

Elections belong to the people, not the politicians

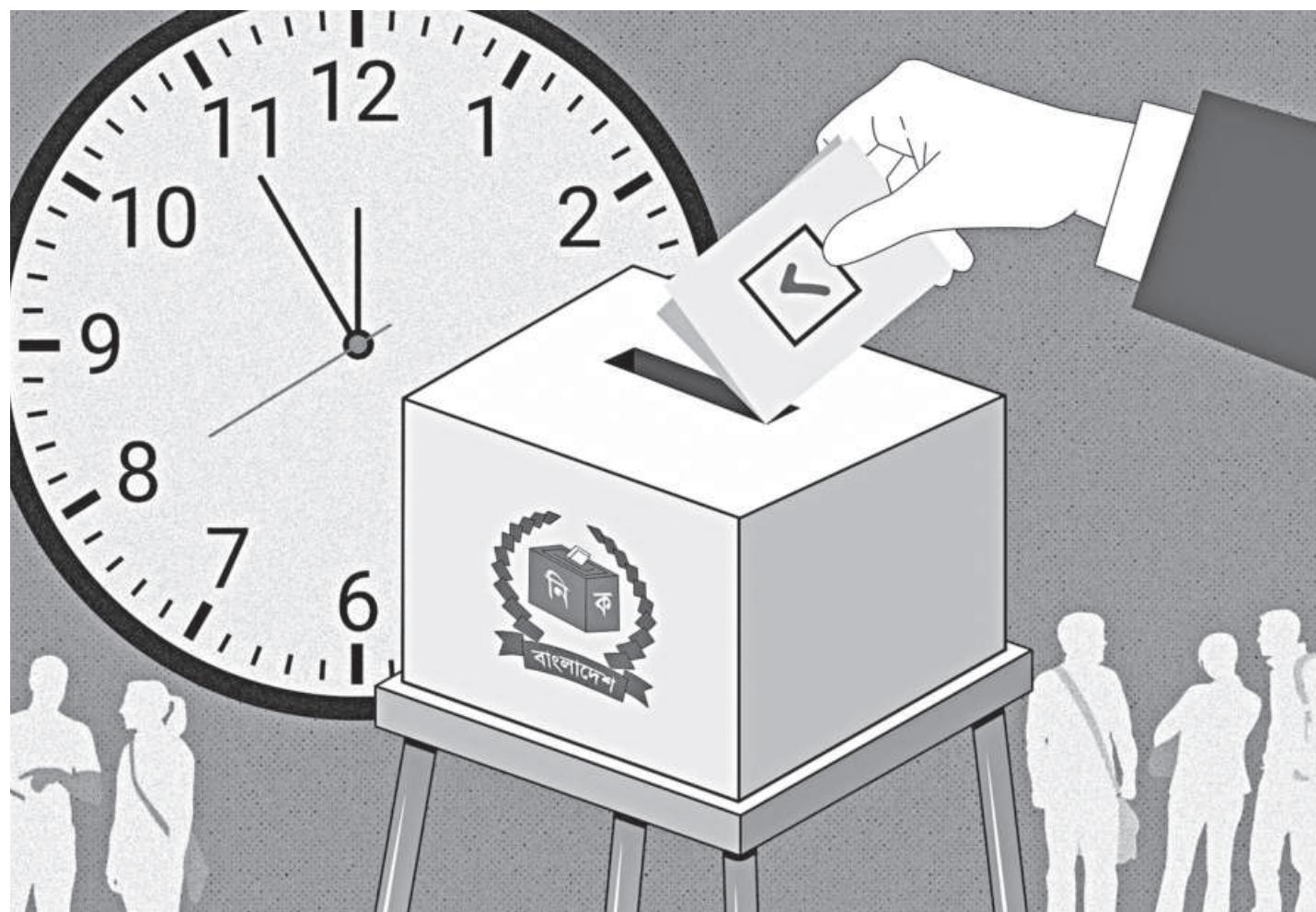
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The July uprising was not an isolated event. It stood in a long line of struggles where citizens of this country took to the streets to reclaim their rights. In 1971, they fought a bloody war to secure sovereignty after their voices were ignored following the 1970 election. In 1990, they rose again to bring down military rule and restore democracy. In 2024, they marched once more—this time against the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina who, through election engineering and various repressive tactics, had suppressed them for more than a decade. Each of these moments carried the same message: that power must flow from the people, not the other way around.

The fall of Sheikh Hasina's government of 15 years created a fragile hope that Bangladesh could finally return to that principle. But whether that hope will survive depends on what we do now and in the coming days. The next election forms a crucial part of that equation as it can signal whether Bangladesh has really broken the cycle of manipulation and is ready for the transformation necessary for a true democratic transition. In other words, an election that reflects people's choices and an elected government that carries out their mandate will show whether the hope created by the uprising will be turned into meaningful change, or lost once again to history. Therefore, any delay or disruption of the electoral process must not be entertained.

However, recent events suggest a smokescreen being created over the election timeframe. The chief adviser has said that polls will be held in February, but uncertainty lingers. Some political parties are still emphasising reforms before elections, with the NCP openly opposing the February date. Such mixed signals fuel doubt at a time when



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

clarity is essential. Boycotts and threats of withdrawal only deepen the risk of another disputed election. Political parties cannot abandon the people to a narrowed choice, as they did before.

This nation was founded on the demand for people's sovereignty, and this has been the bedrock of all subsequent uprisings or movements. So to deny or delay voting will not just be a political failure; it will

mean a rejection of the country's founding promise. The kind of election engineering or disruption we have seen over the last few decades has already eroded public trust, pushed younger generations away from politics, and left society increasingly polarised. The longer this pattern continues, the harder it will be to repair the breach between citizens and institutions, including political ones.

The accumulated costs of this state of affairs have been visible everywhere. Instability has continued to stall economic growth, foreign investors remain wary, and people are still left to bear rising prices and uncertainty. The national poverty rate has already soared to nearly 28 percent, according to a recently published estimate by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC). Bangladesh's reputation as a

responsible actor in peacekeeping, climate diplomacy, and trade is also at risk. A country cannot expect a place in global leadership while denying basic political rights to its own citizens. The world is watching, and credibility is not easily rebuilt once it is lost.

The greater burden of change rests not on the people, who have already demonstrated their will, but on political parties. They must prove that they can compete without relying on manipulation, boycotts, or backroom arrangements. Elections cannot remain tools for power preservation; they must become the mechanism that gives power legitimacy. Political leaders who fail to understand this will only invite another wave of public resistance.

Against this backdrop, what is needed now are structural guarantees. An Election Commission that acts with authority and independence, equal access to media and the right to assemble for all parties, and security forces bound to the constitution rather than partisan loyalty—these are the minimum conditions of credible democracy. Without them, the promise of the July uprising may collapse.

Above all, political parties must accept the people's verdict. Democracy does not survive on the convenience of elites; it survives when citizens can cast their ballots freely and see their choices respected. With more than half the population under 35, Bangladesh's future depends on whether this generation grows up believing in the power of the vote or dismissing it as a sham. Their political memories cannot be defined by repeated disillusionment. They deserve the right to shape the country's future through genuine, competitive, and peaceful elections.

The July uprising showed that Bangladeshis will not accept the denial of their rights for long. The lesson of 1971, 1990, and 2024 is consistent: when leaders shut down democracy, people rise to reclaim it. If the political class ignores that history today, it risks again pushing the nation back into chaos. So this time, the elections must belong to the people, and politicians must accept the result.

Global warming is winning while we are smiling



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Although we have now surpassed the midpoint of 2025 and will shortly reach the halfway mark of this decade, commonly recognised as the "make-or-break" decade for international climate initiatives, the signs from the climate system are more evident than ever. It is deteriorating, as the main culprit behind global warming—carbon dioxide emissions—continues to rise. Notwithstanding the commitments and assurances made by governments worldwide, global carbon dioxide emissions reached an all-time high in 2024. Our planet is now on the verge of an irreversible climatic disaster as more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases accumulate in the atmosphere.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), "extreme heat is breaking records worldwide." However, this ongoing trend of deadly heatwaves is merely an early indication of far more severe conditions to come. Additionally, a peer-reviewed study, titled "State of the Climate," published by the American Meteorological Society with contributions from numerous scientists across the globe, presents a range of climate metrics that achieved new records in 2024. This study offers one of the most comprehensive analyses of the various impacts of global warming, both on

a global scale and regionally. Key findings include: "the global temperature across land and oceans, global sea level, and ocean heat content all reached record highs in 2024, and glaciers experienced the greatest ice loss of any year on record."

The year 2024 was marked as the hottest ever documented, with global temperatures averaging 1.52 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels for the first time. This figure is alarmingly near the 1.5 degrees threshold established by the 2015 Paris Agreement, which scientists warn is a crucial tipping point for catastrophic climate consequences. These unprecedented temperatures act as a wake-up call, indicating that 2025 could be a pivotal year—one in which surpassing the 1.5 degrees limit may become the norm rather than the exception. By the end of this century, climate models predict that the global average temperature will be 3-5 degrees higher than current levels, rendering our planet uninhabitable.

Two sweltering heatwaves battered Europe earlier this summer, leading to hundreds of heat-related fatalities, igniting wildfires, and straining power systems to their maximum capacity. Temperatures surged past 40 degrees, reaching as high as 46 degrees in Spain and Portugal, due to heat domes—high-pressure systems

that trap hot air over a region, resulting in prolonged extreme heat. Meanwhile, India experienced its longest and most oppressive heatwave on record, compelling millions to evacuate their residences.

As climate change drives global temperatures higher, glaciers, polar ice caps, and ice sheets in Greenland and mountainous regions are melting faster than ever recorded. In early 2025, satellite

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observations by NASA revealed that the Antarctic Ocean's sea ice fell to its lowest level for the third consecutive year. The situation in the Arctic is equally dire. This winter, the maximum extent of Arctic Ocean ice was noted to be the smallest since the inception of such records, and experts now predict that we may have our first ice-free summer in the Arctic as soon as the end of this decade.

Rising temperatures, combined with

melting ice, are projected to cause the sea levels to rise by 1.3-1.6 metres by the end of this century, with potentially devastating impacts on coastal communities and low-lying countries such as Bangladesh. Satellites and tidal gauges show that the global sea level has risen by 21 to 24 centimetres over the past 140 years.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the frequency and severity of wildfires globally have doubled over the past twenty years. In the first four months of 2025, both Canada and Australia recorded their earliest and most extensive wildfires in history, with smoke travelling across continents and contaminating cities located thousands of miles away. Experts caution that increasingly frequent megafires may become a lasting characteristic of the planet's evolving climate. As these wildfires emit billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, they exacerbate the challenge of reversing global warming, potentially putting us beyond a critical threshold of no return.

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Forests function as the lungs of the earth, absorbing vast amounts of carbon dioxide. In 2024, the Amazon rainforest experienced a loss exceeding 4.5 million acres due to illegal logging, mining activities, and

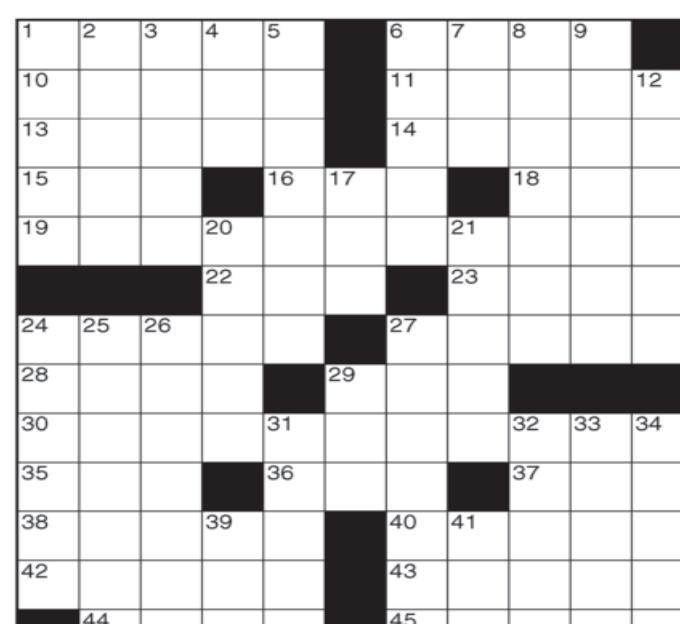
fires, as reported by the World Resources Institute. In Central Africa and Southeast Asia, the situation is equally severe. In addition to destroying important species habitats, deforestation also lowers the planet's capacity to absorb carbon dioxide. Scientists warn that some rainforests may reach a critical point in 2025, when they start to release more carbon dioxide than they absorb if current trends continue. This disastrous move would impede the mitigation of climate change and hasten global warming.

Permafrost is a layer of soil and rock, sometimes extending 1,500 metres into the ground beneath the Arctic's frozen exterior. It is a significant source of methane and carbon dioxide. Methane's impact over a century is more than 25 times that of carbon dioxide, which makes it particularly concerning. A 2025 study claims that greenhouse gases are being released into the atmosphere as a result of permafrost thawing faster than expected.

Unfortunately, many nations are backtracking on and watering down their pledges to combat climate change. Numerous countries among the 196 that are bound by Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement are acting as if they are content with global warming.

When combined, the aforementioned ramifications of climate change provide compelling proof that humans have altered the climate in a way that will significantly change our planet not only in the far future but also during our own lifetimes, thereby handing over our children and grandchildren the warmest climate that any generation of *Homo sapiens* has ever experienced.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

