



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Reflecting on one month of the interim government



Shahab Enam Khan
is professor of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

SHAHAB ENAM KHAN

It has been precisely one month since the interim government, led by Dr Muhammad Yunus, took office following a series of traumatic and dramatic events that tragically claimed more than 700 lives throughout July and August 2024. With its hopeful outlook and promises, the interim government has come to power to create an enabling framework for election for peaceful power transfer and sustainable economic growth that the nation's 170 million people aspire to see.

The student-led movement, a powerful force that has significantly reshaped the social ecosystem and public attitudes towards governance, politics, and security, has inspired hope and optimism. It has shifted the balance from elite and partisan entitlement to a more inclusive society. One must be mindful that all the grievances were and are still written on the wall.

People, particularly the youth, have put remarkable trust in the new government despite the past regime's infrastructural boom that widened disparity and encouraged the culture of kleptocracy. The anti-discrimination movement, led by the students under unforgettable gun-points and state-sponsored hostilities on the grounds, supported by the opposition parties, participated by the mass public and the remittance earners, and aided by the military, resulted from apolitical and rational demands reflecting the dire socio-economic crises.

So, what do we get from the agony of the past, hope of the present, and expectations for the future? The simple answer is "reform".

However, the interim government faces challenges on the path to reform due to the complexity of the political situation.

First, reform is a painful process and is often seen as unpopular when it begins with political institutions. In a rare historical situation, a civil government in Bangladesh took on its responsibilities when political institutions were almost non-existent and state institutions had been converted into partisan clubs. The existing political vacuum, hence, is more profound than one would expect.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is gradually reforming and rejuvenating itself, which will take some time. Jamaat-e-Islami is working to address the barriers imposed by the previous government. A political party to be set up by the students to sustain the movement's spirit is gradually gaining prominent space in public discourse, underscoring their continued

influence on the new political landscape.

The debate about the nature of future elections—whether they should be inclusive and fair, or participatory and credible—will unfold in the coming days. The ultimate goal of the interim government should be to create an environment conducive to elections. At some point, whispering campaigns from the messiahs of textbook democracies or a neighboring country to hold an "inclusive election" will pop up, even though Awami League is tainted by an unforgivable past and

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crimes against humanity.

Ceteris paribus, a critical mass of the population, the students, or the two main political parties, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, will congruently exclude the AL and forge their own paths. Nonetheless, both parties have reaffirmed their public commitments to support reforms.

The necessary constitutional reform to ensure fair elections will be challenging due to varying public expectations and differing ideologies among political parties. Our political culture has not yet reached a point where the public can be confident that future governments will continue the constitutional reform efforts initiated by the interim government. The key focus here is to achieve political consensus on the ideological underpinnings of the parties. The left, right, far-right, and the left-right must agree on a state ideology reflecting the public

aspirations. The sooner the national consensus is reached, the better the electoral and political reform prospects.

Secondly, reforming public institutions is equally necessary. Dr Yunus's cabinet has promptly initiated public sector reforms with the students' support. The focus should be on uprooting the kleptocratic structure. Given our past experiences, it would be wiser to have a limited agenda for reform rather than expanding extensively.

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The judiciary and the accountability institutions such as the commissions for elections, public service, university grants, and anti-corruption need fundamental but organic overhauling. Independent commissions for the police and media are essential to restoring public confidence in these two crucial pillars of society. Its breakneck speed in repairing these institutions has garnered public support.

However, the present government's success would lie in finding the right human resources to replace the subservient ones and, indeed, in how the advisers perform beyond their political prejudices. As we hear, the politics of grasping on to power have returned at the grassroots level, denoting a need for radical responses.

External and internal instigations will keep the security environment volatile, whether in the labour sector, communal harmony, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Myanmar front, or cyber domains. The key to the solution lies in coordination between the present government and the political parties. Mob rule, media trials, bulldozer justice, and social media disinformation and misinformation continue to dent public psychology.

It is imperative to urge students to resume classes and the public to return to regular life, enabling them to express their voices through rights, institutions, and political sanity. The interim government must not allow the glory of the precious student movement to be tarnished by fringe elements and toxic precedence.

If we want history to recognise the "anti-discrimination students' movement" as a revolution, we must be fully prepared to embrace radical and profound ideological and cultural shifts. But of course, as Audre Lorde said, revolution is not a one-time event.

We need Prof Yunus and his ideas today more than ever



NR Narayana Murthy
is the founder of Infosys Limited.

NARAYANA MURTHY

Over the past half-century, South Asia and its influential diaspora have been the source of some of the world's great entrepreneurs and business leaders. The modern world increasingly depends on their contributions. Enlightened government policies, in India and abroad, accelerated their rise and their contributions to the world economy and society at large.

While many of those entrepreneurs built profitable businesses at the cutting edge of modern technology that made them (and others) very wealthy, others focused their talents on social entrepreneurship and innovation. They built world-class institutions that helped solve social and environmental problems in creative ways that could be scaled to positively impact millions. Some of the companies they created

Of course, he is best known for creating the Grameen Bank: first as a pilot project, and later as the world's first bank, serving the poor women with the majority owned by poor women. Today we take microfinance—the ability to provide financial products to the world's poor on a commercial basis for their and society's benefit—as a given. But until Yunus showed how it could be done on a massive scale, the ideas on which modern microfinance rests appeared absurd. In this and other ways, he turned what was once unthinkable into something that is obvious and taken for granted. No amount of revisionist history can obscure his role in building Grameen Bank from day one into a world class institution that has shaped the global economy from the grassroots up.

In today's troubled world, we need Yunus and his ideas more than ever. This is true in India, other major economies, and smaller, less developed countries and regions. Supporting Yunus in this mission is crucial, particularly in enabling him to use his influence, ideas, and energy for the common good, and therefore maximise the good he can do for people, institutions, governments, and academia. My ardent hope is that any free society that hopes to benefit from Yunus's extraordinary work, will allow him to continue his great work unencumbered.

Business leaders often talk about how society can create an enabling environment for commercial activity. The same is true for social entrepreneurship. We must formulate an agenda in India and beyond that encourages social business, impact investment, social stock exchanges, and the like while also celebrating and supporting leaders like Yunus at the pinnacle of their creative powers and the kinds of idealistic entrepreneurs incubated and supported by organisations like Action for India that seek to build a thriving ecosystem for social entrepreneurship.



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were for-profit, some non-profit, and other hybrid in nature. What they all had in common was their innovative thinking about problems like poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, and climate change that leveraged market forces, technology and the idealism of individuals and groups to change lives and indeed, entire nations.

One of the stars of this community of entrepreneurs who has shined the brightest is the Bangladesh Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus. Starting in the mid-1970s, just a few short years after returning to post-independence Bangladesh from the comfort of being a university teacher in the United States, he has painstakingly created dozens of organisations that have done a world of good: not only for Bangladesh, but for the world. Other leaders studied his models and adapted them in places as diverse as the Philippines, the United States, Kenya, and India. His influence on the thinking and work of a generation of traditional and social entrepreneurs is undeniable.

Grameen Bank under his leadership has successfully demonstrated that a microfinance institution can be a viable business. This is validated by the fact that the recovery rate of Grameen Bank was over 96 percent, even though their loans do not have collateral as security.

But many people are unaware that his work has gone far beyond microfinance. Over the past two decades, he has designed a model for impact-first entrepreneurship that he calls "social business" and then created dozens of organisations that apply this approach to improving health care, education, the environment, and the positive role that sports can play in improving society.

Incredibly, at age 84 he remains as productive as ever, travelling the world from his home in Bangladesh to inspire a new generation of young entrepreneurs to create their own social businesses and challenging corporate leaders to incorporate his model into aspects of their companies.

Over the next two weeks, we will see the world coming together to celebrate the world's greatest athletes and what is possible when nations set aside differences and promote excellence under a defined set of rules. Yunus's influence on the Paris games will be on view for all to see. He proposed, for example, that the Olympic Village be designed in a way that once the games were complete, the housing and related infrastructure would be turned into affordable housing for low-income Parisians. The organisers adopted his idea and have made him one of their honoured guests and partners.

Let us all focus our energies on turning other human endeavours into socially progressive ones, as Yunus has done with banking, sports, and many other fields. A world of impact and progress awaits.

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Package No.	Name of work	Tender ID
08/2024-25/BGB/CB	License Renewal of Data Backup Solution	1013448

1. This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

2. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

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Md. Mahbubur Rahman
Director (It)
For Director General
dirit@bgb.gov.bd

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