When Dhaka was small enough to just drop by

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AI-ASSISTED ILLUSTRATION

MY DHAKA

There was a time in Dhaka when weekends had one simple plan: "Cholo, beraite jai."

No calls, no WhatsApp, no traffic apps. You simply got on a rickshaw or a wheezing baby taxi and went.

Sometimes, you arrived carrying a box of sweets or a bag of fruits, as if visiting a relative required a modest offering to the household gods. Sometimes, you brought nothing at all. It did not matter. You went anyway.

You went to your nani's house, khala's house, fupu's house, some uncle's flat where the adults would sit and talk for hours, while you disappeared into bedrooms with your cousins. Someone would make tea. Someone would bring out biscuits. Someone would insist that you eat. Someone would inevitably comment on how much you had grown since the last visit, followed by a fairly aggressive assessment of your weight.

And then, just when you thought you had escaped the inspection, some uncle would look over his glasses and ask, almost casually, "What was your result in your last board exam?"

There it was.

The afternoon had started with tea and biscuits. But somehow ended with your academic audit.

Still, it was fun!

There were cousins on the floor, uncles occupying the best chairs, aunties discussing people who were not present, and one television quietly providing background noise until somebody remembered that BTV had something worth watching.

Someone would shout from the kitchen, "Has the show started?"

"Yes!"

And suddenly, the uncles had stopped discussing politics, and the cousins had been temporarily stripped of their right to make noise.

The house itself seemed to understand that people would come.

There was space for extra chairs. Space for extra plates. Space for children to make a nuisance of themselves. Nobody appeared particularly concerned about whether the sofa would survive.

Then the city grew.

The buildings went up. The drawing rooms became smaller, or perhaps our expectations became larger. Families became nuclear and relatives increasingly became people we loved from a respectable distance.

Everyone moved somewhere.

An uncle moved to Mirpur. Someone bought a flat in Bashundhara. Grandparents stopped living with everyone. Then somebody left for Canada, Australia, or America and suddenly, the family tree had branches in three time zones.

And Dhaka became very difficult to cross.

A visit that once meant a rickshaw ride now requires Google Maps, a ride-sharing app, traffic updates and what not!

"Come over this Friday" has become a proposal requiring negotiation.

Next week becomes next month. Next month becomes Eid. Eid becomes a phone call.

And that is perhaps how 'beraite jaowa' disappeared. Not dramatically, but through a thousand small inconveniences.

Now we know where everyone is, what they ate and occasionally what they are thinking. Sure, we are more connected than ever, technically.We just do not show up at each other's houses very much anymore.

I sometimes wonder whether children growing up in Dhaka today will understand the peculiar excitement of being told to get ready because you were going to your khala's house.

And perhaps the most remarkable thing about those afternoons was how utterly ordinary they were.

You went because it was Friday. You went because school was closed. You went because your mother felt like visiting her sister. You went because your grandmother lived there. You went because nobody needed a better reason.

Perhaps beraite jaowa did not disappear because we stopped loving our relatives. Perhaps Dhaka simply became too busy, too crowded, and too inconvenient to visit the people who live within it.

Which is a rather strange thing for a city to do: bring millions of people closer together, while making it harder to drop by!

Houthis target Saudi capital again

Missiles, drones intercepted; 5 killed in Yemeni presidential palace attack

AFP, *Riyadh*

The Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Houthis yesterday said that it intercepted missiles and drones over Riyadh and other areas, as the kingdom comes under sustained attack from its Iran-backed foes.

Since Yemen's civil war flared back to life in July, the Houthis have repeatedly struck Saudi targets including Red Sea tankers, oil facilities and Riyadh's international airport, where 13 people were killed in a single attack last week.

Saudi Arabia leads a military coalition that has supported Yemen's internationally recognised government against the Houthis for more than a decade.

"We intercepted and destroyed three drones in the southern area and Riyadh... and two cruise missiles over the Red Sea," coalition spokesman Turki al-Malki wrote on X.

He added that "in the past hours, we intercepted and destroyed a ballistic missile over Yanbu", a city home to the terminus of a major oil pipeline on the Red Sea coast.



Smoke billows from the presidential palace complex in Aden, Yemen on Thursday. PHOTO: REUTERS

The pressure on Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, comes as global energy markets were already rattled by Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz at the outset of the wider Middle East war in February.

The Houthi attacks have proliferated since the group launched a lightning offensive in Yemen in September, seizing strategic government-held territory along the Red Sea coast overlooking a major chokepoint for global shipping.

The UN Security Council on Thursday "condemned in the strongest terms continued and escalatory Houthi attacks against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", as well as their "attacks and threats against commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb" Strait, the southern gateway to the Suez Canal.

Yemeni government forces have launched a counteroffensive with Saudi air support to retake areas seized by the Houthis, but have so far failed to reverse their gains.

On Thursday, the group launched a deadly missile attack on the presidential palace in the interim seat of the Yemeni government in Aden, killing five people and wounding 16 others, according to the health minister.

Yunus gets 'Hillary Rodham Clinton Award'

BSS, *Dhaka*



Former interim government chief adviser and Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus has received the "Hillary Rodham Clinton Award".

Former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton presented the award to Grameen Bank founder Yunus at a ceremony held at Georgetown University in Washington on Thursday.

Four people, including Yunus, received the honour this year. The other recipients are India's Self-Employed Women's Association Director Reema Nanavaty, Tory Burch Foundation founder and fashion designer Tory Burch, and board chair of Jordan's Microfund for Women Muna Sukhtian, who also received the special "Georgetown Ambassadors Award".

In his acceptance speech, Yunus said, "This is a recognition of 50 years of our work. The event you have organised here will convey an important message to Bangladesh and inspire Grameen families."

Dhaka still in the dark over Saudi executions

Awaits response to note verbale

TASNEEM TAYEB

Three days after Saudi Arabia executed two people it identified as Bangladeshi nationals, Bangladesh's consulate in Jeddah is still awaiting an official Saudi response in a bid to verify their identities and nationality.

An official of the Bangladesh Consulate General in Jeddah said it has yet to receive a formal response from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a note verbale seeking formal confirmation of the executions.

The Saudi Ministry of Interior identified the two as Nazerul Islam Abdul Basir and Siti Akhtar. The official said the mission was trying to verify the information.

The incident raises questions about consular notification under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, to which both countries are parties.

Article 37(a) requires the authorities of a receiving state, where relevant information is available, "to inform without delay the consular post in whose district the death occurred" when a foreign national dies.

Article 36(1)(b) requires authorities to inform detained foreign nationals without delay of their right to consular notification. If a detainee requests it, the authorities must notify the relevant consulate.

The convention does not explicitly require advance notification of an execution. The Bangladesh consulate said it had no prior knowledge of the executions.

Article 36(1)(c) also provides for consular access to detainees, communication with them and assistance in arranging legal representation.

It remains unclear whether either individual knew of these rights or requested consular assistance.

According to the Saudi Ministry of Interior, the two were arrested, investigated and charged before being referred to a competent court. The court found the charges proven and sentenced them to death under ta'zir, a form of discretionary punishment under Islamic law.

The ministry said the offence involved what it described as an immoral act inside a mosque in Makkah. The sentences were upheld by the relevant authority before a royal order was issued for their execution, according to the statement carried by the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

The Saudi statement did not say when the two were arrested or how long they remained in custody. It also gave no details about whether they had legal representation or whether their families were informed of the legal proceedings.

A year on, July charter remains mired in discord

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he said. The Jamaat-led alliance has been holding demonstrations with an eight-point demand that includes implementation of the referendum result.

After the second meeting of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Amendment on September 20, Salahuddin reiterated that the government remained committed to implementing the July charter in full.

"We have said that we will implement the July National Charter word for word. We will bring the necessary constitutional amendments as quickly as possible in line with the charter that was signed by the political parties," he told reporters.

Rejecting allegations that the BNP was unwilling to implement the charter because of its parliamentary majority, he said such claims were intended to create confusion.

"Some political parties are spreading propaganda that the BNP does not want to implement the July National Charter because it holds a majority in parliament. This is completely untrue," he said.

HOW THE CHARTER TOOK SHAPE

The charter emerged from a political dialogue initiated by the National Consensus Commission, headed by then chief adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

Between March and October 2025, the commission held several rounds of discussions with political parties on reforms to the constitution, judiciary, public administration, elections and other state institutions.

Thirty parties took part in the process, and 24 signed the charter on October 17, 2025. Gano Forum joined later, followed by the National Citizen Party (NCP) after the February election, bringing the total number of signatories to 26.

On November 13, 2025, then president Mohammed Shahabuddin issued the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order. It provided for a referendum on 48 constitutional issues, to be held alongside the national election on February 12 this year.

Under the approved framework, elected MPs were to serve both as legislators and as members of a Constitution Reform Council, which would implement the charter's constitutional provisions within 180 working days.

POST-ELECTION HICCUP

After the election, BNP lawmakers declined to take the additional oath required to join the reform council, arguing that the constitution made no provision for such a body.

Opposition MPs from the Jamaat-led alliance took both oaths and insisted that the referendum result and the implementation order be respected.

The council has yet to be formed.

The government instead proposed a special parliamentary committee to oversee the constitutional reforms.

Jamaat, the NCP and their allies rejected the proposal, arguing that an ordinary parliamentary committee could not replace the council envisaged in the charter.

The government initially proposed a 17-member committee, with 12 members from the ruling alliance and five from the opposition. The Jamaat-led 11-party alliance, which includes eight charter signatories, rejected the proposal. The committee was nevertheless formed on July 13.

It has since consulted various stakeholders and is expected to submit its recommendations by December. The government aims to place a constitutional amendment bill before parliament in its January 2027 session.

At the committee's seventh meeting on October 13, Salahuddin reiterated that the government preferred consensus but would proceed with the amendments even if opposition parties declined to participate.

CONCERNS OVER REFORM ROLLBACK

The dispute extends beyond the council to the ordinances issued by the interim government.

The interim administration issued 133 ordinances covering judicial independence, anti-corruption measures, human rights and other institutional reforms.

The BNP government chose not to ratify 16 and repealed another seven, fuelling opposition concerns that parts of the reform agenda could be diluted or abandoned.

The affected measures included provisions on Supreme Court judge appointments, a Supreme Court Secretariat, enforced disappearances, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Human Rights Commission and the Police Commission.

Among the repealed measures were the Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance and the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, which had been introduced to strengthen judicial independence.

The government has said the relevant measures will be reintroduced as bills after further review and consultation.

It has moved ahead with legislation on some issues, including enforced disappearances, the National Human Rights Commission and security sector reforms. Opposition lawmakers, however, say several bills fall short of the original reform agenda.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday said the unprecedented opportunity to establish accountable governance and undertake state reforms after the July uprising had been held hostage by power politics and a "vicious bureaucratic cycle".

In a statement marking the charter's first anniversary, the anti-corruption watchdog urged all political parties to show the same goodwill and wisdom they had displayed in reaching consensus on the charter.

OPPOSITION PARTIES SCEPTICAL

For the NCP, the BNP's refusal to join the council marked a decisive break with the charter's implementation framework.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen said the referendum had given the reforms a direct public mandate.

"The BNP is effectively rejecting the referendum verdict because it disagrees with many of these fundamental reforms," he said.

He warned that the government could pursue only limited reforms while leaving broader democratic goals unfulfilled.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh has also questioned the government's commitment.

Its General Secretary, Gazi Ataur Rahman, alleged that the BNP had backed the referendum process before the election but began questioning its legality after taking office.

His party was waiting to see how the government proceeded, he said, warning that abandoning the charter could carry political costs.

"If the government backs away from the charter, it will face a difficult situation," he said.

Rastro Songskar Andolan President Hasnat Quaiyum said the charter recorded political parties' commitments to reform, while the referendum endorsed both the proposals and the mechanism for implementing them.

Recent developments had raised doubts about the BNP's commitment to the full agenda, he said. Disregarding the public verdict could undermine the democratic process and risk a return to highly centralised governance.

"This is creating a troubling precedent in Bangladesh's democratic politics. If the people's verdict is ignored, it could create a serious crisis for the country's democratic future. It would not only damage the BNP politically but also undermine Bangladesh's broader democratic culture and political process," he said.

Quaiyum nevertheless said he remained hopeful that the government would honour the mandate within the council's 180-working-day timeframe. Constitutional reform could not be avoided indefinitely, he said.

RULING ALLIANCE PARTNERS REMAIN HOPEFUL

Some parties that joined the BNP-led ruling alliance in the election remain optimistic about implementation, although they differ over the causes of the impasse.

Abul Hasan Rubel, executive coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon, said the charter was a formally signed political document that should be implemented as agreed. Failure to do so could undermine the political unity built around it.

However, he attributed the deadlock partly to "flaws" in the interim administration's implementation framework.

"In my view, the referendum order should have been issued only after further discussions among the political parties based on the recommendations of the expert committee. But that did not happen," he said.

Revolutionary Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque said the BNP had made a political mistake by refusing to form the council for 180 days, despite campaigning in favour of the referendum-backed process.

Had the BNP followed that course, it could have countered accusations that it did not believe in the charter or the July uprising, he said.

"For now, I remain optimistic that the BNP will move forward with it in the coming months," he said.

Elon Musk unveils Tesla's 'flying' car

AFP, *Houston*



Tesla CEO Elon Musk unveiled what he described as a "flying" car, equipped with thrusters, during a livestreamed event at his SpaceX rocket company's facility on Thursday.

Technical and regulatory challenges have so far prevented the much-hyped flying car sector from getting off the ground. Musk revealed his new Roadster sports car during a launch event at a SpaceX test facility in Texas.

During the demo, which was livestreamed on Tesla's X account, the car launched from a steep ramp and landed on its wheels. "Flying cars are real," Musk said during the event. He added that the vehicle's "success is not guaranteed" but that "it will probably work."

Musk said the car was equipped with "ultra high-pressure air tanks" to propel itself into the air.

The tech billionaire described the development as "what happens when you have a collaboration with the world's best car company and the world's best rocket company," referring to Tesla and SpaceX.

The vehicle would go into production in 2028, he said.

American aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss debuted the first flying car prototype in 1917.

But successful designs have become more seriously contemplated only in recent years as electric motors and high-performance batteries have advanced.