

We must stop this madness

Incidents of mob violence in universities deeply troubling

We are deeply alarmed by the recent incidents of mob violence in some prominent public universities that claimed three lives, two of them within hours of each other on Wednesday night. These killings, by students no less, mark an escalation in a whole catalogue of violence and subversion that generally characterised the fluid situation post-August 5. The breakdown of law and order, amid little field presence of police officers, has already forced the administration to grant magistracy powers to army officers so that they can intervene decisively to restore order. But that the malaise goes beyond a mere crisis of law enforcement is getting increasingly clear.

The case at Dhaka University's Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall, where a man identified as Tofazzal was beaten to death on mere suspicion of theft, is a chilling example of this. Despite being reportedly mentally unwell, he was subjected to hours of torture by students. A similar tragedy unfolded at Jahangirnagar University, where a former Chhatra League leader, Shamim Ahmed, was fatally beaten by students. The third case involved Abdullah Al Masud, another former Chhatra League leader at Rajshahi University. It happened last Saturday when Masud was mercilessly beaten before he was taken to a local police station and then to the hospital, where he died from his injuries.

These are not the first incidents of mob violence after August 5. In fact, according to an estimate, nearly two dozen citizens have fallen victim to mob lynching over the last 40 days. But the same happening in the highest seats of learning, at the hands of our brightest students, who not long ago rescued the nation from the grips of an authoritarian regime, makes one wonder where it all went wrong. The brutality that was on display is unthinkable. The question here is not just about universities becoming hotbeds of mob violence. The idea that it's alright to take the law into one's own hands to punish some perceived wrongdoing may have found a similar expression before the regime change, but its continuation now suggests a crisis that cannot be resolved overnight or through law enforcement measures alone.

It needs a critical rethink about the transformation of an increasingly radicalised society, the loss of faith caused by the failure of vital institutions like the judiciary and police, the cultivation of hate, distrust, and self-serving interests, and a growing belief that change only comes through force. While reversing this thought process will require a sustained campaign of education, awareness, and civic engagement, what the authorities can—and must—do now is ensure accountability for those involved in mob violence and restore faith in the justice system through proper reforms. Mob justice is just murder under the guise of collective action. It will happen again if we don't hold to account these murderers, regardless of their identity.

Dengue inaction is increasing the risk

Conduct regular mosquito control drives, manage hotspots

The dengue situation seems to be gradually getting out of control amid a lack of proper initiatives by the government. While 27 people died of dengue in August, already 36 people have died in the first 18 days of this month. The infection rate is also steadily increasing, with 865 patients hospitalised in the 24 hours till Wednesday morning. If the city corporations, municipalities, and the health authorities fail to respond properly, we may have another disastrous dengue season this year.

In Dhaka, the anti-mosquito drives have been largely inadequate since the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5. In many areas, workers of the city corporations have been found to be sitting idle, not having the equipment ready to spray insecticides, or are unable to work due to a lack of space to keep spraying equipment. Although the authorities were made aware of the situation, the problem has not been resolved. At the Pallibidyut area of Ashulia, residents have themselves carried out anti-mosquito drives in the absence of official measures. The question is: why are responsible government institutions failing to perform their duty in this regard? While we understand that the administrative void created in the aftermath of the regime change hampered mosquito control drives, what justification can there be now when administrators have been appointed to properly steer all city corporations and municipalities?

These institutions are supposed to keep their cities and towns clean, and conduct regular mosquito control drives and awareness campaigns. Meanwhile, the health authorities are supposed to hold at least three surveys around the monsoon to learn about the real dengue situation so that area-wise measures can be taken. The pre-monsoon survey was reportedly done in April by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), but there has been no development on the remaining surveys. There is then the question of taking proper action based on survey findings, which is rarely done. Clearly, the authorities have to step up efforts on all fronts to control the dengue situation.

For the city corporations and municipalities, it is vital that they start anti-mosquito drives without delay and with full vigour. They can engage local residents, including students, in their activities including cleaning. As for the DGHS, they should regularly identify dengue hotspots through surveys, and ensure proper hotspot management which is the best way to contain the spread. In addition, the health ministry should be able to provide treatment to all dengue patients in the coming days. Only coordinated efforts from all concerned can contain the disease satisfactorily.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Italy occupies Rome

On this day in 1870, Italian troops occupied Rome, leading to the eventual incorporation of Rome into the Kingdom of Italy and the limiting of papal governing authority to the Vatican itself and a small district around it.

July uprising and some thoughts of Bangladeshi-Americans

Snapshots from my latest conversations with Gregorians in North America



THE THIRD VIEW
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It was heartwarming to see so many old faces from my school days as I attended the second reunion of Gregorians of North America (GNA), held on September 14 in New Jersey, US. Nearly 200 former students of St Gregory's High School, Dhaka had gathered—many with their spouses—from all over the US and Canada. The occasion was one of reconnecting, reminiscing, and exchanging stories, anecdotes and school-era jokes.

The most popular session was the one that focused on how Bangladesh became a Test-playing cricket nation and how we can build upon our recent extraordinary Test performance against Pakistan. There were many exciting comments regarding the ongoing tour of India. The session consisted of our early cricket heroes such as Syed Ashrafur Huq, Yousuf Babu, and Khandker Nazrul Quader Lintu. Their personal stories of early failures, hard work and subsequent success entertained us all. Their experience-rich comments about the future kept everyone in rapt attention, and we wondered why these three stars are not a part of our present day cricket board leadership, especially when so much is changing at the top echelon of professional bodies.

Shahudul Haque—Gullu to us all—kept the audience enthralled with the story of his incredible journey of walking more than 15,300 miles in 1,425 days (three years and 11 months). Starting on October 17, 2020, he has walked every day. Everyone gasped when he recounted that on rainy days, when he cannot go out, he climbs up and down the stairs of his 13-storey apartment building for as many times as it takes to complete his daily routine of minimum five miles. The circumference of Earth is nearly 25,000 miles, of which he has already passed the halfway mark. For someone who is in his mid-70s, such a feat of endurance made him an instant hero of the event.

Where I had the privilege to speak was a session titled "Recent events in Bangladesh and how NRBs can contribute in the changed

circumstances." Everyone spoke in a manner that proved that they had been following the recent uprising most meticulously. There was a lot of pride in what has been achieved, accompanied with some feeling of uncertainty, especially regarding the various forces that appear to have been unleashed. While there were some uncertainties regarding reforms, a consensus seemed to prevail about significantly trimming the prime minister's power and fixing their tenure in office to a maximum of two terms.

Generally, they all welcomed the toppling of the previous government, having suffered the humiliation for many years of belonging to a country whose reputation of corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, cronyism and unaccountable power surpassed most others of similar category. Like us at home, the non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) also wondered how the Sheikh Hasina government could become so unbelievably oppressive. Whatever details I could provide led to more in-depth questions about the gradual deterioration of the quality of governance in Bangladesh. They wondered, like many of us, how a powerful regime like Sheikh Hasina's could fall so fast, so completely, and so ignominiously. People's power made it all possible.

They marvelled at the bravery of our young. Though we have a long tradition of student movements, the distinguishing feature of the July uprising was the participation of younger generation—boys and girls from schools. The Road Safety Movement in 2018 seemed to have broken the psychological barrier of school students to get down to the streets to fight for what they considered to be right and just. Families descended on the streets of Dhaka with courage and bravery that armies get trained for years to master. What amazed the NRBs over and over again were the stories of these students, spontaneously joined by the general public—including women, the elderly and young mothers—who

continued to demonstrate for days in spite of police killing. To defy the trigger-happy police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members for days, without the slightest sign of fear or despondency, will surely be recorded as one of the most courageous mass demonstrations in the world. The GNA audience were mesmerised by how young women participated with equal intensity and courage as their male counterparts in the daily battles with police and other forces. This marked a new phase in their sense of equality, confidence and self-assertion.

The NRBs' faith in Prof Muhammad Yunus seemed boundless. They all believe that he is the right person for the job, but are worried as to whether he would be given the time he needs for the reforms people expect him

engineering, IT, medicine, pharmacy, and even cybersecurity. Those present mostly consisted of mid- to high-level professionals who, though they were US citizens, were eager and willing to partake in the new journey. They cited the example of their Indian counterparts who have made significant contributions to India's march forward. They greatly regretted the failures of past governments to tap into these highly trained intellectual resources, who have now gained strength and momentum and are ready to assist their country of origin. What they eagerly wanted was a dependable conduit—either governmental or through the private sector—to channel their professional and academic expertise to their counterparts in Bangladesh. Given Prof Yunus's experience and personal expertise on knowledge transfer, these



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

to deliver. The length of his tenure remained a lively topic throughout the event.

Fear was expressed about too many issues being placed on the agenda and that the enormity of the task would jeopardise the interim administration's success. The formation of six commissions with highly competent leaders somewhat assuaged the fear among the audience that substantive work could now be expected in some crucial areas.

What impressed me immensely was the eagerness of the NRBs gathered in New Jersey to assist in the journey of the new Bangladesh forward, which has so suddenly emerged. The whole session was full of questions as to how these highly qualified Bangladeshi-Americans could help in the progress of their country of origin. There were professionals from academia, business,

NRBs feel confident that their long-cherished wish is on the verge of being fulfilled.

My brief exposure and fragmented exchanges convinced me that it's high time we established professional linkages with these highly qualified and equally highly motivated NRBs, and use their knowledge to assist in our journey in the potential-rich 21st century. We need to urgently set up some sort of mechanism to make use of this huge reservoir of talent that can help transform Bangladesh.

If knowledge is the most important resource of future advancement, then the global citizens of Bangladesh origin are eagerly waiting to serve Bangladesh in providing that crucial resource. It has been foolish on our part not to seek their collaboration earlier. It will be self-defeating, in fact suicidal, to continue in that direction.

PROSECUTING THE PERPETRATORS OF JULY-AUGUST MASSACRE

A case for restorative justice

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Just a month and a half ago, Bangladesh witnessed abominable atrocities and mass killings perpetrated by Sheikh Hasina's fascist regime. In response to these grave human rights violations, the interim government has initiated the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) to prosecute Hasina and her government for ordering the killings between July 1 and August 5. In this context, it is essential to reflect on the utility of a criminal tribunal and reconsider whether prosecution alone constitutes justice. While punishing the key perpetrators of mass killings is indeed an essential component of transitional justice, other crucial aspects of justice must also be considered, particularly from the perspective of restorative justice.

International crimes tribunals are usually based on punitive frameworks that seek justice through the prosecution of those involved in mass killings or war crimes. Although the International Criminal Court (ICC), established by the Rome Statute, incorporates both punitive and rehabilitative elements, it has been criticised for its lack of meaningful victim participation, reparation, relational restoration, and healing. This gap has led to the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) grounded in the principles of restorative justice. TRCs recognise the importance of truth, accountability,

reparation, relationship-building, reconciliation and healing in post-conflict societies—elements that are often missing in the adversarial and punitive justice systems of criminal courts or tribunals.

The restorative justice approach has gained growing acceptance in several post-conflict nations, including Canada, Rwanda, Cambodia and Sierra

With a focus on addressing the 'social harm' caused by crime, restorative justice advocates for the involvement of all stakeholders in the justice process, promoting meaningful dialogue between victims and perpetrators instead of a simple 'punitive blame allocation exercise.'

Leone, due to its holistic, participatory, empowering and empathetic approach to justice. With a focus on addressing the "social harm" caused by crime, restorative justice advocates for the involvement of all stakeholders in the justice process, promoting meaningful dialogue between victims and perpetrators instead of a simple "punitive blame allocation exercise." The truth and reconciliation process aims to uncover the truth about past atrocities, mend societal relations, and prevent future human rights violations. This justice mechanism is especially valuable in political contexts where victims and perpetrators often need to coexist in the same society,

thus requiring a structural reform, rather than the mere criminalisation of one group.

In contrast, international criminal courts and tribunals have faced increasing criticism over the past decade for their narrow and decontextualised approaches to justice. The legal constraint on individual criminal accountability makes these institutions ill-suited to address the complexities of conflicts in Global South countries, which are often shaped by local or domestic actors. Additionally, punitive and adversarial forms of justice frequently result in polarisation, dominance of the victor's narrative, and ultimately unsustainable justice outcomes.

For instance, in Bangladesh, in addition to law enforcement officials, local goons, Jubo League and Chhatra League members, and local government representatives affiliated with the Awami League government played significant roles in perpetrating violence against the protesters in July and August. Therefore, punishing only a few state leaders or law enforcement officials while ignoring the local actors who enforced violence and intimidation within communities would be insufficient. Moreover, the conflict has already sown distrust, hatred and division among people who have witnessed members of their own communities participating in violence and killings. In such a context, punitive justice alone could further weaken community bonds, social cohesion, and peacemaking efforts. Hence, it is crucial to reconsider the ICT as the sole tool for justice and instead explore a more grounded and holistic approach to addressing these mass atrocities.

Bangladesh is an ideal candidate for a restorative justice approach if it seeks to establish accountability for the mass

killings while fostering reconciliation, healing, and the reintegration of various societal stakeholders. The restorative approach offers victims a diverse range of justice outcomes, including reparation, healing and empowerment—outcomes that are absent from criminal prosecutions alone. According to recent reports, as many as 875 people have been killed and over 30,000 injured during the quota reform movement and the subsequent student-led mass uprising. A key component of justice lies in ensuring reparation and restitution for these victims, which is just as important as criminal prosecutions. Under a restorative justice model, community reparative boards could be established to address the diverse needs for reparation and compensation of the victims.

Additionally, Bangladesh's genocidal past and the failure of the ICT to punish war criminals in an uncontroversial manner have long fuelled political tensions, civil unrest, and polarisation. Over the years, the Awami League government has constructed a linear political narrative, forcing people into a dichotomy of either supporting the party as the champions of independence or being branded as Razakars (traitors). This political culture of intolerance, polarisation and discrimination has not only marginalised a significant portion of the population, but is also one of the main drivers of the anti-discrimination movement. Therefore, it is imperative to adopt a justice mechanism that does not exacerbate existing fault lines, but rather fosters amnesties, reconciliation, and healing within the country. Because of that, while the restorative justice approach may be new to Bangladesh's justice landscape, it is worth serious consideration.