

## Bring the true perpetrators to book

Justice must be ensured for the victims of enforced disappearances

At a press briefing on Tuesday, the chairperson of the inquiry commission on enforced disappearances once again stated how the highest level of the ousted Awami League government had been directly involved in cases of enforced disappearances, abusing the state's security apparatus to this heinous end. While this has been known for some time now, Tuesday's revelation reinforced the extent to which the fallen regime perverted the purpose of security forces to commit this absolute aberration of justice, rule of law, and human rights. Not only is it deeply saddening, but it is also a dark, shameful stain on the country's image as well as collective psyche.

The commission, which has been investigating cases of enforced disappearances since its formation on August 27, 2024, said it had interviewed 45 members of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and identified those within these forces who had carried out the orders of their political masters. The commission chief also mentioned the prevailing apprehension among security forces in this regard and warned against what he called "community shielding" of the perpetrators, clarifying that individuals directly involved in this abominable crime must take personal responsibility for their actions.

We could not agree more. As we learnt from the inquiry commission's preliminary report, submitted to the chief adviser in December, various security agencies—from different wings of the police to intelligence bodies—were involved in a well-coordinated system set up by the fallen regime to abduct, detain, disappear, torture, and execute or frame in trumped up charges those critical of the government. Members of these forces thus strayed from their true purpose—serving the people and upholding the rule of law—at the behest of the deposed prime minister and her cohorts. Therefore, justice must be served, and as the commission chief said, those involved must be held accountable.

We appreciate the inquiry commission's efforts to bring justice to the victims of enforced disappearances. We also believe all details of this clandestine system of suppression should be made public. Doing so would serve as a lesson for the nation, ensuring that such a horrific abuse of our law enforcement and security forces, which are meant to protect us, is never repeated. To this end, laws could be enacted if necessary to shield security agencies from the undue influence of any government. This we suggest with the best interests of these institutions and the nation at heart.

## Streamlining citizen services is crucial

More scrutiny of the draft ordinance is needed before a final decision

It is encouraging to learn about the government's plan to streamline vital certification services by bringing national identity (NID) cards and other essential records under a single authority. Reportedly, the Cabinet Division has prepared a draft ordinance to establish a dedicated body overseeing the preparation of NID cards, birth and death registrations, marriage, divorce, and adoption records, etc. The draft also proposes implementing a robust unique ID system, integrating it with various service delivery processes. However, while having a centralised authority for managing citizens' data is logical—as it could reduce public hassles and enhance service efficiency—there are also significant challenges associated with it.

At present, different government bodies oversee various civil registration processes. While NID-related services are provided by the Election Commission (EC), the Directorate of Registration under the Law and Justice Division handles marriage and divorce data, and the Directorate General of Health Services collects health data, including causes of death. NID services include issuing secure national identity cards, maintaining a national citizen registration database, and providing identity verification services to qualified public and private entities.

However, as proposed in the draft ordinance, a new entity—named the Civil Registration Commission—would be the central authority overseeing all these data related activities, including NID services. It remains unclear how the entire process will function, and experts have differing opinions on the matter. For instance, the chief election commissioner believes that NID services should remain under the Election Commission, especially as the country prepares for a national election. On the other hand, the registrar general (Birth and Death Registration) argues that integrating NID and birth registration under one authority will expedite citizen services. Given these differing perspectives, we think thorough discussions among all stakeholders are necessary before a decision is made. The government may also consider delegating NID services to the proposed Civil Registration Commission while allowing the EC to retain authority over voter list-related functions, as some have suggested.

If a central agency is indeed tasked with managing all citizens' data and certifications, it must be able to ensure strict data security measures as well as uninterrupted services. We know how the previous government's failure to protect citizens' data led to numerous scams and security breaches—something that must not happen again. The primary goal of a central data authority should be to provide citizens with secure, efficient, and hassle-free services.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### King Tut's tomb opened



On this day in 1924, the Egyptian government opened the mummy case of King Tutankhamen, ruler of Egypt in the 14th century BCE, whose burial chamber had been discovered in 1922 by renowned British archaeologist Howard Carter.

# India's influence and the quest for a democratic South Asia



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During British rule, present day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were part of the same colonial structure: British India. Therefore, we have a shared history of resistance against British imperialism, where the people of the subcontinent fought together, bound by common aspirations and cultural connections. However, to counteract this unified struggle, the colonial rulers and their local allies, including the emerging capitalist class and ideological forces, contributed to creating communal divisions. This led to the rise of Hindutva politics and, as a reaction, Muslim-centric political movements, strengthening identity politics. As a result, those who were earlier involved in the anti-British movement later became adversaries based on religious identity. When the British eventually left, the region was left in turmoil, where Hindus and Muslims saw each other as enemies while the British remained the common "friend" of all.

During British rule, investments were made in various sectors, leading to the emergence of a capitalist class that later became the driving force behind the region's development path. After independence, under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership, India adopted policies that facilitated the

merged, reinforcing each other. This connection became especially evident in the 1990s.

While India has witnessed the expansion of large capital, what has been the condition of its people? India is home to some of the world's richest people, but it is also home to the largest number of poor people, where



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

**Due to the nature of global capitalism, Indian capital cannot always be separated from multinational capital. Indian capital is practically interlinked with, among others, US, Japanese, and German capital through subcontracts, partnerships, and joint ventures, forming a multinational economic dominance. This is why the US has been promoting India as the regional leader for decades.**

growth of a state-sponsored capitalist class. Because of sustained political stability, this capitalist expansion continued uninterrupted, leading to the rise of powerful business groups and a strong industrial foundation in India. However, by the late 1980s, Congress began to weaken, allowing Hindutva politics and the BJP to gain significant traction. Over the past two decades, we have witnessed how large capital and Hindutva politics have

caste- and class-based discrimination is rampant, despite the country's consistent economic growth.

Meanwhile, to sustain its expanding capital, India needs more markets and raw materials. Thus it is easier to understand why India seeks to assert its influence beyond its borders. Alongside economic expansion, the country has also aspired to become a global military power. In the 1990s, India became a nuclear-armed state, conducting nuclear tests that prompted Pakistan to do the same. India has one of the largest military forces globally and is the largest importer of arms.

Within India's own borders, there has been a heavy militarisation process, closely linked to capital interests. In mineral-rich areas, entire communities have been displaced to pave the way for corporate exploitation; this has even led to the emergence of armed resistance movements. Today, a number of areas in India is under some form of militarised control. The most extreme example of this is Kashmir. Beyond Kashmir, military forces have been used to displace people in resource-rich areas under the guise of "development."

Due to the nature of global capitalism, Indian capital cannot always be separated from multinational capital. Indian capital is practically interlinked with, among others, US,

with India concerning electricity, water, rivers, and industrial sectors. While these agreements reflect competition between capital interests, they also highlight strategic alliances.

Over the past decade, Bangladesh has entered into agreements with India that have significantly favoured the latter's big capital interests. Previous governments also made unequal agreements with India, but the Sheikh Hasina administration showed unprecedented submission. Hasina needed a guarantee of perpetual power without elections, leading to her complete dependence on India. She openly admitted, "What we have given to India, they will remember forever." She further stated that she expected no return. However, it now seems she does seek something in return: her own security.

Whenever Bangladesh's issues with India are discussed, the 1971 Liberation War is brought up. It is true that India supported Bangladesh during our Liberation War. When Pakistan's military launched a brutal genocide, around one crore Bangladeshis took refuge in India. The Indian people provided invaluable support, demonstrating unparalleled empathy and solidarity. We must always remain grateful for this. However, it is important to note that the government in power at that time was led by Congress, not the BJP, which did not even exist then.

Another critical question is: just because the Indian people supported Bangladesh in 1971, does that mean Bangladesh should now be indebted to the Indian government? Should Bangladesh be forced to favour Indian conglomerates like Adani? Must we sacrifice the Sundarbans, our airports, seaports, and borders to serve India's interest over our own? A state is never benevolent—its actions are always driven by strategic interests. India's decision to support Bangladesh in 1971 was also strategic. However, the support from the Indian people was driven by humanity and ideology. While we remain thankful for the Indian people's past support, that does not mean that we have to give in to India's capitalist exploitation.

The people of Bangladesh have specific grievances, problems, and opinions regarding India. Among these are water and river disputes, border killings, transit issues, unbalanced trade, and political interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs. And grievances against India's current foreign policy stance are not limited to Bangladesh alone; it has also attempted to exert influence over Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Consequently, India has different levels of distrust, conflicts, and tensions with these countries as well. The problems between us, therefore, are not just communal issues; rather, they stem from the "big brother" attitude of a powerful state and its large capital.

For the interest of the people of the region, we badly need a peaceful, democratic South Asia. To eliminate unrest, violence, and inequality in South Asia, we need collective efforts. In this regard, it is also important to recognise how the Indian people themselves are victims of the existing system. Ultimately, the interests of the people of South Asia, including India, are fundamentally aligned.

Our common struggle should, therefore, be for a South Asia free from oppression, inequality, and imperialistic control. To achieve this, it is now more crucial than ever to build solidarity among the people of the entire region.

# The fatherhood we owe our children

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NICOLAS WEEKS, GITANJALI SINGH, STEFAN LILLER, and MASAKI WATABE

"Bangladeshi and Swedish Baba," the photo exhibition inspired by Swedish photographer Johan Bävman, featured many of the "babas" whose voices echoed this reflection—We say we love our children more than anything. We dream of giving them a better life, a better world. We cheer them on at school plays, celebrate their birthdays, and promise that the future is theirs. And yet, when it comes to shaping the future, really shaping it, we don't walk the talk.

The images exhibited tell stories of love, commitment, and the quiet but powerful shifts in attitude towards fatherhood. Through words and experiences, one question emerges: If we adore our children and want the best for them, why are we, as a society, still holding on to outdated ideas about what it means to be a father?

How often do fathers truly assume

responsibilities beyond the provider role? Society still tells fathers that their job is to earn, and to be the pillar of financial stability. But when did fatherhood become a paycheck rather than a presence? Many of the fathers in the exhibition shared how they once thought caregiving was a mother's duty, until they stepped into it themselves and realised the deep, life-changing bond that comes with being fully involved with your children.

Many societies admire the fathers who change diapers, take their children to school, cook dinner—not because it should be remarkable, but because it still feels like an exception. Why? Because we are told—from generation to generation—that certain roles belong to men and others to women. That fathers "help", but mothers "raise". That fathers' involvement is optional, while mothers' is expected.

But let us flip that script for a moment. What if real fatherhood meant being fully present? What if being a great "baba" was not just about playing the hero in big moments but in the small, everyday ones—listening, teaching, standing up against inequality and injustice. Perhaps then, our sons and daughters can grow up in a world where roles are not decided by gender, but by capacity, effort, and dedication.

This is not just about personal choices; it is about societal transformation. Research highlights that involved fathers help shift established gender norms and that children who grow up seeing their fathers equally engaged in caregiving are less likely to reinforce rigid gender roles as adults. In addition, when men share unpaid care work, women have greater opportunities to pursue education and employment—strengthening families and economies alike. Research by the International Labour Organization shows that closing the gender gap in labour force participation could boost gross domestic product (GDP) by over 30 percent in countries like Bangladesh.

Fathers influence the way their children see relationships and understand respect and fairness. If we

want a more equal world, we have to start at home. We can teach our sons that strength is not dominance, and we can show our daughters that they deserve the same opportunities as their brothers. But we can only do that if we step up, if we break the cycle of outdated expectations.

The young generation is watching. They learn from what we do more than what we say. If we want them to believe in equality, we have to live and exemplify it. If we want them to thrive in a more just world, we have to help build it—starting with the way we father.

So, the question is: what kind of future do we really want for our children? And what are we willing to do, as fathers, to make it happen? Bangladesh stands at a crucial moment where shifting social norms can redefine the roles of men in caregiving and beyond.

The "Bangladeshi and Swedish Baba" photo exhibition will have its final show in Dhaka on March 7 at the Jahangirnagar University after travelling across Bangladesh, where it has sparked dialogues and reflections on gender stereotypes, while demonstrating how active fatherhood can be a transformative force for positive social change.