

Fix the system to prevent rape

Existing justice mechanisms for rape crimes are not working

A report published by this daily on Monday reveals a disturbing yet familiar picture of women's safety in Bangladesh. Citing data collected by the Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), it states that a female has been raped every nine hours on average in the country between January 2020 and September 2024. This translates to at least two rapes each day. To call this horrifying would be an understatement. More importantly, this highlights yet again how the country has been systematically failing half of its population.

During the above-mentioned period, a total of 4,787 cases of rape were reported in the media. Of those, police cases were filed for 3,419, meaning about one-third were not reported to law enforcement. It's not unreasonable to assume that there were even more incidents that didn't reach the media, as the stigma surrounding rape as well as threats of retribution continue to deter victims and their families from seeking justice. Unfortunately, despite numerous awareness campaigns and the authorities' promises to ensure safety and justice for women, our society has yet to undergo an effective shift to prevent gender-based violence.

For those who can overcome initial barriers, however, more hurdles await, as victims must endure distressing environments in court, lengthy legal battles that can be mentally and financially taxing, and also a lack of empathy across the justice system (from police stations to courts). Police data from the first nine months of 2024 also shows their arduous and often futile legal battles, with around 68 percent of those accused in cases of violence or abuse against women remaining at large. Police authorities say this is not due to a lack of capacity. Should we then assume a lack of interest?

The existing justice system for sexual and gender-based violence is deeply flawed. Delays in arrests in rape cases, combined with protracted legal proceedings, place the burden on victims and their families rather than on the perpetrators. Furthermore, there is still no specific law for victim and witness protection, despite the existence of a vetted draft. Nor is there a state-sponsored compensation mechanism which could encourage victims, especially those from underprivileged communities, to pursue justice. This cannot be the norm in a civilised, modern nation.

We urge the government to address the harsh reality that half of our population endures, and to incorporate modern, empathetic mechanisms for pursuing justice in cases of rape and other forms of gender-based violence into ongoing reform efforts. Ensuring women's safety and access to justice is essential if we are to build a society that truly values and protects all its citizens.

Dengue taking a deadlier turn

Relevant agencies must answer for failure to check its spread

We are deeply concerned by the rising number of dengue-related deaths at a time of year when such fatalities typically decrease. This November has already seen the highest number of deaths in the year, with 144 fatalities reported in the first 24 days of this month, including 11 in just the past 24 hours as of Sunday morning. Overall, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 459 patients have died this year from this mosquito-borne disease. This is only the second time in the last 24 years that dengue deaths have surpassed the 450-mark. Clearly, such a tragic toll could have been avoided had the authorities acted decisively and in a timely manner.

Admittedly, this year's dengue control efforts were disrupted by the July uprising, which left city corporations and municipalities unable to carry out their regular duties in the absence of mayors and councillors. However, once the interim government appointed administrators to replace the latter, we expected a swift resumption of mosquito-control drives. Unfortunately, both city corporations in Dhaka failed to do their part, and the situation was equally dire outside the capital. This daily has published many editorials urging action before it was too late, but nothing seemed to spur the authorities into action. It reflects not just inefficiency but also a certain disregard for public health, for which they must be held accountable.

Experts and entomologists have repeatedly warned about the shifting dengue patterns, but their warnings went unheeded. Previously, dengue was largely concentrated in Dhaka, but this year, cases outside the capital have exceeded those within, according to an October report by this daily. Furthermore, dengue cases that would typically decrease in winter show no signs of abating this year. If this trend continues, the situation may worsen in the coming days. Therefore, our dengue management strategy must account for these changing realities. Reportedly, many deaths this year have been due to late detection, with patients being diagnosed when it was too late. Since early detection is key to effective treatment, all healthcare facilities, including upazila health complexes, must be equipped to diagnose and treat dengue promptly. The government should also ensure that dengue tests are available at subsidised rates.

As for city corporations and municipalities, they must conduct regular anti-mosquito drives and awareness campaigns as these can have a significant impact on reducing cases. With dengue now endemic, we need sustained, year-round measures to curb its spread and prevent needless deaths.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Tutankhamun's tomb discovered

On this day in 1922, British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the main chamber of Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun's tomb and had a peek inside with a candle.

Monuments of resistance and the politics of memory



Nubras Samayeen is an architect, urban designer, and PhD candidate in the joint programme of Landscape Architecture and Heritage at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

NUBRAS SAMAYEEN

It was no easy victory. After enduring massive carnage and 15 years of unjust dominance by a single political party, Bangladesh experienced a reincarnation. This resurgence, marked by bloodshed and violence, claimed the lives of individuals ranging from toddlers—like Zabir (6), Abdul (4), Roya (6)—to university students and civilians, totalling over a thousand. This *shadhinota* differs vastly from what the post-1971 generation knew. These young people did not seek martyrdom; they were killed, forced into it by police brutality—gunshots, severe burns, or shrapnel—in the homeland they thought would rightfully be a safe haven. Ultimately, the student movement—or rather, the student-led people's movement—triumphed on July 36 (August 5), 2024. These horrific yet historic moments must be memorialised. But where and how? How can we, as common citizens, claim our victory? Thus arises the urgency of spatial claim/reclaim/lun]claim to reveal a fresh historical narrative—one that does not disregard 1971 but builds upon it. This nuevo-nationalism version 2.0 deviates from the Mujib-centred, post-1971 *chetona* (spirit) and its mono-narrative of Bangladeshi nationalism.

Immediately after the revolution, people spontaneously began to historicise and monumentalise urban spaces across broiling Bangladesh. Spaces of protest, martyrs, and carnage were transformed into markers and monuments, turning the major towns and cities—and particularly Dhaka—into open-air museums. These ad-hoc actions are techniques for historical recording. Notable examples include the commemorations of Abu Sayed (1999-2024) and Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho (1998-2024).

Sayed, just 25, died after enduring baton charges and being shot four times, becoming what Shahidullah Faraj called the "hero of the generation." His name has now been immortalised. The people renamed the Rangpur Park intersection to "Shaheed Abu Sayed Chatter" in his honour. On July 18, Mugdho was killed by police while distributing water to protesters. His death further galvanised people. In his memory, "Shib Bari Mor" in Khulna was renamed "Shaheed Meer Mugdho Chatter," Dhaka's Zero Point became "Mugdho Chatter," and the Bangabandhu Mukta Mancha in Uttara

was renamed "Mugdho Mancha." Police brutality, deaths, and political caricatures have been illustrated and replicated through recurring visual representations—wall paintings, cartoons, and street art—across Dhaka and beyond. These artworks, often created by hand and reproduced shortly after the incidents, carry a weight that counters Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Though transient, the proliferation of these artefacts plays a crucial role in ensuring that Bangladesh's evolving narratives are not forgotten. In this way, these spatial moments serve as agencies of historical



People celebrate the downfall of the Hasina-led Awami League government near the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban on August 5, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

transference and identity-making. Thus, they also become powerful catalysts and iconoclastic gestures challenging the pervasive dominance of Mujib's omnipresence, propagated during Awami autocracy. Like museum pieces, these artworks act as critical historical spectacles. Dr Yunus, as head of Bangladesh's interim government, carried this message in mobile form—a book—to the UN meeting in New York, further underscoring the significance of these art forms.

One space that must be uncovered and integrated into Bangladesh's evolving, multi-faceted narrative is Aynaghar (House of Mirrors). Under Sheikh Hasina's regime, the country became infamous for forced disappearances, commonly referred to as *goom*. Much like India's Kaala-Pani—a hidden cellular jail and notorious torture site used during the British period—Aynaghars were

including even pet ducks. While the looting can be seen as a momentary act of vengeance and a release of pent-up frustration, it holds no deeper connection to Bangladesh's collective memory. Thus, memorialising Gono Bhaban as a museum risks evoking negative memories. Memorialising a space with such fear could wrongly shape the collective memory of a place where the public had little interaction in history. In that way, it may be counterintuitive to the monumental conquest, overshadowing the public struggle.

As educated citizens, we must remain vigilant about the significance of Gono Bhaban and the larger Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area. The building was specifically designed for the nation's leader by renowned modernist architect Louis I Kahn (1901-1974). Arguably one of Kahn's finest works, it deserves both scrutiny and preservation. It

of Kahn's design in shaping our national consciousness. Hence, the removal of the wall and the opening of the space long-owed to the public is perhaps a more justified approach, aligning with Bangladesh's newly found independence. This might also be an opportunity to decolonise the substantial number of independence-war museums, many of which were built using public funds during the Awami era. The images and narratives once set out of visibility should now be included to reflect evolving Bangladeshi nationalism and identity. We can also fill the gaps with visuals (photos, newspaper clippings) that were once restricted. It is time to insert the unsung heroes alongside those who gave their lives in 1971 and 2024. Now is the prime time to claim, and even reclaim, what is rightfully ours, and to discard what no longer represents Bangladesh Version 2.0.

Breaking the cycle of juvenile crime



Dr Rakib Al Hasan is the founder and executive director of the Centre for Partnership Initiative. He can be reached at md.rakibalhasan.bd@gmail.com. His X handle is @rakibalhasan_bd

RAKIB AL HASAN

As Bangladesh surges forward into a new era of political change, a darker tide is rising within our communities—a troubling spike in juvenile crime. While our leaders focus on national reform, an underground world of teen gangs and criminal networks is quietly taking root, ensnaring our youth in cycles of violence, crime, and despair.

But why are so many of our children and teenagers drawn into the shadows of gang culture? It is a complex web woven from poverty, broken homes, peer pressure, and a search for identity. In underserved neighbourhoods, gang life can offer a twisted sense of family, protection, and power. Without strong family support or access to opportunities, young people can feel adrift, easily lured by the false promises of gang culture.

Yet the influences stretch beyond poverty. Across economic divides, some youths are captivated by the glamorisation of gang life on social media and in popular culture, where figures of crime are idolised as symbols of defiance and "success." With such distorted role models, many teenagers begin to see violence and lawlessness as pathways to respect and recognition.

In the wake of recent political turmoil, many communities are vulnerable, left without the support

and security they once relied on. The administrative reorganisation following the revolution has left gaps in law enforcement, creating space for gang activities to flourish. As political power shifted, gang leaders capitalised on the upheaval to recruit young people who feel isolated, restless, and overlooked.

Moreover, corruption among local power figures has emboldened gang networks, as some councillors and "big brothers" enable these gangs for their gain, using them as pawns for influence. This erosion of integrity at the local level has turned neighbourhoods into battlegrounds, where teenagers become unwitting soldiers and gang affiliation becomes a deadly game for respect.

What may start as minor acts of mischief often spirals into something much darker—drug distribution, theft, extortion, and even murder. Innocent people live in fear as communities are disrupted, their streets claimed by teenagers who see no future outside gang life. Schools are no longer sanctuaries but places of intimidation, where innocent students can fall victim to violence. Families are left shattered, watching as their children slip further away, trapped in a dangerous world with few exits.

The rise of teen gang culture calls for a united, strategic response—a plan that addresses root causes, not just symptoms. Here is a blueprint for a future where youth have a real chance to thrive:

Family and community engagement

Parents and guardians must be the first line of support, fostering open communication and offering a stable foundation. Communities can strengthen this support by creating safe spaces for young people, offering mentorship, mental health resources, and educational support. Government programmes can aid families facing financial hardship, reducing the vulnerabilities that gangs exploit.

Transforming schools into safe havens

Educational institutions have the power to reshape the trajectory of young lives. Beyond academics, schools must provide social and emotional support with activities that encourage positive self-expression—such as sports, arts, and leadership opportunities. Through community partnerships, students can engage with role models and mentors who demonstrate that success is attainable without resorting to violence.

A culture of awareness and empowerment

Awareness is key. Community organisations, local leaders, and the media must collaborate to shine a light on the dangers of gang life, offering clear, powerful messages that dispel the myths surrounding it. Real stories of resilience and redemption should be amplified so that young people see that strength lies in integrity, not in crime. Social campaigns, events, and

programmes that celebrate positive achievements can create a sense of pride and belonging that gangs cannot offer.

Reinforcing law and order with compassionate solutions

While strengthening law enforcement is essential, it must go hand in hand with rehabilitation efforts. Quick and fair punishment serves as a deterrent, but so does the chance at a future. By establishing rehabilitation programmes for juvenile offenders, we can guide them back to a constructive path. Police should also work in partnership with community organisations, ensuring they are not only enforcing laws but also supporting prevention efforts.

Bangladesh stands at a pivotal moment. The path we choose today will shape our future for decades to come. By ignoring the rise of juvenile crime, we risk losing a generation to violence, perpetuating cycles of poverty and fear. Yet, by coming together—parents, teachers, community leaders, and law enforcement—we can reclaim our neighbourhoods, giving our youth the chance to thrive in a world free of violence and corruption.

Bangladesh's youth are not inherently lost or violent. They are searching for purpose and direction in a society that too often looks the other way. It is up to us to show them that real power lies in courage, honesty, and lifting each other up. By building a society that values resilience and respect, we can protect our young people from the lure of gang culture and create a safer, more just Bangladesh.

The time for action is now. Let us break the cycle, together.