

Stern action vital to prevent robberies

Residents in many areas are having to spend nights in fear

We are worried about the surge in attempted robberies in recent times, with the residents in many neighbourhoods in Dhaka spending sleepless nights. According to a report by this daily, there has been a marked increase in such incidents in the capital's Uttara, Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Basila, Adabor, Mirpur, Zigatola, Gulshan, Badda, Jatrabari, Old Dhaka, etc. Since Monday, when a mass uprising ousted the Sheikh Hasina government, each night came with robbery alerts on social media as well as reports of residents, led by students, patrolling their neighbourhoods with sticks in hand and even driving away criminal gangs wielding knives and machetes. Many robbers were also held.

This is but one fallout of the breakdown of law and order that was caused by the widespread attacks on police, and police stations, both before and following the government's fall. The resultant panic led to the entire police force vanishing from the scene, with its ripple effects also felt in traffic and fire services. However, attempts to restart all closed police stations and resolve the issues brewing within the force have begun to show results, especially after the interim government finally took over the reins, ending a four-day power vacuum. In Dhaka, 29 police stations resumed their services yesterday. Officers are returning to duty. But many stations still remain shut. Clearly, residents are not out of the woods yet.

They will expect a dramatic improvement given the toll this protracted uncertainty over security is taking on them. This is further underscored by another report that says that, in the past two weeks, there have been over 100,000 complaints of theft, robbery, and looting across the country. In many areas, people are relying on mosque announcements and grassroots vigilante efforts to protect themselves from criminals. The Bangladesh Army, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and other armed forces have stepped up efforts to provide some measure of security, but those have been insufficient in the face of the huge tide of criminal activities. That said, restoring law and order completely will not be possible with law enforcement measures alone. We need the political parties and community leaders to help in this regard by sending strong messages of stability and calm.

People in Dhaka—and indeed Bangladesh—deserve better than to live in fear, especially after an uprising meant to protect them from the shackles of lawlessness. They deserve to sleep soundly in their homes, and to trust that their safety is in capable hands. It is, therefore, imperative that the law enforcement authorities take all steps necessary to fully operationalise the entire police force and re-establish rule of law.

Recent jailbreaks call for urgent steps

Authorities should address security lapses, undertake prison reforms

At a time when we are concerned about the overall law and order situation in the country, particularly with most police stations still non-functional and large abstention in the force, the repeated incidents of jailbreak attempts have raised further concerns. The latest incident occurred in Jamalpur jail on Thursday, in which six inmates were killed. Earlier, on Tuesday, a total of 209 prisoners fled from the Kashimpur High Security Jail in Gazipur after holding prison guards hostage during a demonstration. Six inmates were also shot dead then. On the same day, around the same time, at least 94 inmates fled from the Kustia jail. In both these cases, the army took control of the situation later. But the question remains: why was the security of our jails not beefed up after the first incident of jailbreak in Narsingdi on July 19, in which 826 inmates including nine militants had escaped? Such incidents have also occurred in several other districts, including Chattogram, Sherpur and Satkhira.

Clearly, there are security lapses in our prisons, but an equally worrying development has been the escape of some hardened criminals, including militants and terrorists. For instance, in Narsingdi, inmates belonging to some militant groups escaped. Three of the six inmates who were shot dead were also militants. According to the jail superintendent, militants and ordinary prisoners together started the demonstration that day, demanding their release. This brings to the fore another crucial issue that needs immediate attention: the keeping-together of militants, terrorists, and general inmates in jails. This cannot be allowed because it increases security risks as well as the threat of radicalisation of ordinary prisoners.

Moreover, many of the jails in the country remain overcrowded with prisoners, even after the recent releases following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government. Overcrowding is a long-standing issue in our jails. For example, according to a report published in July, the Chattogram Central Jail has a capacity to house 2,249 inmates, but is having to house twice as many prisoners. Also, hardened criminals and militants are kept in the same wards as general inmates in the prison, increasing its security risks.

We, therefore, urge the authorities to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of security risks in all our prisons, address their vulnerabilities, and increase their security, taking help from other security forces if necessary. Also, urgent measures should be taken to track down the escapees who are still traceless. These recent incidents also serve as a call to undertake prison reforms, which have been long overdue.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Operation Ranch Hand launched

On this day in 1961, Operation Ranch Hand was launched by the US army, which involved spraying approximately 20 million US gallons of defoliants and herbicides in South Vietnam. Sprayed over rural areas, this was done to destroy the food and vegetation covers of the Viet Cong.

The power of education in 'Bangla Bashanta'



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The latest wave of student-led uprisings in Bangladesh, widely referred to as the "Bangla Bashanta" (Bangla Spring), symbolises a profound sociopolitical awakening. This seasonal metaphor, akin to the Arab Spring, represents the blossoming of collective consciousness and the quest for meaningful change. The *Bangla Bashanta* channels the frustrations and aspirations of a generation yearning for educational reform, resistance, and democratic renewal—much like the socioeconomic grievances and demographic pressures that fuelled the Arab Spring.

At the heart of this movement lies a youth bulge—an entire generation of young people who, despite having access to education, find themselves underemployed and dissatisfied with the status quo. These youth, who constitute 28 percent of the population, have become the vanguard of the movement, driven by the paradox of being educated yet unemployable. The frustration is evident: official records indicate that 12 percent of university graduates are unemployed, a figure notably higher than that of individuals with only primary or secondary education. Last year's data estimated that 800,000 graduates were without jobs, unable to enter the informal sector due to the so-called prestige associated with higher education. This stark mismatch between educational attainment and employment opportunities underscores the systemic issues plaguing the nation's education system.

Interestingly, it was a generation whose education failed to prepare them for the rapidly evolving demands of the global job market that spearheaded this revolution—rather than organised political parties led by the educated elite. The movement, although centred at the country's oldest university with its historical track record of successful employment, spread like wildfire across the nation. Students from private universities also joined with revolutionary zeal, despite being less likely to pursue public sector jobs. This widespread discontent is a direct result of years of neglect in the educational sector, where the government, in its pursuit of populist numbers, has compromised on quality, spreading resources thin. While previous administrations have made strides in enrolment and access, the quality and relevance of education have not kept pace, leaving graduates in a prolonged state of "waithood"—a term that encapsulates the limbo between graduation and employment.

Pervasive inequities and the low quality and irrelevance of education further exacerbate this frustration. Employers frequently lament the basic competencies of



PHOTO: REUTERS

The students of Bangladesh have spoken through their movement, giving us an opportunity to fix the systemic issues in our education system and pave the way for a more prosperous, equitable, and democratic future for the country.

graduates, despite years of formal education. This has led many private organisations with an international outlook to rely on expatriate staff, further shrinking the already limited job market for local graduates and putting additional pressure on the national economy. Efforts to replace rote learning with more creative curricula have faltered due to poorly trained teachers, resulting in conflicting education policies that fail to align with the needs of the modern workforce. The overemphasis on securing government jobs—a shrinking sector—has further stymied the potential of the youth, limiting their prospects in an increasingly diversified global economy.

Moreover, the glass ceiling remains a significant barrier for female students, particularly in the tertiary education system. Despite progress, educational inequities persist, with girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds continuing to struggle with access to quality education. However, it is worth noting that female students, who played a bold and prominent role in the movement, called for an end to the quota system, driven by their confidence in their ability to shoulder equal responsibilities in society. This highlights a generational shift in attitudes, where young women are increasingly demanding the same opportunities and recognition as their male counterparts.

Identity and ideology politics also

played an essential role in brewing the *Bangla Bashanta*. The overemphasis on a monolithic history has backfired. Generation Z has actively recycled slogans from the Liberation War to redefine their identity and advance nationalist perspectives that are conscious of protecting sovereignty and freedom of expression. They sought to reclaim and reaffirm the national

but also the effective use of resources and a commitment to measuring and improving learning outcomes. One hopes that the interim government will increase budget allocations for the organic growth of education. The impressive deliberations by our leaders on talk shows must now be put into action to achieve real change. This change must come with a

reassessment of our young generation, for whom education is designed. For a long time, we have underestimated this generation, thinking that they are not equipped to bring about any change, either for themselves or for society. Yet, here we are, learning from their creativity and innovation—from their use of technology and cyber-activism. Incorporating recent experiences into curriculum redesign is crucial to enhancing the overall educational ecosystem.

Advocacy and public opinion will play a critical role in holding the government accountable for these results. Youth have historically led change in Bangladesh, so they must be actively involved in this process to ensure that their voices and needs are heard. The *Bangla Bashanta* is more than just a moment in time; it is a movement that can be used to transform education into a powerful tool for resistance, reform, and democracy.

The students have spoken. The unmet aspirations of youth are now out in the open. By addressing the systemic issues in the education system—quality, relevance, equity, and the integration of identity and ideology—we now have the opportunity to harness the potential of our youth and pave the way for a more prosperous, equitable, and democratic future. The success of this movement will ultimately depend on our collective ability to reimagine education as a catalyst for meaningful and lasting change.

The winds of change

Syed Wasif is a freedom fighter.

SYED WASIF

As the euphoria and exaltation slowly subside, as the smoke clears over the horizon of a new Bangladesh, people are slowly coming to grips with the grim reality confronting them. A government of 15-plus years dissolved. The head of government has escaped abroad, fearing for her life. A teetering economy, an uncontrolled law and order situation. A witch hunt of political opponents is going on. Killings, burning, looting, vandalising have become the order of the day.

All this came about due to the ineptness of the ruling class in handling a very simple matter: the quotas. Kudos to our young and determined students of universities and colleges who started a simple non-violent protest, which snowballed into a historic revolution and unseating of Sheikh Hasina government, a result mainly of uncalled for brutal force and the barbaric killing of over 400 unarmed people. The resilience,

bravery and sacrifices of our gallant students and citizens have written a new chapter in the annals of non-violent protests.

During the latter part of the movement, disparate political party activists joined the students, seeking their own political gains, as said by many. Some speculate that they were

to return. Students and the army have unanimously selected Prof Muhammad Yunus, a Noble laureate, to lead the interim government, which will oversee public affairs as well as pave the way for a free and fair election.

But what does the nation have in store? Can we expect better

Corruption has eaten up the vitals of our society. It's rampant in all walks of life. The nation needs to do some soul-searching, instead of pointing the finger at Hasina alone. Our politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats, doctors, teachers, business people, shopkeepers, etc—all need to take a solemn vow to uphold honesty at all levels of life. Without honesty, sincerity and morality, we will fail as a nation.

the ones who mainly carried out the attacks, vandalism and killings post the government's fall.

Students were seen in the streets directing traffic and returning looted property. Some sense of normalcy in public life has started

governance from the other political parties in the country? Sad to say, their track record is equally unsatisfactory as the AL. Can we expect honesty, integrity, impartiality, from them? Do they have the will and the gusto to build a new, vibrant Bangladesh, free

from corruption and dirty politics?

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We can identify the corrupt, but what about the corrupters? Who bribe, peddle influences, and in the process line their own pockets? They, too, must be sought out and meted with exemplary punishment. The anti-corruption authority must be strengthened and be given free rein to identify the corrupt and the corrupters.

The ombudsman system must be installed, which no government has dared to install in the past. People must focus on voting for good, honest representatives. Only then can the dream of Sonar Bangla, for which we fought and sacrificed, can be achieved.