

# The month that was

neighbourhoods and communities.

The role of the entire justice system, both

police and judiciary, in the dying days of

the Awami League regime left little doubt

that would only do the biddings of the

powers that be. As a result, both are still

TANIM AHMED

The uncertainty that gripped the nation immediately after Bangladesh's former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, fled the country in a military helicopter to India, eased to some extent when the army chief announced that Dr Muhammad Yunus would be heading an interim government. It was August 5.

What began as a fledgling students' campaign to reform quotas in government jobs under the banner of anti-discrimination student's movement had transformed into an anti-government protest. It culminated in a people's uprising toppling an iron-fisted autocratic regime of 15 years.

As is wont to happen, Sheikh Hasina left a substantial vacuum in the wake of her hasty departure. In her bid to hold on to power, Hasina and her cohorts had politicised and, thereby, destroyed crucial institutions of the state. The police fled their posts, government offices ceased to function, those deemed to be enablers of the Awami League went into hiding. Unfortunate though it was, some elements exploited that opportunity

and attacked the minorities. But

then the communities and

students responded with

commendable resilience.

scrambling to recover their credibility and image of authority. The Appellate Division, which is the top court of Bangladesh, has been completely reconstituted. The police are going through a cleansing too, with wholesale transfers and new

appointments besides relieving a

few of the notorious officers.

Some have already been accused in criminal cases, including murder, for their role during the July-August protests.

The entire month of August has seen a series of protests and demands almost as part of a ritualistic

The citizens came together to protect their have been in hiding since the fall of the government. Beginning with the central bank, almost every government agency has seen change at the top. There have also been numerous demonstrations demanding that the government address long held grievances. Almost a month after the fall of Hasina, angry factory workers are still reported to be demonstrating in industrial districts on the outskirts of Dhaka blocking a major highway which is like a national artery.

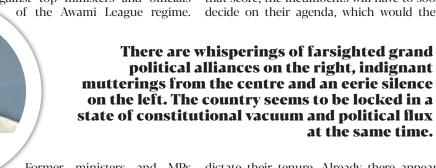
There has been a slew of criminal cases against top ministers and officials

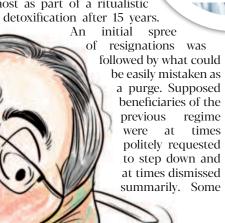
merely symptoms stemming from an inner core that itself is still rather fluid. The interim government has yet to define its own agenda or its tenure. When Yunus addressed the nation 20 days after taking over the helm of Bangladesh, he laid out an elaborate vision of Bangladesh. He proposed reforms, all of them necessary and crucial, which will take years if not more. While his primary stakeholdersthe political parties—are in agreement that reforms are imperative before elections, they are unlikely to give him a blank cheque. On that score, the incumbents will have to soon decide on their agenda, which would then

millions within Bangladesh and beyond, that alone would not have sufficed for the interim government's political and social acceptance. The students continue to be a visible force on the ground and lend substantial political legitimacy to Yunus' government. Thus far, the students have clearly hinted that the reform agenda is rather trivial compared to what they want this government to do. They appear to be inclined to overhaul the system in such a manner that will preclude the need for the reforms that are the being discussed.

There appears to be a comfortable obliviousness that although the advisers were sworn in with an oath to uphold the constitution, the latter does not recognise the existence of their government. There are whisperings of farsighted grand political alliances on the right, indignant mutterings from the centre and an eerie silence on the left. The country seems to be locked in a state of constitutional vacuum and political flux at the same time. We may have barely averted a catastrophe and come back from the brink of disaster a month ago, which might suggest smoother sailing. But actually, the course remains almost as uncertain as it was a month ago.

Tanim Ahmed is a journalist at The Daily





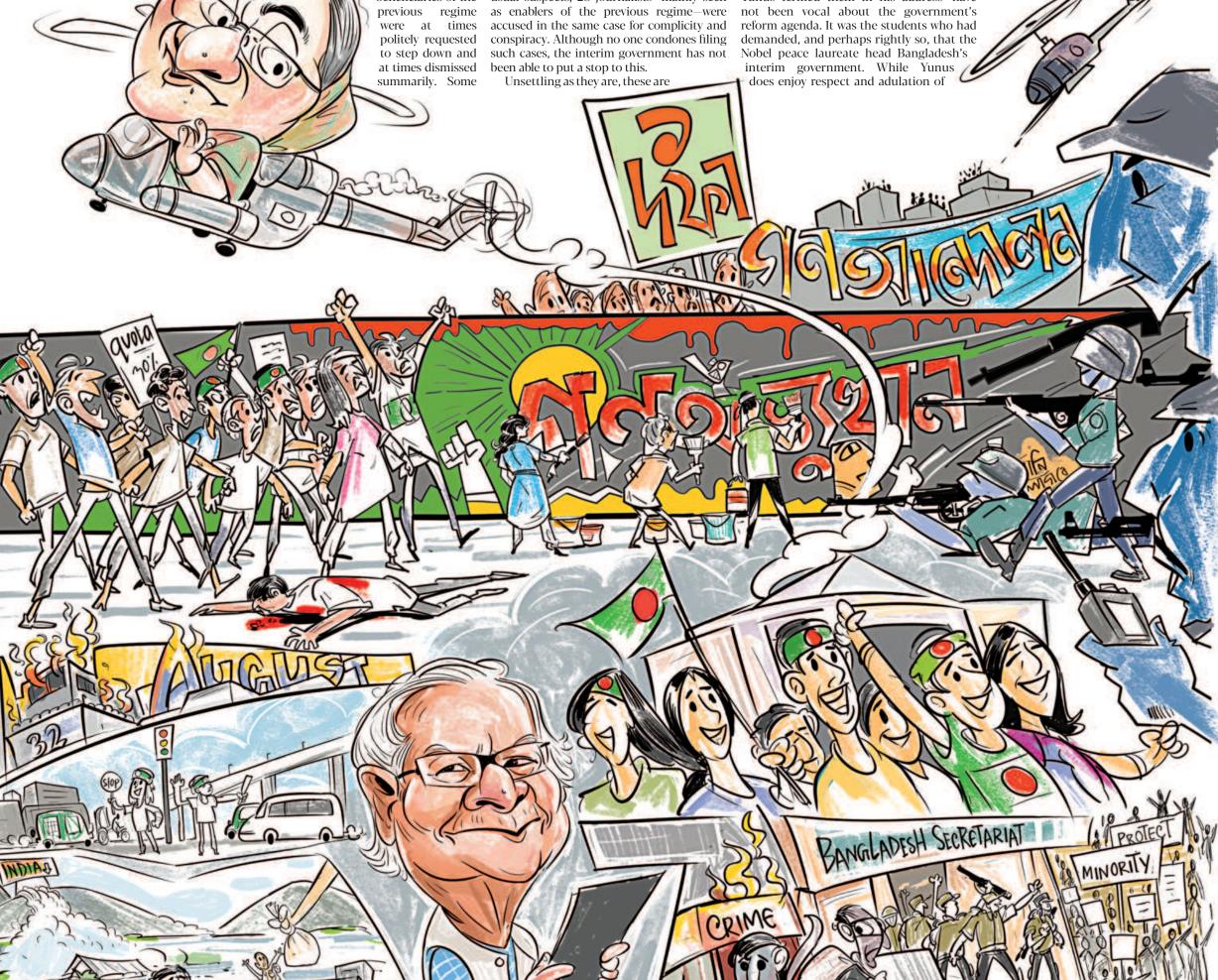
**Tanim Ahmed** 

Former ministers and MPs remain in hiding, while murder cases pile up against them. The former prime minister is already facing a few dozen, including a few allegations of crimes against humanity and genocide. Besides the usual suspects, 28 journalists—mainly seen

dictate their tenure. Already there appears to be some difference between long-time allies BNP and Jamaat regarding reforms and But perhaps more significantly the

at the same time.

students-'the primary employers', as Yunus termed them in his address—have interim government. While Yunus does enjoy respect and adulation of



The Daily Star recently organised a roundtable titled 'Vision of the Youth.' Students from various universities across the country, who led the quota reform movement, participated in the event to share their vision for a new Bangladesh. Below, we present a summary of the discussion.

# What do the youth really want?

WHAT KIND OF CONSTITUTIONAL August mass uprising, it is both

was itself undemocratic; it was quick to dismiss anyone who does not

without sufficient consultation with are the original proponents of cancel













Arif Sohel

University

REFORMS DO WE WE NEED?

In this context, it is notable

allowed opposition parties to retain crafted by a small group of lawyers conform to their views and, in fact,

Organiser, Jahanairnagai





timely and essential to demand a

new constitution or substantial

reforms to the current one. Without

this, any future democratically

therefore, serious reforms to the

present constitution are imperative.

Contemporary political parties

in Bangladesh, or those trying

Prapti Taposhi

Organiser, Jahangirnagar



which is fraught with problems. It

a decision is made on whether

they will be granted a permanent

position. This process often leads to

justices feeling compelled to cater

to the ruling regime's whims and

The role of the ombudsman, as

provision worth discussing. The

ombudsman is meant to act as a

and the general public, serving as a

contentious because it was

check and balance on power.

minister from office.

sectarian demands.

culture. Whichever party comes to of 'no confidence' against the Prime

power routinely uses repressive legal Minister. A possible modification





# juridical power to remove a prime Mozammel Haque

Another significant issue is the Looking at past elections, especially process of appointing justices, the most recent one, securing the nomination seemed more important elected government could once is said that a justice's performance than winning the election itself, as it again devolve into a fascist regime; is observed for two years before was often assumed that whoever won the nomination would automatically win the election. Those who had more money wielded more muscle power, utilised the media for propaganda, and exploited the bureaucracy were more

likely to secure a nomination. These outlined in Article 77, is another corrupt practices must be stopped. I involved in corruption and money mediator between the bureaucracy laundering participating in elections. Such practices must be banned. Meghmallar Basu In countries without proportional

representation, elections often end

up doing more harm than good. In

such systems, voters are left with

no choice but to vote for one major

party to remove the other—BNP to

oust AL and vice versa. Even when

we campaigned for a leftist party

or candidate, the most common

response was: "Your candidate is

good, but if we vote for you, it will

be wasted." This sentiment arises

because, if a vote does not cross

the 50 percent threshold, it doesn't

count, which is fundamentally

undemocratic. Without proportional

representation, the fear of a wasted

vote drives people to choose between

the two largest political parties,

thereby hampering political plurality.

Another important issue i

that, according to media reports,

90 percent of former parliament

members were millionaires. We want

representation from different groups,

such as religious minorities and

millions represent someone whose

fundamental class interests are

In my opinion, the two most

critical factors are implementing

proportional representation and

strictly regulating the amount of

money spent in elections and the

We must not overlook the fact

that political influence is not the

only factor corrupting the Election

Commission; powerful businessmen

and industrialists also play a

stipulated that there should be five

members in the Election Commission,

including a woman, to create an

rarely have any real scope to voice their

opinions. They tend to serve as mere

puppets or showpieces, which raises

the question: How logical is it to keep

women members in the EC under such

circumstances? This is something we

Moreover, the 13th Amendment

different from theirs?

sources of that money.

Prapti Taposhi

significant role in this.

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN POLITICS? Sabah Anjim Farabi

holding the EC accountable.

Nazifa Jannat

The latest Election Commission

Act was passed in 2022. According

to this Act, the Chief Election

Commissioner and three other

individuals will form the Election

Commission, with a six-member

search committee proposing

their names. It is essential for the

search committee to publish their

meeting minutes and resolutions

as public notices. This transparency

would ensure public participation

by keeping people informed about

system of checks and balances. The

media can also play a crucial role

in keeping the public updated and

When discussing religion-based politics, it's crucial to consider the role of religion itself. As a Muslim, I which teaches that Islam does not condone interference in the that individuals of all faiths are fails in this responsibility, it should be held accountable.

Prapti Taposhi

Political parties based on religious ideologies often promote extremism and are prone to rejecting differing viewpoints. This issue is compounded in countries a particular religion can limit everyone should have the right to

inclusivity. Arif Sohel

The concept of religion-based

some might describe their approach as Shariati politics. Additionally, Maulana Bhashani's politics, rooted in Hukumat-e-Rabbania, played a crucial role in Bangladesh's independence. By adopting an inclusive

mindset, the state would naturally evolve from the community rather than imposing itself upon would be reflected in both rural the EC's activities and fostering a and urban areas, continuing limitations of theocracies focused History demonstrates that of both religion and secularism. underscoring the need to critically evaluate political systems that lack

Meghmallar Basu speak from an Islamic perspective, In theory, religion-based politics could be progressive, as illustrated by the Maulana Bhashani's politics. practice of other religions. It is However, in Bangladesh, parties the government's duty to ensure like Jamaat-e-Islami and Khilafat Mailis, which engage in religion protected, and if the government based politics, often present themselves as protectors. This raises the question of why individuals from other religious communities would seek protection rather than

It is crucial to recognise that the longstanding policy of banning these parties has been with an official state religion, ineffective. Despite 15 years of where those who align with the repression, Jamaat-e-Islami has national religion and engage in not disappeared; rather, such

political struggle. Umama Fatema

voter base. This religion-based this country equally, with equal politics is not grounded in genuine rights and opportunities. religious philosophy; instead, it functions merely as a tool for where students, youths, and the

others through its rules and rituals. Pranbad or Stewardship, these a tradition of coexistence. ideas have minimal presence Communities can overcome the in rural areas. Given the state's as war criminals in 1971. on specific rituals or obligations. governance could create a genuine space for discussions on religiongenocide has occurred in the name based politics, fostering more meaningful engagement. People

The current state of student politics requires thorough reassessment. The traditional structures and characteristics are no longer effective, as evidenced by the growing disillusionment among both youths and the general public in Bangladesh.

should have the freedom to choose which ideas they accept.

Sabah Anjim Farabi parties. despite their differing on Islam-based principles. Every ideals of law-abiding politics. participate in politics, it is vital views. They reached a consensus to political party, in some way, adheres for political parties to embrace exclude such politics from campus, to its own 'dharma' globally. Even and any attempts by Shibir to those who are anti-religion in their enter were collectively thwarted. politics can inadvertently create a It represented both a social and new form of ideological influence.

Nazifa Jannat

In 2024, mass murders occurred,

securing votes. Moreover, it seems elderly people were killed by that religion is being weaponised state apparatus under the Awami by political parties to suppress League government. However, we must not forget the events of 1971 While some city-based study or alter the established historical groups discuss concepts like narrative. While condemning the 2024 genocide, it's also important not to forget Jamaat-e-Islami's role repressive nature, a shift in HOW DO YOU VIEW STUDENT POLITICS IN EDUCATIONAL

> **Mustafiz Rahman** What we have consistently

observed before and during the July massacre is violence against student movements. The student wing of the Awami League, Chhatra League, has been disruptive even during This group exerted significant control over students, frequently commanding various aspects of their lives. Many activists would skip lectures to attend political meetings and participate in processions. This dominance has made us increasingly pessimistic about university-level politics in Bangladesh, which is why I support the idea of making student politics illegal.

When student politics leads to be highly polarised. I support the practices such as extortion and terrorism, it becomes a serious concern. At Jagannath University, demands are part of a broader student politics, we must focus such activities have been prevalent, narrative advocating for a ban on the condition of student repression often enhances the It's crucial to recognise that setting a poor example for with the principles of secularism, party's image as a symbol of no politics is entirely free from academic institutions. Student resistance. In the 1980s, Shibir religious influence. The Awami politics must be banned as it has it would not necessarily end of student politics were upheld inclusivity. Such a bias towards was not banned outright but was League centres its politics around already been corrupted and is at challenged through a collective Mujib-dharma, the BNP around risk of further being influenced by agreement among active student Zia-dharma, and Jamaat-e-Islami propaganda, leaving behind the might feel marginalised.

Masud Rana

always been relevant. A recurring inevitably impact student politics. issue with youth-based political Political actors in Bangladesh groups is that final approvals must confront this issue and are typically granted by higher strive to build more equitable

theocracy, yet religion encompasses from some linguistic differences. objective should be to unite as and hindered the development of 1980s. DUCSU elections were more more than just theocratic rule; Since most people are religiously Bangladeshi citizens, ensuring student leaders. Student politics regular at that time, and student inclined, these parties exploit equal rights for everyone without should be for students and should leaders had to demonstrate their religious rhetoric to build their categorisation. We all belong to not be exploited by major parties effectiveness. In recent decades, like the AL and BNP to extend their however, political figures have increasingly neglected the need to

> gain approval from the masses. Certain regulations from The current state of student politics 1990s require revision requires thorough reassessment. The traditional structures and should not be allocated based on characteristics are no longer political affiliation. Such practices effective, as evidenced by the disadvantage ordinary students growing disillusionment among by prioritising those with specific both youths and the general public deological or organisational ties. Ensuring fair access to We currently lack successful accommodation would support models for student politics that the development of progressive truly address the needs of the student politics. people. To rectify this, we must

> > Prapti Taposhi

first focus on developing effective policies and mobilising resources A university should be a haven for to meet political aspirations. free thought. I envision Bangladeshi Practical experience is crucial educational institutions where and should be given serious students are granted the liberty to consideration. Only through this express themselves openly. Issues approach can we build a solid such as U.S. imperialism, Indian foundation for student politics aggression, and both local and that is recognised nationally. international politics are crucia As emphasised, student politics subjects that students need to should primarily serve the interests debate and understand.

Mozammel Haque

of young people. Upholding this

principle is essential if we are to

prepare Bangladesh for modern,

internationally recognised political

Bangladesh, involving both

students and teachers, tends to

Student politics is influenced

Meghmallar Basu

University-level politics

The pressing need is for corruption free youth politics. To achieve this, we must ensure transparent and equitable processes for accommodation facilities and student elections. University administrations need to be both

recent calls to eradicate corruption Umama Fatema

from student politics. These Before addressing the legality of

campus polarisation. Instead, new despite widespread rigging. The divides could emerge, as groups 28-year hiatus of DUCSU suggests loss of essential ethical standards. Today, it is crucial for students by societal dynamics. Divisions with genuine intentions to step Student politics in Bangladesh has and discrimination within society up. Banning student politics would only create unnecessary obstacles.



Organiser, Raishahi University hope of freeing ourselves from an The greatest strength of any political Over the past 15 years, a fascist undemocratic government, you have party is its opposition. The mistake regime has rendered the constitution taught us to dream again. the Awami League (AL) made was increasingly irrelevant in ensuring Throughout my long career trying to consolidate its own power the proper functioning of the state, in journalism, I have witnessed while simultaneously attempting to as evidenced by the removal of the the erosion of democracy, the suppress other political ideologies. suppression of free expression, and For example, why did the opposition from the constitution. countless human rights abuses. members of parliament flee after Acknowledging the efforts of my the government fell? This suggests that the regime frequently makes colleagues, we have strived to they either considered themselves rhetorical references to the 1972 to remain politically active, are practise free journalism even in part of the AL or were conditioned constitution. However, the drafting fundamentally undemocratic and the most challenging times. Yet, to behave as such. However, the AL process of the 1972 Constitution authoritarian at their core. They are much has remained unsaid, or we could have been stronger if it had have self-censored due to concerns

or junior colleagues. With many parties must be the diverse groups involved in the culture, which is fundamentally at considerations in mind, we chose to internally. Without Liberation War—people from various odds with true democratic political essentially designed to prevent a vote refrain from writing about certain issues. But you have dismantled that an internal system of checks and walks of life. oppressive environment, and we in balances, the entire structure will

the media are particularly grateful to The government has changed, opening up new opportunities. However, the path forward is far more complex than simply replacing those

for the safety of our reporters

After your revolution, we are beginning to see signs of deviation and a tendency to enforce certain decisions, such as entering the Secretariat or cancelling exams. While these actions might seem iustified to vou, it is crucial to reflect on these matters when guiding a state and fulfilling its associated dreams. We live within a societal structure that requires certain disciplines.

in power.

In reality. I must say that the political parties that suffered under the Awami League (AL) have now merely replaced the previous ruling party. The faces are new, but the actions are the same—abusing power in the name of your revolution. You must consider how to safeguard your achievements because this is a slippery slope. You are standing on a mountain peak, surrounded by

It is incredibly difficult to maintain an environment where true freedom of expression prevails. Freedom of expression means that criticism may be directed at anyone. We have laws to address; whether such criticism is based on facts or not. Attacking journalists or vandalising newspaper represent freedom of expression.

Your voices have given me hope, making me believe in the possibility

> movement, we have The nomination process was entirely managed to remove undemocratic. We, the students, **the Awami League** urge existing political parties to be as **regime. but our** democratic as possible. aim is not to simply Nazifa Jannat other political party. stressed.

of a Bangladesh we have aspired to since its birth. To achieve this vision, you must foster a culture of tolerance. You have set many examples already, and I am confident you can set parties, such as the Communist examples in this regard as well. Shuchismita Tithi

Sub-editor, The Daily Star, and moderator of the Session

The movement started as a studentled demand for quota reform but the general public. quickly expanded into a wider

accountable. For example, the AL has Meghmallar Basu **Through our** not democratically selected any of its representatives in the last 15 years.

**replace it with any** Organiser, East West University a fundamental weakness: their of the colonial state. disconnection from the common rights. This resulted in a significant

Through our movement, we have protest against the government's managed to remove the Awami suppression and oppression. Initially, League regime, but our aim is not students called for the Prime Minister to simply replace it with any other to retract her speech. In response, the political party. This point must be student wing of the Awami League, stressed. In the process of restoration, the Chhatra League, launched an political parties must prioritise attack on the University of Dhaka, the public interest when selecting prompting students to protest mandates and formulating policies. against the Chhatra League itself. If political parties can reconnect with Gradually, the movement evolved the people, it will become evident to demand the Prime Minister's which party offers the best approach from a policy-making perspective.

its own cultural framework, which is advocates of a new constitution, one especially within the AL and BNP. crucial for any political organisation. founded on equity, human dignity, when every layer of it is held of our Declaration of Independence.

## Organiser, Dhaka University

The Digital Security Act, which was later revised and renamed the Cyber Sabah Anjim Farabi Security Act, serves as a case in Organiser, BRAC University point. It is important to recognise of 1860. Thus, it could be argued The former ruling party and that, over the years, we have merely **This point must be** the opposition parties shared reproduced the repressive apparatus

The framework of our current overall governance were not people- influenced by this colonial discourse, centric. The main opposition party which is incompatible with a party office, frequently justifying its spent much of its time in protest but sovereign nation like ours—one that failed to lead effectively or provide a is largely homogeneous in its nature clear path forward. Similarly, other vet celebrates cultural pluralism.

The religious fanaticism and To uphold the spirit of the 2024 Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and leftist dehumanisation we are witnessing uprising, we need an entirely new groups, were unable to secure the today can be directly traced back to constitution. While it is important mandates needed to protect people's this colonial repressive apparatus. to acknowledge that the 1972 Additionally, the severe human rights Constitution includes inclusive breakdown in their connection with violations faced by certain ethnic principles, such as socialism and minorities in the Chittagong Hill secularism, and is not merely a Tracts (CHT) are often a consequence mindless duplication of the Indian of the colonial legacy that continues constitution, its fundamental to shape our current constitution.

#### Umama Fatema

Organiser. Dhaka University There is considerable debate about whether we need a new constitution, constitution need further it. As students and leaders of this

After the 2008 election, when that this act can be traced back to the AL formed the government, the colonial-era Special Powers Act it quickly moved to abolish the caretaker government, a step taken by amending the constitution. This action subsequently impeded the decentralisation process in Bangladesh. Whenever a political people. Their laws, mandates, and constitution is undoubtedly party comes to power, it often turns the entire country into its

that dominates our society.

women have long been denied agency

and rights. Additionally, we must

move away from the factionalism

#### This culture needs to changed.

organising principles are still heavily rooted in colonial ideology. The creation of a new constitution would require a constituent assembly. Certain clauses in the current

reform the existing one, or amend elaboration. For instance, Article 33 of the judiciary must be guaranteed. allows for the indefinite detention of Without an independent judicial movement, we must closely consider individuals. Additionally, it is crucial system, Bangladesh will never be law. The EC must move beyond this the people's aspirations concerning to note that there is no provision in able to establish a foundation for fair colonial legacy to ensure a truly the constitution. In light of the July the constitution that provides the elections.

or TV channel offices does not eventually collapse. Every party has people, to become the architects and provisions to suppress opposition, could be to allow MPs to vote against their party in all instances, We can also anticipate some form except in cases of 'no confidence', A party becomes culturally strong and social justice—the core principles of reform in inheritance laws, where without losing their membership in parliament. Although I believe Article 70 should be open in all inclusive body. However, this is not cases, if there is a concern about reflected in our current EC. The stability, this exception could be women in the EC often lack agency and

## WHAT SHOULD BE THE AND HOW SHOULD THE **ELECTION COMMISSION (EC)**

Mustafiz Rahman Organiser, Jagannath University

First, we must consider the context of the last 16 years to understand the nature of elections conducted under the Election Commissionthe 2014 election by selection, the actions through the constitution. 2018 election with votes cast the night before, and the 2024 dummy election. Reflecting on these three elections, it is clear that reforming the Election Commission is essential to ensure transparency and

Secondly, if we are moving Furthermore, the independence

towards an election, we must analyse the history of the past 16 years to implement necessary changes through an interim government and guide the country toward improvement. It is also crucial to determine how long the interim government can remain in power according to the constitution.

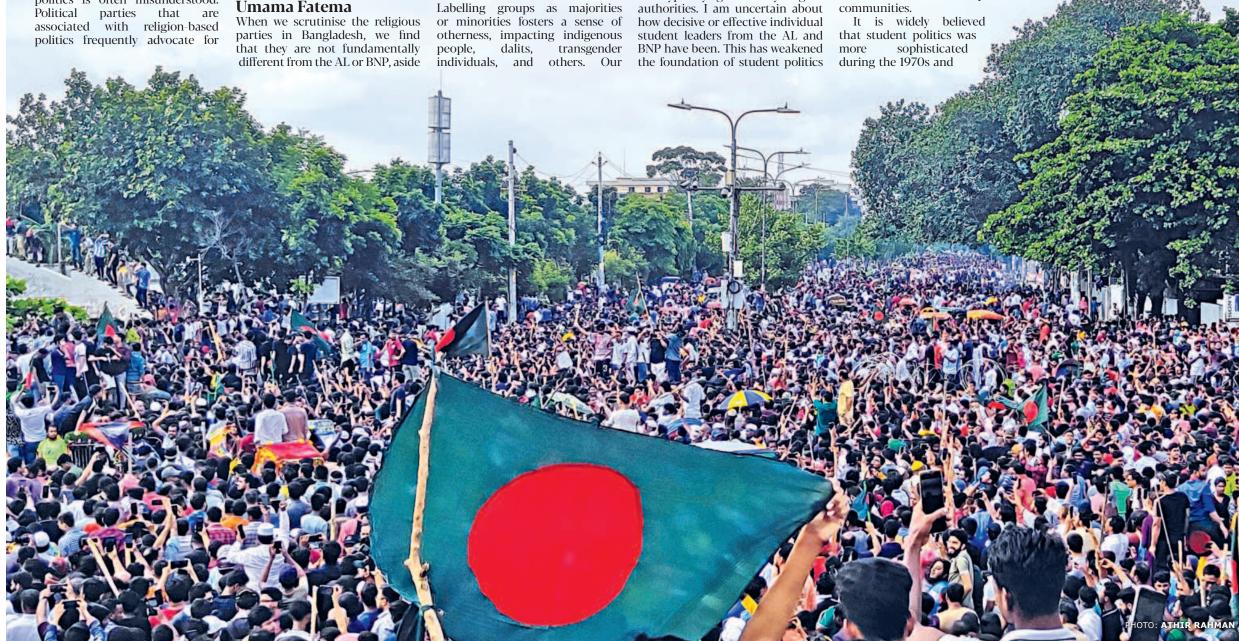
must critically examine.

It is also crucial to recognise



**Arif Sohel** In the 1991 and 2001 elections, the EC acted transparently under the caretaker government, serving as an intermediary among various elite groups. It established a mechanism to balance the interests of pro-Awami and pro-BNP factions, ensuring that elected officials could assume their positions and those who were not elected would remain secure. To effectively realise the people's democratic will, we must begin at the grassroots level. We need an election that includes the millions who are not part of these elite groups. While this will be a challenging task, it is essential to prevent the mass uprising from being in vain.

that our election practices are still influenced by a colonial mindset. inherited from British rule. The British established the framework for our elections, and this outdated approach continues to shape our understanding of democracy and democratic election process.



# Can we rebuild the lost trust in LAW ENFORCEMENT?

The euphoria of August 5 was marred by incidents of violence including attacks on minorities and supporters of the former government, rampant looting and burning of houses and establishments associated with the Awami League regime. Mobs attacked police and some perished under their wrath; police stations were burnt to the ground. The result was a general feeling of insecurity as police became reluctant to perform their duties, fearing for their safety. In the wake of all the uncertainty and mutual mistrust, how can we come to a state of peace and normalcy?

**Jyotirmoy Barua** 

#### JYOTIRMOY BARUA

Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

After the jubilation following the fall of Sheikh Hasina, we saw the horrors of the nights of August 5-how houses were set on fire, vandalised and looted, and no one was prepared for that. For some unknown reasons, the army disappeared from the streets. Whose decision was that, and why was it done? From different individual sources, we heard that the army did not have enough human resources or they were not prepared for the ensuing chaos, but we have not received an explanation from any official sources yet.

Had there been army vehicles in the streets, or if people knew that army platoons were patrolling the streets, then these incidents could have been avoided. The arson attack at the Bangabandhu Memorial on Road 32, and other state institutions, such as the Shishu Academy, could have been avoided. Also, individual attacks, neighbourhood robberies could have been addressed.

As a result, the general public suffered the most and are still suffering. We heard from different Hindu businesses how Jamaat or BNP activists carried out extortion, threatening arson attacks on warehouses with goods worth lakhs of taka. In some places, the business owners tried to manage the situation by giving money to the goons; in other areas, they could not and their houses and businesses were attacked and looted. Well-off Hindu households and even impoverished Hindu families in neighbourhoods were individually targeted only because of their religious identity. In many cases, these families did not even dare to go to the media to report these attacks.

The attacks on some police stations, as well as families of police personnel, have been so severe that many are too afraid to get involved in

anything. Because of my personal contact with several police officers, I have tried to find out how they are feeling. A lot of people within the police are traumatised-they need counselling. It is important to find a way to help them get back to work.

But let me be clear: we do not want to see anyone, who has been identified as a perpetrator in the mass killings, involved in any work of the state. It is not enough to merely suspend them for their crimes. It is very

important to set an example by trying them and bringing them to book to create public confidence. The previous regimes always ignored these issues.

> uniform, be it of the police or any other security agency, is legal. I want to reiterate that we need to come out of the culture of taking administrative actions against someone who commits a crime while wearing a police uniform. We need to try such perpetrators under

Not every action performed in

criminal offences just like a layperson is tried. This has to be brought under the purview of our existing laws. If restrictions exist in the current laws, those have to be removed and new provisions for trying law enforcers must be incorporated.

#### MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Student of Institute of Business Administration (IBA) at the University of Dhaka

The recent resurfacing of videos and images from the police crackdown during the anti-discrimination student movement has plunged us into a deep reckoning. These records, apparently captured during the internet shutdown, unveil the extent of the brutality unleashed upon innocent protestersstudents, civilians, and activists who dared to raise their voices. As we watch the horrific footage of police officers opening fire on unarmed citizens and dumping their dead bodies like sacks, it is impossible to not feel a profound sense of betrayal. The police force, funded by our money, was meant to protect us, not the interests of a ruling party. But in those moments, they became agents of oppression, leaving an entire generation

The trauma inflicted by these events runs deep. For many of us, the police are no longer the first responders in times of crisis but are seen as a threat and an instrument of violence that could be turned against us at any moment. This fear is not unfounded—it is born out of real experiences, documented in videos that are now indelibly etched into our collective memory, triggering a visceral response of fear, disgust, and disbelief. The images of bloodied students, the sound

of gunfire, and the sight of lifeless bodies have left us questioning whether we can ever trust those who were supposed to protect us.

To understand the depth of this betrayal, we must remember the fundamental role of the police in a democracy. The police are not meant to serve the interests of any political party or government; they are meant to serve the people. Their salaries are paid by taxpayers-by us. It is our money that funds their operations, and it is in our name that they are supposed to act. When the police turn their weapons

on the very citizens they are sworn to protect, they are not only betraying their oath but also misusing the resources provided by the people. This breach of trust is egregious because it undermines the very foundation of our society. The rule of law is essential for the functioning of any democracy. When the enforcers of the law become violators of it, the entire system is called into question. How can we, as a society, have faith in the justice system when those responsible for upholding it are seen as perpetrators of violence?

To begin addressing this trauma, there must be a collective acknowledgment of what happened. The interim government must take steps to ensure that the truth is not buried, that the stories of the victims are heard, and that those responsible for the violence are held accountable. This is not just about punishing the perpetrators; it is about sending a message that such actions will not be tolerated, and that the state stands with the people, not against them.

It goes without saying that rebuilding trust in the police force will be a monumental task. The first step must be a complete overhaul of the police force—one that addresses both the structural issues and the culture of impunity that has taken root. This means implementing rigorous accountability measures, ensuring that those who abuse their power are swiftly and publicly punished, and creating mechanisms for independent oversight of police actions. The police must be taught to see themselves not as enforcers of the state's will but as protectors of the people. This shift in mindset is crucial if we are to restore any semblance of trust in the institution.

The trauma, disgust, and fear that we feel today are valid responses to the horrors we have witnessed. But we must channel these emotions into action-into demanding reform, into building a police force that we can trust, and into creating a society where such atrocities can never happen again. It is time to reclaim the police force for the people, to rebuild it into an institution that serves and protects us all.



#### **RASHED NIZAM**

Crime reporter, Jamuna Television Our past experiences of covering a conflict or clash did not work this time during the uprising because we did not know where we could stand for

safety. Reporting rules require journalists to stay somewhere above the ground or behind the most powerful party in a conflict zone to avoid attacks. This time, we had a totally new experience and had to stay in the middle. Consequently, five journalists were killed during the unrest and we still do not have data on the total number of injured journalists.

After the events (in July and early August), it was the police were attacked the most. We could not go to Jatrabari, Mohammadpur and Uttara police stations in relation to the incidents that took place on August 5 and after. Nobody knows yet the total number of police fatalities. From August 5 onwards, I received phone calls from many people, especially journalists or friends from minority communities, who asked for confirmation of certain attacks. As a crime reporter, my primary source of confirmation is the police whenever there is a murder or other criminal incident. With no police in sight anywhere for the first few days, who could we call for confirmation?

**Rashed Nizam** 

We could not go to the spot and collect the news ourselves because of fear of attacks. Media outlets, including The Daily Star, quoting two organisations, reported that 205 incidents of communal violence took place in 52 districts, but why could they not follow up on their own? The change in journalism that we had expected in the new country where we would have freedom of expression-I have not seen it yet. For how long will we operate out of fear?

Moving forward, another serious concern is politicisation of the police. There are two organisations for the police: Bangladesh Police Association, which includes personnel from inspectors to all the lower ranks; and Bangladesh Police Service Association which is for BCS cadre police. Suddenly, the latter announced that they were creating a new committee as they could not find members of the previous committee. The person who was named as the main adviser of the committee had been an active official during BNP regime. This is indicative of the same politicisation in police that we have been talking about. What kind of change is really taking place, then?

The police reform programme has not been implemented in Bangladesh for many years, though a lot of money has been spent on it. There was a critical point there about making the police independent. The interim government should start the reform process because a political government will never carry it out.

#### MOHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

Former Inspector General of Police

Let's first ask: why does the police behave the way it does? Does it operate on its own? No, it does not; it is directed, as it is part of the executive. The question, then, is: can legal action be taken against members of the force who are directed by the executive?

There are some legal protections afforded to law enforcement, which were made during the colonial era. For instance, Section 76 of the Penal Code states: "Nothing is an offence which is done by a person who is, or who by reason of a mistake of fact and not by reason of a mistake of law in good faith believes himself to be, bound by law to do it." Whether to keep this provision is a big question. After the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, a constitution for the People's Republic was formed. But the politicians at the time did not change colonial rules and regulations because party and serving the people.

they wanted to exercise such power. **Mohammad Nurul Huda** Т h

relationship between the police and the public is that of chase and counter-

chase. Why is the relationship like this? It all comes down to the mindset of the police who wants to ascend to power any cost-and it's not just one person, it's everyone.

Our constitution is republican but our rules are feudalistic. It is very difficult to defeudalise and decolonise yourself. Heavy words are easy to say but implementation on the ground is very difficult. Public servants must consider themselves as appointed servants of the republic. They need to understand the difference between serving a

### **ASHFAQUE NIPUN**

Filmmaker If we are to focus on the events of August 5, one must ask about the role of the army. On one hand, they withdrew the curfew, but then they disappeared from view. Was it really that they did not have enough manpower? We know the characteristics of the Bangladeshi people; they become rule followers as soon as they step into the cantonment. And there was a soft corner amongst the masses regarding the army during the uprising, so it is confusing why they simply allowed such vandalism and violence to take place.

Meanwhile, the distrust that has been created between the people and law enforcement agencies—the police, in particularlyneeds to be addressed urgently. Never before have heard of such



that

now the

fear is gone.

another

incident untoward

incident happens

after a year, it means

a group of 10 people

can go and attack

a police station

**Ashfaque Nipun** because that tendency has been created among us. We need to come out of this.

We are all looking for immediate solutions. But the truth is that real reforms will take a long time. It might not be done even in five years, given the extent of corruption and injustice that

was perpetuated over the past 15 years. A huge gap has been created between us and the police, the judges and every single segment of the administration. We do not believe in any investigation. We do not trust any judgements. We believe that all these are hollow words, that nothing will materialise at the end of the day. This trust has to be rebuilt.