

Dhaka is becoming a city of mugging

Short- and long-term measures needed to prevent it

Various newspapers have reported a disturbing rise in mugging on the streets of Dhaka with most of the perpetrators being drug addicts and carrying sharp weapons. Already, many victims were seriously wounded, while others succumbed to their injuries. The grisly stories of people being stabbed, or their throats slit, by muggers make travelling after dark quite daunting. So, why are these crimes on the rise? And what are the authorities doing about it?

Reportedly, lonely, poorly-lit streets and an increase in load-shedding hours have made it easier for muggers to prey on victims. Sometimes, they just snatch valuables and run away. But lately, rising incidents of muggers stabbing their victims have been reported. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) have identified some areas where the miscreants are more active. Reportedly, there are about 500 muggers active on the streets in Tejgaon, Ramna, Gulshan, Mirpur, Uttara, Motijheel, Wari and Lalbagh thanas. If police already know this, we expect them to take stern action against the culprits and make sure they are punished under law.

Which brings us to the critical question of whether these muggers, when caught, are, in fact, brought to justice, or they escape through payoffs or loopholes in the legal system. If they are not meted the punishment they deserve, it is hardly surprising that they will feel emboldened enough to carry on with their crimes with more such individuals joining the “profession”.

The short-term measures needed to prevent this are quite simple. Police must be more vigilant and undertake regular patrols in the identified areas where muggings are on the rise, especially during load shedding. Apart from catching the muggers, they have to find the leaders of mugging gangs and bring them to book. Streets have to be properly lit with regular maintenance of existing street lights.

But in order to ensure that the streets are safe, the government also has to take long-term measures by addressing factors that lead to men taking drugs and resorting to crimes when they run out of money to buy them. Increasing financial hardship, joblessness, frustration among the youth – all these factors lead to substance abuse which often leads to crime. The rise in muggings suggests that there is an increase in the number of such drug-abusers. Many street children and young and older men can be seen taking drugs in certain areas of Dhaka. The government has to set up rehabilitation centres for these individuals so that they can get clean and live drug-free lives. Creating jobs as well as a stable environment for them will ensure they do not enter the world of crime.

The streets of Dhaka can only be safe if the government and its law enforcement agencies take concerted steps, instead of organising safety drives to catch muggers once in a blue moon.

Should we worry about a typhoid outbreak?

Authorities must remain careful, ensure supply of clean water

It's unfortunate that Bangladesh's transition from Covid-19 didn't bring the relief desired by citizens, especially urban residents, who have had to deal with a succession of diseases in its wake. First, there was the cholera outbreak in Dhaka. Then came the dengue outbreak across many cities, which is still ongoing. And now news has emerged of the first stirrings of what could be a typhoid outbreak, if left unchecked. Although people are more or less used to such diseases – and, as we know by now, not all cough, fever and runny nose are symptoms of Covid-19 – we must be wary of another outbreak, given how ill-equipped and overburdened our healthcare system is.

According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, there has been a sudden jump in typhoid cases in some parts of the capital, especially in Rampura, Khilgaon and Adabar. A health inspection in Rampura's Notunbag-Loharghat area found many patients visiting hospitals with symptoms of typhoid and paratyphoid. Like cholera, these are waterborne diseases. Their symptoms include fever, hard and loose stools, stomach ache, loss of appetite, etc. Households with poor sanitation are said to be particularly vulnerable. This has led some to question the quality of water being supplied by Dhaka Wasa to these areas, as well as ongoing road repair works that allegedly breached water and sewage pipes. At the Dhaka Shishu Hospital, a steady stream of typhoid patients from nearby Adabar also led to similar concerns.

The silent coup of waterborne diseases amid a still-unsundered Covid is indeed worrisome. What's more troubling is their spread in geographically unrelated areas, connected only via water supplied by Dhaka Wasa. This warrants scrutiny by the health and city authorities. They should investigate if the typhoid outbreak in those areas is indeed caused by leaks in Wasa's supply and disposal system. Earlier in the year, similar breaches and cross-contamination with sewage lines were found to be the main reason for the cholera outbreak. In many areas, residents became sick after getting contaminated water through taps. Wasa's pipes are mostly old and full of holes through which all kinds of germs can mix with the water.

One can deal with waterborne diseases but when such diseases are born of dereliction of duty, by both Wasa and those responsible for road repairs, it is totally unacceptable. A potential typhoid outbreak will only increase suffering at a time when dengue is causing all sorts of problems. On Saturday, at least 922 dengue patients were admitted to hospitals across the country – the highest number of admissions recorded in a single day this year. Meanwhile, the total number of deaths reached 112, the third highest annual death toll since the first outbreak of dengue in 2000. The authorities must take proper steps to avoid another outbreak through the failures of responsible government agencies.

Bootlickers only?



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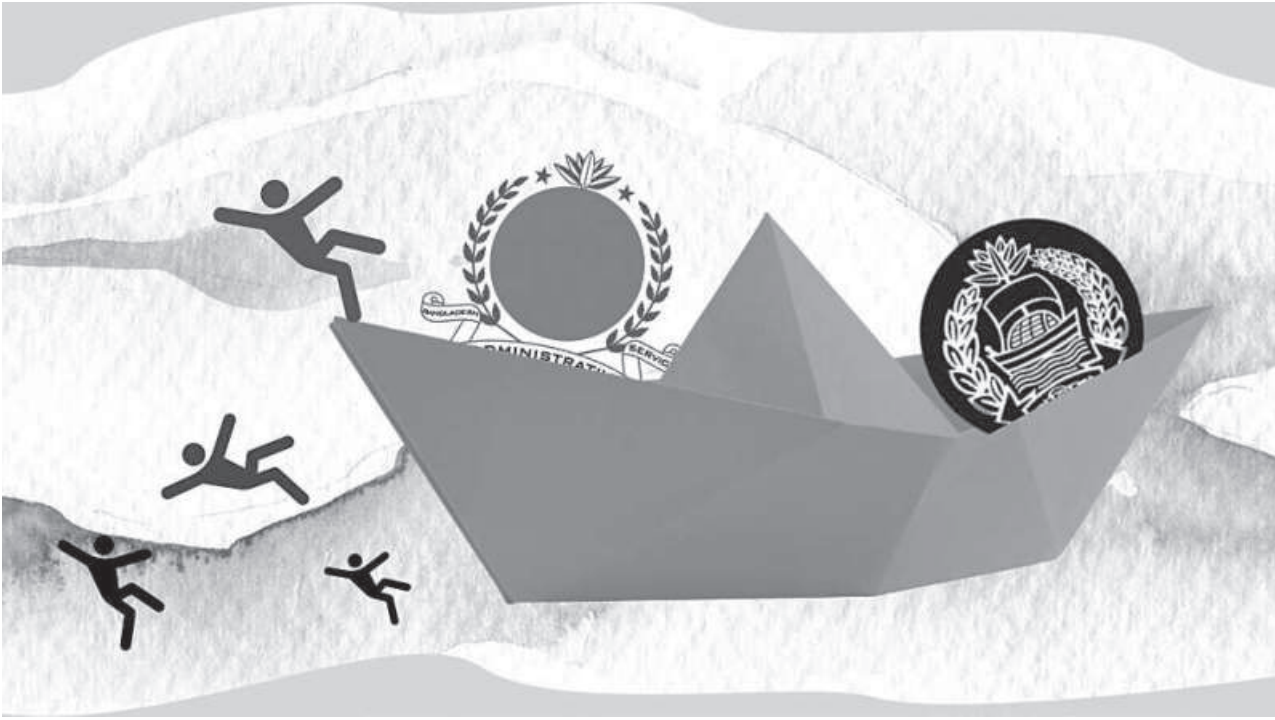
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No matter who is in power, the governments of this country have always tried to fill up the administration and law enforcement under their rule with servile people who would toe the line of their parties and even give special favours to them when they need it. The ruling Awami League has done so, too, and with the next general election looming, the party is taking extreme measures to ensure that the administration and the police would be filled with such people so they can secure an easy victory. The government is already taking measures to snip out people who, they believe, have relations with the opposition or may somehow favour the opposition in the times of election.

This is not mere speculation. Five secretaries were recently sent to compulsory retirement by the government. The total number of those suspected of participating in some sort of “anti-government”

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conspiracy stands at 12, and the government plans on keeping them under tight monitoring even if it does not sack all of them. According to a report published by the daily *Ittefaq*, the detective agencies monitored



VISUAL: STAR

the day-to-day activities of these officials and wiretapped their phones, and gave a detailed report on them. The government is reportedly also considering lodging sedition charges against them.

Needless to say, this is an unfair practice. It is unethical to send government employees to compulsory retirement just based on suspicions that they may be involved with the opposition party, and it is unethical to surveil government employees wholesale. The government service should be a meritocratic sphere where those with seniority and merit are promoted. Instead, we can see that the government is shaping the administration into an extension of the ruling party. Even the recently ousted information secretary cited his involvement with the ruling party student wing to save face. What does this indicate? It shows that, in order to remain and prosper in the administration, one has to bow to the wishes of the government and flash

over the past six months to find who might be leaking information about the government's secrets to the opposition, according to *Desh Rupantor* newspaper. Three superintendents of police have already been sent to compulsory retirement and 200 others are being monitored. The officers who have been sent to retirement deny that they have been in touch with the opposition; one said he would not be able to work in the police for so long if he had been involved with the opposition.

These actions – monitoring officials and sending them to compulsory retirement in some cases – are actually being taken to send a message to all government officials. The message is that they all have to comply with the ruling party's wish to continue their stronghold on power indefinitely – through unfair means, if necessary. Anyone who wishes to object to such an arrangement will have to face harsh consequences. The government is looking at the past records of the officials to find if any officials were ever

the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979, bar the members of the civil service from engaging in any kind of politics. But selectively pushing out people because of their alleged sympathy or support of the opposition sends a clear message: bow down and carry on.

Through these actions, the ruling party is attempting to ensure a core of servile police and administration members who will serve its purpose in the upcoming election, which will possibly feature widespread irregularities. The party needs its servants to collude with its unethical practices or at least stay silent in the face of irregularities.

The Awami League's attempt at maintaining its power by purging the administration and police of anyone even deemed to have a slight leaning towards the opposition is a nefarious strategy, which sends the message that the party has no intention of running a free and fair election in the coming year.

Don't let world leaders put us through World War III



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Popular press is not the right place for a discussion of game theory. However, if we avoid the complex mathematical models, understanding its theoretical or practical underpinnings is not that difficult. A critical component of game theory is scenario building. It is commonly used in policy planning and military schools. Let's see if we can apply this in the current situation in Ukraine.

Here is a recap. On October 8, 2022, the Kerch Bridge, a key supply line for the Russian troops fighting in eastern Ukraine, was partially destroyed by a truck explosion. It adds to Russia's loss of occupied land and military losses. Russians have countered that with heavy bombardment. Are we seeing an “escalate to de-escalate” strategy? Heavy bombing did force the winning Vietnamese to the negotiating table during the mid-1970s.

On September 21, 2022, President Vladimir Putin in a speech to the Russian people stated that “those who try to blackmail us with nuclear weapons should know that the weathervane can turn and point towards them” and “this is not a bluff.” On October 6, 2022, in an address to the Lowy Institute, a nonpartisan international policy think tank in Australia, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky underscored the importance of “preventive strikes, preventive action.” To him,

pre-emptive steps are crucial to deterrence. He also cautioned against “waiting for the nuclear strikes first.”

Sometimes pre-emptive strikes are gamechangers – Israel's pre-emptive bombing of the Iraqi nuclear plant in 1981 changed the security arrangement in the Middle East. However, in a nuclear war, who struck first is irrelevant when we consider its consequences.

Scenario 1: West wins

A victory of the West would mean disintegration of Russia as a de facto nation-state with a weak centre. We have observed this in Iraq, Libya, Venezuela, and many other countries in the world. A weakened Russia would sign a peace treaty and pay for reparations. Putin would be deposed and could face trials. A new set of leaders would take over Russia. Western companies would pursue Russian oil and gas.

The above outcome would be possible if Russia a) was willing to accept a defeat; b) did not have nuclear weapons; c) chose not to use it; d) the chain of command broke down in Russia; and/or e) Putin was deposed from within. Putin will try his best not to lose.

A corollary effect of this scenario would be a unipolar war under the leadership of a victorious America/West. A new global political and economic order would follow. A

weaker China would fold back its Belt and Road Initiative and accommodate to the will of the West. OPEC would also comply. The world would embrace a new form of “core-periphery” economic relationship rooted in colonialism.

Scenario 2: Russia wins

Ukraine would cease to exist as a nation-state in the current form; a pro-Russian government would take over. It would be a political and military

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victory for Russia, but there would not be much economic gain. However, it would secure its border in the south and have control of the Black Sea and trade routes. Victory would give some facelift to Putin and his leadership. An isolated, sanctioned Russia would work hard to regain its influence on a global platform.

The West will not allow Russia to win, as they did not in Afghanistan.

Weakening Russia in a protracted war is its stated goal. Russia will not be able to win a conventional war in Ukraine. Militarily, Ukraine has the “defender” advantage. Also, quasi-nuclear strategy may not deliver victory on the ground.

Scenario 3: No one wins

This would be the ultimate irrational choice. No one could win in a nuclear war. The survivors in different parts of the world would begin a new life.

Scenario 4: Everyone wins

A rational choice would be a BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiation Agreement) where none of the warring (or supporting) parties would get a clear victory. Face-saving options would be provided. Putting pressure on all parties to accept a mutually beneficial agreement would be the most desirable outcome. The 38th parallel in Korea is an example in this regard.

On June 4, 2022, in an interview with Crux, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said, “Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems.” The whole world is suffering because of a European war that they did not ask for. Lest we forget, three million people died in Bengal during World War II for a war they never understood.

Words like “Armageddon” and “annihilation” are making headlines. Our leaders must not be allowed to hand us World War III. Being silent is not an option for the common people in the developed and the developing worlds. Voices of reason for peace and against war must be raised. Leaders will listen when our voices are “louder” than their guns, be it in the popular press, social media or the street.