

Waterways must not be crime hotspots

Ensure fair investigation, justice for the seven-murder incident

We are shocked by the brutal murder of seven crew members aboard a cargo vessel in Chandpur that has left ship workers fearing for their lives. This tragic incident has once again turned the spotlight on the dangers lurking in our waterways as well as the many inadequacies in the sector, which must be addressed.

Reportedly, the tragedy occurred when eight crew members on the bulk carrier MV Al-Bakhera came under attack in Meghna River on Monday. Five died on the spot due to injuries inflicted by sharp weapons, while two succumbed after being taken to hospital. Only one survived and is under treatment. Grieving families, along with several workers' associations, have since demanded justice—and rightly so—as without accountability, such heinous crimes will continue to haunt our waterways.

There has been much speculation about the motive behind the killings. Law enforcers and ship staff noted that little was stolen from it, ruling out robbery as the primary cause. Meanwhile, Rab has arrested a crew member named Akash Mondal Irfan who, according to Rab, admitted to killing his colleagues out of frustration over unpaid wages and mistreatment. He allegedly sedated the victims with food laced with sleeping pills before stabbing them to death. This is an important lead, but further investigations are necessary to rule out all other possibilities and ensure credible trials.

While this incident may appear to stem from personal vendetta, ship workers have long raised concerns about the perils they face. A shipmaster has pointed out that this particular Meghna area is notorious for extortion. Non-compliance, in the absence of proper oversight, also leads to accidents. While waterways remain a popular option for transporting cargo in the country, extortions and robberies serve as a huge disincentive for the thousands of registered vessels. A Samakal report identified Narayanganj, Hatia, Bhola, Kishoreganj, and Sylhet as high risk areas, noting that transporting cargo from Sylhet to Chandpur often requires paying Tk 20,000–30,000 in extortion fees. Besides, in the last three months, there have been five reported robberies. Moreover, one labour association leader claimed that filing police cases is an issue as officers often dismiss incidents as outside their jurisdiction. Such negligence only emboldens criminals.

These issues need to be resolved. For now, we must demand proper compensation for the families of the victims of the Chandpur incident, many of whom were sole breadwinners. The financial assistance provided so far—Tk 20,000 from the district administration and Tk 10,000 from the River Police—is grossly inadequate. The government must step up in this regard, offer meaningful financial support, ensure swift punishment of the perpetrators, and work to eradicate crime from our waterways. Our rivers must not be crime hotspots.

Curb the menace of throwaway plastics

Tackling widespread pollution needs stringent action

It is deeply concerning that despite growing awareness of the dangers posed by single-use plastics, their use remains extremely high in Bangladesh. A recent study by the Environment and Social Development Organization (ESDO) has found that the country consumes between 3.15 and 3.84 billion single-use plastic bottles annually, with a mere 21.4 percent being recycled. Both urban and rural areas are heavily dependent on plastic bottles, though in different ways. While urban areas see high consumption of water bottles, rural areas are increasingly witnessing the menace of soft drink bottles.

When this plastic waste is dumped into rivers, the consequences are disastrous. Rivers such as the Buriganga, Karnaphuli, and Meghna are already choking on plastic, rendering their waters toxic for aquatic life. As a study revealed earlier last year, at least 17 fish species and three shellfish species in three key rivers flowing through the Sundarbans are contaminated with microplastics. The health risks of such pollution for humans and ecosystems are immense.

Over the decades, successive governments have made plans to curb the use of throwaway plastics but these efforts faltered due to poor implementation. For example, although polythene bags were officially banned in 2002, they remain widely used. In January 2020, the High Court ordered a ban on single-use plastic products in coastal districts. Four years later, there has been no visible progress in its implementation.

After the interim government assumed office in August, the cabinet division, at the environment adviser's request, instructed government offices to replace single-use plastics with eco-friendly alternatives. The environment ministry also banned polythene bags, initially targeting superstores before expanding the ban nationwide. However, these measures have yielded little impact largely due to inadequate enforcement and the absence of viable alternatives. Moreover, after the recent order to stop using single-use plastics, domestic plastic manufacturers have reportedly lobbied for a delay in implementing the ban until 2030, citing potential disruptions to businesses and consumers.

Clearly, issuing directives without ensuring readiness among all stakeholders will not suffice. To effectively combat plastic pollution, the government must adopt a comprehensive, well-coordinated plan developed in consultation with key stakeholders including businesses and the general public. Solutions should focus on promoting eco-friendly alternatives, supporting waste management systems, and strictly enforcing anti-plastic policies. The urgency for robust action cannot be overstated considering the level that plastic pollution has reached across the country.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004

On this day in 2004, a tsunami hit the coasts of several countries of South and Southeast Asia killing an estimated 228,000 people across 15 countries.

Justice for enforced disappearance: Lessons from Argentina

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MD ZAHID HASAN AKHAND

In Bangladesh, Argentina is more than just a footballing nation; it's a symbol of passion, resilience, and shared identity. The famous "Hand of God" moment and Maradona's dazzling 1986 World Cup victory are still celebrated with immense enthusiasm. But beyond the footballing legacy, there's another connection between the two nations—a shared pain and sorrow that ties them together in ways most would never expect.

Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina endured one of the darkest periods in its history, known as the "Dirty War" (*Guerra Sucia* in Spanish). The country was ruled by a military junta that used brutal tactics to eliminate perceived threats. Thousands of citizens, including political activists, intellectuals, union leaders, and students, were disappeared without a trace. These individuals, often the brightest and most outspoken members of society, were subjected to torture, imprisonment, and death. Their families, left in torment, had no idea whether their loved ones were alive or dead. This led to a profound trauma that still echoes in Argentina today.

In many ways, Bangladesh's modern-day struggle mirrors this painful past. Since Sheikh Hasina assumed power in 2009, Bangladesh has seen a troubling rise in cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, particularly between 2009 and 2022. Human rights organisations estimate that more than 3,000 people have vanished over the last decade, many of them political activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens who dared to challenge the government. The tactics used by Bangladesh's security forces, especially the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), are chillingly similar to those of authoritarian regimes, with violence wielded as a tool of political control. The Digital Security Act, introduced in 2018, further silenced dissent by criminalising free speech, in essence, and empowering the government to target critics.

Although the political contexts in Argentina and Bangladesh differ in many ways, both countries have been profoundly impacted by authoritarian rule and the heavy human cost of enforced disappearances. However, the paths they have taken to address these abuses and the extent to which justice has been served are markedly distinct.

After the fall of Argentina's brutal military dictatorship in 1983, the country began the long and difficult process of confronting its past. One



The families of the disappeared in Bangladesh, like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, have refused to stay silent.

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

of the most significant steps was the formation of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), which investigated the enforced disappearances and human rights violations committed during the dictatorship. Their report, *Nunca Más* ("Never Again"), was a landmark document that detailed the scale of the atrocities and gave voice to the victims' families. For the first time, the suffering was acknowledged, and the public could no longer ignore the truth.

In the years that followed, Argentina took important steps towards achieving justice. Laws that had previously shielded military officials from prosecution, such as the Full Stop Law and the Law of Due Obedience, were repealed in 2003. In the subsequent years, former military officers were put on trial, and some were convicted of crimes against humanity, including torture, enforced disappearances, and murder. While justice was delayed, it wasn't denied. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a group of mothers whose children had disappeared during the dictatorship, became a powerful symbol of resistance, relentlessly demanding truth and accountability. Their courage and determination brought the issue of human rights violations to the forefront, forcing Argentina to reckon with its past.

In contrast, Bangladesh's struggle with enforced disappearances remains largely unresolved. In 2024, after the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government, an interim administration led by

Muhammad Yunus signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Later, a commission of inquiry into the disappearances was established. While

Daak movement continues to gain momentum. The group's members, many of them mothers, sisters, and wives have become the public face of resistance. Their constant presence at protests and public demonstrations is a testament to their refusal to let the truth be buried. Through their tireless efforts, the Mayer Daak movement has kept the issue of enforced disappearances in the national conversation, pushing for recognition of the victims and accountability for the perpetrators.

Bangladesh has not yet seen the same level of institutional reforms as Argentina, such as the creation of a national truth commission. However, the activism by Mayer Daak has the potential to spur a broader movement for justice, one that might eventually lead to formal inquiries, legal accountability, and reparations for the families of the disappeared. The group's insistence on truth and justice offers a glimmer of hope in the face of a long history of government oppression.

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With the right commitment and action, there is hope that Bangladesh can take meaningful steps towards healing, and the painful legacy of enforced disappearances can eventually be addressed. By learning from Argentina's example and ensuring accountability, recognition for the victims, and a genuine process of truth-telling, Bangladesh has the potential to move forward. While the journey may be long, it is not without hope. In time, the families of the disappeared may find the justice and closure they deserve, and the country as a whole can begin to heal from this dark chapter.

Act now to secure a future for Rohingyas

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ADNAN JUNAID and HASINA RAHMAN

Recently, we travelled to Cox's Bazar, where around one million Rohingya refugees live in 33 congested camps. Among them are hundreds of thousands of children—more than 50 percent of the population—whose lives have been confined to these camps. These children have no memory of their homeland and are growing up without the basic rights every child deserves: education, safety, freedom, and opportunities for a brighter future.

As we watched children play in narrow alleys among endless rows of makeshift shelters, it became painfully clear—they are at risk of becoming a lost generation. But it doesn't have to be this way. These children have the potential to shape a better world. With proper support, they can rise as leaders, innovators, and contributors to humanity. Humanitarian organisations

collective responsibility to ensure these children have the opportunity to grow into empowered individuals, capable of shaping a better tomorrow.

The situation for youth in the camps is equally dire. More than 30 percent of Rohingya refugees are young people, packed with untapped energy and potential. Yet, with no access to formal education, employment, or income-generating activities, they are left idle and vulnerable to negative coping mechanisms.

Their frustration mirrors that of the youth in host communities, who also face limited opportunities. During our visit, we heard both Rohingya and Bangladeshi youth express a common desire: "We want to work, run businesses, do jobs, and lead meaningful lives."

Investing in these young people is

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are working tirelessly to provide education, health, and protection services to these children, but they need support of others.

The world must not close its eyes to their plight. Every child, regardless of where they are born, deserves a chance to dream, learn, and succeed. It is our

investing in peace and progress. With IRC Bangladesh's support hundreds of youths are running small businesses, promoting social cohesion. But more needs to be done. Solutions can be drawn by collaborating with young people to become agents of change rather than victims of circumstances.

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FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

all GBV survivors in the camps are female, with physical assault and psychological abuse being the most reported incidents.

Adolescent girls face the threat of child marriage, while boys are forced into child labour. With a few alternatives, many take risky sea journeys in search of safety and a better life. The growing insecurity within the camps is a grave concern, voiced repeatedly by residents.

Despite these challenges, the government of Bangladesh has shown remarkable generosity in sheltering nearly one million refugees. Even with limited resources and its challenges, Bangladesh continues to offer refuge to

to address this forgotten crisis, as proposed during the recent UN General Assembly. The world must commit to sustainable solutions that ensure dignity, opportunity, and safety for the Rohingya while alleviating the burden on Bangladesh.

This is not just about one community or one country; it is about humanity. These children and youth are looking to us with hope that they, too, can one day live with freedom, dignity, and purpose. Let us not disappoint them.

The time to act is now. Together, we can transform despair into opportunity and create a future that reflects the best of humanity.