

ONE YEAR OF SHEIKH HASINA’S FALL

The unfinished journey of Drohojatra



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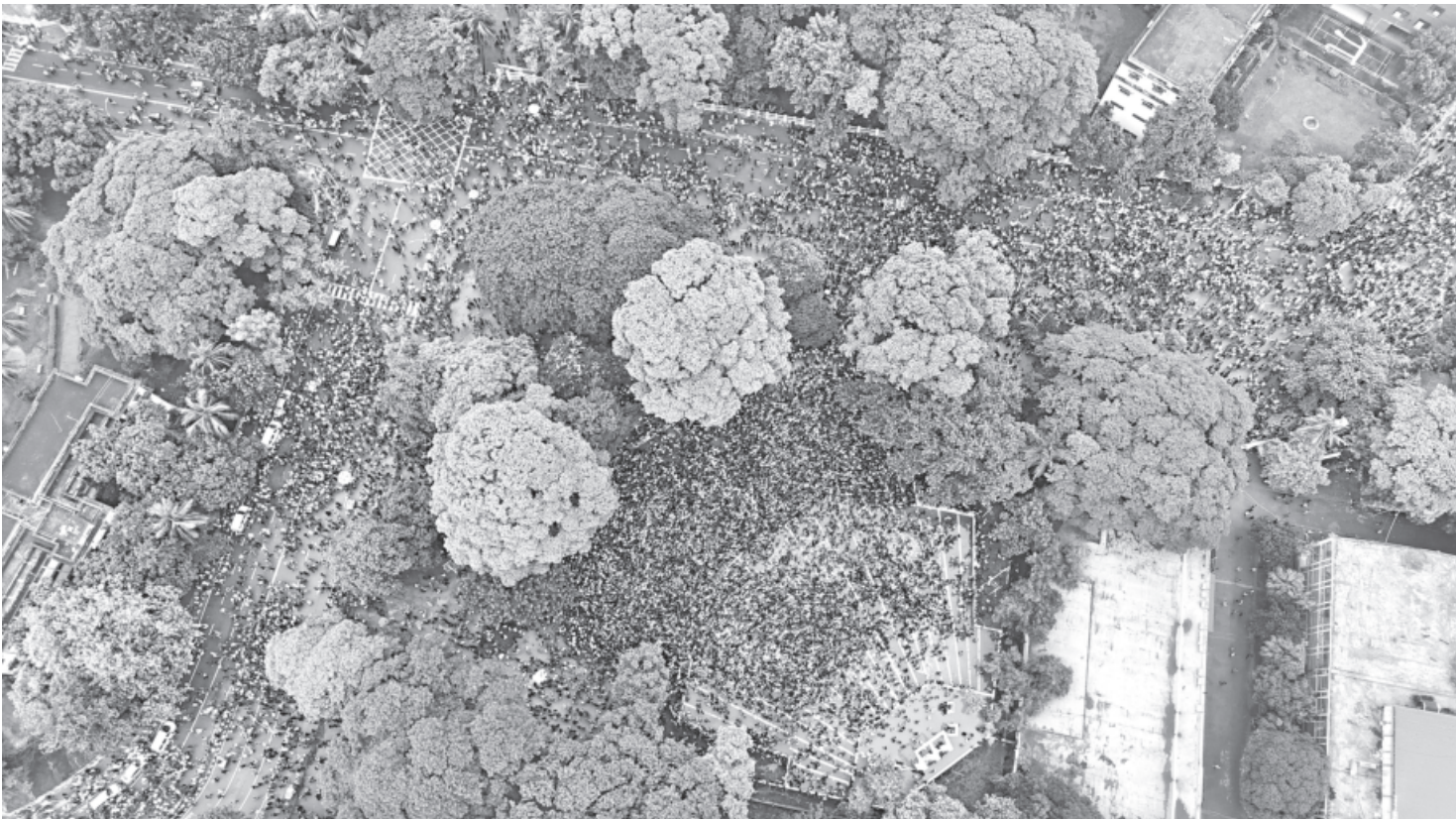
In the face of the people's collective power, the coercive tools of the state—police, law, curfews, propaganda, RAB, military, Section 144—become powerless. When people take to the streets with unity and determination, these mechanisms collapse. That moment of truth—when fear is cast aside and resistance becomes collective—is what we call a mass uprising.

Bangladesh has experienced such moments before: in 1952, 1969, 1971 (when people's resistance turned into an armed Liberation War after the Pakistani forces started committing genocide), and in 1990. And then came July 2024. In each instance, the strength of ordinary people overcame repressive regimes. But in every case, we have also seen how those moments of possibility have been derailed or co-opted, either by betrayal from within or by the failure to

based on historical experience.

One year later, these fears have proven justified. The promises of a new beginning have begun to fade. The interim government, in its own way, has repeated many of the same practices of previous regimes: repression of dissent, evasion of transparency, backroom deals, disregard for justice. Many who actively took part in the uprising—workers, women, students, the poor, and minority communities—find themselves once again under attack.

The very people who made this political shift possible are being silenced or sidelined. Female worker Champa Khatun became the first martyr under this government. Auto-rickshaws have been flattened in mass drives. Villages have been raided. Protesters have been shot. And all the while, those in power try to justify this violence using the same



FILE PHOTO: NAIMUR RAHMAN



Expectations were high after the fall of the autocratic regime of Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

sustain the momentum.

The most recent uprising toppled the Hasina-led government on August 5, 2024. Just three days later, an interim government led by Mohammad Yunus took office. Expectations were high. However, on August 2 last year, at the beginning of Drohojatra, just before the transition, I had warned that removing Hasina and the Awami League would not automatically result in people's empowerment. Without dismantling the structures of power and dominance that had been built over the years, the risk of reverting to old patterns remained high.

That warning was not pessimism—it was

language of “stability” and “order” used by previous regimes.

The mass killing of July 2024 is still waiting for credible justice. Proper investigations are yet to be completed. Many of the injured have suffered from a lack of proper attention and treatment. Meanwhile, thousands face harassment, threats, and financial pressure from fabricated cases filed against them. Extortion and the everyday fear of speaking out continue. Mob violence has become a regular practice to get one's way—be it to punish someone illegally, grab a position of power, acquire land, or make money. All the old habits persist under a new banner.

July-August 2024 was one of those moments in Bangladesh's history when fear was shed and resistance became collective.

And like the Hasina government, the current administration has shown little respect for democratic processes when it comes to policy decisions. The Chattogram Port is being handed over to a foreign company without open tenders. LNG import deals are being signed behind closed doors. An order has been officially placed to purchase 25 Boeing aircraft, without any public discussion or explanation. Whose interests are being served by these decisions?

The government makes public statements against Indian domination, but key deals like the Adani power contract, the Rampal coal project in the Sundarbans, and the controversial transit agreements have not been cancelled. The US, meanwhile, is emerging as a growing military and strategic partner. Secret agreements are being signed. The same policy of subservience to global powers continues, now with slight variations in tone. Dependence on the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and JICA for policy formulation and determining the development path remains the same, thus leading to the same outcome as before. The sources of increasing inequality, environmental destruction, corruption, and erosion of public rights remain the same too.

This is not a break from the past; it is a continuation of the same ruling logic, repackaged. The names have changed. The structure remains.

This is why the struggle cannot end with the fall of a government. It must be a deeper, more committed fight for justice, equality, and democracy in every sense. The state must take responsibility—responsibility for the judicial process for July killings; responsibility for the fabricated cases; responsibility for the

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culture of impunity that continues to dominate our institutions.

It must also commit to not signing any long-term deals—on ports, defence, ICT, energy—without public debate and transparency. It must stop the harassment of women, minorities, and gender-diverse communities, both online and offline.

Democratic transformation is impossible without dismantling the corrupt alliance of money, muscle, and communalism in politics. Electoral reform is needed at every level, from local government to the national parliament. But that is only one part. We need institutional changes in the judiciary, administration, and law enforcement. Without these, any election is merely a change of faces.

At the same time, there is a growing attempt to distort history. Forces that claim the 1971 Liberation War as their own have used it to silence dissent and loot resources. They have turned a people's struggle into party property. That must be resisted. The

Liberation War belongs to the people, just as the 2024 uprising does.

These struggles—1971, 1990, 2024—were not isolated events. They are part of a continuum. But each time, the people have paid the price, and others have taken the gains. We cannot let that cycle repeat itself.

To build a just and inclusive Bangladesh, we must confront the four key areas of discrimination that structure our society: class, religion, ethnicity, and gender.

Class: Economic inequality continues to increase. The majority of people continue to suffer, while the rich grow richer.

Religion: Discrimination persists both between and within religious communities.

Ethnicity: Non-Bangalee communities remain marginalised and underrepresented.

Gender: At every level—home, street, institution—patriarchy continues to dominate.

Until these axes of inequality are addressed head-on, no amount of electoral change will bring true freedom. And unless people remain mobilised, active, and organised, the forces of autocracy will return, again and again.

This is why the movement must go on. It is not over. It cannot be over.

Our struggle is not just for one country or one moment—it is part of a global struggle for justice and dignity. The resistance here echoes the resistance in Palestine and beyond. And just as our uprisings inspire others, we too draw strength from global movements.

The future depends on us. The path ahead is difficult. But the people of this land have shown time and again that they can rise. Now, we must ensure that this time, we do not let that rising be captured, diluted, or destroyed. We continue.

Nightmares of sleepless nights



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MANZUR-AL-MATIN

Zakir Shikder could tell from the grinding noise of the bone saw that he was losing a part of his body. His leg was being amputated. A couple of days ago, he had found himself amid thousands of others like him, protesting against the tyranny of Sheikh Hasina, who was directing the use of lethal weapons on the very people she had sworn to protect. One of the bullets fired from one of those lethal weapons would pierce through the bones of Zakir. The emptiness below his left thigh would forever remind him of the July of 2024.

Zakir would live to tell his horrific story. Soheli would not. He, too, was shot during those fateful days. Like so many others, he feared his parents would not allow him to join the protests, so he pretended he was going to the Jumma. Usually, he would don a panjabi for the Friday prayers. On that day, he wore a shirt instead—never to return home. Nupur, Soheli's sister, recollected his last moments at a Dhaka hospital. As they waited for his turn to get into the OT, Soheli asked, “Is Ma too mad at me for getting shot like this?” But at the same time, he was proud, because he was struggling for his country. Nupur soon realised her sandals were getting soaked with blood on the floor. Her brother's blood—and the blood of many, many others—who dared to tread the path to freedom.

Naima, a teenager, was eager to join the protests. Her mother Aynun Nahar, fearing the worst, would not agree. Naima, inquisitive as ever, was on the balcony when she heard gunshots. Instinctively, she started capturing footage of the shooting on her mobile



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

‘The weight of sleepless nights is something that can only be felt by those who continue to relive the horrors of July 2024.’

phone. Her ever-protective mother was right behind her, believing she was safe inside her home. She could never have guessed what was to come. Moments later, a bullet would penetrate Naima's skull; her brain would be spattered all over the balcony. The blood

gushing from her daughter's shattered skull is still vivid in Aynun Nahar's memory.

These are the stories of myriad families who faced a war waged by a ruler against her own people. A war that was thrust upon us because our children refused to be humiliated at the whim of a dictator. An unjust war, where on the one side were pistols, shotguns, machine guns even, and on the other, there were just pebbles and

and grieving relatives like Zakir, Nupur, or Aynun Nahar—is something that can only be felt by those who continue to relive the horrors of July 2024. And that number, I fear, is not small.

July is the month of pride, the month of triumph against tyranny, and yet July is the month of irreparable trauma for the whole nation. Many of those who were on the streets have witnessed first-hand the death of their

comrades. Almost the entire nation became a witness to the horrors via social media. When we close our eyes, it doesn't feel like a year has passed since the blood-drenched hospital floors of July 2024, or the sight of Nafiz hanging from that rickshaw, his blood

A war that was thrust upon us because our children refused to be humiliated at the whim of a dictator. An unjust war, where on the one side were pistols, shotguns, machine guns even, and on the other, there were just pebbles and sticks. Yet, we fought, and we won!

dripping. It feels very much like the present. Sometimes it even feels like we are entrapped in an endless cycle of blood and death.

This trauma presents itself every day in diverse reiterations: when we overreact on social media with vulgar slurs, when we share horrific footage of burnt children without considering the consequences for their families, or for other children who might come across it. We are in a state of constant irritability, almost at daggers drawn, be it in the political arena or in our bedrooms.

I believe we are failing to realise that as a nation we need to heal. We need to heal the wounds for us to be able to move towards the future. Of course, we need to ensure justice for the July massacre. We need to agree upon the basic structural reforms for better governance. But more than anything, we need to be able to think straight without the overwhelming burden of nightmares that continue to haunt us.

As we continue to be shaken to our core by the images of children being starved to death in Gaza, let us admit: we live in an unjust world. Our leaders have forged a world order where reason and sensibility are in retreat. Yet, our own small nation has become a beacon of hope for the whole world. We have shown the world how the powerless can be victorious against all odds. Let us now show the world that we can heal our wounds, and pave the way for a world where things make a little more sense.