

MY DHAKA

THE FURRY ANARCHISTS OF DHAKA

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Ever noticed how every neighbourhood in Dhaka seems to have one thing in common? Wherever you go in this city, you're almost always bound to run into a cat. Not the pampered ones with collars, nor the Instagram-ready breeds. I mean the real, streetwise Dhaka cats.

You're likely to encounter them everywhere. They follow no rules, and answer to no one. And yet, somehow, they are the most permanent residents of this city.

No, Dhaka hasn't turned into Istanbul. Not yet. There are no slow-motion cat documentaries or city-sponsored feeding corners here yet. Dhaka is still Dhaka -- chaotic, impatient, unsentimental at times. But somehow, it makes room for its cats. Not out of kindness, perhaps, but out of sheer inevitability. A cup of leftover milk here, a discarded fishbone there -- Dhaka's love for its cats is more reluctant. Yet, this messy coexistence feels very Dhaka; an equation between irritation and tenderness.

The cats here are unapologetic rebels! They cross "No Entry" signs without hesitation. They nap on "Do Not Sit" walls as if those warnings were just polite suggestions. Rooftops, car

bonnets, half-built buildings -- they claim it all -- not with claws or chaos, but with a single, slow, perfectly confident yawn. And somehow, the city just lets them get away with it.

Occasionally, kind people try to "help" them with rescue attempts, but the city cats perhaps do not crave adoption. They're content being polite guests. They'll take your food, maybe even purr, but they'll leave before you can name them. Commitment isn't their style. Freedom is.

They're furry anarchists; just the cute kind. While we get stuck in traffic, they stroll past our cars. While we hunt for housing, they nap on someone's porch. In a city obsessed with walls, gates, and boundaries, they're the only ones still moving freely, still claiming space without apology.

There's an orange cat I often see near Banani. She walks right past the guard, ignores the sign that says



PHOTO: INTISAB SHAHRIYAR

"Private Property," and sits under the pastry display, as if waiting for her order. No one ever chases her away. She belongs to no one, yet she belongs everywhere.

Dhaka has grown more hostile to everyone -- the rent, the rush, the relentless constructions, the CCTV cameras always watching, recording, and policing. But the cats? They remain unbothered. They slip through it all, reminding us that not every inch of space needs to be owned or named. They nap through noise, survive on scraps, and somehow make it look poetic. Maybe that's why we tolerate them -- or secretly admire them.

Perhaps, in them, we see a kind of freedom that Dhaka once had before it

became obsessed with permission and paperwork. While developers flatten trees and pave ponds, the cats still find sunlit corners to stretch in. While we humans argue about ownership, they simply take it.

Their rebellion is elegant. No slogans, no drama, just presence. A kind of soft occupation.

If anything, they've figured Dhaka out better than we have. They live without rules, yet with perfect rhythm. And in their quiet rebellion lies something we've forgotten; ease, audacity and grace. Maybe that's why we secretly envy them.

Because deep down, every Dhakaite wishes they too could walk past the guards, ignore the horns and traffic, and find a little sunlight to nap in -- no schedule, no permission, no care in the world. Just existing without owning anything, yet claiming everything, like a little cat



Pre-polls climate remains fragile

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intends to integrate the armed forces into its election framework.

"Despite these efforts, the pre-election environment remains fragile, with isolated but politically significant incidents of violence, questions about the neutrality of local officials, and lingering distrust of security forces," the report said.

The IRI mission in Bangladesh held 21 meetings between October 20 and 24 with the interim government, media personnel, civil society, international organisations to assess the election environment, and announced plans to send a 10-member delegation to observe the polls in February.

The report comes amid disagreements among political parties over the referendum, its timing, and the July Charter -- containing 84 reform proposals -- whose implementation remains uncertain due to procedural ambiguities and divergent party positions.

The IRI observed that the EC has improved the voter list by removing 2.1 million deceased voters and adding 4.4 million previously unregistered ones. It also plans to print about 128 million ballots, including those for diaspora voters, and deploy up to 900,000 security and election personnel across more than 42,000 polling stations.

While transparency has improved compared to past elections, security remains a major concern. The report noted that the armed forces' increased role in election security reflects both government confidence and public mistrust of civilian law enforcement.

"Close coordination between the Election Commission, the military,

and the police will be essential to ensure unified command and clear operational protocols," IRI said. It added that effective communication and defined authority lines will help prevent localised violence and maintain public confidence.

The report highlighted the rise of youth-led parties and high first-time voter turnout as positive signs of democratic engagement.

However, it warned that non-transparent candidate selection, low female representation, and the growing appeal of extremist movements threaten Bangladesh's secular political foundations.

"The trajectory of the July National Charter and how political parties institutionalise democratic norms, including those advanced by the student movement, will determine the direction of Bangladesh's transition."

Public sentiment reflects both anticipation and hope, with voter turnout expected to reach up to 80 percent. "Yet, established parties continue to dominate despite internal and reputational challenges," the report noted.

IRI further observed that limited security and weak law enforcement have prevented some parties from campaigning freely, reducing open competition. "The suspension of the Awami League from participating in the election raises questions about representativeness and the potential for election-day violence."

The report said the EC's enforcement mechanisms on campaign finance, expenditure reporting, and candidate eligibility remain weak.

Stakeholders expressed concern

about the influence of unregulated financial resources or "black money". The IRI called for greater transparency in campaign financing and party membership records.

It said the interim government's success will depend on maintaining neutrality, ensuring security, and advancing the National Consensus Commission's reform agenda toward tangible implementation.

"The July National Charter provides a blueprint for democratic renewal, but its realisation depends on the next parliament's political will.

"Sustained dialogue, transparent election administration, and credible participation by political parties will be essential to mitigate polarisation and reinforce confidence in the transition."

Since last year's July Uprising, Bangladesh's civic space has widened considerably, though the environment for political participation and civil society engagement remains uneven.

The IRI recommended that the interim government and EC jointly establish a legal framework for the July Charter referendum and launch civic education initiatives to raise public awareness about proposed reforms and electoral procedures.

It further urged political parties to strengthen internal democracy by ensuring transparent candidate selection, preventing violence during nominations, and promoting women's participation.

The report also suggested that the EC publish clear criteria for accrediting citizen observer groups and propose legal amendments guaranteeing public access to political fundraising and expenditure data.

Govt clears draft law with death penalty

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witnesses, and ensuring compensation and legal assistance," Shafiqul added.

Sources familiar with the draft said that instead of law enforcement agencies, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) will investigate enforced disappearance cases.

The ordinance stipulates that failure to produce a detainee before a court within 24 hours of apprehension will be deemed an act of enforced disappearance.

The draft law mandates that investigations must be concluded within 90 days, with a permissible extension of up to one month. Officers found responsible for failing to meet this deadline may face departmental action.

If a person remains missing, the ordinance states that NHRC must continue searching until their fate is determined, filing progress reports every three months and sharing the findings with the families concerned.

The death penalty is reserved for cases where the victim of enforced disappearance is determined to be permanently untraceable or found dead, the ordinance states.

In cases where the victim is found alive, the ordinance stipulates a prison sentence ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment as punishment for those responsible.

If anyone constructs, establishes or uses a secret detention centre, then, as per the ordinance, the perpetrator may face a seven-year jail sentence and a fine of up to Tk 20 lakh.

Crimes under this law are non-bailable and ineligible for out-of-court settlements.

The ordinance empowers the NHRC to inspect any establishment to check for secret detention centres and take legal measures if such a centre is found.

The NHRC shall have the authority to summon and interrogate any person when investigating cases

of enforced disappearance, lifting the existing bar that had prevented the NHRC from investigating the disciplined forces.

The NHRC will be staffed with investigating officers deputed from various state agencies who will be directly accountable to the commission rather than their parent organisations.

The investigating officer will have magistracy powers equivalent to that of an officer-in-charge of a police station.

However, the investigating officer and the accused in a given case cannot belong to the same organisation to ensure impartiality.

The ordinance calls for establishing special tribunals in every division and, if necessary, in every district.

The hefty fines prescribed in the ordinance will be used as compensation for the victims. If the accused cannot pay the fines even after liquidating all assets, then the government will bear the remaining amount.

Nepal searches for avalanche victims

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepali rescuers yesterday searched for the bodies of multiple climbers killed in an avalanche this week, while Italy said five citizens reported missing in a separate incident were safe.

Seven people were killed on Monday when an avalanche hit multiple expedition teams at the base camp of 5,630-metre (18,471-foot) Yalung Ri peak near Nepal's border with China.

"Mountain guides, skilled in search, have been deployed," Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks told AFP.

Crews are digging through snow,

and scanning the white landscape with electronic detectors.

Sherpa said that they were searching for five bodies -- two Italians, two Nepalis and one German. The bodies of an Italian and a French citizen had already been recovered.

Survivors recounted to AFP how slabs of ice smashed into the group as they clung on the mountain, burying some under the snow.

In a separate incident last week, two Italian climbers died while attempting to scale the 6,887-metre Panbari mountain.

Italy's foreign ministry had also reported several missing citizens trekking in Nepal, but said yesterday

they had "managed to communicate with the group of five hikers... with whom there had been no contact for several days".

It said the five were safe and well. Home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, including Mount Everest, Nepal welcomes hundreds of climbers and trekkers every year.

Last month, Cyclone Montra triggered heavy rain and snowfall across Nepal, leaving trekkers and tourists stranded on popular Himalayan routes.

According to the Himalayan Database, an expedition archive, at least 1,093 people have died on peaks since 1950, with avalanches killing almost a third of them.

Jamaat warns of showdown in Dhaka

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like-minded parties are issuance of an order to implement the July charter and holding a referendum within November; introducing the proportional representation system in both houses or the upper house in the next election; ensuring a level playing field; ensuring visible justice for all repressions, killings, and corruption committed by the "fascist" government; and banning the activities of the "dictatorial collaborator" Jatiya Party and the 14-party alliance.

Earlier, Jamaat and its allies announced they would submit a memorandum to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus to press for their demands.

Around 11:00am, the parties took out separate processions and gathered at the Paltan intersection. Later, they marched towards the Jatiya Press Club. When the procession reached the Matsya Bhaban area, police put up barricades.

Afterwards, nine leaders from the eight parties went to the state guesthouse Jamuna to submit the memorandum to the chief adviser.

On their return from Jamuna, Porwar told journalists that Industries Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan received the memorandum on behalf of Yunus. He said the

would soon hold talks with senior BNP leader to seek a greater share of seats.

Bangladesh Liberal Democratic Party Chairman Shahadat Hossain Selim, also spokesperson for the 12-party alliance, said BNP had already nominated its own aspirants in some seats sought by allies. "There's anger and sadness ... We're discussing it internally. Talks will be held soon."

Fariduzzaman Farhad, coordinator of the Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote, said they wanted nine seats but BNP kept only two. "We'll press for a few more."

Bangladesh Labour Party Chairman Mostafizur Rahman Iran said they demanded six seats and got one. "We'll ask that Faridpur-1 be kept for us, where our secretary general plans to contest."

13 SEATS

According to BNP sources, 13 seats have been initially reserved for the allies.

These include Brahmanbaria-6 for Zonayed Saki, Dhaka-17 for BJP Chairman Andaleev Rahman, Patuakhali-3 for Gono Odhikar

adviser expressed the government's sincerity in resolving the political crisis.

At Paltan, leaders of Jamaat and like-minded parties said the referendum should be held first, even if the national election is delayed due to it.

There, Taher said the nation expects major political parties to sit together not only to discuss the July charter but also to determine how the next election will be held.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh's spokesperson Gazi Ataur Rahman said they would not accept the referendum and national polls on the same day.

Parishad's Nurul Haque Nur, Jhenaidah-2 for Rashed Khan, and Kishoreganj-5 for Bangladesh National Party's Ehsanul Huda, among others.

A member of the BNP standing committee, seeking anonymity, said recent amendments to the Representation of the People Order have complicated seat-sharing since allies can no longer contest under BNP's "sheaf of paddy" symbol.

"We now have to handle seat distribution carefully. Without the common symbol, many allies may struggle to win due to weak grassroots networks and limited voter bases."

BNP leaders said a few allies had strong political bases and past electoral success, but most smaller parties had little organisational strength.

Meanwhile, BNP is considering leaving 10 seats for the National Citizen Party. The party has not nominated candidates from two constituencies -- Dhaka-18 and Dhaka-9 -- where NCP leaders Nasiruddin Patwary and Tasnim Jara plan to contest.

Don't blame charter alone for democratic deficit

Says Dr Kamal

UNB, Dhaka

Dr Kamal Hossain, founder and emeritus president of Gono Forum, yesterday said that it is wrong to blame the constitution alone for the government's authoritarian attitude and lack of democracy.

"Rather, the practice of democracy within the government and political parties must be given the highest priority."

The eminent jurist made the remarks in a written statement read out on his behalf at a discussion titled "Bangladesh's Constitution and Reform Proposals" at the Jatiya Press Club.

Dr Kamal said reviewing the constitution in the present context is very important. "But during any reform, we must keep in mind that the constitution is the foundation of independent Bangladesh and the result of the sacrifices and united aspirations of its entire people."

"The constitution is the guiding document for running the state. Over the past 53 years, it has undergone various changes. Constitutional reform is a sensitive matter, and this process must be carried out based on the opinion of the people."

Dr Kamal, one of the architects of the 1972 constitution, said no individual has the right to change the constitution alone, and any reform proposal must reflect the will of the people while being consistent with the nation's basic values and the needs of the present time.

The veteran politician went on to say that constitutional institutions that have failed to meet public expectations due to politicisation in the past urgently need reform. "If political parties cannot build a national consensus on this matter, democracy will never get institutionalised."

Ending with a note of optimism, he said, "I believe the next national parliament, to be formed through a free, fair and acceptable election, will be able to fulfil the people's expectations and play its role in building a democratic, just, progressive and humane state through systematic reforms."

