

## Partial tariff relief is a hard-won victory

A sober understanding of the new reality is necessary moving forward

In securing a 20 percent tariff rate from Washington, Dhaka has navigated a perilous new era of US trade diplomacy. The immediate reaction is justifiably one of relief. A potential 35 percent tariff, which would have been catastrophic for the country's primary export engine, has been averted. This is a hard-won victory for Bangladesh.

Yet, this relief should be tempered with a sober understanding of the new reality. While National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman rightly praised the outcome as "good news," the more measured comments from Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin are equally telling. His admission that Bangladesh "expected a rate below 20 percent" reveals the fine print of modern transactional diplomacy: a win is not about achieving the ideal, but about securing a competitive position in a world of hard bargains. The new 20 percent benchmark, applied under the reciprocal trade framework, will stack atop the country's existing average tariff of 16 percent, pushing the total levy to 36 percent. While steep, the rate remains workable, precisely because it is not unique to Bangladesh. The same formula applies to all nations, ensuring the country stays competitive with key rivals.

Indeed, the outcome keeps Bangladesh in lockstep with Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, and only marginally behind Pakistan's 19 percent. The contrast comes from the fate of India. Hit with a punitive 25 percent tariff, New Delhi's experience demonstrates that in President Donald Trump's Washington, strategic partnership alone is no longer a shield. Access to the world's largest consumer market is now explicitly tied to a country's willingness to align with American priorities.

The price of this access is clear. Bangladesh's negotiators wisely focused their commitments on purchasing US agricultural products, a move that serves food security goals and fosters essential goodwill. That was an astute concession. It illustrates that successful negotiation is no longer confined to tariff percentages but requires a holistic approach, linking trade to everything from food policy to strategic cooperation.

Therefore, this episode must serve as more than a momentary success; it must be a blueprint for the future. The era of predictable, rules-based trade relations is giving way to a more fluid and demanding environment. The White House has declared that each country's tariff rate reflects the "depth of its commitment" to US interests. Dhaka has proven it can meet this challenge, but the demands will not cease. The government should be applauded for securing this initial victory, as a failure to do so would have disrupted exports to the country's single biggest market. But the key takeaway is that such negotiations are the new normal. Bangladesh must now institutionalise this capacity for agile, interest-based statecraft. The hard work of navigating this complex new world order, where every trade benefit comes with a cost, has only just begun.

## Break the nexus of crime and politics

Jahangir's death in Narayanganj continues legacy of political crimes

In a few days, Bangladesh will mark the first anniversary of freedom from Sheikh Hasina's tyrannical rule, notorious for its corruption and political abuses. Yet, the toxic nexus between crime and politics continues to grip the country, as illustrated most recently by the alleged killing of Md Jahangir Hossain in Narayanganj's Arahazar by local BNP members.

According to a report, Jahangir's shop—along with two others—was used to set up the Mahmudpur union's Ward 7 BNP office shortly after August 5. Quoting the deceased's son, the report states that Jahangir's consent was not taken before using his shop, and no rent was paid for it either, although rent for the other two was paid to their owner. On July 30, Jahangir visited the site to demand rent and got into an argument with Tota Mia Pradhan, former general secretary of Mahmudpur union BNP, and several other BNP men. The altercation escalated into a scuffle, after which Jahangir, also a BNP affiliate, was taken to the local health complex where he was pronounced dead. As of 5pm on Friday, police arrested one person in relation to the killing. However, the main accused, Tota, is still absconding.

This is not an isolated incident—certainly not for BNP, which has seen its grassroots leadership often descend into violent infighting since the uprising—continuing the legacy of the Hasina era when abuse of power and party affiliations became widespread. In fact, over the past 12 months, errant members of almost all major parties have made headlines by engaging in unlawful activities, often leading to violence. According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), between January and June this year, 65 people died in political violence stemming from intra-party feuds. Crimes of all kinds including extortion, murder, and rape were also reported. Unfortunately, most parties disown such incidents by placing blame on individuals, ignoring how they draw their power from party affiliations. Parties signal symbolic distancing when it suits them but have no issue with using the muscle power provided by criminally minded members or when they use images of party founders or top brass for personal gains.

But expelling party members after the fact—like BNP did in the Arahazar case—is not enough. Political parties must build effective and transparent accountability mechanisms that prevent crime within their ranks. They must ensure every member is held accountable by actively cooperating with law enforcement. Without such measures, political abuses will persist. We also call on the government to investigate Jahangir's death and ensure justice. Without consistent enforcement of justice, the legacy of political crime will only deepen.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Kuwait invaded

On this day in 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and Saddam Hussein's subsequent refusal to withdraw his troops sparked the Persian Gulf War, in which an international force led by the United States quickly defeated Iraq.

# After July: A fragile transition, a nation in waiting



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One of the most significant political upheavals in Bangladesh's recent history occurred during the July uprising, which took place only a year ago. After years of political persecution, suffocation, and the deliberate deterioration of democratic principles, it was a moment of communal liberation for many. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's prolonged and increasingly autocratic administration came to an abrupt end due to a confluence of student protests, widespread public discontent, elite disenchantment, and institutional retreat. Hope for change, rebirth, and the restoration of the republic followed. That hope remains a year later, albeit weakened.

The subsequent transition following the uprising brought with it an interim government, headed by Prof Muhammad Yunus, which was never going to be easy. The government began cautiously optimistic, charged with re-establishing public trust, consolidating a shattered state, and laying the groundwork for a fair electoral process. It pledged a restoration of the rule of law, reform, and inclusivity. However, the administration is increasingly vulnerable to both internal conflicts and public scepticism due to its delayed delivery, increasing political inconsistencies, and growing doubts about its authority.

The breakdown of the political unity that initially enabled the revolt has been the most depressing development since it began. After briefly uniting behind a common goal—the overthrow of the previous government—the alliance of student activists, opposition parties, and civil society leaders has returned to distrust, competitiveness, and conflicting agendas. Long seen as the main opposition party, the BNP has struggled to articulate a consistent post-Hasina policy, wavering between calls for more extensive structural reform and demands for early elections. The National Citizen Party (NCP), which formerly presented itself with a young, reformist image, has

become increasingly entangled in internal conflicts and characterised by exaggerated rhetoric. Even some student organisations, which were previously praised as the movement's moral core, have been drawn into disputes and controversies.

The Awami League's political future is still a significant concern in the interim. Whether it should be officially



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banned or marginalised remains a topic of debate. Although many people believe that a party long associated with authoritarianism and impunity must be held accountable, others caution that exclusion—particularly by decree—risks eroding the same democratic norms that the movement aimed to restore. Here, there are no simple solutions. There is a fine line between justice and retaliation, and in a culture still dealing with the effects of political violence, moving forward

requires a level of self control that is hard to muster.

The position is made more difficult by the strategic hesitations of the interim government. It has hinted at election dates, with February 2026 being the latest, but has yet to release a definitive schedule or legal framework. (On July 31, the law adviser said the election date would be announced in a few days.) Both supporters and opponents have criticised the interim for its incapacity or refusal to take decisive action on issues such as judicial independence, bureaucratic accountability, and law enforcement reform. Merely symbolising is no longer sufficient in an environment where public vigilantism, mob violence, and administrative indifference are becoming more apparent.

offering cautious engagement. While applauding the end of autocratic leadership, Western nations have begun to voice concerns about the absence of human rights protections and the lack of election certainty. The interim government continues to face a challenging balancing act between local consolidation and international credibility.

Nevertheless, something has changed amid all this uncertainty. The prevailing power's myth of invincibility has been dispelled. The fear-based culture that stifled dissent has been broken. A new generation has taken the stage, one that is politicised by engagement rather than inheritance. This is no small accomplishment in and of itself. However, this is not enough to sustain a movement. They

International players have also been keeping a careful eye on things. Once a major backer of the former Awami League-led government, India has been, at best, ambivalent towards the new administration due to its unclear stance and cautious diplomatic approach. Border disputes have escalated, especially in light of recent push-ins of Rohingya refugees and Muslims who speak Bangla. China and Pakistan, however, have taken a more realistic stance and are

need organisation, creativity, and most importantly a forward-looking vision.

The next few months will be pivotal. The gap will either be filled by opportunism, resentment, and a return to authoritarianism, or the interim government will be able to steer the country towards elections and reform in a legitimate manner. For a country that has repeatedly paid the price of freedom, it is reasonable to expect its leaders to step up when the time comes.

## Time for political parties to prioritise disability rights



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In the wake of the historic July uprising, a new wave of hope and resistance surged across Bangladesh. It was not just a call for reform and justice, but also a cry for a country where equality is not aspirational but foundational. One year later, amid the chants of change, there lies a question we must not ignore: what place do the 16 million people with disabilities hold in Bangladesh's new vision for the future?

For far too long, persons with disabilities in Bangladesh have remained the most marginalised and invisible in the national development agenda. This invisibility is not due to their inability, but our failure as a society—more critically, failure in political leadership—to recognise and uphold their rights. As the country prepares for the upcoming national election, manifestos must reflect not just promises, but profound political will to ensure that disability rights are central to their vision of inclusive development.

Bangladesh, in a commendable display of commitment on paper, ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007, thereby pledging to ensure the full realisation of rights for persons with disabilities. Subsequently, several legal and policy frameworks were introduced, including the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act, 2013 and its accompanying national action plan

on disability. These measures signify a shift from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based paradigm. This act recognises persons with disabilities as equal citizens, entitled to the same rights and protection under the law. However, despite its progressive legal framework, implementation remains slow, fragmented, and under-resourced, primarily due to the lack of strong political commitment.

While the Ministry of Social Welfare is the lead agency responsible for disability inclusion, it cannot act alone. Disability is a cross-cutting issue affecting all sectors—education, health, employment, infrastructure, governance—and thus demands inter-ministerial coordination. But the role of political parties is paramount. They are the architects of policy, the bearers of legislative power, and the shapers of public priorities. An election manifesto is a moral and political contract with the people. Therefore, inclusion of disability rights in manifestos is both a democratic necessity and a litmus test of a party's commitment to equality.

Ahead of the national election, the political parties must consider the following actions:

**Legislative commitment:** Every political party must pledge to enforce the RPPD Act. In this regard, the law must be updated to ensure that all government bodies are held accountable for their implementation.

**Nomination of persons with disabilities:** Representation matters.

Political parties must commit to nominating qualified persons with disabilities as candidates for parliamentary and local elections to demonstrate their true potential. Their presence in decision-making bodies is crucial for disability-inclusive governance.

**Establishing disability local points:** Every political party should establish a dedicated disability focal point to coordinate inclusion efforts, both during the election campaign period and beyond.

**Formation of a parliamentary caucus on disability:** Commit to establishing an all-party parliamentary caucus on disability. This caucus should be empowered to monitor policy implementation, influence legislation, and ensure that disability issues remain on the parliamentary agenda.

**Adequate resource allocation:** Manifestos must commit to allocating adequate financial and human resources for disability inclusion. This includes funding for accessible infrastructure, inclusive education, assistive technologies, and community-based rehabilitation.

**Capacity-building for political leaders:** Top leadership within political parties must undergo orientation sessions and include mandatory disability inclusion training in their party development modules. Understanding rights is the first step towards ensuring them.

**Universal accessibility:** Political parties must pledge to uphold accessibility standards across public infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and transportation systems. The universal design principle should guide all future development plans.

**Awareness and sensitisation:** Combating stigma and discrimination requires consistent public awareness campaigns. Political parties must

commit to public education initiatives that promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

**Strengthening institutional mechanisms:** The national executive committee, the national coordination committee, and the district disability committees outlined in the RPPD Act must be reactivated. Ministries should appoint disability focal points with clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms.

**Engagement with civil society:** Disability advocacy groups and organisations of persons with disabilities are the voice of the community. Political parties should consult them on developing and implementing policies related to disability.

**Accessible campaigning:** Political campaigns themselves must be inclusive. Rallies, debates, manifestos, websites, and social media content must be accessible to people with diverse disabilities. Inclusion starts with how parties communicate their vision.

**Work with Election Commission:** Political parties play a significant role in the conduct of a smooth, free and fair election with the Election Commission (EC). Therefore, they must collaborate with the EC to ensure people with disabilities can enjoy their voting rights independently.

The July uprising of 2024 ignited a national conversation around injustice, economic disparity, and democratic accountability. If this spirit of reform does not translate into tangible gains for the marginalised—including persons with disabilities—then the movement's legacy will remain incomplete. It is time for our political parties to demonstrate leadership in ensuring inclusivity in all aspects of society. Let their election manifestos be the starting point of transformation.