

**Commentary on Interim Government:**

## **CRAFTING A PRAGMATIC PATHWAY TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

By Dr. CAF Dowlah  
Chair, Bangladesh Institute of Policy Studies  
Email: [Chair-BIPS@bipsglobal.org](mailto:Chair-BIPS@bipsglobal.org)

Bangladesh now basks in a moment of euphoria—a new generation, resolute and unyielding, rose against the grip of an exceedingly oppressive and autocratic regime. Their sacrifice and courage, marked by the shedding of blood in unimaginable proportions, awakened the conscience of the world, and garnered spontaneous and unwavering support from every corner of the nation.

Under the unstoppable force of this popular uprising, the autocrat, who once seemed invincible, was compelled to flee abroad as a barefaced coward who abandoned millions of her followers to face the righteous fury of newly liberated people.

The sudden fall of the autocratic regime has opened an extraordinary opportunity to revamp the nation's path forward. The journey however will be fraught with incredible challenges due to the fact that the nation's history has been marked by political turmoil, military coups, and the pendulum swings between tyranny and a façade of democracy.

Although the institutions and beneficiaries of autocracy may seem uprooted, they are not yet vanquished. Like a serpent lurking in the shadows, they remain poised to deliver a fatal strike. The forces that once used the state machineries to oppress the people and plunder the nation's wealth for personal gain have retreated, but not eliminated. None should remiss that dangers lurking unseen, may strike when least expected.

The leaders of the mass upsurge made the right choice—there could be no better choice than Nobel Laureate Prof. Mohammad Yunus to guide the nation through its transition to democracy and stability. He stands as one of the most honorable sons this nation has ever produced. Tragically, he was also among the prime victims of the autocratic regime that has now crumbled.

Prof. Yunus however faces a Herculean task. The very fabric of every institution in the country—no matter the judiciary, the legislature, or the administrative machinery—has been corroded by corruption and demoralization to such an extent that none can command the respect or trust of the people. He must guide the nation's rebirth—the new liberation—with immense care and foresight. Should the burgeoning revolution of expectations fail to materialize, the burden of that failure will rest squarely on his shoulders—not on the cabinet or anything else.

It should however be recognized that the mass uprising which ousted the autocratic regime has placed the interim government in power through a normal constitutional process. The constitution was never abrogated, and apparently the interim government draws its authority from the presidential powers under the existing constitution. Unlike a

revolutionary government, which could claim legitimacy from the will of the people, this government is thus constrained to operate within the bounds of the existing constitution. This limitation makes it challenging for the government to implement sweeping changes in governance, as such actions could be perceived as betrayal of democracy itself.

The most immediate challenge facing the government is the restoration of law and order. It will be a monumental challenge, as for an extended period, law enforcement agencies functioned as instruments of oppression, suppressing dissenting voices and perpetuating tyranny. Unfortunately, the government must now rely on these same institutions, otherwise, widespread lawlessness cannot be prevented.

The most formidable challenge, however, lies in navigating the transition from autocratic rule to democratic governance. This journey demands the development of intricate strategies that can secure the unwavering support and active engagement of the masses. The government also faces a profound dilemma: should it hasten to hold free and fair elections, or should it first address the deep-rooted institutional flaws that are essential for genuine democratic governance?

Rushing into elections without first addressing these institutional deficiencies risks perpetuating the same cycles of corruption, concentration of power, and exploitation of state machinery for political and personal gains. Such an outcome would betray the very essence of the mass uprising, which seeks a decisive break from the country's troubled past.

The interim government must understand that breaking away from this dark legacy—reforming legal, political, and social frameworks to enable a transition to a more stable and democratic Bangladesh—may take years. During this time, the initial euphoria and support for reforms may wane, potentially even dissipating. The government must therefore prioritize the most urgent reforms and implement them swiftly and transparently to establish the foundations for free and fair elections, leading to the transfer of power to the people's representatives as speedily as possible.

To facilitate this process, several key measures should be undertaken immediately:

1. **Form an Independent Judicial Commission:** Establish a 10-member Independent Judicial Commission with immediate effect, granting it comprehensive powers, including subpoena authority, policing powers, and enforcement mechanisms. This will enable the commission to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for crimes committed against demonstrators during the recent popular uprising.
2. **Create a Constitutional Reform Commission:** Constitute a five-member Constitutional Reform Commission tasked with reinforcing the system of checks and balances among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The commission should also recommend legal reforms to ensure uniform application of laws and propose transparent processes for the appointment of key officials, including judges, heads of police, military leaders, and senior government officials.

3. **Restore Civil Liberties:** Undertake a comprehensive review and amendment, or repeal, of laws and regulations that restrict freedom of speech, in order to allow independent media and civil society organizations to operate without fear of reprisal.
4. **Revamp the Election Commission:** Thoroughly reform the Election Commission to restore public confidence in the democratic process. This commission should be empowered to ensure transparent voter registration, implement mechanisms to prevent electoral fraud, and oversee the conduct of free and fair elections at all levels of government without any interference from any other governmental authority.
5. **Ensure a Level Playing Field for Political Parties:** Amend or repeal laws and regulations that impede the functioning of political parties, ensuring they can operate without fear of repression. Encourage political parties to democratize internally by adopting transparent processes for leadership selection and policy formulation.
6. **Decentralize and Deconcentrate Power:** Transfer more authority to local governments to enhance governance, bring decision-making closer to the people, promote grassroots political participation, and foster a more engaged and informed citizenry.
7. **Establish a National Economic Council:** Form a National Economic Council to address pressing economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and inequality. The council should focus on promoting inclusive growth and reducing disparities across different regions and social groups.
8. **Make Bangladesh Bank Independent:** Place the Bangladesh Bank under the control of an Independent Board of Governors, who will have the authority and responsibility to monitor the economy, manage the money supply and foreign reserves, and enforce regulations on the banking and financial sectors, independent of the executive branch.
9. **Create a National Forum for Dialogue:** Establish a National Forum for Dialogue, composed of eminent citizens, to organize regular national discussions involving all major political parties, civil society groups, and other stakeholders. The aim is to build consensus on essential reforms and to guide the interim government in successfully transferring power to the people's elected representatives.
10. **Validate Reforms and Elections:** Ensure that the upcoming elections are held under a presidential ordinance requiring all participants to express their commitment to these reforms. The validation of the reforms and the election process should be secured through the first legislative act of the newly elected government upon taking office.

The transition from autocratic rule to democratic governance is a formidable challenge, yet many nations have triumphed in such transformations. Bangladesh stands at the threshold of this historic transition, and the wisdom gleaned from global successes must be harnessed to build a stable, prosperous, and democratic future. Above all, the interim

government must act with unparalleled swiftness and efficiency; any hint of delay or indecisiveness will undermine its legitimacy.