

INQUILAB ZINDABAD?

ইনকিলাব জিন্দাবাদ



*A socialist analysis of
Bangladesh after the uprisings*



This pamphlet is a summarised version of the 2025 book ***Inqilab Zindabad?: A socialist analysis of Bangladesh after the uprisings.*** It has been produced by Nijjor Manush and Nijjor Manush's Bangladesh Solidarity Group. Nijjor Manush is a socialist organisation for Bangladeshis, as well as Bengalis, based in Britain. It was formed in 2018, and is independent of any political party in Britain or Bangladesh.

The contents of this publication have been developed through a close reading of news and reports from Bangladesh since the uprisings, collective discussion about political developments in the country, reflections from visits by members back to Bangladesh post-uprising including conversations with a range of ordinary people, as well as correspondence with comrades in Bangladesh, a number of whom were actively involved in the uprisings.

It has been written in the spirit of advancing the struggle for socialism and for a more just and egalitarian Bangladesh - but is necessarily a partial account and limited by our own vantage points of the struggle.

Authors: Safieh Kabir, Azfar Shafi & Saif Kazi

Cover design and artwork: Sonia Uddin

Any reproduction of the text in this pamphlet should be credited to **Nijjor Manush and the authors.**

Contact details:

www.nijjormanush.com

nijjormanush@gmail.com

Instagram: @nijjormanush

Twitter: @nijjormanush



Inquilab Zindabad?: A socialist analysis of Bangladesh after the uprisings

(summary)

What happened in June-August 2024?	 2
What were the roots of Bangladeshi discontent?	 6
How did the uprisings conceptualise this structure of dispossession and violence?	
Who were the forces involved in the uprising?	 10
What was the role of formal political groups?	
Was this an 'Islamist uprising'?	 12
Was this a coup orchestrated by the US?	 14
US imperialism after the uprisings	
Why could the movement not effect a deeper transformation of Bangladesh?	 18
How do you assess the Interim Government?	 22
What interests does the Interim Government represent?	
The honeymoon is over	
What do you make of the new student party, the National Citizen Party (NCP)?	 26
What is the political project of the NCP?	
What is the future of the NCP?	
What has been the fate of the Awami League since the uprising?	 31
How can we understand the cultural shifts in Bangladesh since August 2024?	 33
Vigilantism and political violence	
How can we make sense of the backlash against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?	
A future for socialism in Bangladesh?	 38

What happened in June-August 2024?

The uprisings that culminated in the ouster of the **Awami League (BAL)** government on 5th August 2024 began as a student movement in late June 2024. It was the latest wave of a longer battle to reform the country's quota reservation on 30% of civil service jobs for descendants of freedom fighters in Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War - an increasingly tenuous category decades on from the war.

These quotas, described as 'discriminatory' by the students, restricted the ability for graduates to attain good, formalised jobs in a country where youth unemployment was rampant, wages were stagnant and poverty abounded. Moreover they were also widely seen as open to abuse, and a way for the Awami League government to lubricate its patronage networks to cement their political hegemony - serving as a symbol of the corruption and nepotism that had defined their increasingly repressive years of rule since 2008.

As such, a demand that could otherwise be enclosed as simply the aspirations of students seeking middle-class economic security, obtained broad resonance. The turning point came first on 14th July when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appeared to label the protestors as descendants of *Razakars* - collaborators with the West Pakistani army against Bangladesh's liberation, and a term used to indict oppositional forces as inherently traitorous - which turned student sentiment decisively against her.

Sympathy for students exploded into active support of the masses once the government unleashed the full force of security forces against them thereafter, with curfews, internet blackouts and shoot-on-sight orders becoming features of the state's response. The police killing of student coordinator Abu Sayed in Rangpur on 16th July - filmed in his final moments with arms outstretched defiantly against police bullets - broke the floodgates.

Therefore, while beginning as a movement among students primarily from Dhaka's public universities, it soon spread in scope and depth: growing across the country, spreading to non-public universities - and with workers stepping in,

turning it into a truly mass movement. Student protesters organised to break the **Chhatra League's (BCL;** Awami League student wing) hold on student halls of residence and turn them into sites of resistance - fending off evictions and even managing to expel the BCL from the buildings.

Rickshaw pullers carted the injured, and also joined protests.

Women and girls, despite even greater pressure from families to stay home, and risks of sexual violence from the regime's musclemen, played a major role in the movement.

Areas like Jatrabari, Rampura and Banasree, on Dhaka's expanding outskirts where students rent cheaply alongside workers, became 'autonomous zones' for a time. In Jatrabari, mic announcements in neighbourhoods called residents to prevent security forces from entering, and citizens' patrols checked people for police IDs.

As the 36 days of the movement wore on, with state violence and death tolls ratcheting skywards, the demands from the movement evolved, expanded - and then finally collapsed into a 1 point demand: for the ouster of the government.

On 4th August, with a mass march to Dhaka planned for the following day, the Army's chief finally withdrew support for the Hasina government by refusing to enforce what would have been a profoundly bloody curfew. On 5th August, Sheikh Hasina fled to India, and the Bangladeshi army announced the creation of an **Interim Government (IG)**. The day after, leaders of **Students Against Discrimination (SAD)**, the official coordinating body of the student movement, called for this IG to be headed by microfinance entrepreneur Muhammad Yunus, with his cabinet coming to be staffed by technocrats, NGO executives, retired military officials, academics, business leaders - alongside some figureheads of SAD.

The formation of the IG on 8th August headed off the imminent risk of a return to formal military rule in the country - for the moment. But the composition and character of the IG was a telling indication of the political trajectory of the movement and where Bangladesh would head over the following year.

We consider the 2024 movement to be a genuine mass uprising and a phenomenal moment of courage - from those who stood before police bullets and held out under police torture, risked their lives to hand out water and carry the injured to hospital, and worked ceaselessly to organise continuous creative action.

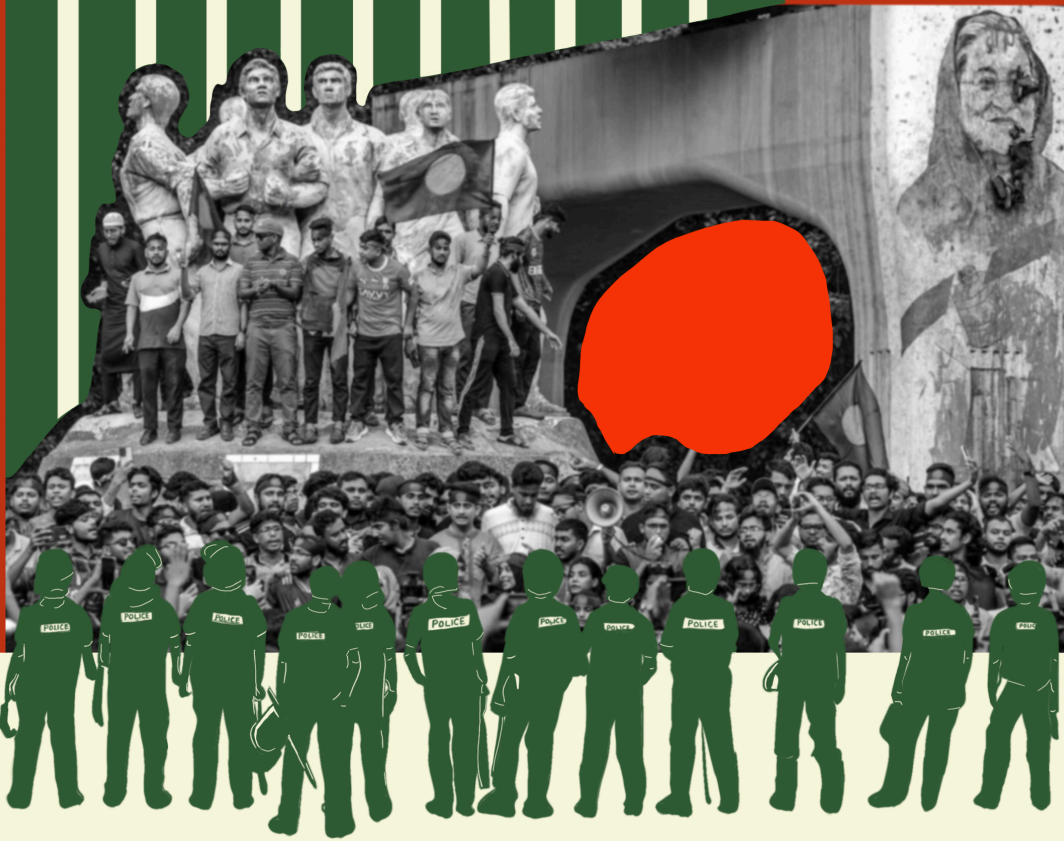
However, there is no immediate prospect of a radical break with political or economic orthodoxies in Bangladesh, with neither the IG nor any of the major political forces offering a transformative agenda for the working classes and peasantry of the country.

The major forces of the new, post-2024 dispensation offer either a rejuvenation of the political centre, or a rehabilitation of the Right.

As such the prevailing political logics in Bangladesh at present are that of technocratic centrism focusing on the reformist politics of anti-corruption, meritocracy, entrepreneurialism and a more 'level playing field' for capitalism in Bangladesh - or a rightwing Islamic revivalism which is seeking to erase the ideological precepts of Bangladesh's liberation struggle of 1971 and refashion Bangladeshi public life.

The struggle for real transformation and a socialist Bangladesh continues.

- 18th July 2025



What were the roots of Bangladeshi discontent?

The crises facing Bangladesh's youth and working classes of all generations are similar to those that have fuelled uprisings in the last decade across the Global South: chronic un/underemployment (especially for youth), spiralling inflation of basic goods, hollowed out public services, and hatred of a repressive regime funnelling the country's wealth into tax havens and mansions abroad.

In the years before the uprising, life for Bangladesh's working and middle classes was characterised by crushing economic pressure. Inflation surged past 11% in 2024 with food prices rising even faster, forcing nearly 28% of households to borrow credit just to cover basic needs.¹ Meanwhile, wages stagnated or fell in real terms. Garment workers, who make up an important part of the workforce, repeatedly struck for a living wage, including in a huge mobilisation in November 2023, but were met with bullets.²

Many youth found themselves unemployed, out of education or stuck in precarious informal work, with some statistics placing the country at double the global average.³ More than figures for unemployment, the condition of working class people is represented by 'underemployment'. In the absence of state benefits, people have to seek work of any kind, but often cannot secure enough hours to feed themselves. 85% of the workforce is in informal employment - rising to 97% for women.⁴

While over 15 unbroken years of Awami League rule had seen the Hasina government come to embody these ills, they were - as with those other cases across the Global South - also expressions of Bangladesh's subordinate position in the global economy.

Since the onset of neoliberalism in the 1980s Bangladeshi governments have adopted an Export-Oriented Industrialisation model promoted heavily by the Global North powers and International Financial Institutions through aid conditions, 'technical assistance' and temporary preferential trade schemes.

The economy was restructured around low-wage manufacturing for global markets, subsidising the emergence of the sweatshop garments industry, while also becoming trapped in IMF and World Bank-led aid and debt dependency.

Rather than push for more social welfare-oriented, resource nationalist and/or redistributionary political projects, the Bangladeshi elite opted to facilitate the drain of wealth from the country - while skimming off some cream for themselves. While millions sank deeper into debt and exhaustion, a small elite grew obscenely wealthy through loan defaults, money laundering, and state-backed deals, funnelling illicit funds into real estate in Dubai and sprawling mansions in Dhaka. While the first mega-profits in Bangladesh were made in the garment sweatshops, the post-2009 Awami League regime supported the expansion of a set of super-rich conglomerates further into real estate, power plants and infrastructure, commercial banking and healthcare.

It's important to recognise that these activities weren't unique to the Awami League regime, but were distinctive in how successfully they were concentrated around the party, and how completely the party controlled security forces, formal and informal. BAL's Chhatra League became the emblematic enforcers of these operations. Their extortion activities extended far beyond the control of university settings. In addition to these 'informal' troops, official state security forces operated in similar ways, contributing to the consolidation of an authoritarian political culture in Bangladesh organised around fear, surveillance, and ideological saturation.

Among the most stark emblems of this is *Aynaghar* ("House of Mirrors"), a network of secret prisons used by the DGFI (the Army's defense intelligence agency) and the notorious paramilitary force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) to detain, torture, and disappear regime opponents. Survivors described windowless cells, psychological torture, and extended incommunicado detention - some emerging after years in near-total darkness. Far from rogue operations, RAB officers testified that enforced disappearances were carried out on the orders of senior leadership, including Hasina herself.

This infrastructure of violence was reinforced through legal and digital repression. The 2018 Digital Security Act (DSA) criminalised dissent by casting

wide nets around anything deemed “false,” “defamatory,” or “anti-state.” It enabled warrantless arrests, blocked websites, and gave the government sweeping power to police online speech. By 2023, over 7,000 cases had been filed under the DSA - targeting journalists, cartoonists, students, and even day labourers posting memes.

The result was a society marked by internalised fear and enforced silence.

The Army - currently being upheld as the clean, trustworthy enforcers (in contrast to the police) - is in fact part of the same nexus.⁵ The Army operates a huge conglomerate of businesses through multiple trusts, ranging from cement, housing societies and hotels to transport and banking. They operate an especially vicious regime of dispossession and violence in the south-eastern Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), home to numerous ‘Jumma’ indigenous communities. Since the 1997 ‘Peace’ Accord ended the Jumma insurgency the CHT, under Operation *Uttoron* (Upliftment), has become the most militarised region in Bangladesh.

How did the uprisings conceptualise this structure of dispossession and violence?

The development industry has long crafted a narrative that this extortion, extra-legal violence and illicit financial flows are symptoms of a country that has not yet learned how to properly order a capitalist market and a ‘good governance’ state. The prescription, therefore, is to remove the supposed aberrations and implement *real capitalism in Bangladesh*. This has become the mainstream logic of political critique in Bangladesh. The narratives of the uprisings shifted between this mainstream mode of understanding, and another which sought to situate Bangladesh within its place in the hierarchy of global capitalism.

The uprisings themselves are typically understood as originating with the push for quota reform in government jobs. This had previously surfaced earlier, in a 2018 wave of the student protests, and tapped into young people’s battle for work, particularly those jobs with some measure of security or benefits.

In addition to the earlier 2018 quota reform protests, the other movement that laid the ground for 2024 was the Road Safety movement of that same year. School children brought the capital to a halt for over a week after two students were killed in a bus accident. Decades of privatisation and deregulation enabled a small number of private operators in the transport sector - largely aligned with the ruling BAL - to dominate the sector through tightly controlled syndicates. In 2018, Dhaka saw surreal scenes of children conducting traffic and demanding licences even from Army vehicles. The movement was ultimately crushed through the combined violence of the police and the 'helmet brigades' of the BAL's student and youth wings, as well as moderate concessions made to the movement. Many of the students of 2024 were school children in 2018 and drew experience on how to respond to these tactics of repression and diffusion.

The 2018 Road Safety and Quota protests illustrated the contradictory character of the 2024 uprisings. The movements were driven by a seething discontent against an unjust order that was structural and deeply political, and motivated by a drive to turn that order upside down. Yet after 2024, this impetus was diverted into the technocratic and depoliticising frames of corruption, meritocracy and narrow reform.



Street art from the 2024 uprisings,

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (Masum-al-Hasan Rocky)⁶

Who were the forces involved in the uprising?

The July uprisings were largely spontaneous, with action and resources were organised through rapidly-formed or informal structures and methods. The most visible and widely-recognised leadership of the student movement were the coordinators of the **Students Against Discrimination** (also known as the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement) platform. The largely Dhaka University-based official leadership of this platform - many of whom have now gone on to form the **National Citizen Party (NCP)** - emerged from a relatively new centrist student organisation called **Ganotantrik Chhatra Shokti** (Democratic Student Force). Students from private universities played a significant role in expanding beyond the quota demands, as they have little stake in civil service jobs.

With the relative weakness of other student-level formations, the SAD and later its civic counterpart, the **Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JNC)**, attracted individuals from diverse political leanings and backgrounds, from the Right to the Centre to the Left. This mixed political make-up has been at odds with attempts to form a centralised structure for the National Citizen Party out of the SAD and JNC, and it appears that the organisational core of the NCP has taken shape around the centre and right-leaning elements of SAD.

The mass of students around the country are from lower-income families, and share material grievances with other working class people. Abu Sayed, the SAD coordinator whose death sparked the major escalation in the movement, was from a poor family. Kader, another SAD coordinator, is the son of a security guard and briefly worked in the garments industry to cover his expenses.

There was a limited presence of self-declared workers' organisations or movements. However, a large number of daily wage labourers and residents of working class areas swelled the ranks of the uprisings, drawn by a shared experience of police violence and economic woes. 112 workers were identified amongst the dead (many more are still unidentified). Some *hijra* (third gender) communities, who are precarious workers in the informal economy, assisted at

overflowing hospitals. Sumon, a garment worker, wrote before he was shot to death, “I will consider myself blessed if I can stand by my country the way Abu Sayed had sacrificed his life for it. Please, everyone, pray for me, so that I can help liberate my country and live freely!”.

What was the role of formal political groups?

Despite the informal structure of much of the movement there was significant involvement from the organised student wings of political parties. **Chhatra Dal**, the student wing of the main centre-right party the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)** and **Shibir**, student wing of the Islamist **Jamaat-e-Islami**, were very active in the movement, later seeking to claim greater degrees of ownership over the uprising⁷. Even segments of the BCL split from Awami League and resigned in protest during the movement

Student socialist groups were active in the uprising, including the **Socialist Students' Front of BaSaD (Bangladesh Socialist Party)**, the **Chhatra Federation** (Students Federation) of the **Ganosanhati Andolan**; and **Revolutionary Student Unity**.

Left student groups played a particularly important role in small towns where there are more sparse political networks, while Left-leaning organisations like the **University Teachers' Network** offered key support, with the Left first publicly marching with the demand of Hasina's resignation at the *Droho Jatra* procession on 2nd August, before Nahid Islam of the SAD echoed the demand on the 3rd.

However, the Left was not the driving force of the July uprisings nor of worker organising during the uprisings and is not their political beneficiaries. The decline of the Left in Bangladesh has a long trajectory, stretching from the violent suppression of the dissident Left under the post-Liberation BAL government, the subsequent military regime's targeted repression of Left organisers, the neoliberal industrial restructure decimating the Left's bases of peasant and unionised bases such as mills. Finally, the rise of NGOs as a form of limited, privatised social movement organising against social distress, usurped the role that the Left would once command.

Was this an ‘Islamist uprising’?

During the uprisings and in their aftermath, the Awami League, its sympathisers and the Indian media have claimed that the uprisings were essentially *Islamist*, engineered by Jamaat-Shibir, who led ‘ordinary students’ astray, and that the SAD leaders are a variety of Islamists in disguise.

The Islamist Right were an important force in the 2024 uprisings - with Shibir’s level of discipline and organisation in particular, and experience in navigating Awami League surveillance and repression, proving an asset for the mobilisations. One significant SAD coordinator, Shadik Kayem, subsequently came out in public as the President of Dhaka University’s clandestine Shibir branch. But the movement did not belong to them nor could they be said to have led the uprisings, and the development of the movements’ decision-making, demands and strategy appears to have been much more messy and improvisational than centrally organised.

However, Bangladesh’s Islamist Right have undeniably claimed a significant cultural victory in the aftermath of the uprising. This owes partly to their level of organisation, their continued presence in the streets and a growing strategic alliance with SAD/NCP - but also to major shifts in the political culture of the country that have served to incubate their politics.

Presently, Jamaat seems to be riding the wave of being ‘something new’, despite their role in the corrupt BNP-Jamaat government of the 2000s. Notably there does not appear to be any intention on either side to revive this alliance. Instead, Jamaat’s proximity to parties like the NCP and smaller Islamist parties as part of a ‘pro-reform’ camp is allowing them to present themselves as the authentic alternative to the continuity parties of the Bangladeshi establishment.

Despite intense repression by the Hasina government and the execution of top leaders for 1971 war crimes, Jamaat saw a manifold rise in members and activists, including in their women’s section, during BAL’s rule. A March 2025 national survey showed an astonishingly high level of support, with nearly 32% of those stating their voting preference - suggesting Jamaat would be the leading opposition in the next Parliament.⁸

This support for Jamaat is no sudden swing, however, but rather reflects their deep-rooted social presence as an organisation. Jamaat runs a huge number of businesses and financial, educational, healthcare, welfare and cultural institutions. On the one hand, these, particularly their madrasas (religious schools for the poor), are means of building support bases and penetrating deeply into rural areas. The speed with which they provided aid to those injured in the July movement, while the Interim Government lagged, is emblematic. On the other hand, this also provides the infrastructure to develop their cadre by deploying them to deliver these programmes.

After the uprisings, groups like Jamaat-Shibir have also been part of the successful push to rewrite the logic of Bangladeshi politics, demoting the significance of the 1971 Liberation War and reframing Awami League's exclusionary form of secularism as "fascism". They have formed a key part of SAD and NCP mobilisations against the Awami League⁹, while NCP leaders have embraced Shibir as 'key allies' in the uprising¹⁰ and appeared on TV seemingly casting doubt on the narrative around Jamaat's role in the 1971 genocide.¹¹

While the IG cannot realistically be designated as an Islamist administration, there are signs that elements within it and/or the state apparatus are either supportive of or pandering to groups like Jamaat. AFM Khalid Hossain, Vice President of Islamist movement **Hefazat-e-Islam** and adviser for the **Islami Andolan** party, serves in Yunus IG's Cabinet as Adviser for Religious Affairs. In a move condemned by the Left but lauded by the IG's law adviser¹², the conviction of Jamaat leader ATM Azharul Islam, previously sentenced to death for war crimes in 1971 by Hasina's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), was overturned by a reconstituted Supreme Court and he was released.¹³ Moreover, Tajul Islam, who represented the Jamaat leaders in the Awami League-era ICT, has been appointed the chief prosecutor of the post-2024 ICT, where Awami League leaders are being tried.

This, coupled with the undeniably more open climate for mobilising that Islamist groups have enjoyed since the uprisings, has fuelled accusations that the Yunus government is in league with Islamists. While this claim is overblown for political purposes, we should be vigilant about these moves as illustrative of the shifting sands of political realignment in Bangladesh today.

Was this a coup orchestrated by the US?

Some have alleged that the uprising against Hasina was coordinated by the US in order to gain a more pliable ally in Dhaka and a stronger foothold in the region - which would prove valuable as it seeks to encircle China. According to this, the generally non-aligned approach of the Awami League government vis-a-vis the US, China and Russia proved a roadblock to these plans; Hasina herself claimed that her fate was sealed by her refusal to lease St Martin's Island in the strategically valuable Bay of Bengal for US military purposes¹⁴. There have also been as-yet-unsubstantiated allegations that the US' development/soft power agency USAID played a role in fomenting the uprisings too¹⁵, akin to its role funding subversion in anti-imperialist states like Cuba.

Despite its bluster and its performance of sovereignty vis-a-vis the West, BAL's commitment to anti-imperialism has historically been compromised and half-baked. The brief Awami League-led coalition government in unified Pakistan from 1956-57 moved swiftly to embrace US imperialism's designs in the region and to enter into military alliances with it - including strong support for SEATO and CENTO, the Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern counterparts to NATO. Hasina's governments were also happy to take large-scale IMF loans while engaging in joint military exercises with the US, such as *Exercise Tiger Lightning* sponsored by US's Indo-Pacific Command¹⁶.

But that being said, it is undoubtedly true that relations with the US had grown strained under the Hasina government - even if it had moderated its criticism given her closeness to India, the US' stalwart ally in the region.¹⁷ In 2021 the US Treasury sanctioned the RAB paramilitary unit, former US ambassadors had been critical of the government's conduct¹⁸ and with its tensions with China mounting the US would certainly be grateful to secure a safer pair of hands in Dhaka.

This was a role that someone like Muhammad Yunus would be happy to fill.

US imperialism after the uprisings

Anti-imperialism was not an ideological tenet of the uprisings by and large. In terms of international analysis, criticism was directed almost singularly at neighbouring Delhi; its domineering attempts at regional hegemonism, and the material and political support that the Indian government had provided to undergird the Awami League's repressive rule.

This much is evident in the fact that Yunus faced no discernible domestic backlash for embracing support from the likes of then-US President Joe Biden¹⁹ - despite his rule underwriting the genocide in Gaza at that very moment - or for gracing the stage of the Clinton Global Initiative²⁰ as part of his attempts at making rapprochement with the 'international community'.

More substantively, Yunus' attempt at bringing Bangladesh in line with international norms of governance has also enabled a greater role for US entities, with some describing him as pursuing a 'personalised foreign policy' nostalgic for the 'fading glory of a Clintonesque world'.²¹ Moreover the presence of civil society NGO figures in the IG, symbolises the IG's effort to present post-uprising Bangladesh as a return to 'responsible' governance in line with international norms - neither too autocratic, nor too radical.

Neoliberal maxims such as 'good governance' and anti-corruption have also served as a nexus for the penetration of international NGOs and Western interests into the country. In September, a US delegation hosted by the US Embassy in Dhaka resulted in the signing of \$200 million development agreement with (now-defunct) USAID in order to 'support Bangladesh in advancing development, strengthening governance, expanding trade, and creating greater opportunities for the Bangladeshi people'²². Meanwhile, leaders of the US-based NGO Right 2 Freedom, staffed by two former US Embassy officials, have met a number of times with Yunus and are poised to 'assist the country in its democratic transition'²³. Additionally, the IG's Home Adviser has sought to deepen existing security collaboration with the US²⁴, while as of writing there are discussions ongoing for Bangladesh to purchase US military equipment and to better integrate the countries' military operations.²⁵

More recently, there have been efforts from various quarters to make questions of foreign policy in Bangladesh more salient, with some on the Left also introducing an anti-imperialist analysis of the IG's positions. In March 2025 Umama Fatema, at that point one of the Left-leaning leaders of SAD, 'personally rejected' the 'International Women of Courage' award issued by the US State Department to all women involved in the uprising, pointing out that the award "has been used to directly endorse Israel's brutal attack on Palestine [since] October 2023."²⁶ Meanwhile in June an alliance of socialist parties organised a march under the banner of '**Anti-Imperialist Patriotic People**', condemning the IG as a 'gatekeeper of imperialism'.²⁷ The platform opposed the IG's moves to undermine national sovereignty by handing over management of Chattogram Port New Mooring Terminal to foreign entities, signing telecoms deals with Elon Musk's Starlink service, and a proposal to implement a 'corridor' between Rakhine state in neighbouring Myanmar, apparently at the behest of the US, and with profound geopolitical implications.²⁸

Moreover, Yunus' clear desire for greater closeness with the US has been confounded by the return of Donald Trump to the White House, who has brought with him a personal grudge against Yunus for his Clinton connections²⁹, and swingeing cuts to foreign aid, alongside devastating 35% tariffs on Bangladeshi goods. While this forced a pragmatic diversification by the IG in terms of economic investment from the likes of China, the Gulf and Japan, the US is, at the time of writing, attempting to force through a 'framework agreement' to secure the US' national security interests in return for tariff relief.³⁰ This framework reportedly includes a ban on Chinese tech in logistics, and a prioritisation of US companies for defence and telecoms.

From the information available to us at present, we believe that the uprisings were fundamentally an organic, locally-driven phenomenon. But the US stands to be a beneficiary of it. We must be both vigilant to US' attempts to exploit the current situation to secure their own agenda, and be clear eyed about the role a figure like Yunus and his IG play in enabling a greater role for the US in Bangladesh. Importantly, this requires an expensive assessment of the multifaceted ways that imperialism has structured Bangladesh to be economically and politically subordinate, in order to develop a truly principled anti-imperialist approach to Bangladesh.



Why could the movement not effect a deeper transformation of Bangladesh?

The scale and breadth of the mobilisations in July were a reflection of the suffocating realities of neoliberal Bangladesh. At times this even circled a class critique of Bangladeshi society, embodied in the obscene wealth of the former regime's backers and beneficiaries. Yet there was a swift retreat from the potentially anti-capitalist thrust within the movement, especially after the downfall of Sheikh Hasina.

This is something that speaks to the deeper lack of ideological nourishment within the movement - as well as the inherent weakness of the spontaneous forms of organising that characterised it. It is here that the long decline of Bangladesh's once influential socialist movement has been sorely felt, robbing the movement of greater ideological and organisational potency.

This lack of ideological clarity can be illustrated in the way movement leadership centred on the excesses of Hasina and Awami League in their singularity. As such, their typical economic analysis only went as deep as the pockets of the League and its industrial elite, their geopolitical analysis extended as far as Hasina's backers in Delhi, and their historical analysis stretched as far back as 1972 and the institutionalisation of 'Mujibism' - but rarely further.

Anti-capitalism was not on the agenda - but a critique of corruption was. Anti-imperialism was not an ideological cornerstone - but a rejection of neighbouring India's hegemonism and expansionism was. Liberal touchstones of *democracy*, *equality*, *meritocracy* and *anti-corruption* became the articles of faith used to frame the students' political vision for post-BAL Bangladesh.

This was fertile ground for the likes of Muhammad Yunus - a figurehead of supposedly 'compassionate capitalism' in his own right - and his backers in the worlds of international development and the NGO-sphere to present their programme for reforming Bangladesh.

With this new set of elites in the driving seat, the programme of the IG has amounted to creating a more level playing-field for capital and a more conventional competition-based market. It is also seeking minor reforms to maintain social peace in order to project the idea of a Bangladesh that is now *open for business* for investors. It offers no prospect of Bangladesh transcending its lowly position in the global division of labour, or moving beyond its dependency on international aid and debt bondage.

Moreover, the trajectory of Bangladeshi politics post-August 5th has validated the long-held analyses by the Marxist Left of the inherent limitations of 'spontaneous' politics without a clear political leadership to sharpen it - which itself speaks to the consequences of the political repression of opposition politics seen under the Hasina government. The spontaneous, non-partisan nature of the upsurge - while an asset for a population weary of the opposition political parties - also meant it was unable to properly serve as a crucible for the kind of enduring and transformative shifts in political consciousness, ideology and class realignment that are a feature of revolutionary movements. Instead, these shifts have largely played out post-hoc and reinforced partisan political lines, while the NCP's refrain of maintaining the 'unity of July' reflects their hope of holding on to the quicksilver moment of spontaneous, cross-partisan cooperation that came together during the uprisings.

Given the lack of long-standing organisation going into the uprising, it would have been essential to hold onto the streets - for which there was a clear appetite among ordinary people. A longer presence among the masses could have enabled a deeper and formative encounter for student political leaders. Instead, the SAD leadership demobilised the mass movement, handed over power and accepted the two/three positions on the Interim Government.

Thereafter what we have witnessed being dramatised in Bangladesh since the fall of the Hasina government is the uprooting of an entrenched and once-powerful fraction of the capitalist class - which had secured its position under the shade of Awami League patronage - in order to make space for a new crop of capitalists to take control.

So while the movement has changed the personnel currently holding power, it has not changed the class profile or character of the country's ruling elite.

It is for this reason that we would characterise the movement as an uprising, but *not* a revolution.

However, we should not lose sight of the opening that the uprisings temporarily brought into being. Until the final days of the movement, the fall of Sheikh Hasina was genuinely unimaginable. The protesters' declaration that the month of July would continue until the moment of their victory - so that the moment Hasina fled on 5th August took place on '36th July' in the chronography of the uprising - gives a sense of the transformed consciousness of the period: time itself was malleable.

As the police melted away, people patrolled the streets, defended temples from attack and cooked huge pots of biryani collectively in their neighbourhoods. Students directed traffic for days. When devastating floods hit, young people from the cities organised huge amounts of aid, and travelled to the South to distribute via boat.

The potential of this scale of mobilisation dissipated, but its memory cannot - and must not - be erased from the people.



How do you assess the Interim Government?

As of writing the Interim Government has now been in power for a year - and in that time, has seen its popular support ebb away further and further.

Now, the IG carries the air of a lame duck administration, accepting its role as a transitional administration rather than offering pretence to being a transformative government. It is currently focusing on limited electoral and economic reforms while trying to place a fugitive BAL on trial and scheduling elections for 2026 - but has found itself unable to grapple with the day-to-day concerns of the masses.

What interests does the Interim Government represent?

Under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, the IG draws heavily from elite technocrats, NGO heads, retired military officials and figures from academia and business. 2 (formerly 3) leaders of the SAD are also serving in posts. It has commissioned eleven reform commissions and two inquiries, spanning women's rights to enforced disappearances, from police violence to labour conditions.

As a figure Yunus himself undoubtedly enjoys a large degree of popular goodwill within Bangladesh. This stems from the international prestige of his Grameen Bank microloans scheme, his status as Bangladesh's only Nobel Prize winner - and for some, owes also to his politicised legal battles under Hasina's rule.

But while we can place his brand of 'socially conscious' business in neoliberalism's 'moderate' camp, he remains just that: a committed evangelist for entrepreneurialism, marrying ideals of liberal human rights protections and a stated concern for the poor with a zeal for 'popular' and reformed capitalism.

Tellingly, in Yunus' own words, his signature vision of a world of 'three zeroes' (zero poverty, unemployment, and net carbon emissions) can only be achieved "with the businesses, not by the government. The Government cannot achieve that, that's not the function of the government".³¹

Yunus and the IG see their locus of legitimacy stemming to a large degree from their acceptance by the 'international community'. As such, Yunus has embarked on a mission to bring Bangladesh *in from the cold* on the international stage, by courting the worlds of international civil society, international multilateral institutions and international investment. In turn, the IG's reform agenda can be understood as threading these international audiences together for the purposes of projecting a Bangladesh that is *open for business*.

Its economic and political project can be seen chiefly as reforming Bangladesh and Bangladeshi institutions to fit within the dictates of free market orthodoxy and re-establish itself as a legitimate destination of foreign investment. This was something which to them had been stymied by BAL's patronage-fuelled economic project, and the political-social instability which faced the country under their repressive rule, denting foreign investor confidence.

For example, the IG's moves to reform labour laws in line with baseline international labour standards, while being a welcome if fundamentally liberal reform, should ultimately be understood as a measure to try and secure a social truce at home. It is an attempt fundamentally to *stabilise* the relationship between the state, employers and the labouring classes in Bangladesh in order to ensure a comfortable operating climate for business - while also serving as a signal to foreign investors and foreign governments of the same. It is therefore no surprise to find the likes of the EU, global clothing brands and the US Government - no champions of the working class - urging for the law changes, alongside Bangladeshi union leaders.³² Fundamentally their concerns are not with neoliberalism as a project, but with reining in its 'excesses' to ensure its sustainability.

Alongside this, the IG has pursued an aggressive agenda to reopen Bangladesh for foreign capital and stabilise the capitalist economy. Unsurprisingly, the IG has quickly won the confidence of donors and the IMF, not through any democratic legitimacy, but through its embrace of familiar macroeconomic discipline. In public statements, the IG has affirmed its commitment to "tightening fiscal and monetary policies, reforming the tax system, improving banking sector governance, and advancing climate-related investments" - all closely aligned with IMF guidance.

With foreign exchange reserves low and economic growth faltering in 2024, the government moved swiftly to stabilise Bangladesh's macroeconomic position and reassure both domestic and international capital. In a nationally-televised address in September 2024, Yunus appealed for up to \$5 billion in foreign aid to help shore up the economy, citing acute pressures from elevated import costs and mounting debt.³³ This plea was partially answered by Western donors and aligned with the continuation of a \$4.7 billion IMF loan programme, first approved in 2023 under the Hasina government. The government's push for emergency financing came hand-in-hand with a renewed commitment to structural (economic) reforms, pointing to a familiar script of conditionality-based neoliberal development. By May 2025, the IMF announced a staff-level agreement to release \$1.3 billion after the government broke a months-long deadlock on core programme conditions.³⁴

Just as the IG's economic policy is largely consistent with the neoliberal dispensation under previous governments, so too has organised labour continued to face repression from state forces. Protests in September 2024 across 30 factories saw police fatally shoot worker Kawser Hossain Khan and injuring dozens³⁵. In October, demonstrating garment workers were fired on by police and state agencies, resulting in two teenage workers being shot and hospitalised.³⁶ In the aftermath, authorities filed criminal cases against 1,110 workers with arrests following thereafter³⁷.

There has also been a worrying normalisation of the deployment of the military to quell labour disputes, and the IG has come to rely upon and progressively empower state agencies, in particular the Army, as well as forces like RAB - to assume day-to-day law and order functions as well, granting them policing powers.³⁸

The honeymoon is over

Despite the hopes placed in Yunus and the IG, it is now clear that the IG's honeymoon period is decisively over. It has faced public dissatisfaction over its ability to curb spiralling criminality and sexual violence against women, or to manage inflation, while its contradictory approach to the issue of street justice has seen it unable to rein in a rising issue of lynchings in the country.

Meanwhile political parties - with the BNP at the forefront - have increasingly voiced their displeasure with the IG. This includes over the seeming deference that the IG has paid to the SAD and its demands, and questions over the legitimacy of the IG to make substantive decisions over the future of the country, without a popular mandate. Fending off mobilisations from the BNP and facing veiled threats from the Army chief, who ultimately guarantees his position, Yunus went as far as to threaten resignation in May 2025.

The contestation over whether the IG constitutes a 'revolutionary government' with the latitude to effect sweeping constitutional changes - as in the eyes of the SAD - or merely a caretaker government - as in the eyes of most political parties - have been protracted and fluid. But as of mid-2025 and with the IG's credibility faltering in the eyes of the public, it is the latter that appears to have largely won out, with the IG reduced to taking a more moderate, consensus-driven approach to reform taking its cues from political parties. It has progressively lost its appetite for substantive reforms, and recommendations from the various reform committees established by the IG - including some genuinely progressive suggestions from the likes of the Enforced Disappearances and the Women's Affairs Reform committees - have seemingly been consigned to gather dust, if not being disowned by the IG.³⁹

With the IG unable to bridge the gap between the realities of daily struggle facing the Bangladeshi masses on one hand, with the students' demands for political reforms and its own desires for international acceptance on the other, the more high-minded ideals of the post-uprising moment have also retreated from the public consciousness towards more prosaic concerns of survival in Bangladesh. The IG's inability to deliver on any of these has secured its downfall, and squandered the potential of the uprisings.

Ultimately, the Interim Government is not a rupture but a reconfiguration of elite rule, dominated by familiar figures from the post-1971 generation. While presented as transitional, the IG appears to replicate the logic of institutional management over redistribution - focusing on elite consensus, political choreography, and system preservation rather than democratic transformation. The sense among younger organisers is that this is not a new beginning, but a final reshuffling of an exhausted political class.

What do you make of the new student party, the National Citizen Party (NCP)?

The NCP (National Citizen Party; Jatiya Nagorik Party) was launched on 28th February 2025, emerging jointly out of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD) platform, which had served as the most prominent organ of the student-led movement, and its civic counterpart the JNC (Jatiya Nagorik Committee).

The formation of the NCP seemingly symbolised the feeling by SAD leaders that their role in the IG had become hemmed in by opposition from other political actors, and that they needed to contest in the political realm to see through their vision rather than rely on Muhammad Yunus' goodwill alone. Since its formation, the NCP has essentially played the role of a critical friend to the IG, while facing accusations of being a 'King's Party'. It simultaneously criticises and demonstrates against the government for its slow pace in securing reforms, while mobilising in defence of the IG when, for example, Muhammad Yunus confided in NCP leaders that he was considering his resignation in May.⁴⁰

With the NCP's emergence, SAD has descended into a string of scandals and accusations of criminality, factionalism, and moves to subordinate it to the NCP.⁴¹ In June 2025, the prominent Left-leaning SAD leader Umama Fatema dramatically quit the platform, revealing that she had suffered personal attacks and smears from within SAD, and alleging that she had witnessed how 'opportunists had eaten [SAD] away from the inside like termites', and that 'The future of [SAD] is now dark'.⁴²

What is the political project of the NCP?

In summary, the NCP's politics can be described as *militant centrism*: invoking the aesthetic of revolution with the programme of liberal, democratic capitalism.

Ideologically, the party's leadership bodies comprise figures associated with the student Right, Centre, as well as some from the Left. Seemingly attempting to sidestep these inevitable political contradictions, the party has continually described itself as a big-tent, centrist and "post-ideological" party⁴³: 'neither right-wing nor left-wing', nor 'dominated by any specific individual, group, class, region, or ideology' and 'neither secular nor theocratic'.

Rather, the NCP is characterised by liberal ideas of civic politics centred on anti-corruption, transparency and anti-discrimination and hazily-defined notions of equality, while it positions itself as a fundamentally 'pro-Bangladesh' party in terms of its orientation towards regional neighbours. Its signature political objectives are centred on creating a second Bangladeshi republic as a political reset for the country, by abolishing the 1972 constitution and the politics of 'Mujibism' associated with post-independence Bangladesh and Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the Awami League.

While the NCP's stated concern with wealth inequality and ending economic discrimination could potentially bend towards some form of social democratic policies, it could just as easily become a matter reconciled through mainstream neoliberal orthodoxy, or the supposedly *compassionate capitalism* promoted by Muhammad Yunus.

The only indication of the NCP's economic programme thus far can be found in their pledges to turn Bangladesh into an 'investment paradise' for foreign capital, promising to always 'ensure a business-friendly environment' and expressing hopes for high-tech digital advances to modernise business and combat inefficiency and corruption⁴⁴ - offering nothing so far to differentiate itself from the neoliberal platitudes of their political competitors, much less any structural critique of Bangladesh's place in the global economy.

The NCP's big-tent approach has not stopped the party from facing factional splits and divisions already. There are also indications that the present party leadership is prepared to indulge in social conservatism⁴⁵ and to make strategic alliances with the Bangladeshi Right to advance their political objectives.

While eschewing ideology, the NCP have made a politics of 'anti-fascism' - whereby 'fascism' is located specifically in the Awami League as a party, as well as the practices of 'Mujibism' that have shaped the country since 1972 - as their

guiding political principle. This come alongside their call for a 'second republic', in effect granting the 2024 uprisings parity with 1971 in Bangladeshi history. This has enabled NCP leaders to rationalise their proximity with groups of the hard-Right in Bangladesh as part of effectively a popular front strategy to cleanse BAL influence from the country - including Islamist parties who, for their reasons, want to erase the legacy of 1971.

Groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan and Hefazat-e-Islam have provided support as a mobilisational force and a political ally to the NCP, and in turn, the NCP has shared platforms and provided political currency to those parties. While the NCP and the Islamist Right represent their own distinct projects rather than a front for one another, this convergence raises troubling questions about the way that the generational and 'anti-establishment' politics championed by the student leaders is helping to rehabilitate the Islamist Right, and incubating the latter's project of claiming a 'post-1971' Bangladesh and writing themselves into the country's new narrative.

What is the future of the NCP?

NCP appears to be banking on the memory of July, especially among students and youth, to claim authority as custodians of the uprisings. Their assumption is that this will in turn carry them forward as a viable political and electoral project. Meanwhile, their suspension of core political contradictions through their big-tent, cross-class and non-ideological approach to politics is intended to maintain the 'unity of July' to create a new political settlement in Bangladeshi society beyond the existing binaries established since 1971. However, it is not clear that these assumptions still hold.

Firstly, the NCP are having to confront the fact that many of the students and youth they championed and marched alongside in July have since returned to their own pre-existing political or partisan inclinations or affiliations. This, coupled with the fragmentation of students themselves into various formations, is complicating the NCP's claim to singularly represent the legacy of the uprising. Meanwhile, their attempt to extend the legacy of July to claim as the basis of their own legitimacy has pitted the NCP against many well-established parties.

This includes parties of the Left, who resist their iconoclastic approach to post-1971 history.

While the working class of Bangladesh was present as a force in the uprisings, and decisive in seeing through the movement's ultimate success on 5th August, their aspirations are not reflected in the programme and orientation of any major political force, including the NCP, beyond rhetorical gestures.

Meanwhile NCP, along with the IG, have sought to remove 'Socialism' as a pillar from the constitution, associating this as an artefact of 'Mujibism'.⁴⁶ Socialism has not been an objective that any Bangladeshi government, past or present, has meaningfully advanced. But it is not something that should be reactively discarded as the property of the Awami League alone; the NCP's move to do so reflects poorly on their political coordinates.

There is no virtue in shying away from ideological conviction. The problems facing Bangladesh cannot be resolved by another actor entering its already crowded array of centrist parties.

While the NCP's emphasis on 'political inclusivity' and technocratic middle-ground politics may work for a single-issue campaign, a protest movement or an NGO, it does not inspire confidence as the sustainable basis for a political party - outside of potentially attracting some of Bangladesh's politically disengaged youth.

Instead, its anti-ideological politics can shade into a lack of political conviction, and enable its political positions to become overdetermined by its loudest voices. This has already emerged as an issue, with its chief organisers Sarjis Alam and Hasnat Abdullah's public personas often being seen as abrasive, arrogant and attention-seeking - while these leaders have also been visibly courting the Muslim Right by fraternising with Jamaat-Shibir and Hefazat.

While there is certain to be political contestation within the party and between its various factions, it remains to be seen whether any measure of ideological clarity will emerge from the NCP, what orientation that will take - or whether it will become ossified into the trappings of bourgeois electoralism, and continue its early tilt towards courting conservatism.



*Mural of Sheikh Hasina defaced during the uprisings,
Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (NahidHossain)⁴⁷*

What has been the fate of the Awami League since the uprising?

The Awami League has suffered an inglorious fate under the Interim Government. It has been uprooted institutionally, and within weeks of the IG being installed it purged the BAL/BAL-backed mayors of all 12 city corporations alongside nearly 2,000 local government representatives⁴⁸.

Days after Hasina fled to India, most of the Supreme Court judges, understood to be subservient to her government, resigned in the face of protests.⁴⁹ Later in 2024, a dozen High Court judges, all but one of whom was appointed under the BAL government, were barred from sitting by the freshly reconstituted Supreme Court, again in the face of SAD protests.⁵⁰

In October 2024 the Chhatra League was banned under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 after demands from the SAD. After a pressure campaign the IG also banned the Awami League proper under the Anti-Terrorism Act in June 2025, revoking its electoral registration and ‘prohibit[ing] the party and its affiliates from conducting any political activities, including publications, media appearances, online and social media campaigns, processions, rallies or conferences, until the International Crimes Tribunal completes its proceedings’.⁵¹

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), initially constituted under the Hasina government to prosecute local collaborators with the Pakistani Army during the 1971 genocide, has been expanded, enabling it to prosecute political parties and affiliated organisations and granting it legal powers to ‘suspend, prohibit, or dissolve organisations proven to have facilitated atrocities’.⁵² While the BAL ban is ‘temporary’, pending the proceedings of the ICT’s investigation into crimes against humanity committed by the government during the uprisings, this could translate to a years-long suspension of the party, if not a dissolution under order from the ICT.

Beyond its battered institutional footprint and legal reckonings, however, the prospects for political renewal or recovery of BAL are unclear - but likely dim. With little room to operate within Bangladesh, the party mainly seems to be confined to occasional flash demonstrations in Dhaka, and using its bases-in-exile abroad to undermine the Interim Government and shape international perceptions of it.

Internally entrenched in personalised politics and party members jostling for Hasina's approval, BAL has also likely alienated and isolated itself externally from its erstwhile allies in its 14-Party Alliance electoral front. In recent years the Hasina government had gradually minimised and diminished the role of other parties in the Alliance, effectively rendering it a paper grouping⁵³ - leaving its nominal partners to face backlash within the country for their former alliance with BAL, but little incentive to reactivate it.

Despite its greatly diminished stature, it is true that the Awami League still has some organic constituency within Bangladesh, owing to its status as the preeminent representative of the autonomy and then liberation struggle which would still command support from a segment of the population. But the informal centres of power that guaranteed their long rule - including corporate houses and organised crime and extortion networks - would share no such sentimentalism. That base would happily switch to supporting the BNP or other major parties in order to preserve their benefits; likewise, local and grassroots BAL activists will also likely defect to other parties, leaving it with little local presence or patronage networks.

Moreover, the IG's attempts at enshrining the July uprisings in Bangladesh's cultural memory - for example by making 5th August a public holiday, and potentially elevating it alongside the 1971 Liberation War within the constitution - are clearly designed to head off such a 'rebound' of support to the League.

Therefore even outside of the ban on their activities, the chance of a return to power or a commanding national presence for the Awami League seems in the short to medium term at least, deeply unlikely.

How can we understand the cultural shifts in Bangladesh since August 2024?

Amidst the contest for political control electorally - which the BNP and Jamaat are poised to find greatest success - there has also been continued contestation for control of the streets and local institutions in Bangladesh post-uprising.

Vigilantism and political violence

Political violence continues to be the norm, both between parties and within them as rival party factions - especially of the BNP - move to seize control of important institutions and stomping grounds.⁵⁴ Confrontations at universities between various groupings and factions continue, at times turning bloody, while local party networks and factions also tussle violently to fill the gap left by the Awami League's former extortion networks.

Lawfare continues to be used to settle vendettas in the country with mass, arbitrary police filings being submitted for crimes relating to the July uprisings. BNP and Jamaat members have been noted as 'helping' family members of those injured and killed during the uprisings file police charges, while taking the opportunity to add in names to filings - and in some cases trying to extort family members of the accused to get their names removed⁵⁵.

In the streets, Islamist groups such as Hefazat-e-Islam have made great strides operating in the new political environment, and managed to command massive mobilisations centred on, for example, the demand to abolish the Women's Affairs Reform Commission offering a spate of progressive recommendations, as well as demonstrating locally to shut down events they deem anti-Islamic.

With the widespread discrediting and demoralisation of the police after the collapse of the former government, and their inability to reassert their authority, there has been an increase in vigilantism and lynchings in Bangladesh too. On

their end, the IG has found itself caught in a contradictory approach to the issue of street justice: simultaneously decrying ‘mob justice’, while often turning a blind eye to or equivocating over criticising those instances of vigilantism directed against remnants and vestiges of the former ruling party.⁵⁶ As a result, such attacks have become ‘disturbingly routine’ with the IG’s inability to rein in vigilantism emerging as one of the public’s chief criticisms of it.

How can we make sense of the backlash against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?

Perhaps the most striking changes in the politics and political culture post-uprising have been the scale of *Demujibisation*, the erasure of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the public realm in Bangladesh, as well as the re-evaluation of the narrative and politics surrounding the post-independence period.

Initially, and to some degree, this could be expected as an organic boomerang effect: the overbearing and cult-like reverence that the Hasina government institutionalised around Mujib to cement her dynastic rule saw his image come to be associated with her government. But it has increasingly come to cohere into a partisan political project that is reshaping the political culture in a manner that is primarily benefiting the Islamist Right.

Following the ousting of Hasina, the anti-BAL politics that served as the political glue of the SAD and the wider uprisings congealed into the politics of anti-Mujibism mentioned above. Accordingly, the roots of “fascism” in Bangladesh were to be located in the practices enshrined during Mujib’s term as Prime Minister from 1972–75.

This includes the highly centralised 1972 constitution drafted by the BAL-dominated constituent assembly, the principles of ‘Mujibism’ as embedded in the constitution’s preamble – i.e. *Socialism, Nationalism, Secularism and Democracy* – and Mujib’s violent concentration of power, including against the post-independence socialist insurgencies, and the brief consolidation of the one-party BAKSAL state in 1975.

This “anti-fascist” reappraisal of post-1971 has, in turn, been the pivot used by students and other groups to displace the traditional political binaries in Bangladesh into a generational divide, or a divide between pro and anti-‘establishment’ politics. Attempts are being made to codify this as a new legitimising principle of politics in Bangladesh, placing 2024 on par with 1971.⁵⁷ While the SAD and NCP have been at the forefront as the political groups pushing for *Demujibisation*, they find themselves working alongside a range of forces pushing for this in the streets and into Bangladeshi political culture - including the Interim Government, certain state-linked institutions and, more notably, the Islamist Right.

This *Demujibisation* has included moves such as the IG’s cancellation of seven national holidays centring around Mujib and his family - including 7th March, marking his famous 1971 speech announcing Bangladesh’s independence from Pakistan, and precipitating the subsequent Liberation War. In late 2024, the IG’s Attorney General moved to remove the ‘Mujibist’ tenets of *Socialism*, *Secularism* and *Nationalism* from the constitution⁵⁸; the IG’s Constitution Reform Committee proceeded to suggest the same, replacing them with the generic principles of ‘equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism, and democracy’. Other institutions have also followed suit; the authorities of a number of universities have renamed halls and buildings named after Mujib and/or BAL figures. One renamed the ‘Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall’ to ‘Shah Azizur Rahman Hall’ - after the Bangladeshi politician who collaborated with the West Pakistani Army during the 1971 genocide, and argued at the UN in their defence.

But most striking is how *Demujibisation* is being carried out in the streets. In February 2025, in response to a scheduled speech by exiled Sheikh Hasina a ‘bulldozer procession’ was called at the remains of Mujib’s former home in Dhaka, where it was burned and completely demolished as army officers stood by. Thereafter homes of Hasina’s family members were destroyed, alongside murals of Mujib and former BAL MPs across the country in a wave of bulldozer demolitions and arson over subsequent days.⁵⁹

The Awami League, especially under Hasina, appropriated the legacy of liberation - including the values of *Socialism* and *Secularism* - hegemonised it and bastardised it, in an attempt to entrench BAL supremacy. In light of this

vulgar treatment of 1971, a critical and sensitive engagement with post-1971 history is a necessity for Bangladesh. But a 'scorched earth' *Demujibisation* is feeding the continued deterioration of political culture in Bangladesh, and edging out more sober voices in what should be a critical discussion on the past and future of the country.

Moreover, attempting a 'clean break' from the political history of the country post-independence, especially given how charged and contested the independence moment was, is bound to be a messy prospect. In seeking to redraw political lines around a generational divide, the uprising and its anti-Mujibist afterlife, SAD and NCP are pitting themselves against many more established tendencies within Bangladeshi politics. This includes the BNP on the Right, but also Bangladesh's socialist groups, which includes those socialists that helped struggle for and shape what would become distilled - and distorted - as 'Mujibism' under the Awami League governments, even while their contributions were written out of Bangladesh's history.

Meanwhile, this campaign dovetails neatly with Jamaat-Shibir's attempts to shift the political culture of Bangladesh away from the leftwing tenets of the Liberation movement towards their brand of Islamist politics, and to recuperate their own image. An uncritical approach to *Demujibisation* is therefore extending an umbrella under which Jamaat and related organisations can redefine themselves as key stakeholders in the 'new Bangladesh' and simple victims of the old political dispensation.

Rather than creating a new unified political settlement, this is having the opposite effect of polarising politics and society in Bangladesh, as the spectre of 1971 - and Jamaat's role in opposing Bangladesh's liberation - asserts itself. As a consequence, the party-political divide in Bangladesh at this present moment, whilst often posed reductively as "pro reform" vs "anti reform", is better understood as the consolidation of two camps buttressed by differing forms of historical consciousness relating to the Liberation moment.

As such this post-uprising period has served to relitigate the fractious politics of 1971 and fuel further contestation between Bangladesh's various bourgeois forces over the basis of their own political legitimacy - rather than moving Bangladesh towards a broader and more emancipatory horizon.



A future for socialism in Bangladesh?

The 2024 uprisings in Bangladesh momentarily cracked open the country's political order, toppling a deeply repressive government and raising new hopes for change. As of yet, this change - and certainly not the type many had envisioned - has not materialised.

The situation is fluid and evolving, but it is clear that the forces currently poised to rise from the ashes of Awami League rule range from ideologically inert to inchoate to intolerable. They offer either a romantic retreat to the past or the endless extension of the neoliberal present. Socialism, the struggle for the future, awaits a convincing interlocutor in Bangladesh.

The historic decline of Bangladesh's once influential socialist movement has been sorely felt in the aftermath of the uprising, robbing the movement of greater ideological and organisational potency to steer a transformative course in the year since. In this respect, Bangladesh is confronting the pattern seen across many other countries, particularly those in the Global South, reaching the final limits of neoliberalism: where the status quo has made the conditions of life impossible to bear, but the destruction of political life has left the masses without a clear political standard-bearer for change.

If there is a note of optimism we hold, it is that new possibilities are already emerging at the margins of the 'old Left'. The current generation in Bangladesh has seen first-hand the bankruptcy of the status quo, and many are searching for an alternative. It is our conviction that a new socialist politics can be born from this discontent, but only if it engages creatively with people's grievances.

The new shoots of a Left revival can be found, even if in small form, in the assortment of organisers who stepped into the breach during the uprising, often without formal party affiliation. These scattered forces - some rooted in Marxist study circles, others in community struggles - hint at the potential for a reinvigorated Left built from the ground up.

The necessity for such a revival, however, cannot be overstated. The crushing daily assaults on life, labour and dignity continue to mount. Bangladesh remains locked in a subordinate position in the global division of labour, trapped in a

dependence on international aid and debt bondage. The need for a principled defence of Bangladesh's sovereignty - and one that can confront India's hegemonism without indulging in communalism⁶⁰ - is crucial.

The Left's strength and ability to capitalise on the current political opening will depend not only on slogans or traditions, but on how well it reflects and responds to the real structure of Bangladeshi society today. And that structure has changed dramatically. The legacy parties and organisations will need to radically rethink their approaches, or else new forces will emerge outside their ranks to carry the socialist banner forward.

We do not underestimate the difficulties they face - state repression, Islamist resurgence, economic turmoil, and global pressures all pose immense challenges. The growing strength of the Army and the greater penetration of US imperialism in the country under the IG's auspices represent a clear and present danger. Yet, we also see glimmers of a different path, one where the Left in Bangladesh can once again become a mass force grounded in the struggles of workers, peasants, students, and oppressed communities. Nurturing those glimmers into a coherent movement is the task ahead.

Our position as a Bangladeshi diaspora within Britain also saddles us with a unique responsibility. It is an explicitly *political* responsibility, which cannot be glossed over by defaulting to cultural affinity rituals or the indignities of the international charity-industrial complex. It means taking up the struggle against the British state's tutelage of forces like the notorious RAB, to recent UK-Bangladesh agreements targeting Bangladeshi asylum seekers, or the straightjacket of foreign aid conditions. These connections fuel the need to practice anti-imperialist solidarity, and in that, our role is mutually invested in the reinvigoration of socialism within Bangladesh.

The stakes are high: Bangladesh is at a crossroads. Let us speak across oceans, learn from each other, and build the conditions for a revolutionary politics that honours the courage of those who rose up last year. There will be no revolutionary Bangladesh without revolutionary internationalism. And there will be no internationalism worth its name unless it begins with solidarity from the masses to the masses.

Inquilab zindabad. May the struggle continue.

References

- 1 www.cadtm.org/Bangladesh-the-Global-South-debt-crisis-intensifies
- 2 www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/nov/15/bangladesh-garment-workers-fighting-for-pay-face-brutal-violence-and-threats
- 3 www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/343602/too-many-youths-not-in-education-not-in
- 4 www.ilo.org/resource/article/formalization-key-shared-prosperity-workers-bangladeshs-informal-sector
- 5 thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/10-former-top-military-generals-caught-in-anti-corruption-dragnet
- 6 commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AB%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%9F%E0%A6%93%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BC%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%AD%E0%A7%A8%E0%A7%AA.jpg
- 7 www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/july-uprising-disputes-over-credit-now-out-social-media-3828016
- 8 innovision-bd.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/250310_Innovision-National-Poll_Methodology-Summary_English_Official.pdf
- 9 www.newagebd.net/post/Politics/264431/shahbagh-blocked-for-awami-league-ban-trial
- 10 www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/369586/saris-islami-chhatra-shibir-was-a-significant
- 11 youtu.be/f62t6m4Qd0Y?t=2700 (in Bangla)
- 12 www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/asif-nazrul-hails-jamaat-leader-azharul-acquittal-3904756
- 13 www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/mockery-justice-gonatantrik-odhikar-bashes-asif-nazrul-questions-judiciarys-independence
- 14 www.news18.com/world/weeks-before-accusing-us-of-eyeing-st-martin-island-bangladesh-ex-pm-sheikh-hasina-warned-of-white-mans-airbase-offer-new-christian-state-threat-9012310.html
- 15 www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/usaid-alleged-to-have-fueled-regime-change-in-bangladesh/3477789
- 16 www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/266932/us-supports-bangladesh-military-training-exercise
- 17 www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/08/15/india-bangladesh-sheikh-hasina
- 18 cbs-bd.com/article/9576/Sanctions-to-stay-until-Rab-is-accountable%2C-reformed
- 19 www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/biden-yunus-meet-09242024144927.html
- 20 www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative-september-2024-meeting/highlights
- 21 netra.news/2024/go-west-who-asked-bangladesh-to-go-all-in-en
- 22 bd.usembassy.gov/u-s-delegation-meets-interim-government-of-bangladesh-to-underscore-continued-partnership
- 23 www.newagebd.net/post/foreign-affairs/259471/us-rights-group-to-help-bangladeshs-democratic-transition
- 24 www.observerbd.com/news/533602
- 25 en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/kb9gtt0twp
- 26 www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/sad-leader-umama-rejects-us-award-honouring-women-july-uprising-over-ties-attack
- 27 www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/keep-ports-under-state-control-3927021
- 28 www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/381545/the-hidden-stakes-in-the-rakhine-corridor
- 29 economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/global-trends/heard-he-donated-to-see-me-lose-when-trump-made-his-displeasure-with-muhammad-yunus-clear/articleshow/115105438.cms
- 30 www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/us-wants-framework-agreement-bangladesh-adviser-fouzul-1186871
- 31 www.tbsnews.net/economy/ca-joins-investment-summit-inauguration-address-investors-1113111
- 32 www.thedailystar.net/business/news/bangladesh-amend-labour-law-march-next-year-3747786
- 33 [www.bonikbarta.com/home/news_description/398970/Additional-\\$5-billion-in-aid-sought-from-development-partners](http://www.bonikbarta.com/home/news_description/398970/Additional-$5-billion-in-aid-sought-from-development-partners)
- 34 www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2025/06/14/pr25145-bangladesh-imf-reaches-sla-on-combined-3rd-and-4th-reviews-ecf-eff-and-rsf-arrangements
- 35 www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/fatal-protest-09302024153354.html
- 36 www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/rmg-factory-closure-2-workers-shot-during-clash-law-enforcers-3741291
- 37 rmgbd.net/2024/10/ashulia-labour-unrest-over-1000-workers-sued-in-two-cases-16-arrested
- 38 www.thedailystar.net/news/news/the-powers-granted-army-officers-under-executive-magistracy-3705861
- 39 www.newagebd.net/post/country/269603/five-reform-reports-put-on-back-burner
- 40 www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/politics/ncp-trying-unify-islamist-pro-bangladeshi-parties-patwary-1150006
- 41 bdnews24.com/politics/9296cb1e0e4d
- 42 www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/385013/umama-fatema-announces-leaving-platform-citing
- 43 www.newarab.com/features/naheed-islam-and-rise-bangladeshs-second-republic
- 44 www.observerbd.com/news/520384
- 45 www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/381600/saris-backs-women-s-rights-with-conditions
- 46 en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/zolry3d303
- 47
- 48 commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Sheikh_Hasina_Used_as_a_Pillar_of_Protest_Symbolizing_Public_Dissent_and_Hatred_01.jpg
- 49 www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/all-city-mayors-removed-3681401
- 50 www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/cj-5-other-sc-judges-resign-3674021
- 51 www.newagebd.net/post/editorial/247993/worrying-way-of-high-court-judges-removal
- 52 www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/ ousted-bangladesh-pm-hasinas-party-barred-election-party-registration-suspended-2025-05-13
- 53 www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/govt-issues-gazette-allows-ict-prosecute-political-parties-1139351
- 54 en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/60rhtuyhk1
- 55 www.newagebd.net/post/politics/263173/political-violence-becomes-deadlier
- 56 en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/5vcvwtfn1
- 57 en.prothomalo.com/opinion/op-ed/q6h1I2h1t8
- 58 en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/7x3htcmrd0
- 59 theprint.in/world/why-bangladeshs-top-judicial-officer-is-calling-for-removal-of-secularism-from-constitution/2359362
- 60 www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/mob-vandalise-sheikh-muijbs-residence-dhanmondi-32-1061966

Meaning inter-religious or inter-ethnic conflict in the context of the subcontinent



