

What the Awami League and Jamaat can learn from apologies



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Political discourse in Bangladesh is increasingly marred by a dangerous trend, especially through the casual use of stigmatising labels against ideological dissent. The trend of tagging individuals as pro- or anti-Islamist, pro-Pakistani or pro-Indian—often based on circumstantial or short-term politically opportunistic interpretations—is inevitably problematic and deeply destabilising. This culture of labelling undermines democratic norms and contributes to long-term sociopolitical volatility. What may begin as a strategic manoeuvre to delegitimise opponents often spirals into a broader culture of suspicion, hostility, and somatic violence. The effects of this tagging culture have eroded democratic values and compromised national security.

A recent example is Mahfuj Alam, the current adviser for information and broadcasting in the interim government. Over time, he has faced various political labels, including accusations of being an Islamist linked to the banned group Hizbut Tahrir and a pro-Pakistan sympathiser. More recently, he has been accused of being both pro-Indian and anti-Islamist, based on a Facebook post and a critical speech about the student-teacher protests at Jagannath University. These contradictory labels highlight the opportunistic and inconsistent nature of political branding in Bangladesh. As he appeared to address JNU protesters, Mahfuj was physically attacked with a water bottle and later targeted with widespread verbal abuse. Yet, instead of retaliating, he invited his attacker to his home for tea, which is a rare and commendable gesture in a political culture often driven by vengeance. His response mirrors two other recent public apologies that stand out in Bangladesh's deeply polarised political landscape.

The first came from the Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam, following outrage over

misogynistic censures made by some of its leaders during a protest at Suhrawardy Udyan against the proposals of Women's Affairs Reform Commission. Under public and legal pressure, the party issued a formal official apology—an unprecedented move in its history. This is particularly significant given that in 2013, Hefazat's then chief Shah Ahmad Shafi derogatorily compared women to tamarinds, which credited him with the satirical title "Tamarind Hujur." Despite national uproar, neither he nor the party apologised for this derogation.

Another significant example from the Bangladeshi media landscape occurred during the 2006-2008 caretaker government period, when nearly all media outlets were accused of uncritically reproducing narratives and stories provided—often pushed—by intelligence agencies, particularly the DGFI. Only the New Age resisted this trend, and years later, a prominent editor acknowledged this by crediting the New Age and publicly apologised on a television show for his own paper's role during that period. Such rare apologetic humility in our culture marked a significant milestone for media

To achieve genuine democratic renewal, Bangladesh must adopt a political culture rooted in historical truth and moral accountability. This demands that all political actors, especially Jamaat-e-Islami (most notably its controversial role during the 1971 Liberation War), confront past wrongdoings. The party's internal divisions highlight the urgency of such reckoning.

accountability and journalistic ethics in Bangladesh.

These three acts of forgiveness and apology carry significant weight at a time when public figures rarely admit their wrongdoings. In a regressive political culture so often driven by aggression and propaganda, these gestures suggest a potential shift towards democratic values and the ethics of accountability.

Similarly, the Awami League must confront recent allegations of state-sponsored atrocities. A leaked audio recording allegedly implicates the then regime premier, Sheikh Hasina, in authorising the use of lethal force against demonstrators. In addition, a recent UN fact-finding report describing state actions as potential crimes against humanity raises grave concerns about human rights and democratic governance in the country.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Our nation is still haunted by the horrors of the 1971 Liberation War and deeply divided over many issues. Most importantly, targeted and opportunistic tagging of political opponents often imperils hard-won democratic gains. Such practices silence dissent and deepen societal divisions. In this context, three key lessons emerge from these events that merit broader reflection in Bangladesh's sociopolitical landscape.

One editor's public apology underscores that admitting mistakes reflects ethical responsibility, not weakness—an essential

and a break from the politics of vengeance.

Towards genuine democratic renewal
t Barrister Abdur Razzaq, Jamaat's former assistant secretary general, resigned after failing to convince party leaders to seek an apology. Razzaq's stance was a principled act that sparked introspection within the party, reflected in the public tribute paid by Jamaat activists at his funeral. Jamaat's continued failure to unequivocally support the Liberation War remains a profound moral and political shortcoming.

It is worth mentioning that Sheikh Hasina sought apology for any mistakes committed by her father's Awami League government during its 1972-75 tenure, which allegedly brought her to power through an electoral victory.

Given these realities, both Jamaat and the Awami League must formally acknowledge their past misdeeds. Only sincere apologies and concrete steps towards accountability can help the country build a political culture based on democratic values, mutual respect, and a more equitable society.

Dhaka's darling dengue diaries



MIND THE GAP

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NOSHIN NAWAL

Ah, summer in Dhaka. That magical time of the year when mangoes ripen, lychees flood the bazaars, and humidity smothers you, and everyone's plus one to picnics, school events, and family dinners is—you guessed it—dengue fever. As if melting into a puddle of sweat in this heat was not enough, you also have to embrace the skeletal-level weakness that makes lifting your head off a pillow a herculean feat.

Yes, while other countries boast cherry blossoms and beach holidays, we get a yearly VIP visit from the Aedes mosquito. It doesn't just bite—it makes your body buckle into absolute stupor. These mosquitoes have better timing than airlines (not saying much, but still) and a more efficient delivery system than the local food delivery services.

At this point, let's stop pretending that dengue is a health crisis. It's a lifestyle. You don't get dengue—you host dengue. It arrives

uninvited, overstays its welcome, and leaves you broke, exhausted, and contemplating your life choices. Think of it as a relative from hell, but airborne and slightly more bloodthirsty. The cost of the blood tests alone is doing much to my blood pressure.

The symptoms? Fever, joint pain, headache, rashes—and a newfound intimacy with hospital waiting rooms. And the cure? Well, mostly papaya leaf juice, blind optimism, and your mum whispering, "InshaAllah bhalo hoye jaba" while pouring coconut water down your throat like she's exorcising the virus.

Hospitals? Overcrowded. IV drips? Shared like a plate of pakoras. Beds? Optional. In fact, dengue is the only illness where being sent home to "rest" means you're not sick enough to die yet. Congratulations!

Meanwhile, the government launches their annual dengue awareness campaign

which is critically sidelined by the who-will-be-our-new-mayor crisis: posters that no one reads, fogging drives that look suspiciously like stage smoke for a low-budget jatra, and public health officials assuring us on TV that "the situation is under control," while behind them someone faints from a platelet count that's trying to set a new limbo record.

And the fogging? Oh, the fogging. It's less a public health intervention and more a

waterlogged street—nice try, *bhai*, but we're built differently.

Local authorities always seem shocked by the yearly outbreak, as if dengue RSVs in invisible ink. Every year, it's the same drill: act surprised, scramble for beds, pretend that fogging works, and give interviews about "raising awareness"—which, if you're wondering, now includes TikTok videos of teenagers doing the dengue dance. (Spoiler: the mosquitoes are not impressed.)

But we, the Bangladeshis, are resilient. We'll fight dengue with a bottle of Dettol, a plastic racket that makes zapping sounds but kills nothing, and a fervent belief that neem leaves solve everything.

And let's not forget the elite response. In Gulshan, you'll find people consulting homeopaths, importing organic mosquito nets from Switzerland, and applying lavender oil as "a natural repellent." In contrast, in Mirpur, your dad is wearing jeans indoors and whacking the air with a sandal, yelling, "Ekta merechhi!" with the confidence of a man who's declared war on an invisible enemy while armed only with rage and footwear.

The mosquitoes, of course, are thriving. They aren't just insects; they're trained operatives. They dodge coils, laugh at sprays, and develop immunity faster than your cousin lake-cried for a vaccine exemption. One bite and you're down. Two bites and

you're on saline. Three bites and you're asking your doctor if he takes bKash.

So, what's the long-term plan? Trick question—we don't have one. Our dengue strategy is like a poorly managed relationship: deny, ignore, panic, repeat. No proper drainage system. No nationwide mosquito control. But hey, at least the fogging guy gets a yearly performance review.

And yet, we endure. Because in Bangladesh, illness is not just a physical condition; it's a communal experience. Neighbours bring fruits, your *bua* gossips about which auntie gets it next, and every family member becomes a medical expert armed with Google and two teaspoons of misinformation.

So, here's to dengue, our unwanted summer guest, our viral nemesis, our yearly reminder that in Dhaka, you're never truly alone. Not with mosquitoes in your bedroom, in your shower, and possibly in your group chat.

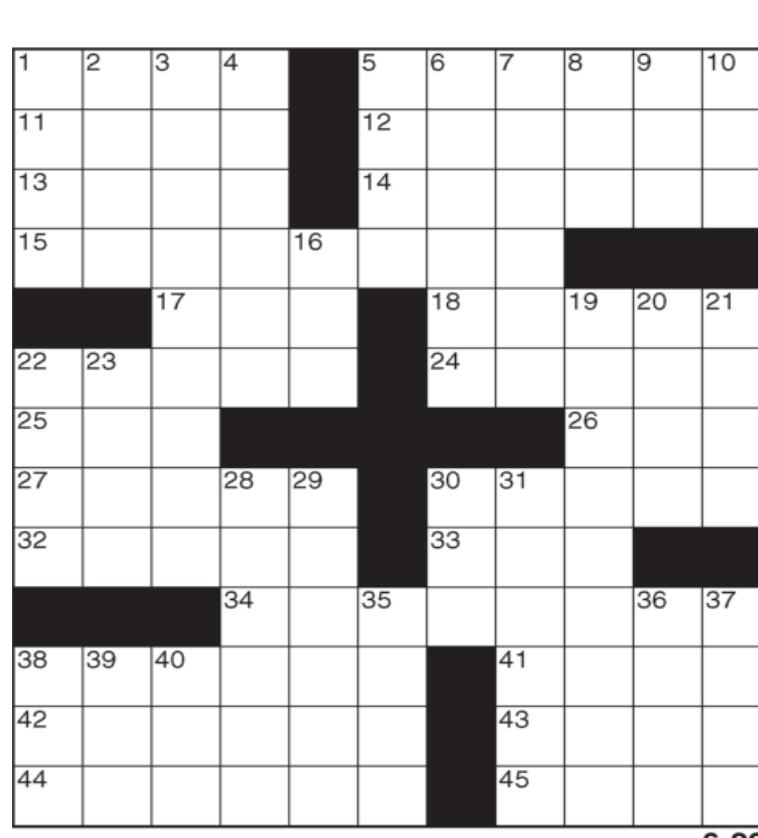
Cheers to another season of itching, sweating, and trying to remember which body part you haven't already slapped. If dengue had a flag, we'd probably hoist it. After all, what's a Bangladeshi summer without a little fever, fear, and a nationwide fog machine that doubles as a vibe check? Welcome to the tropics. We may be drowning in mosquito larvae, but at least we're doing it with style and some fizz.

dramatic theatre. A man in a mask emerges from an alley like a rejected Ghostbuster and blasts out enough chemical mist to either kill a mosquito or awaken your childhood asthma. Meanwhile, the mosquitoes shrug it off like seasoned Dhakaites navigating a

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Dull pain
5 Loving touch
11 Bird on a Canadian dollar
12 Spotted cat
13 – mater
14 Catcher's catch
15 Goblets, e.g.
17 Stew sphere
18 Trade agreement of 1994
22 School areas
24 Mixes
25 Hagen of acting
26 Agent, for short
27 Suggested
30 Stands
32 Met offering
33 Drama division
34 First grade subject
38 Bar order
41 Gushing review
42 Warring groups
43 Exploits
44 Leave
45 Dispatched

DOWN
1 Woeful cry
2 Future stallion
3 Diamond corner
4 Tooth layer
5 Nightclub of song
6 Squirrel's stash
7 Iterate
8 Pole worker
9 Musical note
10 Pig's place
16 Used to be
19 Diamond corner
20 Grove growth
21 Pharaoh symbols
22 Designer Boss
23 Resting on
28 Mecca setting
29 More statuesque
30 Cheering cry
31 Doomed flier
35 Gnat, e.g.
36 Smooth
37 Evaluate
38 Pop
39 Iron source
40 Diamond worker



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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