

End custodial torture and deaths

How can we build a new Bangladesh using brutal old tactics?

It is deeply disheartening that, despite the change in government following a bloody mass uprising, custodial torture and deaths continue to plague the nation. Among the many crimes committed during the fallen Awami League regime, one of the most heinous was the repeated torture and killing of individuals in police and security force custody—including in secret detention centres infamously known as Aynaghars—alongside other forms of extrajudicial executions. This newspaper has consistently condemned such egregious human rights violations. With the change in government, many expected these abuses to end. However, according to Odhikar, between August 9 and December 31 last year, law enforcement and security agencies were reportedly responsible for 12 extrajudicial killings.

Of the victims, six were allegedly tortured by joint forces, and one died due to police torture. Additionally, Odhikar reports that three individuals were shot by joint forces, while another by police. The report also states that one person was beaten and pushed off a bridge by the police. Furthermore, Odhikar highlights allegations that joint forces conduct operations in plainclothes and engage in torture and extrajudicial killings, providing specific names and details of these incidents.

For instance, on September 8, 2024, Elahi Sikder died in custody after being arrested five days earlier on charges of attacking army personnel. A doctor at Gopalganj General Hospital, quoted in the report, stated that Sikder's body bore multiple injuries. Similarly, on September 10, members of the joint forces in Gaibandha arrested Mosharof Hossain Sweet, chairman of Saghata Union and president of the Awami League's Saghata unit, along with his associates Shafiqul Islam and Sohrab Hossain Apel. Shafiqul later died while receiving treatment at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura, while Apel passed away at Gaibandha General Hospital. Their families have alleged that both men succumbed to brutal torture while in the custody of the joint forces.

This is not what was envisioned for a new Bangladesh—one that promised justice, accountability, and the protection of human rights for all. In a country committed to the rule of law, even the guilty must be punished through due legal procedures, not through extrajudicial means. We urge the interim government to address this matter with utmost seriousness. Immediate and decisive action must be taken to end custodial torture and killings once and for all. Furthermore, all cases reported by Odhikar must be thoroughly and impartially investigated, with those responsible held to account.

We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. If we are to truly turn a new page as a nation, justice must not only be promised—it must be delivered.

Attack on freedom of publishing alarming

Ensure safety of writers and publishers at the book fair

We are alarmed by the assault on a book stall at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela on Monday and its consequent shuttering by police to control the situation. Such an incident, at a book fair no less—which is supposed to celebrate freedom of thought and expression—is not only unfortunate but also disconcerting. It goes against the principles of tolerance and inclusivity, which are essential for the pluralistic society we hope to build following the July uprising.

According to media reports, the incident occurred when a group of individuals demanded the removal of a book by Taslima Nasreen from the Sabyasachi stall, leading to an altercation when the latter refused to comply. Police, in their attempt to control the station, covered the stall with a tarpaulin. One person—reportedly the publisher—was also taken into custody. Meanwhile, Bangla Academy formed a seven-member committee to assess whether the stall should be reopened, with a report due within three working days. A Bangla Academy secretary stressed that the closure was a police decision, not the academy's.

The Sabyasachi stall had already been a target of online threats ahead of Monday's incident, with multiple social media posts calling for its demolition on the grounds that it was promoting atheism. Bdnews24.com quoted the publisher's wife who said that they had informed police about these threats, only to be advised to remove Taslima Nasreen's book instead of being offered protection.

While it is reassuring that the interim government has strongly condemned the incident, we hope the authorities will move beyond words and take concrete action. Time and again, we have seen this pattern where social media platforms are used to issue threats and incite violence, yet law enforcement remains mostly passive instead of taking preventive measures. One may ask: why was security at the book fair not strengthened even after the publisher's complaints? This is not the first time the fair has come under attack from groups opposed to free thought, and given this history, Bangla Academy should have ensured adequate security to create a safe space for book lovers and publishers.

However, security measures must not come at the cost of freedom of expression. The right to publish diverse thoughts, beliefs, and opinions must be protected. In a truly democratic society, it is the readers—not the police or any special interest group—who should decide the fate of a publication. Finally, we urge the police to identify and take legal action against those responsible for Monday's incident.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Chile gains independence from Spain



On this day in 1818, Chile formally declared independence from Spain, on the occasion of the first anniversary of Chile's victory at Chacabuco, although the decisive victory over the Spanish did not come until April at the Battle of Maipú.

BANGLADESH IN CPI 2024

Can we rise back up from the abyss of corruption?



Dr Iftekharuzzaman
is executive director at Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

The Transparency International released the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024 on February 11, 2025. Bangladesh has scored 23 out of 100, one point less than 2023, and has been ranked 151st, two steps lower than its rank in 2023. The 2024 score is Bangladesh's worst since 2012, which has given us three disappointing designations. We are placed among countries that are “losing control of corruption”; we are also among countries that having scored below 50 are considered to have a “serious corruption problem”; and scoring 20 points lower than the global average of 43 qualifies us as having a “very serious corruption problem.” Bangladesh's score is 14th lowest among 180 countries or territories included in the index. It remains the second lowest in South Asia, after only Afghanistan, and fifth lowest in the Asia-Pacific region.

More specifically, our 2024 score is three points lower than 2012, 2021, 2020, 2019 and 2018, and five points lower than the highest score of 28 achieved in 2017. Bangladesh is the only South Asian country other than Sri Lanka that has lost points. Notably, both were under the worst form of authoritarianism ousted by people's power. Furthermore, Bangladesh's performance is nine points worse than the average for the 59 authoritarian regimes in the world. It is also six points lower than the average for the 33 countries with the lowest HDI, and six points lower than the 27 countries that were categorised in 2023 as having closed civil society space. Equally embarrassingly, our score is 10 points lower than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa that performs worst as per the regional comparative analysis of the index.

As on previous occasions, no country has scored 100 percent, and hence corruption remains a global problem. The CPI 2024 also reveals that most countries have made little or no progress in tackling public sector corruption since 2012. Compared to 2023, overall global scores have worsened. For 93 countries, the score has declined, compared to 63 in 2023. As many as 122 countries (67.77 percent) have scored below 50, and 101 countries (56.11 percent) below

the global average of 43. This means that over 80 percent of the world's population live with a “very serious corruption problem.”

Over a quarter of the countries or territories (47) got their lowest scores yet since 2012. Low-scoring countries like Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Russia and Sri Lanka are joined in this club by high scorers like France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States. The rot at the top suggests a global trend of discrimination. However, 25 countries, including Bhutan, South Korea, Laos and Saudi



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Arabia, have scored their highest since 2012. For the seventh year in a row, Denmark has topped the list, having scored 90, followed by Finland (88) and Singapore (84).

Among Bangladesh's South Asian neighbours, Bhutan continues to be the best performer, having scored 72, which is four points higher than that in 2023, and nine points higher than that in 2012. In the rest of the region, scores remained well below the global average: India and Maldives (38), Nepal (34), Sri Lanka (32), Pakistan (27) and Afghanistan (17). All South Asian countries except Bhutan have scored less compared to 2023. However, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, formerly the two most authoritarian states in the region, have scored their lowest in 12 years since 2012, whereas all other South Asian countries have gained compared to 2012, except Pakistan, which remains unchanged.

corruption in terms of money laundering are ironically among the top performers, like the third-ranked Singapore (84), fifth-ranked Switzerland (80), Australia 10th (77), Canada 15th (75), Hong Kong 17th (74), United Kingdom 20th (71), UAE 23rd (68), United States 28th (65), and Malaysia 57th (50).

Leading rich countries of North America and Europe are also seeing a decline in scores indicating a failure to implement anti-corruption commitments. This is particularly reflected in terms of delivering their global funding commitments to address climate change for the worst-affected countries. For the same reason, many of them are also facing domestic challenges at multiple levels, including climate crisis and erosion of rule of law and public services.

It is important that the anti-corruption drive is mainstreamed

Why nuclear energy makes sense for Bangladesh



Kazi Omar Farook Saneed
is research assistant in the Department of Environmental Science and Management (DESM) at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

KAZI OMAR FAROOK SANEED

Dhaka, often grappling with poor air quality, has earned the grim distinction of having the worst Air Quality Index (AQI) score worldwide on several occasions over the last few months. The smog serves as a reminder of the environmental degradation driven by fossil fuels, the primary source of energy. While solar and wind power dominate discussions about cleaner alternatives, their limitations highlight the need for a more reliable solution. Nuclear energy, despite its efficiency and cleanliness, has been overshadowed by public fears and misconceptions. Regardless, nuclear power holds the potential to bridge the gap until solar and wind energy become more viable options in the long term or nuclear fusion is successfully achieved.

Public perception of nuclear energy has been shaped by historic disasters like Chernobyl in 1986 and Fukushima in 2011. While these incidents were catastrophic, they were the result of governance failures and outdated technology rather than inherent flaws in nuclear power. Modern reactors have revolutionised safety with passive

cooling systems and fail-safe designs.

Coal is responsible for approximately 24.6 deaths per TWh (terawatt hour) due to air pollution and occupational hazards, while nuclear power accounts for just 0.07 deaths per TWh. This places nuclear energy on par with wind and solar power in terms of safety, or even safer. Yet, the fear of radiation and long-term waste persists, often overshadowing these statistics.

A significant apprehension is about the management of radioactive waste. Nuclear waste is a legitimate concern, but risks are often misunderstood. Technologies like the PUREX (Plutonium Uranium Redox Extraction) process enable the recycling of up to 95 percent of spent nuclear fuel, significantly reducing waste volume and toxicity. France reprocesses over 1,700 metric tonnes of spent fuel annually. Through recycling, the containment timeline for nuclear waste can be reduced from tens of thousands of years to approximately 500 years.

Despite these advancements, investment in nuclear fuel recycling remains limited. High initial costs and

political hesitation have hindered its adoption in many countries. France's success with mixed oxide (MOX) fuel illustrates that, with proper funding and commitment, nuclear waste can be managed effectively while maximising energy output.

The global hesitation to embrace nuclear energy has been compounded by the fossil fuel industry. Using its significant economic clout, the industry seems to perpetuate myths about nuclear power to maintain its dominance in the market. This stagnation not only hinders nuclear innovation but also delays the broader transition to renewable energy sources like solar and wind. Unlike renewables, nuclear energy provides a consistent power supply, operating all day everyday regardless of weather.

For Bangladesh, nuclear energy would be an opportunity to diversify its energy portfolio and reduce heavy reliance on natural gas and oil for electricity. As the country's natural gas reserves dwindle, the need for alternative energy sources becomes increasingly urgent. Bangladesh currently generates over 50 percent of its electricity from natural gas, but domestic reserves are projected to deplete within the next decade. This would place immense pressure on energy security and economic stability. Additionally, reliance on imported oil, subject to volatile global markets, further exacerbates the challenges of maintaining a stable energy supply.

The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) offers a viable path forward. Utilising VVER-1200 reactors, the

in national and international development policies across the world in order to control and prevent its devastating effects on development, democracy, human rights, and justice. The impacts of the failure to do so were experienced by Bangladesh over the 15 and a half years of authoritarian rule.

The data period for CPI 2024 witnessed the peak of kleptocracy-driven authoritarianism in the country. Instead of any meaningful action against corruption, political and governance systems were used to promote and protect corruption. Widespread public sector corruption further intensified particularly in public contracting and project implementation. No effective action was taken despite concrete, evidence-based exposures of high-level corruption and money laundering. State institutions mandated to control corruption, including the ACC, public administration, law enforcement and judicial institutions, continued to operate under partisan political influence, which was a key factor behind the poor performance.

Even after the fall of the authoritarian regime, evidence of the continued abuse of power and corrupt practices, including extortion and turf war for capture of corruption hotspots, persisted through the data period in both political and governance spaces. Risks also persisted in terms of freedom of dissent, free media and civic space, which may have been reflected in the CPI performance of Bangladesh.

The way out is no rocket science. The recommendations of the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission must be implemented with a specific focus on the ACC's true independence and accountability. Examples must be set of concrete success in holding to account high-level corrupt individuals and entities on a priority basis. State institutions must be depoliticised to ensure professional integrity and excellence, especially at the ACC, bureaucracy, law enforcement and judicial services.

Effective measures must be in place to salvage the crucial sectors of public interest from the clutches of policy capture, conflict of interest and partisan political and other influences. These areas include public procurement, banking, trade, power and energy, health, education, land, and infrastructure. The freedom of media, civil society, and people at large must be ensured for the unrestricted disclosure and criticism of corruption and those involved. Above all, our political and bureaucratic culture and practices must be transformed to be free from treating political and public positions as a licence to private gains.

plant is designed to produce 2,400MW of electricity, providing a clean and reliable energy source that can reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels. Beyond addressing immediate energy needs, nuclear power has the potential to support long-term economic growth by stabilising electricity costs and attracting investment in high-tech industries.

Bangladesh has made progress with the support of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), adopting global best practices such as the Milestones Approach and Integrated Nuclear Infrastructure Reviews. However, building indigenous expertise, enhancing legal frameworks, providing appropriate training, and ensuring long-term waste management are critical to sustainable nuclear development. Public communication is another area requiring attention, as transparent information about safety measures and environmental benefits can help dispel misconceptions and build trust in nuclear projects.

The urgency to adopt cleaner energy solutions has never been greater. Cities like Dhaka, plagued by toxic air, illustrate the dire consequences of continued reliance on fossil fuels. While solar and wind energy are indispensable to the global energy transition, their limitations necessitate the inclusion of nuclear power as a complementary solution. Investing in nuclear energy and addressing public fears can pave the way for a cleaner, more sustainable future.