

The Daily Star

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A new party with new hope

NCP's emergence can bring positive change in our political culture

We welcome the launch of the National Citizen Party (NCP), led by individuals from the July uprising that toppled the regime of the Awami League in August 2024. The party has been formed at a time when the people of the country are eagerly looking forward to new political leadership, expecting positive change in our political culture. As the leaders of the newly formed party shared their vision for a new Bangladesh, the public's response was overwhelmingly supportive. Students, activists, young professionals, and ordinary citizens from across the country participated in the inauguration ceremony to show their backing.

Nahid Islam, the convener of the NCP, vowed to reshape Bangladesh's political landscape. He declared that the common people will be the supreme source of power in Bangladesh and that their mission is to dismantle constitutional autocracy and establish a robust democratic framework. Nahid also emphasised that the NCP is committed to rebuilding the country's political and economic institutions, combating corruption and nepotism, and prioritising inclusion, equity, and national sovereignty. While these promises are encouraging, the true challenge for the new party will be in staying true to its word.

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed the failure of major political parties to uphold the democratic spirit of the nation. During the 15 years of AL rule, all major institutions were politicised, rendering them inefficient and incapable of performing their duties. The party's failure to ensure democratic practices within itself, coupled with widespread corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability, severely damaged our political culture. As a result, the people of Bangladesh are eager for change. Therefore, if the NCP genuinely seeks to become a people's party, it must first practice democracy within the party itself. It needs to foster an environment where disagreement and debate are welcomed, and everyone's voice is heard. It is encouraging to see that the party has included people with diverse views and beliefs, with three of the top 10 positions in the committee held by women.

Transparency and accountability will be key factors in determining the future of this party. A lack of transparency has long distanced people from mainstream political parties. The NCP must, therefore, ensure transparency in all its activities, especially regarding its finances. Understandably, launching and running a new political party requires substantial funding, and the NCP must make its sources of funding public—both now and in the future—to ensure transparency. As Nahid has affirmed that the NCP will be a truly democratic, egalitarian, and people-centred political force, it must remain accountable to the people.

We hope that the NCP will set a positive example for other political parties to follow. It has emerged directly from the heart of a mass uprising—led by the very youth who spearheaded it. We wish them success in building the inclusive society they have pledged to create.

Can Russia-Ukraine war finally end?

Vital questions remain unanswered after Trump-Zelensky talks

Following Ukrainian President Zelensky's meeting with US President Trump, we are hopeful that the war between Russia and Ukraine can be brought to an end. The whole world desires peace and undoubtedly this has been one of the most destructive wars in recent history. The death toll has been staggering, and the global fallout—including supply chain disruptions, inflation, and food shortages in parts of the world—has been severe. Moreover, as Trump noted, this war has been so dangerous that the risk of it spiralling into a World War III-like scenario has persisted all along. Therefore, the sooner it can be brought to an end and tensions de-escalated, the better it will be for Ukraine, Russia, and the world as a whole.

While President Trump stressed the importance of reaching a peace deal, the terms under which peace will be achieved remain unclear. Will it come at the cost of territorial concessions by Ukraine? If so, what message would that send if a powerful country can invade another and gain territory in exchange for peace? Would this not set a dangerous precedent—one that makes the world more insecure, unstable, and vulnerable to future acts of aggression?

For peace to be lasting, it must also be just. Therefore, international law should be the sole guiding principle in any peace agreement. No agreement should be imposed by external powers, including the US. It must be remembered that Ukraine is the victim in this war, and its interests should not be sidelined in negotiations.

While discussions of peace have begun—an encouraging first step—it is disappointing that the meeting between the Ukrainian and US presidents did not yield more concrete progress. During their press briefing in the Oval Office, it became evident that tensions persist among all parties involved. Nevertheless, continued dialogue is crucial, as diplomacy remains the only path to peace.

Ending the war between Russia and Ukraine while safeguarding Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty must be a top priority for the global community. The US and Europe, in particular, have a pivotal role to play in achieving a just and lasting peace. To that end, we urge all parties involved to commit to sincere and constructive diplomacy.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Morocco declares independence



On this day in 1956, the North African country of Morocco, situated directly across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain, proclaimed independence from France. Sultan Muhammad V formed its first government.

Who are the true masterminds behind the current chaos?



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H. M. NAZMUL ALAM

In the dead of night, the whispers of horror spread like wildfire. A man shot and robbed of his gold, a teenage gang hacking a passerby to death in broad daylight, an entire moving bus held hostage by looters—these are not excerpts from a dystopian thriller. No, this is the daily news, the grim reality of our nation now. And what's worse? The masterminds behind this lawlessness might not even be within our borders.

The special operation codenamed Operation Devil Hunt—a name fit for a gothic horror novel—has thus far been little more than a sensationalised parade of mass arrests. In just 16 days, between February 8 and 24, a total of 9,253 individuals have been detained, yet the crime wave shows no signs of abating. If anything, it seems emboldened, as if mocking the very hands that seek to suppress it. Analysts argue that Devil Hunt is more about optics than effectiveness, a politically motivated spectacle to distract from deeper structural failures.

But what if the problem isn't just local incompetence? What if the real puppeteers are sitting comfortably in foreign lands, sipping cocktails purchased with money siphoned from our economy, now investing it in terror and crime to ensure Bangladesh crumbles under its own weight?

Once upon a time—before they were ousted—the Awami political elites were busy playing an elaborate game of Monopoly with the country's treasury. Billions of dollars were laundered to Dubai, Canada, Malaysia, and Switzerland, each penny meticulously extracted from our banks, our development projects, and our hard-earned remittances. Their love for luxury condos and offshore accounts was only matched by their disdain for accountability.

If anyone wonders why crime hasn't stopped despite thousands being thrown behind bars, the answer is simple—because the real criminals may not even be here. Many are in exile, directing traffic on the highway to hell.

Political analysts and criminologists are puzzled. How does a country with active security forces and a special anti-crime operation still manage to descend into such chaos? The answer lies in economic incentives.

The funding required to maintain an organised crime syndicate does not fall from the sky. Someone is paying for the guns, someone is organising the logistics, and someone is ensuring that criminals get the needed support after their inevitable arrests.

And where does this mysterious funding come from?

Consider this: the very criminals now looting the streets are often allegedly found to have surprising connections to the exiled political elites. As police scramble to arrest low-level foot soldiers, the masterminds remain untouchable, their influence extending from plush overseas

public is pushed to the brink, they will be willing to demand "any" solution, even from the same looters who once drained the country's coffers dry.

The terrifying rise of mob justice is perhaps the most striking indicator that people no longer trust the system. In some areas, pickpockets were beaten to a pulp. Elsewhere, suspected criminals were lynched before the police could even arrive. The irony is suffocating—while the public takes justice into its own hands, many of the real villains enjoy state-of-the-art security abroad.

The situation has become so absurd that even the police seem confused about their priorities. While they launch large-scale operations against petty criminals, gold smugglers, corrupt bureaucrats, and financial fraudsters walk free. Meanwhile, the home affairs adviser promises "even stronger" crackdowns. One has to wonder how much more "crackdown" does it take to actually produce results?

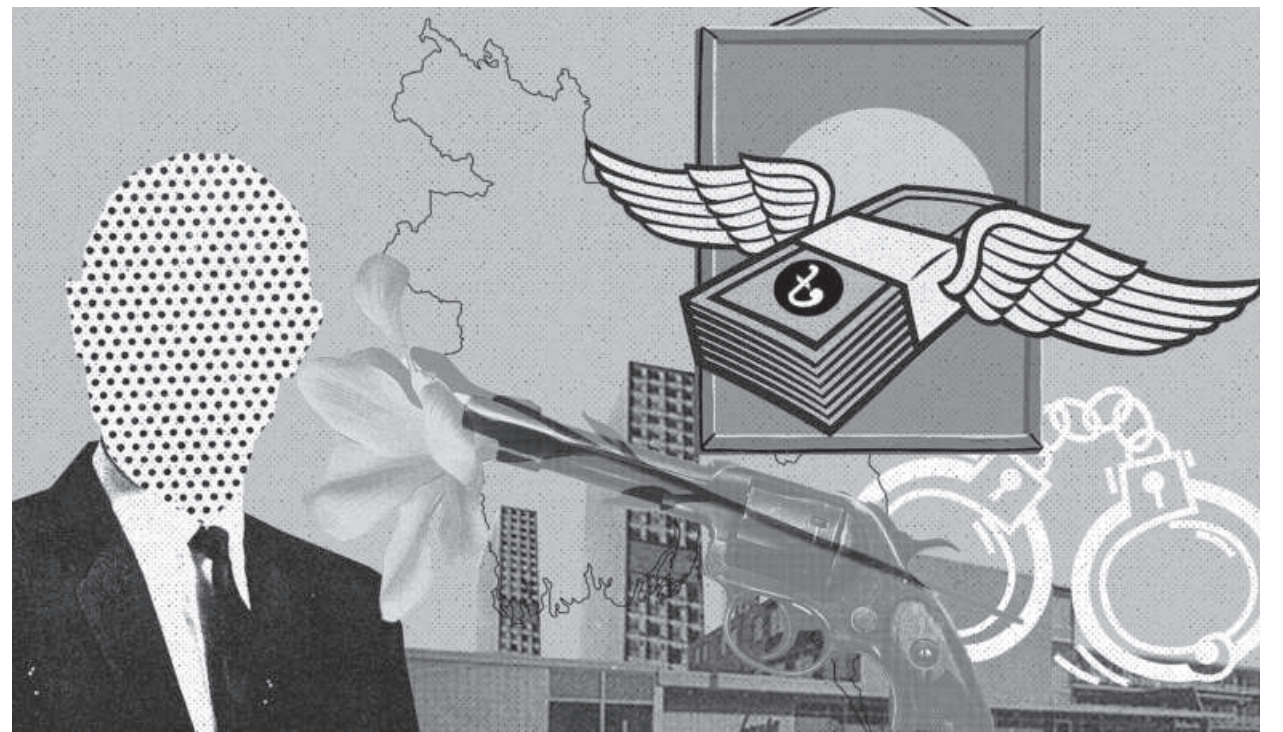
Perhaps the most poetic part of

ramifications extend far beyond our borders. The rise of unchecked crime in Bangladesh doesn't just affect the local population; it threatens regional security and economic stability. Foreign investors, already wary of corruption, will hesitate even more. Tourism will dwindle. And the global financial watchdogs, seeing the unchecked movement of illicit funds, could consider harsher restrictions on Bangladesh's financial transactions.

This is an attempt to strategically dismantle a nation, one crime at a time.

Despite the bleakness, there is one undeniable truth—fear is contagious, but so is courage. People are fighting back, not just against robbers, but against the very culture of impunity that enabled them. Protests demanding accountability are gaining traction. Students at Dhaka University, fed up with empty promises, are taking to the streets. Even local businessmen, traditionally silent, are beginning to resist.

The question remains: will this



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

retreats to the grimy back alleys of Dhaka. They are the ones bankrolling terror, ensuring that the public remains distracted, disillusioned, and desperate.

For the exiled elites, this is a win-win strategy. A destabilised Bangladesh serves multiple purposes—it undermines the legitimacy of the current administration, creates an atmosphere of fear and frustration, and most importantly, sets the stage for their possible grand return. After all, they may think that when the

this tragedy is that the very people suffering today were, not too long ago, permitted the very system that enabled this crisis. They tolerated financial corruption, thinking it wouldn't affect them. They ignored blatant money laundering, assuming it was just "politicians being politicians." But now, as criminals rule the night and day, they realise—too late—that stolen money has consequences beyond just emptying bank accounts.

It's easy to view this crisis as a purely domestic issue, but the

resistance be enough? Can Bangladesh reclaim its streets before the next wave of violence? More importantly, will we learn from this crisis and finally hold those in power accountable—not just the petty criminals, but the grand architects of this nightmare?

Or will we, yet again, watch the looters walk free—only to return in a different disguise, ready to rob us blind once more?

The next few months will decide whether we remain a nation of victims or finally rise as a nation of justice.

At the crossroads of faith, identity, and change



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Religion has long been the bedrock of Bangladesh, binding belief and belonging into the fabric of its identity. Mosques, temples, and churches stand as pillars of piety, steadfast through generations, their very presence a testament to a spiritual identity that has endured the trials of war, the grip of colonisation, and the relentless march of globalisation, standing unshaken in the sands of time. Yet, in hushed conversations among many in certain sections of the society, a quiet detachment is taking root.

A study, submitted to an international symposium in 2021, on generational and religious norms among Bangladeshi youth found that 68.5 percent of young Bangladeshis now identify more with their national or global identity than with their religion. Some young people participate in religious rituals not out of conviction but to maintain social harmony. A study regarding religious performance during the pandemic highlights that many irreligious

students feel compelled to uphold an outwardly religious image despite privately distancing themselves from faith. The study was published on a student-run digital platform.

This shift in perspective is not occurring in a vacuum. It is part of a broader zeitgeist, shaped by the currents of Western liberalism, the rise of individualism, and a culture that champions autonomy over communal identity. Another study from 2021 on education leadership in Bangladesh notes that globalisation, social media, and Western academic structures have reinforced an increasingly corporatised approach to education, one that sidesteps spirituality in favour of material progress.

Individualism, when left unchecked, fosters a culture of detachment, eroding the sense of duty to faith, family, and community. It elevates the self above all else, severing the bonds of responsibility that sustain a cohesive society. The push for autonomy without moral

grounding has not led to freedom but to fragmentation, turning self-interest into an ideology that rejects shared purpose. It replaces timeless moral principles with transient ideologies dictated by global trends, creating a feedback loop that feeds its own excesses. Bangladesh, once physically colonised, now navigates a more subtle force: "neo-colonisation," where external influences shape societal values and perceptions under the banner of progress—often unchallenged, often unquestioned.

What is striking, however, is not just the slow detachment from religious practice, but the reason for it. It is not entirely an intellectual rebellion, nor a conscious rejection of faith. It is, in many cases, the result of blind belief itself. Faith, when inherited but not explained, when memorised but not internalised, becomes fragile. When young people are handed religion as an obligation rather than an invitation to explore, it is only natural that exposure to critical inquiry, philosophy, and global discourse leads to detachment rather than deepened conviction.

The real question is not whether Bangladesh is witnessing a generational shift in religious identity. It is. The real question is whether this shift will create a divide that runs deeper than personal belief, whether it will lead to ideological rifts too stark to reconcile. Nations throughout history

have encountered this fracture: one section of society remaining deeply committed to its religious roots, while another moves towards liberal and self-defined values. When the gap between the two is not managed, it leads not just to disagreement but to polarisation, where faith becomes a battleground rather than a guiding force.

Bangladesh stands at a crossroads where the divide between ideologies and religious beliefs is shaping national identity, governance, and social cohesion. One side sees tradition under siege, eroding the moral fabric that has long held society together; the other views long-standing beliefs as barriers to progress, relics of a past best left behind. Yet, both risk the same trap—clinging to convictions without scrutiny. Religious belief should be rooted in reason, not blind acceptance, just as modern ideologies must not be embraced uncritically, mistaking change for progress without evaluation. As this divide deepens, the fractures extend beyond belief, shaping the nation's cultural and ideological trajectory. The real question is not just about faith but about the principles we uphold, whether we seek truth through reflection or follow prevailing narratives unexamined. In the end, conviction is not inherited but cultivated, and the willingness to question must extend not only outward but inward.