

Time to focus on the election

Fool-proof preparation needed to ensure free, fair polls

It's now official: Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has announced that the next parliamentary election will be held in February 2026. This marks the interim government's transition into the final phase of its tenure—the “most important chapter,” as the chief adviser has put it—while setting the country on a definite path towards the transfer of power to an elected government. The authorities now must work out a fool-proof plan with the Election Commission and all other relevant institutions to ensure a free, fair and credible election.

The election announcement has been reportedly accepted by most political parties. The BNP has welcomed the decision; although Jamaat and the NCP initially demanded visible reforms before holding the elections, they too have accepted the timeline. The NCP has said that it has no objection to a February date, but the government must ensure justice and implement reforms beforehand, as well as guarantee administrative impartiality and a level playing field for all participants. These are not unreasonable demands. That said, we acknowledge the importance of transferring power to an elected government. An election is essential to retain economic confidence and restore investors' faith, among other things. A representative government can offer stability and predictability, which our economy badly needs at the moment.

Our political parties must come to terms with the fact that while reforms are crucial, key ones will take time and dedication. However, in the months ahead, the interim government must focus on ensuring that reform initiatives that should not take time are implemented without delay, especially those related to governance and accountability in key public sectors. The political parties are equally responsible for ensuring that the election is fair and peaceful by rejecting violence and embracing civilised electoral conduct.

Preparations for the election are already underway. The EC has stated that it is ready to hold the election in February, and will likely announce the poll schedule in December. The chief adviser has issued 25 directives to the relevant authorities to complete preparations by then. The EC has been allocated Tk 2,080 crore for this purpose. To ensure a credible election, the government is planning a number of steps, such as law enforcers wearing body cameras and ballot boxes being delivered to the poll centres on the morning of election day. It must also ensure that law enforcement personnel are adequately trained and resourced so that they can maintain law and order effectively.

A free, fair, and credible election is the first step towards rebuilding the state as a democratic and inclusive one. Through this election, we will get a representative parliament that can spearhead the next phase of key reforms. Citizens have been deprived of exercising their franchise for far too long. Let the 13th parliamentary election be a trend-setter for democratically sound, credible and festive elections in the future of Bangladesh.

Why is child labour still rampant?

No minors should be employed in hazardous work

It is deeply frustrating that children continue to be employed in work that is not meant for them, many of which are hazardous. According to a recent report on child labour, children as young as eight years old are working at the Secondary Transfer Stations (STS)—where solid waste is temporarily stored before being moved to landfills—of both Dhaka South and North City Corporations. Many of these children have migrated from outside Dhaka, while others have been residing in the city's slums for years. These children have been driven to these waste management sites by poverty and lack of family and government support.

For instance, 18-year-old Raza began working at an STS in Ward 10 of DSCC when he was just eight years old, following his father's death. He never attended school. Thirteen-year-old Shadhin, driven by poverty, came from Sherpur to work at another STS. Instead of learning and playing, these children toil in rubbish fields, risking their health and sacrificing their futures. This is unacceptable. Engaging children in waste management is not just a breach of their rights, it also poses serious health risks. These children frequently suffer cuts from sharp, contaminated objects, exposing them to diseases like hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS, and chronic infections. Many endure malnutrition, respiratory problems, and skin diseases. The question is, why does child labour continue to persist? Why are 1.776 million children in the country still trapped in this?

We have laws like the Labour Act 2006 and the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010, but they often remain unenforced. Some provisions of these policies are vague, and inadvertently enable child labour. For example, while the Labour Act sets the minimum employment age at 14, it allows children aged 12-14 to engage in “light work”, if that does not affect their education and development. Moreover, the government has declared 38 sectors hazardous for children, banning employment of anyone under 18 in these fields. Yet, 1,068 million children are still working in these sectors, including welding, transportation, auto workshops, tobacco factories, battery recharging. Many more go uncounted, especially in informal sectors like waste management.

If we are truly committed to eradicating child labour, we must address the legal loopholes that allow it to persist and make its elimination a national priority. This means not only enforcing existing laws but also investing in children's education and empowering vulnerable families through robust social safety nets and livelihood support. No child should be forced to choose work over education.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Japanese airfield on Guadalcanal seized by Allies

On this day in 1942, US Marines launched the Allies' first major offensive in the Pacific during World War II by landing on Guadalcanal and seizing a key airfield from Japanese forces, igniting a brutal battle that would rage for nearly six months.

The logical anatomy of July Declaration



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On August 5, 2024, students and ordinary citizens ousted the authoritarian Awami regime after weeks of marches, blockades, and brutal crackdowns. The fall of Sheikh Hasina's government was not just the end of a chapter—it marked the beginning of a new one. One year later, on August 5, 2025, the July Declaration was read out by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the South Plaza of the parliament. The declaration, coming as it does after a prolonged wait, should be seen as a foundational document for post-uprising Bangladesh. While public attention may focus on its symbolism and ambition, with analysts also scrutinising its content from historical and political perspectives, I think the logic underlying its formation also deserves attention.

The declaration is structured in a form familiar to students of law and logic alike. It follows a legal-deductive pattern of reasoning often used in charters and constitutions. This structure, commonly referred to as

The declaration rests on a deductive inference that can be summarised as follows: if a people rise up to overthrow a fascist regime in pursuit of justice and democracy, then their movement deserves constitutional recognition. And the people of Bangladesh did precisely that in 2024. Therefore, the 2024 mass uprising deserves constitutional recognition.

the “Whereas to Therefore” format, presents a sequence of premises leading to a normative conclusion. Each “Whereas” clause serves as a premise, and each “Therefore” clause functions as a conclusion. Philosophers often refer to this form as an enthymeme: a type of syllogism

in which one or more premises are implied rather than explicitly stated. It assembles a set of empirical and normative claims that together justify a definitive conclusion. In this case, that conclusion is bold and unequivocal—the 2024 mass uprising must be constitutionally recognised.

At its core, the declaration rests



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus reads out the July Declaration at the south plaza of the parliament on August 5, 2025. PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

on a deductive inference that can be summarised as follows: if a people rise up to overthrow a fascist regime in pursuit of justice and democracy, then their movement deserves constitutional recognition. And the people of Bangladesh did precisely that in 2024. Therefore, the 2024 mass uprising deserves constitutional recognition.

In other words, any movement that is both a protest against injustice and a legitimate expression of people's sovereignty deserves legal recognition. The mass uprising meets both conditions, so recognition follows.

In a valid deductive argument, if the premises are accepted, a conclusion must follow. Of course, one may challenge the premises. One could argue, for example, that the Awami regime was not entirely illegitimate *per se*, or that the uprising lacked nationwide support. The declaration anticipates such objections by offering a broad evidentiary base: that the scale of public participation,

the intensity of state repression, and the erosion of electoral legitimacy all support its claims.

The declaration also draws strength from precedent, which is itself a form of reasoning. It situates the 2024 mass uprising within a lineage of historic moments when citizens reclaimed sovereignty from illegitimate regimes: the 1971 Liberation War, from which the constitution itself emerged and draws its legitimacy; the 1975 uprising that dismantled the BAKSAL system; and the 1990 movement that ended military autocracy. Each of these ruptures prompted a reimagining of the political order. By aligning 2024 with this tradition, the declaration makes an argument from analogy, invoking past expressions of popular

and obligations, rather than outcome or consequences. It defines what we ought to do, not just what is politically expedient. If the people acted to reclaim democracy, then democratic legitimacy demands that their action be recognised. The claim is not that recognition is a reward. It is that recognition is a moral requirement.

One final layer of reasoning may be the most powerful. According to speech act theory, when a political authority makes a formal declaration with legal force, the act of speaking brings about a change in reality. This is known as a performative or illocutionary act. The July Declaration operates in precisely this way. It does not merely describe recognition of the uprising; it enacts that recognition. As the declaration itself states, the student-people uprising will get proper state and constitutional recognition, and that the declaration will be included in the schedule of the reformed constitution by the next elected government. In saying this, it does not report a completed fact. It participates in bringing that fact into being. Like a court issuing a verdict, the act of declaring becomes part of the process that constitutes legal and political reality.

Marked by passion yet grounded in principle, the July Declaration weaves together deductive, analogical, instrumental, deontic, and performative reasoning, offering a rare example of political argument shaped by formal reasoning in Bangladesh's recent history. It presents a structured argument, employing multiple layers of reasoning to articulate its claims. Rather than functioning as a symbolic or emotional appeal, the declaration outlines a formal framework through which transitional demands, such as electoral reform, institutional accountability, and the rebuilding of democratic structures, are presented.

While Bangladesh has experienced political transitions driven by protests and upheavals since before its independence, it is relatively uncommon for such moments to be accompanied by a political text that attempts to discipline popular energy through formal argument. The July Declaration thus offers a useful case for examining how political reasoning operates under conditions of rupture. To evaluate the long-term significance of the mass uprising, one must consider not only its institutional consequences but also the intellectual architecture through which its demands are expressed.

Digital progress becomes a threat without cybersecurity



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In mid-2020, Roxana Akhtar, a garment worker living in the capital's Mirpur area, checked her mobile banking account and discovered that someone had withdrawn Tk 18,000, her three months' savings, through multiple transactions. She had not made any transactions, nor had she shared her password or PIN with anyone. It was later revealed that criminals had cloned her national identity card and mobile number, accessed her account through a “SIM swap” scam, and withdrawn the money. She filed a complaint but received no response. Today, the number of victims like her exceeds one lakh across the country.

Cybercrime in Bangladesh has risen in recent years. Social media fraud, identity theft, phishing, ransomware attacks, and hacking into banking systems are no longer uncommon. Previously, several government websites were hacked, and the personal information of lakhs of citizens was leaked. In 2023, media reported that personal information of over five crore citizens had been disclosed without authorisation from a Bangladesh government website—one of the largest data breaches in the

country's history.

The absence of a robust cybersecurity system to accompany the rapid expansion of digital services is an issue in this context. Many government and private organisations continue to operate with outdated firewalls, weak encryption, and insufficient technical staff. A 2024 Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) review found numerous ambiguities and potential for abuse of power in current cybersecurity regulations, rendering them ineffective in preventing cybercrime.

The banking sector is in an especially critical state. In 2016, the hacking of the Bangladesh Bank website drew global attention, yet most banks have since failed to implement effective cybersecurity reforms. According to a study by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM), 52 percent of banks in the country remain at high cyber risk. Many still lack dedicated cybersecurity units or conduct regular security audits. As a result, they have become easy targets for hackers.

The crime is as grave as its impunity. According to a Financial

Express report, despite the increase in cybercrime complaints, most accused are acquitted in court. This is due to the lack of digital forensic technology, inefficient investigations, and legal complexities. The Cybersecurity Act, 2023, which replaced the Digital Security Act, 2018, remains controversial. Many of its problems persist—vague definitions of crimes,

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investigative delays, and prolonged trials.

The human cost is the most devastating. Behind every hacked account and every instance of stolen data, is a person—someone who is losing money, facing mental distress, and gradually losing trust in digital platforms. Not only urban professionals or tech users, but also expatriate workers, small business owners, and even school students are now victims of cybercrime. Women, in particular, suffer from cyber harassment, photo leaks, and online stalking. Yet in most cases, they do not receive justice, or even know where to

file a complaint.

To address this challenge, first, the state must treat cybersecurity as a matter of national security. An effective framework combining advanced technology, skilled manpower, and coordination with NGOs is urgently needed. Second, public awareness must be increased. Citizens must learn to use strong passwords, enable two-factor authentication, avoid suspicious links, and respond prudently to incidents.

Cybersecurity education should be introduced at least from the secondary level. Often cybercrimes are committed by younger people. Educating them in digital awareness and ethical technology use can prevent many crimes before they occur. Additionally, cyber police units must be equipped with greater autonomy and advanced technology. Speedier case resolution, the admissibility of digital evidence, and stronger international cooperation are equally essential.

Bangladesh is becoming a digital nation, but its success depends on how securely we manage our digital space. If we cannot protect citizens' data, privacy, and digital rights, this transformation will be technological but not secure. Cybersecurity is not merely a technical issue—it is a question of social responsibility and political commitment.

Let Bangladesh's digital progress continue, but not on a path of mistrust. As technology advances, citizens must not fall into danger. Now is the time for cyber awareness, cyber prevention, and cyber justice.