

## Weaponisation of legal cases must stop

### Murder charge against ZI Khan Panna seems designed to harass

The inclusion of eminent lawyer ZI Khan Panna in a murder case is a disturbing reflection of a trend of legal harassment that refuses to go away even after the fall of an autocratic regime that normalised it over the years. Panna was embroiled in the case along with 179 others on October 17. On Monday, the High Court granted him anticipatory bail following a petition. But the fact that he was named at all—with the plaintiff admitting he did not know Panna and had no idea how his name ended up in the list of accused—shows the farce that is being made of our legal system through such dubious cases.

The irony of Panna's case is hard to miss. Not long ago, the veteran rights activist slammed the wholesale filing of murder cases over the July killings across the country, yet now finds himself at the business end of one. This doesn't look good for the interim government. In recent weeks, Panna made headlines by criticising the government for various reasons, including the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's "reset" remarks, the cancellation of March 7 and several other national days, and the suspension of an assistant commissioner following her controversial Facebook posts. It will not be a leap to suggest a connection between his critical stances and his being accused in a case. No adviser also came out strongly against the development. This is a PR disaster the government can ill afford to have when both its credibility and competence are being tested on multiple fronts.

As things stand, Panna's name seems likely to be dropped, after the plaintiff filed a request in that regard. This doesn't resolve the concerns or questions raised by the case, however. Over the two months and a half since August 5, we have published multiple reports and editorials on the indiscriminate filing of such murder cases without any evidence, mostly implicating the leaders, activists, and suspected supporters of the Awami League regime. Even journalists and rights activists were not spared. In many cases, fabricated FIRs were filed. There were also instances of the names of accused in cases predating August 5 being replaced. This is nothing but a weaponisation of the legal process for harassment and political vendettas. Such false or exaggerated cases only dilute the justice system, diverting resources away from genuine investigations and creating an atmosphere of fear.

The interim government has a responsibility to ensure that the legal system is not abused in this way. While it has taken some initiatives to reform the system, progress has been slow and often invisible. This needs to change. The authorities must take decisive steps to stop the filing of false cases and punish those responsible for them. The real culprits behind the violence during the mass uprising must be brought to justice, but it must not be at the expense of innocent individuals, including government critics.

## Israel's genocide in Gaza must end

### World must come together to force a ceasefire agreement

It has been more than a year since the start of Israel's genocide in Gaza that has so far led to the loss of over 42,600 lives, 40 percent of whom are children. At this point, we are at a loss for words to express our condemnation of Israel's destructive activities, which continue unabated. On Saturday night, at least 87 people were killed or went missing under the debris after an Israeli air attack in Beit Lahiya of northern Gaza levelled several buildings.

While Israel, in line with its continued war rhetoric, justified the killing by calling the strike "a precision attack" on a Hamas target, video footage shared by Al Jazeera and Palestinian authorities shows dead bodies as well as injured children being pulled out of the rubble by rescuers. A resident of the area told the BBC that the neighbourhood Israel bombed was mainly home to civilians and displaced families who had fled other high-risk zones in Gaza, hoping it would be safer. But safety anywhere in Gaza is elusive these days. Even aid workers have not been spared by Israeli offensives. The question is: how many more lives will Israel and its military take before they finally feel "safe" within their fortified borders?

For Israel, even the killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar or Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was not enough. Ironically, by releasing the video of Sinwar's murder by an Israeli drone, the brutish state appears to have made the Palestinian resistance stronger. But then, which oppressor in the world could silence people's demand for justice and freedom by genocidal acts? What does Israel then wish to achieve in the long run? Its military's recent bombing in Lebanon and Netanyahu's phone conversation with former US President Donald Trump on Saturday indicate that it has no intention of reining in its killing spree targeting Palestinians or civilians of any neighbouring state that backs Hamas. Sadly, even the US policy of denying Israel's genocide in Gaza is unlikely to change, even if there is a new US administration after the elections.

Under such circumstances, we can only hope that nations that still have a conscience would finally come together to condemn Israel's genocidal acts and ensure that Israel agrees to a ceasefire agreement in Gaza and Lebanon without any further delay. The genocide must end.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### WikiLeaks releases Iraq, Afghanistan war documents

On this day in 2010, WikiLeaks, a website founded by Julian Assange that functioned as a clearinghouse for classified or otherwise privileged information, released thousands of US documents relating to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.



# Bangladesh's quest for a corruption-free tomorrow



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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

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In more than five decades of independence, Bangladesh has made little progress in tackling corruption. The country continues to perform poorly in corruption indices, reflecting its status as one of the most corrupt nations globally. Corruption has turned more and more pervasive over time, engulfing politicians, civil and military officials, businesspeople, and law enforcement. Over the 15-plus years of the previous government, it intensified in both scope and scale, with no significant measures taken to address it.

Corruption manifests in various forms—such as bribery, favouritism, and embezzlement—and is experienced firsthand by ordinary citizens, entrepreneurs and investors. Government services, for example, have become inaccessible without paying bribes. Services and tasks at public offices are delayed regardless of their merit as "facilitation fees" or "speed money" have become the norm. Over time, these under-the-table transactions have become a standard practice for accessing public services in Bangladesh. This practice not only burdens honest citizens, but also creates opportunities for dishonest individuals.

Corruption is self-reinforcing—one instance leads to another. In the past, the authorities issued licences, permits and contracts in exchange for bribes. As a result, opportunities were often given to unqualified entities, resulting in poor service delivery as their sole aim was to maximise profits through fraudulent means. While the exchange of money between individuals may not directly affect economic growth as long as it is within the economy, the collapse of a bridge or building due to substandard construction materials results in both economic losses and the tragic loss of human lives. Similarly, when project costs

escalate beyond initial estimates, citizens bear the financial burden through increased tolls and taxes. The Padma Bridge is an example of a project completed at a much higher cost than originally projected. Indeed, megaprojects became a large source of overspending through various means. The interim government is reviewing the megaprojects including Payra port, Matarbari thermal power plant, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and Dhaka metro rail as huge amounts of money have been spent on these.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Corruption also discourages private sector investment by creating uncertainty and raising operational costs. Genuine investors often face barriers in obtaining the necessary permits and approvals. High facilitation fees reduce competitiveness, favouring those with privileged access. For example, businesses that acquire prime land at low prices or receive utilities through informal payments enjoy a competitive advantage over those operating by market rules. Companies forced to pay high bribes for gas and electricity connections struggle to compete. This discourages innovation,

job creation, and productivity—key drivers of national economic growth.

Corruption also carries significant social and environmental costs. When the government fails to raise adequate revenues through taxation, it lacks the resources to fund essential social protection programmes for vulnerable communities. Environmental degradation occurs when corrupt practices allow illegal encroachment of rivers and forests. Unfit vehicles are allowed on the streets through bribery and contribute to severe pollution, harming public health and reducing worker productivity. These conditions increase public expenditure while simultaneously lowering the country's overall economic output.

Addressing corruption requires decisive actions. Systems must be made more accountable and transparent, with digital governance playing a vital role in achieving these goals. Punishing corrupt practices, upholding the rule

Public perception shifts as wealth amassed through corruption becomes a source of influence, with corrupt individuals attending high-profile events and gaining social acceptance.

Eliminating corruption requires a comprehensive improvement in governance across all sectors. Institutional reforms are vital to achieving sustainable progress. Although Bangladesh undertook economic reforms in the 1990s to liberalise the economy, it failed to strengthen governance institutions at the time. Subsequent regulatory and institutional reforms, including in the banking sector, have been limited in scope and impact. Reforming public administration remained an unfinished agenda as well; meaningful action in this sector was limited to introducing new pay scales for government officials. Establishing accountability within public institutions is the most critical step towards curbing corruption.

A key area for reform is strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Established in 2004 under donor pressure, the ACC was intended to operate independently. However, successive governments have not provided the institution with the necessary legal, administrative or financial support to function effectively. Political interference continues to constrain its autonomy. Though government plans, such as five-year policy frameworks, have called for empowering the ACC, these commitments have not materialised.

The interim government has formed several commissions to introduce reforms in various important sectors. The commissions to reform the ACC and public administration are crucial for tackling corruption in the country.

So far, Bangladesh's economic development has largely progressed independently of governance improvements. But sustained and inclusive growth requires addressing corruption to enhance the efficiency of development efforts. Without rooting out corruption, the wheels of progress will remain stalled. Effective governance reforms are crucial to realise the full potential of Bangladesh's economy and securing a prosperous future for all.

## Doris Lessing's message of hope for anti-Zionist protesters



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Nobel Laureate Doris Lessing was no ivory tower writer and no detached observer of local or global events. She was a perceptive social critic and an engaged intellectual. She dared to defy the political establishment and dived straight into political hot water by speaking truth to power. According to a 2015 report by *The Guardian*, British intelligence service MI5 targeted "Lessing for 20 years, listening to her phone conversations, opening her mail and closely monitoring her movements."

In 1956, Lessing's views against racism, apartheid and other inhuman and degrading practices led to her being "declared a prohibited alien in both Southern Rhodesia and South Africa." The ban on entering Southern Rhodesia (where she grew up) was lifted in 1980 when it was renamed Zimbabwe after the collapse of the old order. Apartheid in South Africa ended in 1994, and Lessing visited the country in 1995 on a book tour to promote the first volume of her autobiography, *Under My Skin*.

Lessing's words are pertinent to the Israel-Palestine issue too.

In a 2001 interview with Australian journalist Jennifer Byrne, Doris Lessing made the following observations, "I think there's a new generation who's only seen war in television programmes and war films... I don't know why war always looks glamorous... And it makes my blood run cold because I've lived through it

more than once... And this is what's so frightening about it... Oh... we love powerful people, unfortunately. We do. We do."

Given Israel's predilection for what political theorists call "escalation dominance" and the backing it receives from its powerful allies, Lessing's statement rings true. The Israeli government has normalised cruelty and denial of basic human rights to children, women and men in Palestine and beyond. It counts its success on killing, maiming and humiliating them.

The Zionist state has made violence and brutality so glamorous in the eyes of the young men and women of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that they film their persecution of Palestinians and share it on social media. They gloat and revel in the impunity they enjoy and the crimes they perpetrate against indigenous Palestinians. Even pro-Israeli British journalist Piers Morgan found it revolting that IDF members filmed their own human rights violations. On January 15 this year, he took to X (formerly Twitter) and asked, "Why do Israeli soldiers keep filming themselves doing this kind of crass, insensitive thing? Why don't their commanders stop them? Makes them look callous when so many children in Gaza are being killed."

During the 2001 interview, Jennifer Byrne asked Doris Lessing, "Is it getting harder to speak your mind, or easier,

do you think?" Lessing replied, "Easier. No one's going to put you into prison at the moment, for speaking your mind... or banning you. Luckily, I am not a Muslim in this country—they're having a bad time."

The US and other Western governments take pride in their ostentatious support for free speech, freedom of movement and press

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freedom. But, on the question of Palestine, they seem to be ready to ignore such values and give Israel free rein to trample them all.

Israel has manifested its disregard for press freedom by carrying out targeted assassinations of journalists in Gaza and by restricting Al Jazeera's coverage of its human rights violations. According to a Democracy Now report titled "Meet Maha Hussaini," published in June this year, Israel up until then killed about 150 Gaza-based journalists during the ongoing spate of violence. As of October 2024, the number has reached nearly 200. Sadly, the silence of self-declared advocates of free press over Israel's killing of journalists is simply deafening.

In the US, students have been

harassed, abused and assaulted on their own campuses and in the streets of their own cities for demanding justice for Palestinians. What Lessing said about Muslims in Britain is true with regard to these anti-Zionist and anti-genocide protesters. Western governments and pro-establishment media organisations have been caricaturing them and trying to silence them by conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Many of us have been demanding justice for Palestinians for decades. Conscientious people in the world have been protesting against the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza since early October 2023. Did Doris Lessing leave a message of hope for us?

Yes, she did.

After she won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2007, Lessing said in an interview with BBC Newsnight presenter Kirsty Wark, "When I was growing up, there was Germany and Hitler, and Stalin and Russia, and Italy and Mussolini, and the British Empire and all the other European empires, and race hatred in Africa and in America, and all... have disappeared like clouds in the sky... I'll tell these young people you look out (for) what you see, terrifying things. They are going to disappear before you know it. They might not disappear pleasantly, but they will disappear."

Lessing was referring to young anti-racist and anti-imperialist campaigners and was giving them hope that the structures of oppression would cease to exist and better days would come. This message rings true for young anti-Zionist protesters who have been assaulted, arrested and subjected to police brutality as well as media smear campaigns.

We all cling to this hope that, one day, Israel's brutal apartheid and colonialism will end and Palestinians will gain freedom and human dignity.