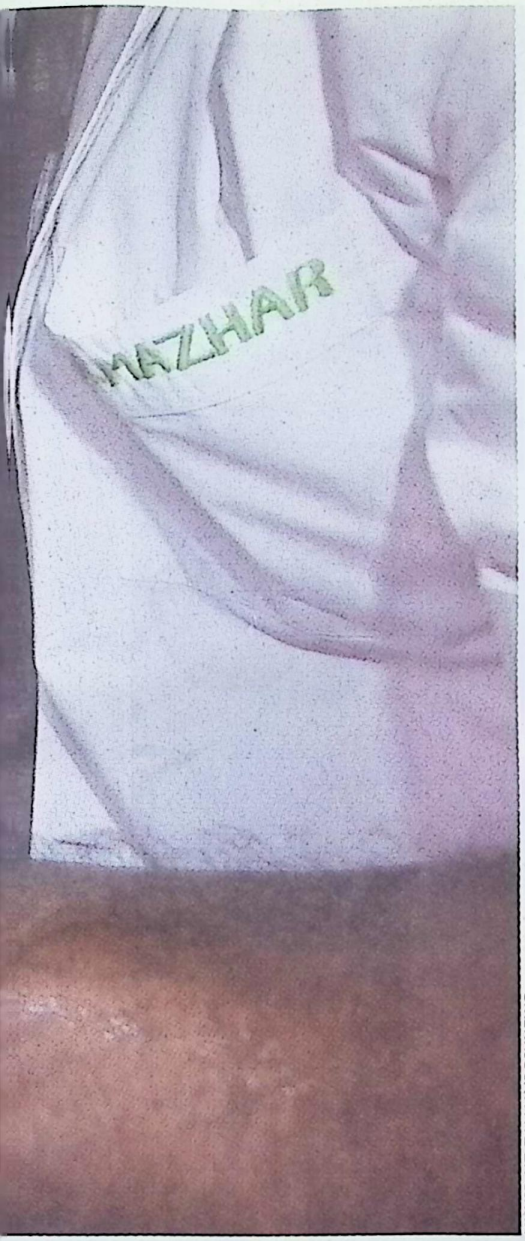


MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/DRIKNEWS

more. Now, all roads lead back to that harsh truth we had hoped could be unsettled, the equilibrium we had hoped could be disturbed: In Bangladeshi politics, nothing ever changes.

Housed inside that door enjoying the autumn is the poster-boy of all the lice that had woven itself over the fabric of Bangladeshi politics ever since its inception. The greed with which its masters assumed their position, the absolute disregard for the common good of its people, the clan mentality, systematic looting, and divisive ambition.

A snapshot of it all is framed inside the portrait of Tarique Rahman. A few broken bones, perhaps, a few dents as well to the ego, but in the end you have to say he got away with it. And so have many of his brethren, and his mother, and the annoying aunty too.

Some, like Uncle Nazmul got unlucky. But all in all, as a generation, they are now safe. Nothing that cannot be gotten over, when the stakes are so high as control of a nation. Temporarily, they may have to leave the table, but they can all come back for another roll of the dice. It is inevitable that most will.

Witness how loudly it has been whispered that Tarique's forfeiture of his party post is merely temporary. And his party's break-up, once seemingly so imminent, has now lost all momentum. But the bewildering question screaming to be heard above the din in the political discourse of the nation right now is this: What has been the point of the roughly two years post-1/11?

"Administrative and institutional reform," wise men propose, no doubt referring to changes in the operational structures of the Election, Anti-Corruption and Public Services commissions, as well as the separation of the judiciary. "Witness their effect in the long-run," they suggest.

But those wiser point to missed opportunities for more comprehensive and meaningful reforms in the absence of a political government: "It is really only by way of enforcement that they have trumped previous governments," they opine as they brush their smartly-tailored suits, "Which is not saying much given their apolitical stance. Besides, badly needed reforms in education and the police

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administration have been largely overlooked."

And then the wisest, almost feigning interest, bring the conversation to a shattering finale with their fatal judgment: "This, too, can be undone." They are the voices the optimists among us have been striving to deny attention for the past two years. The ones who knew change was never coming, that it was all an eyewash or a sham or, if well-intentioned, doomed for failure amidst the corrupt landscape of Bangladeshi politics.

They have been vindicated, and in the land of the duped, the pessimist's voice reigns loudest. But what lies at the root of that once-almost thrilling ride towards change coming to such a meek, sputtering surrender, still such a distance from its designated destination?

I have been back in the country for the last six of the 20 months since 1/11, and in that time, one very noticeable absence in my eyes from times before has been the glaringly apparent lack of authority.

We all know this military-backed caretaker government assumed power to fill the vacuum that had eventuated as a result of events in the period between October 2006 and January 2007. But power without authority also lacks legitimacy.