When NCP's rhetoric of a new politics meets reality

Kazi A S M Nurul Huda
is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Dhaka and the Cmelikova Visiting International Scholar in Leadership and Ethics at the University of Richmond. He can be reached at huda@du.ac.bd.

KAZI A S M NURUL HUDA

The promise of a "*noya bondobosto*" or new settlement carries an enormous political appeal. After years of democratic erosion, institutional decay, and public disillusionment in the country, citizens have understandably been eager for a political force that breaks with the entrenched habits of established parties. The National Citizen Party (NCP) had positioned itself as that force. But a new political "settlement" or system or culture cannot be built through lofty speeches or slogans. It requires clarity, credibility, and disciplined political practice on the ground. Judged by these standards, there is reasonable scepticism, especially after its seat-sharing arrangement with Jamaat-e-Islami, about whether NCP can deliver its promise as it increasingly surrenders to the pull of familiar political conveniences.

The central issue with the NCP's move isn't that they have ideological differences with their partners, but the action's potential to create public distrust. In an article published in this daily on October 17, 2024, I argued that the student-public uprising succeeded where established political parties such as the BNP failed, despite their shared goal of regime change, because the public had lost trust in traditional politicians. That distrust was the cumulative outcome of years of opacity, opportunism, and instrumental politics. Notably, the same pathologies appear to have emerged within the NCP itself, a party that had promised to transcend them.

Any party serious about a new political settlement must first articulate a clear vision to the people. Apart from a few vague concepts and symbolic initiatives, such as the *"Desh Gorte July Padajatra"*, the NCP has failed to offer sustained pro-people programmes that explain what it stands for, or how it intends to govern differently. Even after formally constituting itself as a political party, its leadership has remained disproportionately engaged on university campuses and with foreign delegates, rather than systematically building grassroots connections. My conversations with voters outside elite or educated circles in urban areas reveal, most citizens cannot identify NCP leaders beyond a handful of prominent figures, let alone explain the party's ideological commitments. A party that remains largely socially unrecognisable cannot plausibly claim to represent the public.

This limitation of outreach reflects a deeper failure of ideological clarity. What exactly is the NCP for? What principles guide its policy positions, alliances, and internal decisions? Nearly a year after its emergence, the party still lacks a clear, publicly articulated manifesto. Even senior figures struggle, when asked, to move beyond a few abstract terminologies in explaining the party's commitments. This is not a messaging problem. It is a failure of political self-definition.

VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

When a party cannot clearly state who it is and what it stands for, citizens are not obliged to supply trust in advance. On the contrary, opacity invites suspicion. If a political actor appears uncertain about its own identity, or unwilling to clarify it, it dents confidence. Political trust arises from sustained clarity about ends, means, and limits. Ambiguity may offer short-term tactical advantages, but it is normatively corrosive. Clarity is a political virtue, and without it, the rhetoric of a new settlement collapses.

Concerns about political judgment on different occasions further compound this credibility gap. Even the decision to rename their July *podojatra* in Gopalganj as a "March to Gopalganj," a move that later contributed to violence, raised questions about the party's political maturity and capacity to assess risk in volatile contexts. A party aspiring to reshape the political order must demonstrate restraint, situational awareness, and responsibility. On this count, the NCP has fallen short.

Problems of internal governance intensify these doubts. Recent public disclosures, including Tajnuva Jabeen's Facebook post and Anik Roy's interview, suggest that decision-making within the party does not consistently follow transparent or consultative procedures. Decisions reportedly taken without majority consent, or circulated at the last moment when party insiders have had no meaningful opportunity to respond, generate internal distrust. Such dysfunction does not remain internal. Political parties are public institutions by nature. When their internal processes appear arbitrary, citizens reasonably infer that similar habits will govern public decision-making.

The problem becomes even more acute when questions of inclusion are considered. A party that claims to inaugurate a new political settlement must demonstrate a principled commitment to women and marginalised groups. Yet, the NCP has articulated no clear roadmap for women's participation or leadership. This absence is especially troubling given its electoral coalitions with parties that openly oppose women's visibility in public life and often display misogynistic attitudes. Former insiders suggest that the NCP is now compelled to campaign for allied parties in constituencies where it does not field its own candidates. Such arrangements compromise both moral credibility and political autonomy.

Taken together, these failures form a pattern, and it is this pattern that decisively undermines the NCP's claim to a new political settlement. The conditions required for a genuine settlement—ideological clarity, organisational discipline, internal democracy, political judgment, and principled inclusion—are not missing by chance. They appear to be absent by design or neglect. A party that cannot properly define or govern itself, and cannot transparently justify its actions and alliances, cannot plausibly be entrusted with reshaping the political order. Political settlements are built by actors who know who they are, what they stand for, and whom they refuse to accommodate. The NCP has shown neither the coherence nor the courage required for such a task. What remains is not an unfinished project but a cautionary example of how the language of renewal can be hollowed out from within.

Bangladesh does not merely need new actors in politics. It needs new standards of political conduct. Trust cannot be demanded in advance, nor can democratic renewal be declared into existence. It must be earned through clarity, discipline, judgment, and visible commitment to principles that survive pressure, temptation, and alliance politics. Where these are absent, appeals to novelty only deepen public cynicism rather than overcome it.

Is the Trump administration committing war crimes in Venezuela?

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

Dr Abdullah Shibli
is an economist working at a non-profit fiscal intermediary. He previously worked for the World Bank and Harvard University.

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

Since September last year, the Trump administration has taken a hard line against Venezuela's Maduro government. Without any provocation, US fighter jets have been regularly firing missiles at fishing boats suspected of transporting drugs in the Caribbean Sea and in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing around 100 people in several dozens of strikes, according to the BBC. In none of these cases has the administration provided any evidence of alleged drug trafficking by Venezuelans.

One particular incident that has aroused international attention happened on September 2, when the US military targeted a boat in the Caribbean. The first strike killed nine individuals on the ship, and a second follow-on attack killed two survivors. Videos show the two survivors clinging to a capsized lifeboat and waving their arms to the airmen flying overhead. The only rational interpretation of the action of these unarmed sailors was that they were calling for help or trying to wave off another strike.

The shock and outrage generated by this news, first reported by *The New York Times*, has reverberated throughout the globe. One needs to ask if the US military committed war crimes by killing innocent and helpless fishermen. The US Congress and the international community need to investigate and answer why powerful nations can get away with such violations of human rights law.

A brief history of the conflict between the US and Venezuela is in order. The US has been pushing back against imported drugs and foreign drug cartels for many years. Since Trump took office in January, he has targeted Venezuela and its leader, Nicolás Maduro. While the administration has cited its war against drugs as the excuse for this obvious transgression, Trump has not been shy to voice his grudge against the leftist regime in Caracas. *Fortune* magazine, in its latest issue, went further and said, "Everything the Trump administration is doing in Venezuela involves oil and regime change." In other words, the military actions are not really about drugs but about stealing Venezuela's natural resources.

The September 2 attack on two survivors finally got the US Congress to act and ask some tough questions of the Trump administration. According to the US Constitution, only Congress can declare war against another country. The offensive against the so-called "narco" speedboats is a violation of all international laws and practices. The US Navy is conducting an operation that best resembles the lawlessness that prevailed in the frontier land in the old US West. US media have aptly described the principles guiding the US policy as "might is right" and "shoot first, ask questions later."

From the outset, it was clear that the US Defense Department had embraced a "shoot-before-you-ask" policy in its war against drugs, which resulted in hasty or impulsive actions without fully understanding the situation or considering the consequences. This mentality originates from the Wild West, where law enforcement often acted quickly without careful consideration, often leading to potential mistakes or negative outcomes.

The characterisation of the fishing boats as "drug boats" and identifying humans as "narco-terrorists" are beyond existing norms of international legal principles, and are not a substitute for a lawful process. Michael Kimmage, professor of history at The Catholic University of America, wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, "Trump's strategy traces multiple contradictions. It celebrates an economic statecraft conducted (if necessary) through military means in the Western Hemisphere ... and the selective application of military force."

Also, the second strike against the two survivors, called "double tap," has been unanimously condemned by the media and politicians. Some Democrats and legal experts have argued that a strike to kill shipwrecked survivors could constitute a war crime.

The rules of war, formally known as International Humanitarian Law (IHL), protect persons who are not, or are no longer, directly or actively participating in hostilities, and impose limits on the means and methods of warfare. As mentioned earlier, the two shipwrecked fishermen were not engaged in any combat, and they should have been rescued by the US naval ships in the vicinity.

The Geneva Conventions say shipwrecked persons must be "respected and protected." The Department of Defense Law of War Manual states that helpless, shipwrecked survivors are not lawful targets, while The Hague regulations forbid orders declaring that no quarter will be given.

In short, "double tap" or shooting to kill survivors are war crime. Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta called the second strike a war crime in an interview with CBS News on December 8.

When pressed by ABC News in the Oval Office with specific questions about accountability and the attack, Trump said, "This is war," although Congress has not authorised war, and the initial strike is still being scrutinised.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the US military during Trump's rule has killed innocent civilians at sea and has tried to cover up these murders. *The New York Times* recently reported that in 2019, during the first Trump administration, the US Navy killed three North Korean fishermen when they were found witnessing a secret American SEAL team off the coast of North Korea.

Jonathan Blitzer offered a scathing critique of current US policy: 'Because the President had labelled several drug cartels "terrorist organisations" in a series of executive orders, the government simply asserted that suspected traffickers were "unlawful combatants" who could be summarily killed.' (*The New Yorker*, December 7, 2025).

The US government must be held accountable for innocent deaths, and the G7 countries and the UN bodies must voice their concerns without delay. While the State Department justifies the escalation of tension and random attacks against a peaceful Latin American country in the name of preventing drug trafficking, experts point out that the US administration is setting a bad example. Russia, China, and Israel now have a roadmap to attack their neighbours and cover up their territorial ambitions with one pretext or the other.