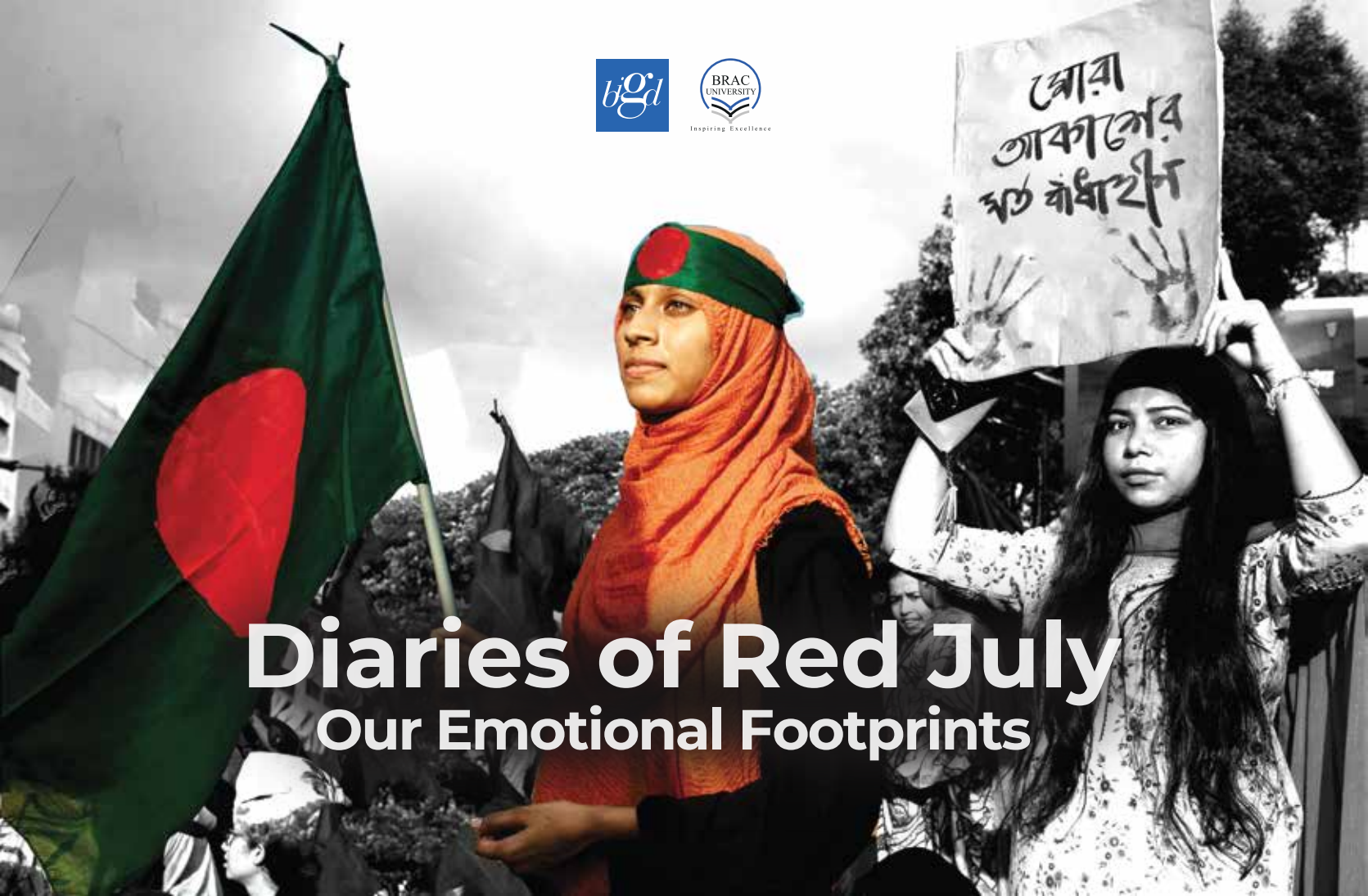




Diaries of Red July

Our Emotional Footprints

Diaries of Red July

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Fatima Ara Khan
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BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)
BRAC University

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We are deeply grateful to the six individuals who volunteered to share their personal reflections and recollections during the lead-up to the July Revolution of 2024. These contributors—through their honest, vulnerable, and vivid accounts—offered us a window into the emotional landscape of a nation in upheaval. Their testimonies captured the full spectrum of human emotion during this period: confusion, fear, grief, rage, and, above all, solidarity. What emerged was not just a documentation of events, but a living archive of how the same moment in history can leave vastly different emotional imprints on individuals—yet still bind them together in a shared yearning for justice.

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খেলে গিয়ে আর ঘরে ফিরলো না
ছেঁটে শিমুরি।

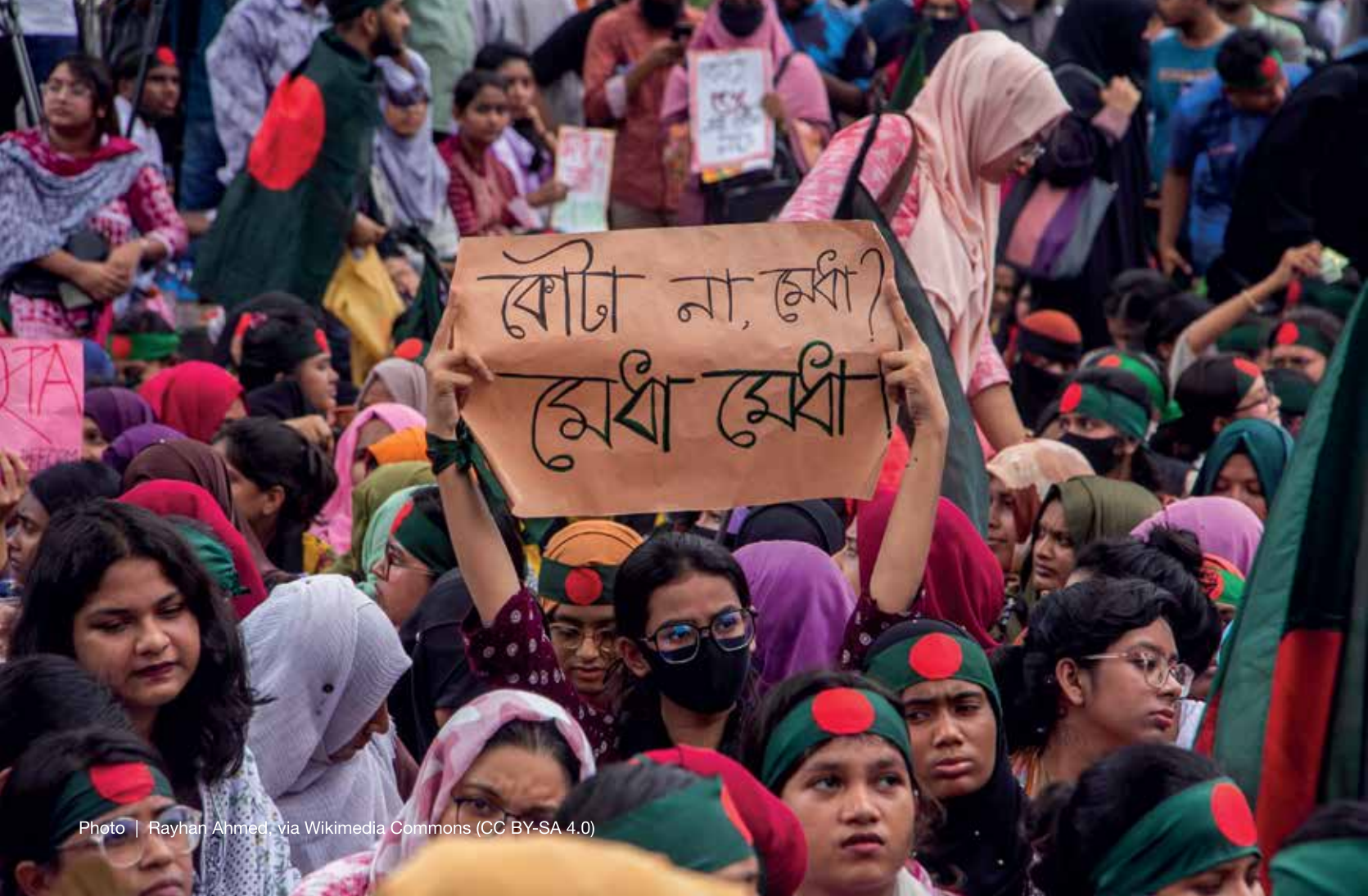




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Chapter One

Setting The Scene

1.1. Red July: Why It Matters

The July Movement of 2024 became a turning point in Bangladesh's history. What began as protests against the reinstatement of a controversial quota system for government jobs quickly transformed into a nationwide movement demanding justice and change. Initially led by students from public universities, the movement gained widespread support as private university students and citizens joined in, outraged by the government's violent response. The deployment of security forces, internet shutdowns, and curfews further escalated tensions, leading to mass rallies, road blockades, and demonstrations across the country.

During these turbulent times, traditional media faced heavy restrictions, making firsthand accounts and lived experiences essential to understanding the brutal realities on the ground. Even those not directly involved felt its ripple effects, as uncertainty and upheaval reshaped daily life across the nation.

As the protests intensified, so did the state's crackdown. According to reports,¹ over 650 lives were lost, and thousands were injured or arrested during this period. The mounting public outrage culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, ending her 15-year tenure. An interim

¹ Hossain, S. (2024, September 9). July-August Movement: 631 lives lost, 19,200 injured. *The Daily Star*. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/july-august-movement-631-lives-lost-19200-injured-3697901>

government, led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus and composed of diverse experts—including student leaders—stepped in to restore stability.

The Diaries of Red July is an initiative by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) to understand how individual citizens relate to a political rupture of this nature, and how individual emotions turned into a collective experience. We do this by capturing the personal stories and emotional struggles of individuals during this time. While most contributors were not directly involved in the protests, their lives were deeply affected by the events unfolding around them. These reflections provide a glimpse into the fears, frustrations, hopes, and resilience of people caught in the storm of change. They reveal how a national movement shaped personal lives and created ripples of solidarity, pain, and reflection across the country. This initiative highlights the human side of one of Bangladesh's most defining moments through individual perspectives.

1.2. About the Contributors

The individuals contributing to this project represent a segment of Bangladesh's working youth, all based in Dhaka, united by their shared experiences during the July Movement of 2024.

Their backgrounds, locations, and prior involvement in activism were recorded to provide a unique perspective on the events and to understand the impact of these incidents on their lives.

Some individuals had a history of participating in key movements such as the 2018 Quota Reform Movement and the Road Safety Movement. Their past experiences enriched their reflections, with the emotions conveyed in their writings showcasing a deep-rooted spirit of resistance. Despite their varying circumstances, they shared common feelings of fear, determination, and hope. While individuals in affluent neighbourhoods observed the unrest from a relative distance, others closer to the epicentre grappled with the daily realities of curfews, violence, and a crumbling sense of normalcy.

What unites these individuals is their collective connection to the spirit of resistance that defined the July Movement. Whether through firsthand participation, offering moral support, or reflecting on the unfolding chaos, each individual's account contributes significantly to the collective memory of this pivotal moment in Bangladesh's history. Table A1 includes a short profile of the six contributors who shared their diary entries.

1.3. Methodology

The *Diaries of Red July* project adopts a unique approach to capture reflections on the events that unfolded and examine how individuals' lives were affected by the July Movement. While the participants were not directly involved in the protests, they experienced significant disruptions in their daily lives and witnessed the broader societal impact. This initiative aimed to track the emotional journeys of each individual, identifying shifts in their feelings toward the protests over time.

Initially, the project was introduced to a diverse group of young researchers from various organizations across Bangladesh. Out of this pool, 30 participants expressed interest in sharing their personal experiences of the July Movement through diary entries. The initiative was launched after the July Movement, in October 2024, with instructions to write reflective diary entries covering the period from early June until the end of August. Participants were encouraged to document where they were, what they were doing, who they were talking to, and how they were feeling each day, while maintaining full anonymity using their preferred pseudonyms. We encouraged them to start with the days most significant and vivid in their memories.

During the collection of entries, some individuals withdrew, as revisiting the atrocities of that time proved overwhelming. They struggled to put into words the depth of their emotions and the suffering they endured. Ultimately, complete diary entries were received from six individuals—Aiyanna, ArchAngel, PQR, Luminol, Rafid, and Hydrenza—all of whom submitted their reflections under self-chosen pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. These entries cover the period from June 5 to August 5. In this paper, we present their stories and what we learned from them.

The analysis of the *Diaries of Red July* involved a multi-step process aimed at understanding and visualizing the emotional journeys of individuals during the July Movement. The first step was to carefully read and interpret each diary entry, allowing us to derive a cohesive narrative for each day and each individual. These narratives captured the lived experiences, thoughts, and emotions of participants, connecting their personal stories to the larger historical context of the movement.

Next, we identified key dates that featured the most diary entries and corresponded to significant events during the July Movement. For each of these dates, we cross-referenced the entries with major incidents—such as government crackdowns, public demonstrations, or announcements—that unfolded on that day.

To understand the emotional impact, we then tracked the wide range of emotions each individual felt during a given day. Using this approach, we analyzed shifts in their emotions over time, highlighting patterns of fear, terror, rage, solidarity, and other sentiments as they navigated the movement's highs and lows. This date-wise mapping of emotions allowed us to visualize

how personal experiences aligned with the broader trajectory of the protest.

By identifying the emotions expressed in each diary entry, we categorized them into primary emotions such as joy, admiration, and ecstasy, alongside negative emotions like grief, terror, and

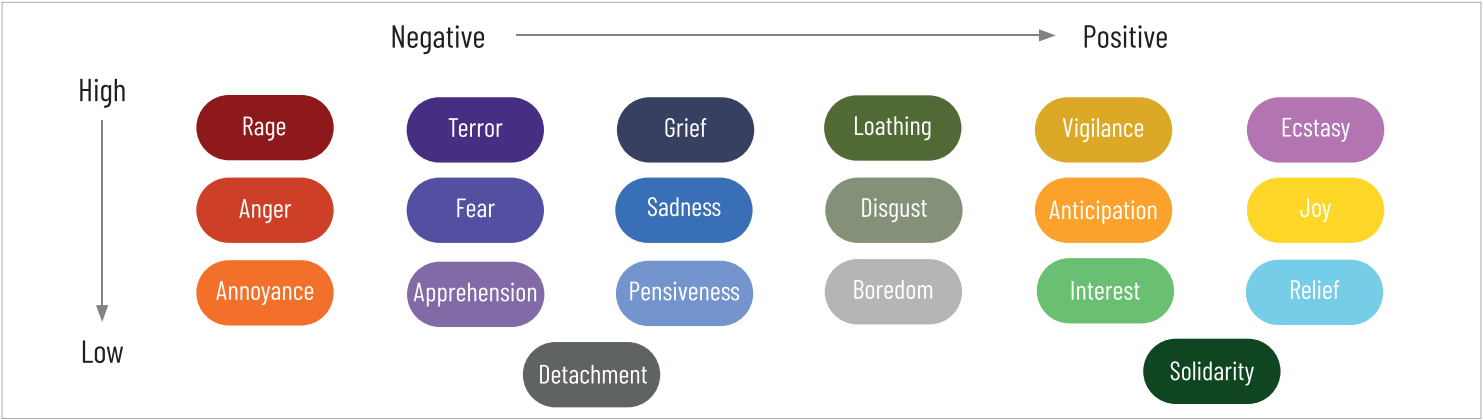


Figure 1. Visual Key of Emotions Identified From Diary Entries Using Valence (Negative to Positive) and Intensity (Low to High) Axes With Distinct Colour Codes

loathing. The colours chosen for each emotion were selected based on what felt most appropriate, rather than being strictly derived from existing models. This allowed for a more intuitive and emotionally resonant visual display. More intense emotions like rage or ecstasy were assigned bold, vibrant colours, while milder emotions like annoyance or interest were paired with softer, more subdued hues. This approach enabled us to create a visually cohesive representation of the emotional spectrum, facilitating easy comparison across emotions while preserving the individuality and intensity of each emotional expression.

The final step involved visualizing the emotional flow of each participant's diary entries across the timeline of the July Movement. Through this approach, we were able to create an emotional timeline that connected personal experiences to key incidents during the movement, offering a comprehensive understanding of the collective emotional landscape during that turbulent time.

1.4. Ethical Considerations

To uphold ethical integrity, all diary entries were submitted through an anonymous online form on a platform called SurveyCTO, ensuring that participants could share their experiences without fear of identification. Respondents used pseudonyms to main-

tain full anonymity, allowing them to express their thoughts and emotions freely. Before submission, they were clearly informed about the purpose of the initiative and how their entries would be utilized, ensuring transparency and informed consent. This approach safeguarded the confidentiality of participants while preserving the authenticity of their lived experiences.

1.5. Limitations

A key limitation of this model lies in its reflective nature. The emotions identified from the diary entries are based on personal recollections, and some may be influenced by events that occurred after the initial emotional experience. The emotions captured in the diaries may not solely reflect the immediate feelings at the time of the events but may also be shaped by subsequent reflections, realizations, or shifts in perspective. This retrospective influence could lead to a reinterpretation of certain emotions, potentially altering the intensity or nature of the feelings described. As such, while the model provides a valuable framework for analyzing emotional expression, it must be understood within the context of individual subjective experiences and the potential impact of later reflections.

“আমি চির বিদ্রোহী বীর
বিশ্ব ছাড়ায়ে উঠিয়াছি একা
চির উন্নত কিয়!”



Ramin Sora



Azha



Nikah



THIS IS NEW
BANGLADESH

MADE BY

GEN-Z

Chapter Two

Mapping the Emotions

2.1. Our Approach

The emotional mapping of The Diaries of Red July (shown in Figure 2) provides a visual representation of how different individuals experienced and internalized the key events of the movement.

The chart categorizes emotions along two main axes: positive and negative. Positive emotions are located towards the top, while negative emotions are placed towards the bottom. The emotions are colour-coded, with green and yellow representing positive emotions such as joy, interest, and solidarity, and blue, purple, red, and orange representing negative emotions like fear, rage, grief, and terror.

To construct the chart, we first identified the range of emotions expressed by each individual on each day, based on their diary entries. We then considered the frequency with which each emotion appeared and the number of diary entries associated with each specific day. The size of each bubble represents the number of times each emotion was mentioned, with the largest bubbles indicating the most commonly expressed emotions for that date. These emotions were also labelled within the circles to clearly highlight the dominant feelings on those days.

2.2. Surges and Shifts

The first major incident began on June 5, when the High Court's decision to reinstate the freedom fighter quota triggered wide-

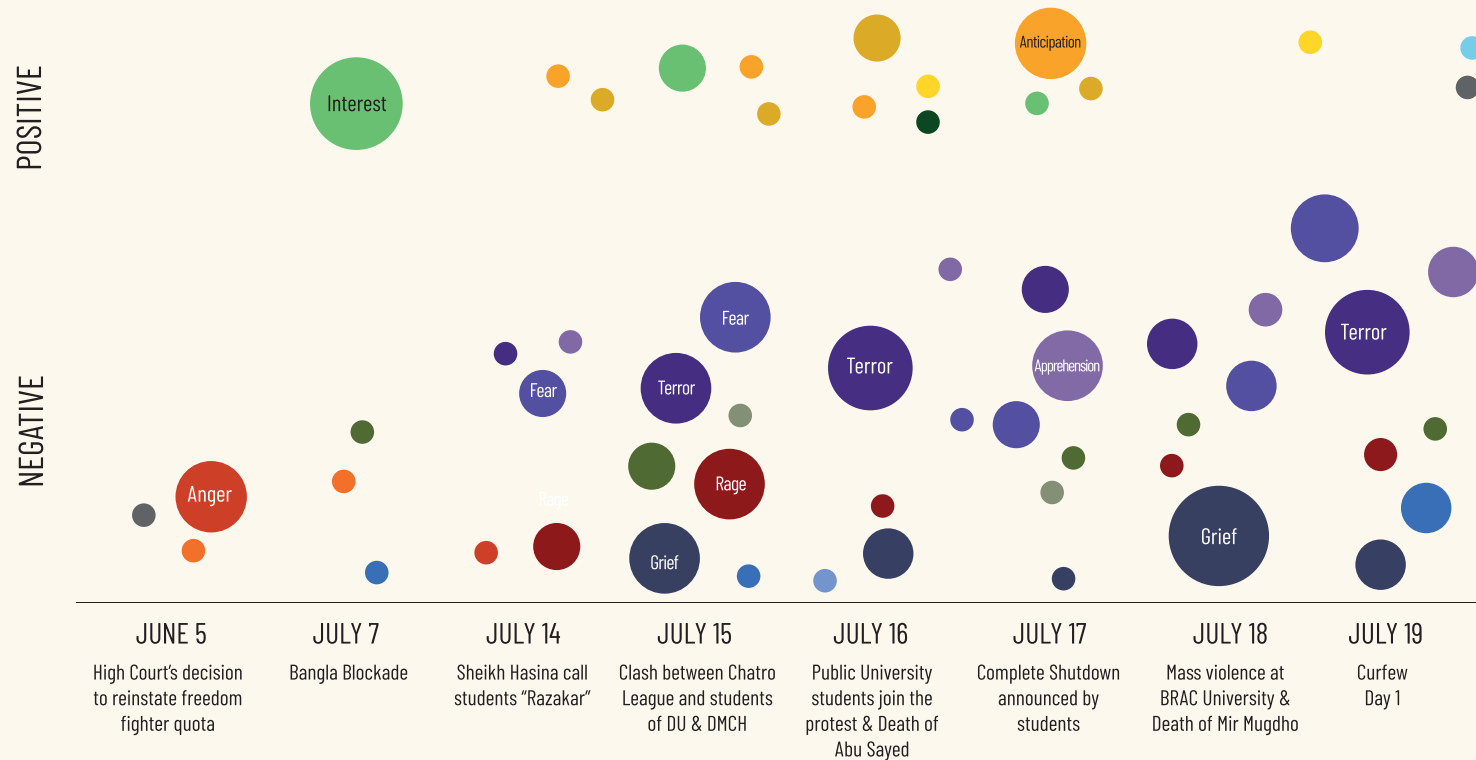
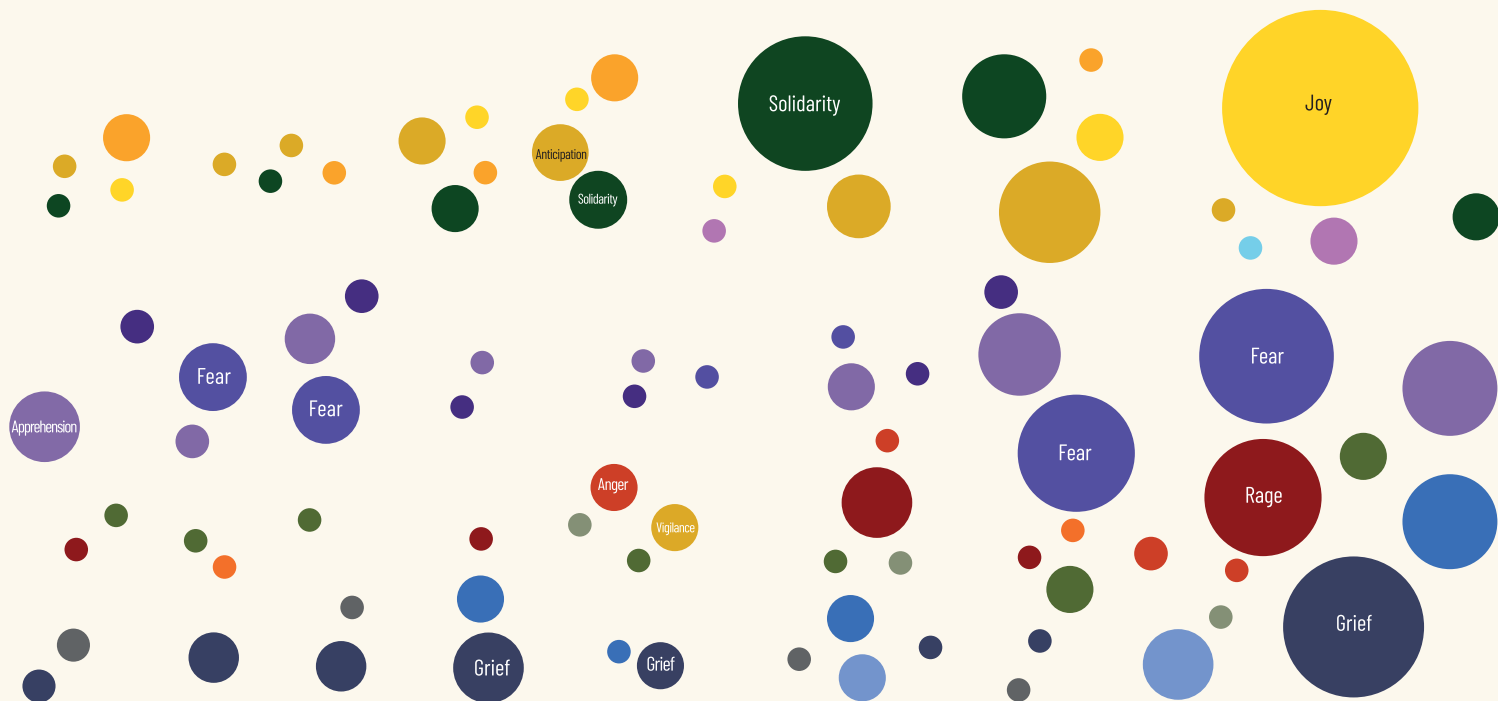


Figure 2. Timeline of Dominant Emotions Expressed by Contributors During the Red July Movement (5 June–5 August 2024) With Bubble Size Representing Number of Mentions



JULY 21
Supreme Court's
verdict of 93% for
general students

JULY 22
Mass arrest
of students

JULY 28
Forced
statement by
student leaders

JULY 30
Red Profile Picture
Protest on Social
Media

AUGUST 2
People from all classes
and professions showing
solidarity with the
demands

AUGUST 3
Mass gathering at
Shaheed Minar demanding
resignation of PM

AUGUST 4
Mass violence
intensified

AUGUST 5
Resignation of
Prime Minister

spread anger and fear. Still, the unrest remained mostly contained, an undercurrent rather than a flood. This moment of awakening set the stage for what followed.

This changed a month later, on July 7, with the Bangla Blockade—a coordinated mobilization of dissent against the quota reinstatement. While some participants expressed annoyance at the inconvenience caused by the traffic obstruction, many found pride and a growing interest in the issue, as the protest became both a physical and emotional act of reclaiming space.

The movement's emotional nadir came between July 15 and July 18, following violent clashes between Chhatra League activists and student protesters, and the tragic deaths of Abu Sayed and Mir Mugdho. Here, the chart visibly darkens: grief and terror swell, accompanied by rage and apprehension, symbolizing the intense negative emotions participants faced during these violent encounters.

Following the Supreme Court's verdict on reducing the quota on July 21, emotions were mixed and complicated. Though grief and fear remained, they were tempered by vigilance and growing anticipation, signalling growing resistance despite the emotional toll.

The first week of August brought another turning point. On August 2 and 3, mass gatherings like the Shaheed Minar rally fueled a sharp rise in solidarity—but the emotional atmosphere remained complex. Fear and rage continued to grow, reminding that while unity was strengthening, the sense of vulnerability had not disappeared. The movement balanced precariously between euphoria and the ever-present threat of violence.

Finally, on August 5, the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina triggered a burst of joy and ecstasy—the largest positive emotional bubbles captured on the chart. Yet, even at this moment of apparent triumph, many were still processing the grief and fear stemming from the violence and bloodshed that had marked the movement. Victory did not erase the memory of loss; it merely reframed it.

Overall, the emotional mapping reveals that Red July was not a simple story of uprising and triumph. It was a complex negotiation between hope and heartbreak, outrage and resilience—proof that political movements are fought as much in the mind and heart as on the streets.

Chapter Three

Days That Shook the Nation

June 5, 2024

The Verdict That Sparked It All

June 5 marked the day the High Court reinstated the controversial quota system in government jobs, overturning the hard-won 2018 decision that had previously abolished it—and the day public demonstrations began. Initially, the streets were silent. The news slipped into social media timelines, office chatter, and university corridors. But within hours, students from six major universities—including the University of Dhaka and Jahangirnagar University—began to mobilize. A small crowd gathered in front of the Dhaka University Central Library, while a brief rally formed at Shaheed Minar. It was not yet a revolution—it was a murmur, a sharp intake of breath before the storm.

This day was not defined by clashes or curfews. It was marked by something quieter but equally potent: the dawning realization that the hard-fought battles of the past could be undone without warning, and that if injustice resurfaced, resistance would have to rise again.

For ArchAngel, the day initially passed without much concern. “I was still not bothered by it despite being a BCS aspirant myself,” he reflected later. A quiet confidence had kept him detached: “I thought I was worthy enough to secure my place among the rest of the 44%.” At the time, he believed he was meritorious enough to withstand the system’s unfairness. Nonetheless, the seeds of doubt were already being sown beneath the surface.



Photo | Rayhan Ahmed, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

For PQR, however, the day was marked by frustration. “I was shocked and annoyed,” he recalled. Having spent years immersed in gruelling preparation for government job exams in 2022 and 2023, the reinstatement felt like a betrayal. “Since many of my peers are taking preparation for govt job exam, this verdict was frustrating,” he wrote. Beneath that frustration lurked deeper grievances—the rot of corruption and injustice that haunted the recruitment system. “There was news of question leaks for the last 13 consecutive BCS exams and many other govt job exams,” he added bitterly. Watching friends and seniors flood social media with outrage only sharpened his sense of helplessness. Although he had moved away from that career path, he could not escape the sting of seeing a rigged system polished and paraded as normal once again.

June 5 planted different emotions in each heart: detachment, annoyance, and anger.

July 7, 2024

The Bangla Blockade

A month after the quota system was reinstated, Dhaka came to a standstill. Students across the country launched the “Bangla Blockade,” a coordinated effort to block roads, intersections,

and rail lines—signalling the growing strength of the anti-quota movement. From Shahbagh to Nilkhet, from Agargaon to the Intercontinental, the arteries of Dhaka were seized by young voices refusing to be sidelined.

The protest began modestly. Around 3:20 p.m., students gathered in front of the Dhaka University Library and marched through the streets, chants echoing off the old walls. By 3:50 p.m., the Shahbagh intersection was sealed, followed quickly by other vital points of the city. Traffic backed up across the capital and onto highways beyond. The students of Jahangirnagar University blocked the Dhaka-Aricha Highway, creating miles-long traffic jams. Inconvenience itself became a protest—a disruption no citizen could ignore.

That day, the country's minority Hindu community was celebrating Rath Jatra, a religious festival. In a gesture of respect, students delayed their protests until the afternoon—emphasizing the movement's inclusivity and sensitivity, in sharp contrast to the government's attempts to portray them as anarchists. Despite mounting pressure, the Prime Minister dismissed the movement as “illogical,” deflecting responsibility by suggesting that the courts, not the government, should address the students' demands.

Amid this frozen city, perspectives began to shift. For many who had not yet fully committed to the cause, the Bangla Blockade was the moment the movement became impossible to ignore.

For ArchAngel, the day triggered a deepening sadness. Until then, he had observed the growing unrest from a distance. But on July 7, a viral Facebook post shattered his indifference. It exposed the systemic fraud and question-paper leaks in BCS recruitment—the very path he had long been preparing for. “Being a BCS aspirant myself, it made me feel sad and depressed, considering there is already a 56% quota. Now, if the rest of the 44% recruitment isn’t fair, then I stand no chance.” The blockade outside mirrored a blockade within: doubts about whether the system could offer any future at all. “Slowly I started to think that I will shift from BCS. Started thinking of master’s opportunities somewhere abroad.” The streets were blocked, but for ArchAngel, it was the collapse of his own future that hit hardest.

For PQR, the day unfolded differently—with fascination and pride. Watching the news, he saw a city transformed: students courageously blocking Shahbagh, TSC, Science Lab, Chankharpul, and beyond. “I saw news of protests at the Dhaka-Aricha Highway by students of Jahangirnagar University,” he recalled. “In fact, the whole Dhaka city experienced traffic that day.” But instead

of resentment, PQR felt admiration. The students flooding the streets were not causing chaos—they were demanding justice in a system that had robbed them of fairness. “It was Sunday, but there was very little transport on the road after office time. Many colleagues in my office had to face tremendous traffic,” he noted. Yet amidst the gridlock, PQR felt a pulse of pride: the youth were refusing to let history repeat itself in silence.

July 7 was not a day of slogans alone. It was the day inconvenience itself became protest—a day when Dhaka’s very stillness spoke louder than a thousand voices. It was the day even the indifferent were forced to confront the truth: a nation’s youth had risen, and they would not be silenced.

July 14, 2024

“Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar!”

On July 14, 2024, the protests took on a sharper, more defiant tone. What had started as a demand for fairness evolved into something deeper—a cry against being branded, insulted, and attacked by those in power. Students marched across Dhaka, submitting a memorandum to the president in the hope that a

political solution remained possible. But by evening, that hope was shattered.

In a press conference that sent shockwaves across the country, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina referred to the protesting students as the “children of *Razakars*”—a label synonymous with betrayal and treachery in Bangladesh’s history. The insult cut deeper than any previous dismissal. Across campuses, a wave of fury erupted. Students gathered spontaneously, chanting under the darkening sky: “*Tumi ke? Ami ke? Razakar! Razakar!*” The symbolic heart of Dhaka University, Rokeya Hall, saw its gates broken by female students who refused to be locked away. They marched into the night.

Sensing the eruption, the government ordered a shutdown of 4G networks around Dhaka University. But even in the absence of full internet access, word spread like wildfire. Around 11:30 p.m., clashes erupted: leaders and members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League attacked protesters under the cover of night, their brutality a grim echo of the regime’s fear. Meanwhile, the High Court formally released its decision to uphold a 30% quota for descendants of freedom fighters—a final blow that made clear the system would not bend.

PQR experienced the evening through the lens of growing turbulence. As students submitted their memorandum to the president, PQR followed the rising tide of events. The prime minister’s comment branding the students as *Razakars* triggered a visceral reaction in him, as it did across the nation. He saw students breaking locks, raising slogans, and flooding campuses with a mix of anger and grief. “Among all the unstable situations within the country,” he wrote, “there was a sense that something irreversible had been unleashed.” The dignity of the movement had been insulted; the rage was now personal.

Meanwhile, ArchAngel remained sceptical. He believed that, like so many times before, the protest would eventually lose momentum, and the government would find a way to silence dissent once again. His fears deepened when Obaidul Quader openly instructed the Chhatra League to “take action” against the students. “Probably the protest will die down now,” he said, more in despair than cynicism.

July 15, 2024

Blood on Campus

On July 15, the brutal and organized attacks on protesting students by the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) inside Dhaka



Photo | Rayhan Ahmed, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

University ended any sense of safety or possibility of dialogue. Students who had been protesting peacefully against the reinstated quota system were met not with negotiation but with violence.

Across the country, fear turned into collective anger. Sadness deepened to loathing, and solidarity hardened into an unstoppable resolve. Attacks in residence halls, on campus roads, and even inside hospitals left emotional scars that would shape the days to come.

For Aiyanma, July 15 was the breaking point. “The attack on general students at Dhaka University by the BCL was the tipping point for me. Seeing my peers brutally attacked for voicing their dissent was unbearable.” What had begun as a political protest now felt deeply personal. Dhaka University, a place he believed symbolized free thought and expression, had become a war zone. “It was a stark reminder of the lengths to which those in power would go to silence dissent,” he reflected. The quota system, once a matter of policy, had become a gateway to institutionalizing injustice.

"Complacency was not an option. We had to stand up, speak out, and fight back, even if it meant facing dire consequences."

For ArchAngel, the events of July 15 triggered a different kind of resistance—one within his own department. The night before, he had warned his sister: “There will be a fight in that area—by the League’s student wing. Stay away.” But when reports of attacks—especially on female students—poured in, he could no longer remain on the sidelines. “The news of girls getting beaten up made me furious. Some women’s faces were scarred for life. Some panicked and became senseless.” ArchAngel began collecting evidence—photos of department students involved in the attacks—and led a boycott movement. “I instructed my juniors to take steps to boycott these League members in our department.” In a quiet but powerful act of resistance, his call was met with overwhelming support. He realized that rage could be channelled into action, even in the smallest spaces.

PQR’s experience added another layer to that night’s anguish. “My friend who lives in the DU teacher’s quarter sent a video showing how brutally the Chhatra League was beating students protesting the quota.” Panic surged. “I immediately called some friends who were at the protest. I couldn’t reach anyone. The anxiety intensified.” The night became a sleepless vigil: videos surfaced of BCL members shooting inside dormitories, storming Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and attacking the injured. “I couldn’t sleep at all that night.” With each new clip, his anger at

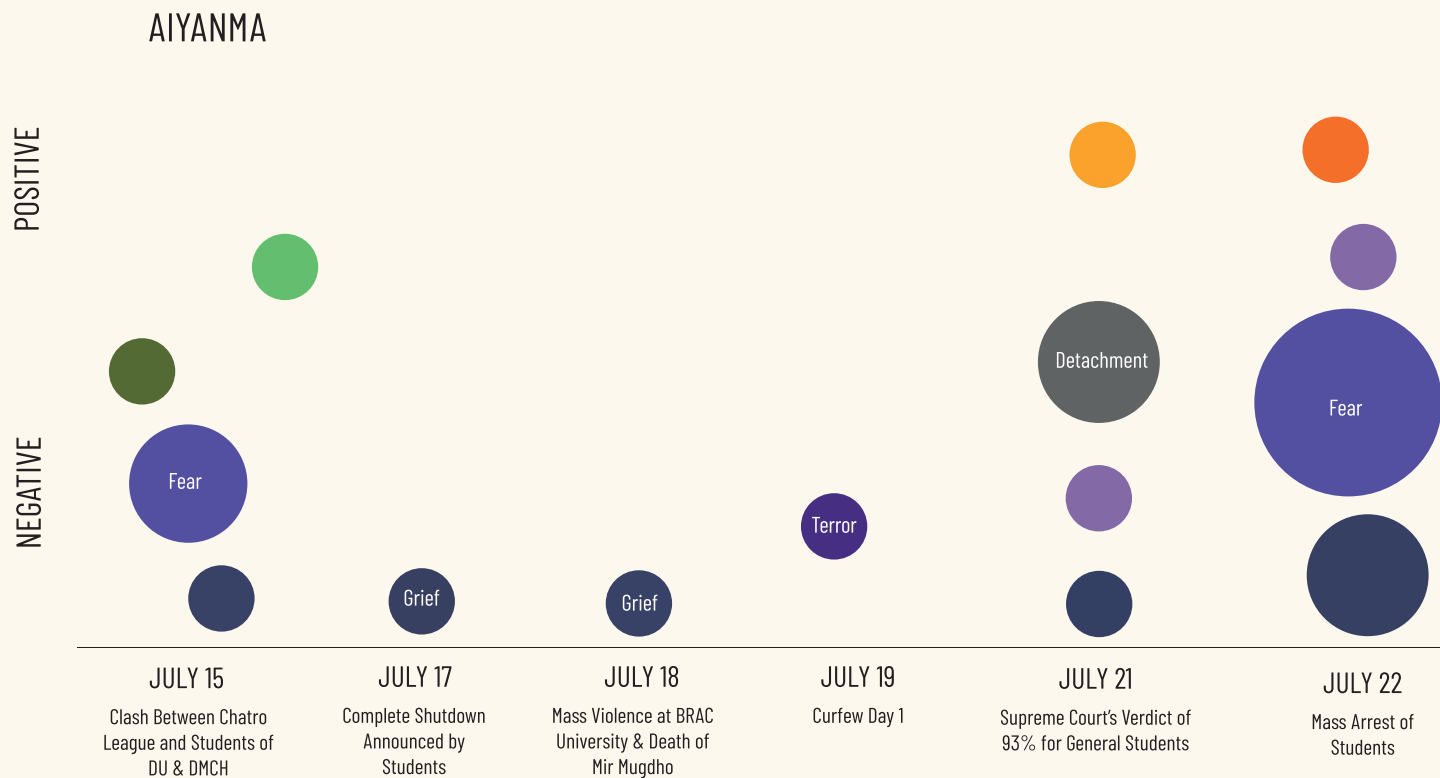


Figure 3. Ayanma's Emotional Map

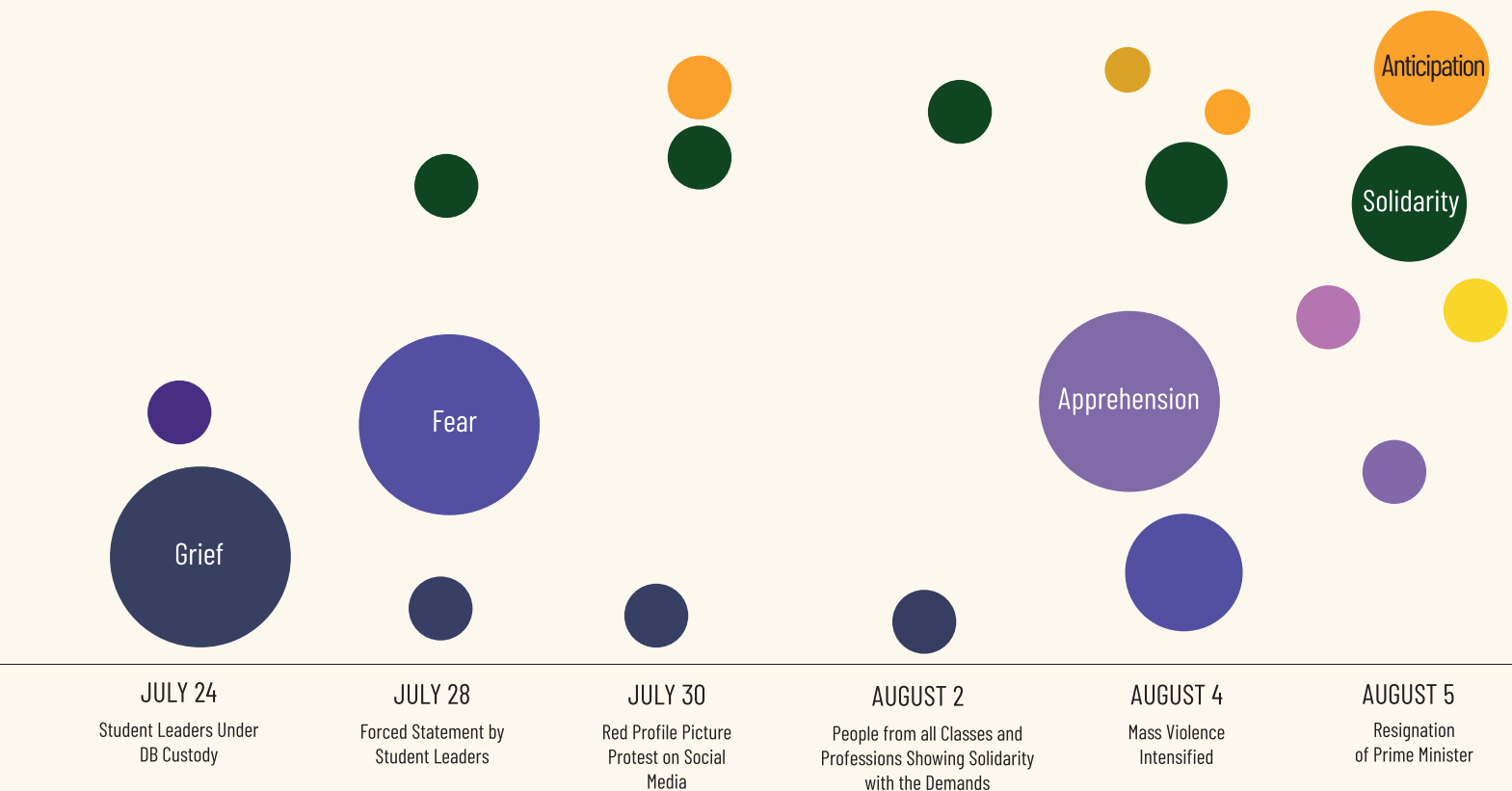




Photo | Aishik Rehman, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

those who had supported such forces deepened. “I started to hate them even more.”

As the clashes intensified, so did PQR’s sense of guilt. “I saw my friends, seniors, and juniors beaten, bloodied—some unrecognizable. And I was stuck at home, unable to join them.” He spent the night glued to his screen, reading updates, his chest tight with fear. When he learned that even students in emergency rooms were not spared, something inside him broke. “It felt like we were no longer citizens—just bodies to be crushed and erased.” His hatred hardened into resolve. “Never again,” he vowed. “Even if I have to stand alone, I will stand against them.”

By night’s end, the memory of battered bodies, broken dormitories, and shattered hopes had evolved into a grim understanding: the fight ahead was not just for fairness, but for survival itself.

"We were no longer protesting just a quota system. We were fighting for the soul of our nation."

July 16, 2024

The Death of Abu Sayed

July 16 marked a significant escalation in the July Movement. The previous day’s violence had ignited outrage among students nationwide—but now it was clear the state would use force to suppress dissent. Dhaka, Chittagong, and Rangpur became battlegrounds. At least six students were killed as clashes between protesters, law enforcement, and ruling-party activists engulfed campuses and streets. The government ordered the indefinite closure of all educational institutions, deployed Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) troops to key districts, and instructed students to vacate their dormitories.

Yet the students’ spirit remained unbroken. In retaliation, general students reclaimed dorms once dominated by the BCL. They signed “Politics-Free” declarations and hung banners across previously occupied halls. In one surreal scene, students seeking refuge were beaten inside the Farmgate Metro station. Meanwhile, private universities such as BRAC University, North South University, and Independent University, Bangladesh saw students block key roads across the capital. What began as a demand for fairness had become a fight for dignity and resistance.

For ArchAngel, July 16 crystallized into a personal mission. Earlier that day, he had wired a generator line to his room—an act of readiness in a city on edge. But nothing prepared him for the killing of Abu Sayed, an unarmed student shot dead by police at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur. “At first, I thought some deaths were supposed to happen in such protests,” he admitted. But seeing the viral video of Sayed’s death made it immediate and personal. ArchAngel responded by ensuring that any student in his department who had supported or taken part in the violence was banned from all student platforms and removed from group chats. “I personally made sure that people who actively participated in beating up the students or supported it on Facebook get banned and removed from all kinds of Department groups and affiliations,” he wrote. It was his act of defiance—a refusal to forget or forgive.

Rafid, still abroad at the time, encountered the horror through a viral Facebook video: a young man stood with arms wide open, defiantly facing the police. What happened next shook him to the core. **“I watched the video at least six times to make myself believe what I had seen. Was this a brave man or a man who had nothing to lose?”** The image haunted him. For the first time, he truly understood the everyday terror experienced by Palestinians in Gaza. From thousands of miles

away, the violence in his homeland felt painfully close.

PQR found himself at the heart of the storm in Dhaka. By July 16, he witnessed how swiftly students had shifted from passive protest to active resistance. Abu Sayed’s death galvanized campuses across the country. At Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, and Begum Rokeya University, students reclaimed their dormitories, expelled BCL members, and declared their dormitories “BCL Free.” In Rokeya Hall, the provost was made to sign an agreement committing to a politics-free environment. Meanwhile, students from private universities rallied in Bashundhara and Badda, blockading streets and paralyzing the city.

“At around 3:30 p.m., it was reported that in the Farmgate–Khamarbari area, Chhatra League assailants attacked protesters with sticks,” PQR recalled, highlighting how even refuge inside metro stations was no longer safe. Yet, despite the danger, students stood their ground. At North South University, BRAC University, and other campuses, young people discovered that collective courage could—even if only for a moment—beat back even the most brutal forces.

July 17, 2024

A Janaza Under Fire

July 17 was a day when grief collided with violence. Across the country, students gathered to offer Gayebana Janaza prayers for their fallen peers. Even mourning was not spared: police stormed the prayer gatherings at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, and Rajshahi University, unleashing sound grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets. The government's response to sorrow was suppression, making the students' call for a "Complete Shutdown" of the country the next day inevitable.

University authorities, under pressure, closed campuses and ordered students to vacate their dormitories. Riot police, RAB forces, and undercover agents flooded institutions that once symbolized learning and hope. That evening, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appeared on national television, dressed in a black saree, expressing sorrow for the deaths and announcing a judicial inquiry. Yet her words rang hollow. For PQR, it was yet another attempt to manipulate emotions without addressing the real injustice. He reflected bitterly: "I have always seen the government of our country try to manipulate people's demand by taking an immediate solution without addressing the root causes." Students realized they would have to pursue survival,

dignity, and justice on their own terms.

ArchAngel wrestled with doubt. An "Anti-Terror Citizen Gathering" was taking place at Shahbagh, and his partner urged him to join, but he hesitated. "I never consider myself to be a field-level person," he admitted. "I thought I could provide better support through my internet activities and financial support if needed." His partner went anyway, navigating streets increasingly dominated by Jubo League operatives. Tear gas canisters exploded, and sound grenades echoed through the city. Soon after, the attackers temporarily retreated, but ArchAngel felt a sense of paranoia creeping in. "It all seemed too good to be true," he worried, "I felt like they would come back with a more vicious plan. They will cause more deaths."

For Aiyanma, July 17 was etched with pain and loss. Watching from afar through Facebook posts and frantic phone calls, he witnessed the movement descend into horror. "The news of at least fifty deaths, with reports suggesting even higher numbers, was a haunting testament to the brutality faced by the students," he wrote. His heart broke reading stories of young men like Sharif Hasan, Farhan Faiyaz, and Yamin becoming casualties of a government's merciless crackdown. The mother of Abu Saeed,



Photo | Hasnat Abdullah, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

sobbing for her son who had been shot for daring to dream, became an unforgettable symbol of the pain inflicted.

Every post, every image told a story of resilience and bloodshed. Students had tried to hold peaceful prayers, but their prayers were answered with bullets. Police entered Dhaka University with permission from the vice-chancellor himself. Protesters were chased, shot, and beaten. **“How could anyone point a gun at a teenager?”** Aiyanma wondered helplessly as he stared at Farhan’s smiling photo, now a memory.

The city became a battlefield. Sound grenades exploded in the night air. Riot police and security forces swept through hostels and streets. Some students fought back—hurling bricks, shouting slogans, refusing to be cowed. But the human price was immense. Roads were blockaded. Private universities rallied. From North South to BRAC, from United International to independent citizens, Dhaka’s arteries pulsed with a mixture of fear, anger, and an unwavering desire for justice.

Yet through it all, one emotion prevailed: solidarity. Even those not on the streets—ArchAngel, PQR, and Aiyanma—felt the struggle weigh on their hearts. It was no longer just about quotas; it was about survival, dignity, and ensuring that no more mothers

would bury their children for daring to dream of a better country.

July 18, 2024

The Death of Mir Mugdho

July 18 descended into chaos and heartbreak as violence escalated far beyond anything students had previously endured. Across Dhaka and the nation, clashes grew deadlier. Armoured personnel carriers (APCs) rolled through the streets. Mobile internet collapsed by afternoon; by nightfall, even Wi-Fi was disabled. This was more than a power outage—it was a blackout of voices, a blackout of truth.

The government reported 29 deaths, but protesters on social media compiled a list of 45 names by evening. Streets near private universities like BRAC University turned into battlegrounds. Police stormed campuses, fired tear gas, swung batons, and chased students through the streets. Witnesses reported helicopters flying overhead, with allegations that RAB forces fired at students from the skies. Later, government figures claimed the helicopters were merely “throwing water” to douse fires, but few on the ground believed them. “The government has never met such fierce resistance in the last 15 years,” ArchAngel reflected. “In panic, they are shooting people to save themselves.”

The entire transport system was paralyzed. Metro services shut down. Fires broke out at places like the Banani Toll Plaza, BTV Bhaban, and Setu Bhaban. Protesters alleged these fires were provocations—reports later suggested they were deliberately set by high-level officials themselves to justify the crackdown. Among the growing list of casualties, the death of Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho stood out. A student distributing food and water to fellow protesters, he was gunned down in cold blood. His video—raw and heartbreaking—circulated before the blackout. **“Mugdho’s video before death brought me to tears,”** ArchAngel wrote.

The horror spread beyond Dhaka. A second-year student from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology drowned while fleeing police gunfire across a canal. Chaos engulfed 19 districts. Dhaka became a ghost city: flames rising from its heart, APCs rumbling past deserted roads, and the silent cry of a wounded nation building to a crescendo.

At home, people waited with bated breath. ArchAngel, working remotely, watched clashes unfold just 1.5 kilometres from his home, near Malibag Chowdhury Para. “We were concerned about my dad returning home today,” he noted. His father, travelling from Gazipur weekly, was urged not to come back—it was simply too dangerous. In Uttara, ArchAngel witnessed an open fire.

Military vehicles rattling past left him shaken. Fear and defiance danced in uneasy tandem.

For ArchAngel, this day was proof that the movement had crossed a threshold. “I was happy to see the entire Dhaka city getting blocked. I started feeling hopeful that, finally, the fascist regime might get overthrown,” he admitted. But hope came laced with grief—friends and classmates were arrested, beaten, and even killed, and the noose of fear tightened.

PQR followed reports of internet shutdowns, arson, and the chilling claim that RAB helicopters fired on protesters. Official sources blamed a “third force,” but anyone who had seen the streets—or the bodies—knew otherwise.

Government attempts at negotiation fell flat. Students responded, “Discussion and shooting/killing do not go together. We can’t sit together walking past dead bodies.” Trust had been shattered beyond repair.

July 19, 2024

Lockdown Begins

July 19 was soaked in blood and veiled in surreal chaos. It no longer felt like a protest—Bangladesh was in a full-blown civil war. After Friday prayers, clashes erupted simultaneously across Dhaka—in Badda, Rampura, Uttara, Jatrabari, and Mohammadpur and then spread nationwide. Buildings burned. Metro rail stations and BRTA offices were vandalized. The streets, once full of daily life, were reduced to ashes.

The official death toll stood at 66, though many believed the true figure was higher. Armed forces took control, and a nationwide curfew went into effect at midnight. Yet protesters did not retreat. They hurled stones at armoured vehicles; the army often returned fire. In some videos, civilians were seen trying to push back an army jeep, only to be crushed by gunfire.

“The roads were looking like an absolute warzone,” ArchAngel wrote. His father had returned from Gazipur that morning to scenes of destruction—government offices gutted, cars burned out, and smoke hanging in the air like a funeral shroud. The day had once been marked on calendars for celebration: ArchAngel was due at two weddings. “I wanted to attend at least my close

friend’s wedding at any cost. But now, I had to cancel going to both weddings,” he noted. Reality was too dangerous, too uncertain.

In Sreemangal, Hydrenza found himself stranded between two worlds. His family attempted to return to Dhaka from Sylhet but were turned back at Madhabpur when they learned Bhairab was under siege. With no internet, the news was fragmented and terrifying. “I felt utterly lost, unsure of what to do,” Hydrenza wrote. As the day slipped into night, their driver refused to take them further, and they were forced to stay back. “That night was one of despair and helplessness,” Hydrenza remembered.

Luminol, too, carried a quiet grief. He had planned for his friend’s wedding in Uttara—now one of the most violent flashpoints—selecting his outfit a week in advance. That morning, a friend who was with the bride described their journey: “I went out in the morning to go to the parlour. As I came out from the alley to the main road, I saw an APC parked there,” his friend said. The bride, dressed in full bridal attire, had to ride a rickshaw through roads guarded by the Army, Police, and RAB—a surreal parade of vulnerability in a city under siege. The wedding proceeded, but only a handful of guests attended.

“I was sad about it, and very worried throughout because everything was uncertain and risky at that time,” Luminol recalled. Yet, in the strange way that trauma sometimes softens over time, he reflected, “Ever since 5th August, I remember this day as an interesting memory to have—I am aware of this change in feeling I am having once the danger is gone.”

Meanwhile, even under curfew, the students—bloodied but unbroken—announced their nine-point demand. They called for Sheikh Hasina’s public apology, the resignation of ministers and university vice-chancellors, the punishment of BCL attackers and complicit police, compensation for the families of the dead, and legal protection for protesters.

July 21, 2024

A Hollow Victory?

July 21, 2024, brought what should have been relief, but instead raised more questions. After weeks of unrest and bloodshed, the Supreme Court ruled that quotas for government jobs would be drastically reduced: 93% of civil service positions open to merit-based competition, 5% reserved for children of freedom fighters, and 1% each for ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities or the third gender. To outsiders, this might have appeared as

a triumph of reason. On the ground—under curfew and digital blackout—people were too fractured and distrustful to celebrate.

For Aiyanma, the verdict was met not with joy but with deep suspicion. “I did not believe this rule,” he reflected, “as I doubted whether it would be sustained.” The decision contained loopholes—its vague language allowed future “amendments.” Coupled with censored media and a total clampdown on internet communication, the victory felt hollow. **“The media were censoring deaths that took place,”** he noted bitterly. “Even the limited information on death tolls was unofficial; Dhaka Medical stopped providing death counts to the media.” To Aiyanma, the government’s manoeuvres seemed like a strategic retreat—not surrender, but a calculated move to smother dissent quietly.

PQR, too, watched the day unfold with numb detachment. The Supreme Court’s ruling, though ostensibly merit-based, could not erase the bloodshed. Curfew remained in effect, and at least seven more people died that day. The reform came at such a high cost that it tarnished any legitimacy it might have held.

Amidst this turbulence, ordinary life asserted itself in small, stubborn ways. ArchAngel found a moment of calm on a rooftop with neighbourhood friends—emotionally battered by recent

weeks. “We kept our smartphones aside and just gossiped like old times,” he wrote. They played games, watched old movies, laughed awkwardly, and for a few hours, tried to forget the world outside. “During crises like this, it sure does feel good to live in a neighbourhood where you have lots of friends of the same age,” he noted.

Far from Dhaka, Hydrenza remained in limbo. Still stranded in Sreemangal, his day was filled with phone calls offering little comfort. “I was in constant phone contact with Dhaka,” he remembered, “where people reassured me they were safe and told me not to worry. But I couldn’t tell if they were speaking the truth.” He considered flying back, but ticket prices had skyrocketed to BDT 9,000 per person—profiteering off desperation. “It enraged me that airlines would exploit people’s desperation like this,” he wrote.

July 21 was supposed to be a turning point. Instead, it deepened the fracture between the people and those who claimed to govern them. The struggle had not ended; it had only changed shape.

July 22, 2024

The Blackout

July 22 was another day steeped in uncertainty and despair. For many, it was defined by survival—both of the body and the spirit. In Dhaka, the intensity of previous clashes gave way to a heavy paralysis. While some were forced into hiding or seeking refuge in their homes, others cautiously ventured into the streets, weighed down by curfew and shutdown orders. The capital was littered with the remnants of destruction—burned vehicles, broken glass, and the acrid stench of unrest.

For Aiyanma, daily life had become an insurmountable hurdle. “The weight of this day felt heavier than ever,” he wrote. His sense of isolation was compounded by the sudden lack of money. “There was no money at home, and the ATMs near my home were empty,” he remembered. Even paying his electric bill was a struggle—his bKash payment system failed due to the shutdown. “The lines at the offices were long, with people waiting for hours just to pay their electric bills.” The frustration was high, but it was the overwhelming helplessness that defined the day. Students crowded the streets, holding banners and demanding justice, yet this sense of urgency only intensified the feeling of helplessness for Aiyanma. With the internet shut down, communication with

his family abroad had been severed. “My brother, who lives in Australia, couldn’t contact us,” he shared. The shutdown was not just an inconvenience; it cut ties to the outside world, intensifying fear and uncertainty.

ArchAngel’s day was marked by moments of uneasy calm. His routine had devolved into spending time with his neighbourhood friends. “We rewatched old movies and tried to analyze them from a whole new different perspective,” he reflected. Amidst the chaos, it was these small, shared acts of diversion that offered a sense of normalcy.

For Hydrenza, however, the calm sparked resolve. “On this day, I resolved that enough was enough,” he wrote. Determined to return to Dhaka, he risked travel from Sylhet despite the curfew. After a tense journey, he secured a flight. “Upon landing, the situation at the airport seemed normal,” he recalled—until he stepped outside. The city had changed beyond recognition: “The streets were lined with remnants of destruction—burnt walls and signs of vandalism.” Dhaka had become a ghost city, “stripped of its vibrancy and life.” Massive army checkpoints dotted every major road, reinforcing the eerie sense that he had returned not home, but to a war zone.

PQR spent the day observing the unrelenting escalation of violence. The official death toll reached at least 66. “The police attacked the students during the ‘*gayebana janaja*’ of the deceased,” he recalled. Grief and anger flooded the streets as the government’s crackdown continued unabated. Curfew remained in effect, and armed forces were deployed en masse. Public buildings and institutions became collateral damage in the state’s bid to quell the uprising. “A fire incident occurred in the evening at Banani Toll Plaza of Dhaka Elevated Expressway,” he noted. The reports came thick and fast, detailing the increasing brutality of the government’s response. Yet, there was no retreat from the protesters. Even after suffering such grave losses, they remained steadfast in their demands.

July 24, 2024

Mass Arrests Grip the Nation

July 24 was marked by deep emotion, rising fear, and growing determination. The weight of the preceding weeks culminated in a brutal escalation. The government’s violent repression of peaceful protests intensified, and the crackdown widened. Arrests surged, and the internet blackout only added to the growing uncertainty and fear.

Aiyanma was overwhelmed by the scope of the detentions. “From the night of July 23 to the afternoon of July 24, a staggering 1,400 people were arrested across the country, with 641 of those arrests happening in Dhaka alone,” he noted. The magnitude of the crackdown left him questioning the government’s true intentions. The fragmented news due to the internet shutdown created a sense of mental disturbance. “I could not help but feel a deep sense of doubt about the government’s intentions,” he expressed, as the limited information painted a bleak picture of the violence. The posts he read on social media described innocent people—children, students, workers—suffering from gunshot wounds. The government’s claim that it acted in the people’s best interest rang hollow. **“The streets were filled with police, RAB, and BGB forces, relentlessly firing tear gas and rubber bullets at the masses,”** Aiyanma described. The violence was spreading, and so was the realization: the government’s focus was on preserving power, not justice.

Meanwhile, ArchAngel sought slivers of normalcy amidst the chaos. He found a way to stay connected with the outside world. “One of my friends found a way to create a real-time live chat room using an IP address,” he explained. This allowed him to reconnect with his friends from university, but more importantly, it gave him a way to access independent news outside of the

heavily filtered information available on mainstream channels. “I also found an FTP server that was hosting independent news of the happenings in the past few days,” he noted, indicating how determined he was to stay informed despite the information blackout. But even with these small victories, a sense of dread lingered. “I felt like the Awami League would come back with a more vicious plan,” he admitted. The government’s heavy-handed approach made one thing clear: this fight was far from over.

July 28, 2024

Silencing the Leaders

Tensions reached a boiling point as the government’s crackdown on the student movement intensified. On this day, six key organizers of the anti-quota protest—while in custody of the Detective Branch (DB)—read a statement declaring the movement over. But their words did not end the resistance. Their colleagues refused to yield, and protests resumed the very next day. The struggle for justice was far from over—it had simply entered a new phase. As arrests continued to rise, with over 213,000 people accused in more than 200 cases across Dhaka, the city felt less like a capital of education progress and more like a battleground.

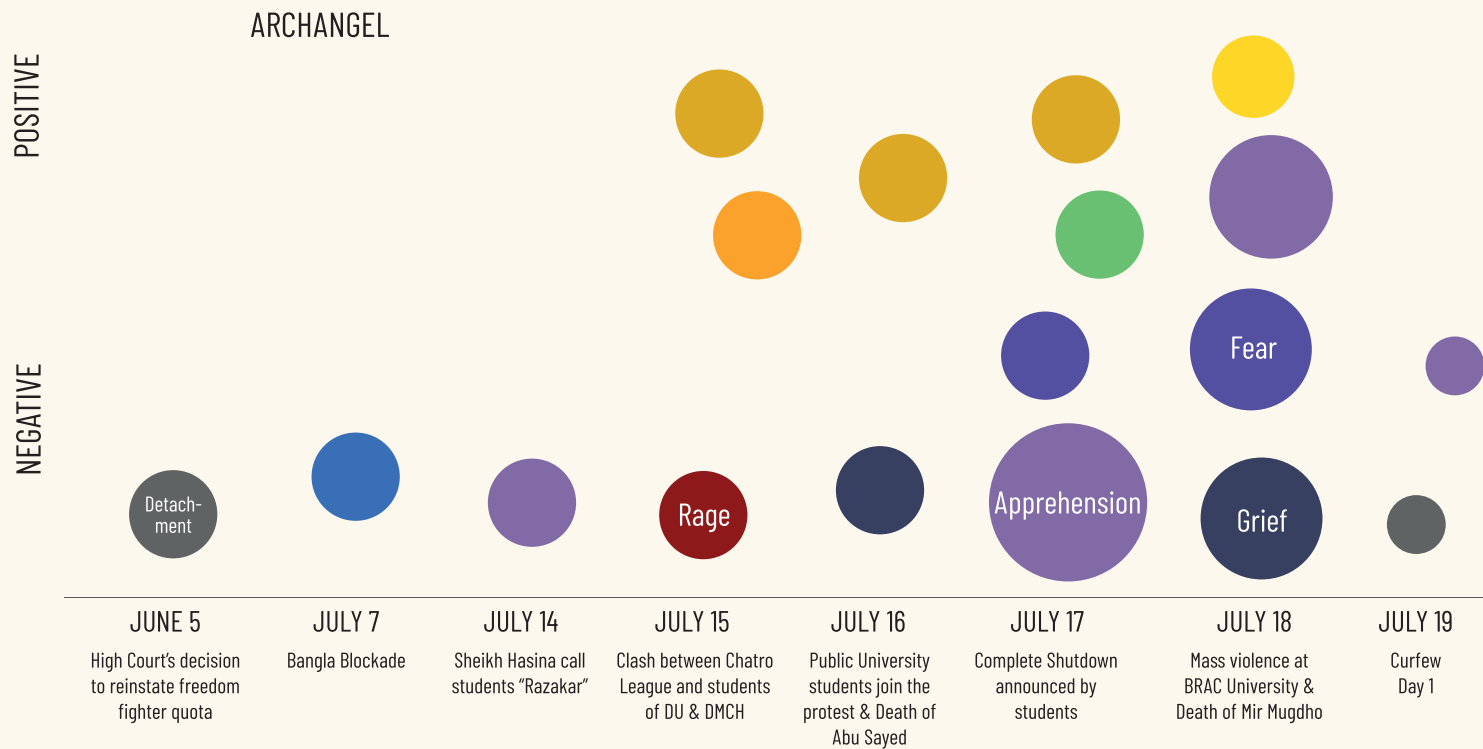


Figure 4. ArchAngel's Emotional Map

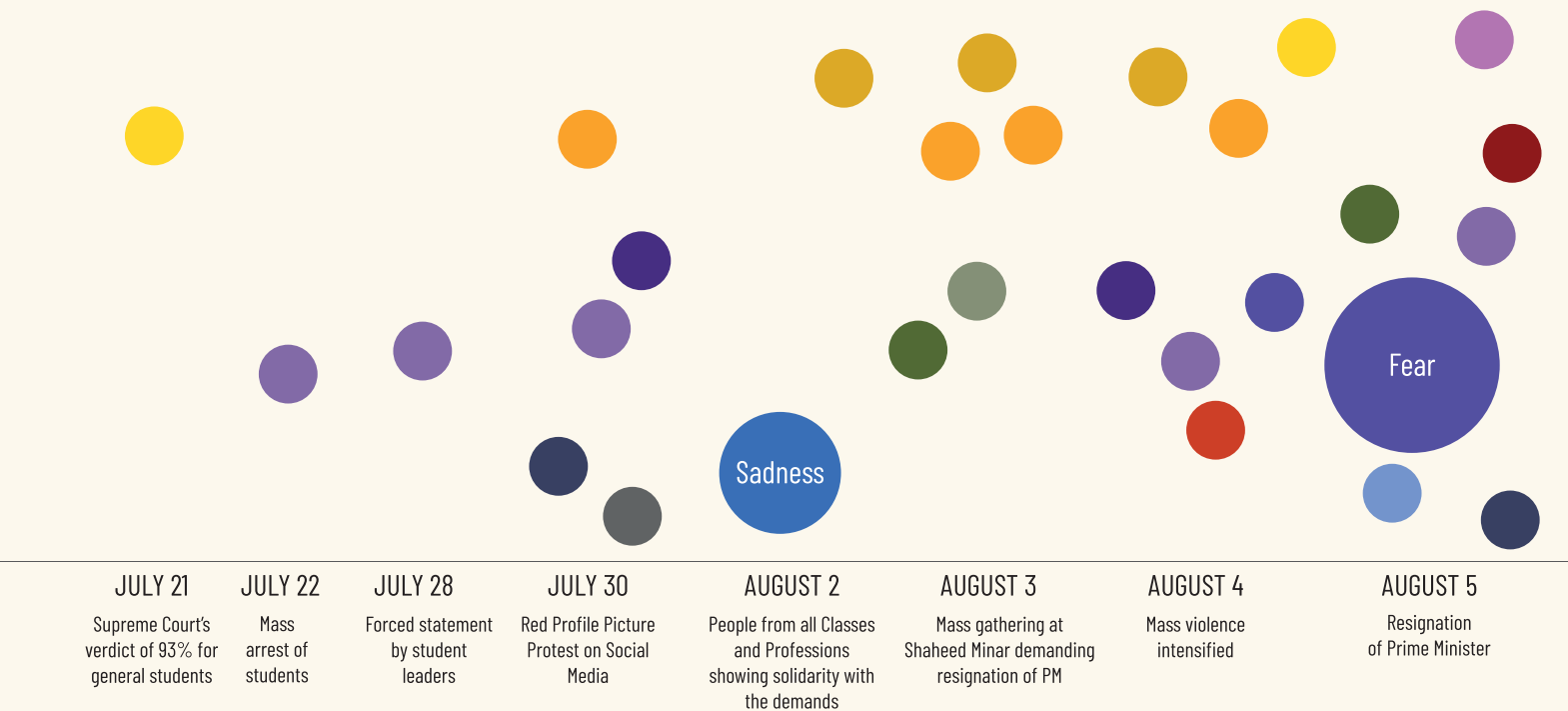




Photo | Tahmid Hasan

PQR reflected on the increasingly oppressive atmosphere. “Six coordinators announced the end of the movement in a video, but others outside vowed to keep fighting,” he wrote, acknowledging the deep divides caused by the ongoing repression. The government officially confirmed 147 deaths, but in PQR’s heart, he knew the real toll was much higher. **“The authorities are silencing the truth,”** he thought, watching as voices of resistance were systematically suppressed. Protesters’ hopes for justice seemed to be fading, but their resolve had not vanished.

Meanwhile, ArchAngel was battling the emotional fallout. “Police seem to have started geographically raiding areas by areas in Dhaka,” he wrote, describing the fear now permeating daily life. His insomnia, brought on by constant violence and dread, mirrored growing national anxiety. One image haunted him in particular: “I saw a video of a police shooting at an unarmed civilian... This was the cruelest video I have seen of any repression so far anywhere.” The man was shot six times—an act of senseless brutality that etched itself into ArchAngel’s memory.

“I will forever bear the names of Abu Sayed and Mir Mugdho in my heart,” he said, grieving the loss of these lives in the battle for justice.

Yet, even in his grief, he clung to a flicker of hope. “Some *shommonoyoks* have given a 24-hour ultimatum to the government to free the arrested individuals,” he noted, signalling that there might still be a chance for change.

Aiyanma, too, found himself drawn into the chaos. “It was around 3:40 AM when I read a Facebook post about the abduction of Arif Sohel, the coordinator of the anti-discrimination student movement at Jahangirnagar University,” he wrote, his heart sinking with fear. The arrests and abductions of key student leaders—coordinated and swift—felt like a deliberate attempt to dismantle the movement. When another key leader, Nusrat Tabassum, the coordinator of Shamsunnahar Hall at Dhaka University, was taken away, Aiyanma sensed the gravity of what was unfolding. “The systematic targeting of student leaders was a clear attempt to dismantle the movement from within,” he observed. Despite the fear surrounding her, Aiyanma remained resolute. “The detention of five key leaders of the movement by DB was a devastating blow,” he wrote. But even in the face of defeat, he continued to support the students. **“Their fight was my fight. Their pain was my pain,”** he said, his solidarity unwavering.

July 30, 2024

Resistance in Red

July 30 dawned as a day of solidarity, marked by an outpouring of resistance across Bangladesh. The streets of Dhaka rang with protest as people of all walks of life came together, draped in red cloth—an emblem of defiance against the government’s violence. Protesters demanded justice not only for the lives lost, but for the future of their country. As Aiyanma stood with his friends, their red cloths covering their mouths, he felt the weight of the moment. **“Seeing the parents standing silently with red cloths over their mouths was heartbreaking,”** he recalled. Their eyes, full of grief, mourned not only the dead, but also the state of their country. This was a moment of unity and resistance—one that would resonate far beyond the streets of Dhaka. “The new slogans became the voice of our protest, ‘Your state mourning is a joke’” Aiyanma added, his pride in the movement palpable.

ArchAngel was deeply saddened by the situation. Though reluctant to join the protests physically, he could no longer ignore the guilt and helplessness. “The sheer amount of guilt [for not actively participating] and helplessness the last 2 weeks made me realize that I DO care and give a shit about this country after all,” he admitted, realizing that standing by in silence was no

longer an option.

In the midst of the chaos, Rafid experienced a terrifying moment of reflection. While on a rooftop with his daughter, the sight of a passing aeroplane—once a normal occurrence—now filled him with dread. “The noise of the plane... amidst the nationwide terror, it only made us question whether a passenger plane should be flying so close to our proximity,” he wrote. His thoughts turned to the child killed by a stray bullet during the protests. The fear in his heart was no longer just about the violence in the streets; it was about how deeply the government’s actions had infiltrated the very sanctity of their homes. “I realized this is what the government has done: instilled a pervasive fear of death and complete erosion of safety within our own homes,” he reflected.

Across the city, PQR observed the growing frustration of the people. The government’s call for nationwide mourning only ignited more anger. As millions posted red cloth pictures on their social media profiles, PQR noted, “Teachers from several universities rallied, parents staged protests, and prominent citizens demanded government accountability for the public casualties.” The movement had expanded beyond quotas into a broader cry for justice. The demand was simple: stop the violence, release the leaders, and ensure justice for the victims.

August 2, 2024

The One-Point Demand

On August 2, the atmosphere in Bangladesh was charged, the tension palpable as students and citizens alike took to the streets in protest. A sense of unity surged through the crowd as the march began at the Press Club and headed towards the Shaheed Minar. The protesters students, teachers, writers, journalists, intellectuals, and working-class people—held one unified demand: the government's resignation. Their call echoed not only through the streets of Dhaka but also across the country. On social media, millions replaced their profile pictures with red cloths over their faces—a symbol of defiance and solidarity. Yet the day was not without tragedy: police fired shots in various parts of the country, and ruling-party members attacked protesters, underscoring how high the stakes had become.

At home, ArchAngel felt frustration and simmering anger. He prepared for the possibility of another internet shutdown. "I heard the internet service may go down again," he said, bracing for isolation. But it was not just the looming threat of communication blackouts that disturbed him. "I saw a post today, Hasina went to a hospital to see the wounded patients from the protests and show her fake support," he wrote, disgusted by the staged visit.

To him, it symbolized everything wrong with the government: empty words overshadowed by violent actions.

Amid the chaos, Aiyanma was moved by the protesters' solidarity. He was among the thousands marching towards the Shaheed Minar, his pride growing with each step. "The sheer diversity of the crowd—students, teachers, writers, journalists, intellectuals, political activists, labourers, professionals, and cultural workers—was a testament to our collective power," he recalled. This march transcended quota reform; it demanded justice for all victims of oppression. "The leftist organizations, by participating in this march, signalled their refusal to be confined within the binary politics of Shahbagh and Shapla used by the AL government," he added, recognizing the broader stakes.

However, despite the strength of the movement, Rafid watched in horror as the crackdown escalated. His social media feeds were flooded with videos of police firing on protesters in Uttara and elsewhere. "This felt like a merciless crackdown," he wrote, the violence leaving him grieving. He followed Rifat Roshid's call on Facebook to continue protesting despite the danger: "There was no room for any more discussion or negotiation with the killer Hasina," Roshid had written, and Rafid could not help but feel a deep sense of empathy for that frustration.



Photo | Tahmid Hasan

PQR observed the unrest's wider repercussions. "Many expatriates are campaigning about not sending remittances through banking channels in the country to protest the many casualties due to violence in the movement," he noted, highlighting the movement's global resonance. Musicians, too, joined in solidarity. "The program is called 'Get Up, Stand Up,'" he shared, capturing the unity of those willing to speak out and demand justice.

As the day wore on, it became clear the movement had outgrown its original focus on quotas and evolved into something much larger. ArchAngel expressed cautious optimism: "I am honestly excited," he wrote, noting that despite the violence, the fight for justice was strengthening. To him, the protests were not only acts of defiance but declarations that the people would no longer be silenced.

In the end, PQR captured the essence of this day when he stated that the protests were no longer just about quotas. They were about standing up to a system that perpetuated injustice, and the movement was quickly gaining momentum. "The movement was no longer just about the quotas," he said. "It was about justice for all." And for Aiyanma, ArchAngel, and Rafid, this was a defining moment—a moment that would shape the course of

their lives and the future of Bangladesh. The fight for justice had begun, and they would stand with it, no matter the cost.

August 3, 2024

The March of Solidarity

August 3 dawned under unrelenting tension as the protests continued to swell in intensity. Reports of police crackdowns—marked by violence in Chattogram, Comilla, and Dhaka—failed to deter the students, whose blockades and sit-ins demonstrated their unwavering determination.

Rafid, feeling the weight of responsibility, reflected on the day's significance: "**Silence would mean siding with the government and betraying the country.** Life would feel meaningless if we didn't stand by Abu Sayed, Mugdho, and many other young and innocent lives lost in this fight against oppression," he wrote. This conviction solidified his commitment. Though he could not bring his young child, he joined the protest at Shahbagh with his spouse. "The street was packed, with flags flying high and slogans echoing loud. It was the proudest moment I had ever felt for my people," he recalled, overwhelmed by patriotism and unity.

At the same time at Shahabuddin Park, Luminol witnessed a different facet of the movement. “The protest was ended early because some participants were discontented, especially when they weren’t allowed to use the slogan ‘*ek dofa ek dabi*—Hasina’s resignation,’” he shared, noting the performative nature of elite-driven demonstrations. “I realized this was more about mass politics in posh areas like Gulshan. The elites were showing up at the last moment when the war had already been won without their help.” His disillusionment about the disconnect between the privileged few and the people on the streets fighting for justice grew as public figures—previously silent—appeared to claim legitimacy.

Hydrenza, struggling with the weight of helplessness at home, decided to join the peaceful protest at Shahabuddin Park. Marching towards Gulshan Circle, his spirits lifted. “The unity, courage, and righteous anger we felt were indescribable,” he shared. “It felt like the purest act of defiance. Even if the police tried to stop us, I wouldn’t back down.” Inspired by activists’ resilience, he walked away feeling empowered, despite being unable to proceed to Shaheed Minar due to time constraints.

Amid the unrest, Aiyanma felt the weight of the collective grief and anger. “I stood with the students in their non-cooperation

movement,” he said. **“This was no longer just about quotas. It was about reclaiming our dignity.”** As he marched, the students upheld their nine-point demands and Ashfaq Nipun’s words deeply resonated with her: “Many people have died, and many are still dying in hospitals, but the hatred and contempt for corrupt politics and politicians that have built up in two generations will take decades to overcome.”

Despite that day’s progress, Aiyanma noted continued government suppression. “The government claimed to work for the people, yet their actions spoke otherwise,” he wrote. “The streets were filled with police, RAB, and BGB forces, relentlessly firing tear gas and rubber bullets at the masses.” Heartbreaking as it was, he clung to the belief that the fight for justice was far from over.

August 4, 2024

The Night Before

On August 4, the country was in turmoil. Dhaka’s streets were choked with protesters—some protesting peacefully, others suffering under violent crackdowns. The government had imposed a curfew in an attempt to quell the unrest, but the protesters, led by the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, remained steadfast in their demand for justice. Thousands gathered at

Shahbagh, their calls for the government's resignation echoing through the city.

Aiyanma awoke with a heavy heart, sensing a shift in the atmosphere. "The protests had reached a fever pitch," he recalled. **"The government's response had been brutal, but we remained resolute."** As the day wore on, he felt torn between hope and fear. Progress had been made, but at a high cost, and uncertainty loomed. "I feared that the government would respond, and the uncertainty of what lay ahead was daunting," he wrote. Still, he reminded himself, "Our cause was just, and we were fighting for a better future for all Bangladeshis."

On this day, ArchAngel observed from the sidelines, his frustration simmering. Rumors of military involvement circulated, and clashes spread. "Police are firing shots everywhere. The protests have literally reached my doorstep," he wrote. "I'm scared for the protesters. The streets are lined with armed forces, and violence is spreading fast." Yet even amid the chaos, he felt a spark of hope. "I'm honestly excited to see what happens next," he shared. "Either it's a massacre, or it's like the scene from V for Vendetta when the army stands down. Either way, tomorrow will be a turning point."

Meanwhile, Luminol experienced the July Movement through the tension at his own dinner table. His father, a hardcore Awami League supporter, initially dismissed the protests as a conspiracy by "Jaamat-Shibir cadres" and believed only Hasina could keep the country stable. Arguments became routine, until Luminol stopped responding to maintain peace. Despite moments of fear, he remained committed to the movement—driven by the injustice his friends faced on the streets.

As the government's power weakened, his father's stance shifted. "He finally told me he wouldn't mind whatever position I took," Luminol wrote. "I was glad he was willing to get out of his biases and join the side of justice." For Luminol, it was a quiet but powerful moment of validation.

As the day wore on, PQR tracked the unrest's escalation: "The government declared a curfew and shut down the internet," he noted. "At least 93 people were killed in the violence, and the government tried to spin the narrative in their favour, claiming it was all caused by 'miscreants.'" Yet, despite the crackdown, solidarity spread. "The entire country, from musicians to teachers, was showing their support for the students," he observed. "This wasn't just about quotas anymore. It was a fight for justice."



MY BABY BROTHER **DEAD** BUT YOU CRY
FOR METRO RAIL, **DISTRACT** ME WITH 5GB
BUT THE STUDENTS ARE IN **JAIL?**

BULLETS MAY
BUT WE WON'T QUIT

Hydrenza, still processing the previous days' events, found himself engulfed in despair and described August 4 as "one of the darkest nights of my life." The news of police brutality and bodies near Shaheed Minar "was enough to break anyone's spirit," he wrote. "I felt suffocated by the suffocating fear," Hydrenza added, "this regime has managed to create a pervasive fear of death." Contemplating the students' suffering, he asked, "How could anyone endure such injustice?"

By evening, the country was under lockdown, the curfew in full effect. ArchAngel and Luminol both acknowledged the importance of staying engaged. **"Tomorrow is the Long March to Dhaka,"** ArchAngel wrote, **"and it feels like we're on the verge of something monumental. I'm both terrified and excited."**

Aiyanma shared that same sense of urgency. "The struggle for justice is far from over," he reflected. "We have to stay focused and support the students. We can't let this government suppress our voices any longer."

As night fell, tension mounted. The protests had reached a new level, and the government's actions had pushed people to the edge. But despite the violence, uncertainty, and fear, the resolve of the people remained steadfast. The fight for justice, fairness,

and a better future was just beginning.

| August 5, 2024

The Fall of the Regime

The day began with a mixture of anxiety, hope, and fear. People waited with bated breath, knowing this could mark a turning point in a long and painful struggle. Whispers of a new beginning—of a country freed from the shackles of an oppressive regime—mingled with the reality of the steep price: prolonged protests, high casualties, and deep wounds. As the hours passed, the tension became almost tangible, and the moment of reckoning felt closer than ever.

Aiyanma woke up with a heavy heart, aware that this was the day the movement could either succeed or collapse. "The protests had reached a fever pitch," he reflected. "The streets were filled with people marching towards Ganabhaban. The students were more determined than ever. Today, we were going to reclaim our country." The sense of solidarity in the streets was overwhelming as chants demanding Sheikh Hasina's resignation rose in unison. "This is our day," Aiyanma thought. Yet uncertainty lingered: "What will happen next? Will we finally see justice? Will this bloodshed come to an end?" Rumours circulated that the government would

deploy the military, but he refused to back down. “Our cause is just,” he reminded himself. “And we are stronger than ever.”

Meanwhile, ArchAngel set out to join the long march but ran into roadblocks at every turn. “I was ready to join the long march from Rampura to Shahbagh, but the police had blocked every exit from my neighbourhood,” he wrote. “I saw people being beaten for trying to leave. The violence was getting closer to home.” Despite his frustration, he feared the crackdown was inevitable. Then, a shockwave of news hit: “Hasina had fled. The dictator was gone,” he recorded. “I felt conflicted—relieved, but not satisfied. He left without facing justice.” The streets erupted in celebration, but ArchAngel’s joy was tempered by what followed. “This is our victory,” he told himself, “but the cost of freedom is high. The looting, the vandalism—it felt wrong.”

Luminol reflected on the day’s mixed emotions: “Today was a victory, but at what cost? We’ve won the battle, but what about the price we’ve paid for it?” The day felt surreal. **“I was happy the regime had fallen, but at the same time, I couldn’t shake off the sadness. Innocent lives were lost, and the nation was in chaos.”** He continued, “There was a sense of pride in what we had achieved, but it was quickly overshadowed by the violence that followed.” Admitting his own limited role, he confessed, “I

didn’t participate much in the protests. I provided moral support and financial help, but I wasn’t on the front lines. Now, with the joy of freedom comes the realization of how little I contributed.”

For Rafid, the March to Dhaka felt like the beginning of freedom hard-won. “This was a victory built on the blood of fearless students, children, and unarmed civilians,” he wrote. As he joined the march to Shahbagh, he felt a lightness in the air—freedom echoed in voices, footsteps, and even the breeze. It was a moment of collective release after years under a repressive regime.

But on his way home, that feeling soured. He saw people looting government homes—sarees, TVs, paintings, even sofas strapped to rickshaws. “This is the dark side of freedom,” he reflected, “when no one is held accountable.” The joy of liberation was giving way to chaos. “We didn’t fight for this,” he wrote. “If justice is to mean anything, the law must return—soon.”

PQR observed the national breakdown with a sense of awe and horror. “The government declared a curfew, but the protests only grew stronger,” he noted. “Hasina’s resignation was the moment we had been waiting for, but it didn’t feel like a victory. There was a sense of relief, but also a deep unease.” PQR’s reflections were marked by the same internal conflict that others felt. “The

government tried to suppress the truth, but we had won,” he said. “Yet, the violence, the looting—it left me feeling empty. We had toppled a dictator, but at what cost?”

By the evening, Hydrenza felt the weight of the day’s events. “The regime has fallen, but the loss, the bloodshed—it’s hard to rejoice fully,” he said, his heart heavy. “I ran to the streets to celebrate, but the images of the violence, of the bodies, of the destruction, lingered in my mind. This was not the victory I had imagined.” As Dhaka erupted in joy, he could not shake the feeling that the road ahead remained uncertain. “Yes, Hasina is gone,” he reflected. “But the challenges we face as a nation are far from over.”

As the night drew to a close, the streets of Dhaka were filled with the sounds of celebration, but also the echoes of pain, of loss, and of uncertainty. Aiyanna, ArchAngel, Luminol, Rafid, PQR, and Hydrenza all saw the same momentous event through different lenses—some filled with hope, others with guilt, and some with a deep sense of foreboding. The victory was hard-earned, but the true cost of freedom was yet to be fully realized.



Photo | Nazim Uddin / BIGD

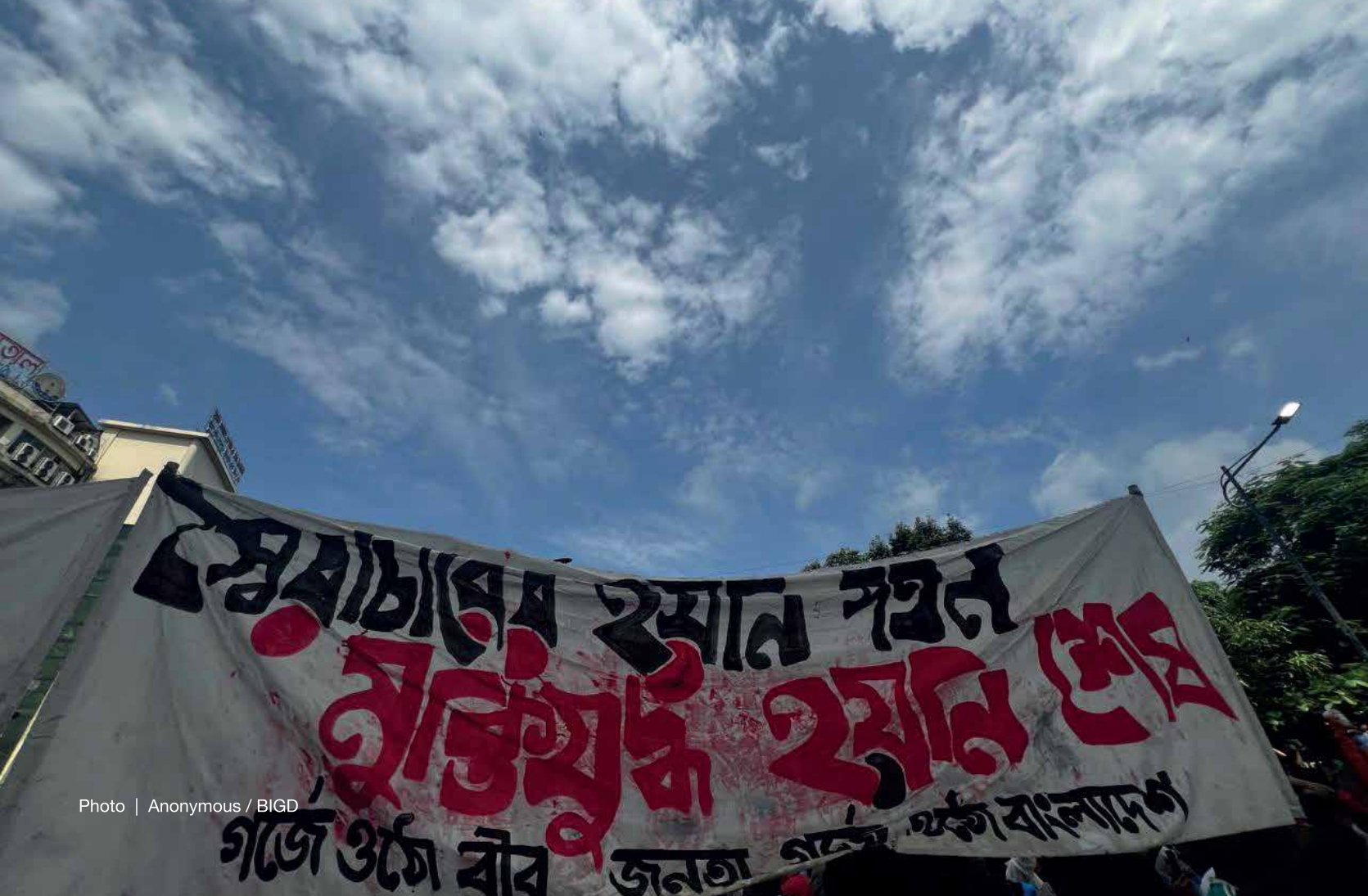


Photo | Anonymous / BIGD

Chapter Four

Reflections

The Diaries of Red July offer a window into how a national political movement can affect individuals on a deeply personal level. Through the reflections of the six contributors, we see how the events of July 2024 disrupted everyday life and prompted a range of emotional responses—from fear and anger to solidarity and reflection. While not all participants were on the front lines, their experiences reflect the broader impact of the movement on society. These diaries highlight the emotional costs of political unrest, but also the resilience of individuals trying to make sense of a rapidly changing environment.

What stands out is how varied the emotional responses were, even to the same event on the same day. And yet, through those differences, a common thread emerged: a growing sense of solidarity, a refusal to accept silence, and a shared belief that

something had to change. These stories remind us that movements are shaped not only by protests and policies, but also by private moments of reckoning, doubt, and courage.

As Bangladesh moves forward, these personal accounts serve as a reminder of how national events shape individual lives in lasting ways.

Appendix

Table A1. Profile of Contributors

	Luminol	ArchAngel	PQR	Hydrenza	Aiyanma	Rafid	Zunairah
Age	26	25	25	27	28	28	24
Location	Gulshan	Khilgaon	Mohakhali	Khilgaon	Luxmibazar	Moghbazar	Gulshan
Occupation	Researcher	Private Job	Researcher	Researcher	Researcher	Researcher	Researcher
Participated in previous protests	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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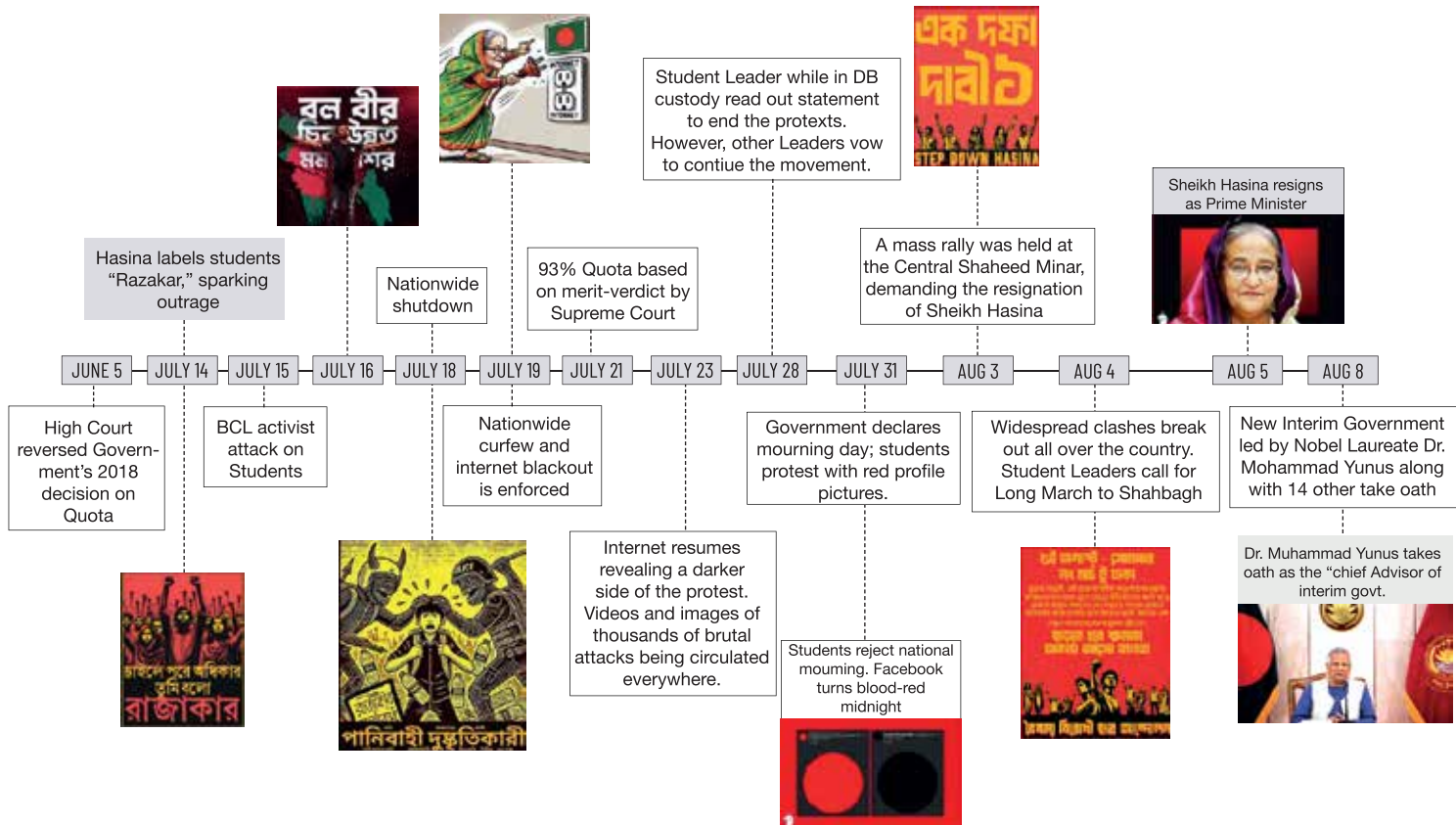


Figure A1. Timeline of the Most Significant Events During the July Revolution



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