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Take effective steps to curb crimes

Rising incidents of violence, murder, and mugging raise alarm

We are concerned about the deteriorating state of law and order in the country, including in Dhaka. Media reports indicate a noticeable rise in incidents of violence, murder, mugging, and robbery as law enforcement agencies struggle to ensure security despite increased vigilance. Muggings and killings, in particular, have become quite common, with bodies of victims reportedly being found in lakes, rivers and open fields. The perception of security forces playing a reactive role—as evidenced by instances where crime or violence was anticipated—is only heightening the sense of insecurity among citizens.

A quick search online would reveal a wide spectrum of crimes: from the dramatic bank heist attempt in Keraniganj to the strangling to death of a nine-year-old in Satkhira, from the brazen muggings and equally brazen lynching of suspected muggers to the gruesome discoveries of buried bodies in different areas. On December 18, four people were killed and 50 others injured during a violent clash between two factions of Tablighi Jamaat in Tongi, Dhaka. On December 12, two students involved with the anti-discrimination student movement were hacked to death. These incidents show how opportunistic criminals and anarchists are exploiting the fluid security situation to commit crimes and disrupt public order.

Adding to this crisis is the proliferation of stolen arms and ammunition, with police sources indicating that many firearms looted from police stations following the mass uprising have not yet been recovered. Reportedly, criminals including escaped prisoners, youth gangs and extremists are using these weapons to commit crimes. While joint security drives are going on to reclaim these weapons, progress has not been swift or satisfactory. In any case, as police data suggests, whatever the reason behind the surge in criminal activities, efforts by the authorities are proving ineffective to contain this wave of lawlessness. For example, according to an estimate, 583 people were killed in September, 399 in October, and 337 in November. In contrast, during the same months last year, the numbers of murders were lower—238, 258, and 227, respectively.

One of the reasons behind police struggles to contain rising crime in Dhaka, and likely in other areas, is that the replacement of many police officers after the uprising has created an intelligence gap about criminal trends and offenders, resulting in poor response by those newly assigned to police stations. Moreover, there still seems to be a reluctance among many officers to file cases instead of GDs, apparently because more cases would mean a heavier workload. Clearly, we cannot tackle crimes head-on without our police being fully equipped and motivated. The assurance by the home affairs adviser—that patrol has been increased, including during the wee hours when there are greater risks of mugging and robbery—may not work if the many security loopholes that now exist are not addressed simultaneously.

What we need is a comprehensive strategy that includes improving detection of potential criminal and violent developments, enhancing police-community cooperation, and properly utilising security forces to neutralise threats. Since the rising trends of crime and violence have been noted across the country, the whole security apparatus must be engaged so that public concerns about security can be effectively addressed.

Ensure rights, dignity of domestic workers

State must take effective steps to address their plight

We are concerned about the continued deprivation of rights faced by domestic workers, with their profession remaining excluded from the labour law. While there does exist the Domestic Workers' Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015, it has largely gone unimplemented so far, resulting in widespread violations of their rights by employers. A recent event held at The Daily Star Centre brought out some harrowing stories of domestic workers that underscore the urgent need for intervention.

Reportedly, domestic workers endure daily humiliations and exploitations. They often work without set hours, suffer physical abuse for even minor mistakes, and are threatened with job loss if they fall ill. Worse yet, they are often denied holidays during major festivals. One domestic worker shared how she was denied clean drinking water and prohibited from sitting on the sofa she cleaned, while another spoke of being forced to continue working while pregnant. These stories reflect the widespread suffering of thousands of domestic workers in households across the country.

The situation is even worse for child domestic workers, who are particularly vulnerable to abuse by employers. Over the years, numerous reports have emerged detailing physical and sexual abuse of these children. A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies and Dnet found that domestic workers face various forms of abuse: four percent experience sexual abuse, 21 percent physical abuse, 67 percent mental abuse, and 61 percent verbal abuse. Alarmingly, 95 percent of these workers do not report any incidents of abuse, while nearly 99 percent are unaware of any protective policies.

We, therefore, urge the government to properly address the plight of the domestic workers, especially children. Experts have emphasised the need to include these professionals under the country's labour law, ensuring legal recognition and protection of their rights. Additionally, creating a register for domestic workers could help monitor and improve their working conditions. The Domestic Workers' Protection and Welfare Policy—which seeks to secure fair wages, reasonable working hours, and the right to health and education—must also be rigorously enforced. Finally, the media can play a significant role in highlighting the abuse faced by domestic workers and running campaigns to protect their rights.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Marie and Pierre Curie discover radium

On this day in 1898, having recently discovered polonium, future Nobel Prize winners Marie and Pierre Curie discovered radioactive chemical element radium, a silvery white metal that would be used to treat cancer.

THE SPIRIT OF 1971 Reflections on liberation, aspirations, and modern challenges



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During the period when Bangladesh was still a part of Pakistan, the resistance of its people began against ethnic discrimination, regional disparities, economic inequality, oppression, military rule, and ultimately the denial of elections and the perpetration of genocide. The Liberation War was not merely a military conflict, but a culmination of years of exploitation and injustice imposed upon the people of the then East Pakistan.

The Pakistani forces systematically targeted intellectuals who had played an active role in fostering cultural and ideological consciousness against discrimination and oppression. This brutal attack began on the night of March 25, 1971, and continued throughout the year. Intellectuals including teachers, journalists, writers, and artists were killed across the country. On December 14, 1971, during a curfew, this carnage reached its peak when many prominent intellectuals were brutally killed in several places. Local collaborators, known as Razakars, played a pivotal role in assisting the Pakistani military, particularly in targeting and killing intellectuals.

The systematic elimination of Bangladesh's brightest minds was an attempt to cripple the intellectual foundation of our nation. However, the Liberation War saw massive participation from all sectors of society—workers, peasants, and ordinary citizens, excluding only a few collaborators/war criminals. The price was steep: millions were martyred; countless women and men were tortured and injured; and an entire nation lived through the trauma of pain, fear, and loss.

The essence of the Liberation War was to create a Bangladesh free from discrimination and oppression. It was an aspiration for a country unlike Pakistan—authoritarian, communal, and centred on the wealth of a select few. The dream was to build a nation where equality, justice, and opportunity would be accessible to

all citizens, regardless of their social identity or economic standing.

In the 53 years of independence, Bangladesh has experienced numerous governments, each with its promises and pitfalls. The post-liberation government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, though initially extraordinarily popular, eventually shifted towards authoritarian rule. The establishment of Rakkhi Bahini



As Bangladesh moves forward, it is essential to keep the dreams of the Liberation War alive.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

and a one-party system brought disillusionment. Soon afterwards, military regimes took hold of the country for nearly 15 years, pushing Bangladesh further away from the original aspirations of the Liberation War.

However, people did not give up. Through struggles, sacrifices, and an unwavering determination, they fought to restore democracy, culminating in the fall of the military rule in 1990. Yet, even after the restoration of elected governments in 1991, the hopes that emerged out of the Liberation War often remained unfulfilled. The alternating rules by BNP, Awami League, and their coalitions failed to bring significant changes in governance,

with corruption and authoritarian practices persisting.

While Bangladesh has achieved noticeable economic growth since independence—with expanding GDP, improved infrastructure, and higher literacy rates—the promises of equality and justice remain elusive. Inequality has multiplied over the decades. The commercialisation and privatisation of essential services like healthcare and education have put them out of the reach of ordinary citizens. A single illness can push a family into poverty, while the cost of education continues to financially cripple many households.

At the same time, Bangladesh's natural resources—rivers, hills, forests, and land—have faced alarming levels of pollution and exploitation. The so-called development has often come at the cost of the environment, with

League and Jubo League affiliated with the ousted Awami League party—have aided oppressive regimes, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and misrule.

Yet, resistance remains a defining feature of Bangladesh's history. Just as the youth of 1971 rose against the injustices of Pakistan, the recent July uprising reflects a renewed aspiration for a just and discrimination-free Bangladesh. The youth, just like in 1971 and in the 1980s, once again took the lead in resisting oppression in 2024, standing against indiscriminate killings and injustice. Their actions remind us of the unfinished goals of the Liberation War and the need to revive its true spirit.

The July uprising is not, therefore, an isolated event—it is a continuation of the Liberation War's aspirations. It reflects the collective will of the people to reclaim the dream of a Bangladesh that is free from discrimination and oppression. The values of 1971—equality, justice, and freedom—must once again serve as guiding principles for the nation. The 2024 uprising showed that the people of Bangladesh never give up or accept defeat. It also opened up the possibility of moving forward after the fall of an autocratic ruler.

We must remember the sacrifices made during the Liberation War and recognise that the journey towards a just and equitable Bangladesh is far from over. While some progress has been made, the spirit of 1971 demands more. It calls for an end to inequality, exploitation, and environmental destruction. It urges us to resist authoritarianism and uphold the ideals for which millions gave their lives.

As Bangladesh moves forward, it is essential to keep the dreams of the Liberation War alive—to strive for a nation that is truly free, just, secular, environment-friendly, democratic, and inclusive. The spirit of 1971 lives on, and it is up to the present generation to ensure that its promises are fulfilled. We do not want to see any more profit-making projects at the cost of the environment and people's livelihoods. We do not want to see any autocratic, patriarchal rule with discrimination based on religion, gender, ethnic identity or class. We do not want to see the rise of oligarchy at the cost of public rights. We do not want to see any domination by imperial or sub-imperial power. We want to live with freedom, dignity, diversity, and a clean environment.

A tested approach that can help us fight dengue



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Despite years of battling dengue, Bangladesh still finds itself dealing with the crisis as lives continue to be cut tragically short. The Dengue Dynamic Dashboard for Bangladesh managed by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) shows that, as of December 19, at least 557 people have died due to dengue in 2024, with a total of 99,805 cases recorded this year. This outbreak is the second deadliest in the country's history, following the 1,705 deaths and 321,179 cases recorded in 2023, making the case fatality rate (CFR) this year (0.52 percent), almost as high as last year's CFR (0.49 percent). It reveals not just a public health crisis but a failure to adapt quickly to a changing reality.

Despite effective measures, Bangladesh still faces major roadblocks in fighting dengue. For example, the effectiveness of mosquito control initiatives in Bangladesh has been inconsistent, contributing to the proliferation of Aedes mosquitoes. A monsoon survey conducted by the DGHS in 2023 revealed that the Aedes mosquito population in Dhaka's two city corporations nearly tripled over four years. This significant rise indicates lapses in sustained vector control measures. A comprehensive study revealed that while Dhaka city accounted for over half of the cases in 2019, by 2023, there was a nationwide

surge with cases peaking earlier in the year.

However, through innovation, data-driven solutions, and smarter resource allocation, Bangladesh can turn the tide in this fight. The Integrated Aedes Management (IAM) approach, tested and approved by the World Health Organization (WHO) and successfully implemented in many countries, could be effective in controlling Aedes. IAM is a concrete data-driven and evidence-based initiative, implementing which involves a combination of vector control methods tailored to local contexts. This strategy includes four components: environmental management, biological control, chemical interventions, and community engagement and education. It aligns with the WHO's Integrated Vector Management (IVM) strategy, which advocates combining interventions to reduce reliance on any single method.

The environmental management of IAM focuses on the elimination of mosquito breeding sites, reducing favourable habitats. Regularly removing stagnant water from containers, flowerpots, discarded tires, and rooftops and enforcing strict construction site regulations is a very effective approach to the environmental management

of mosquitoes. Singapore conducts a "10-minute mozzie wipeout" campaign to eliminate breeding grounds weekly. The US Environmental Protection Agency emphasises that targeting mosquito larvae in their breeding habitats is an effective and cost-efficient control method.

The biological control uses natural methods to suppress mosquito populations. The Wolbachia Bacteria Intervention strategy used in the biological measures introduces Wolbachia-infected Aedes mosquitoes to prevent virus replication. The technique has proven successful in reducing dengue cases by 77 percent in Indonesia's Yogyakarta City. In Brazil, the programme has curtailed dengue cases in the Aburra Valley region to a 20-year low.

The larvivoracious fish technique uses fish like guppy fish that feed on mosquito larvae in ponds, canals or stagnant water sources. It will be a very cost-effective control for Bangladesh's rural and urban areas with large water reservoirs. India implements such programmes and has seen positive results. A study in India reported a 70-90 percent reduction in mosquito larvae populations through the introduction of guppy fish. Bangladesh has also used similar methods before.

Another very effective biological control is the Sterile Insect Technique method, which releases sterilised male mosquitoes to prevent reproduction. Successfully piloted in China, the method has reduced the Aedes population by up to 96 percent.

The chemical control targets adult mosquitoes and larvae effectively using insecticides. The Targeted Fogging strategy conducts early morning or evening fogging where

Aedes mosquito density is high, identified through Geographic Information System-based surveillance. The method avoids indiscriminate spraying, which, of course, causes insecticide resistance. So, the technique achieves more sustainable results in mosquito population management.

The larvicide approach uses eco-friendly larvicides in breeding areas. It addresses resistance by alternating classes of insecticides. Studies in Dhaka found that 50 percent of mosquitoes are resistant to pyrethroids, emphasising the need for chemical rotation.

The last of the IAM framework is the community engagement and education approach, which empowers communities to participate actively in mosquito control. Part of it is behaviour change campaigns that focus on public education on preventing breeding sites, wearing protective clothing, and using repellents.

As another example, school-based programmes can educate students to be "mosquito warriors" by spreading awareness. Successful community-based models in Sri Lanka reduced dengue emergency admission by 60 percent. We must expand these programmes to reach more communities.

IAM offers sustainable, data-driven solutions to address Aedes mosquito density in Bangladesh. By combining environmental, biological, chemical, and community-based interventions, IAM ensures an adaptable approach to tackling dengue. For the framework to be successful, government commitment, technological integration, and community ownership are crucial.