

Aug 5 events caught Delhi off guard: BBC

It reported that India believed Hasina’s stay there would be short

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Indian government, on the morning of August 5 last year, was under the impression that Sheikh Hasina would overcome the crisis; it could not realise that she would become a semi-permanent guest when the deposed prime minister arrived later that day, reported BBC Bangla yesterday.

Although Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and Home Minister Amit Shah had been briefed by intelligence officials that Hasina was facing the most formidable political challenge of her career, they were assured that she would weather the storm.

The events that ultimately unfolded on August 5 last year caught Indian government officials off guard, claimed BBC Bangla.

It reported that during what is believed to have been the final conversation over the hotline, likely on August 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then premier Hasina did not discuss the possibility of her seeking refuge in India.

The report said although Indian officials were aware that the ongoing protests in Bangladesh carried a distinct anti-India sentiment, the scale of hostility came as a

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In observance of July Mass Uprising Day yesterday, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus visited the under-construction “July Uprising Memorial Museum” at the Gono Bhaban, which was previously the residence of the deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina. *Clockwise from left: A symbolic mass grave stands in tribute to the martyred heroes of July. Sculptures in the outdoor area depict iconic moments from the July uprising. The interior gallery showcases photographs, artworks, books, and newspapers highlighting the past regime’s brutalities and the rebellion.*



PHOTOS: CHIEF ADVISER’S PRESS WING

Election in February

FROM PAGE 1

The announcement came at a time when major political parties are still divided over when the 13th parliamentary polls should be held.

The BNP and like-minded parties pressed for holding the election in February following a meeting between Prof Yunus and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman in London in early June.

The National Citizen Party (NCP) wants the polls to be held after visible progress in reforms and trial of those responsible for the killings during the uprising. The Jamaat-e-Islami has been demanding reforms before elections.

The BNP, Nagorik Oikya, Ganosamhati Andolan, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and AB Party welcomed the chief adviser’s announcement.

NCP and Jamaat did not give any immediate reaction and said that they will come up with their statements after discussions in their party fora.

‘FINAL CHAPTER’

In his 35-minute speech, Prof Yunus recalled he had said four months ago that the next parliamentary election would be held by June 2026. But before that, the government needed to complete some essential tasks – among them, the July Declaration and the July Charter.

“We had three responsibilities: reform, justice, and election,” he said, highlighting the progress being made in democratic reform of the state system and the trial of those responsible for the July killings.

To that end, he said, the government formed several reform commissions and already implemented many urgent reforms within a short time.

The chief adviser said that for the implementation of long-term

reforms, the interim government formed the National Consensus Commission which held dialogues with more than 30 political parties and alliances for weeks and brought the July Charter to its final stage on the basis of intense talks.

“We hope that, based on this consensus, the political parties will soon sign the July Charter and reach an agreement on its implementation as well.”

Yunus said the July Charter will ensure the smooth transfer of power in Bangladesh, the independence and efficiency of the state institutions, the genuine implementation of citizens’ rights, and the proper management of state resources and capabilities.

“We must ensure that no future government can ever again become fascist,” he said. “We must repair the state in such a way that if any sign of fascism appears anywhere, it can be eliminated instantly without having to wait another 16 years, without more lives having to be lost, without needing another mass uprising.”

Speaking about the ongoing trial of people charged with committing crimes against humanity during the uprising, Prof Yunus said the procedure is progressing firmly with the start of formal hearings.

“Those involved in the most brutal killings in history will be brought to justice on the soil of this country,” he asserted.

He added that the trial process and its outcomes will be made public step by step to ensure transparency and make it visible to the people.

In his speech, Prof Yunus also said that holding the polls will be his government’s final task.

“From the moment I finish this address to you on this historic day, we will enter our final and most important chapter. We will

now begin the process of handing over responsibility to an elected government.”

Praising the contribution of the expatriates in recovering the previously devastated economy with remittances, he said the Election Commission is making preparations to ensure that expatriate voters are able to cast their ballots this time.

“We also want to ensure that women voters across the country can cast their votes freely and with enthusiasm. We will take all necessary measures so that the polling centres overflow with women voters,” he said.

The chief adviser said citizens could not cast their votes during the Awami League’s tenure as they were robbed of their right to franchise.

“In this election, we want to cast our overdue votes in great joy and celebration. The first-time voters will head to polling stations amid festivities to create lasting memories of this day. These will include new women and men voters and also those who were eligible 15 years ago but never had the chance to vote in their lifetime.”

He asked everyone to start discussing every day how to make voting arrangements smooth, festive, and enjoyable. “This election will lay the foundation for building a new Bangladesh. Get ready for that.”

Prof Yunus said faulty elections were responsible for every major conflict and violence in the history of the country.

The July uprising showed the ultimate consequence of any party forcibly grabbing power through a flawed election, he said, adding, “We do not want any repetition of such disgraceful chapters of our history.”

He cautioned that a certain group is desperate to obstruct the election process and engaged in various

conspiracies from both within and outside the country to disrupt democratic progress.

“The defeated forces will try repeatedly to re-emerge before the election,” he said. “But if a free, fair, and impartial election is successfully held, those evil forces will face final defeat.”

He said the government will use technology to get constant feedback on the polls. It is taking an initiative to launch an app, which will be available soon.

Through this app, people will be able to share all their suggestions, concerns, opinions, and initiatives. The relevant authorities will take necessary measures to resolve if any issue arises, he added.

The chief adviser urged the political parties to ensure that the youth and women are not left out in their manifestos, promises, and plans.

“Remember, the young men and women who have changed Bangladesh are also capable of changing the world. Give them the opportunity to do so through your party,” he said.

ECONOMY, OTHER ISSUES

Prof Yunus said taming inflation was one of the biggest challenges of his government. Food inflation rose to around 14 percent due to the fragile state of the economy and the floods in the south and northern regions.

“It [inflation] has halved now. We hope to bring it down to 6 percent by December.”

He stated that remittance inflow helped the currency get stronger and therefore the taka appreciated against the dollar after a long time.

Prof Yunus said in the last 11 months alone, Bangladesh paid \$4 billion – the highest ever – in principal and interest to foreign creditors.

“Even after settling previous dues, our foreign exchange reserves are increasing, and we hope this trend will continue.”

Thanks to a raft of government initiatives, he said, the country received over Tk 10,500 crore in foreign investment in the first quarter of the year, more than double the amount received during the same period last year.

Since October, Bangladesh received Tk 16,500 crore in foreign direct investment in six months – twice as much as the last six months of the previous government’s tenure, he added. He also mentioned an investment pledge by Hong Kong-based industrial group Handa.

Prof Yunus said creating employment opportunities is one of the key priorities of the interim government.

On the money laundered during the past 16 years, he said the government has taken initiatives to bring these funds back and appointed a renowned international legal firm.

Due to appropriate legal actions, some of the assets laundered abroad have already been confiscated and the government believes that more positive outcomes will come soon, he said.

Emphasising the importance of freedom of journalism for democratic practices, Prof Yunus said the government repealed the Digital Security Act and withdrew all cases related to journalists under the act.

“We have made criticism open and accessible,” he said. “It is now possible to criticise the government even in state media.”

The Cyber Security Act has been amended, and internet access has been declared a fundamental right, he added.

Speaking about the modernising Chattogram Port’s management, he said the government assigned Dry Dock Limited, operated by the Bangladesh Navy, to handle container operations at the New Mooring Terminal.

“Positive changes have already been observed since they took over,” he said.

“If the port is being modernised, it will benefit not only Bangladesh’s economy but also the economies of neighbouring countries including Nepal and Bhutan.”

Prof Yunus said his government is working diligently to ease visa-related complications for Bangladeshi expatriates and has initiated preparations to send at least one lakh Bangladeshis to Japan in the next five years.

He also spoke about the measures to ensure smooth Hajj operations, improve the quality of education, and upgrade the pay scale of teachers.

“The interim government is committed to never again allowing our educational institutions to be polluted by such politics that destroy the academic environment and the lives of our youth.”

He also mentioned the steps on the treatment and support given by the government to the victims of atrocities during the July uprising, judicial reforms and police reforms.

The chief adviser concluded with a call to all citizens on the first anniversary of the uprising, “Come, let us overcome the first major challenge towards building a new Bangladesh.”

“Let us take a vow on this July Mass Uprising Day that we will never again allow this nation to be divided,” he said.

July Declaration to get constitutional recognition

FROM PAGE 1

Jamaat-e-Islami, stood beside Prof Yunus on the steps of the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad (national parliament) as he read out the declaration.

Prof Yunus also said the people wish to recognise the martyrs of the July uprising as “national heroes” and ensure necessary “legal protection” for the students and citizens who participated in the movement.

The declaration chronicles events spanning decades, including the Liberation War of 1971, the November 1975 uprising and the struggle against military dictator HMErshad during the 1990s.

The announcement was part of a daylong programme celebrating the “36 Days of July,” organised by the government to commemorate one year since the mass uprising that culminated in the fall of Sheikh Hasina’s government.

The former prime minister fled to India on August 5 last year.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar, National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam, Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Rezaul Karim, Nagarik Oikya President Mahmudur

Rahman Manna, Ganosamhati Andolan Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki, Hefajat-e-Islam Secretary General Sajedur Rahman, Jatiya Ganofront Coordinator Tipu Biswas, Amar Bangladesh Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju, and Gano Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Haque Nur stood beside Yunus on the podium.

Sabrina Afroz, sister of July mass uprising martyr Mahbubul Alam, also joined them on the stage.

Amid light rain, the programme began with the national anthem, followed by a one-minute silence in honour of the fallen heroes of the mass uprising.

JULY DECLARATION

The declaration opens by stating that, as part of the historic struggle against colonialism, the people of this land rose against 23 years of deprivation and exploitation under Pakistan’s autocratic rule. Through mass resistance against indiscriminate genocide, they declared independence on March 26, 1971, and established the state of Bangladesh through a Liberation War for national emancipation.

The people made the ultimate sacrifice through a long struggle to realise a liberal democratic state based on equality, dignity, and social justice, as articulated in the 1971 Proclamation

of Independence.

However, the declaration states, the post-independence Awami League government failed to meet public aspirations due to procedural flaws in drafting the 1972 Constitution, its structural weaknesses, and misuse of power, which undermined democracy and state institutions.

It says the AL, instead of fulfilling the democratic promises of independence, manipulated the constitution to establish a one-party BAKSAL system, curbing freedom of expression and judicial independence.

In response, soldiers and the masses staged an uprising on November 7, 1975, paving the way for the return of multi-party democracy, freedom of expression, and judicial independence.

Following the 1990 mass uprising against military dictatorship, parliamentary democracy was restored in 1991. But this process was later disrupted by internal and external conspiracies, leading to Hasina’s rise through the orchestrated “1/11” episode.

Over the past 16 years, the declaration says, Hasina’s regime pursued undemocratic and illegal constitutional changes driven by a desire to establish a one-party state. It says that Hasina’s rule “turned Bangladesh into a fascist, mafia-style,

and failing state,” tarnishing the country’s international image.

“In the name of so-called development,” it says, Hasina’s government devastated the economy through rampant corruption, bank looting, money laundering, and the destruction of financial institutions, while also endangering the country’s environment, biodiversity, and climate.

The declaration adds that democratic opponents across society were subjected to imprisonment, torture, false charges, abductions, and extrajudicial killings.

It notes that Hasina’s regime held three rigged elections – in 2014, 2018, and 2024 – to cling to power amid mounting public discontent.

Amid this, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement emerged, demanding the abolition of the discriminatory quota system in public recruitment. The student-led protests, joined by people from all walks of life, evolved into a full-scale mass uprising.

“The Awami fascist forces indiscriminately killed nearly a thousand people, including women and children, leaving countless others maimed or blinded; and in the final phase of the movement, members of the armed forces extended their support to the people’s democratic

struggle,” reads the declaration.

Eventually, Hasina was forced to flee the country on August 5, 2024, as crowds surged toward the Gono Bhaban, the then PM’s official residence.

Following her ouster, the illegitimate 12th parliament was dissolved, and “in accordance with Article 106 of the Constitution and based on the opinion of the Supreme Court, an interim government was constitutionally formed on August 8, 2024, under the leadership of Dr Muhammad Yunus”.

“The people of Bangladesh express their intent to democratically reform the existing constitution and all state and constitutional institutions in an orderly manner to ensure good governance, free and fair elections, and prevention of the recurrence of fascist rule,” the declaration says.

It also affirms the people’s “firm resolve” to ensure prompt and appropriate justice for crimes committed by the AL government during the 16-year anti-fascist struggle and especially the July 2024 uprising, including enforced disappearances, killings, and the plundering of state resources.

The declaration further states that “the people of Bangladesh declare all martyrs of the July mass uprising as

national heroes” and intend to provide full legal protection to the families of the martyrs, injured fighters, and all students and citizens who took part in the protests.

It reaffirms the intent to establish the rule of law, human rights, a corruption-free, exploitation-free, and equitable society based on values, and a democratic state system – through constitutional reforms undertaken by a national parliament formed via free, fair, and impartial elections, in line with the aspirations of the people, especially the youth.

It also expresses the hope that the rights of present and future generations will be safeguarded through an inclusive, sustainable development strategy that is environmentally and climate resilient.

Finally, it affirms that the 2024 uprising will receive due state and constitutional recognition, and that this declaration will be included in the schedule of the reformed constitution by the next elected government.

The government announced the “July Declaration” after consulting political parties. It took on the responsibility last December amid protests led by Students Against Discrimination, the platform that spearheaded last year’s uprising.