

## Proper sewage management is vital

### Dhaka's unimplemented master plan leading to rampant pollution

It is unfortunate that a decade after adopting a master plan to address the city's sewage problem, the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has made little progress in its implementation. The plan originally envisioned the establishment of five sewage treatment plants across Dhaka, but only one—the Dasherbandi plant—was set up two years ago. Unfortunately, this facility is still not fully operational, as it has not been connected to Wasa's sewerage network. Moreover, while Wasa is struggling to acquire land for its Mirpur and Rayerbazar treatment facilities, it has yet to complete the feasibility study for the plant in Uttara. In the absence of proper sewage treatment facilities, most of the city's sewage now ends up in rivers and water bodies.

A recent study by the River and Delta Research Centre has revealed the severity of pollution in rivers surrounding Dhaka—Buriganga, Turag, Shitalakkhya, and Balu. It identified 102 industrial waste outlets, 75 municipal sewer lines, and 216 private outlets discharging untreated waste into these rivers. Additionally, pollutants enter through 38 sluice gates, 62 service canals, and 441 dumping points. Industrial units, dockyards, and markets are exacerbating the problem.

Experts, however, say the Wasa master plan was unrealistic to begin with, given the challenges of finding suitable land for large-scale projects in a densely populated city like Dhaka. With the plan proving ineffective, authorities should instead prioritise localised solutions, such as mandatory septic tanks, small-scale treatment plants, and strict enforcement of building regulations. Small treatment plants should be established in large housing project areas, while the construction of modular treatment systems should be made mandatory for high-rise buildings. Our current construction rules require septic tanks in buildings outside the sewerage network. Despite past efforts by the two city corporations to block sewage outlets and enforce this rule, their attempts were largely unsuccessful. To ensure compliance, Wasa, city corporations, and Rajuk must intensify their efforts, while building owners must also adhere to the provision during construction. Moreover, the Dasherbandi plant should be brought under Wasa's sewerage network as it could treat up to five lakh tonnes of sewage per day; the Pagla sewage treatment plant must also be urgently repaired.

Dhaka is becoming increasingly unliveable with its air and water becoming severely polluted, endangering the lives of its residents. To protect this city and its residents, the government must come up with a new vision—a new master plan—with a clear strategy to address the city's persistent sewage pollution, save our rivers and water bodies, and ensure a healthier environment.

## Why can't mob violence be curbed?

### Recent estimates show continued surge in mob beatings

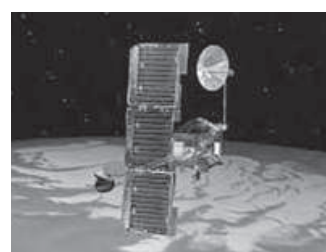
That mob violence continued unabated throughout March highlights once again the dangers of the business-as-usual approach the government appears to have adopted in response to this troubling trend. In fact, data from the human rights platform Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) show that mob beatings more than doubled within a month—from 18 incidents in February to 39 in March. The number of people killed in such attacks also surged, from 8 to 13. While these estimates are consistent with other recent crime figures, the picture that emerges in relation to mob violence is quite concerning.

In one particularly disturbing incident early Sunday last week, Riyadh, an Uber driver in Dhaka, was beaten to death after being falsely accused of being a mugger. According to his wife, he was taking a passenger from Pallabi around 2:00am when another car hit his vehicle from behind. As he stepped out to confront the driver of that car, its passengers shouted "mugger", prompting locals to beat him up. "He bought his car for Tk 16 lakh just a couple of months ago... Would a mugger buy a car for Tk 16 lakh?" his wife asked. Similarly, in Narsingdi, two brothers were killed by a mob on Monday night following an altercation with local autorickshaw drivers. These incidents are a stark reminder of the ease with which criminals disguised as common men are perpetrating such attacks.

The question is, why can't the government contain mob violence? What makes a section of the public feel so emboldened that they can take the law into their hands and execute "punishment" for perceived injustices? MSF has analysed the various motives leading to such attacks. Among them, suspicions of crimes including theft, robbery, mugging, extortion, rape, smuggling, and drug peddling often resulted in deadly violence. Sometimes, murder suspects were targeted. Political and personal grudges were also flagged as frequent drivers of mob violence. For instance, around the same time Riyadh was killed, a man was beaten to death in Shariatpur for allegedly asking two youths to stop smoking in public. Such a broad spectrum of motivations shows how easily mob violence can be incited, and executed, in the absence of effective deterrents.

This must be changed. This trend, which saw a surge after the political changeover in August, owes primarily to two reasons: first, the inability of law enforcement to act decisively and identify or detain those involved in mob violence, and second, the failure of the judiciary to ensure proper punishment. We urge the government to address these systemic issues with utmost priority.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Mars Odyssey spacecraft launched

On this day in 2001, NASA launched the Mars Odyssey spacecraft, which reached Mars in October and transmitted photos and other data back to scientists on Earth.

# Political expediency and the narratives of our liberation

WINKERS AWEIGH!

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TANIM AHMED

It was plainly evident on March 26 how Bangladesh's political parties do not dither to propagate alternative narratives of our independence and the 1971 Liberation War purely for expediency. They did not seem to mind at all that, in the process, they end up belittling or trivialising 1971 or our independence, which should have become sacrosanct by now.

The July uprising leaders—some of whom remain in the government, while others lead the newly formed National Citizen Party (NCP), having established itself as the natural heir of the July uprising—revisited their comparison of the achievement of 2024 with 1971. Their statements on March 26 were along the same vein, perhaps in an attempt to reassure people that they are still respectful of 1971 even while they eulogise 2024. Take Nahid's remarks, for example. The top NCP leader said many could not yet grasp the significance of the mass uprising and the people's victory.

He said the events of 1971 and 2024 were interconnected, and the spirit of the Liberation War was revived through the July uprising. "We believe '71 and '24 are not separate," he said. The promise of equality, he added, had remained unfulfilled, allowing a fascist regime to rule Bangladesh for 15 years. "In '24 we advocated for the same egalitarian society."

Still an adviser to the interim government and one of Nahid's longtime comrades from the uprising, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan said merely securing a piece of land—which seems to suggest that it is all that happened through the Liberation War in 1971—is not necessarily the be-all and end-all of freedom. True independence is also in the freedom of thought, expression, and speech, which was not there in the last 15 years.

BNP leaders, on the other hand, were sharp in their criticism of these young leaders, dismissing any comparison with 1971, as they have been doing for quite some time. Senior leaders of this party, which had been the main opposition camp to the Awami League regime, have been sharply critical of the oft-repeated pronouncements like "new independence," "second republic," and "Bangladesh 2.0."

But BNP had no qualms about being the main ally of Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Chhatra Shibir for a long time to hold on to power,

or even appoint Motiur Rahman Nizami or Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed—both of whom are held responsible for leading vigilante militias during the Liberation War and have been hanged for their war crimes—as ministers. As such, one could assume that this newfound sensitivity regarding our Liberation



The covered mural at the Liberation War Memorial in Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR

War—which is, of course, welcome if proven to be genuine—is nothing but political posturing; a ploy to set themselves apart as the champions of Bangladesh's Liberation War and the sanctity of 1971.

While the political sphere is rife with such exchanges, Jamaat is cleverly exploiting the opportunity to posit its own narrative of the Liberation War, which it had actively opposed. It would have been unimaginable even last year that the party which actively opposed the Liberation War, joined hands with the Pakistani army, and was instrumental in abetting, inciting, and even perpetrating war crimes, would presume to have any authority on this matter.

But for some people, Jamaat's acceptance—however grudging that might have been—as a political force

came about only after it came to light that they had been among the forces that bolstered the July uprising. In fact, it transpired later that many of the frontline uprising leaders were top office bearers of Shibir, a fact they had concealed from the public and even their comrades.

The uprising leaders, for their part, have indicated that Jamaat and Shibir's sacrifice and active participation in the July uprising of 2024 have been enough of a penance for their crimes in 1971. The presumption that participation in an uprising undoes war crimes, wittingly or not, implicitly likens the July uprising and the Liberation War. Jamaat, for its part, has latched on to that sliver of opportunity to criticise

the social fabric of harmony and tolerance, they smack of being run by those adept at concealing their identity. The optics of men wielding sticks tied with the red and green, beating down Indigenous people on the streets of Dhaka for demanding the inclusion of "Adivasi" in an artwork on a textbook—which, by the way, remains deleted—would suggest that patriots were acting against traitors, when actually it could be argued to be the other way around.

Together, this lays the groundwork for Jamaat to emerge free of its mire and shame of 1971 and helps it claim a place as a rightful political contender.

To conclude, a mural depicting the 1971 Liberation War was covered up this Independence Day—before being

Mujib and his "pro-India stance."

They point out how Bangladesh had been run according to Indian prescriptions, how Dhaka continued to be manipulated by New Delhi, and thus insinuate that the independence of 1971 was not quite what we thought it to be. That it was not quite true independence. And that rhetoric, quite conveniently—too conveniently, in fact—fuses rather well with the NCP claiming to have heralded a new independence.

There are also alarming signs on other fronts. There are the ghostly platforms like "Students for Sovereignty" and the "Inquilab Mancha" preventing the Indigenous people from marching for their rights or activists from standing up for rape victims. While there is no conclusive evidence of who is behind propping up these platforms disrupting

destroyed later—because, according to the district commissioner, it did not align with the ideals of the July uprising. Surely that would add to the jubilation of those who want to undermine our independence and sow seeds of doubt. While those seeds fester, the uprising leaders remain quiet, looking the other way.

If the independence of the nation has to take a back seat to the spirit of the July uprising—if it is perceived that celebrations of our Independence Day are becoming muted just so that it is not too inconvenient for certain quarters—then those perceived to be behind such a disposition would see their credibility eroded. The July uprising will always have its place. But so long as the NCP is seen not giving '71 its justified importance, it may affect their likelihood of winning the hearts and minds of the people.

# A diplomatic reset wrapped in contradiction

THE STREET VIEW

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The Yunus-Modi meeting in Bangkok appears to be the long-awaited diplomatic reset that many had predicted—but few expected to materialise so soon. On the surface, it looks like India is finally acknowledging the interim government in Dhaka. But beneath the handshake seemingly lies a tangle of contradictions, strategic hedging, and diplomacy. It's not just about turning a new page—it's about writing the next chapter.

**From denial to dialogue**

For nearly eight months, India's relationship with Bangladesh has remained awkward, intermittently broken by a handful of uplifting moments when officials met and discussed bilateral issues. This meeting, therefore, signals more than engagement. It's an implicit admission that reality has outpaced India's assumptions. Yet, Modi's words seem to carry an almost performative tone—he talked about democracy

and inclusion after years of openly backing elections in Bangladesh that were anything but democratic. His government supported Hasina through the 2014 walkover, the 2018 ballot-stuffing, and the 2024 puppet show of a vote. So, when Indian officials say they support a "democratic and inclusive Bangladesh," one cannot help but ask: since when?

**The people vs the party**

Modi claims India is connected to the people of Bangladesh—not to any political party. It's a noble sentiment, but history arguably tells a different story. India's deep-rooted ties with the Awami League were not merely diplomatic—some may say they were ideological, strategic, and personal. Delhi has in the past prioritised regime stability over popular legitimacy. So, is this newfound detachment real, or just rhetorical repositioning now that the old guard has fallen? Perhaps Modi's statement is less about people and more about giving India room

to pivot—to distance itself from Hasina without appearing disloyal, and to engage with Yunus without committing too deeply.

**Shelter as strategy**

Yunus's call for Hasina's extradition was bold, necessary, and symbolic. It marked a shift from transitional governance to assertive leadership. But India's non-committal response—labelling the request as "under consideration"—could suggest that Hasina is now less a guest and more a bargaining chip. By sheltering her, India retains leverage over the interim government. It's a contradictory position—India claims to support peace and stability in Bangladesh, yet it harbours a figure accused of inciting unrest. If Yunus is serious about moving forward, he'll have to navigate this situation delicately.

**Security concerns and political theatre**

The discussion on minority rights and social unrest is another minefield of double meanings. India expressed "serious concern" about the treatment of Hindus in Bangladesh—likely as much for domestic political optics as for genuine worry. Yunus, meanwhile, dismissed many of the claims as exaggerated or false, pushing back on India's moral posturing. Here again, India's selective outrage feels somewhat hollow. It had no such concerns under Hasina, even when

systemic violence and suppression were rife. The sudden spotlight on minority rights raises the question: is this about human rights or political messaging?

**Border killings and hollow empathy**

Yunus made a heartfelt appeal to stop border killings, invoking the suffering of families torn apart. Modi responded with the usual line—Indian forces fire in self-defence. Yet, hundreds of civilians have died in these so-called "self-defence" incidents over the years, often unarmed and within Bangladeshi territory. This isn't just a bilateral security issue—it's about trust. If India continues to act unilaterally on its border while preaching partnership, the credibility of its cooperative rhetoric falls apart.

**The real game behind the optics**

So, what does this meeting really represent? For me, it's not as much of a breakthrough. It's a calibration. India is adjusting to—not embracing—the new Bangladesh. This is not about Yunus earning India's trust; it's about India hedging its bets. Delhi wants to remain relevant, especially as Dhaka's ties with China deepen and with Pakistan open. India isn't fully on board with the interim government yet. But it is experienced enough to realise that ignoring it any longer could cost regional influence. The meeting, therefore, is less about conviction and more about pragmatism.