

What comes after January 7?



BLACK, WHITE AND GREY

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While the state-managed show described as an "election" is a few days away and not a single vote has been cast, Sheikh Hasina and her party's victory is already a foregone conclusion. It is all but certain that Hasina will win in an essentially uncontested election and that her fourth consecutive term as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh will commence. The victory of the Awami League will be a thumping one like the two previous elections held in 2014 and 2018, described by the international media as "farical" and "transparently fraudulent." What the diplomatic missions have identified as a "special election operation" of the government, *The Economist* has described as a "farce," and the BBC described as a "one-woman show," has been in the making for some time. The road to the election is littered with intrigue, machination, crackdown on opposition, mass arrests, violence, and use of state apparatuses (including the legal system) to keep the most formidable opposition out of the contest. The "election" is not intended to get a mandate but to adorn the exercise with a garb of participatory and contested views; even though, except for the incumbent, most of the participants command very little public support. If AL's victory in the 2014 election was a hollow one, the 2024 victory in the making is nothing short of a Pyrrhic one—a victory which inflicts so much damage that it cannot be considered worthwhile.

It is against this background that the central question on everyone's mind is: what will happen after January 7?

There are two aspects to the answer—domestic and international. As for the domestic aspect, the

concern is regarding what the political landscape will look like. Ahead of the "election," the ruling party has employed all state apparatuses against the opposition parties, especially against BNP. Persecution using the coercive apparatuses was combined with a strategy usually described as "persecution through prosecution," something that has been seen in other autocratic regimes. After January 7, theoretically, the government will have two options: 1) to scale back and return to past practices, or 2) double down in its persecution and attempt to rule with an iron fist. Usually, authoritarian regimes sustain themselves by depending on three pillars—legitimation, repression, and co-optation. In recent years, Awami League has gradually shunned both legitimation and co-optation strategies. The previous two elections have shown the regime to be bereft of any moral legitimacy. The way the 2024 election is being staged will not compensate for these shortcomings but will only accentuate them. Its ideological legitimacy, based on the narrative of development success, has fallen apart in the past year and a half. The economic crisis has laid bare the hollowness of the development argument.

Sheikh Hasina's decision to form a single-party cabinet in 2018 was a signal to her allies that they have become less necessary than they thought they were. Lest we forget, the 2018 Awami League cabinet was the party's fifth since independence and, except for in 1973, AL included members from its allies in the cabinet until 2018. Whether the single-party cabinet was signalling the end of a "marriage of convenience," or whether it was a celebration

of successfully weakening other parties (to the extent of making them essentially defunct), is an open question. But the treatment of the allies by AL in the past five years was not unintentional, as the seat-sharing saga demonstrated. Over the past few years, the ruling party befriended radical Islamists when needed but

assertion that "the BNP has no right to do politics" seems more than political rhetoric. Regimes relying on repression alone is not a new move as there are other examples of the same around the world.

Whether or not such a drastic and desperate measure is seen in the near future, the post-January

would it get better after January 7? This question is innocuous and, in some measures, a reflection of desperation. Considering that the current economic crisis was not created in a single day, there is no reason for it to magically disappear overnight. The "new government" will not adopt a policy that will keep

The economy is where the domestic and external aspects converge. How the current alignment of global and regional powers on the Bangladesh issue plays out after January 7 will have serious implications for the immediate future of the country. The India-China-Russia axis' support for the present regime is well-known, as is the US' and European countries' alignment demanding a fair election here. But what is being staged is not a free, fair, and inclusive election that will deliver a mandate to the new government. The unknown element is the question of whether the Western countries, especially the US, will step back and continue their engagement policy. The US has so far been silent since October 28.

India, the longstanding friend of the current government, is arguing that the US' insistence on democracy and for a free and fair election will push Hasina towards China. This argument appears to be contrary to the development of the past decade. India's policy of keeping the US out of the region and acting as its linchpin to counter China's influence has failed. Over the past decade, China has made serious inroads to Bangladesh and the region as a whole. In fact, India's policy towards its neighbours has backfired in several neighbouring countries. Recent decisions of the Bangladesh government to explore the Chinese proposal of a Teesta project and mulling over joining the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement are worth noting. The ongoing economic crisis is likely to make the country more reliant on China, unless the Western countries are willing to offer support. If the economic punitive measures are imposed, India will have little leverage to steer the policy of the Bangladesh government. India's discomfort will not deter China.

The managed show of January 7 is neither going to bring an end to the domestic political and economic crises, nor will it offer a resolution to the global and regional power contestation in Bangladesh. Instead, the situation will be further exacerbated and the country's vulnerability will worsen.



The 'election' is not intended to get a mandate but to adorn the exercise with a garb of participatory and contested views.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

also went after them whenever it had the upper hand.

With legitimation and co-optation strategies set to the side, the post-election political scene is likely to be different from those in the past. Statements from ruling party leaders regarding BNP's future existence send an ominous signal. Although some AL allies, whose own past is replete with violence, had been demanding since 2019 that BNP be banned on charges of terrorism, this has also been echoed by AL leaders and its affiliates in the past year. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's repeated

7 atmosphere will lack stability as there will be an existential question facing not only BNP but also other opposition parties. With the election, particularly by arranging a number of parties along with AL, the line in the sand has been drawn. Parties which do not belong to this camp may be made defunct. There is no desire from the ruling party to have an effective, multi-party system. Instead, AL prefers to have several parties, but only those which are docile in its favour.

The second domestic aspect is the economy. Many are wondering—

the banks from being plundered. On the contrary, the cronies who have benefited from such looting for the past decade will be making policies concerning the banking sector. The loans incurred over the years, in the name of mega-projects and other "development" symbols, will have to be paid back. The depreciation of the taka will continue. Many analysts are warning that there could be punitive measures from Western countries. Undoubtedly, such measures will exacerbate the plight of the general people as they will be the ones paying a high price.

What causes poverty to rise with 'prosperity'?

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ATIQR RAHMAN

After more than 40 years of relative calm since the end of the Second World War, the world is again slipping towards disorder and conflict. But beyond the conflicts arising from the desire to dominate resources, the Covid pandemic and the worsening climate crisis are also leading to the loss of livelihoods of millions of people, particularly in the developing world.

A great majority of the world population today is not in control of their fate. Their fates are being written by the rich, the powerful, and the big corporations who are controlling global resources, finances, and the arms industry. While there is global awareness of the increasing conflicts and disorder, what is not widely known is the scale at which deprivation and skewed development are threatening the lives and livelihoods of a large segment of people.

During the first three years of the pandemic, the global economy slumped; country after country saw their growth rates lowered and had to lay off workers. This has led to the lowering of incomes and an overall increase in poverty. Beyond the deaths and the loss of livelihoods, Covid-19 widened inequalities globally.

A year into the pandemic, capital markets rose by \$14 trillion. According to an analysis of the stock performance of 5,000 companies by McKinsey, 25 companies (mostly in the technology, electric vehicles, and semiconductor sector) accounted for 40 percent of the total gains.

Nabil Ahmed of Oxfam America noted that the "pandemic period has seen the biggest surge in billionaire wealth since the records began." According to Oxfam's "Profiting from pain" report, billionaires saw their fortunes surge as much in 24 months as they did in the last 23 years.

Bloomberg Billionaires Index noted that, during the pandemic, 131 billionaires more than doubled their net worth. Most notable among them are Louis Vuitton chief Bernard Arnault (whose wealth increased by \$60 billion between 2000 and 2022), Elon Musk (who gained nearly \$90 billion over the same period), and Gautam Adani (who saw his wealth also surge by \$90 billion during the pandemic). Meanwhile, skyrocketing inflation reduced growth in real wages and ate into the disposable incomes of people globally. So, the question arises: what really caused this incredible widening of inequalities?

One element is the inadequate measures taken to stop rising prices,

2020 and 2022. All these helped the rich become richer through financial market investments.

But instead of leading to more economic output, the money has largely been used in the speculative market. It was noted by Francisco Ferreira, director of the International Inequalities Institute at the London School of Economics (LSE), that this sudden infusion "led to a dramatic rise in asset prices, including stocks." This, too, has largely benefitted the rich.

This reality of money finding its way to the rich is not surprising to those who have studied the theory of market behaviour during periods of uncertainty caused by war and conflict.



Billionaires saw their fortunes surge as much in the first 24 months of the pandemic as they did in the last 23 years.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

with central banks reducing the flow of money into their respective economies by increasing interest rates and withdrawing excess liquidity. While this may have curbed inflation, it also led to a squeeze around big companies to lay off workers, thus leading to a rise in unemployment.

Then, to boost economies, countries adopted policies such as tax breaks and financial incentives for businesses. Central banks flooded their economies with money to make lending and spending easier. Major central banks of the world infused more than \$11 trillion into the global economy between

At present, we are again faced with uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine, the one in Palestine, as well as the 30 or so conflicts happening in various parts of Africa (some of which may well explode into larger conflicts).

The sad part is that while the rich may have enough resources to sail over such cycles, it will be the poor who will bear the brunt of rising prices and scarcities ensuing from the hostile market trends, unless they are engaged in the most primitive source of livelihood—that is, agriculture—which will keep them employed and provide for their basic needs.

Office of the Nabinagar Pourashava
District: Brahmanbaria
Memo No. 46.02.1288.002.11.093.22-02
Date: 02-01-2024
e-Tender Notice No. 01/2023-2024 (OTM)
e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of works as mentioned in the following table:

Tender ID No.	Package No.	Description of works	Online (e-GP System) tender publication date & time	Online (e-GP System) tender closing date & time
931558	LGCRPP/Nabinagar/2023-24/W-03	(i) (CRRP-07): Environmental Management Work for Rehabilitation of Hospital Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+833km) at Ward-02 (ii) (CRRP-07): Road Safety Work for Rehabilitation of Hospital Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+833km) at Ward-02 (iii) (CRRP-07): Construction of RCC top Slab on existing drain at Hospital Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+350km) at Ward-02 (iv) (CRRP-07): Rehabilitation of Hospital Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+833km) at Ward-02 (v) (CRRP-08): Maintenance of Nabinagar-Fatehpur RCC drain (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312) with Construction of RCC drain (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312) km at Ward-02 (vi) (CRRP-08): Maintenance of Nabinagar - Fatehpur RCC road (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312 & Ch: 0+995 to 1+143 km) with Construction of RCC road (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312) km at Ward-02 (vii) (CRRP-08): Environmental Management Work for Maintenance of Nabinagar - Fatehpur RCC road (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312 & Ch:0+995 to 1+143 km) with Construction of RCC road (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312) km at Ward-02 (viii) (CRRP-08): Road Safety Work for Maintenance of Nabinagar - Fatehpur RCC road (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+ 312 & Ch 0+995 to 1+143km) with Construction of RCC road (Ch 0+212 to Ch 0+312) km at Ward-02	04-Jan-2024 09:00	01-Feb-2024 13:00
931559	LGCRPP/Nabinagar/2023-24/W-04	(i) (CRRP-09): Rehabilitation of College Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+371km) at Ward-04. (ii) (CRRP-09): Environmental Management Work for Rehabilitation of College Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+371km) at Ward-04. (iii) (CRRP-09): Road Safety Work for Rehabilitation of College Para road (Ch 0+00 to 0+371km) at Ward-04. (iv) (CRRP-10): Rehabilitation Uni-block road from Matrichaya School to Halim Mia's house (Ch 0+00 to 0+320 km) at Ward-04. (v) (CRRP-10): Road Safety Work for Rehabilitation Uni-block road from Matrichaya School to Halim Mia's house (Ch 0+00 to 0+320 km) at Ward-04. (vi) (CRRP-11): Maintenance of Kallol Mia's house to Atik Commander's house road (Ch 0+00 to 0+337km. Ward No-05 (vii) (CRRP-11): Road Safety Work for Maintenance of Kallol Mia's house to Atik Commander's house road (Ch 0+00 to 0+337km) Ward No-05	04-Jan-2024 09:00	01-Feb-2024 13:00
931560	LGCRPP/Nabinagar/2023-24/W-05	(i) (CRRP-12): Protective Work of Rehabilitation of Uni-block road from Kamal Miah's house to Nabinagar - Companiganj road via Omar Miah's house at Narayanpur south para (Ch 0+00 to 0+ 433km) Ward No-07 (ii) (CRRP-12): Road Safety Work Rehabilitation of Uni-block road from Kamal Miah's house to Nabinagar - Companiganj road via Omar Miah's house at Narayanpur south para (Ch 0+00 to 0+433km) Ward No-07 (iii) (CRRP-12): Environmental Management Work for Rehabilitation of Uni-block road from Kamal Miah's house to Nabinagar Companiganj road via Omar Miah's house at Narayanpur south para (Ch 0+00 to 0+433km) Ward No-07 (iv) (CRRP-12): Rehabilitation of Uni-block road from Kamal Miah's house to Nabinagar - Companiganj road via Omar Miah's house at Narayanpur south para (Ch 0+00 to 0+433km) Ward No-07 (v) (CRRP-06): Installation of street light with pole from (A) Issamoyi School to Alamnagar Bridge at Ward No -02, (B) Sohata More to Jugidara Bridge at Ward No. 08 & 09 (C) Abdul Kuddus's house to Khajia Nagar Graveyard at Ward No. 03 & 04 (D) Konaghat More to Sreerampur at Ward No. 07 under Nabinagar Paurashava. (vi) (CRRP-06): Road Safety work for installation of street light with pole from (A) Issamoyi School to Alamnagar Bridge at Ward No. 02, (B) Sohata More to Jugidara Bridge at Ward No. 08 & 09 (C) Abdul Kuddus's house to Khajia Nagar Graveyard at Ward No. 03 & 04 (D) Konaghat More to Sreerampur at Ward No. 07 under Nabinagar Paurashava.	04-Jan-2024 09:00	01-Feb-2024 13:00
931561	LGCRPP/Nabinagar/2023-24/W-06	(i) (CRRP-13): Rehabilitation of Uni-block road from Bholachang old Bazar to Kheaghat (Godaraghat) (Ch 0+00 to 0+465 km) at Ward No. 08. (ii) (CRRP-13): Road Safety Work for Rehabilitation of Uni-block road from Bholachang old Bazar to Kheaghat (Godaraghat) (Ch 0+00 to 0+465 km) at Ward No. 08. (iii) (CRRP-15): Rehabilitation of internal RCC road of Bholachang New Bazar (Ch: 00+00 to 0+283 km) with Link-01: (Ch: 00-72 m) & (Link-02: Ch: 00-127m) at Ward-09 (iv) (CRRP-15): Road Safety Work for Rehabilitation of internal RCC road of Bholachang New Bazar (Ch 00+00 to 0+283 km) with Link-01: (Ch:00-72m) & (Link -02: Ch:00-127m) at Ward-09 (v) (CRRP-15): Environmental Management work for Rehabilitation of internal RCC road of Bholachang New Bazar (Ch 00+00 to 0+283 km) with Link-01: (Ch:00-72m) & (Link-02: Ch:00-127m) at Ward-09	04-Jan-2024 09:00	01-Feb-2024 13:00

These are an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tendering documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches up to 31-Jan-2024 17:00. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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