



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The collective spirit must not be lost



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Beginning with Abu Sayed, a great amount of sacrifice was made to reach this point. Our students and children were martyred, while many more were injured after being attacked by tear gas and rubber bullets. Many were arrested, some of whom were minors. Though this is a kind of victory, we are still mourning the lives lost. Even today, we lost people. We will always remember and respect the people in the protests of bloody July.

Occasions such as this has repeatedly arisen in Bangladesh's history, whether 1971 or 1990. In truth, we missed the opportunity each time. The expectations people had from different political parties

in the past were dashed many times, and our politicians have only acted in their own interests without keeping in mind the best interests of the people.

The most significant factor of this protest has been that this has not been carried out under the banner of a specific political party; its success lies in the participation of all people. Those who failed to understand history, and weaponised the spirit of the Liberation War to create an environment of corruption and suffering—we have been able to bid them farewell. If we consider the atrocities over the past 15 years, we want justice for all of these actions. Those who used anything

and everything, from shotguns to assault rifles and sniper rifles, to take lives during the movement in July, must be brought to book, as per national and international laws. In addition, people's sufferings must be addressed, particularly the increase of the prices of essentials and the burden of taxes being placed on the people.

In the past, we have faced disappointment; we don't want to return to a state where politicians work for their own benefit. We want to build a better nation in the memory of the martyrs of 1971, the martyrs of July and August 2024. We want an inclusive governance system where all people are recognised as equal citizens of Bangladesh, regardless of their gender, religion or any other factor. We want to see this initiative from the state and we want it to be institutionalised. Let Bangladesh begin anew, and let this new Bangladesh reflect the dreams of all those who lost their lives.

Much work remains to be done, however. We must determine a list of all those who passed away, provide treatment to the injured, and ensure safer means of

livelihood for families that are in great distress due to this situation. These matters must be resolved at the earliest.

To reiterate, the success we have attained now cannot be attributed to any party, it belongs to the students, particularly the six coordinators along with various others who organised this at great risks to their lives.

We know that military rule never bodes well for any nation. Hence, the creation of an inclusive government is vital. This national solidarity that has arisen must be utilised to create a healthy and peaceful Bangladesh—different from what we have seen in the last 53 years. We must remain united and integrated, and we cannot let the collective spirit and unity that has emerged from this movement dissipate in any manner. We cannot fall into the trap of a cult of personality again. We are all the same, we are all equal and we are all Bangladeshi people, regardless of how we identify or what class or segment of the population we belong to. The nation must be able to retain this collective identity.



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PHOTO: NAIMUR RAHMAN

How will the interim government shape up?



Mujahidul Islam Selim
is former president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB).

MUJAHIDUL ISLAM SELIM

It is too early to react to the speech by the army chief because he has said we will get more information on the interim government after he discusses it with the president. But one thing to note here is that he mentioned the name of a banned political party—Jamaat-e-Islami—when he said a discussion had been held with the main political parties of the country. Also, he said that he had discussed the current situation with all the big political parties of the country, which is not true. For instance, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) was not contacted.

Moreover, they did not contact the coordinators of the protesting students' platform (the Students' Movement against Discrimination). He said Prof Asif Nazrul had taken the responsibility of informing the students. These are vague comments. He said things would be clear



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

tomorrow. As long as the demands of the quota reform movement are not fully implemented, the protesters should remain alert.

The enthusiasm seen during the current movement is unprecedented. Such enthusiasm was not even present

during the 1969 Mass Uprising, which was led by an organised leadership. Although the quota reform movement does not have the same format, I have not seen any mistakes made by its leadership so far. Rather, the movement gained more public support and there does not seem to be any

loss of momentum. We are witnessing the determination of very ordinary students ready to sacrifice their lives to establish their rights.

The Awami League government lost public support. To stay in power, they applied brutal force. We heard the

VOICES FROM SHAHABAGH

We can't celebrate yet. Not until there is justice for our brothers who have been killed. Sheikh Hasina's resignation was, of course, a must. But for all the deaths that happened, there must be thorough investigations into the role of the administration, party activists, Chhatra League and others. Once that has been achieved, then we can finally celebrate.

We do not know who will come to power next, but the army is likely to take over in the immediate future. We hope whoever it is, they will take prompt and proper actions to deliver justice for the killings. Those who have been unjustly detained must be unconditionally released.

I don't think there is any country in the world where the government has tried to stay in power by raising its hand on its own students so many times like this. Students are a nation's assets. Students have a special place in peoples' hearts. This regime didn't just kill one or two students. According to newspaper reports, it killed more than 300—even though we believe the number is higher. Many ordinary citizens have also been killed. It is because this regime killed so many students that people have come out flooding the streets to lend their support. If you look around, you will see thousands and thousands of ordinary people around you—there are no political parties here. Why is that? They are here to support those who have been killed, the students, who are our brothers and sisters.

No government in the world, I believe, can stay in power by killing its own students. And we have proved that here in Bangladesh.

A university student

The prime minister had no other alternative but to resign. After creating the situation that she and her party did, how could she speak of finding a compromise? Everything had gone out of control by the time she was willing to listen to the students. So, resigning was the best decision for her.

All these people have gathered together for independence. A government that shoots at its own people is not wanted by anyone.

A BRAC university student

We are very happy right now for achieving this independence. We achieved this victory in return for our blood. Now, we want to celebrate it fully and with everyone.

Now, we need to ensure that the perpetrators of the killings are held to account, alongside those who gave the orders. Even if they manage to flee the country, they should be brought back and tried properly, so that no one ever dares to commit such crimes again.

A university student

We want thorough investigations into all the killings. Even if any of them were committed by the army, it has to investigate them also. My point is, no one who fired at students and ordinary people should be spared. As a student of Dhaka University, what some law enforcers did in our university over the past weeks is unacceptable. What the vice-chancellor and other responsible persons did must be looked into as well.

Even today, when we went to the campus, people fired at us. Who were involved in these shootings? Do we not deserve to know as students of that university, who were shooting at us in our own campus? Whoever comes to power next, they should know by now the power of Bangladesh's students and its people. So, if they do not investigate these incidents, we will once again unite.

A Dhaka University student

The students' initial one-point demand of quota reform turned into a one-point demand for Sheikh Hasina's resignation. It turned into a movement to bring back democracy. How could she get away with carrying out mass murders so she could stay in Gono Bhaban? I held back my child from joining the protests before, but not today. We've been here since the morning and we won't leave till she resigns. We've seen a lot of bloodshed; we will not accept any more of it.

Nipa
Housewife from Lalbagh

I am here observing the mob. I am really happy. The students have achieved a lot, they have done the hard work of bringing us here. We love our country and we want to save it. The students should work towards establishing peace in the country where no one is suppressed.

Syed Afzalul Karim
Dermatologist

Whatever happens, it has to be done through a peaceful, amicable way and we do not want any military intervention in this whole process. The transition has to be done with the leadership of the students, and with constructive consultation with political parties, civil society, and other actors in the movement.

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