Politics of destroying shrines

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The July insurrection was spawned from the apolitical banner of the quota reform movement. In the space of 20 days, an apolitical reformist movement escalated into practices around tombs-like devotional a quintessential political event: a popular insurrection.

By August 1, the very apolitical hyperpolitics of the July insurrection converged into one point: the resignation of Sheikh Hasina. The subtractive demand for toppling an authoritarian regime was achieved within the next five days when the positive political content of the insurrection was still indeterminate. Thanks to that indeterminacy, a diverse range of social elements could project and invest their respective desires into the vast, formal shell of the insurrection.

Freud used the term "cathexis" to indicate the investment of desires onto a psychical object. We might say, a sort of pan-cathexis was at work in the July insurrection. One of those elements in the unfolding political process was the Salafi element that seeks to eradicate the culture of tomb veneration.

There is probably no cause for universal alarm. Only a small percentage of shrines and tombs have been attacked so far. But it is probably apposite to understand and characterise the tendency before it launches onto a bigger campaign in the coming days.

My suggestion in this brief epistle is that we should read the recent *mazar* destruction campaign in terms of certain "political desires" of the campaign proponents, instead of being distracted by arguments about the theological merit or otherwise of those

Criticism of shrine culture is not a novelty in Islam or in South Asia. Tasawwuf as a modality of Islamic piety always had a deep dialectic at its heart. It was as much a selfrecapitulating heritage as it was a mode of radical self-criticism. Thus, Sufism itself generated repeated impetuses of selfpurification-motivating various saints to cast aspersions on mass devotional practices. But popular Islamic culture faced attacks from within as well, such as the destruction of tombs by the Wahhabi militia in Hejaz—a paradigmatic case.

In Bengal itself, a new mode of Sufi praxis was scaled up in the colonial period that denounced certain longstanding gestures and the ritual Urs-as shirk and bidah. Under the broad umbrella Tarigah i Muhammadiyah, for example, many *shaikhs* called for a purification of Islamic practices from the overgrowth of "rasm" or customs. However, the *Tariqah* sought to undertake this purification from within the rubric of tasawwuf itself. Shrines were not meant to be razed to the ground—one only had to refrain from practices that were seen to go against the grain of God's unity (tawhid).

Beyond the respectable high culture of tasawwuf, even within the rural, workingclass culture of fakiri, there was a critical discourse about the devotional cults built around tombs and living ascetics. Lalon Fakir, for example, was heavily critical about various questionable dervish practices. Referring to the dargahs in Penro, ie, Pandua—the location of major dargahs like that of Jalaluddin Tabrizi and Nur Qutb Alam, Lalan criticises the false beliefs and accompanying practices of gift-giving:

"In the Penro dargah, the ghost is emancipated if one offers faita (futuh)... Instead one should die before one's deathand become a living-dead-to offer futuh to one's own soul."

The mode of self-care suggested by Lalon here is more congruous with Nur Qutb Alam's platonic spirituality than the prevalent practices at the Penro dargahs.

Thus, both high Sufism as well as working class fakiri culture developed strong critical discourses about inauthentic spectacles of sanctity around shrines and tombs that were aimed at unburdening the devotees of their

However, wholesale dismissal of Sufism or the calls to destroy mazars from Bengal seems to have assumed new dimensions. It builds on a *khariji* habitus of labelling those with theological differences as disbelievers. The recent call for the wholesale destruction of shrines thus reminds one of the actions of khariji groups that have destroyed pre-Islamic as well as Islamic tombs and shrines

in Syria and Iraq in recent years.

There is a broader question of identity and place-making to understanding Islam in Bengal. Over the centuries since Islam's advent in Bengal, the hospices and shrines of fakirs and "pirified" notables, their memories and heirlooms turned the so-called "frontier" region (a place that is *gharib*) into a land replete with the aura of established holiness. From Baba Adam to Shah Jalal, the tombs

terminology borrowed from tasawwuf was not strange to Bengal politics-religious or secular. In March 1971, the non-cooperation programme would involve visiting and offering respect to shrines of martyrs and that of AK Fazlul Haq.

What then does the desecration of tombs mean for this legacy of place-making in



Lalon Shah Fakir's Shrine in Kushtia. Shrines and saints have been integral to popular life of Hindus, Muslims and indigenous communities of Bengal. SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

of countless shaikhs encouraged the chishti saint Nur Qutb Alam to consider Bengal a sacred realm. The shrines and saints have been integral to popular life of Hindus, Muslims and indigenous communities of Bengal. When Apu, the fictional hero in Bibhutibhusan Bandapadhyay's Pather Panchali, was born in a brahmin family, the midwife made apotropaic offerings to a local shrine of a *pir*.

This legacy of place-making continued into 20th century Bengal politics. While Maulana Bhasani himself was a pir, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ended his February 1966 booklet on the six points identifying himself as a "khadem" of the people, and asking his "brothers and sisters" to pray to "Allah's dargah" so that he could remain a

Scholars of genocide have noted how across world history, destruction of graveyards and tombs was a common means used to eliminate the cultural identity of entire groups. One would wonder if the "political desire" that inspires the anti-mazar ideology is not about unmaking the memoryladen location of Islam in the life of emplaced communities in Bengal.

Such an ideology thus prefers a deterritorialised religious piggybacking on global content flows in digital platforms. The new Salafi intelligentsia cultivates a certain kind of techno-religiosity supported by the new media of technofeudalist platforms and "heno-lingual" globalisation.

But when we speak of criticism of *mazar*

people's khadem till his last breath. Spiritual and pir culture, why not consider the other strand of anti-mazar discourse? What about Laalsalu—the renowned novel by Syed Waliullah, people may ask.

Waliullah wrote in a modernist vein-but that strand of modernism was not necessarily about political disenfranchisement of Muslims. Quite the contrary. The key concern for Waliullah and his ilk was probably the very conditions of production of political subjects in the context of post/colonial world. One would find the same kind of critical discourse about off-political Sufi culture in the work of someone like Muhammad Iqbal-respected as an "Allama"—who developed an entire philosophical discourse around the concept of the authoritarian ego (khudi) as the ideal Muslim subject. When it came to the heavy baggage of pir-centred Islamic culture, the secularist Kazi Abdul Wadud and the political theologian Abul Hashim could probably agree that one needed a more pristine recapitulation of Islam. How that modernist-Salafist consensus was shattered can be discussed on another occasion.

Techno-religiosity produces its own immanent contradictions. Salafi influencers denounce the devotional relation between the master and the disciple as practiced in Tasawwuf. Yet as they gain a wider, hybrid following across online platforms like YouTube or Facebook as well as offline events, their listeners begin to see these Salafi influencers as quasi-omniscient shaikhs. In an unavoidable division of labour, ordinary pious Muslims rely on the digital shaikhs to learn what is right in the minutest aspects of their daily lives. While in the heyday of Chishti Sufis the dargah could act as an axis of resource redistribution through futuh and charity, today Salafi digital influencers establish charities through which they mobilise comparable patterns of pietistic giftgiving for resource redistribution. They create a whole array of business enterprises branded Islamic while acquiescing to the epistemic and political parameters of late capitalist modernity.

The neo-Salafists' fascination with ultramasculinity hinging on a vulgar materialist ontology of hormones, or the aesthetic techniques used to boost views of religious content may be as addictive and manipulative as the proverbial malpractices in the shrines that trigger so much of the Salafist animus.

A placeless global field navigated by a self that uses coercion and destruction to establish its own mode of self-growth based on a codified content-this is as much a neoliberal ideology of fossil fuel-based capitalist civilisation, as it is a new techno-Salafists' way of dealing with difference.

A strategic roadmap to battling inflation

is a Banaladeshi-American financial economist.

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The newly formed interim government in Bangladesh faces two significant challenges: an extraordinary political challenge compounded by severe economic difficulties not seen in decades. A major factor driving these economic troubles is soaring inflation, largely a result of unprecedented economic mismanagement by the previous administration. While official inflation rates hovered around 8 percent during the tenure of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, concerns about the accuracy of these figures were widespread. These suspicions now appear validated after recent estimates by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), which show inflation surging to 11.66 percent yearover-year in July, followed by 10.49 percent year-over-year in August.

In an article published in The Daily Star on August 21, 2022, I urged the Bangladesh Bank to adopt a contractionary monetary policy to combat inflation. At the time, the central bank's governor hesitated to raise interest rates. Between September 29, 2022, and May 9, 2024, the central bank eventually increased the policy rate by 3.5 percentage points. However, this measure has proven insufficient, as demonstrated by Bangladesh Bank's recent decision to further raise the policy rate by 50 basis points, bringing it to 9 percent, effective August 27, 2024. The new governor has expressed his commitment to continuing rate hikes until inflation subsides.

While the recent rate hike aligns with economic theory, its limitations should not be ignored. First, raising the policy rate primarily targets demand-pull inflation and is less effective against cost-push inflation. Second, it could worsen the liquidity crisis already plaguing banks that have suffered years of mismanagement—a concern some bankers have already voiced. The last thing Bangladesh needs is a bank run, a risk that cannot be ruled out if liquidity issues intensify due to further rate hikes. Given these risks, and the country's economic fragility, controlling inflation requires a multi-faceted strategy rather than relying solely on monetary tightening. In this article, I would like to present a strategic roadmap that, if adopted, can lead to a reduced and stable inflation regime in Bangladesh in

The first step to managing inflation is to ensure the collection of accurate, reliable data to facilitate timely, informed decisionmaking. To this end, the interim government

is responsible for collecting key economic data. of skilled labour, which could be addressed access to fast-track immigration lanes inflation control while providing the This restructuring should include a review of the current methodology, particularly the base year and "basket of goods" used to measure inflation. Additionally, the government should revitalise the Price Monitoring and Forecasting Cell within the Ministry of Commerce. Although established in 2014, this cell has had limited impact on stabilising essential commodity prices. Engaging external experts, including distinguished economists and statisticians from Bangladesh, may strengthen

While reliable data collection is crucial for identifying the main drivers of inflation, it will take time before yielding actionable insights. Meanwhile, economic theory must guide the government's approach to controlling inflation. The government cannot rely solely on the central bank's monetary policy; it must explore other avenues to achieve stable and reduced inflation.

> The first step to managing inflation is to ensure the collection of accurate, reliable data to facilitate timely, informed decisionmaking. To this end, the interim government should consider restructuring the BBS, which is responsible for collecting key economic data.

One such approach is cracking down on monopolistic and oligopolistic practices, as some firms have been accused of illegal price gouging. Strengthening the Bangladesh Competition Commission to more effectively combat anti-competitive behaviour is essential. If necessary, the commission should be restructured to include experts in antitrust law, consumer protection, and competition economics. The US Federal Trade Commission, led by Columbia Law School professor Lina Khan, offers a strong example, having sued the e-commerce giant Amazon in 2023 for maintaining monopoly power.

Another often-overlooked tool for combating inflation is improving productivity. Increased productivity lowers production costs, making it cheaper to produce the cards" to migrant workers who send a certain same output. One of the main barriers to amount of remittance annually through

through enhanced technical and vocational education. In addition to the existing 2-year and 4-year programmes, the government should introduce shorter hard skill-enhancing programmes focusing on electrical work, data entry, machine operation, quality assurance, etc. Local NGOs with established networks can play a vital role in promoting these programmes and removing barriers to education.

The decline in productivity also likely correlates with the drying up of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Bangladesh. According to UNCTAD, FDI declined by about 14 percent from 2022 to 2023. This loss of investment is particularly significant, given that the cost of capital is much lower in advanced economies than in Bangladesh. The country's poor ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report, where it ranked 168 out of 190 countries in 2020, underscores the need for improvement in the overall business environment. Infrastructure deficiencies, bureaucratic red tape, and corruption are widely cited obstacles to attracting FDI.

Corruption remains a persistent challenge. A notable example is the World Bank's 2012 withdrawal from funding the Padma Bridge project due to allegations of procurementrelated corruption. To attract foreign investment, the government must take decisive action. One potential step is mandating annual asset disclosures from government employees and their immediate families. Although employees are currently required to declare assets upon joining the service and submit wealth statements every five years, enforcement has been lax.

Encouragingly, on September 1, 2024, the interim government issued a directive mandating that all employees comply with existing rules, warning of penalties for noncompliance. However, the specifics of these penalties remain unclear, making it difficult to assess the directive's potential impact. Importantly, collecting asset data is just the first step. The government must develop a robust system to analyse this information and identify anomalies. Modern technological tools, including AI and large language models, could play a crucial role in automating this process, enhancing the government's ability to detect corruption efficiently.

Similarly, migrant workers may need incentives to send remittances through formal banking channels rather than informal methods. Boosting remittance inflows could help ease pressure on import prices, with positive effects on inflation. The Bangladesh government could explore offering "priority

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should consider restructuring the BBS, which higher productivity in Bangladesh is a lack formal channels. These cards could grant Theory, tax reforms can play a role in at airports and discounted services at Bangladesh embassies abroad. Obviously, this is just one idea and the government along with the Bangladesh Bank may need to try other initiatives on a trial basis.

Additionally, the government must also avoid crowding out private sector investments by monopolising funding for development projects. The previous administration's reckless practice of pressuring Bangladesh Bank to print money for infrastructure spending must not be repeated. In this context, overhauling the government's tax collection strategies cannot be overstated. From the perspective of Modern Monetary

much-needed funds for development projects. Therefore, the government should prioritise strengthening the National Board of Revenue by equipping it with the workforce, tools, and-most importantlyindependence from political interference.

Finally, it is essential to recognise that significantly reducing inflation will take time. Treating it as a "quick fix" would be a mistake. Given that the interim government may have a limited mandate, it should focus on laying the groundwork for longterm measures that the future government can continue to implement in order to bring inflation down to manageable levels.

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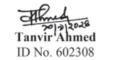
Date: 10/09/2024 Tender Notice (Open Tendering

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal for the following works:

Method, NCT)

Tender ID & Package No.	1012598, e-GP/01/PRD/PMP-Major/2024-2025
Name of tender	Construction of 12m Long RCC Culvert (with pile) (Talukdar Hat) at 10th Km (Ch: 09+800m) of Kawkhali-Chirapara-Vitabaria-Bhandaria (Z-8713) Road under Pirojpur Road Division during the year 2023-2024.
Tender last selling date and time	08-October-2024 & Time 16:00
Tender closing & opening date and time	09-October-2024 & Time 14:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd). For more details please contact e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).



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