

Awami League's melodramatic redemption arc



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The ongoing political narrative surrounding the Awami League (AL) seems to be an attempt at rewriting its history—a curious exercise in portraying itself as a victim after years of wielding unbridled power. While some might view this as a natural turn of events in the cycle of politics, others find it to be an astonishing display of hypocrisy and irony.

If politics were a theatre, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and his ilk would be worthy of Oscars for their tragicomic renditions of "Victims of Circumstance" and "The Forgotten Heroes." Only this time, the audience isn't clapping; they're rolling their eyes.

In a recent interview with the *Indian Express*, the former home minister delivered a soliloquy so riddled with irony that even the most skilled satirists would struggle to script it. Kamal admitted to an intelligence failure during the July uprising of 2024, lamenting how 460 police stations were torched,

burn because dissent was already smothered in the flames of crossfires and enforced disappearances? During his party's reign, anyone daring to speak out against the regime was silenced, often permanently. Yet here he stands, bemoaning the inefficacy of the same police force he once weaponised. It's akin to a firefighter who moonlights as an arsonist lamenting the spread of flames. Kamal's lament is like a chef blaming his burnt soufflé on the oven—completely ignoring his own recipe for disaster.

Mohammad A Arafat, another AL luminary, recently took to Facebook to demand elections under a caretaker government. Yes, you heard that right—the very system they demonised, abolished, and declared unconstitutional is now their chosen sanctuary. It's as if someone who insisted on drinking seawater for years suddenly complains about dehydration.

For those who've forgotten, AL spent three consecutive

forward to 2025, and here they are, weeping for its resurrection. The hypocrisy could power an entire season of *House of Cards*.

Let's talk about the crimes that AL leaders conveniently overlook in their newfound role as victims. Under their watch, the nation witnessed extrajudicial killings euphemistically dubbed "crossfires." Innocent

"morale" of AL workers being high is as believable as claiming that Walter White cooked meth for charity. He wistfully spoke of Sheikh Hasina's transformative leadership, citing her economic achievements. But where were these accolades when the economy spiralled into inflation, and essential goods became luxuries? The price of onions soared so

man defeated by my own system. Meanwhile, Arafat's Facebook status could be the perfect script for a villain's monologue, demanding justice while ignoring the skeletons in his own closet. Their melodramatic shift from authoritarian overlords to misunderstood victims deserves its own soundtrack.

Kamal's claim that "everything

electoral victories as proof of public support. But in a country where elections were marred by allegations of ballot box stuffing, intimidation, and outright fraud, these claims hold as much water as a sieve. The phrase "public mandate" was weaponised to justify their grip on power, ignoring the disillusionment simmering among ordinary citizens.

Ironically, the same party that dismissed peaceful protests as "foreign conspiracies" now attempts to portray itself as the defender of democracy. Their narrative is as believable as a thief crying foul when caught red-handed. They demand an impartial system, conveniently forgetting their systematic efforts to erode democratic norms for over a decade.

Under AL's rule, silence became a survival strategy. Academics, activists, and ordinary citizens were forced to self censor, lest they invite the wrath of the regime. The state apparatus functioned as an omnipresent spectre, watching and punishing dissent. The culture of fear they cultivated is a scar on the nation's psyche—one that will take years to heal.

Now, in an ironic twist, AL leaders lament the lack of "freedom of expression" under the interim government. Their cries would be laughable if they weren't so infuriating. It's like an authoritarian mourning the loss of their own dictatorship.

The people of Bangladesh have spoken, and their message is clear: enough is enough. No amount of crocodile tears or revisionist narratives can erase the AL's legacy of oppression. Their cries for justice and democracy ring hollow, echoing the hypocrisy of a regime that trampled those very ideals. The public is now the discerning critic, refusing to buy tickets to a show they've seen too many times before.

So, as Kamal dreams of a "short time" for recovery and Arafat rallies for a caretaker government, one can't help but chuckle at the absurdity. The AL's redemption arc is less a phoenix rising from the ashes and more a circus act fumbling its way through a dark comedy. The curtain has fallen on their melodrama, and the only applause they're receiving is the sound of people turning their backs.



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thousands of weapons looted, and chaos reigned supreme. To top it off, he boldly blamed a "joint coup of Islamic extremism and the army" for the government's fall.

But let's rewind the reel to his own tenure. Remember the years when police stations didn't need to

elects—2014, 2018 and 2024—under their own political regime, systematically dismantling the caretaker system to cement their autocracy. Their justification? Caretaker governments, they claimed, were a breeding ground for instability and conspiracies. Fast

citizens, political opponents, and journalists were subjected to a reign of terror. The streets of Dhaka were painted red, not with the colours of revolution, but with the blood of innocents. The frightening reports of people disappearing overnight were treated as just another day in the AL's kingdom.

One could argue that the AL's rule was a masterclass in dystopian governance. If Orwell's *1984* were ever to be adapted into a Bangladeshi context, their regime would serve as the perfect blueprint. Surveillance? Check. Thought control? Double check. Fear as a tool of governance? Triple check. Their tenure redefined the term "big brother" and not in the reality-TV sense.

Kamal's lament about the

high that they became a symbol of wealth, and the middle class found themselves nostalgic for days when a simple fish curry didn't break the bank.

And let's not forget the AL's media stranglehold. During their tenure, newspapers were muzzled, journalists were imprisoned, and social media became a hunting ground for dissenters. Yet today, they whine about media bias under the interim government. It's like a monopolist complaining about competition.

If the AL's current predicament were a Bollywood film, it would be titled *Ghar Ghar Mein Hypocrisy*. Picture Kamal as a tragic hero, spouting lines like, "Main woh insaan hoon jo apne hi banaye huye system se haar gaya" (I am the

has turned 360 degrees) is unintentionally accurate. A full circle indeed, as the AL now finds itself in the very position it worked so hard to eliminate—pleading for fairness, justice, and democracy. The irony is almost poetic, like a snake biting its own tail. Except this snake spent years assuring everyone it was a dove.

From *Game of Thrones* to *Breaking Bad*, pop culture is rife with cautionary tales about power and its corrupting influence. The AL's saga is no different. Their fall from grace serves as a stark reminder that unchecked power inevitably leads to ruin. It's like Walter White lamenting the moral decay of the meth industry or Cersei Lannister criticising unethical leadership practices.

The AL often boasted about their

A reminder of the nearly unwinnable hand Yunus was dealt



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History shows that the aftermath of popular revolts—particularly those that overthrow authoritarian regimes—is marked by chaos and uncertainty. What Bangladesh is currently facing—economic instability on pocketbook issues, such as exorbitant prices of essentials, a feeble investment climate, and a war of words among political stakeholders with competing vested interests—is a predictable symptom of a messy but necessary political transition.

In reality, that transition is underway—not through an overhaul of how politics functions in Bangladesh but within the pre-existing paradigm of a flawed system, through gradual, incremental steps towards democracy. Finding the sweet spot that constitutes a liberal, multi-party ecosystem will take decades, not months. It depends on both a good-faith commitment and the implementation of that commitment by political actors through self-reflection, public policies, and rhetoric that differ extensively from what Bangladesh has experienced in the past.

A sentiment has taken root in Bangladesh: Yunus is an honest man with good intentions, a philosopher who has wooed international leaders every time he has travelled abroad since taking the reins of government. At the recent World Economic Forum conference, he was in fine form. In Bangladesh, though, he seems out of his comfort zone, struggling to steer the ship of state—a ship he did not want to captain.

There are many steps that, as chief adviser, Yunus could and should have taken but has not. Critics have

examined these shortcomings in depth. But it is the nation's duty to continuously remind itself of the context in which Yunus finds himself in the position he occupies today and why he deserves a fairer assessment.

To begin with, consider how Yunus assumed office. He was preparing either to remain abroad or return to Bangladesh to face

than Yunus. At that moment, and even today, no one else other than him had—or has—the moral legitimacy to unify a fractured Bangladesh. Yunus brought an aura of hope, a balm for a country reeling from weeks of state-sponsored carnage. Mob violence still occurred, but viewed contextually, things could have been much worse. Nonetheless, being a symbol of

The caretaker governments of 1991, 1996, and 2001 operated under three-month mandates to organise elections. They benefitted from defined goals, established timelines, and institutional preparation. In contrast, Yunus was tasked with a much broader and less defined mission: to reform a system riddled with corruption, dismantle entrenched authoritarian structures, unite political parties, hold elections, and manage the day-to-day affairs of the state. There was no roadmap, no consensus on priorities, and no clarity on the duration of his administration.

Most members of his advisory council have no experience in government, including Yunus himself, as he often reminds the public. He could not appoint figures closely tied to the Awami League or BNP, nor could he include anyone seen as ideologically extreme to the left or the right. This resulted in a team that lacks administrative skills and ideological cohesion. While these shortcomings are real, they reflect the impossible deck of cards Yunus was dealt.

The politics Yunus must navigate are no less fraught. The BNP demands elections as soon as possible with minimal reforms, pushing the idea that an elected government is urgently needed. Meanwhile, frontline student leaders have begun to display signs of inexperience, veering into unnecessary ideological debates, such as calls to amend Bangladesh's state ideology, rather than focusing on designing a coherent policy vision for the future. Activism, for all its courage and energy, has not translated into the kind of maturity needed post the uprising.

Then there are the religion-based factions, including Jamaat-e-Islami, which seek to steer Bangladesh in a direction likely at odds with a sizeable segment of the country. Considering all this and more, Yunus has become an umbrella shielding a nation from local and international conspiracies,



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imprisonment under a regime that sought retribution. That regime, led by a prime minister with a personal vendetta against Yunus, resented the universal respect he commanded. His statue was an insult to the fragile ego of an autocrat.

In the aftermath of August 5, a group of young student conveners, most in their 20s, approached Yunus with an emotional appeal. They summoned him back to Dhaka from Paris, delivering an unambiguous message: you have to return to take the role of head of government in Bangladesh. And they were right.

Frankly, there was no other option

national unity is one thing. Governing is another matter entirely.

His advisory council has attracted valid criticism due to the underperformance of certain individuals. According to Yunus's own admissions in a candid conversation with *New Age* editor Nurul Kabir, he was presented with a shortlist of names—likely suggested by the student conveners—and chose individuals he knew personally. Unlike previous chief advisers of caretaker governments, who had the luxury of time to prepare and the clarity of purpose, Yunus inherited a state apparatus with neither.

striving to cocoon citizens from conflict with one another to the best of his ability, battered by competing political, ideological, and generational storms.

Compounding these challenges is the bureaucracy. The civil service, entrenched in inefficiency and outdated practices, has become a barrier to both reform and daily administration. Yunus has faced a public service designed to resist change, still bearing the influence of the previous regime. From law enforcement's failure to carry out its responsibilities to the continued dominance of syndicates, the bureaucracy has proven to be an almost insurmountable obstacle.

The greatest challenge lies ahead. The recommendations from various reform commissions must now be either agreed upon, ditched, or left for the elected government to pursue, requiring negotiation among political stakeholders. Yunus has taken on the responsibility of building consensus—an extremely difficult task. He has positioned his government as a facilitator without its own agenda, suggesting that those expected to lead Bangladesh after the elections should take the wheel in determining what is best for the country.

On paper, this approach seems inclusive—some might even call it democratic. The real question, however, is whether an 84-year-old man, who has lived a remarkable life, achieved nearly everything one can aspire to, and brought international recognition to Bangladesh, can rise to meet the moment and what is arguably the biggest test of his life. The people of Bangladesh have little choice but to place their faith in a man who, throughout his storied career, has rarely disappointed his nation. Criticise his government we will, but place our trust in him we must. Good luck, Dr Muhammad Yunus.