

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

## Stop retributive violence in politics

### Brutal killing of Jubo League leader demands scrutiny

The recent killing of a Jubo League leader in Natore, allegedly by men linked with BNP, comes as another grim reminder of the cycle of political retribution and exploitation that has gripped Bangladesh after the fall of the Awami League regime—much like how it did when the regime was in power. According to a report, the victim, Saidur Rahman Babu, succumbed to his injuries on Wednesday after a brutal assault. He had been in hiding since his home was attacked on August 5, but on October 30, he was caught by his alleged assailants, tied to an electric pole, and beaten with sticks and iron rods. Saidur's family has accused Kabir Hossain Kangal, a Jubo Dal leader, of leading the attack and previously demanding Tk 5 lakh in exchange for his safety.

These incidents show little sign of abating even after three months. We had hoped that the culture of political repression would end with the end of an autocrat's rule, paving the way for a politics that genuinely serves public interests. However, the ongoing violence and harassment targeting the oneruling camp raise concerns about a likely resurgence of authoritarianism under different banners. Almost every day comes with some troubling sign of authoritarian tendencies—murder, vandalism, arson, opportunistic extortion, forced takeover of properties, ill-motivated cases, etc. Data from the rights group Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) also reflects the persistent nature of these crimes, with at least 12 political fatalities in October, nine from Awami League alone.

This, on a broader level, aligns with how political parties that were once part of the AL-led 14-party alliance are being targeted, with a report by this daily revealing that many party offices were vandalised, abandoned, and even repurposed. Some public outbursts towards these parties were expected because of their role over the past 15 years, and particularly their complicity or silence during the brutal killings of students and other ordinary citizens during the July-August uprising. But what's happening now seems more politically designed, which is concerning.

We, therefore, call on the interim government and indeed leading political parties to break this cycle of retributive violence. The BNP secretary general on Thursday said that party leaders and activists have "taken a fresh vow to resist hegemonic forces" and safeguard democracy. We appreciate the commitment but would like to see matching actions on the ground. Political parties, including the BNP, that once suffered heavily under the Awami League rule must ensure that they don't end up repeating its wrongs. The onus also falls on the government to establish accountability of the excesses being committed, particularly by ensuring thorough investigations and fair trials for all political killings as well as punitive action against anyone committing or inciting political violence.

## Can we reverse the brain drain?

### Create an enabling, inspiring ecosystem for our youth

A recent study by British Council, conducted before Bangladesh's 12th parliamentary election, has revealed a concerning trend: that 55 percent of our youth want to move abroad due to unemployment, corruption, as well as various discriminatory and authoritarian practices. This reflects the deep frustration that has taken root in society over the years. For too long, young people have had to contend with obstacles in government hiring, insufficient jobs for an ever-growing pool of graduates, and limited politico-economic opportunities, all coalescing to create a suffocating environment for them. This eventually boiled over during the 2024 quota reform movement, leading to the ouster of the Awami League regime.

The survey, held among individuals aged 18 to 35 across diverse backgrounds, found that 37 percent identified corruption and nepotism as the primary causes of unemployment, while 20 percent pointed to discrimination in hiring practices. Another notable, if unsurprising, finding is that 72 percent were eager to vote in the January 7 election, before the autocratic regime again deprived them of this basic right. The cumulative effect of these grievances very much remains, even after the political changeover on August 5, pushing many to continue seeking opportunities abroad. Despair and desperation still accompany many who have seen their aspirations come unstuck.

Reversing this trend and engaging our young workforce in rebuilding the nation stands as a formidable challenge for the interim government. It, therefore, must give them hope by generating more jobs and creating an ecosystem that rewards merit, hard work, innovation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the government must undertake reforms in key institutions to serve greater public interests. In the survey, the top priority identified by young respondents was education reform. In that respect, modernising our education system by making it more skills-based and market-oriented remains a priority. Corruption, too, must be uprooted across all sectors. Furthermore, an environment must be established where people, regardless of social class, religion, or ethnicity, can voice their opinions freely and without fear.

The government has initiated its state reform agenda by setting up various commissions for various sectors. We hope these commissions can operate independently, without interference from vested interests. Only through genuine political and institutional reforms can we empower our youth and inspire them to contribute to the nation's progress. This is crucial to fulfil the promise of a brighter, more equitable future for Bangladesh.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Opening of the Berlin Wall



On this day in 1989, the Berlin Wall was opened by the East German government. Long a symbol of the Cold War, it was erected in 1961 and eventually extended 45km to divide the western and eastern sections of Berlin.

# How to choose a good bank



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MD MAIN UDDIN

Depositors looking to put money in banks often face the risk of selecting a bad bank. This is because often they don't have complete information about the financial and other conditions of the banks. For a safe and good banking experience, it is essential to recognise strong banks, which can be done in the following ways.

A good bank ensures quality of loans (assets) by selecting the right borrowers, sanctioning loans to various sectors in different sizes, and keeping collateral. It avoids credit concentration and aggressive lending to high risk borrowers, and grants loans to those who have credit discipline. It is motivated by value driven strategies rather than immediate performance-driven ones. A bank's performance can be measured by its loan quality: if it has a small amount of distressed assets, its quality is good, but a bank with huge distressed assets—which include non-performing, rescheduled, restructured and other loans stuck in money loan courts—is surely a bad one. Such a bank fails to be profitable because it has to maintain a provision against non-performing assets from its profits. A bank that has a non-performing loan (NPL) rate of less than five percent is a good bank in Bangladesh's context. Depositors should look at this rate.

There is a single-borrower exposure limit, indicating the maximum amount of loan that banks can grant to one borrower. A bank can sanction 25 percent of its capital at most to a single borrower. It can also make a large loan that's at least 10 percent of its capital. It should not extend such loans frequently because doing so creates a concentration risk. It also fails to construct a diversified portfolio with many large loans. In contrast, when a bank extends many small and medium loans, its portfolio is diversified, making a trade-off between risks and returns. Depositors should avoid banks that have high proportions of large loans.

Capital is a parameter that's used to understand banks' loss absorption capacity. A bank must have sufficient capital for solvency purposes. When the capital is adequate, it can absorb significant unforeseen losses. Any loss that arises mainly from credit, interest rate, liquidity, foreign exchange and/or price risks is adjusted against the capital. Hence, a bank must keep a minimum amount of capital against its risk-weighted assets. If it possesses more risky assets, its capital requirement is high. A sound bank

also maintains additional capital rather than the minimum. It keeps some capital buffer to face the loss emerging from unfavourable economic conditions and adverse business cycle. Depositors must also look at the overall capital position of a bank.

Liquidity is the ease with which an asset can be converted into cash without affecting its market price. Liquidity risk is a sudden surge in liability withdrawals that may leave banks in a position of having to liquidate assets at a very short notice and low prices. It is one of the most



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significant risks that banks need to manage to keep the trust of their depositors. When a bank faces a liquidity problem, it generally borrows from the money market. But when it tends to borrow at high interest rates, that signals that the bank is at a serious liquidity risk. It may also tend to collect deposits at abnormally high interest rates. As a last resort, it may borrow from Bangladesh Bank (BB). Sometimes, it may even need special liquidity support from BB to continue its operations.

Depositors should also know whether a bank can maintain regulatory reserves required by the

central bank. Every bank has to maintain certain statutory reserves in cash and other assets. Failure to maintain the reserves leads to punitive action. Recently, several banks have failed to maintain these reserves, for which they were fined.

In a good bank, there are checks and balances between the board of directors and the top management where the former ensures that the bank's affairs are carried out competently, ethically, and in accordance with the law and policies; it also ensures that quality services are provided. The latter have to supervise all operations of a bank. There must be a fair participation of all directors in policymaking. The management must have freedom in its operations and the right to say "no" to the board of directors.

However, sometimes a bank is dominated by the chairpersons or directors from the same family. The chairperson makes major decisions on issues such as lending, recruitment,

zone are risky. The central bank also runs stress testing on banks to better understand their financial position and risks. The test shows the shock absorption capacity of banks under different adverse conditions. A good bank is highly shock-absorbent.

The BB analyses a bank's conditions by the CAMELS (capital adequacy, assets, management capability, earnings, liquidity and sensitivity) rating. Although this rating is not made public, every bank knows its own rating. In addition, banks are also rated by external credit assessment institutions every year. When a bank attains a good rating, it is advertised in newspapers. This rating is an important indicator of performance.

A good bank is also consistent in making profit; it declares a certain percentage of dividends every year for its shareholders and retains a portion of its profit to increase capital base and expand business. Its share price does not change abruptly. A good

bank earns a decent return on assets and equity. It has respectable earnings per share, and so is its net asset value. The financial statements of banks contain these sets of information which depositors can look through. Depositors should not necessarily make all these analyses by themselves. Most analyses are readily available in annual reports. They can depend on media reports too. If they are confused while selecting a bank, they can simply talk to bankers and experts. What's most important is that they need to be conscious about choosing a good bank. Doing so can reduce the risk of losing money.

The BB discloses information indicating the quality of banks. Recently, it categorised banks in red, yellow and green zones based on their performances. Banks in the green zone are safe, while those in the red

# Will Gaza's incessant bleeding end under the new US leadership?



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SAYEED AHMED

Acclaimed Palestinian writer Adania Shibli's novel *Minor Detail* was selected for the LiBeraturpreis Prize 2023 by German literary organisation LitProm. Based partially on historical facts, the book recounts the rape and murder of a Palestinian girl in 1949 by Israeli soldiers, who were later convicted of murder (but not rape) by an Israeli court. Originally, the award ceremony at the Frankfurt Book Fair had been announced for October 20, 2023. A few days before the scheduled date, LitProm cancelled the ceremony in response to protests by German journalists who said the novel expressed antisemitic attitudes. The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas was also mentioned as another reason for the cancellation, although the writer had nothing to do with Hamas or its actions.

Shibli, who has a PhD from the University of East London, lives in Jerusalem and Berlin, speaks Arabic, English, Hebrew, French, Korean and German, has taught at the University of Nottingham, and has never supported violence. Despite her international reputation, recognition, and

widespread support from more than 1,000 high-profile writers, including Nobel laureates, LitProm could not appear to support antisemitism. The slightest hint of doing such a thing is an absolute no-no in the West, regardless of the prevailing political, social or cultural scene. We must see the outcome of the US election through this lens. The winner in the race for the White House is now already known, but that has nothing to do with the US policy towards the decades-old Israel-Palestine conflict.

Let's revisit the genesis of the current situation. Part of the broader Middle East crisis, last year's escalation started when Hamas-led militant groups launched a surprise attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, involving a rocket barrage and a few thousand militants breaching the Gaza-Israel border, attacking Israeli civilian communities and military bases. Israel retaliated with ultimate lethal force. Its sophisticated military machine, aided by the most advanced weaponry, unleashed a brutal terror campaign of indiscriminate killing in Gaza.

While continuing its support for

Israel's right to act in self-defence, Washington has been mediating peace talks and proposing ceasefires. For instance, in May 2024, President Joe Biden announced a three-phase plan aimed at ending the conflict, which included a complete ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and the release of hostages. The US also urged the UN Security Council to support this plan. However, such efforts have faced significant challenges. Negotiations have been stalled, and the warring parties are unwilling to withdraw from their demands. Hamas has demanded a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, while Israel insists on maintaining control over parts of the territory. Notwithstanding Washington's efforts to find a peaceful resolution, its iron-clad commitment to Israel's security and the continued supply of weapons question its sincerity.

The irony of history is stark in this conflict. For a thousand years, Jews were oppressed by Christian ruling powers across Europe, culminating in the Holocaust, perhaps the largest recorded genocide in human history. On the other hand, Arab Muslim rulers in Iberia and Africa were relatively more tolerant of the Jews, often appointing them to high government positions. Today, the roles have reversed, with Jews as the oppressors and the Arabs as the oppressed.

Regardless of the election outcome, the US policy will almost certainly remain the same: to support and arm Israel while largely ignoring the Palestinians' plight. Too many people

benefit from this conflict, making it difficult to stop the war. We must also note that it was Israel who had long nurtured Hamas to counter the moderate and secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his hardline government need a war to remain in power. Hamas benefits from violence as it can appear to be the saviour of the Palestinians. The US government can't afford to lose the Israeli lobby's support. Powerful defence contractors in the US must continue the highly profitable war. No one in the region has the military might to match Israel's, and perhaps most crucially, the West's collective sense of guilt for the many centuries of dehumanising the Jewish people forces them to blindly support Israel.

Adania Shibli's work often highlights the everyday realities and struggles of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. In *Minor Detail*, she poignantly captures this sentiment, "By the way, I hope I didn't cause any awkwardness when I mentioned the incident with the soldier, or the checkpoint, or when I reveal that we are living under occupation here." This quote underscores the daily hardships and emotional toll of living under occupation. Oppression and the constant presence of occupation in the lives of Palestinians are now normalised, leading to an immeasurable human cost.

Will Trump's second term be able to change it? Or any other future president?