

ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR

Protesters return, undeterred

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at the Detective Branch (DB) of police for taking six coordinators of the quota reform protests to its office and staging a media interaction showing them being served food. Amnesty International also weighed in, urging the Bangladeshi authorities to end mass arrests and arbitrary detention of student leaders and protesters.

Despite heavy police presence and widespread crackdowns, quota reform protesters took to the streets across the country, including major demonstrations in Dhaka and Chattogram. Law enforcers, however, dispersed many of the gatherings and detained at least 80 people nationwide. In several areas, ruling party activists reportedly obstructed protests as well.

In Chattogram, police detained at least ten students after breaking up a protest in the Jamal Khan area. Later, another group of students near Andarkilla Shahi Jame Masjid hurled brick chunks at police, prompting a response with rubber bullets and more tear gas.

In Dhaka, law enforcers detained at least 70 people from various locations. The previous night, coordinator Abdul Kader had announced via social media that demonstrations would be staged at eight points in the capital, including Science Lab, North South University Gate-8, Jatiya Press Club, BNS Centre in Uttara, Mirpur-10, ECB Chattar, Rampura, and Mohakhali.

Protests continued outside Dhaka as well. At Jahangirnagar University, students demanded the unconditional release of all detained protest leaders. Several JU teachers joined the demonstration to express solidarity.

At Dhaka University, teachers under the banner of the Anti-Repression Teachers' Rally gathered at Aparajeyo Bangla, calling for an immediate end to the harassment and mass arrests of students.

Hundreds of Rajshahi University students blocked the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway from 12:20pm to 1:00pm, demanding justice for the deaths of fellow students and accountability for those responsible.

At Barishal University, at least 15 students were injured when Chhatra League activists allegedly attacked protesters near the administrative building around 2:00pm.

Meanwhile, the six detained protest organisers—Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud, Abu Baker Majumder, Hasnat Abdullah, Sarjis Alam, and Nusrat Tabassum—remained in DB custody. Their families were allowed to meet them around 2:00pm. The Detective Branch claimed the detention was necessary “to ensure their security.”

In a significant development, 74 eminent citizens—including academics,



FILE PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A young man screams and shows his ID card to prove he is a student while being dragged away by a policeman in a motorcycle helmet during a demonstration in front of the Independent University in the capital's Dhanmondi-2 on July 29, 2024.

human rights defenders, and lawyers—called for an independent, UN-led investigation into all deaths, injuries, and reports of torture related to the recent protests.

In a parallel move, a group of leading citizens formed a National Mass Inquiry Commission to investigate allegations of legal and human rights violations during the crackdown. The nine-member body, co-chaired by Justice Md Abdul Matin and human rights advocate Sultana Kamal, was composed of lawyers, teachers, cultural figures, and guardians. The commission issued a public call for evidence and information to help uncover the truth behind the recent violence, deaths, and mass arrests.

Complete reforms in 2yrs after polls

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The interim government formed the consensus commission on February 12, with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus as the chair, to advance and solidify the overall reform process through national consensus.

The commission initiated its second round of dialogue with political parties on June 2, aiming to develop the July National Charter that will outline reform proposals mutually agreed upon by participating parties through the discussions.

CONSENSUS ON 12 ISSUES

In the second round of discussions, the commission deliberated on 20 issues and reached consensus on only 12.

The issues that were not resolved include the formation of the caretaker government and appointment process of the chief adviser of the caretaker government, fundamental principles of state policy, appointment committee for constitutional and statutory bodies, formation process and structure of the upper house, women's seats in the parliament and election process of the president.

So far, parties have agreed that lawmakers will be allowed to vote across party lines, except on no-confidence motions and finance bills. Opposition MPs will chair at least four key parliamentary standing committees. An expert committee will be involved in the process of delimiting electoral constituencies. Permanent High Court benches will be set up in every division, and the presidential clemency power will be regulated through a law.

Parties also agreed that the most senior judge of the Appellate Division, based on duration in service, will be appointed as the next chief justice. However, if a political party explicitly states in its election manifesto its intention to appoint one of the two most senior judges and subsequently wins the election, it will be permitted to proceed with that appointment.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, “We accept that the most senior judge will be appointed as the chief justice. However, we will submit a note of dissent. Our election manifesto will include the option of appointing one of the top two senior judges.”

The parties agreed to amend the constitution to ensure that the declaration of a state of emergency cannot be misused for political purposes. The amendment will also aim to prevent the suspension of fundamental rights during emergencies.

Political parties agreed that any constitutional amendment concerning the caretaker government system must secure a two-thirds majority in parliament, followed by a referendum. They also agreed to this two-step process for making any changes to the constitution's preamble, article 8 (on basic principles), article 48 (on appointment and powers of the president), article 56 (on appointment of the prime minister), and article 142 (on constitution amendment procedures).

The majority of political parties, excluding the BNP and its allies, agreed that a party chief should not be eligible to serve as prime minister. Parties opposing this decision can submit a “note of dissent” to be included in the national charter, widely referred to as the July Charter. The BNP, LDP, Labour Party, NDM, and the 12-party alliance opposed the separation of the posts.

Parties also unanimously agreed on a proposal to form the Election Commission through a five-member search panel that will include the Speaker, the deputy Speaker (from the opposition), the prime minister, and the leader of the opposition in parliament.

They agreed that no individual may serve as prime minister for more than 10 years in their lifetime. They supported another proposal to form an independent police commission.

DRAFT CHARTER

In the wake of the July uprising, a historic opportunity has emerged to reconstruct a democratic state, the draft said.

It said the people aspired to establish a democratic state through the Liberation War of 1971, rooted in the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice. Yet, even after 53 years, that aspiration has not been fulfilled.

The development of democratic processes and culture has repeatedly faltered. Over the last five decades, democratic institutions have neither been built on solid foundations nor functioned effectively, even if they existed.

These institutions have been rendered dysfunctional and complicit in impunity through the institutionalisation of partisan

influence aimed at securing one-sided control and misuse of power within the state apparatus.

Since 2009, a partisan government has governed the state and gradually abandoned democratic values, taking on an authoritarian character. By violating human rights, committing enforced disappearances, killings, repression, and persecution of political opponents and critics through fabricated cases and attacks, they established a regime of anarchy and terror.

The entire state machinery was dedicated to authoritarian personality and group worship. Over a decade and a half, the authoritarian Awami League government distorted the constitution through amendments to consolidate power against public interest, enacted repressive laws, destroyed the electoral system, politicised the judiciary and public administration, and looted state resources through rampant corruption, said the draft.

It said over 1,400 unarmed citizens including women and children were killed during the powerful anti-discrimination movement led by students.

In exchange for their sacrifice, and through the collective strength and resistance of the people, the authoritarian rulers and their allies were ultimately defeated.

“Consequently, a deep public resolve has arisen to reconstruct the state structure. This has created a historic opportunity for state reform — particularly fundamental constitutional changes, restructuring of the electoral system, the practice of democratic governance, the establishment of an independent judiciary, and a well-governed, accountable, and corruption-free government system — which it is our sacred duty to utilise,” the draft said.

Parties will need to sign the charter and pledge that they will ensure full implementation of the charter.

“We pledge to undertake all necessary constitutional amendments, additions, revisions, drafting and redrafting, and changes to existing laws, or enact new laws, as well as issue new regulations or amend existing ones, to implement the proposals and recommendations contained in the charter concerning the constitution, judiciary, electoral system, public administration, police, and anti-corruption system,” the charter read.

“There were no agendas in these meetings — no fruitful discussions, no timelines. Only decisions made at Hare Road were being implemented.”

She also alleged that from the morning after August 5, the title “coordinator” was being used for extortion, to assert dominance in areas, and more.

“I was shocked. Just the day before, no one even used that title. Now everyone is a coordinator... The platform has become like the Rakkhi Bahini after the Liberation War in 1971.”

me that money could be made from this [being spokesperson or coordinator]... I found out only after joining... It felt like clownery.

“July–August was a lived experience. So why on Earth would I use that as a money-making machine? But unfortunately, that's what it has become common, regular,” she said.

“We wanted to change the system, not create a political party and become part of it.”

Umama said she had stopped attending SAD meetings since January this year.

July being used as a moneymaking machine

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chapter” and said she would no longer act as spokesperson due to “barriers created by a particular group within the platform”. “The way the platform operated made it impossible for anyone with self-respect to remain involved.”

Without naming individuals, she alleged that some SAD leaders were involved in extortion, tender manipulation, lobbying for the appointment of deputy commissioners, asserting dominance, and other such activities.

“It never once occurred to

Women led, the nation followed

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they beat us like animals. One of them said, ‘So, you’ll protest again, will you?’ And then he hit me.”

On July 17, Sanjida Anwar Chowdhury, a former DU linguistics student, joined despite growing threats. “If I die, send my body to my family,” she said. “But I will not leave the street.”

Women weren’t just protesting; they were protecting. They formed shields, treated the injured, challenged authority with nothing but resolve. In return, they faced assault, harassment, and online vilification.

Tonni, a DU student, was attacked near the University Club. “Even as we tried to leave, they didn’t spare us. I was left bleeding.”

The state’s response turned increasingly violent. Arrests, torture, and disappearances became daily realities. But fear failed to quell the uprising.

What began as resistance to quota policies in government jobs evolved into a full-scale revolt. “This wasn’t about quotas anymore; it was about justice,” said Nusrat Jahan, a Stamford University student.

On July 31, Nusrat joined the March for Justice after her senior, Noor Hasan, was arrested outside the High Court. She stood in front of the prison van to block it. Her photo went viral. “I wouldn’t let them take him without a fight,” she said.

The movement soon rippled across society. Professors, workers, and homemakers stood beside students. In Gazipur, garment workers joined in.

“We saw our younger brothers and sisters shot,” said Ambia, a garment worker. “We couldn’t stay silent. The police threatened us, but we stood our ground.”

At least 26 garment workers were killed, according to Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity. “The real number is likely higher,” said its president, Taslima Akhter. “We’re still verifying.”

Dr Chowdhury Saima Ferdous, a Dhaka University professor and member of the Public Service Commission, said, “I had supported the students’ demands since the 2018 quota reform protests, but when they were branded as Razakars, something inside me broke. Silence was no longer

an option. I had to stand with them.”

Saima recounted the days of chaos on the streets. “We witnessed brutal police crackdowns on campuses. Reports poured in of female students being tortured through the night. A small group of us, teachers, marched in protest through campus gates, to the Press Club, anywhere we could raise our voices.

“Nazrul’s songs became my armour. I remember singing ‘Karar Oi Louho Kopat’ and ‘Muktir Mandir Sopan Tole’ while staring down riot police. We were ready for whatever came,” she said.

She received death threats and anonymous calls, even handwritten letters warning she would be abducted. “There were nights I wasn’t sure I’d live to see the morning. But after seeing my students’ blood spilled on the streets, retreat was no longer possible.”

The July uprising was not isolated. According to a cross-national study ‘The Women in Resistance (WiRe)’ by Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government in 2019, women’s participation increases the chances that a resistance movement will succeed. This research tracked and documented women’s roles in major resistance movements around the world. It includes 338 both violent and nonviolent movements from 1945 to 2014 in every country.

According to a global study on the Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 named “preventing conflict transforming justice securing the peace” conducted by Radhika Coomaraswamy in 2015, women’s participation not only strengthens humanitarian response and boosts the success of peace negotiations, it also extends the durability of peace, speeds up economic recovery, and serves as a powerful force against violent extremism.

The July uprising also echoes a long and powerful history of women leading from the front in Bangladesh’s most defining moments.

From the Language Movement, where figures like Sufia Kamal and Shamsunnahar Mahmud raised their voices, to the Liberation War of 1971, where women like journalist Selina Parveen, guerrilla fighter Krishna Member, and freedom fighter Lutfun

Nessa risked everything, women have never stood on the sidelines. Their defiance continued through the anti-Ershad mass movement of the 1980s and resurfaced with renewed force on the streets in July 2024.

Shirin Sultana, a former student leader during the anti-Ershad movement, sees echoes of the past in today’s defiance.

“Our movement wasn’t spontaneous. It took years—’86, ’87, ’89—before we forced Ershad out,” she recalled. “But this July movement, though sudden, burns with the same fire.”

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She described how they led the march from the vice chancellor’s residence to Mohsin Hall, then toward the Press Club—flouting curfew orders. “That was the point. We wanted to show we didn’t acknowledge the regime’s authority. The march grew to over 3,000 students. We stayed at the front—to protect the boys from being fired upon. We formed a human shield.”

When authorities ordered the evacuation of female dormitories, she and a small group of 12-13 students stayed behind in Ruqayyah Hall for days, coordinating resistance. “One night, the army raided our hall. We hid in the washrooms. The next day, we left the campus and continued the movement from our local areas.”

“In Basabo, I led torch processions every night. Soon they became victory marches.”

Comparing past and present, she noted, “We were scared too, but we stepped up. Today’s young women face a more brutal reality—surveillance, smear campaigns, political violence.”

“But when I saw the girls of July 2024 marching out despite brutal attacks, I felt this regime cannot survive. Just like Ershad’s couldn’t. I knew then, history was repeating.”

Govt set to reshuffle admin ahead of polls

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the country is on track for a safe, well-managed, free and fair election.

About the administrative reshuffles, the chief adviser’s Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder said, “Transfers will only occur where necessary, not across the board.”

At a meeting on Saturday, Prof Yunus assured political parties that the election date would be announced within four to five days, meeting sources said.

Earlier on July 9, Yunus ordered the authorities concerned to complete all polls preparations by December.

The polls are likely to take place in February or April, he told an earlier meeting with law enforcers.

On June 13, Yunus said the election could be held the week before Ramadan 2026 if all preparations are completed by then.

He made the remarks during a meeting in London with BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman, who suggested holding the polls before the month of fasting, which will begin in the third week of February.

Yesterday’s meeting was attended by Home Adviser Lt General (ret’d) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser on Home

Affairs Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, the principal secretary, cabinet secretary, home secretary, and top officials of law enforcement agencies and the Armed Forces Division.

Several crucial decisions were made regarding law enforcement, administrative preparedness, and countering misinformation.

Yunus directed law enforcement agencies to identify potential election-time “hotspots” — areas that could see unrest — and make recommendations on steps needed to maintain order, said Azad.

The chief adviser also asked agencies to assess the situation in each area ahead of the polls and submit reports to the central monitoring committee. Based on these reports, special deployments will be made in vulnerable districts.

Azad added that Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam told the meeting that starting in September, approximately 150,000 police officials will undergo specialised training on election duties.

The training will continue till November to ensure readiness across the country.

Meanwhile, Azad said, the government is planning to establish

a National Information Centre ahead of the polls due to the growing spread of rumours and disinformation. “The centre will rapidly identify and counter false information, ensuring accurate updates reach the public in real time.”

The centre will also highlight timely and positive interventions by law enforcement, which often go unnoticed due to the lack of a dedicated media outlet, he added.

A proposal to establish a media wing within the national security command structure is also under discussion. It would enable regular press briefings and real-time updates on law and order.

Press Secretary Shafiqul issued a stern warning to YouTubers and other non-traditional content creators covering news events without following journalistic ethics.

“Many are seen collecting news without maintaining even minimum professional standards, which disrupts the work of trained journalists. If this continues, we may be forced to issue formal guidelines.”

He urged them to learn the basics of news gathering and act responsibly, especially during sensitive events like natural disasters or political rallies.