Understanding November 7 beyond competing political narratives



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Some days slip into history almost unnoticed, their significance revealed only with the passage of time. Others arrive amid uncertainty and upheaval, carrying questions that generations later continue to ponder. November 7, 1975 was such a day.

For some, it entered the national memory as a soldiers' and people's uprising. For others, it was unmistakably a military coup. Some regard it as an extension of the turbulence unleashed by the events of August 1975; others see it as the beginning of a new political era whose consequences shaped Bangladesh for decades. However, no matter which interpretation one may embrace, one thing remains beyond dispute: by the morning of November 7, Bangladesh had become the stage of a profound national crisis.

Barely four years had passed since independence. The young republic, born in sacrifice and sustained by the dreams of liberation, entered one of the most turbulent chapters of its existence. Political authority was contested, institutions were strained, and competing visions of the nation's future collided with growing intensity. The events of November 7 were not the work of a single actor, nor the triumph of a solitary ideology. Rather, they emerged from the convergence of powerful currents that had been gathering force for many months.

The Bangladesh that stepped into 1975 was still a fragile nation in the making. Economic distress, the devastating famine of 1974, administrative shortcomings, political polarisation, and mounting public disillusionment combined to cast a long shadow over the country's future. Against this backdrop, the establishment of one-party rule in the name of BAKSAL marked a defining moment in the nation's political evolution. Its supporters portrayed it as a bold attempt to foster national unity and accelerate state-building. Its critics, however, saw it as a departure from pluralist democracy and a concentration of political power. The debate remained unresolved when the dramatic events of August 15 abruptly transformed the political landscape. President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. His government collapsed.

If August 15 brought one political order to an end, it did not establish another with certainty. Within the armed forces, opinions were deeply divided over the events and the nation's future course. Then came the developments of November 3. Led by Brig Khaled Mosharraf and a group of fellow officers, a fresh intervention shifted the balance of power within the military. Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman was placed under restrictions.

Public perceptions at the time were equally diverse. Many believed that political forces associated with the pre-August order might soon regain influence. Accurate or not, such perceptions became part of the political atmosphere of the period, and atmospheres often shape history as powerfully as facts.

While developments within the military commanded national attention, another political current was gathering momentum beyond the barracks. The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), which emerged during the early years of independence, became a significant force among leftist political sections. Its leaders argued that the promises of liberation remained unfulfilled. Political independence, they maintained, must be accompanied by a deeper social transformation.

The enduring significance of November 7 lies not merely in the fate of any single individual but in its place within the wider currents of history. The events contributed to the emergence of a new political landscape in Bangladesh. In the years that followed, Ziaur Rahman gradually became the country's central political figure. At the same time, the upheavals of 1975 underscored the decisive role of the armed forces during a period of institutional fragility.

The JSD advocated far-reaching changes in the relationship between society and the armed forces. Among its most prominent figures was Lt Col (retd) Abu Taher, who led the party's armed wing and became increasingly active within the cantonments. To his supporters, Taher embodied a radical democratic vision rooted in revolutionary ideals. To his critics, his ideas appeared impractical, even destabilising.

By the evening of November 6, 1975, uncertainty hung heavily over the capital. Rumours moved swiftly through the streets. Military installations simmered with tension. Reliable information became scarce, while speculation travelled faster than truth. There was a growing sense that events were moving towards another decisive turning point, though few could foresee what shape it would take. Then, on the morning of November 7, change arrived.

The events unfolded with remarkable speed. Groups of soldiers mobilised, so did political activists. Commands and counter-commands echoed through the military establishment. Power dynamics that had seemed fixed only hours earlier suddenly became uncertain. It was within this atmosphere of confusion and momentum that Ziaur Rahman was released, an event that quickly assumed national significance.

The days that followed revealed the complexity of the moment. The various actors who had contributed to the events were united neither by purpose nor by vision. Military officers, political activists, ideological movements, and state institutions often imagined very different futures. As the situation evolved, these differences became increasingly apparent. Some prioritised stability, some demanded political transformation, and others aspired to a broader social revolution.

The story of Abu Taher captures many of the contradictions of this turbulent period. Within weeks of the November events, his fortunes changed dramatically. His relationship with the emerging political order grew increasingly strained. Ultimately, he was arrested, tried, and executed. His legacy remains contested, inspiring admiration in some quarters and criticism in others.

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Viewed from the distance of half a century, November 7 appears less as a simple tale of victory or defeat than as a national crossroads. At that crossroads stood competing visions of Bangladesh: the legacy of the Liberation War, the memory of August, the uncertainties of November, the aspirations of political activists, the calculations of military officers, and the hopes and anxieties of ordinary citizens. For a brief yet consequential moment, all these forces converged.

Each participant believed that they were shaping the destiny of the nation in their own way. But history rarely unfolds according to a single design. The significance of November 7 lies precisely in its complexity. It was neither the achievement of one man nor the triumph of one ideology. Rather, it was a moment when powerful historical currents met, collided, and altered the course of Bangladesh's political journey.

For this reason, the events remain not only influential but also enduringly contested, continuing to invite reflection, debate, and reinterpretation as the nation looks back upon one of the most pivotal days in its modern history.

Cleaner cities begin with better waste management



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The age-old method of garbage collection and disposal by municipalities and city corporations calls for scrutiny. Municipal vans collect waste from households and workplaces and dump it at disposal sites, which are largely open spaces. Due to inadequate capacity, solid waste is also frequently dumped in drains and canals, severely polluting surface water and groundwater. One primary reason for inadequate garbage collection and processing is the scant resources of local bodies, but not all urban local governments are equally deficient in funding. With serious commitment, all city corporations and bigger pourashavas could build reasonably good systems for waste management. However, one upazila-level urban local body, Saidpur Pourashava in Nilphamari district, has shown that with determination, it can establish a modern faecal sludge treatment plant (FSTP). An FSTP collects and safely manages human waste and sludge from homes and other establishments, while integrated waste treatment systems can convert waste into reusable products such as organic manure, treated water and electricity. As an old railway town, Saidpur Pourashava has a population of 142,749, with roughly 33,472 households in an area of 34.43 square kilometres, according to figures cited from the 2022 census. Established in 1958, Saidpur is one of the largest pourashavas in Bangladesh in terms of area. One of the primary duties of the pourashava is the collection and disposal of solid waste and maintenance of drainage systems, which the local body has taken seriously.

Saidpur Pourashava, under the leadership of its mayor and councillors, established a solid waste and faecal sludge co-composting treatment plant on an area of 170 decimals (approximately 1.7 acres) of land five years ago. According to a WaterAid assessment, Saidpur generates approximately 33,245 tonnes of solid waste annually, of which about 51 percent is collected. Shops, offices, hospitals, clinics and other establishments also generate significant amounts of solid waste. The pourashava workers collect solid waste and a good amount of faecal sludge to feed into the co-composting treatment plant. Municipal vacuum trucks ranging in capacity from 1,000 to 3,500 litres, with the help of private sweepers, collect sludge from residential septic tanks and market areas for use in the plant. This sludge is emptied into 24 drying beds, where it undergoes a scientific drying process before being mixed with dried organic waste and sawdust and converted into agricultural co-compost fertiliser, which is marketed to local farmers. Although the plant took several years to establish and has yet to process all the solid waste and human sludge of the entire pourashava, it has the potential to handle larger quantities if additional municipal workers and equipment can be made available. The facility has a faecal sludge treatment capacity of approximately 26 cubic metres per day. The FSTP uses rainwater and solar energy to enhance sustainability. It has a reported solar power capacity of around 10 kW, with electricity transferred to the national grid.

I believe the social and health benefits of FSTPs should be given greater weight than financial costs and benefits. The role played by such plants in disease prevention is substantial, since they reduce breeding grounds for mosquitoes and rodents, helping lower the risks of dengue and other infections. Safe treatment of faecal waste can also reduce the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera. Such plants will also help eliminate the open dumping of solid waste, as is commonly practised in urban areas of Bangladesh.

The plant was established at an initial cost of Tk 7 crore and has been upgraded with an additional Tk 2 crore, with technical support from WaterAid Bangladesh. It started producing fertiliser in February 2021. After visiting the plant site recently and talking to municipal officials, technical personnel at the plant and residents, it can be confidently said that this type of plant can be established in other urban areas of the country to improve environmental conditions and potentially become financially viable by producing organic fertiliser and electricity if additional machines are installed. In another waste management plant in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) uses faecal sludge and solid waste to produce fertiliser, clean water, recoverable plastic and electricity. Built at a cost of Tk 60 crore, it reportedly has a power generation capacity of 40–50 kW. It produces distilled water and ash as well.

While most cities and towns in Bangladesh are reeling under the pressure of huge quantities of unprocessed solid waste every day, posing a serious threat to human health, these two models of solid waste and faecal sludge management should be seriously considered for replication in all urban areas as soon as possible. The establishment and management of such plants could be undertaken jointly through cooperation among urban local bodies, DPHE and NGOs specialising in waste management system development.

As I gather information about the possibility of replicating the above pilot initiatives in other urban areas of Bangladesh, the main question that arises is the financial viability of solid waste and faecal sludge co-composting treatment plants. However, in the case of urban waste management, I believe the social and health benefits of such plants should be given greater weight than financial costs and benefits. The role played by such plants in disease prevention is substantial, since they reduce breeding grounds for mosquitoes and rodents, helping lower the risks of dengue and other infections. Safe treatment of faecal waste can also reduce the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera. Such plants will also help eliminate the open dumping of solid waste, as is commonly practised in urban areas of Bangladesh. A good part of this waste is also regularly burned, producing toxic pollutants, including black carbon, and foul odours, while improper waste disposal contributes to groundwater contamination. A cleaner city will improve mental and physical health and reduce people's out-of-pocket treatment costs. Above all, proper waste management will prevent raw sewage and untreated leachate from polluting water bodies, groundwater and agricultural land. Therefore, to improve the liveability of our cities and towns, solid and liquid waste management must be modernised without delay.

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ঢাকাস্থ খিলগাঁও পুনর্বাসন এলাকার ভূমি বরাদ্দ কমিটির গত ২৭/১০/২০২৬ তারিখে অনুষ্ঠিত সভার সিদ্ধান্ত মোতাবেক খিলগাঁও পুনর্বাসন এলাকার ক্ষতিগ্রস্থ এওয়ার্ডী/এওর্য়াডীর ওয়ারিশগণের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, যে সমস্ত ক্ষতিগ্রস্থ এওয়ার্ডী/এওয়ার্ডীর ওয়ারিশগণ তাদের ক্ষতিগ্রস্থ জমির পরিবর্তে এখনও খিলগাঁও পুনর্বাসন এলাকায় প্লট বরাদ্দ পান নাই, তাদের স্ব-স্ব ক্ষতিগ্রস্থ জমির পরিমান, সিএস দাগ নং, মৌজার নাম এবং এল এ কেইস নং উল্লেখপূর্বক হুকুম দখলকৃত জমির কাগজপত্রাদি/দলিলাদিসহ প্লট বরাদ্দের জন্য আগামী ০৭/১২/২০২৬ তারিখের মধ্যে খিলগাঁও পুনর্বাসন এলাকার ভূমি বরাদ্দ কমিটির চেয়ারম্যান ও মাননীয় সংসদ সদস্য, ঢাকা-৯ অথবা নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, ঢাকা গণপূর্ত বিভাগ-৪, ঢাকা ও সদস্য সচিব, খিলগাঁও পুনর্বাসন এলাকার ভূমি বরাদ্দ কমিটি বরাবর আবেদন করার জন্য আহবান করা যাচ্ছে। উল্লেখ্য, কোন এওয়ার্ডী/এওয়ার্ডীর ওয়ারিশগণ পূর্বে আবেদন করে থাকলেও পত্রিকায় বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের পর পুনরায় তাদেরকে আবেদন করতে হবে। উল্লিখিত সময়সীমা অতিক্রম হওয়ার পর আর কোন আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না।

(মোঃ মাসুদ রানা)
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