

July's legacy and the myth of a singular vanguard



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In the aftermath of Sheikh Hasina's long and repressive rule, Bangladesh stands at a critical juncture. A moment of rupture—so rare in the history of managed autocracy—has passed into the hands of an interim government. But the narratives now emerging to explain this rupture have taken a troubling turn, shaped less by truth and more by convenience, exclusion, and political opportunism.

The July-August movement, which culminated in the collapse of Hasina's regime, is now increasingly portrayed as the work of a select few—a tightly curated band of young leaders, most of whom are now prominently placed within the interim administration or in the leadership of the National Citizen Party (NCP). This narrative is seductive in its clarity but wholly inadequate in truth. It erases the broader architecture of revolt and misrepresents the diffuse forces that brought a despotic government to its knees.

To begin with, the origins of the July uprising have been widely misunderstood, both by foreign observers and Dhaka's own elite commentariat. The protests began not with any grand vision, but with a specific demand: the reform of quotas in public sector employment, a cause resurrected by students and graduates of public universities. Similar protests had occurred before and had been quelled with surgical repression and partial concessions. There was every reason to believe that this cycle would repeat.

However, in mid-2024, something shifted. The Hasina government, perhaps influenced

by sensitive geopolitical considerations, particularly widespread rumours of a controversial agreement with a neighbouring country regarding regional transit access, chose not to act swiftly. Many suspected the regime was deliberately allowing unrest to simmer to distract public attention from the brewing scandal. This initial hesitation gave the protests time to gain momentum. When repression did follow, it was late—and though brutal, it failed to extinguish the surging dissent.

The original organisers, many of whom would later rise to visibility under the NCP banner, were eventually silenced or sidelined. But by then, the fire had spread. Two unexpected sources breathed new life into the movement. The first, students from private universities and madrasas, who had long been absent from traditional protest politics but now poured into the streets. The second, the disillusioned youth who had borne the brunt of state violence in the earlier quota and road safety movements of 2018. These young people, with no formal structure, no single leadership, and no declared ideology, refused to bow again.

When the state murdered Abu Sayeed, and the video of that killing went viral, the dam burst. What had been a series of localised protests transformed into a national uprising. The movement had no high command, no manifesto, no designated leaders. It was organic, collective, and entirely uncontrollable.

Yet today, we are told that it was engineered and executed by a narrow circle of now-prominent faces. This fiction has taken root in part because of the failure of Dhaka's elites to understand how political movements actually operate. The city's educated class, largely distant from the barricades and relying on a media ecosystem long dominated by the Awami League's propaganda machine, saw only what

opposition in their minds was filled by those closest to the microphones.

This misunderstanding was further compounded by the rhetoric of the interim government, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus. In speech after speech, the administration invoked its gratitude to the "youth who overthrew Hasina." The implication was clear: the interim government derived its moral authority from a small group of young



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they were permitted to see. They mistook visibility for authorship. Worse, they swallowed, almost uncritically, the regime's 15-plus years of campaign to delegitimise the BNP and all other organised opposition as corrupt or obsolete. Thus, when the government fell, the vacuum of credible

figures. The result was the mythologising of a few and the erasure of the many—students, activists, ordinary citizens, and political parties—who had fought and sacrificed just as much, if not more, for the cause.

This narrative, at first a convenient fiction, has now become a political liability.

It is impeding the country's path back to democracy. The NCP, buoyed by its proximity to power and flattered by the narrative of singular heroism, has shown little interest in an early or competitive election. Whether out of inexperience, fear of electoral defeat, or a desire to prolong their influence, they appear unwilling to embrace the fundamental logic of democratic transition.

Their reluctance has begun to fracture the fragile post-Hasina consensus. Tensions have emerged between the NCP-led factions of the interim government and the country's armed forces, which have thus far acted with caution and restraint. Relations with the BNP, a party with deep organisational capacity and electoral legitimacy, are strained, and clashes with other democratic parties seem inevitable. Meanwhile, the business community, whose support is crucial for economic stability, has grown increasingly disillusioned by the lack of direction and support for commercial recovery.

This impasse cannot persist. We cannot be governed by myth. We must be governed by mandate. The only legitimate path forward is a fresh, free, and competitive general election, one that welcomes all parties, reflects the diversity of voices that took part in the uprising, and restores institutional balance. To reach that point, we must dismantle the false narrative that the NCP leaders alone were the architect of Hasina's fall. This version of events has bred arrogance, exclusion, and political gridlock. More dangerously, it risks repeating the very centralisation of power that the movement sought to dismantle.

The July mass uprising was not the triumph of a single party. It was a broad movement against tyranny. To reduce it to a footnote in someone else's story is not only dishonest, but a betrayal of the people who risked everything for a new beginning. The time for mythmaking is over. The time for elections has come.

Freedom in the sky?

The limits of satellite internet in Bangladesh



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their data doesn't go directly to local internet infrastructure. Instead, it is sent (uplinked) from the user terminal to a satellite in orbit. From there, the satellite beams the data down to ground stations, which may be in foreign countries and operated by private companies. Only then does the data enter the broader internet, often

What we call "resilience" may, in fact, be disempowerment—trading one form of control for another.

The illusion of universality

Let's also examine the technical accessibility of satellite internet. In theory, satellite internet should be a great equaliser, offering rural communities and marginalised populations the same digital opportunities as those in urban centres.

But in practice, it is prohibitively expensive. In Kenya, the service is subsidised to \$10 a month. In Zambia and Rwanda, it's around \$30. According to the latest figures, Starlink offers two residential internet packages in Bangladesh, Residential Lite at Tk 4,200 per month (approximately \$35) and Residential at Tk 6,000 per month (approximately \$50), with one-time hardware and setup cost of Tk 47,000 (roughly \$402), while the average monthly salary in the country is around Tk 26,000 (about \$245). That means the upfront cost of the hardware alone is nearly 1.8 times the average monthly income, and the recurring monthly subscription could consume 15-23 percent of a typical worker's wages.

Technically speaking, the Starlink hardware—a phased-array antenna

called "Dishy McFlatface"—is highly advanced. But it's also fragile, requires a clear line of sight to the sky, and draws around 100 watts of power continuously. That's more than what many households can afford to power reliably during outages.

So, who will use it? Not the student live-streaming a protest. Not the rural health worker trying to send data during a crisis. Likely, it will be gated to those with existing access to reliable infrastructure and institutional support—urban elites, corporate entities. In this way, satellite internet risks reinforcing a two-tiered system, one where meaningful connectivity remains out of reach for those who need it most.

Internet shutdowns are not just technical problems

The central policy challenge is that we treat internet shutdowns as technical disruptions that require technical fixes. But the reality is, internet shutdowns are acts of state power—deliberate, political decisions aimed at information control. They are not engineering failures; they are governance failures. And yet, we often respond with technical solutions. We reach for circumvention tools, virtual private networks, mesh networks, and now satellite internet. These tools can be powerful stopgaps.

They can mitigate harm. They can allow human rights defenders to continue documenting abuse, enable journalists to publish when the fibre lines are cut, and preserve life-saving communication during repression or conflict.

But the danger is, if we invest in satellite internet without also reforming the political culture, the legal and institutional frameworks that permit shutdowns in the first place, we will have treated the symptom, not the disease. We risk accepting the false notion that resilience means finding workarounds rather than addressing the root problem: that internet shutdowns should not happen in the first place.

So, can satellite internet safeguard freedom of expression and access to information?

Yes, it might be possible. But only if we govern it well. Without robust legal frameworks, democratic accountability, and inclusive policy design, we risk replacing one form of centralised control with another—this time, embedded within opaque corporate structures and complex transnational dependencies.

The satellites may orbit above us. But the consequences of how we govern them will be felt here, on the ground, by the people.

Starlink becomes not just a workaround to terrestrial censorship, but a relocation of power: from state regulators to corporate policy departments, from national laws to foreign boardrooms.

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bypassing national infrastructure and regulatory oversight.

In India, for example, the government forced Starlink to stop accepting pre-orders until it secured a licence. Why? Because encrypted satellite communication could bypass state monitoring systems, especially in politically sensitive regions like Kashmir.

This dependency raises questions about regulatory jurisdiction and accountability. Satellite internet operates across borders, complicating national oversight and creating potential vulnerabilities to surveillance, data privacy violations, or political pressure from external governments. And yet, Bangladesh, despite having far less regulatory capacity, has moved ahead without a coherent or enforceable strategy. Regulatory bodies like the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) are

under the jurisdiction of the BTRC.

Starlink satellites can be remotely controlled by authorities—turned off and disabled, confined to a specific area known as geofencing, or redirected and re-routed through alternative networks—often without users' and government knowledge or consent. This makes them powerful tools for enforcing shutdowns or surveillance because the entire infrastructure stack is under the jurisdiction of US law and subject to the US foreign policy.

From a technical standpoint, this

means Bangladesh does not own or control the infrastructure through

which its citizens' data travels. When

someone uses satellite internet,

ক্র.নং	পদের নাম, পদবীয়া, বেতন কেল	বয়স	স্তরীয়বৃদ্ধি
০১	উপ-প্রাচীক নিয়ন্ত্রক (প্রাচীক নিয়ন্ত্রকের দলত্ব), ০১ টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ৪০০০০-৬৫৮৫০/- (গ্রেড-৫ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৪৭ বছর	অবেদনকারীকে বিশ্বাসদাতারের নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে প্রাচীক নামী সমন্বয় কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের অন্যান্য প্রাচীক অবেদনকারীর মধ্যে প্রাচীক নামী সমন্বয় কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০২	উপ-প্রাচীক (ব্যাটেল) (হিসাব দলত্ব), ০১ টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ৪৩০০০-৬৯৮৫০/- (গ্রেড-৫ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৪৭ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের অন্যান্য প্রাচীক অবেদনকারীর মধ্যে প্রাচীক নামী সমন্বয় কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৩	সহকারী পরিচালক (অভিযোগ) (উপায়ীর মাহাদেশের দলত্ব), ০১টি হাতী পদ	অন্ধর্ম ৩৭ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের অন্যান্য প্রাচীক অবেদনকারীর মধ্যে প্রাচীক নামী সমন্বয় কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৪	একান্ত সচিব (ডিপার্টমেন্ট মাহাদেশের দলত্ব), ০১টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ২৯,০০০-৬৪৩১০/- (গ্রেড-৭ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৩৭ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের অন্যান্য প্রাচীক অবেদনকারীর মধ্যে প্রাচীক নামী সমন্বয় কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৫	দেস্কপাল অফিসার (গ্রেড-০৯) (রেজিস্ট্রেশন দলত্ব-১, প্রশাসন ও সংস্থান-১, ইরেজি বিভাগ-১, কলা ও সামাজিক বিভাগ অনুযোগ-১), ০১টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ২২০০০-৫৩৬৫০/- (গ্রেড-০৯)	অন্ধর্ম ৩২ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৬	সহকারী প্রেসিয়ার্ল (গ্রেড-০৮) নিয়ন্ত্রকের দলত্ব, ০১টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ২১,০০০-৬৫৪০৮/- (গ্রেড-৭ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৩২ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৭	সহকারী প্রেসিয়ার্ল (নিয়ন্ত্রকের দলত্ব), ০১টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ২১,০০০-৬৫৪০৮/- (গ্রেড-৭ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৩২ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৮	বাজেট অফিসার (হিসাব দলত্ব), ০১টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ২১,০০০-৬৫৪০৮/- (গ্রেড-৭ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৩২ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে তারিখ
০৯	যানবাহন কর্মকর্তা (পরিবহন দলত্ব), ০১টি হাতী পদ, বেতন কেল: ২১,০০০-৬৫৪০৮/- (গ্রেড-৭ম)	অন্ধর্ম ৩২ বছর	অবেদন কাজগুলোর পূর্ণ অবেদন ০২ সেটে রেজিস্ট্রেশন, যশোর-৭৪০৮ ব্যবহারের আগুনী ০১/০১/২০২৫তে