



DHAKA THURSDAY AUGUST 29, 2024, BHADRA 14, 1431 BS

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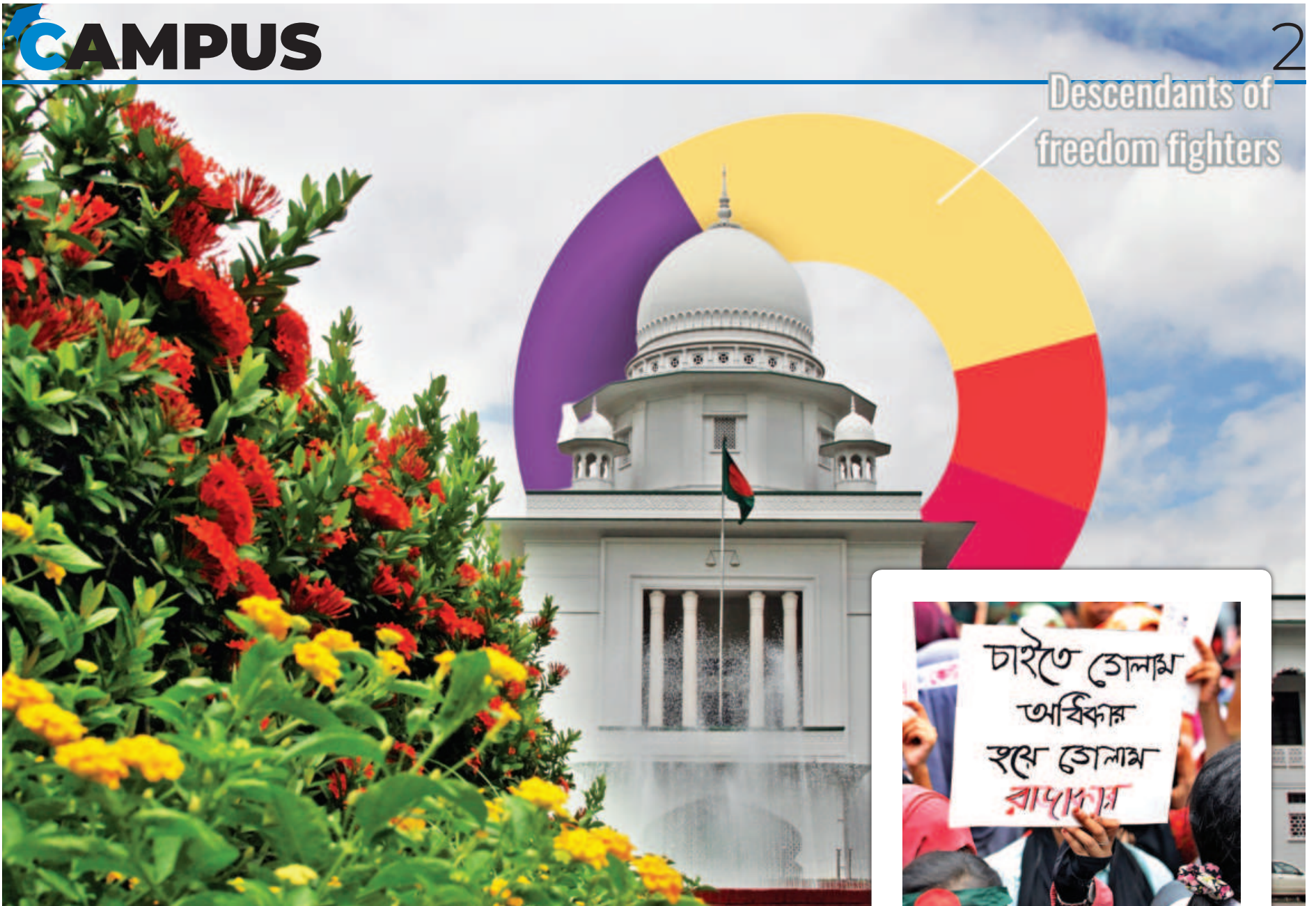
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Descendants of
freedom fighters



On June 5, the High Court declares the government's 2018 decision to cancel the 30 percent quota for freedom fighter's children and grandchildren illegal, effectively reinstating the quota. Students start staging protests in six universities across the country.



On July 14, in response to a reporter's question, Sheikh Hasina makes the controversial remark that compares the protestors to *razakars*. Her words cause an uproar leading to several demonstrations across different campuses with students chanting "Tumi ke? Ami ke? Razakar, razakar! Ke boleche, ke boleche? Shoirachar, shoirachar!"



Dhaka University (DU) students organise under the banner of "Students against Discrimination" on July 2, and stage a demonstration in the TSC area demanding reinstatement of the 2018 government circular that scrapped the quota system in civil service. Protests spread to other parts of the country over the next few days. Students call for "Bangla Blockade" from July 7.



Between July 7 and 13, Dhaka comes to a standstill multiple times due to blockades and demonstrations organised by the students.



Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and other ruling party activists start attacking quota protesters at Dhaka University on July 15.



PHOTO: COLLECTED/SCREENSHOT FROM FOOTAGE

Police attack students during an absentee funeral for student martyrs on July 17. Students declare a nationwide complete shutdown starting the next day.

On July 16, at least six are killed in fierce clashes between protesting students and law enforcers joined in by ruling party activists in Dhaka, Chattogram and Rangpur. The government deploys the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in six districts. In Rangpur, an unarmed student protestor, Abu Sayed of Begum Rokeya University, is shot and killed in front of his campus by police, as he stood in front of them with his arms wide open.

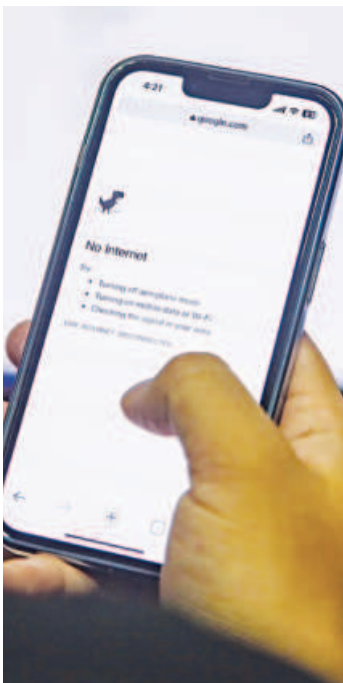


PHOTO: COLLECTED/SCREENSHOT FROM FOOTAGE

Police and BCL men attack students at BRAC University and other campuses on July 18. The same day, several government establishments are vandalised and set on fire. Mobile internet service is blocked across the country by afternoon. Around 9 PM, a countrywide internet shutdown is ordered by the government.

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Daylong violence on July 19 kills around 66 people and hundreds more are injured across the country, as violence escalates.



Effective from July 19 midnight, government announces nationwide curfew and deploys army.



At least 21 people are killed on the first day of curfew amid army deployment. Curfew is extended until further notice and a two-day general public holiday is announced. Over three days, police raids see law enforcers arrest 1,427 people in connection with the violence. Around 50 cases are filed with different police stations accusing 20,000 unidentified people of resorting to violence.



Late at night of July 20, Nahid Islam, a key organiser of the anti-discrimination student movement, is forcibly taken by plainclothes persons from a house in Sabujbagh. A day later, Nahid wakes up to find himself under a bridge in Purbachal. He alleges he was blindfolded and taken to an unknown location where he was tortured until he was unconscious. He was treated for severe pain and deep bruises on his left thigh and shoulder.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangladesh: End punitive mass arrests and arbitrary detention of student leaders and protesters

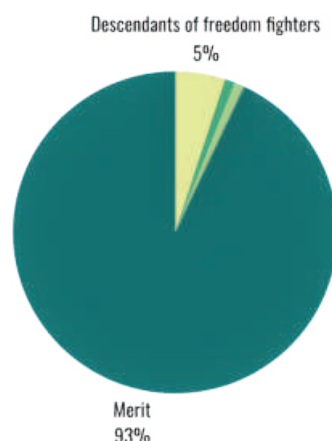


The mass arrest and arbitrary detention of student protesters is a witch hunt by the authorities to silence anyone who dares to challenge the government and is a tool to further perpetuate a climate of fear.

Smiti Singh, Regional Director for South Asia at Amnesty International



Supreme Court curtails quotas to 7 percent and at least seven people are killed amid curfew. Chiefs of three forces meet Hasina, as UN, EU, UK voice concern over violence. Amnesty International also responds to reports of violence.



On July 23, government issues a circular reforming quota system, allowing 93 percent of the recruitment at government, semi-government and autonomous bodies to be based on merit. However, quota reform protest organisers reject it, demanding justice for deaths and injuries that occurred during the protests.



Hasina makes first public appearance since army deployment and visits damaged metro rail station, urging people to resist arson and vandalism. But, her focus on property damage over human lives further enrages protesters and the general population.



On July 29, Detective Branch (DB) of police pick up three organisers who had been taken and released once before, from the hospital where they were being treated. Six detained protest leaders were seen dining with Dhaka Metropolitan Police chief Harunor Rashid in a social media post. They subsequently announce the end of the movement in a written statement.



Students take to the streets again to protest the detention and harassment of the six coordinators. Supreme Court lawyers file a petition seeking orders to have the six protesters released immediately and to stop the use of bullets against protesters.



Block raids targeting protesters, mostly students, continue. Organisers outside vowed to continue the protests, saying the six in custody were forced to make a statement. The government officially confirmed a death toll of 147.



Coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement call on people to cover their faces with red pieces of cloth and upload their photos online as a rejection of the government's call for nationwide mourning. Facebook is flooded with the colour red as scores of Bangladeshi users change their profile pictures to a solid field of red as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the students.



As violence intensified, it became quite obvious that the regime spared no one. The wider population could no longer stand and watch as their children were being killed. Individuals from all walks of life – artists, rickshawpullers, teachers – mobilised and organised protests alongside students. The initial nine-point demand was now replaced by only one: the resignation of Sheikh Hasina. In the days that followed, people gathered in great numbers across the nation – the likes of which we hadn't seen in a long time.





PHOTO: COLLECTED



On August 4, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement announced the “Long March to Dhaka” programme – urging everyone to show up to the capital. The early hours of August 5 were tense. By early afternoon, however, the tension that hung in the air was suspended. Rumours of Sheikh Hasina’s resignation was confirmed by the Bangladesh Army Chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman. People were jubilant. Nonetheless, it was short-lived as vandalism and violence swept the country once again.





The absence of law enforcement on the streets rang alarms in everyone's minds. Everyone feared a complete breakdown of law and order but students stepped up to the occasion – cleaning up the streets, managing traffic, painting murals, and forming local committees to guard temples as well as their own neighbourhoods. With sticks, megaphones, paintbrushes, and brooms in their grasp, the students sought to continue their momentum and not let chaos overwhelm the nation. The luxury of a new start comes with the promise of boundless potential. It is up to us make sure to foster that potential to ensure that the Bangladesh we envisioned materialises.



PHOTOS: AMRAN HOSSAIN, ANISUR RAHMAN, RASHED SUMON, PALASH KHAN, PRABIR DAS, SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED, ORCHID CHAKMA, NAIMUR RAHMAN, AFP, REUTERS

