

An urgent call to action

Do not neglect malnutrition among children, who are our future

Amid continued focus on economic crises, dollar shortages, and political developments, one topic that perhaps impacts our long-term future the most—the nutrition level of our children—hardly comes into discussion. Children, especially those under five years of age, have no voice in the public realm, whether in politics, policy planning, or in our parliament. As a result, a crisis of nutrition among children is quietly in the making.

Although there has been some improvement in this regard over the last decade, experts are worried that, given the current prevalence of stunting and wasting among children under five, Bangladesh may not meet the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDG) targets by 2030. Besides, statistics and percentages often hide the real picture. Take, for example, the stunting rate among children under five, which came down from 41 percent in 2011 to 21 percent in 2022—it does not really convey the reality of the millions who are still stunted. When these children become adults, the deprivation of proper nutrition during their most crucial development years is likely to haunt them for the rest of their lives. According to experts, 80 percent of brain development occurs between birth and three years of age. As such, even if an adult increases their nutrition intake, they will not be able to reverse the harm done from lack of nutrition in the early years.

One of the main causes of malnutrition among children under five is deprivation from breast milk. Sadly, in Bangladesh, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding has come down from 65 percent in 2018 to 55 percent, according to the most recent data. Reasons include inadequate campaigns to raise awareness on the importance of breastfeeding, an increase in caesarean deliveries, aggressive marketing by powder milk suppliers, an increase in the number of working mothers, and lack of space for nursing at workplaces. Child marriage, which remains quite high in Bangladesh, can also lead to malnutrition among mothers and children under five, according to research.

Ironically, we are not just depriving our children of proper nutrition; we have allowed toxins to seep into our food chain through excessive use of plastics, chemical fertilisers, and pesticides, harming their health and nutrition in the long run. Therefore, we must not only increase budget and manpower—especially at the grassroots—for nutrition programmes and raise awareness about breastfeeding and antenatal care. Child marriage must also be stopped, along with the use of harmful chemicals and plastics that toxify our food chain. It is time for an urgent call to action.

A tragic waste of youthful energy

Clashes between students of Dhaka, City colleges raise concerns

In what is becoming a tedious display of ego clashes and false heroics, students of Dhaka College and Dhaka City College have again turned the streets around their campuses into battlegrounds, leaving the general public to suffer the consequences. Given how routine such conflicts involving the two colleges have become, this is no longer just about who or what started it off; any excuse seems enough to unleash violence. On Tuesday, it was the allegation of a Dhaka College student being assaulted the previous day, leading to an attack on the City College premises as well as hours of chase and counterchase as police struggled to contain the situation. Many, including police officials, were injured. It's painful to see this meaningless cycle of violence among students who are supposed to lead the nation one day.

According to a report, this is the fifth time that students of these colleges clashed in the last four months. City College students were also involved in a separate clash with their peers from Ideal College earlier this year. As police and witnesses have noted, often trivial matters ignite clashes, leading to repeated disruptions, injuries, and property damage. The surrounding areas, dense with markets and educational institutions, bear the brunt of these outbursts. For commuters and small businesses, every such episode means lost time, lost income, and a growing sense of insecurity. For the students involved, it is a tragic waste of youthful energy, and it has a damaging effect on all other students as well.

Equally alarmingly, this tendency for violent outbursts seems to be increasing in the country. Only days ago, a third-year student of Primeasia University was stabbed to death in broad daylight over a petty argument. The ease with which young people often resort to violence—even over minor personal slights—suggests a deeper malaise caused by decades of authoritarian and undemocratic practices, whose effects continue even after the uprising. There is a possibility that this culture of impulsive aggression could harden into a long-term norm if we do not act urgently.

It is, therefore, not enough to blame the police for the failure to prevent vandalism at City College, as its authorities did. This vandalism or violence is not just a law enforcement problem; it goes much deeper, and all must do their part to resolve it. Dhaka College and City College administrations must work closely with law enforcement to impose strict disciplinary measures, enhance monitoring on and around campuses, and ensure swift punishment for any acts of violence. The role of social media groups in fuelling tensions must also be addressed. We urge the interim government and political parties—whom feuding students often draw their strength from—to treat this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Installation of Pope Benedict XVI

On this day in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), successor to John Paul II, formally assumed his position as the new leader of the Roman Catholic Church during a mass in St Peter's Square in Vatican City.

EDITORIAL

Rana Plaza: 12 years of grief, courage, and unkept promises



Taslima Akhter is president of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati and a photographer. She can be reached at taslima.74@yahoo.com.

TASLIMA AKHTER

It's been nearly 12 years, but the memories still refuse to fade.

Back then, the place was sealed off with tin walls and barbed wire. Inside that enclosure lay what could only be called a graveyard—where human remains were mixed with dust, brick chips, and scraps of concrete. If you dug even a little, you might've found a tooth, a bone, or even a skull. Just the thought still sends shivers down the spine.

The ground was uneven, with small mounds and dips. Pieces of torn fabric in red, blue, and violet were scattered everywhere, silent witnesses to the shattered bodies they once clothed. Threads lay tangled with buttons, blood-stained clothes, and foreign labels bearing unfamiliar names. Seen from above, it looked like a land struck by a brutal storm. But this wasn't caused by nature. This was the wreckage left behind by April 24, 2013.

These workers were not just statistics. They were citizens of this country. They were daughters, sons, mothers, and fathers. They were the lifeblood of a national economy, part of a 40-lakh-strong workforce. How can we, as a country, turn away from them?

That day, at Rana Plaza, more than a thousand lives were crushed beneath cement, machines, and metal. It wasn't a natural calamity. It wasn't an accident or divine punishment. No outside enemy attacked. The real storm that hit Rana Plaza was made with human hands—by neglect, by greed, and by the failure of those who should have protected lives. It was a massacre, silent, cold, and structural.

April 24 is a date that cannot be swept under the rug. No matter how many years pass, its impact will linger. On that morning in Savar, just



On April 24, 2013, the name Rana Plaza became synonymous with both tragedy and awakening.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

21 kilometres from central Dhaka, more than 1,100 workers lost their lives when the nine-storey Rana Plaza building collapsed. At least 162 are still missing, according to research by Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati.

The workers arrived early, in groups, as they had every day. They entered the building that housed five factories—New Wave Bottoms Ltd, Phantom Apparels, Phantom Tac, Ether Tex, and New Wave Style—spread across six floors (third to eighth). The lower floors held shops and banks; the top floor was empty. Bizarrely, huge generators were installed on the third and eighth floors, not on the ground, raising the risks. From the outside, the blue glass facade looked polished. Inside, it was a death trap.

The land that the building had been constructed on had been illegally grabbed, including the property owned by locals like Rabindranath Sarkar. Sohel Rana, owner of Rana Plaza, and his family had a reputation for grabbing land. People were afraid to speak out. "If you say anything about him, there will be trouble," they would whisper. "Even the local MP

deafening roar, the building came crashing down. Within moments, everything was reduced to rubble. Survivors described it as being buried alive inside a grave. Some cried out for help. Others whispered prayers. Many fainted from shock or exhaustion.

In the dim light of their mobile phones, trapped workers saw horrifying sights. Bodies crushed under machines and concrete. Blood dripping down the walls. One man's legs hung from beneath a staircase. A woman was impaled by an iron rod. There were dismembered limbs, lifeless eyes, broken dreams. Some survivors clung to one another, huddled in the darkness, their only wish to live. Religion, gender, age—none of it mattered. People reached for comfort wherever they could find it.

Jasmine, a survivor pulled from the rubble two days later, shared a story that still resonates with me. "I was trapped and had lost hope," she said. "An unknown man held me close to his chest. As a woman, leaning on a stranger like that would normally be unthinkable. But in that moment,

nothing mattered more than the hope of living—of seeing my daughter again. I'll pray for that brother all my life. Because of him, I'm alive."

The horrors didn't stop there. Blood, filth, intestines, and death surrounded them. Some drank their own sweat, others resorted to drinking urine to survive. One woman named Rojina cut down her own hand to release herself out of desperation. People recited their final prayers. Some lost their minds. They pulled hair, scratched, attacked each other—anything to stay sane or alive. Trapped survivors held on for as long as 17 agonising days.

The official record says the Rana Plaza collapse caused 1,136 deaths. But when you include those who are missing and DNA evidence, the number exceeds 1,175. Still, for the authorities, factory owners, and international buyers, these lost lives seem to be just a number—a number that's too easy to forget.

But these workers were not just statistics. They were citizens of this country. They were daughters, sons, mothers, and fathers. They were the lifeblood of a national economy, part of a 40-lakh-strong workforce. How can we, as a country, turn away from them?

The world woke up that day. The name Rana Plaza became synonymous with both tragedy and awakening. Since then, the ready-made garment (RMG) sector has seen massive changes: green factories, new markets, ambitions of becoming a hundred-billion-dollar industry. But the question remains: how much of this progress has reached the workers?

Twelve years have passed. And yet, there has been no real justice. Sohel Rana and others responsible have not faced meaningful consequences. The compensation laws haven't changed. Survivors still struggle to live on a minimum wage of Tk 12,500. The site remains unpreserved. There is no national memorial at the site of Rana Plaza, nor other sites of industrial disasters such as Tazreen Fashion and Hashem Foods.

But their fight should not be forgotten. In the new Bangladesh built by its people, there must be justice—not only for Rana Plaza but also for Tazreen and Hashem Foods fires. We must protect the stories, the sites, the sacrifices.

Let April 24 be a day not just of mourning, but of renewal. Let us remember the dead—and the fight for the living. That must be our promise.

Our propensity for violence and the elements that foster it



Abir Hossain is a journalist. He can be reached at abir.hossain@thethedailystar.net.

ABIR HOSSAIN

On April 20, 2025, battery-run rickshaw drivers took to the streets to protest against the decision to ban their vehicles in Dhaka's Gulshan and Banani areas. Soon after, tensions flared with clashes breaking out between battery-run rickshaw drivers and the locals, pedal rickshaw pullers, and ride-sharing motorcyclists. Based on the reports on the alteration, it appears that this entire affair has devolved into a "he said, she said" situation, with all parties claiming that they did not provoke the clashes—they just acted to defend themselves. The following day, protests escalated again. This time, there were reports of the protesting drivers threatening pedestrians who attempted to take photos of or record the incident unfolding. Additionally, the scuffle with pedal rickshaw pullers intensified as the protesters threw two pedal rickshaws off the bridge into Gulshan Lake.

Earlier this month, when demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza poured out across the country, the movement garnered attention for all the wrong reasons. With the rallies fizzing into chaos, it was the looting and vandalism that captured most of our attention. Not only did these abhorrent acts divert attention away from the very issue the protests were

for, but they also undermined the collective effort that the rest of the nation displayed.

A month before that, records of two young women being attacked in Lalmoni by an enraged mob pervaded much of our discourse and psyche. What followed was a barrage of more reports of violence against women. In between and beyond, plenty more has happened. One might claim that too much has happened. Yet, it would be wrong to claim that these acts have only taken place in the past several months since the interim government took charge. It did, however, feel like they happened more frequently. Moreover, it would be dismissive to claim that a collective fear did not grip the nation. After all, we are a nation in transition. Any sign of instability threatens grave consequences.

However, as we look back and scrutinise at all such incidents that took place over the years, an underlying pattern emerges. That pattern not only binds the many events that have plagued the conscious collective, but in many ways is a reflection of it. What I am alluding to is our inclination for violence. Many traits may characterise this irrational phenomenon. It may be described as being delirious, damning, and downright despicable. But if all we do is condemn these attacks, without

fully fleshing out what compels them to transpire in the first place, then the thoughts we spare for the victims are performative at best, and dismissive of their struggles at worst.

What triggers violence cannot just be explained by the rule of the former regime and its subsequent overthrow. To make sense of it, we must turn to the values, or rather the lack of them, that the country has survived with for far too long. Our core values, the four principles of our constitution, haven't been used to create organisations that promote them. Without institutions built on the foundation of state values, how can we expect to undertake a long-term project of nation-building? On what basis is it meant to be sustained and directed? What core beliefs are supposed to resonate across generations?

Despite our history, all these questions are devoid of a solid answer. We have been left to fend for ourselves based on the whims of our politicians, most of whom have rarely, if ever, attempted to rectify or even address it. Rather, they have continued to perpetuate a political culture of control and dominance and leveraged it to accumulate personal wealth. The cycle has repeated far too many times because the system here has been rife with corruption for decades. It has cultivated a culture of impunity, not accountability, essentially warping the law and forcing functionality to completely crumble. Inevitably, the impulse that one might get away with their wrongdoing trickles down, thus forging the culture of impunity as the norm.

Nonetheless, the malfunctioning of the system doesn't exist in isolation. Its roots, which are a result of a lack

of a value system, are entrenched deep in our education system as well. Without a set of values to dictate the curriculum, what core principles are meant to be instilled in and embodied by young minds? We cannot deny that these principles can at least act as references to mould their thinking around. Additionally, what is indicative of the state of our educational institutions is the fact that elected politicians themselves tend not to send their children to local government schools, opting instead for private English medium schools or schools abroad.

What, then, does that say about the state of our educational institutions? It screams of the giant rift between politicians and their constituencies. In the process, it also lays bare the scarcity that the rest of the nation has to make do with. The dynamic this fosters is one of resentment, enforcing the idea that not only is there no one looking out for them, but also that these institutions are doing nothing to bolster their interests. As a result, people take matters into their own hands and take drastic, often poorly thought out measures that prove to be counterproductive.

With crumbling institutions built on fragile principles, power has, time and again, been co-opted. Is it any wonder, then, that Bangladesh has been marred by mindless violence for as long as most of us can remember? The sources of people's apathy and collective restlessness can be attributed to a system that has continued to fail them. A withering system may amplify and echo their troubles. However, it most certainly underpins that while values may be abstract, their weight is tangible.