

A shocking revelation

How did fake names enter the July martyrs' list?

Having seen over the decades how those in charge have botched the list of Bangladesh's freedom fighters, leading to the frequent inclusion of "fake" beneficiaries and exclusion of genuine candidates, it shouldn't come as a surprise that a similar botchwork is in play with the listing of July uprising martyrs. Yet, it surprises us. The preparation of such a high-impact list under a political government may lend itself to politicisation and exploitation, but a non-political administration should, ideally, be able to handle it more efficiently. Sadly, nothing has been ideal about it so far, as per an investigative report by *Prothom Alo*.

The report reveals that of the 834 individuals currently listed as martyrs, at least 52 do not meet the legal definition of a July martyr. The July Uprising Martyr Families and July Warriors Welfare and Rehabilitation Ordinance, 2025 clearly states that only those killed by state security forces or ruling party affiliates during the uprising would qualify as a martyr. But the current list includes 35 people who died in arson-related fires, three in road accidents, two from illness, one from electrocution, and several killed in personal disputes or clashes unrelated to the uprising. Even three policemen, one Chhatra League leader, and even one person who attacked the protesters have been added to the roll of honour.

The absurdity of this situation becomes further evident when you consider that five of the names belong to individuals who died after the Awami League government's fall on August 5. Many of the families *Prothom Alo* spoke with admitted that their relatives did not die from injuries caused by atrocities during the uprising, but they received benefits anyway. Some even confessed that they enlisted their names to access government compensation. As we know, each listed martyr's family is entitled to a lump sum of Tk 30 lakh, including through savings certificates. There is also a monthly stipend of Tk 20,000, and the prospect of getting flats in Dhaka. The allure of these provisions has clearly created avenues for abuse and deception.

Needless to say, this undermines the credibility of the entire exercise, stripping a solemn state recognition of its sanctity. The question is, how could such glaring discrepancies slip through the vetting process by the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, particularly the Directorate of July Mass Uprising? This cannot be a simple clerical mistake; it points to the complicity of corrupt officials and the manoeuvring of political opportunists. Apparently, the government has instructed deputy commissioners (DCs) to re-verify the list, but such reactive measures cannot undo the damage already caused, nor do they absolve those responsible for trivialising the sacrifices of the true martyrs.

We urge the government to immediately suspend all benefits to disputed names until proper verification is completed. Independent committees must be formed to ensure thorough re-vetting, and the updated list must be published with case details to restore public confidence. The July uprising is a watershed event in our history, and to taint its legacy with a manipulated list would be a betrayal to those who truly fell for freedom.

Why are women falling behind?

Survey raises concerns about women's labour force participation

We are deeply concerned by the declining participation of women in the labour force, as found in the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' (BBS) Labour Force Survey 2024. The survey reveals that our labour force shrank by 17 lakh in just one year, with women accounting for most of it. In 2024, the total labour force stood at 7.17 crore, down from 7.34 crore in 2023. This is particularly alarming because between 2010 and 2023, the labour force had grown by over 1.6 crore, driven largely by increased female participation, which rose from 1.72 crore in 2010 to 2.53 crore in 2023. However, this upward trend has now reversed. While male participation remained relatively stable at 4.8 crore in 2024, compared to 4.81 crore the previous year, female participation dropped significantly from 2.53 crore to 2.37 crore, which deserves scrutiny by our policymakers.

According to experts, although the economy is gradually shifting away from agriculture, this transformation hasn't led to better employment opportunities for women. Women's participation in urban, semi-skilled, and formal jobs has also not seen much improvement over the years. Economists have opined that one major reason behind this decline is the slow pace of job creation or "jobless growth." According to them, despite periods of high GDP growth, Bangladesh has failed to generate enough decent jobs to lift people out of poverty. Needless to say, scarcity of job opportunities has affected women disproportionately.

Reportedly, shrinking employment opportunities in manufacturing may be behind the decline in urban labour force participation among less educated women. In industries like garments, automation and advanced technologies have already reduced the number of jobs available to women. Therefore, to stay competitive, women now need more skills and training. Moreover, in rural areas, women are facing significant barriers to entrepreneurship, such as limited access to capital, markets, and information. Government support for them also remains inadequate. For women with higher levels of education, the picture is even more complex. Limited availability of jobs matching their aspirations, lack of supportive infrastructure like childcare, and deep-rooted societal norms all contribute to their limited participation in the workforce.

To reverse the trend, the government must urgently implement bold, coordinated reforms and introduce inclusive policies. For educated urban women, more opportunities must be created in modern service sectors such as education, healthcare, finance, and hospitality. Removing persistent gender inequalities in the job sector is also crucial to achieve progress. Without meaningful actions, women will continue to fall behind, the poverty rate will increase, and Bangladesh's future development will be at risk.

EDITORIAL

Lessons from Bangladesh and Nepal's youth uprisings



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The recent political development in Nepal reflects a broader political pattern emerging across South Asia. After Sri Lanka and Bangladesh experienced similar unrest in 2022 and 2024, respectively, Nepal has now joined the list of countries where public dissatisfaction and anger, particularly among the youth, escalated into mass mobilisation, leading to the removal of governments.

Nepal's current political upheaval stems from a mix of structural, economic, social, and governance issues. Slow economic progress, high unemployment, and limited opportunities have left many young people feeling frustrated and disillusioned. Furthermore, inflation and rising living costs have worsened their economic and social crises. The youth have also felt excluded from

However, despite these institutional adjustments, stable governance remained elusive. Since 2008, Nepal has seen change in governments 14 times, with none completing its full term. One reason for this is the country's proportional representation electoral system, which often prevents any single party from securing an outright majority. Coalition governments, although theoretically more inclusive, have proven fragile, prone to internal divisions, and have been unable to implement long-term policy agendas.

This led to the youth-led protests that resulted in the resignation of the former government, marking a significant turning point in Nepalese politics. The protest amplified the voices of young people through social media and enabled swift mobilisation.

to the streets to demand change. The rise of youth-led political activism in South Asia has important implications for countries worldwide.

It challenges the notion that political stability relies solely on institutional inertia or elite control. Today, a highly connected and knowledgeable youth group can put considerable pressure on governments. These

election timeline. This difference reflects variations in strategic choices. Nepal's approach indicates an understanding that political uncertainty can be economically and socially destabilising. This was not the case in Bangladesh initially, as the interim government felt that reforms would require a reasonable amount of time, and the country could consider



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS
Bangladesh's youth, too, led mass demonstrations last year, challenging political complacency and corruption and ousting the Hasina regime.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS
The youth-led protest in Nepal resulted in the resignation of the government, marking a significant turning point in the country's politics.

the benefits of national development, which have concentrated among the few. They noted widespread corruption among political elites. The perception that elite capture of public resources has created mistrust in political institutions, leading many Nepalis, including the youth, to believe that political leaders are more focused on their personal and partisan interests than on the country's welfare.

On the political front, Nepal's political landscape has been characterised by turmoil, fractured party politics, and frequent government changes for decades. This has increased distrust and concern among the people, especially the younger generation, who called for responsive and transparent governance. Since adopting the 1990 constitution, which introduced a multiparty parliamentary system in Nepal, the country has experimented with various governance forms, shifting from a constitutional monarchy to a federal democratic republic.

As in other countries, the internet has fostered collective action on an unprecedented scale. The grievances rapidly turned into nationwide protests.

The unrest in Nepal reflects broader regional trends. In Sri Lanka, large-scale protests against economic mismanagement and corruption led to the resignation of the then president. In Bangladesh, youth-led mass demonstrations challenged political complacency and corruption. Moreover, beyond South Asia, Indonesia has recently experienced violent protests against government corruption and proposed legislation, which is perceived to have threatened democratic principles.

Nepal's case presents several common threads: a politically aware youth population, significant economic discontent, widespread corruption, and governance failures that neglect the needs of citizens. When governments seem indifferent and unresponsive, young people take

events underscore the risk of political instability in developing economies, where high youth unemployment and inequality persist. Governments that ignore the voices of young citizens may face a sudden loss of legitimacy, as witnessed in Nepal and Bangladesh.

The uprisings also highlight the transformative influence of social media and digital mobilisation in shaping political outcomes. Policymakers worldwide must recognise that information flows, online activism, and digital solidarity networks can accelerate political crises or enable swift reform movements. In fact, governments are scared of the power of social media, which is reflected in their attempts to shut down social media during such protests. This has been observed both in Bangladesh and Nepal.

The South Asian experience also underscores a universal need for accountability, transparency, and inclusion. Political legitimacy is increasingly reliant on governments delivering tangible results for citizens, rather than merely holding office. Youth-led protests serve as a benchmark of unmet social and economic expectations. Countries worldwide can take note that proactively engaging younger generations through education, employment, political participation, and governance reforms is crucial to preventing unrest.

It is also worth noting the similarities and differences between Nepal's and Bangladesh's recent political upheavals and their aftermath. In Nepal, the interim government's quick decision to hold elections within six months demonstrates a focus on political legitimacy and stability. In contrast, Bangladesh's interim government prioritised institutional reforms before elections, leading to a longer electoral process, and took quite a while to announce a specific

an election only after implementing some crucial reforms.

Interim governments in both Nepal and Bangladesh face the complex challenge of balancing political legitimacy, administrative continuity, and electoral preparation. Nepal's interim administration has chosen an assertive approach, announcing elections within six months. This strategy aims to restore democratic legitimacy swiftly, even if the resulting government is likely to be short-lived due to the political dynamics.

The decision reflects an implicit understanding that legitimacy stems not only from procedural correctness, but also from the timely conduct of elections that enable citizens to choose their representatives directly.

Although Bangladesh has made some improvements in a few economic indicators since the July 2024 upheaval, much more needs to be done to improve the economic conditions of the general public. The delay in elections and incomplete implementation of reforms have held back private and foreign investment. The youth, whose activism played a crucial role in the previous government's downfall, are yet to be meaningfully engaged in the economy through employment. Bangladesh now faces a paradoxical situation. While governance reforms aim to boost credibility and legitimacy, the delay in elections has created an environment where economic confidence is muted. Investors remain cautious due to the absence of political predictability, a weak law and order situation, and the fact that the youth's expectations for job creation are largely unmet. This delay risks undermining the momentum of the youth movement that sparked the government change. And prolonged uncertainty can lead to disillusionment and social frustration.

Why our public buildings no longer reflect who we are



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When I hear debates about rewriting the constitution, I cannot help but feel that the crisis is deeper than legal amendments; it is about the metaphysical foundation of our people, our collective memory and place. Institutions no longer reflect who we are. Laws are written and rewritten, monuments renamed, yet the void remains. The disillusionment after last year's uprising feels less like a political disappointment and more like an existential rupture, because when the forms of a nation, whether in law or in architecture, cease to embody the patterns of belonging, they lose their meaning. I see this estrangement most

clearly in our buildings. Modernism in Bangladesh was once more than just buildings to live in; it was an attempt to be metaphysically modern, to give shape to memory and aspiration at a moment when we were searching for our future. Public buildings were imagined as vessels of our identity, but they no longer speak to us. The ministries, courts, and city halls of today stand like fortresses, detached from the lives they are meant to serve, and even monuments raised in the name of memory feel like frozen gestures rather than living presences. This is why I think our architecture mirrors our politics. Just as architecture has slipped into

technocratic utility, politics has collapsed into performance. The constitution is fought over as if it were only words, not the living covenant of a people. Buildings are erected as if they were only structures, not cultural expressions. In both cases, the dialogue with the psyche has been severed.

That is why Muzharul Islam's idea of a "return home" continues to resonate with me. When Muzharul Islam spoke of it, he was not calling for nostalgia but for a return to the psychic ground of the Bangladeshi people. A constitution can only endure if it grows out of that ground, just as a building can only be alive if it embodies cultural memory. Without this return, reform is cosmetic and buildings are lifeless shells. The July uprising, in its fury and its hope, revealed how hungry people are for recognition. They wanted more than new laws; they wanted forms in which they could see themselves reflected. Yet, that hunger remains unanswered because reform has been treated as a surface adjustment rather than a metaphysical renewal. I feel this every time I walk past a government building

that does not belong to me, every time I hear promises of reform that never touch the ground of our being.

To me, architecture offers a lesson for politics. A parliament should feel like a courtyard where people gather, a library should carry the intimacy of a veranda, and a city square should echo the openness of a field. These are not sentimental images but metaphysical necessities; they are how a people recognise themselves in their forms. Without recognition, law and architecture both fail. Bangladesh cannot keep building its future on estrangement. To rewrite the constitution without returning to the psychic ground of its people is to invite another cycle of disillusionment, and to keep raising buildings that serve but do not speak is to deepen alienation. What we need is a return home, not to the past but to the ground of our being, where form and life are reconciled, where law finds conscience and space finds psyche. Without that return, both our politics and our architecture will remain uninhabited, like shells abandoned on the shore.