

The Daily Star

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Is the spirit of August 5 being betrayed?

TIB report paints a grim picture of post-uprising reality

As the nation celebrates one year of the historic August 5 that put an end to the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, it is deeply troubling that the corrupt, authoritarian, and exclusionary practices that had made the regime so reviled in the first place persist to this day. While the interim government has made some progress in certain areas, the challenges that remain are enormous—be it in politics, or economy, or governance. It would be unfair to place the blame squarely on the government. Political parties, newly formed civil platforms, the media, and citizens and public servants alike have all contributed to the growing sense of disillusionment.

That disillusionment is well reflected in a recent report of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) that analysed developments across key sectors to present a sobering assessment of the first year since the uprising. The report highlights how systemic problems in politics, public administration, law enforcement, and even reform initiatives remain largely unaddressed, with troubling continuities in crimes, corruption, and mismanagement.

In politics, for example, violence remains a key concern. According to TIB, between August last year and June this year, 121 people were killed and 5,189 injured in political clashes, mostly involving BNP. In July, as per another estimate, political violence left 15 dead and 661 injured. Moreover, since the uprising, political leaders have conveniently filled the vacuum left by Awami League in various sectors, continuing the same patterns of extortion and control. About Tk 2.21 crore is apparently extorted daily from 53 terminals and stands in Dhaka alone. Political leaders and activists have also grabbed leases of bridges, jetties, quarries, and marketplaces across the country. Many have been involved in filing and manipulating dubious cases, and in orchestrating mob attacks for various ends. And despite proposing numerous reform agendas, most parties have failed to initiate internal democratic practices. Politicisation of public institutions continues as before.

The performance of law enforcement agencies has been similarly disappointing. They continue to allow arbitrary cases and detentions, custodial deaths, and even extrajudicial killings. Their handling of mob attacks has often raised questions. Crimes of all sorts remain rampant. The justice system, too, has failed to live up to the promise of change. TIB notes that political partisanship in the judiciary still prevails, undermining public confidence in the courts.

It has also flagged serious issues within the administration, including chaos, corruption, and conflicts of interest. Public recruitments and promotions continue to be questionable. So far, 11 reform commissions were formed, but important sectors like education continue to be sidelined. No steps have yet been taken to reform state agencies like DGFI, DB, NSI, and NTMC—long used to enforce authoritarian control. The reform drive has also been frequently marred by a lack of clarity and political will. Even agreed-upon reforms, such as curbing executive overreach, have been met with conditional support from some political parties.

Given these circumstances, there are fears that the rare opportunity that we were handed to build a new Bangladesh will be squandered if we are not careful. So, one year on from the uprising, we urge critical reflection from all its stakeholders. They must all do more, and do better.

Finalise the draft parking policy

We need to stop illegal parking practices, reduce traffic jams in Dhaka

It is quite disappointing that the parking policy drafted by the previous government in 2019 has remained idle for years. Reportedly, the Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA), responsible for developing and coordinating transportation services and traffic management in line with the infrastructure growth of Greater Dhaka, has been unable to finalise the draft even after five years. At a time when the capital city is witnessing unchecked proliferation of motor vehicles and the resultant increase in roadside parking, such a policy is urgently needed to guide the construction and use of proper parking facilities.

A modern city should have 20-25 percent of its space allocated for roads, but Dhaka has only 7.8 percent. Unfortunately, these roads often remain illegally occupied by vehicles, further shrinking the space for commuters and pedestrians. In Karwan Bazar, for example, cars are regularly seen parked illegally near buildings like the WASA office, Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel and the metro station, creating heavy congestion. From Banglamotor to Moghbazar, New Eskaton Road is seen lined with auto repair shops, where vehicles are parked and serviced on the street. Similar scenes can be found citywide. Even places like hospitals, shopping malls, and community centres are using public streets for parking, aggravating traffic conditions.

The draft parking policy outlines several directives regarding the development and use of parking spaces. It strictly prohibits parking on roads except in designated areas marked by approved road signs and markings within urban zones. It also recommends that traffic police take action against unauthorised parking on the roads. Additionally, before public transport vehicles are granted registration approval, proper parking facilities must be confirmed. For buildings that lack sufficient parking facilities, they must ensure compliance with construction regulations. Failure to comply will result in legal action as prescribed by law, the policy says.

Traffic congestion is one of the most pressing challenges facing Dhaka, which continues to waste precious work hours affecting both our productivity and quality of life. Although previous governments undertook various infrastructure development projects like building flyovers and also implemented some ad hoc solutions such as demarcating separate lanes for rickshaws to reduce jams, these efforts proved ineffective. To address this problem, restore pedestrian access to pavements, and enhance the city's overall environment, establishing sufficient parking facilities is essential. To that end, a proper policy is paramount.

From rage to reform: Is Bangladesh ready to rise?



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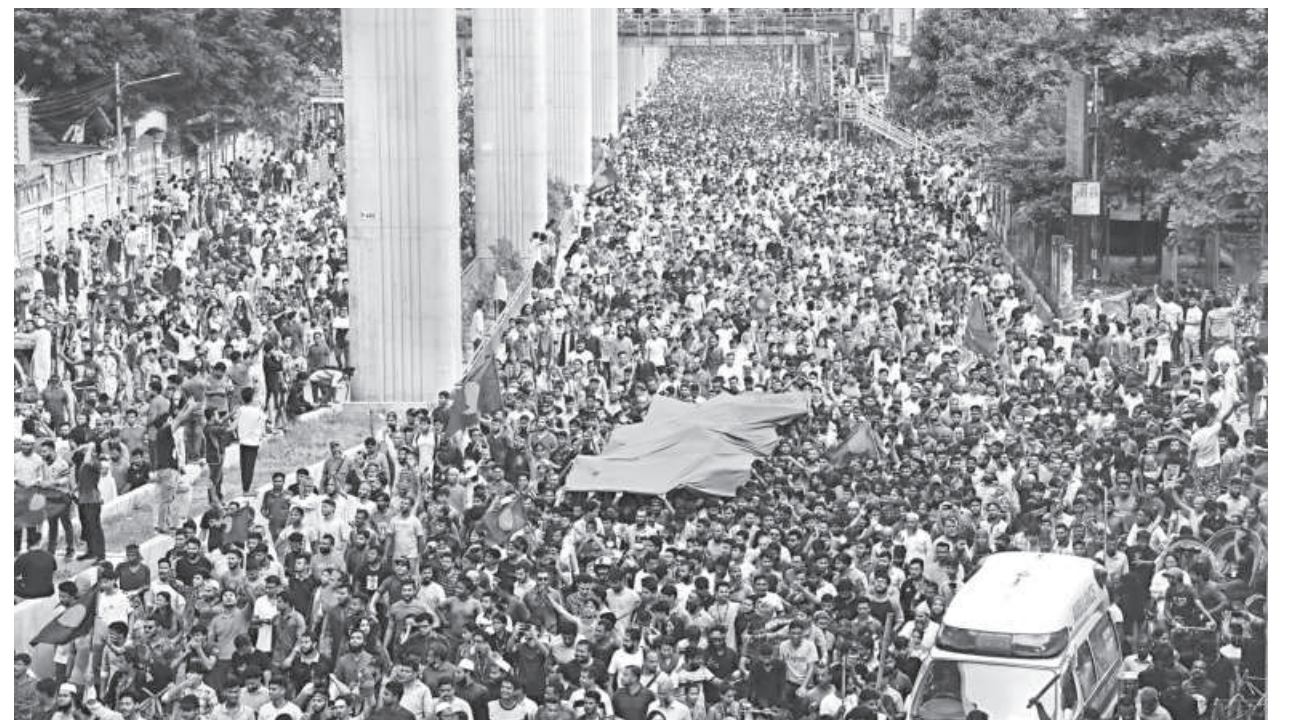
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As we mark the first anniversary of the people's uprising—led by the country's youth, fondly known as Generation Z—it is clear that the greater task now lies ahead: rebuilding a nation with little preparation for the monumental responsibility. But then again, how could anyone truly prepare for an uprising of such magnitude, one that surged like a tsunami, defying all expectations?

Over the past 15 years, prior to the changeover, the opposition—most prominently the BNP—tried repeatedly, with meticulously crafted strategies, to unseat the regime. Yet none of their efforts could rival the spontaneous July-August uprising, which reshaped the political landscape in ways that no planned agitation ever could.

By systematically denying citizens their right to vote in three consecutive elections and holding power for fifteen years and seven months through sustained repression, Sheikh Hasina secured her place among the world's most notorious autocrats. And yet, even her loyal Special Security Force (SSF) could not shield her from the force of a student-led uprising. One year ago, she fled the country and sought refuge in India. According to an SSF report (Ittefaq, September 3, 2024), on August 5, 2024, all SSF weapons and equipment were looted from four key installations, including the Gonobhaban and the Parliament building.

If that does not capture the scale of public fury, then consider the sheer intensity and toll of the 36-day movement that began on July 1. The trigger: a High Court verdict reinstating quotas for descendants of freedom fighters. Students swiftly took to the streets. On July 14, Sheikh Hasina dismissed the protests with a mocking question: "If the grandchildren of freedom fighters don't get the quota, should it go to the grandchildren of razakars?" That night, campuses across the country erupted. Female students marched out of dormitories chanting: "Who are you, who am I? Razakar, razakar!" and "Who said it? Who said it? Autocrat, autocrat!"



The spontaneous July-August uprising surged like a tsunami, ousting one of the world's most notorious autocrats, Sheikh Hasina.

FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

The next day, the Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League, launched armed attacks on protesters, marking the start of widespread violence. On July 16, six protesters were martyred—including Abu Sayed in Rangpur and Wasim Akram in Chattogram. From that point on, the state and its affiliates unleashed a campaign of terror: curfews, internet shutdowns, mobile network restrictions, block raids, and mass arrests.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission documented these atrocities in its investigation. Their report placed the death toll at 1,400. Estimates about the injured vary, but it is no less than 10,000. More than 500 lost one or both eyes, others lost limbs. Among the dead were 133 children. The working class bore the heaviest losses. Yet the people persisted. After burying their dead, they returned to the streets, undaunted.

On July 19, student leaders issued

divided leftist and Islamist factions, previously unwilling to collaborate, stood together in a once-unthinkable alliance.

In the aftermath, the idea of a new nation—Bangladesh 2.0—has taken root. But what shape this new Bangladesh will take remains uncertain. Among idealistic youth, politically marginalised activists, romantic revolutionaries, and even anarchists, one point unites them: they refuse a return to autocracy. That was the soul of the one-point demand that toppled the regime. Yet, the question of what should replace it remains unresolved.

To find answers, the National Consensus Commission held 45 days of individual consultations with political parties, followed by 23 days of all-party dialogue. For a country long fractured by partisanship, the agreement reached on at least nine key points represents a historic step forward. Implementation

anything, is being achieved. Only a handful of advisers appear visibly engaged; the rest remain anonymous and uninspiring.

In a country of 18 crore, chaos is always a possibility. But when a government seems unprepared, overwhelmed, or indifferent in times of crisis, trust begins to erode. People begin to question whether their sacrifice was in vain. After a revolution, the people need capable leadership. Inevitable comparisons arise between the new and the old: when the iron grip of autocracy gives way to apparent disorder, questions of competence cannot be avoided.

These are the challenges that must be met. And yet, the progress made in forging political consensus is no small achievement. If that momentum can be sustained, there is hope—real hope—that Bangladesh's journey towards democracy can finally take root and flourish.

Climate change demands better forecasts for farmers



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Agriculture, the bedrock of Bangladesh's economy and a direct source of sustenance for millions, is facing unprecedented challenges due to the escalating climate crisis.

From the paddy fields of Dinajpur to the shrimp farms in Khulna, the nation's agricultural sector is facing heightened uncertainty. So, farmers are questioning the reliability of existing weather and climate forecasts. This critical juncture brings into sharp focus the imperative for accurate and dependable meteorological data to safeguard harvests and ensure food security.

While the terms "weather" and "climate" are often used interchangeably, they refer to distinct concepts that play different roles in agriculture. Weather relates to short-term atmospheric conditions, for instance, whether it will rain tomorrow or be sunny later this week. It helps farmers make daily decisions such as when to irrigate, apply fertiliser, or delay harvesting due to an approaching storm.

Climate, on the other hand, concerns long-term patterns over decades. It provides projections that help assess how rising temperatures, shifting rainfall, and salinity levels might affect agriculture over the next

10, 20, or even 50 years. This long-term view informs decisions about crop variety selection, suitable cultivation zones, and the adoption of new technologies for resilience.

In a country like Bangladesh, which is highly vulnerable to climate change, understanding both weather and climate is not a choice—it is a necessity. The key lies in using both effectively to ensure sustainability in agriculture.

Consider a farmer in Rajshahi, a region increasingly facing drought. For immediate planning, the farmer might rely on a five-day weather forecast to time irrigation or pest control. However, if climate projections indicate a 15 percent drop in rainfall over the next 20 years, continuing with water-intensive crops could prove risky. In such cases, climate forecasts offer valuable guidance for switching to drought-tolerant crops, adopting water-efficient technologies, or adjusting planting seasons. Ignoring these projections may lead to unsustainable farming practices.

Similarly, in the coastal regions of Satkhira and Bagerhat, rising salinity has made weather forecasts vital for storm preparedness. However, the long-term implications of sea level rise and increasing salinity inland can only be understood through climate

models. These projections suggest a transition towards saline-tolerant rice or aquaculture. Without integrating such insights, communities risk losing their livelihoods to creeping environmental changes.

Despite the rising importance of both weather and climate data, many Bangladeshi farmers lack access to timely and accurate information. The Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) does provide weather updates, and institutions such as the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) and the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) conduct climate-related research. However, the integration of this information into on-the-ground advisories remains limited.

A nationwide agro-meteorological advisory system that combines near-term weather forecasts with long-term climate projections is required. Such a system would allow farmers to make informed decisions not only for the present but also for the coming decades. Effective communication channels—such as mobile apps, community radio, agricultural extension services, and farmer training—can help deliver this information in formats that are easy to understand and act upon.

Bangladesh's agriculture has long been reactive, responding to events as they unfold. However, as climate change becomes more unpredictable, this approach is no longer sufficient. The sector must evolve into a more resilient system that anticipates and adapts to change. This shift requires climate-smart agriculture that draws on both real-time weather updates and long-term climate forecasts. Key interventions include promoting

crop diversification based on future suitability; developing and distributing climate-resilient seed varieties; investing in early warning systems and crop insurance; and training workers of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) to interpret and share climate data effectively. These are not optional upgrades; they are crucial for ensuring food security and protecting rural livelihoods.

The government has made notable progress through the National Adaptation Plan and the Delta Plan 2100. Yet, these frameworks need stronger linkages to farming communities. This involves allocating resources to develop accessible climate information services, fostering coordination among BMD, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), BRRI, BARI, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA), DAE, and local authorities, and embedding climate risk literacy into agricultural training programmes. Investing in climate and weather awareness today can help avoid billions in crop losses tomorrow.

In an era of climate volatility, even a delayed monsoon or an early heatwave can wipe out months of effort. With accurate forecasts—whether for the next week or the next 20 years—farmers can plan, adapt, and thrive. For Bangladesh, an agrarian economy, weather and climate forecasts must be seen as essential tools for survival. Every farmer, from the chars of Kurigram to the coastal plains of Barishal, must know not only if it will rain tomorrow, but whether their fields will still be productive in the decades ahead. Ultimately, the forecast, not just the seed, will shape the harvests of the future.