

Factory shutdown an ominous sign

Workers' grievances must be conveyed constructively, not by disrupting production

We are deeply concerned to see production come to a halt at a number of factories due to workers' protests over the past few days. Reportedly, production remained suspended at some 10 ready-made garment (RMG) and 20 pharmaceutical factories on Saturday and Sunday as factory workers staged demonstrations to press home various demands. Assurances of fulfilment of logical demands have thus far failed to dissuade them from demonstrating. This is a troubling turn of events, especially when the country is going through a critical phase of political and economic transition.

Workers have been demonstrating in Savar, Ashulia, Dhamrai and Gazipur areas with demands ranging from job regularisation, pay raise, and lunch allowance to two-day weekly holiday and attendance bonus. Several factory owners said that even though they had sat with the protesters and assured them of fulfilling their demands, the latter continued protests. A top official of a pharmaceutical company said that workers had given 24 hours to fulfil all their demands, even though doing so is not possible in such a short period of time. Several owners also said they shut down their facilities to avoid possible untoward incidents. Meanwhile, workers of an RMG factory said the authorities closed down the facility without clarifying whether their demands would be met.

On Monday, 30 RMG factories in Ashulia were shut down amid protests by job-seekers who demanded "proportional" recruitment of men and women at the factories. RMG industry insiders told *The Business Standard* that "outsiders" were trying to instigate the workers to create unrest in industrial hubs, taking advantage of the still fragile law and order situation in the country.

This is deeply distressing. We expect factory owners to address the genuine grievances of workers on a priority basis, but agitating workers, too, must understand the gravity of the situation. Suspension of production, especially of export products, has long-term consequences for our export-driven economy. Supply chain disruptions may lead to loss of business, which will surely affect our export earnings. If this situation persists, Bangladesh's image will be further tarnished, and investors, both domestic and foreign, may further lose confidence. We simply cannot afford that right now.

We urge the interim government to send out a clear statement condemning the ongoing unrest, and take steps to ensure safety at the factories and restore the confidence of industrialists. Already, businesses have paid a heavy price, thanks to the politically motivated attacks on industrial units following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5. We cannot have further disruptions. We also urge the workers to not force unrealistic demands upon factory owners, and pursue peaceful means to engage with the latter. If factories remain shut, their jobs will be jeopardised too. Instead of occupying the streets—which has been causing considerable public suffering—they must pursue dialogue through trade unions and workers' rights bodies. The factory owners, too, must fulfil their legitimate demands as soon as possible.

A step in the right direction

Regular disclosure of assets by govt officials can check corruption

We commend the interim government for its instruction to all government employees to submit their wealth statements. A senior secretary at the Ministry of Public Administration has also said that those who will not do so will face punishment. Currently, public employees are required to declare their movable and immovable assets at the time of joining the service, and later to submit wealth statements every five years. However, in reality, they hardly comply with these rules. The lack of accountability has given rise to corruption in many forms. So, making asset disclosures mandatory is a welcome step indeed.

It may be recalled that when the Government Servant Conduct Rules-1979 was formulated, government officials were required to submit wealth statements every year. But in 2002, the rules were amended to extend the period of disclosure to five years. On what justifications were the rules changed still remains a question. But then, as if to give public officials a further scope to get involved in corruption, the public administration ministry earlier this year pushed for a change that would have done away with the obligation to submit wealth statements, instead proposing that employees' asset records are collected from their annual tax returns given to the National Board of Revenue. Clearly, these amendments and proposals were made to grant special privileges to public employees, which is quite unacceptable.

Over the past few decades, we have seen how corruption has spread in every sector in the country, from banking to health to energy to transport to construction. Corruption in the public sector is primarily enabled by public officials, and it starts with their very recruitment process. We have recently come across many reports on how question paper leaks have become a regular phenomenon in the BCS exams. Although the Awami League government routinely insisted on "zero tolerance" against corruption, in reality, it did little to uproot it. We witnessed how money laundering and bad loans almost crippled our economy. We saw how investigations into corruption cases were obstructed by the government machinery. The Anti-Corruption Commission, meant to check corruption in public service, could hardly play its mandated role.

These trends must be changed. The time has come to reverse this scenario and build an administration based on accountability and transparency. The mandatory disclosure of assets by government officials can be the first step towards achieving that goal. All advisers of the interim government should also publish their asset details to express their solidarity with this move. People have high expectations from the interim government, and they must not fail them.

The need for a clear charter for the intelligence agencies



Muhammad Nurul Huda
is former IGP of
Bangladesh Police.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

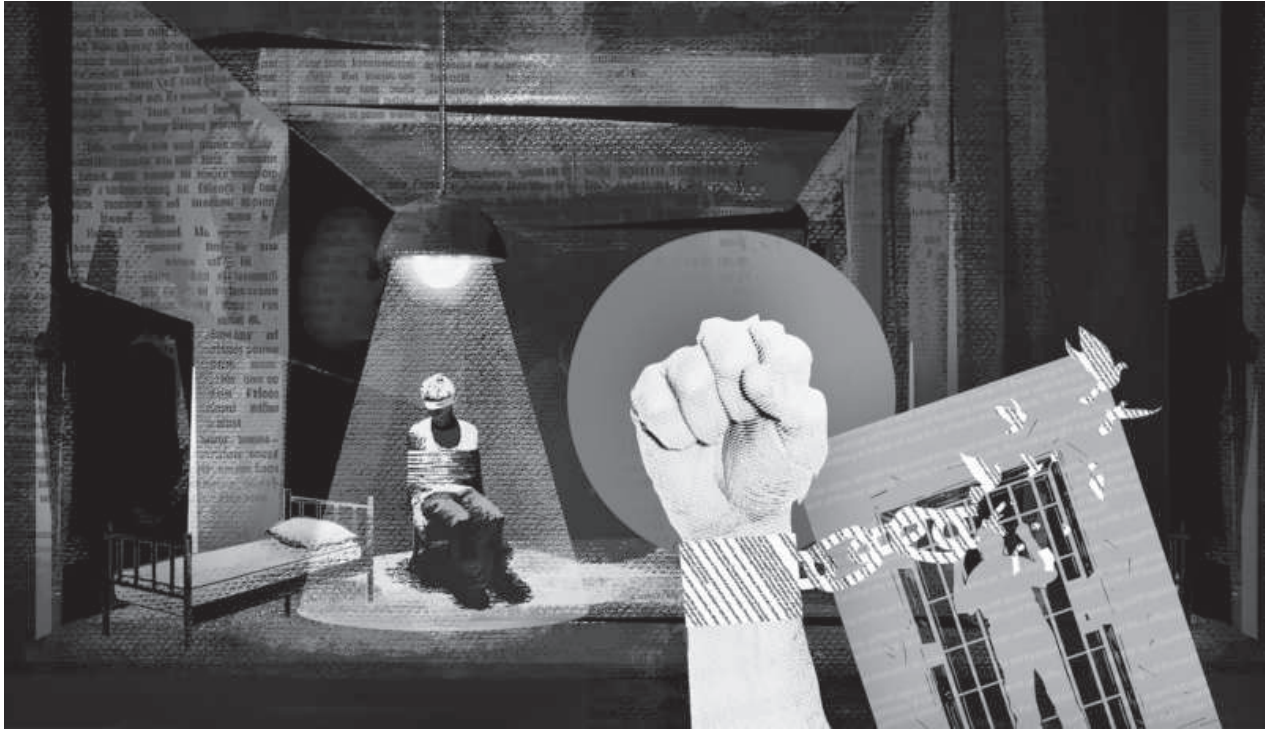
That the law enforcement officials including those in the intelligence agencies had dangerously overstepped their jurisdiction and went beyond their charter, if there is any, is a manifest reality. The heart-rending wailings of the victims of enforced disappearance sadly bring to light the arbitrary and predatory activities of a section of public servants. The compounding tragedy is that while the victims' families were complaining and seeking justice for a painfully long time, the government of the day was consistently in denial mode, thus making light a grave human rights violation.

The undeniable facts of enforced disappearance and torture in unauthorised custody like the Aynaghor, now in public view, surely dent our credentials as an orderly and law-bound society. How have we descended into such a deplorable state, and where are the fault lines? Also, what was the apportionment between political executives and the executors on the ground in the wrongdoers' culpability?

It is no secret that intelligence agencies play a leading role in providing political-analytical inputs to the ruling party and its government. However, there are tales of political skulduggery on behalf of successive political regimes. The agencies are known to have undertaken strategic exercises during elections and conduct election forecasts and analysis to oblige the party in power. In doing so, they have become an instrument of partisan politics. The accompanying politicisation or lack of impartiality and objectivity distorted the policy process and damaged the credibility and political legitimacy of the state.

There is credible suspicion that our intelligence agencies lack an acceptable legal framework and a well-honed charter of duties. Consequently, the allegation of its

functioning in a thoroughly political manner cannot be brushed aside. We do not have adequate safeguards and constant vigilance against likely misuse of the powers of intelligence personnel. This requirement assumes greater significance since intelligence



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

activities are carried out in secrecy and the average citizen may not be aware that his rights are infringed.

Our intelligence agencies collect a great deal of information about the activities of various political parties and in the process keep a watch over the activities of all persons who oppose the policies of the government in position. Curiously, they do not usually collect information about the party in power. While subversion of the constitution or deliberate

used as an instrument for political spying either by the government or an individual in the government.

There has to be a charter of duties, putting responsibilities beyond doubt and indicating what is permitted and what is not. The legitimate purpose of intelligence has to be the anticipation of developments that may imperil national interests and security, to enable appropriate action with the imperative that any tendency that equates national interest with the

to parliamentary oversight regularly as is done in mature democracies.

A detailed and precisely honed charter for intelligence agencies in consonance with the spirit of the constitution needs to be prepared. These are tall orders, no doubt, but we have to make a start however humble it may be. We will not achieve anything if politicians in our perilously polarised scenario fail to accept each other as contestants and not as enemies.

Doctors, mob justice and the health sector



Maisha Islam Monamee
is a student of Institute of
Business Administration (IBA)
at the University of Dhaka and a
contributor at The Daily Star.

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

The recent assault on doctors at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) marks a deeply troubling moment in our society, highlighting a surge of mob mentality that threatens the sanctity of our most vital institutions. This incident not only demands immediate and unequivocal condemnation but also calls for a broader reflection on the implications of such actions for the future of our healthcare system and societal order.

Medicine is a profession steeped in responsibility, sacrifice, and dedication. The journey to becoming a doctor is arduous, requiring years of intense study, relentless discipline, and an unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. Having a "Dr" before one's name comes with immense expectations—of competence, compassion, resilience, and integrity.

DMCH has been a cornerstone of healthcare in Bangladesh. As one of the oldest and most prestigious medical institutions in the country, it has trained generations of doctors who have gone on to serve both at home and abroad. The hospital itself is a lifeline for thousands of patients daily, offering services that range from emergency care to specialised treatment for complex conditions. Its significance perhaps can never be overstated: it has consistently provided care to the most vulnerable,

often under the most challenging conditions.

The doctors at DMCH, many of whom are young and still in the early stages of their careers, are often overwhelmed, working in challenging conditions with limited resources. Despite these challenges, they continue to provide critical care to those who need it most. When such individuals are assaulted, it is akin to an attack on the entire system of care and compassion that they represent.

In a country where healthcare resources are already limited, the erosion of trust between doctors and patients could have catastrophic consequences. When doctors begin to fear for their safety, the quality of care inevitably declines. Fear breeds hesitation, and in medicine, hesitation can be fatal. The psychological toll on healthcare workers—who are already under immense pressure—can lead to burnout, decreased morale, and even a reduction in the number of professionals willing to serve in these high-stress environments. Over time, this could exacerbate the brain drain, with talented doctors choosing to leave the country for safer, more supportive environments abroad. Such a loss would be irreparable, further exacerbating the healthcare challenges we face.

I think that the attack on DMCH doctors is symptomatic of a broader issue plaguing our country: the rise

of mob mentality. When individuals or groups take justice into their own hands, they undermine legal institutions and create an environment of fear and uncertainty. This is especially dangerous in the medical field, where decisions must often be made quickly and under immense pressure. The ability of doctors to perform their duties effectively hinges on their confidence

In a country where healthcare resources are already limited, the erosion of trust between doctors and patients could have catastrophic consequences. When doctors begin to fear for their safety, the quality of care inevitably declines. Fear breeds hesitation, and in medicine, hesitation can be fatal.

that they are protected from unjust retribution. Without this assurance, the very essence of medical practice is compromised.

At the same time, it is also important to understand that the anger and frustration that lead to such incidents do not emerge in a vacuum. They are often rooted in deep-seated grievances, whether real or perceived, about the quality of care, the accessibility of services, or the conduct of medical professionals. While violence is never an acceptable response, these grievances must be acknowledged and addressed through transparent, accountable mechanisms. The interim government has a crucial role to play in this regard.

They must ensure that any allegations of medical negligence are investigated thoroughly and impartially, with clear communication to the public about the findings and any subsequent actions. Accountability, grounded in justice and not in vengeance, must be maintained on all sides.

Owing to the instability we are currently experiencing, the interim government must take decisive action. They must ensure the safety of all medical professionals. This is already being done by increasing security at hospitals, particularly in high-risk areas like emergency rooms where tensions often run high. Legal frameworks must be strengthened to deter violence against healthcare workers, with swift and decisive action taken against those who violate these laws. There is also a need for broader public education on the realities of medical practice, including the inherent uncertainties and risks involved in medical treatment.

Furthermore, this incident should prompt a national conversation about the values we hold as a society. The respect we accord to those who dedicate their lives to public service—whether in medicine, education, or other fields—reflects our collective commitment to the common good. When we allow violence to go unchecked, we signal that the rule of law is secondary to the rule of the mob. This is a dangerous path, one that leads not to justice, but to chaos. This is something we are yet to combat as a nation.

We cannot think of the DMCH incident as an isolated event as it is a stark reminder of the dangers of mob mentality and the urgent need to protect our healthcare professionals. The safety and dignity of our doctors are not just their concern; they are the concern of all who depend on them—indeed, the concern of the entire nation.