

Police alone cannot take on violent mobs

Leaders and influencers too have a responsibility to restore rule of law

For any crime or breakdown in law and order, law enforcement is naturally the first to be held accountable. Police and other security forces now active on the ground must prevent and bring to book those involved in mugging, robbery, rape, extortion, etc. Curbing mob violence is also their responsibility. That such violence has reached an alarming state of late—with at least 119 people killed and 74 injured in 114 incidents since August—is largely due to weak policing. But placing sole attention or responsibility on the security forces risks overlooking the role played by other influential actors in the surge of crimes.

Those getting involved in mob violence, often fuelled by righteous indignation, are partly enabled by the support they receive from a section of social media influencers, the relative silence of political, social, and religious leaders, and the general instability in the country. If we analyse the pattern of some recent incidents—such as the hostile mobilisation around the Shahbagh police station demanding the release of an alleged harasser, or the alleged assault on two women at the Lalmatia area—the reigning mentality seems to support both rule of law and frequent exceptions to it, provided those aligned with the notion of justice of a certain majoritarian group in society. That the home adviser has survived the metaphorical guillotine (calls for his resignation) following his controversial remark on the latter incident is likely influenced by the right-wing support behind such incidents. This is further exacerbated by the lack of legal consequences for taking the law into one's own hands.

Of course, righteous indignation or frustration with inadequate judicial mechanisms is not the only motivation behind the formation of mobs. While previously the key reasons included suspicions of theft, robbery, or mugging, after the political changeover on August 5, there have been many opportunistic and politically motivated mobilisations as well. Think of the mob that stormed a Gulshan flat allegedly linked to Awami League leader HT Imam, over a rumour of a secret stash inside, or the two Iranians allegedly robbed of cash and mobile phones in Bashundhara Residential Area. And more often than not, such mobilisations led to brutal consequences. As well as deaths in the most unthinkable fashion, mob beatings often made for scary headlines—the eyes of a victim being gouged out in Bholi on March 2, two individuals being beaten and hung upside down in Dhaka's Uttara on February 27. The list goes on.

While the government insists that there is no room for mob justice or moral policing under the law, the fact is, its relative inaction has only served to embolden it. Its effect has transcended mob violence—with political violence, harassment of journalists, suppression of freedom of expression, and various other crimes being reported across the country. Under these charged circumstances, we urge all stakeholders of post-uprising Bangladesh to help restore rule of law. That means everyone doing their part as they should—police taking prompt and stern action, political parties restraining their unruly members, community/religious leaders discouraging mob formations, and social influencers sending a message of unity rather than divisions.

Food insecurity of Rohingyas alarming

WFP's food aid cuts may lead to a humanitarian disaster

The World Food Programme (WFP)'s decision to cut monthly food aid for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh from \$12.50 to just \$6 per person will have devastating consequences. Relief workers have long argued that even the \$12.50 allocation is insufficient. A previous round of cuts in 2023, reducing food rations to \$8 per month, led to a sharp rise in hunger and malnutrition, according to the UN. Within months, 90 percent of the camp population was "struggling to access an adequate diet," and 15 percent of children suffered from malnutrition—the highest recorded rate. As a result, the cut was later reversed.

Despite this reversal, relief officials maintain that the current meagre allocation is still inadequate for maintaining a nutritious diet. The WFP itself acknowledges that reducing rations below \$6 would "fall below the minimum survival level and fail to meet basic dietary needs." In other words, the new \$6 allocation represents the absolute bare minimum required for survival. How can the international community expect the Rohingya people to subsist on "the bare minimum" indefinitely?

With more than 1.1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh entirely dependent on humanitarian aid, this drastic cut will put immense strain on families already struggling to meet basic needs. It will likely escalate tensions within the camps, potentially leading to increased violence, crime, and drug trafficking. As desperation grows, more Rohingyas may attempt to break out of the camps, increasing the risk of confrontations with locals. Clearly, this situation poses serious challenges for Bangladesh.

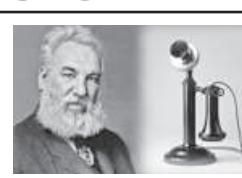
It remains unclear whether the WFP's decision was influenced by the Trump administration's termination of USAID funding worldwide, but such suspicions have been raised. When the decision was initially announced in January, emergency food aid was reportedly supposed to remain unaffected. It is therefore even more alarming that the UN has now opted to cut food rations for the Rohingya population.

Given the circumstances, the government must urgently develop a contingency plan. The reduction in rations will not only harm the Rohingya population but also risk fuelling unrest in the camps, which could spill over and impact local communities. These outcomes must be prevented at all costs. Therefore, the government should immediately engage the international community to secure funding commitments. The global community has a moral obligation to ensure that Rohingya refugees receive at least the minimum necessary to live a decent life and to support Bangladesh, which, despite its own challenges, has done everything possible to assist them.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

The telephone patented

On this day in 1876, Alexander Graham Bell received a patent for the telephone.



When power shifts but patterns remain



H. M. Nazmul Alam
is an academic, journalist, and political
analyst. He can be reached at nazmulalam.
rijohn@gmail.com.

H. M. NAZMUL ALAM

Groucho Marx once quipped, "Politics is the art of searching for problems, searching for them everywhere and finding fault with them." His words, laced with wit, expose a profound truth about governance: politics often becomes more about pointing fingers than about solving real problems. The very essence of leadership, which should be about forging progress and alleviating suffering, often degenerates into cycles of retribution. Nowhere is this more evident than in the developing world, including Bangladesh, where the transition of power is frequently hailed as a revolution but ultimately proves to be little more than a repetition of old patterns under new banners.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche warned of the dangers of becoming what one opposes. He wrote, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster." Yet, in many postcolonial states, revenge politics has become an institutionalised practice. New regimes expend their energy correcting—or rather, avenging—the past, rather than envisioning the future. This inability to break free from the grip of history is why change, despite its grand proclamations, often remains an illusion.

History is replete with examples of political transitions that promised transformation but instead entrenched division. The French Revolution, which heralded *"liberté, égalité, fraternité,"* quickly descended into the Reign of Terror, where revolutionaries became executioners, and old injustices were replaced by new atrocities. The Russian Revolution overthrew the Tsarist autocracy, only to replace it with the oppressive Soviet regime under Joseph Stalin. In both cases, the so-called new orders proved as intolerant and repressive as their predecessors.

In modern developing nations, political turnovers occur under similar circumstances. A government falls, and its successor, instead of breaking the mould, simply reverses the roles of victim and oppressor. Those once persecuted now become the persecutors. Trumped-up cases are lodged, critics are silenced, and rhetoric of annihilation floods the airwaves. "Break them," "crush them," "set fire"—these slogans, once hurled

against the ousted regime, are now repurposed against the newly defeated opposition. But if the language remains the same, can we truly call it change?

A wise observer of history must ask: what differentiates genuine change from mere reshuffling? True transformation demands structural, ideological, and cultural shifts. Yet, most political transitions in the developing world focus on superficial alterations while leaving the fundamental issues untouched. Institutions remain weak, governance remains personalised, and power continues to be wielded as an

the pieces on the board without changing the game itself.

Hans Christian Andersen's timeless tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," serves as an apt metaphor for the political deceptions of our time. In the story, swindlers convince a vain emperor that they have woven an extraordinary fabric that is invisible to fools. Fearing the label of stupidity, his courtiers and subjects pretend to admire his non-existent attire until a child, unburdened by fear, exclaims, "But he isn't wearing anything!"

This mirrors the political theatre in developing nations. Leaders proclaim unprecedented change, supporters applaud, and intellectuals, fearing repercussions, validate the illusion. Yet, for the common citizen suffering under the same corruption, intimidation, and inefficiency, the emperor remains as naked as ever.

Some leaders have defied this cycle. Nelson Mandela, upon leading South Africa out of apartheid, chose reconciliation over revenge. Unlike many leaders who succumb to the

temptation of political purges, prevent their recurrence.

If the developing world is to break free from this cycle, there must be a fundamental shift in how political change is understood and implemented. Rather than viewing transitions as opportunities for retribution, they must be seen as moments for institutional and cultural reformation. Strong institutions must be built to uphold the rule of law impartially, rather than serving as tools for political vendettas. Leaders must rise above personal grievances and cultivate an ethos of governance that prioritises national progress over partisan revenge. Citizens must demand accountability and refuse to be deceived by grandiose rhetoric. Political movements must focus on economic development, social harmony, and long-term policy solutions instead of short-term political gains. Only by ensuring these changes can a nation truly transform, rather than simply reshuffling the players while the game remains unchanged.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

instrument of personal vengeance rather than national progress.

Consider the Arab Spring. From Tunisia to Egypt, people demanded democracy, justice, and dignity. The initial euphoria of overthrowing dictators gave way to political chaos, military coups, and, in some cases, the return of authoritarian rule. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak was toppled, Mohamed Morsi taking his place, only to be ousted by another authoritarian leader, Abdel Fattah el Sisi. The lesson? Revolutions or uprisings without structural reforms merely rearrange

temptation of political purges, rather than national progress.

Mandela understood that sustainable change required building bridges rather than burning them. Similarly, Germany, after the devastation of World War II, did not merely replace one ruling elite with another. It engaged in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—a conscious effort to come to terms with its past. Unlike many postcolonial states that continuously blame predecessors while repeating their mistakes, Germany systematically addressed its historical wrongs, building institutions that would

Change is not a word; it is an action. If one tyranny merely replaces another, if persecution merely shifts hands, if slogans remain the same, then the cycle has not been broken. As Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr said, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*"—the more things change, the more they remain the same. The challenge for developing nations is not to merely replace rulers but to redefine leadership. Until then, we remain trapped in the emperor's illusion, clapping for invisible robes while reality stands stark naked before us.

The world is failing women and girls



Gitanjali Singh
is UN Women representative in
Bangladesh.

GITANJALI SINGH

The year 2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The world today is more equal for women and girls than ever before. However, 30 years after the adoption of this historical and visionary blueprint for gender equality, we find ourselves at a place where progress does not match the commitments made. In some areas, progress has stalled or even reversed, and we see an increasing pushback on women's rights and gender equality globally.

The 2024 United Nations Secretary-General's Report on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly highlights persistent gender inequalities, including gender-based violence, economic and social barriers, and limited representation in decision-making and leadership. Furthermore, it notes that increasing conflicts and crises significantly hold back progress for women and girls on all indicators of sustainable development. Moreover, women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination, including based on age, class, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, or migration status,

have made the least progress, in direct contradiction to the commitment to leave no one behind.

Commitments have not been matched by action, investments, or accountability. Looking ahead, transformative policies leading to accelerated change remain necessary. The report highlights cross-cutting priorities for action, including removing discriminatory laws, prioritising integrated approaches, ensuring adequate financing, increasing women's participation in decision-making, supporting women's rights organisations, transforming social norms, harnessing the potential of technology, and closing gender data gaps—all while ensuring no one is left behind.

In addition, the report highlights specific actions to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, clustered under six key areas:

1. Inclusive development, decent work and well-being, focusing on care services, family leave provisions, labour rights and entitlements for informal workers, reducing labour market segregation and pay gaps, and decent work.

2. Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services, focusing on social protection and

public services, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-responsive technical and vocational education and training programmes, and sustainable financing for gender-responsive public services and social protection systems.

3. Freedom from violence, stigma, and stereotypes, focusing on women's access to justice, comprehensive and well-coordinated services for

survivors, comprehensive, evidence-based, and long-term approaches to prevention, gender-responsive media and technology, norms of respect, non-discrimination, and equality, and ending impunity.

4. Participation, gender-responsive institutions and accountability, focusing on temporary special measures, national gender equality action plans, gender-responsive budgeting, safe and enabling environments for women's rights organisations and women human rights defenders, strong national machineries, eradicating discriminatory gender norms in

political institutions, and eliminating violence against women in public life.

5. Peaceful and inclusive societies, focusing on inclusive peace processes, prevention of gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health services, survivor-centred justice in conflict and crisis-affected settings, women's economic rights in the wake of conflicts and crises, and addressing the root causes of conflict, violence, and instability.

6. Environmental conservation, protection, and rehabilitation, focusing on gender-responsive environment and climate policies, gender-responsive infrastructure, full and equal participation of women in decision-making on natural resource management, disaster risk reduction and response, environmental governance, and climate action, and a regenerative economy.

The annual Commission on the Status of Women will hold its 69th session at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on March 10-21, 2025 to review and appraise the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly. A delegation from the Bangladesh government as well as civil society organisations will attend the session. Member states will adopt a political declaration on March 10.

We cannot afford to march backwards. To deliver on the promise of equality made to all women and girls in Beijing 30 years ago, we need zero violence, full and equal decision-making power, freedom from poverty, peace and security, climate justice, and a digital revolution. The time to act and push forward is now. A gender-equal world is within our control, should we choose it.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

The telephone patented

On this day in 1876, Alexander Graham Bell received a patent for the telephone.

