

## No relief from Khulna waterlogging

### Tk 523 crore spent in six years, yet the city floods easily

It is deeply troubling that despite spending Tk 523 crore over the last six years to alleviate Khulna's waterlogging problem, the city still floods after any substantial rainfall. According to a recent report, the meteorological department recorded 173mm of rainfall in Khulna as of Sunday afternoon. As a result, two-thirds of its 1,215 roads were waterlogged. Earlier in July, this daily reported that just 89mm of rainfall—including 55mm in three hours—left most roads and low-lying areas of the city submerged, causing significant suffering for the residents. Similarly, last year, only 34 mm of rain inundated two-thirds of the city. All this highlights its persistent waterlogging crisis and the failure of the authorities to address it.

After the latest bout of rainfall, the Royal Intersection, KDA Avenue, Boyra Bazar, and several other areas in Khulna were submerged in knee-to-waist-deep water. Consequently, locals were forced to depend on rickshaws and vans to navigate the flooded streets, sometimes at considerable personal risk. Commuters claimed that despite the authorities spending Tk 4.58 crore on reconstructing drains and Tk 2.5 crore on renovating roads, they continue to experience hardships even after minimal rainfall. In July 2018, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Enec) approved a Tk 823 crore project aimed at eliminating waterlogging in the city. The first phase of the project—costing Tk 523 crore—is set to be completed by June 2025. However, residents have yet to find any relief from seasonal waterlogging.

Residents have urged immediate action to free the Mayur River and Khulna's 22 canals from encroachment, as well as proper excavation to improve their flow. Additionally, there have been growing demands for regular cleaning and maintenance of the newly constructed drains. The chief conservancy officer of the Khulna City Corporation (KCC), however, claimed that workers regularly clean the drains, but because residents discard household waste inappropriately, it clogs the drains resulting in the perpetuation of the waterlogging problem.

Whatever the case, the fact that this problem has persisted for so long is unacceptable. For this, the KCC must take the responsibility. Residents too must shoulder some responsibility as without responsible disposal, the drains may continue to fail to channel excess water. That said, the time has come to evaluate the status of the aforementioned project, investigate why it is failing to deliver, and come up with a holistic solution to the waterlogging problem.

## Are we doing enough for the injured?

### Those maimed in July-August need more than free treatment

The price that citizens had to pay to oust Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime, not just in terms of the lives lost but also the sheer number of injuries, is stupefying. According to a recent report, more than 500 people, mostly in their prime age, have been fully or partially blinded by pellets of shotguns that law enforcers used on protesters during the July-August uprising. Despite repeated surgeries, many of the injured reportedly have no hope of regaining their eyesight. In some cases, the pellets penetrated so deep that removing those would require the removal of the eye altogether.

All this has meant extended hospital stays for many victims, taking a toll not just on their mental health but also on the financial and emotional state of their families. Although the interim government on August 17 announced that it would bear all medical expenses of the injured, their families have yet to receive any cash assistance one month later. True, hospital fee waivers have been helpful, but patients need money to buy certain medicine and have tests done in private clinics. Plus, lengthy hospital stay means rising costs of food and accommodation for the attendants, especially those travelling from different districts.

We understand that the cash cannot be disbursed pending finalisation of the list of the injured, which is a lengthy process, but this cannot take so long. Many of the wounded come from impoverished backgrounds. For them to bear treatment and attendance related expenses over a long period is not just difficult; it is literally putting them into debt. We have written about this issue before, and urge the government to prioritise and expedite the cash disbursement, if necessary, in phases.

The government should also start putting in motion its rehabilitation plans for the injured, who will need assistance to rebuild their lives. An overall change is also required to integrate these individuals back into a society where persons with disabilities are often looked down upon and have little infrastructural support. Also, laws related to the use of less-lethal weapons such as pellet shotguns in policing must be reviewed, keeping in mind an Amnesty International finding that these so-called less-lethal weapons injure not only protesters but also bystanders causing permanent impairment, which explains the high number of wounded in the July-August uprising.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Scotland votes 'No' to independence

On this day in 2014, Scottish voters rejected a referendum that would have made Scotland an independent country.

# Can a Third Way politics transform Bangladesh?



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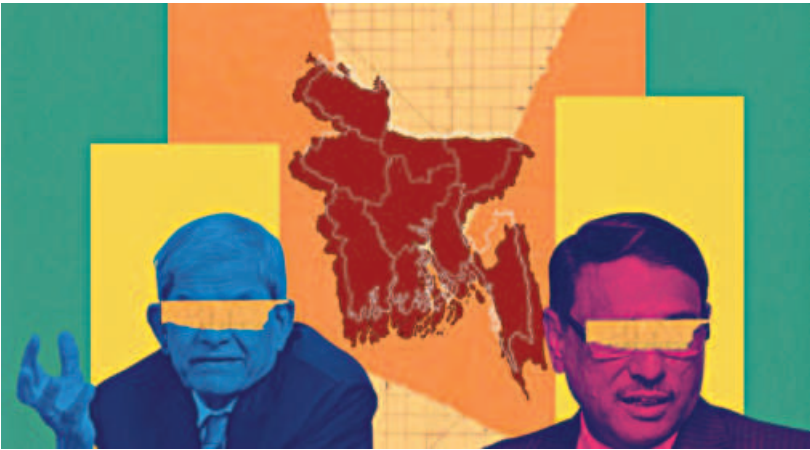
In the 1990s, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President Bill Clinton introduced a bold new approach that blended centre-left and centre-right ideologies to redefine modern politics. Blair's Third Way and Clinton's New Democrat policies combined market-based economics with social justice aspirations. This approach, often described as “modernised social democracy” or “radical centrist politics,” was aimed at reforming traditional socialist principles by incorporating aspects of free market capitalism. Both Blair and Clinton emphasised that the rigid divisions between the left and the right were no longer tenable for winning elections and addressing the rapidly changing global order. Their proposals, focused on democratising institutions, promoting social equality and building justice-based societies, were instrumental in helping both Blair and Clinton secure electoral victories.

Blair's government, for instance, significantly boosted public spending on free healthcare and education, introduced the minimum wage, and expanded rights of marginalised groups. Similarly, the Clinton

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administration implemented a \$500 per child tax credit, expanded state funding to provide coverage for uninsured children in low-earning households, raised the minimum wage, and secured job protection for workers needing medical or family leave.

In Bangladesh, fusion of ideologies remains elusive as the country's political scene reels on the edge of chaos, plagued by a ruthless game of power where ordinary people's interests are often sacrificed. Instead of fostering a balanced and inclusive political environment, what has emerged is a form of *laissez-faire* politics, where political parties prioritise actions that serve their own and corporate interests. This disastrous and anti-democratic approach has led



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to a situation where the very citizens for whom politics should be organised are increasingly marginalised.

The July uprising is a direct consequence of the long-standing ideological vacuum that has plagued the country since the Liberation War. Despite various political factions labelling themselves differently, they have largely failed to exhibit a coherent ideology that aligns with their manifestos or serves broader public interests. This situation is unlikely to change unless Bangladesh's political landscape rejects neoliberal practices such as unchecked privatising and subcontracting, mimicking Western-centric economic models without local adaptation, failing to ensure transparency and accountability in governance, and accumulating high-interest foreign loans for corrupt purposes.

Standing on the brink of political turmoil, Bangladesh needs a fresh Third Way. This approach should emphasise secularism, freedom of speech, anti-nepotism, non-violence,

and a commitment to equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender or identity, alongside justice and equity to safeguard the democratic and voting rights. It should offer both existing and new political parties as well as the secular collectives the chance to present viable and visible alternatives to the existing political setup. Any party that transparently adopts these people-centric ideas and acknowledges past mistakes is likely to gain a stronger foothold in the evolving political landscape. However, achieving this reset is challenging, especially given the low level of public trust in politicians in Bangladesh. Despite these difficulties, a reset is crucial.

To bring about this change, political parties must reform their structures, suspend corrupt figures, and include honest and grassroots individuals in politics. What other interesting and

visible agendas can they offer? For example, the recent formation of the Ganatantrik Odhikar Committee (Committee for Democratic Rights), led by Dhaka University Emeritus Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury, to monitor the workings of the interim government is a notable initiative. This approach could be adopted by any political party willing to offer constructive feedback to the interim government. A formal shadow government put forward by the opposition parties in the UK, for instance, scrutinises the actions and workings of the government in power and suggests alternative policies for their considerations. Establishing such initiatives in Bangladesh would enable the public to evaluate political party proposals to the interim government and their merit.

More importantly, imagine the potential if Bangladesh's secular and left-leaning democratic parties were to unite, thus forming a powerful coalition to bring people-focused politics to the forefront of the national

agenda. This approach could bridge the existing gap between centre-left and centre-right ideologies, and even bring together secular and religious groups through shared objectives like social welfare, fighting corruption, and resisting discrimination and communal violence. The collective could also focus on marginalised groups such as rural citizens, farmers, and labourers, who are often excluded from urban political discourse but capable of generating significant grassroots mobilisation.

To gain momentum, this new collective must rethink its approach to public engagement, seizing this critical moment to lead a fresh and compelling political vision. If Bangladesh's secular and democratic parties don't capture this moment to unite and drive a new agenda, it is unclear when they will have another opportunity. Should they choose to act, their efforts must be sincere. Any viable Third Way political idea must resonate with ordinary citizens and galvanise public support in the next democratic election.

Look no further than India's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for a real-world success case, where a grassroots movement turned the political establishment on its own right. AAP emerged from the anti-corruption movement in India in 2011. The party positioned itself as an alternative to the traditional political establishment by focusing on transparency, anti-corruption measures and grassroots engagement. Despite initial scepticism, AAP gained significant traction in Delhi, eventually securing a landslide victory in the 2015 Legislative Assembly election. AAP's earlier success was rooted in its ability to articulate a clear political objective that resonated with the public, and its effort to challenge the status quo. AAP's rise demonstrated that a new political force could emerge and disrupt the existing power dynamics if the new offerings align with the rightful desires of the ordinary people.

As Bangladesh faces its own political reckoning, the lessons from AAP's meteoric rise show the way for a new era of genuine, people-driven change in the country. But the greatest challenge for a new party or collective in Bangladesh would be the demonstration of their non-violent and non-threatening approach, upholding of secular ideals, and maintenance of an unwavering commitment to the democratic rights of all citizens, including minorities and those with opposing views. If they can remain steadfast to these commitments, any collective or party emerging as a Third Way could have a lasting impact on Bangladeshi politics. Even if it comes through an existing political party revitalising itself, it would still be significant.

# The morale issues of Bangladesh Police



Muhammad Nurul Huda is former IGP of Bangladesh Police.

#### MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

It would definitely be an understatement to say that as of now, the morale of Bangladesh police is less than desirable. The reality is that our police have been badly shaken by the events leading to the fall of a despised authoritarian government. For a significant length of time in the recent past, there was hardly any police presence in public life.

There is no denying that for a long time, the police have been used as a tool of repression in the subcontinent and politicians have frequently misused this vital organ of the state for personal gain and partisan advantages. In the process, the police hierarchy have been willing collaborators of their political masters. However, what is markedly different this time is that many police officers of different ranks have acted as party goons devoid of any sense of legal propriety of their actions. They are complicit in using excessive force while countering public protests, with some policemen stooping low enough to be branded by some as public enemies.

It has to be admitted that the single-minded pursuit of money has impoverished the minds and desiccated the hearts of many politicians, with whom an unholy

nexus has been built by reckless and corrupt police officials. Quite often, interference with the statutory duties of police contrary to the provisions of law has not been condemned. This was the case when it impeded the performance of duties in the maintenance of public order and investigation of cases.

Coercive powers—such as the recourse to fire while dispersing assemblies—have been given under the law to certain officers, and they alone as agents of law, have to act in accordance with their own assessment of the situation and as per their conscience. In our situation, many senior officers have not used their statutory authority to advise, guide, and direct the public order operations. Instead, they resorted to indiscriminate and excessive use of force. Consequently, the police have been demonised in public, perhaps with some justification. This, however, is not desirable as we cannot dispense with the services of the police in public interest.

The police in Bangladesh, coupled with the required determination to perform its legally mandated functions, need to regain its confidence. Winning the trust and

**The best course of action in this case would be the police, as the country's principal law enforcement agency, setting an example themselves of scrupulously abiding by the law.**

of scrupulously abiding by the law. The practical display of this course would be to investigate all cases of murder and other offenses arising out of the recent incidents of July and August, and bringing to book the offending police functionaries. There must not be any protective investigation or any quarter given to defaulting officials.

The police leadership needs to explore how it can financially and socially help the aggrieved families that have been victims of police actions. There are funds that can be judiciously used to ameliorate the distress of the suffering families, particularly those that require medical assistance. Bearing the educational expenses of families that have lost its principal earner could

also be helpful. The remorse and compassion has to be visible to heal the wounds.

In addition, the 999 service provided by police has to be restored to its full capacity with adequate supportive actions on ground. The “open house” project where senior officers of respective units used to hear the grievances of the public on a monthly periodical basis has to be resumed. This would hopefully allay fears, remove confusion, and create a climate of trust. This would be a salutary public relation exercise vital for enlisting public support for law and order maintenance.

Improvement in traffic management in the country, in particular Dhaka city, would significantly contribute to morale boosting. Dhaka motorists should see traffic police performing their tasks with efficiency and authority. Coordination remains a key element in any traffic management. It is suggested that actual behavior patterns of the motorists could be seen and verified only on the roads. Furthermore, wrong parking in Dhaka is a major cause of traffic snarl-ups. If necessary, we have to press several cranes into action in order to tow away the offending vehicles to the nearest police station. Everybody, including VIPs, should face consequences for wrong parking.

In the long-term, measures like sanitisation of recruitment, adequate training and depoliticisation of law enforcement must not escape our attention. The police in Bangladesh needs to be rescued from a dehumanisation process that has engulfed them.