

How to avoid a summer of political discontent



Jyoti Rahman
is a writer and an economist.

JYOTI RAHMAN

Bangladeshis have just observed the first Eid after the despot Sheikh Hasina fled the country. She had left behind a blood-soaked nation where all institutions and organs of the state were systematically ravaged. The chief adviser has rightly compared the state of affairs in August 2024 to a war zone.

From that beginning, the people of Bangladesh have worked hard to restore stability. From New York to Beijing, Professor Yunus has received felicitations and enthusiasm, not accorded to any Bangladeshi leader in years, if not decades. Meanwhile, for the first time in living memory, this has been a Ramadan where many staples have been affordable for most people.

This has been a happy Eid-ul-Fitr for the people of free Bangladesh. However, the Eid revelry has been followed by a return to grim reality.

First came the news report in *The New York Times* about the risk of extremism against the backdrop of the country's political vacuum. There is nothing factually wrong with the report. Indeed, there is a political vacuum. And there are people who cherish the opportunity to peddle their extremism in this vacuum. Furthermore, the potential for instability, misinformation and disinformation remains, pitting the interim government, pro-democracy political parties, and armed forces against each other in the current political interregnum. There is only one way out of this morass: a concrete timetable on elections.

The bad news printed in New York was followed by worse news from Washington, DC, in the form of the shock caused by the tariffs

imposed by the Trump administration. While it is too soon to fathom, let alone analyse the full ramifications of these announcements, the uncertainty is already weighing on the major economies of the US and China. Against this oncoming global economic headwind, domestic political certainty can be a major cushion. If nothing else, a government that has the qualifier "interim" before it is not conducive to investment. Again, this calls for an expedient democratic transition.

Of course, before we can have elections, we need to reach a political consensus on how we can avoid the rise of another despot, or at the least, make another despot a less likely possibility. This is the rationale for the reform process that was initiated in October 2024.

Sheikh Hasina was a tyrant. Without absolving her manifold misdeeds in any way whatsoever, it is important to stress that the political system we had between 1991 (when the 12th amendment to the constitution was adopted) and 2011 (when the 15th amendment came into effect) was extremely vulnerable to despotism. In this system, all powers were concentrated in the person, and indeed the persona, of the prime minister. With Hasina, we saw absolute power bringing absolute irresponsibility.

This extreme concentration of power made losing an election an extremely costly exercise. Meanwhile, our first past-the-post electoral system made it quite likely (in the sense that it had happened twice in four elections) for the winning party or coalition to amass two-thirds majority with less than half the vote and amend the constitution. That is precisely what allowed Hasina to amend the

constitution in 2011, paving the way for three rigged elections.

It would be a gross dereliction of duty by our political leaders if they fail to reach a consensus on a reform package that could reduce the risks of another would-be Hasina.

Fortunately, such a reform package is within the realm of possibility, centred around an upper house of the parliament. All

41 percent of votes in the election and 207 seats (their record in 1979). The government is formed on the basis of the lower house numbers, and since BNP enjoys an absolute majority, it can run a strong government to implement its policies and programmes, and pass budgets and most legislations. It can also pass a constitutional amendment bill in the lower house through its two-thirds majority.

Historically, BNP has been the party of democratisation, through the fifth amendment restoring multi-party democracy, the 12th amendment restoring parliamentary system, and the 13th amendment codifying the caretaker system. To the extent that BNP has no track record of imposing one-party rule, it has no reason to seek a power that has been abused repeatedly by political parties that are less democratic. Rather, agreeing to a "proportionally represented upper house" will be very much consistent with the party's reformist, democratising credentials.

One can further discuss whether such an upper house could have vetting powers over appointments to the judiciary or constitutional bodies. Indeed, that is precisely the kind of discussion that is needed between the senior leaders of all major democratic parties.

However, if BNP agrees in principle to a "proportionally represented upper house," there is no reason to delay the election beyond the end of the year. Professor Yunus has repeatedly said that no reform will be imposed on anyone. Therefore, election is the appropriate mechanism to decide on various other recommendations by Prof Riaz and members of other commissions where disagreement exists. Meanwhile, recommendations such as those on the judiciary, which major parties agree upon, can be implemented through ordinance or regulation.

Some political parties want local government elections held under the interim government, but justifiably, BNP has expressed reservations lest it delays the national election. But even this can be resolved by holding parliamentary, city council, municipality and upazila elections simultaneously (perhaps over several days).

There is no reason to drag the reform process into the monsoon of 2025. Rather, election dates could be announced within weeks if our leaders show sufficient maturity. An election campaign is the best way to celebrate the first anniversary of the Monsoon Revolution.

The alternative may be one long, torrid summer of discontent.



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

major political parties agree with the concept, but they differ on how the upper house members would be elected. The largest party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), wants the upper house numbers to be proportional to the seats won in the lower house, though they have also said that they are open to discussing the matter. Professor Ali Riaz and his team proposed that the upper house members would be elected proportionate to the votes received by the parties in the lower house.

To put that in concrete terms, suppose in a future election BNP were to win

Suppose passing the constitutional amendment in the upper house also requires a two-thirds majority; in that case, under BNP's preferred method, they would have 69 of 100 upper house seats, whereas under the alternative, they would have 41. This difference is crucial—the first method will leave us at the mercy of a future would-be despot, whereas the second one can significantly reduce the risks of brute majoritarian despotism.

The point here is not that a future BNP government will amend the constitution and usher in despotism. In fact, quite the opposite.

GENOCIDE IN GAZA

Bangladeshi youth's solidarity with Palestine will be remembered



Yousef SY Ramadan
is the ambassador of Palestine to Bangladesh.

YOUSEF SY RAMADAN

Everywhere in the world, excited children gathered for Eid and so did the children of Gaza. But the latter, unlike anyone, had to celebrate with bombs raining down on them. At least 85 people were killed on Eid in Gaza, marking one of the deadliest days since Israel began their massacre again. Speaking to the Middle East Eye, Ahmad al-Qahwali who lost his relatives on Eid to Israeli airstrikes, said, "Instead of taking the children to celebrate Eid, we took them to the hospital's morgue—some of them were brought in as pieces." What did Gazans do to deserve such devastation during Eid ul-Fitr?

Two holy months of Ramadan in Gaza—last year and this year—have now passed amidst genocide. Still people fasted, and still, people were excited. They mourn and they celebrate at the same time. Gazans have accepted life with indescribable grief. But Gaza will remain a witness to the failure of humanity to rise up against the gravest injustice we have ever seen in recent history. After seven decades of oppression and occupation, Gazans are being wiped out systematically and brutally for a year and a half.

In despair, we ask: how will Palestinians ever heal from the wound that the Israeli government has instilled in our soul, watching their children being peppered with shrapnel? And how will children losing their families in front of their eyes ever recover from the trauma? And most importantly, how will humanity recover from this period of freefalling morality? The world has watched the flesh and open wounds of Gazans on smartphones, while Israeli extremist ministers have openly said, "A good Palestinian is a dead Palestinian."

On Eid, sadness envelops Gaza—its streets, the remains of its ruins and memories, and the rest of its men,

women, children and the elderly, whose misery was the companion of the decades of its long journey from Nakba to Nakba without catching her breath. Life for Gazans is just intermittent breaks between the bullets and the bombs. It is a collective death sentence by all means. As I write this, the death sentences of thousands more innocent people are being manufactured in American ammunition factories. This continuous military aid, along with unwavering political support from the US, has allowed the gruelling war against Gaza to persist.

After a brief respite of ceasefire, Israel's Netanyahu resumed his murderous campaign, realising his extremist coalition will collapse if the bloodshed truly ends. What's particularly disturbing is that

Netanyahu's own view about Palestinians is just one among many extremist Zionists who truly believe that human beings deserve to be killed in the most vicious ways possible—their bodies broken into pieces.

of Gaza live life, waiting for the next worse action by Israel. In this context, though, students across the world, in the US and in Bangladesh, have protested, reflecting true, genuine support for the people of Palestine.

On April 7, 2025, students from various universities in Bangladesh marched in response to a global strike, "The World Stops For Gaza." The same day, Israeli airstrikes continued killing dozens of people and targeting a tent in Khan Younis that was being used by several journalists. Footage showed a journalist being engulfed by flames, and burned alive. Such horror happens regularly and the outrage towards it has been treated with repeated repression and censorship from the powers that be.

We appreciate students and people's remarkable and sustained solidarity with Palestine, when many have started turning the other way. Protesting against powerful occupation forces, shows the

genuinity of the Palestinian cause to achieve freedom to live life with human decency. And Bangladeshi students have shown that genuinity with their bravery. We must mention Umama Fatema, spokesperson for Students Against Discriminations (SAD), who rejected the US State Department's "International Women of Courage" award for the July

uprising, stating, "The collective recognition of women activists is highly honourable for us. However, this award has been used to directly endorse Israel's brutal attack on Palestine in October 2023. By refusing acknowledgement of the Palestinian war for independence, the award has justified Israel's assault in a way that questions its neutrality. While

the Palestinian people continue to be deprived of their fundamental human rights, including land rights, I am personally rejecting this award as a mark of respect for the Palestinian struggle for freedom." The world must not lose momentum and such acts of solidarity that the youth continue to demonstrate will be written on the right side of this dark history.



Chittagong Medical University

BITID Building, Faujdarhat
Chattogram-4316, Bangladesh

Contact: 01829-626055, 01815-924581, 01719671824
Email: kazi.m.saleheen@gmail.com
frashid943@gmail.com

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1	1084711	Goods (Framework Agreement), Framework Agreement of Cleaning Apparatus for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	08-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 13:00:00	OTM (Framework Agreement)
2	1084714	Goods (Framework Agreement), Framework Agreement of Hygiene Products for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	08-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 13:00:00	OTM (Framework Agreement)
3	1084717	Goods (Framework Agreement), Framework Agreement of Procurement of Printing Materials for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	08-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 13:00:00	OTM (Framework Agreement)
4	1084719	Goods (Framework Agreement), Framework Agreement of Procurement of Various Types of Paper (A4, Legal, A3, Marksheets Paper) for Dean Office usage for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	08-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 12:30:00	23-Apr-2025 13:00:00	OTM (Framework Agreement)



Dr. Md. Delwar Hossain
Controller of Examination
Chittagong Medical University
BITID Building, Salimpur, Faujdarhat, Chattogram