

How do you measure the success of a year?



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ABAK HUSSAIN

When you are a nation so wounded to the core, rebuilding is never easy. A year ago, when the authoritarian regime fell, one thing was clear: a long, painful, uncertain road was ahead of us. We knew that all kinds of players, many of them with questionable intentions, would be shooting their shots. We knew that servants of the old regime would change colours and try to blend in, and this includes some editors, who dedicated years to singing the most exalted praises of the dictator, suddenly trying to rebrand themselves as the voice of democracy. We knew that many would be subtly trying to undermine the efforts of the new caretaker government by creating as much chaos and confusion as possible, no longer bold enough to yell their "Jitbe abar nouka" slogans without fear or embarrassment.

It was an overwhelming situation, a dizzying moment in history that called for celebration while staring down the daunting prospect of rebuilding the country after more than 15 years of ruthless plunder at the hands of a psychopath and her cronies. A year on, while detractors will ceaselessly claim the caretaker government to be a failure, a tremendous amount has been achieved, but the main anxieties have not gone away.

Because while a coalition of forces was needed to bring down the tyrant, not all of those elements had democracy and rule by consensus at heart, and it is becoming clearer and clearer that my enemy's enemy is not necessarily my friend. A year since the spectacular July uprising, it is more urgent than ever to find a path forward based on core principles, not hatred. Antipathy towards the former regime is a powerful force, and certainly many of us have been traumatised by it and filled with a need for revenge, but this trauma can never be a political principle. Hurt people hurt people, and we need to break the cycle while making sure justice is done.

I also believe that we need to get out

alone will save democracy. Let's not forget that while the national election to put a new government in power is an important aspect of democracy, it is not the only one. We don't just elect someone and hand over the keys to do as they please, nor should a government which was technically unelected, as is the case with the interim government, be called fascist simply because of how they came to power. We need to look at each of their

But the Bangladesh we live in, sadly, is far from boring, and our extraordinary times have necessitated a government for the moment that can handle a crisis perhaps without equal on Earth today. A dictatorship of more than 15 years has destroyed our institutions, due process, and political culture so deeply, so thoroughly, that it is naïve to suppose that one more election will fix everything if the ecosystem is not first

button for democracy. True democracy is the tireless process of free, fair institutions that hold power accountable at every step of the way. An election commission that is free from the influence of dirty money, a free judiciary, a clean parliament where the opposition party is not just window dressing but an actual thorn in the side of the ruling party every single day, and perhaps most crucially, a free media that can speak truth to power—these are the necessities of democracy. But all of this is a tall order, because, as I said, we are wounded to the core.

Still, perhaps it is naïve of me, but I do believe much progress has been made, though it may be tempting to see the downside. How do you measure a year? More specifically, how do you measure what has been achieved in the past year? Many of the positive changes are palpable. For one, the media can breathe again. I have spoken to several editors, and they have told me about how, finally, the true job of the media is being reclaimed. For years, some newspapers came out only for an audience of one; they hoped the former prime minister would read their headlines and editorials and be pleased. Often, the ownership of media houses was corrupt and in bed with the government. There are owners and publishers who got fat off government contracts and goodwill, while honest, hardworking journalists wrote their pieces with a boot on their necks and went home overworked and exhausted, looking over their shoulders. Now, there is a much greater variety of critical discourse.

The fact that people can and do openly critique aspects of the Yunus government is testament to a greater openness. Imagine doing the same sort of thing pre-July. Before long, you would get a threatening phone call from a powerful quarter telling you to cease and desist... or worse. A lot has been done towards fixing the financial sector, though a lot of stolen money remains to be brought back. There has been some improvement in Bangladesh's image on the global platform, but there is still a long way to go.

One thing we absolutely need to accomplish, as soon as possible, is bringing our fugitive former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, to book. Not driven by bloodlust, but for justice, so that a wounded nation may achieve closure, build back better, and move forward. This is easier said than done, but it is something the chief adviser must treat as a priority in order to avoid losing the public's faith. It's been a year already, and people can only be so patient.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

A year since the spectacular July uprising, it is more urgent than ever to find a path forward based on core principles, not hatred.

of unhelpful patterns of governing with emotion, constantly glorifying blood and martyrdom. We have been doing those things since our liberation, and it has gotten us nowhere good. Politics must focus on people and their lives, in the here and now.

There are, right now, predictably deafening cries demanding election, as though election

actions and hold them accountable.

Demanding a hurried election just so the next cohort of wannabe fascist kleptocrats can take power and start plundering right away is certainly not the way to go. In an ideal world, things would be calm and boring, and we would not have needed an uprising or an interim government or widespread reforms.

healed.

Let's not forget: Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League initially came to power through the ballot box. Once they had power, they took a torch to all institutions that might have kept them in check and built suffocating monuments to their own glory. Elections, then, are not a one-stop "on"

It's time we turned to inclusive, trauma-informed pedagogy



BLOWN' IN THE WIND

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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

There is a student protest going on demanding the removal of a colleague for political comments made on social media. Since the matter is under investigation, I shall not elaborate on the issue. However, in expressing their demands in public, a section of students—existing and immediate past ones—have expressed their views on some other senior colleagues and their contributions as public intellectuals. The derogatory tone is disingenuous to these nationally awarded colleagues who have dedicated their entire careers to teaching.

One of the safer comments—"hype 100%, contribution 0%"—will give you an idea of the nature of acrimony that exists. My gut reaction was, how could our students think that they were the only ones with feelings and the prerogative to be hurt? They seek punishment for hurtful words and then want their words to be uttered with impunity. As a father of a daughter who belongs to the current generation, I am used to ignoring such rash remarks and then guiding her about the tone or content at an appropriate time. She has been my litmus in the generational beaker to understand the chemistry between the old and the new

agents.

As I read through the student comments, it is becoming increasingly evident that intergenerational chemistry is no longer present. This is a generation that believes it must win every argument. The big question is, how do we teach a generation that thinks it has already won the argument? Unless we, as teachers and policymakers, acknowledge that a perceptible cultural shift has occurred—one in which segments of Gen Z view traditional authority figures such as teachers and parents as irrelevant, outdated, or even obstructive to their worldview and ambitions—we risk becoming ineffective. This sentiment has grown not only out of deeper generational divides, but also from technological and epistemological ruptures. The transmissional model of teaching, through which we learnt to admire our teachers, has gone out of style.

The feeling that Google knows more than teachers now, and AI can deal with most academic challenges, has created a tech-orientated culture that demands a complete overhaul of our pedagogical model: one that is dialogic, co-creative, and adaptive. This learning model is more than insisting on

using digital devices or adopting AI in class; it's about how we reimagine the purpose of education. The issues of authority and relevance will automatically follow. If our students think that they have already won the argument because they know what they need to know, the challenge for us is to teach them how to evaluate, cross-check, and ethically engage with knowledge in an information-saturated world. We need to teach them, "What do you do with what you know, and why?" The authority with which teachers used to approach their students needs to be replaced with authenticity and intellectual humility.

Teachers as co-learners can identify knowledge gaps and ask open-ended questions to contextualise and curate knowledge. Teachers need to be fellow travellers in this journey. And it is during this journey that the teacher-student relationship needs to be based on mutual respect. The old norms of enforcing rules and demanding respect are invalid. In this new model, teachers and students need to share a dialogic platform to co-create norms and foster respect. I know my colleagues in the humanities are aware of these cultural shifts. But the recent rift has shed light on the emotional and cognitive challenges that we face in classrooms. This difficulty stems from the absence of a trauma-informed and inclusive pedagogy.

The July mass uprising has created a strong sense of political efficacy. Students can now boldly, albeit rightly, claim, "We made the political change happen." The sentiment entails empowerment and a sense of ownership over institutional narratives. In doing so, students bring political energy into

every space, including the physical classroom and the cyberspace of social media. Students challenge the moral authority of a teacher, expecting them to earn both relational and intellectual trust. They scrutinise every utterance, whether verbal or non-verbal, for ideological relevance.

We must explain the attack on senior teachers by highlighting the radical relevance of ideology. The celebrity status of a faculty member or the cult figure assumed by some of the public intellectuals is often at odds with a student who has come to the university from a completely different background. For instance, someone who has come from a madrasa system may find it difficult to justify the accolades given to a left-leaning or so-called culturally progressive teacher. Then there is this worldwide relegation of humanities and social sciences as job-orientated disciplines. The rise of STEM and endorsement of such views by world leaders or iconic entrepreneurs intensify the issue further.

It is about time we introduced trauma-informed pedagogy that recognises the emotional, psychological or even physical trauma that students bring into the classroom. A class is not a homogenous space, particularly in a public system where most students choose their majors not out of choice but rather by default. The personal, political, economic, or environmental experiences that students bring can affect how they learn, behave, and engage. A student from a disenfranchised group may have a deep-seated anger towards the assumed or projected social and financial standings of certain teachers.

Institutions, therefore, must create a

code of conduct that provides physical, emotional, and psychological safety during class discussions and assessments. They must adopt a fair and transparent assessment policy so that students do not feel afraid to speak up. The empowerment of student voices will allow them the agency needed in their learning process. Teachers need to respect students' diverse identities and lived experiences as a model for their inclusive pedagogy. As teachers, our job is to create a collaborative space to accommodate students from diverse backgrounds, identities, and learning styles so that they feel valued and supported.

The problem arises when extreme ideological positions view the use of gender-neutral and culturally relevant teaching materials as an encroachment. We have already seen how the diversification of the curriculum to include marginalised voices (e.g. Indigenous and minority groups) was resisted by some newly empowered groups. The resistance is perceived as a challenge to the urban, elite academic norms that mainstream education has perpetuated over the years. The comments made by our students against our teachers, therefore, expose moral or psychological injury. The students who have seen and participated in the July uprising are witnesses to violence, duplicity, and systemic collapse. I think with time their rash reaction will reach an understanding of the consequences of their harmful words. But we need to take the current situation as an opportunity to work on an inclusive and humane system that rethinks learning models for the technologically advanced generations of today.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Unruly groups
- 5 Willowy
- 11 Border on
- 12 Better ventilated
- 13 Feel sorry for
- 14 Blackout robber
- 15 Ready to go
- 16 Buddies
- 17 Wear down
- 19 Chatter
- 22 Bitter
- 24 Steakhouse order
- 26 Somewhat, in music
- 27 Radius partner
- 28 Demoted planet
- 30 Old English forest

DOWN

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- 4 Sow's place
- 5 Leafy lunch
- 6 Small flower
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10 Do the wrong thing

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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