



THE SPOTLIGHT

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NEWSLETTER OF THE GLOBAL CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

INSIDETHIS ISSUE

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COVER STORY

Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Bangladesh Under the Rule of the Interim Government

A Report of the GCDG Research Wing

Introduction

Human rights are inherent, natural and universal rights that belong to all individuals simply by virtue of being human. These rights are universally accepted moral principles or norms that establish standards of human behavior, often protected by national and international laws. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948 (UDHR) outlines a wide range of human rights in 31 Articles, including the right to life, liberty, equality, dignity, security, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly or association, freedom of religion, education, right to own property, social and cultural rights and many more. UDHR is used as the gold standard reference for human rights throughout the world. One of the fundamental obligations of a government of any state is to safeguard the human rights of its residents and visitors irrespective of one's nationality, race, color, ethnic origin or identity, religion, language, sex or any other status. It is worth mentioning that Bangladesh acceded to and ratified the rights embodied in the International Human Rights Instruments adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Although universal human rights are widely accepted, protecting the rights has often been difficult, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries like Bangla-

desh, where people are still less aware of their fundamental rights. However, people, particularly the less well-off faction of the population, in these countries are the worst victims of violating these rights.

The Interim Government of Muhammad Yunus

Mohammad Yunus, Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bangladesh, took oath on 8 August 2024 after the ousting of elected Sheikh Hasina Government on 5th August 2024 by a prolonged and deep conspiracy and meticulously designed plot, headed by Yunus with cooperation and supports from anti liberation political forces and fundamentalist militant groups in Bangladesh, and international supporters of Muhammad Yunus. Yunus used his reputation as a Nobel Laureate to amass support from his powerful friends in power of some foreign Governments and international organizations to achieve this impossible goal, despite Sheikh Hasina Government enjoyed widespread supports from the grassroots population because of the unprecedented economic development and infrastructure improvement in the country, particularly for the many social security measures her Government implemented to reduce the poverty level for the downtrodden population of the country. To achieve this goal, Yunus formed an unwritten,

unholy, tactical alliance with the birth enemy of Bangladesh, the fundamentalist political party Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, their militant supporters and the 2nd largest political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which was out of power since 2008 due to their wrong policy and disconnection from general population. The anti-discrimination student movement had also favored him, and again this movement might have been instigated by Yunus himself because of financial supports bright future promised by Yunus. His powerful international supporters and contacts supplied the resources and neutralized the Army that prevented them from performing their solemn constitutional duty of protecting the country and its government from any type of internal and external conspiracy. For example, UN Human Rights Chief, Volker Turk, intimidated the Bangladesh Army by saying that it could lose the lucrative peacekeeping roles if it were involved in suppressing the July movement (1). Since Mohammad Yunus is a Nobel Laureate, one might wonder what the motivation was for Yunus for this. There might be many reasons, but the most apparent 3 compelling reasons that any average conscious individual would be able to rationally comprehend: [Continued on Page 2]



HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS [Continued from Page 1]

(1) His longstanding and opportunistic ambition, despite having no political background, of grabbing state power as evidenced by formation of a political party "Citizens Power" (Nagorik Shakti) (2) during the Caretake Govt. of Fakhruddin Ahmed (12 Jan 2007 to 6 Jan 2009) with the support of the military Government. Later, Yunus discontinued this party citing a lack of interested candidates (3). While every citizen of the country has the right to form a political party, the time and mechanism of forming a party was suspicious, interesting and thought-provoking. Understandably, the present incident of his grabbing state power is just a sequel to his past attempt.

(2) His long enmity with Sheikh Hasina Government for not interfering with the court to save him in multiple court cases for his tax embezzlements (4), illegal holding of Grameen Bank Managing Director's post beyond the age of 65 (5), breaking the labor law of Bangladesh (6) and for food adulteration by an entity of his business empire (7).

(3) He perceived the Sheikh Hasina Government as the only enemy and an insurmountable wall to expand his vast business empire in Bangladesh to exploit the poor people. However, the Sheikh Hasina Government simply abided by the law of the country and was not his enemy. No patriotic Government of the world will allow someone to embezzle taxes. It is easily understandable this enmity is the result of the typical frustration-aggression theory.

Violations of human rights

There are widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights in Bangladesh under Yunus Government, which are reflected by the concerns expressed by multiple national and international human rights and other organizations (8, 9, 10, 11). These violations are wide ranging, including rights to life, liberty, equality, dignity, security, freedom of expression, education, peaceful assembly or association, freedom of religion, right to own property, social and cultural rights and more. Experienced human rights experts would recognize that often a violation of one of the rights is linked to a violation of other rights.

Root causes of human rights violations under the Yunus Government

(1) Yunus has no political background, no grassroots public support and is totally disconnected from the general population of the country. He, in essence, belongs to the rich and elite international groups of people. He is a typical example of an opportunistic power grabber. To acquire and to stay in a state power, he is dependent on his cash, kind, fame and on the muscle power of anti-liberation political forces, particularly Bangladesh Jamaat e Islami, their student wing Chhatra Shibi and other militant Islamic fundamentalist forces. Since these forces were against the independence of Bangladesh during the liberation war, who committed heinous crimes and unspeakable atrocities against the general mass, they are much hated by the public. However, they are organized and committed forces, have hidden militant wings and are connected to international fundamentalist groups. Thus, they can sometimes bring havoc to the country, particularly in times of democratic power vacuum, like the present time. Since Yunus wants to cling to power to achieve his business goal and to punish his perceived enemies, he has no alternative but to form alliance and give in to these unscrupulous forces. In other words, if Yunus wants to stay in power, human rights violations must be one of his many indispensable weapons and tactics.

(2) Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, on the other hand, enjoys the full support of Yunus and state power to take revenge on their long-standing enemy and only formidable secular opponent force, the Bangladesh Awami League, and their supporters and other pro-liberation political alliance parties. In a symbiotic association, Yunus is offering them indemnity and impunity. Taking this state supports, antiliberation forces are now engaged in killing and maiming AL leaders, activists and their supporters in an unabated manner. Knowing that they will not face any criminal court proceedings for any of their crimes, they are now reckless in killing, destroying, vandalizing houses of people and symbols that represent the Independence and liberation war of Bangladesh. They have already destroyed most of the sculptures and monuments of the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Shek Mujibur Rahman, and most of the symbols of the liberation war throughout the country. In doing so, they established a reign of terror throughout the country, and the consequences are human rights violations on an unprecedented scale. The Jamaat-e-Islami has become the key support system for Yunus's government. Hardline religious groups and Islamist political parties could take further advantage of

the chaotic situation in the country.

(3) Another loyal partner of Muhammad Yunus that engaged in unprecedented atrocity, terror and human rights violations is the so-called Antidiscrimination Student Movement, which now formed a political party with Yunus's support, the National Citizens Party (NCP). Yunus has done irreparable damage to this poor country by assassinating the characters of these young people by supporting them with unlimited cash and kind and allowing them to establish their mobocracy to achieve his own goal. It is understandable that if someone at this young age becomes so powerful and rich, and enjoys impunity from the state, they will inevitably turn into monsters. Yunus's Interim Government uses the students to justify all the illegal and unconstitutional acts, although this government took an oath under the current constitution. It is a matter of deep concern that a section of the youth, believed to be the main force in rebuilding the future of this country, might have been permanently damaged by Yunus and domestic or foreign evil forces.

(4) Unfortunately, the other unholy partner of Yunus's journey is the 2nd largest political party of Bangladesh, the BNP. This party considers AL as their main enemy since AL is the only political party that can keep them out of power. BNP maintained alliance with Bangladesh Jamaat e Islami most of the time since its formation with an objective of creating a formidable force against AL to go to power. For obvious reason, this party is a partner of the Yunus Government to diminish the influence of AL. Yunus, on the other land, is offering them impunity and taking no actions on widespread extorsions and atrocities committed by BNP members throughout the country. So, the alliance is again symbiotic.

(5) The structure of the interim government is also favorable to Yunus and other perpetrator partners of human rights violations. Yunus formed the interim Government by drawing his advisers mostly from his loyal business colleagues (NGO), his natives from Chittagong division and the selected students who were his collaborators, involved in the mass demonstration

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

14 April 2025

১ বৈশাখ ১৪৩২

My Golden Bangla
I love you.

আমার সোনার বাংলা
আমি তোমায় ভালোবাসি

The brave Bengalis never accepted the 190-year rule of the British and the 24-year rule of the Pakistanis. They rebelled repeatedly to break the chains of subjugation. Sometimes they were partially successful, sometimes they failed. In continuation of this, in 1971, under the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in exchange for the blood of 3 million martyrs and the honor of 200,000 women, the Pakistani occupying forces were defeated in a bloody war lasting 9 months, and an independent and sovereign country called Bangladesh was established on the world map.

Although independent, the nation has had its share of assassinations, military coups, rigged elections and dictatorships. The people of independent Bangladesh have been deprived of democracy, equality, good governance, and justice. Human rights have been violated.

With the determination to cooperate in establishing democracy, equality, good governance, justice and human rights in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi expatriates have established the "Global Center for Democratic Governance" (GCDG).

A regular newsletter called 'The Spotlight' is published as the voice of the "Global Center for Democratic Governance" (GCDG) on 14 April 2025 (1st Baishakh 1432).

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to those whose tireless efforts are making 'The Spotlight' newsletter published.

Happy Bengali New Year to everyone.

Prof. Dr. Md. Habibe Millat
MBBS, FRCS (Edin)
President
Global Center for Democratic Governance (GCDG)

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

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and ousting of the Sheikh Hasina government. This makes the interim government seem as if one superman governs the country as a king. No one in the government can oppose or raise concerns about Yunus's decision. The consequences are again bleak and continuous violations of human rights with no sign of relief.

- (6) Finally, the complex, unwritten, undeclared loose coalition that Yunus formed with anti-liberation forces, Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami, BNP, militant Islamic fundamentalists and the student activists, each having their hidden agenda. Since Yunus has no political base or people's support, he must comply or compromise with the separate agenda of each partner to cling to power and fulfill his agenda of taking revenge on his perceived enemy, Sheikh Hasina and AL and expand his business empire with minimum or no tax payment to the state.
- (7) Furthermore, the Interim Government has dissolved the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh.

Examples of Human Rights Violations

Human rights violations under the interim Government are widespread and numer-

ous. It is difficult to find even a few human rights, enshrined in the UDHR, that are not violated. This means there is barely any human rights people of Bangladesh are enjoying under Yunus Government. Most violations are systematic, organized, appear well designed and in many cases predeclared. Because of the complete suppression of press freedom by various tactics, people are only aware of tiny fractions of the violations. Even then, the number of leaked violations is so numerous that it is alarming and horrendous. Bangladesh had never experienced such widespread human rights violations in her 54 years of history after achieving independence in 1971. Human rights violations are so widespread and numerous that it is not possible to list them in such a short report. Here, we are listing very few of the violations under the following subsections: Rights of Life, Rights to Freedom of Association, Peaceful Assembly, Rights of Freedom of Speech, Rights of Freedom of Religion, Rights to Receive Fair Justice, Rights of Women and Children, and Rights to Own Property, etc.

Rights of Life

- (1) A Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report indicated

over 600 fatalities and more than 10,000 injuries across the country within the 100-day rule of the interim Government (9).

- (2) Within just 29 days of the interim Government, four AL leaders reportedly died of "heart attacks" while detained in Bogura prison, bringing the total number of AL members and activists who have died in police custody over four months to at least ten (12).
- (3) The Ain O Salish Kendra, based in Dhaka, in its Annual Report 2024, stated that "during the Interim Government lynching people to death in the name of mob justice has been worrying".
- (3) The Ain O Salish Kendra cited mob lynching death of 128 persons including the death of 57 persons in Dhaka division, 19 persons in Rajshahi Division, 17 persons in Chittagong Division, 14 persons in Khulna Division, 7 persons in Barisal Division, 5 persons in Mymensingh Division, 5 persons in Rangpur Division and 4 persons in Sylhet Division (13).

[To Be Continued]

NB: The numbers in brackets indicate references. The list of references will be published with the last part of the article.

Lead Story

Abysmal Law and Order Situation in Bangladesh: Intended or Inevitable

Manirul Islam

The law-and-order situation in Bangladesh has deteriorated significantly since the unelected Interim Government led by Professor Yunus was installed on August 8 by the ruling of the Highest court of Bangladesh. Violence, intimidation, and restrictions on freedom of expression have surged, leading to fear and uncertainty among citizens. The democratic process was stalled after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left the country for safety on August 5, 2024, facing an imminent attack on her life by a violent mob. The single task bestowed upon the cherry-picked Interim Government is to restore democracy by holding a free and fair election. Law and order are the precursor to holding a free, fair and participatory election. Now there is serious concern percolating through the nation - has the Interim Government failed, or, the Government not have the intention to restore order? To put it straight, stoking fear among citizens through lawlessness will prolong the undesirable presence of the unelected Government.

It is now clear that the elected Government of Sheikh Hasina caved in to a meticulously choreographed masterplan jointly plotted by the external powers with the former USA administration at the lead and Bangladeshi collaborators led by Professor Yunus, a person with burgeoning international celebrity status propped up by the Clinton Foundation. The plan has been successfully implemented by a large violent mob marshalled on the street by a well-trained and funded young leadership, which was changing color like a chameleon, synching with the ferocity on the street. The students started a peaceful street protest with demands to reform the quota system in government jobs. By mid-July 2024, it escalated into a call for the removal of the Awami League-led government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Awami League is the oldest and the largest political party

in Bangladesh, enjoying more than 40% popular votes in elections. Violent confrontations occurred between government supporters and protesters armed with local and modern weapons. It became evident that well-trained armed militants and sharpshooters were embedded in the protesting mob; the armed columns spread out all over the big cities comprised of ex-army officers, Jamat-Shibir cadres and outlawed Islamist extremists. The enormous body mass of the protest was built with the supporters of BNP, Hifazot, Jamat, madrasa students, settler Biharis and Rohingya refugees. The street violence intensified and turned bloody as the protesting mobs attacked 460 police stations across the country, killed hundreds of police personnel, the majority on the line of duty and destroyed government and public installations. Police capacity to contain street violence totally collapsed, and during these days when the country was burning, the Army and Border Guards ominously remained silent bystanders, in some cases assisting the actions of the frenzied mobs. On August 5, 2024, Sheikh Hasina's government was toppled by the violent mob, an 'Interim Government' headed by Professor Mohammad Yunus was installed on August 08, 2024, yet violence continues nationwide unabated, even eight months past since the regime change happened.

The Law-and-order has been spiraling out of control by day, but law enforcement against crimes is not visible, eroding the sense of security in public life. To bring back citizens' confidence about the sincerity of the Interim Government to restore the political process and hold an inclusive, free and fair election under a caretaker government, the following result-based actions should be taken immediately:

(1) Stop vigilante attacks on and mass incarceration of Awami League (AL) supporters.

The government permitted vigilante groups to target anyone having a record of association with AL politics – killing, looting, burning, and evicting from their homes. Demoralized police and military empowered with magistracy power help vigilante groups by identifying, detaining, torturing and also helping the mob to loot, vandalize, and burn down homes and businesses of the AL supporters. At Gazipur on February 08, the day after the neighbours successfully resisted and foiled an attempt by the Yunus loyalist mob, popularly known as 'Bulldozer Mob', to vandalize the home of a senior leader of AL, the Yunus Government unleashed a demonizing military campaign 'Operation Devil Hunt'. On day one, they arrested 84 persons in Gajipur and in the next two days nabbed 1308 persons from across the country; all arrested persons are affiliated with AL politics. Most of the AL politicians, from the leaders to grassroot workers, are now either in prison without any credible criminal charge or internally displaced, relocating constantly for safety or in exile. They may be excluded from the election process unless they can safely return home.

(2) Stop violence against women.

Assaulting women in public places for nefarious reasons, ranging from walking alone on the beach to non-compliance with religious dress codes, is alarmingly on the rise. But the most alarming is the recent spike of rape incidents, victims include innocent children, mentally deranged and even elderly women. In one case, the victim was a child who succumbed to physical injuries and trauma. In another case, father of a rape victim was killed for filing a case with the police. A female journalist was gang raped. The families of the victims often prefer to remain silent for their safety to avoid

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Editor's Note

It is with immense gratitude and pleasure that we wish to celebrate the Bangla New Year 1432 with the publication of the first issue of the Spotlight newsletter as the voice of the Global Center for Democratic Governance (GCDG) for public discourse.

The focus of this first issue is on human rights violations and abuses, violations of press freedom, deteriorating law and order situations, and endangered democracy in Bangladesh. Since the regime change in Bangladesh in August 2024, the horrific atrocities, destruction of the symbols of the glorious 1971 Muktiuddha (war of liberation), the memories of the nation's historical struggles, destruction of the residence of the Father of the Nation, and alarming examples of human rights violations by the militant mobs are disclosed by international media almost every day. These heinous crimes demand serious attention and urgent actions from peace-loving international organisations.

Today, we have to do the soul searching to find out why this happened and is still happening, what went wrong, and how to get back organised, unite the peace and justice-loving forces, and get the steering back to bring Bangladesh back on track to reach the goals that will make the nation proud again!

"We, at the GCDG, envision Bangladesh being governed by the spirit of the liberation war, ensuring democracy, equality, human dignity, and social justice, where the people are united, secular, non-communal, striving for shared progress and happiness".

I am sure the readers will benefit immensely from the documented evidence and suggested future directions discussed in the articles in this issue of Spotlight.

With the help, cooperation and active participation of the learned readers, we, through the Spotlight, are committed to raising our voice based on truth and nothing but truth.

The editorial team and members of the GCDG wish you a happy Bangla New Year 1432 and happy reading.

THE SPOTLIGHT Editorial Policy:

- Ensure that all reporting in THE SPOTLIGHT is accurate and not misleading or false. If errors arise, they will be corrected promptly and appropriately.
- Authors should be bound by accuracy, fairness and balance, should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers by commission or omission, and should be respectful to the privacy of persons, space and personal information.
- Distinction should be drawn between factual information and comment or opinion, which should be accurate and should be presented as such.
- Letters for publication should be guided by fairness, balance, and public interest.
- Headlines, sub-headings, and captions should accurately and fairly convey the substance or a key element of the article they are designed to cover.
- The authors are to avoid overstepping the bounds of good taste and decency, and the use of offensive language, in a way that is likely to cause significant offense to people.
- We encourage debate around current issues, however, we do not encourage or condone illegal activity.
- Authors must be cautious not to defame any individual, group or organisation.
- We value truthfulness, honest opinion (based on stated facts), and Public interest.
- Contributors may have their content published anonymously or by using a fake name (but the true name is disclosed to the editors) in situations where the publication of their name may cause personal harm.
- All articles and other submissions should be grammar-checked and submitted in Microsoft Word (.docs) or pure text (txt) format. Pictures and diagrams should be separately attached. For reference, APA or, in case of a technical article, IEEE guidelines should be followed.
- Views expressed in their articles are the authors' own

OP-ED

The Erosion of Fundamental Rights in Bangladesh Post-August 2024

Mirza Rakib

The **Constitution of Bangladesh**, adopted on November 4, 1972, and enacted on December 16, 1972, is the supreme law of the country, rooted in its Liberation War. The process began with the **Proclamation of Independence** on April 10, 1971, followed by the formation of the **Provisional Government** on April 17, 1971, which served as the interim constitutional framework. After independence, a 34-member drafting committee, led by Dr. Kamal Hossain, was formed on April 11, 1972. The committee worked over several sessions, and the final draft was presented on October 12, 1972. Reflecting the principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism, and secularism, it guarantees fundamental human rights, equality, the rule of law, and justice for all citizens, inspired by global human rights instruments.

The Constitution outlines **Fundamental Rights** in Part III (Articles 26–47A), which are legally enforceable by the courts. These rights encompass a wide range of civil and political liberties. Let us outline how fundamental rights have been violated since August 5, 2024.

After the regime change in Bangladesh in August 2024, we have seen a breakdown in law and order. Since February 8, a total of 11,927 people have been arrested across Bangladesh under the ongoing **Operation Devil Hunt**, with most of the arrests linked to the former ruling **Awami League supporters**. Additionally, 20,372 individuals were arrested in connection with new and existing cases during the same period, according to the **Manobadhikar Sangskriti Foundation (MSF)**. These actions are complete breaches of **Article 27 (Equality before the law)**.

In the aftermath of **Sheikh Hasina's** departure on August 5, 2024, Bangladesh's minority communities faced significant challenges and threats. Between August 4 and 20, 2,010 incidents of communal violence were reported, including 9 murders and 4 cases of rape. Attacks targeted 69 places of worship, 915 homes, and 953 businesses, with widespread vandalism, looting, and arson. Additional incidents included physical assaults and illegal occupation of land and property. In response, Hindu Monk **Chinmoy Krishna Das** led several rallies; later, he was arrested on false charges of sedition and has been locked up in prison for an extended period (VOA Bangla, December 12, 2024). These are violations of **Article 28 (Discrimination on grounds of religion, etc.)**.

According to **Article 32 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty)**, this right has not been upheld since August 5. We observed that agitators attacked the **Enayetpur Police Station in Sirajganj**. They beat up policemen and set fire to the station. Many policemen went to the roof of the station to save themselves. At least 15 policemen, including an officer-in-charge, were hacked and burnt to death (Daily Star, August 4, 2024). **Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)**, a leading Bangladeshi human rights organization, reported that at least 128 people were killed by mobs in 2024. On December 16, 2024, two **Chhatra League** (student wing of Awami League) activists were hacked to death in **Nachol, Chapainawabganj district**, for writing the slogan "Joy Bangla" on a wall. The total number of deaths is in the thousands. However, news about these incidents has not been published in mainstream media.

In Bangladesh, the principles enshrined in **Article 35 (Protection in respect of trial and punishment)** of the Constitution are being violated in the context of political repression, excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, and politically motivated trials. These practices undermine the democratic principles of a fair and

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Abysmal Law and Order Situation

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further reprisal from the perpetrators. The law enforcers often remain reluctant to protect the families of the victims or do not respond to the complaints filed against the perpetrators.

(3) Stop rise of religious polarization and hate crimes against religious and ethnic minority groups.

Religious extremism has been alarmingly on the rise. Since regime change, many terrorist groups outlawed internationally and in Bangladesh have become active, openly flaunting their strength and inciting violence against the religious and ethnic minority population. Hindus, Muslim Ahmadiyya Jamaat and ethnic people have been subject to violence, intimidation, and arson by the organized Islamic extremist mobs. Damage to properties, places of worship, and businesses owned by minorities is being reported regularly across the country. Hundreds of employees and new recruits from the minority communities, particularly from Hindu faith, have lost their jobs by the decision of the Interim Government. Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Das Pravu was arrested on November 25, 2024, for allegedly desecrating the national flag at a rally demanding protection of Hindus. Mr. Pravu was the main speaker at the rally, and he has been languishing in prison without trial or bail. It is reasonable to believe that these hate crimes are happening and intensifying under the tutelage of the government. Safety of the minority groups is of paramount importance for a functional democracy.

(4) Revitalize and reactivate the Police Force, worst hit by the frenzied mob demanding regime change.

The violent mobs overran 460 police stations across the country, looted police armories, broke prison gates and freed convicted dangerous prisoners and religious terrorists; in the process, killed hundreds of cops, many on the line of duty with incomprehensible display of brutality. 15 police officers were hacked to death at a police station in Enayetpur under Sirajganj district. The bodies of the victims were displayed for days, publicly hanging from overbridges or trees. Looted Police firearms, communication equipment, etc., have resurfaced in the hands of vigilantes, street mobs and Islamic extremists. Islamic terrorists freed by prison breaks are now openly participating in street protests and political rallies of the outlawed Islamic terrorist groups like Harkat-e-Jihad and Hizb ut-Tahrir. The unprecedented but well-planned carnage to incapacitate police forces started in mid-July and intensely continued through the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's Government on August 05, installation of the new Interim Government of Muhammad Yunus on August 08 till August 15, 2024.

The Yunus Government hasn't taken any

steps to recover arms or to nab escaped convicted criminals and terrorists. To the contrary, one of the early proclamations of the Interim Government of Yunus was issuing indemnity to shield the perpetrators from law for the crimes committed against police and Awami League workers from July 15 to August 8, 2024. The police force is the vital tool of a democratic system. Lifting this indemnity is imperative to re-energize the currently demoralized Police force.

(5) Curve the alarming rise and visible display of strength by the Islamist terrorist groups outlawed in Bangladesh and in many other countries.

In a recent statement, the Army Chief of Bangladesh has expressed his fear that a large-scale armed campaign by the Islamist terrorist groups is imminent. The Interim Government of Muhammad Yunus and his law enforcers are clearly aiding and abetting the actions of these groups, who are fomenting religious hate and politics of annihilation.

(6) Release all prisoners of conscience immediately.

Besides a staggering number of political prisoners, there are now about 17 leading journalists, a significant number of human rights leaders and activists and cultural personalities who are in prison for months without trial and hearing for bail. They are kept in squalid, unhygienic living conditions, food supplies are inadequate and unconsumable, often denied the right to meet families, allowed in prison code. Farzana Rupa, a leading female journalist on investigative, political and women's issues, is sharing a room with drug addicts and mentally deranged prisoners, often denied rights to meet her daughter. Internationally renowned Human Rights activist and writer Shahriar Kabir, a cancer patient, recently had a stroke and was sent to a prison hospital without adequate facilities for proper treatment of his ailment. He survived, but his health condition has deteriorated significantly. All of these detainees are randomly charged with murder cases, which appear to be fictitious. The Interim Government has been intentionally propagating an atmosphere of fear, stifling freedom of expression.

(7) Hold a free, fair and inclusive election under a caretaker government.

The democratic process should be restored at the earliest to replace the unelected repressive government of Muhammad Yunus with an elected political government. This is the only way out of the current abysmal state of lawlessness and fear that is choking the country blues in the stranglehold of illegitimate power.

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The Erosion of Fundamental Rights

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impartial justice system and violate citizens' constitutional rights. It has been observed that freedom fighters are often neglected, harassed, insulted, and, at times, even subjected to physical assault.

In a concerning escalation, recently, 84 lawyers have been arrested in Bangladesh on false murder charges, allegedly due to their political ties with the ruling **Awami League**, sparking outrage. The detained lawyers, known for advocating human rights and free speech, have been sent to jail without trial, raising suspicions of government misuse of the justice system to silence critics. The attacks on journalists have surged, with 358 incidents reported from August 2024 to February 2025. International rights groups have urged the government to protect freedom of expression (New Age, March 22, 2025). It is also reported in local and international media that due to their respect for the **Father of the Nation** and the **Liberation War**, many government employees have lost their jobs. The above incidents are complete violations of **Articles 37–41 (Freedom of speech, assembly, association, religion, and movement)**.

In essence, the **Constitution of Bangladesh** provides a robust legal framework for human rights, rooted in the country's commitment to democracy, justice, and human dignity. The disparity mentioned above is the reason that Bangladesh is no longer operating based on its constitution. Where the constitution has ensured the protection of its citizens, ignoring it leaves the people feeling helpless. It is hoped that through a more democratic government system, Bangladesh will be able to restore its constitution among the people.

Lead Story

Democratic Governance at the Local Level in Bangladesh: Status, Participation, and Challenges

Latiful Kabir

The local government system in Bangladesh has a long and evolving history, shaped by colonial legacies, constitutional mandates, and shifting political priorities. The roots of local self-governance date back to British rule, with the establishment of local boards and district councils. After independence in 1971, Bangladesh committed to fostering decentralized governance through constitutional provisions, which emphasized the importance of elected local bodies to ensure citizen participation and service delivery.

In principle, local government institutions (LGIs) such as **City Corporations, Municipalities, Zilla Parishads (District), Upazila Parishads (Sub-District), and Union Parishads** are designed to be the closest tier of governance to the people, facilitating grassroots democracy. These institutions are responsible for delivering essential services, managing local infrastructure, and representing the voices of citizens in their respective jurisdictions. Regular elections and community-based activities were meant to strengthen public engagement, transparency, and accountability.

However, in practice, the promise of democratic local governance remains largely unfulfilled. While elections are held at various levels, meaningful **people's participation** is often limited by political interference, bureaucratic control, and the absence of empowered institutions. The trend of appointing **central government officials**, particularly at the **Upazila level**, undermines the autonomy of elected representatives. In many cases, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) plays a dominant role, reducing elected Upazila Chairmen to symbolic figures with little real power.

One of the most pressing challenges is the **financial dependency** of local governments on the central government. Annual budgets for City Corporations, Upazilas, and Union Parishads are overwhelmingly reliant on allocations from the national treasury. This dependency restricts the ability of LGIs to plan and execute projects based on local needs. Moreover, delays in fund disbursement and the absence of a predictable fiscal transfer mechanism further weaken their effectiveness.

Legal constraints also hamper the authority of local government institutions. Despite the existence of enabling laws, overlapping responsibilities between administrative and elected bodies often lead to conflicts and confusion. Local bodies lack the legal safeguards to resist undue interference or to assert jurisdiction over key areas of governance.

Recently, the central government headed by Professor Yunus has taken an alarming step by removing all elected representatives from local government bodies and appointing officials, mostly from the administrative cadre, to oversee public affairs at the City, Town, Zilla (District) and Upazila (Sub-District) levels. At the Union Parishad level, no one has been appointed to carry out public duties, creating a governance vacuum at the most local tier. This centralization move undermines the constitutional principle of decentralization and poses a serious threat to grassroots democracy.

Such decisions strip local populations of their right to elect their representatives and erode public trust in the democratic process. Elected officials serve as the legitimate voice of the community;

replacing them with appointed bureaucrats weakens local accountability, reduces transparency, and disconnects governance from people's real needs. Moreover, the central government should not have the unilateral authority to dissolve or cancel duly elected local governments. Doing so violates the spirit of representative democracy and creates a dangerous precedent for authoritarian overreach.

The current structure, where local democracy is heavily supervised and constrained by centralized control, raises fundamental questions about accountability and democratic legitimacy. Without genuine fiscal and administrative autonomy, the local government cannot function as an effective democratic institution.

To strengthen local democratic governance, Bangladesh must commit to institutional reforms that restore power to elected representatives, establish clear legal frameworks, and develop a more equitable system of fiscal decentralization. Only then can local governments fulfill their role as the foundation of participatory democracy.

Latiful Kabir
Canada

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Introduction

In July-August 2024, the movement to overthrow the elected democratic government in the name of the anti-discrimination student movement in Bangladesh created chaos across the whole country. Until the fall of the government, the role of various forces of the then government was publicized in various national and international media. But the details of the destruction those followed in Bangladesh during the last period of the fall of the government and its aftermath were not published in the media. Especially, the details of the murders, arson, looting and seizure of other people's property by the Jamaat-BNP and anti-discrimination students were not published. The media in Bangladesh could not publish all these news due to its strict government censorship. Especially due to the indemnity ordinance imposed by the government, it was not possible to take any legal action against these atrocities. In view of this, the violence that was carried out by the Jamaat-BNP and anti-discrimination students, in Sirajganj on 4 and 5 August 2024 a part of it is published here. This reflects rest of the 64 districts in Bangladesh.

Despite efforts, many aggrieved persons have expressed their inability to provide their names, addresses, photos/videos due to fear. We hope that journalists will disseminate these through your widely circulated media at home and abroad in the interest of protecting human rights and justice. We draw the attention of international and national human rights organizations to take necessary measures in this regard. At the same time, we expect justice for every crime by repealing the impunity ordinance.

We demand exemplary punishment for the criminals through media inquiries and subject to investigation of the incidents.

We seek your full cooperation in this regard.

Lead Story

Control of Media Freedom in Bangladesh: Call to the International Community to Safeguard Freedom of Expression

M. Hossain

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, highlights the fundamental rights vital for freedom, justice, and the pursuit of peace. These rights, such as freedom of expression, are the state's responsibility to protect.

In Bangladesh, the interim government led by Dr. Yunus poses a significant threat to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, affecting human rights organizations worldwide. As of March 21, 2025, the situation has worsened, with a significant rise in arrests, job dismissals, and intimidation of individuals exercising their right to free expression. This urgent and concerning situation has global implications, underscoring the need for immediate intervention from international organizations to safeguard freedom of speech.

Systematic violations of free expression persist, often accompanied by violence from non-state actors. Recent assaults on journalists, such as the incident on February 3 in Shariatpur, underscore the pressing need for immediate government intervention. Article 39 of the Bangladeshi Constitution, in accordance with Article 19 of the ICCPR, mandates swift action to protect media professionals and hold offenders accountable. Legislative reforms are not just a suggestion but a necessity to address these issues.

The Cybersecurity Act (CSA) further restricts free expression, as illustrated by the arrest of writer Nahid Hasan for allegedly offending religious sentiments. Although the government plans to repeal the CSA, the proposed reforms pose a threat to free speech. Future laws must align with international standards, as these provide a global perspective and include input from civil society.

As Bangladesh's political dynamics shift following the ousting of Sheikh Hasina, the interim government must prioritize human rights to maintain stability. We urge Bangladeshi authorities to ensure that legislation follows a transparent process, drop charges against individuals merely expressing their views, repeal oppressive laws, and protect journalists

and activists from harassment and violence.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a Fact-Finding Report on February 12, 2025, outlining significant human rights violations during the protests in Bangladesh in July and August 2024. The report expresses serious concerns about the suppression of free speech and press freedoms.

On July 18, a violent mob stormed the Bangladesh TV headquarters in Rampura, overwhelming the police and causing extensive damage. The police evacuated the building, while the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) was deployed under the direction of the Prime Minister's Office and ordered to use force to regain control of the situation.

Following Sheikh Hasina's departure on August 5, mobs vandalized and set fire to several television stations. Ekattor TV was attacked on August 3 and again on the 5th, when a crowd looted and burned the station. Other channels, including Somoy TV, ATN News, ATN Bangla, DBC News, My TV, Bijoy TV, and Gazi TV, faced vandalism and assaults on their journalists.

On August 7, a crowd of about 200 people, some of whom were armed, stormed Mohona TV while chanting slogans in support of the BNP. They assaulted a senior journalist and demanded payment to prevent vandalism or arson at the station.

Several journalists have faced accusations of murder and violence, leading to the arrest of prominent supporters of the Awami League. This situation raises concerns about the credibility of these claims. In October, the Interim Government Committee was established to address harassment cases involving journalists. On November 21, the Chief Advisor acknowledged that murder cases had been expedited but relied on outdated methods. The Bangladeshi government asserted that these cases were filed legally by victims and remain committed to conducting fair investigations to identify the actual perpetrators.

In November 2024, the Editors' Council raised alarms about the increasing pressures on media in Bangladesh under the interim government. These pressures included the murders of journalists and the revocation of press credentials for 49 reporters. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) expressed concern over threats to journalists and a rise in legal actions against reporters, describing these developments as signs of growing authoritarianism.

On November 5, the Editors' Council called for action against "mob justice," which threatens media freedom, and criticized society's hostility toward independent journalism. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) also condemned the government's use of accreditation as a repressive tactic, emphasizing the revocation of credentials for 29 journalists linked to the Awami League. Such actions undermine media independence.

On February 21, 2025, a Jamaat leader threatened to vandalize Ekushey Television (ETV) unless cameraman Mohammad Rumi Hasan Talukdar was dismissed over a dispute. ETV's security officer filed a general report at the Tejgaon police station, expressing concerns for safety and stating that Talukdar had been warned that his termination was necessary to prevent vandalism at the station.

Eight months after the alleged coup, the BNP, Jamaat, and NCP continue to wield considerable influence over the media landscape. This situation highlights ongoing reports of staff layoffs and new hires, which raise persistent concerns about corruption. The total number of allegations against journalists nationwide remains undisclosed. Several examples illustrate how the current government, led by Dr. Yunus, has imposed restrictions on media freedom in Bangladesh.

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Control of Media Freedom in Bangladesh

[Continued from Page 8]

BTV is currently the only government-owned television station in the country. Recently, Mahbubul Alam, a journalist affiliated with Jamaat, was appointed as the new Director-General. He had previously worked at Noidiganta newspaper. He has assumed his role and terminated all district representatives nationwide. He also dismissed several journalists and senior officials at headquarters.

The most prominent media owner in the country is the Bashundhara Group, which operates six media companies. A media director who serves as the Deputy Managing Director of the Bashundhara Group oversees these companies. On August 5, journalist Kader Goni Chowdhury assumed the role of Deputy Managing Director (DMD) at East-West Media Group, which Bashundhara owns. Kader Goni Chowdhury identifies more closely with Tarique Rahman than with the journalistic community, clearly aligning with the BNP rather than with journalists.

Interestingly, he set his salary and benefits, as well as those of his subordinates, instead of focusing on the owner's or the organization's profits and losses—an unusual occurrence in Bangladesh's media landscape. Upon taking over media operations, Chowdhury dismissed Rahul Raha, the news chief of News 24 TV, and appointed Shariful Islam Sharif as the new chief of news, naming Farhadul Islam Farid as the executive editor. Additionally, he removed special reporter Joydev Chandra Das from News 24 TV.

The license for Ekattor TV is held by Mozammel Haque Babu, who has sold a portion of it to Meghna Group, an investor. Mozammel has also resigned as CEO of Ekattor TV, with special reporter Shafik Ahmed taking over the role. Several associates, including Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, Noor Safa Zulhaz, A Z M Azad, Monir Hossain Liton, Bayezid Milki, Mainuddin Dulal, Farhana Rahman, Tuhinur Sultana, Jhumur Bari, Rijajul Bashar, Farzana Karim, Soumitra Majumdar, Falguni Rashid, and Mishu Milan, along with nearly 40 other staff members—such as journalists, producers, assistant producers, and camera operators—have been laid off. Additionally, most district and upazila representatives, as well as special representatives from across the country, have also been dismissed.

Loton Ekram has been appointed as the editor of DBC News TV despite lacking prior experience in the television industry. Following this appointment, editors

Zayedul Ahsan Pintu and Pranab Saha, along with Chief News Editor Naeem Tariq and other team members—including Masud Ibn Karzon, Jhumi Rahman, Kawsara Chowdhury Kumu, Abdullah Al Masum, Masudur Rahman, Nadim Mahmud, Tabassum Sarwar Chaiti, Farhad Ibn Malek, Bikash Biswas, and nearly 20 others—have been dismissed by Loton Ekram. Most districts, upazila, and special representatives at DBC have also been removed from their positions.

At Ekushey TV, Harunur Rashid Swapan has been appointed as the new chief, succeeding Rashed Chowdhury, who was removed from the position. The entire team of representatives from across the country has been replaced. Several individuals, including Akhil Poddar, Debashish Ray, Farzana Shova, and Azharul Islam Opu, have also lost their jobs.

Shahidul Azam has been appointed as the news chief at ATN News, succeeding Probbash Amin. Md. Mosharraf Hossain is now the Chief News Editor. At ATN Bangla, Matiur Rahman has taken over as executive editor from J.I. Mamun. Ilyas Hossain is the new news chief at RTV, having previously served as the Assistant Private Secretary to Deputy Minister Abdus Salam Pintur, who is linked to the 2004 grenade attack case.

Additionally, AKM Wahiduz-zaman Apollo, a central leader of the BNP, has become a shareholder and director of RTV without any investment, utilizing Occupier. News chief Asadullah Maruf, senior journalist Sharif Uddin Lemon, and Ruhul Amin Tuhin have been let go.

At Baishakhi TV, Ziaul Kabir Suman has been appointed as the news chief, succeeding Ashok Chowdhury, and Touhidul Islam Shanto has been named Chief News Editor. Several staff members, including Saifur Islam, Sanchita Sharma, and Joy Prakash, have been let go.

Mustafa Akmal has succeeded Mamun Abdullah as news chief at Independent TV. Several employ-

ees, including Ashis Saikat, Animesh Kar, and Biplob Rahman, have been laid off. go. Mohammad Mohiuddin is now the news chief at Desh TV, and Shamima Akhtar and Joy Kumar Yadav have also been dismissed.

Shampa Rahman has been appointed as the managing director of Samay TV, succeeding Joibair Ahmed. Niaz Morshed has assumed the role of Head of Editorial at Samay TV. Several employees have been let go, including Mujtaba Danish, Khan Muhammad Rumel, Lopa Ahmed, Ariful Sajjad, Debashish Kumar Ray, Omar Faruq, Bulbul Reza, and Kamal Hossain Shahriar.

Gawsul Azam Bipu has been appointed as the news chief at Gazi TV. Shahin Raja has taken on the role of editorial head at Mohona TV. Editor Nazrul Kabir has been dismissed from Bangla TV. At Nagorik TV, Chief News Editor Deep Azad and Jayanta Karmakar, Tuhin Khalifa, Suraiya Samanta, Pintoo Hajong, and nearly 39 others have also been let go. Recently, Janisia Borna, a newsroom editor and presenter at Ekhan TV, and another media worker were laid off. Additionally, the government led by Dr. Yunus has shut down Green TV.

We will review printed newspapers. Kader Gani Chowdhury, Deputy Managing Director (DMD) of East West Media Group, which is owned by the Bashundhara Group, has dismissed Imdadul Haque Milan as editor of the Daily Kalerkontho. Poet Hasan Hafiz has been appointed to take over Milan's responsibilities. Executive Editor Haider Ali and senior journalist Sojib Ghosh have also been released from their roles.

Neim Nizam, the former editor of Daily Bangladesh Pratidin, was succeeded by Abu Taher, now the acting editor. Saleh Uddin has assumed the role of Executive Editor at Daily Ittefaq, while Shyamol Sarkar, a special correspondent, has been relieved of his duties. Khurshid Alam has been appointed Executive Editor of Daily Jayjay Din, and Executive Editor Arun Kumar Dey has also been let go.

Ilias Uddin Khan is now the acting editor at Daily Bhorer Akash, following the removal of Monoranjan Ghoshal from his position. After Saiful Alam's departure, Abdul Hai Shikdar, the editor of the Jamuna Group's Daily Jugantor, was appointed as the new editor. Additionally, senior journalist Morchaaleen Babla has been named acting editor of Daily Protidiner Bangladesh, succeeding Mustafiz Shafiq, who was also dismissed from his role.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Events, News and Views

GCDG INAUGURATION CEREMONY

The **Global Centre for Democratic Governance (GCDG)** was formally inaugurated today in a virtual ceremony that brought together distinguished speakers, thought leaders, and advocates from across the globe, united in their shared commitment to defending democracy, justice, and human rights in Bangladesh and beyond.

The inauguration was officially opened by **Dr. Habibe Millat**, President of GCDG, who welcomed attendees and emphasized the Centre's mission to serve as a global platform for research, advocacy, and engagement in democratic governance. The event was **moderated by Dr. Farzana Yusuf**, a prominent academic and activist based in Australia. Dr. Yusuf guided the program with insight and clarity, ensuring a smooth and thoughtful dialogue among the speakers and participants. A major highlight of the event was the **launch of the official GCDG website**, unveiled by **Latiful Kabir**, a professional engineer and senior leader based in Canada. In his remarks, Kabir described the website as a digital hub for public engagement, policy research, publications, and member participation. "This platform reflects our values—transparency, inclusion, and action," he noted, encouraging all attendees to explore and share the site.

Manirul Islam, a Canadian human rights advocate and one of the founding voices of GCDG, delivered a powerful presentation outlining **the state of human rights violations in Bangladesh**, particularly in the wake of political upheavals and the consolidation of power by the interim government. His remarks highlighted the erosion of institutional checks and the growing impunity around extrajudicial practices, censorship, and persecution.

The program also featured two prominent **guest speakers**:

Barrister Tania Amir, a respected constitutional expert and legal activist from the UK, addressed the legal frameworks being undermined in Bangladesh and called for international solidarity in defending democratic values.

Kit Klarenberg, an investigative journalist from *The Grayzone*, UK, offered a sharp analysis of the geopolitical forces shaping authoritarian tendencies in South Asia and emphasized the importance of independent journalism in exposing state repression.

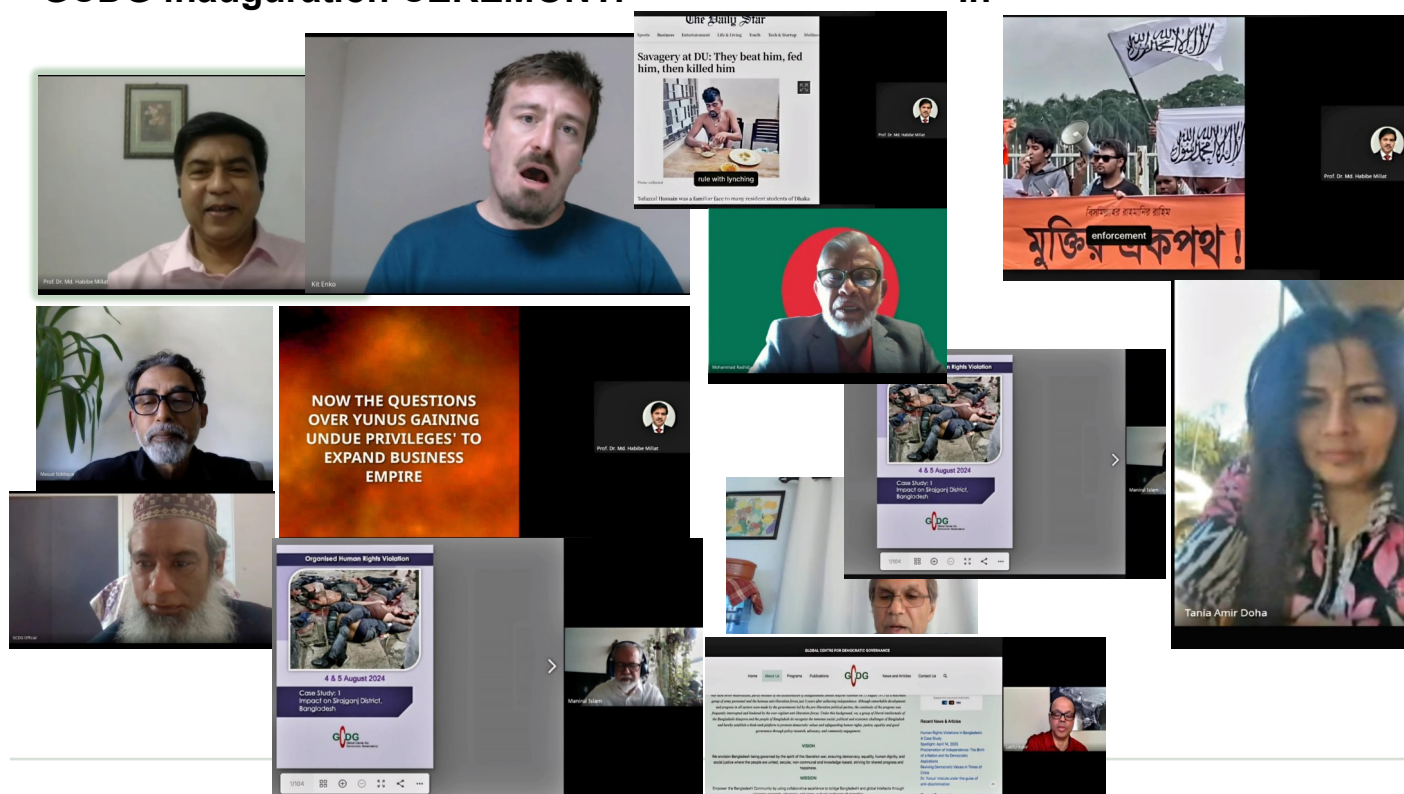
The session concluded with thoughtful **closing remarks by Professor Abdur Rashid**, a leading academic based in New Zealand. Professor Rashid reflected on the discussions of the day and reaffirmed GCDG's commitment to building a more just, inclusive, and democratic future. He called on supporters across continents to remain engaged and united in this vital mission.

With its launch, GCDG sets a bold and necessary course toward **restoring democratic accountability, protecting human dignity, and amplifying voices for justice**.

The full livestream of the event is now available on **Facebook** and **YouTube**, and all related resources can be accessed via www.globalcdg.org.

GCDG inauguration CEREMONY:

In



WORLD MEDIA WATCH

Grim Report on Human Rights Violations

Case Study 1: Sirajgonj District, Bangladesh

Time Period: August 4 to August 5

The document provides a detailed account of the violence that occurred in the District of Sirajgonj, one of the 64 districts of Bangladesh. The report has recorded the events from August 4 to August 5. Therefore, it is a fractional view of a large landscape of violence entailed by anti-government protests that started in Dhaka in early July and quickly engulfed the whole



country. It has been continuing unabated since. The document depicts graphic text, pictures, and videos of mayhem, lynching, mutilated bodies of victims, arson, and the destruction of public and private properties.

The ferocity of these massive attacks on lives and properties is unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh, parallels may only be drawn with the heinous crimes and genocide committed during our liberation war in 1971 by the invading Pakistani military and their local armed collaborators known as Razakar, Al Badar and Al Shams. On this occasion, the perpetrators are all Bangladeshis – the mob, an eclectic coalition of the defeated collaborators of our liberation war, Jamat-e-Islami, outlawed Islamic fundamentalist sleeper cells and right-wing Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the second largest stakeholder in our democracy. This coalition, headed by the Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus and aided by imperialist funds and logistics, meticulously scaled up a peaceful demonstration of the students into a full-fledged violent mob with the single agenda of regime change.

Two days' violence in Sirajgonj resulted in 30 casualties: 15 police officers from Enayetpur police station were brutally hacked and burnt to death by a frenzied mob, 4 mob members were killed by rubber bullets fired by fleeing police, 1 journalist on the line of duty was killed, and the remaining 10 victims have Awami League connections, ranging from grassroot workers to elected representatives. Properties and businesses owned by people connected with the Awami League politics were also indiscriminately targeted, looted, and often set ablaze. As a result, a large number of the population became internally displaced refugees.

The perpetrators of these country-wide crimes have been shielded by the indemnity issued by the Interim Government of Muhammad Yunus. The Secretary of Sirajgonj BNP and a leader of Hifajot Majlis, an Islamic fundamentalist party, confessed in an outdoor political rally to their involvement in the Enayetpur police station carnage. However, a police list of accused individuals from the Enayetpur carnage includes the names of four local Awami League leaders and six thousand unidentified assailants.

The document on violence in Sirajgonj is still a work-in-progress, collecting information and documentation from early July through the overthrow of the elected Government of Sheikh Hasina up to date. The scope of work will eventually expand to all 64 districts.



At a glance: 4th and 5th August 2024 in Sirajgonj district

Details of BNP-Jamaat's terrorist activities in the name of anti-discrimination student movement:

➤ Killed	: 30 (including 15 on-duty police officers)
➤ Injured	: More than 500
➤ Looting, vandalism and arson	: 323
	• Government establishments : 14 • Private establishments : 309
➤ Financial losses	: 133 crore in BDT (US \$11 million)
➤ Number of lawsuits	: 52 (Total number of defendants 16795)
	• Number of named defendants: 3,040 • Number of unknown accused: 13,755

For Details:

- English Version : <https://globalcdg.org/ohrvbd-casestudy-1en>
- Bengali Version : <https://globalcdg.org/ohrvbd-casestudy-1bn>

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THE BACK PAGE



শেষের পাতা



শুভ নববর্ষ ১৪৩২

HAPPY BANGLA NEW YEAR 1432

এক সোনালি অতীত থেকে একটি স্বাধীন জাতির অভ্যুদয়: পহেলা বৈশাখের আত্মিক আহ্বান

লতিফুল কবির

বাঙালির সোনালি অতীত থেকে শুরু করে স্বাধীন সার্বভৌম দেশ হিসেবে বাংলাদেশের অভ্যুদয় এবং তারপর কয়েকদশক পর্যন্ত পহেলা বৈশাখ বাঙালির নিজস্ব ভাষা ও সংস্কৃতির ওপর দাঁড়িয়ে থাকা এক সর্বজনীন বর্ষবরণ উৎসব। ১৯৫২ সালের ভাষা আন্দোলনের সাংস্কৃতিক সমাবেশ বাদ দিলে, পহেলা বৈশাখই বাঙালির সর্ববৃহৎ একাবদ্ধতা প্রকাশের দিন। ভাষা আন্দোলনের সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্য বরাবরই নগরকেন্দ্রিক, মধ্যবিত্তের পন্থার আনা দাবি তাকে ঘিরে; কিন্তু, পহেলা বৈশাখকে নাগরিক মধ্যবিত্তের প্রিয় উঠতে অনেক দিন অপেক্ষা করতে হয়েছে।

সত্তরের দশকে ছায়ানটের উদ্যোগে রমনায় পহেলা বৈশাখ উদযাপন শুরু হয়, একটি সম্ভাব্য জাতি-রাষ্ট্রের জন্মকে স্বাগত জানানোর প্রতীকী প্রয়াস হিসেবে। ঘিরে এটি দেশের অন্যান্য শহর ও জনপদে ছড়িয়ে পড়লেও, রমনার উৎসব বরাবরই এক অনন্য মর্যাদা নিয়ে এগিয়ে গেছে। বাঙালির সাংস্কৃতিক আন্দোলন গড়ে তোলার এবং তাকে টিকিয়ে রাখার এই প্রচেষ্টা নিঃসন্দেহে বিস্ময়কর।

স্বাধীনতার পর—বিশেষ করে ১৯৭৫ সালে বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের হত্যাকাণ্ডের পরে—নাগরিক বাঙালির সামনে আত্মপরিচয়ের এক গভীর সংকট দেখা দেয়। কিছুটা ভুল বোঝাবুঝির কারণে, আর কিছুটা মধ্যপ্রাচ্য থেকে আসা পুঁজির প্রভাবে, মধ্যবিত্ত শ্রেণি ঘিরে এক সাংস্কৃতিক দিশাহীনতায় ডুবে যেতে থাকে। গত পাঁচ দশকেও জাতি সেই সংকট থেকে পুরোপুরি বেরিয়ে আসতে পারেনি। বিশ্বায়নের ফলে অর্থ-সম্পদ ও প্রবাসে বাঙালির বিস্তার ঘটেছে ঠিকই, কিন্তু গণতন্ত্র বা মানবিক মূল্যবোধের মতো আধুনিক চিন্তার জায়গায় মধ্যযুগীয় মানসিকতা আধিপত্য বিস্তার করেছে, যা বাঙালির সাংস্কৃতিক অর্জনগুলোকে ধ্বংসের দিকে ঠেলে দিয়েছে।

যাঁরা একসময় বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিক পরিসরে আত্মপরিচয় নিয়ে দ্বিধা সৃষ্টি করেছিলেন, কিংবা যাঁরা সেই দ্বিধাকে রাজনৈতিক অস্ত্র বানিয়ে জাতিকে বিভক্ত করেছিলেন—তারা কেউই আজ টিকে নেই। মধ্যযুগীয় বর্বরতা, যা এখন মবতন্ত্রের ছায়ায় ফিরে এসেছে, তা ক্রমেই আগ্রাসী হয়ে উঠছে—এটা অনেকেই টের পাচ্ছেন না। এভাবে চলতে থাকলে বাঙালি জাতি ধ্বংসের মুখে পড়বে, এতে কোনো সন্দেহ নেই। এই কারণেই বাঙালিকে ফিরে যেতে হবে।

ফিরে যেতে হবে শতবর্ষব্যাপী বর্ষবরণ উৎসবের সেই চেতনাতে, যা বাঙালির আত্মপরিচয়ের ভিত্তি। এই উৎসবে কোনো শব্দ বা প্রতীক ত্যাগ করা আবশ্যিক সিদ্ধান্ত হবে। পৃথিবীর কোনো জাতিই তাদের ঐতিহ্যকে এভাবে বিসর্জন দেয় না। জাপান থেকে চীন, ভারত থেকে ইরান—এশিয়ার যেসব দেশ সফল, তারা সবাই তাদের ঐতিহ্যের প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা রেখেই এগিয়ে যাচ্ছে। বাংলাদেশ এর ব্যতিক্রম হতে পারে না। ঐতিহ্যের প্রতি অসম্মান জাতির সম্ভাবনাকে ক্ষয় করে; আবার আধুনিকতার প্রতি বিমুখতা জাতিকে অগ্রগতির পথ থেকে ছিটকে দেয়। যারা গণতন্ত্র ও মানবাধিকারের প্রতি বেশি প্রতিশ্রুতিবদ্ধ হবে, আগামী পৃথিবী তাদের জন্যই। যারা তা পারবে না, তারা হারিয়ে যাবে। গত কয়েক দশকে আমরা এমন বহু সম্ভাবনাময় জাতিকে হারিয়ে যেতে দেখেছি।

আজ বাঙালি দাঁড়িয়ে আছে এমন এক সন্ধিক্ষেপে, যেখানে হারিয়ে যাওয়ার সব উপকরণ উপস্থিত। প্রশ্ন হলো, এই জাতি কি সেই হাতছানিকে উপেক্ষা করতে পারবে? পহেলা বৈশাখ হোক বাঙালির আত্মচেতনাকে জাগিয়ে তোলার দিন। বাঙালি তার পূর্ণ সম্ভাবনা নিয়ে বিশ্ময়কে আত্মপ্রকাশ করুক—এই হোক নতুন বছরের একমাত্র প্রার্থনা।



From a Glorious Past to a Sovereign Nation: The Spirit of Pahela Bai- shakh

Latiful Kabir

From the golden chapters of Bengal's past to the rise of a sovereign Bangladesh, Pahela Baishakh has stood as a universal celebration rooted in the Bengali language and cultural identity. Excluding the cultural assemblies that grew around the 1952 Language Movement, Pahela Baishakh remains the most profound and widely embraced gathering of the Bengali people. While the cultural legacy of the language movement was largely urban and claimed mostly by the middle class, Pahela Baishakh took time to become a cherished event among the urban bourgeoisie.

In the 1970s, it was primarily the efforts of Chhayanaout that established the tradition of celebrating the Bengali New Year in Ramna,

as a symbolic act to welcome the idea of a nation-state finally becoming visible on the horizon. Though the celebration eventually spread to other cities and towns, the Ramna festivities always held a distinct and elevated significance. The Bengali people's efforts to build and sustain a cultural movement around Pahela Baishakh remain truly remarkable.

Following independence—especially after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975—a crisis of identity emerged among urban Bengalis. Caught between confusion and the growing influence of Middle Eastern capital, the middle class slowly sank into a current of cultural disorientation. Even after five decades, the nation has not fully emerged from that state. Globalization has brought wealth and expanded the Bengali footprint across the world, but instead of embracing democracy and human values, a medieval mindset has taken root, pushing cultural achievements aside.

Those who once questioned their identity in the name of intellectual inquiry or weaponized that confusion for political gains are now losing relevance. Meanwhile, medieval barbarity—disguised under the veil of mob rule—is growing in its aggressiveness, though many fail to recognize the threat. If this continues, the destruction of the Bengali nation seems inevitable.

That is why Bengalis must return—to the century-old tradition of celebrating Pahela Baishakh in its true form. Abandoning any word or symbol from the New Year celebration would be a self-inflicted wound. No other nation does such a thing. From Japan to China, from India to Iran—successful Asian nations move forward while preserving their heritage. Bangladesh can be no exception. Disrespect toward tradition weakens national potential, just as indifference to modernity obstructs progress. The future belongs to those Asian countries that remain firmly committed to democracy and human rights. Those that fail will be lost. We have already seen many promising nations fade away in recent decades.

Bengalis now stand at a historical crossroads. All the elements of national decline are present and calling. Whether the Bengali people can resist that call remains to be seen. Let this Pahela Baishakh awaken our collective consciousness. Let the Bengali nation emerge before the world with all its potential. That is our one and only New Year's wish.

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