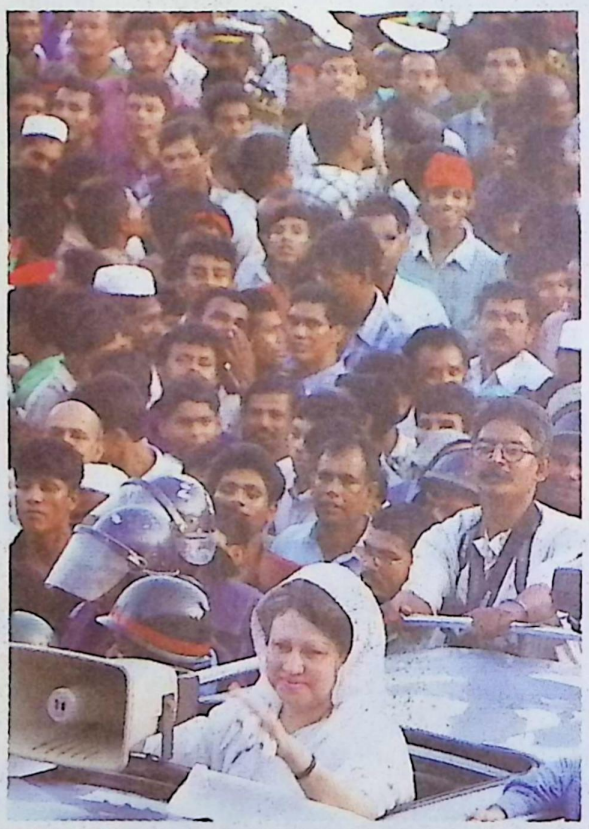
When Streets Become Battlefields

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There is this joke where one states, "Is the country marching ahead?" And in response the other says, "Of course! Why else do you think we all have been pushed aside and stuck at the back?" A lot has been said regarding the nature of Bangladesh's politics. But little is said about the suffering of people every time political parties take over the streets, whether in the form of simple processions or their infamous hartals. The brutality that often takes place in the name of politics in our streets costs all of us very dearly and direly.



Political rallies often end up blocking streets or becoming violent.

It is fairly understandable that the street plays a crucial role in politics as history lets us know that street happens to be the genuine parliament of the common people. But with the change of time the approach towards the street by the politicians have changed radically as the people have been replaced by party hooligans who would simply riot around the streets and eventually unleash a frenzy of rampage and destruction. Streets are chiefly for people to commute and the true sense of it must be established by letting people use them efficiently. But unfortunately the street culture of our political parties often tests our patience to the extreme as we find ourselves stuck for hours in a traffic jam all because of some activity of some political party. Most of these political processions claim to uphold the people's rights but the irony is that what they actually do is deprive the ordinary citizen's basic right to move freely on the streets

Imagine your loved one being stuck in an ambulance and in need of desperate medical care or you are late for an exam or even the most important interview of your career or you are uncertain when your child will come back home from school. The nuisance of political gatherings in public places has habitually victimised citizens all over the country, exposing them often to great physical and psychological trauma while dragging down the city life to a virtual standstill. From the political point of view, it is understandable that they have the right to hold political jamborees but what about *our* rights? Don't we have the rights to move hassle free, punctually and above all, in safety? It is utterly frustrating to see that the self declared guardians of our rights jeopardize our very own privilege in order to fulfill their party agenda.

And what are the odds that a procession would end up in carnage here in Bangladesh? Well, given the history and tolerance level of our national leaders, the transformation of such is perhaps inevitable. We have witnessed over the years how the country's political culture has evolved; whenever party activities take to the streets as meetings and procession, they have ended up into violent clashes where ultimately, the ordinary, law-biding citizens become the victims. What could political parties possibly be trying to establish by instigating destruction of public properties, smashing up car windows, burning up vehicles , demolishing private establishments and so on. Whenever there is a slightest hint of political activities in the streets it is the fear of our very own lives and property that goes through our minds because very regrettably the militant attitude of our political activists have been jeopardizing the peace and stability of our civic lives for generations. This is certainly no exaggeration because political violence has certainly cost us many lives of our dear ones, turned our means of livelihoods to rubble and forced our families enduring days in terror and great uncertainty simply because our political parties are yet to resolve their differences in a civilised manner. And the examples of such are in plenty to back these up.