Our past, present and future appears as an endless series of crushed hopes, disenchantment, and hardships. And so, unsurprisingly, we are fed up, bitter, and disillusioned. Our present hardships simply overwhelm us.

To the point where we are unwilling or unable to make judgments based on the lesser or greater good. We cannot see which way the path to good lies. We can no longer even bring ourselves to believe that short-term pains may lead to long-term gains.

All we can do is protest.

After all what other choices are open to us? Hmmm, let's see ...

Choosing between a corrupt government or having our political leaders in jail? Choosing whether to have our rights ignored completely or having them trampled to the ground?

