

Sohag’s murder signals a deeper crisis

BNP must cleanse itself of criminal elements

We are horrified by the gruesome murder of 35-year-old Sohag, a scrap metal trader in Mitford, in broad daylight before many bystanders. A group of 8 to 10 men dragged Sohag out of his shop and mercilessly beat him with sharp and blunt weapons, stripping and then bludgeoning him with concrete slabs. A video of this horrific killing is circulating on social media. So far, four individuals have been arrested. One of the suspects, Mahmudul Hasan Mohin, is allegedly associated with Jubo Dal, while five other suspects are associated with various other wings of the party. According to Sohag’s wife, her husband had been targeted because he had refused to pay the Tk 2 lakh extortion money by Mohin to continue his business. This murder demonstrates how criminal elements linked to political parties continue to operate with impunity, perpetuating the legacy of extortion and violence from the previous regime. Only the perpetrators’ affiliations have changed.

We are deeply disturbed to see reports of various kinds of crimes, including extortion, assault, vandalism, rape and murder, being committed by individuals connected to the BNP. Even though the BNP has expelled those accused of these crimes, and in some cases has asked the police to file cases against them, such brutality continues, with the latest being the macabre killing of Sohag. Violent infighting has also plagued the party. Since August 5, at least 77 party members have been killed due to internal feuds (according to Ain o Salish Kendra).

Why can’t one of the largest parties in the country control its affiliated organisations? It seems nothing has fundamentally changed in the mindsets of these groups. The BNP has declared that it will not tolerate any kind of crime committed by its members. But just expelling individuals every time they commit a crime, especially when the crimes are widely publicised, will not address the real problem: a culture that tacitly accepts some criminal behaviour from members in exchange for loyalty. This has been our political culture for far too long, and we have seen its frightful manifestations during the last Awami League regime.

These incidents should be a wake-up call not just for the BNP, but for all political parties: this culture of intimidation and violence by members or associates must end. This can only happen from within each party, with strict enforcement of codes of conduct for its leaders and activists.

Law enforcement must act against politically connected criminals like Mohin before—not after—public outrage. Waiting for a viral video or a sensational killing to act reflects a dangerous complacency. The government should also investigate the allegation that the names of three prime suspects have been excluded from the case filed in relation to Sohag’s murder.

Unless the BNP firmly establishes a chain of command, clamps down heavily on any wrongdoing by its members, and purges itself of all criminal elements, it risks losing the support of the people. Ending political criminality is not just a party’s responsibility, it is crucial for a democratic transition.

Govt must be bold with reforms

World Bank’s new assessment report should be taken seriously

The World Bank, in its latest assessment report, has warned that political volatility and global trade challenges may derail Bangladesh’s reform agenda and hinder its recovery from the ongoing economic slowdown. In June, the bank approved a \$500 million development credit for Bangladesh under certain conditions and pledged an additional \$500 million, tied to the interim government’s commitment to fast-track key reforms ahead of the upcoming general election. However, the country is already grappling with serious challenges due to the imposition of a steep 35 percent tariff on Bangladeshi goods entering the US market from August 1. In fact, Bangladesh ranks among the hardest-hit nations in the latest round of US trade measures, which include duties ranging from 25 to 40 percent. The situation is deeply concerning and requires well-thought-out strategies for recovery.

Bangladesh’s economy is already under serious pressure due to declining investments and reduced demand from international markets. Citing the “trade tensions between major economies and further escalation of tariff rates,” the World Bank has estimated that a 5 percentage point decline in exports could shave 1.3 percentage points off real GDP growth and deplete the country’s foreign reserves by \$1.7 billion. Real GDP growth fell to 3.97 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2025, down from 4.22 percent the year before—the slowest in over a decade. Private sector credit growth also dropped significantly, reaching just 6.8 percent in February 2025, the lowest rate in 30 years. Despite current challenges, the World Bank projects that GDP growth could rise to 4.9 percent in FY26 and 5.7 percent in FY27, provided political stability improves and investment rebounds.

Bangladesh must also take strong steps to bring inflation under control. Between July 2024 and April 2025, inflation rose to an average of 10.3 percent, driven by supply chain disruptions, high energy costs, a weakening taka, and the lingering effects of major floods and political unrest—among other factors, according to the World Bank. However, inflation eased to 8.48 percent in June, marking its lowest level in nearly three years. The World Bank predicts a further decline in the coming years, assuming robust domestic consumption and more stable global prices.

Since taking office, the interim government has undertaken various key economic reforms to improve transparency and governance. Bangladesh Bank has introduced stricter rules for banks, requiring disclosure of real ownership, tighter controls on insider lending, and better tracking of bad loans. A major ordinance passed in May separates tax policy formulation from tax administration to reduce political interference and boost revenue. While public investment management has also come under reform, the government is further expected to ensure full audit coverage of public revenues. The successful implementation of these reforms, as well as ensuring political stability, are crucial for steering the country towards a robust economic recovery.

Lessons from the Israel-Iran war for Bangladesh



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What’s going on between Iran and Israel isn’t just another Middle Eastern conflict that we can watch from afar and think it doesn’t concern us. Because it does. Not directly, not yet. But the way the West spins it, the tools they use to shift regimes, and the internal vulnerabilities that make such regime shifts possible—all of that is a warning wrapped in a real-time geopolitical lesson.

Iran’s problem isn’t just Israel. The war has laid bare something deeper: an internal brittleness. And that’s what we need to look at. If your home is divided, if your agencies don’t speak to each other, if data leaks like a broken tap, then no foreign policy in the world can save you. This is where Bangladesh stands at a crossroads. Not because we’re next in line for a war, but because we’re vulnerable in a different, quieter, more dangerous way.

In *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, Trita Parsi makes it painfully clear how regime vulnerability often begins from within. Iran didn’t lose key commanders because its borders were breached. It lost them because its systems were. As Parsi notes, “internal competition among security agencies and lack of coherent oversight” allowed foreign actors to manipulate and assassinate with almost surgical precision. The West didn’t need to invade—they walked in through Iran’s own back doors.

This is something we in Bangladesh need to take seriously. We often speak of “foreign interference”, but when you get right down to it, the most dangerous enemy is the one within. Intelligence silos, political infighting, divided civil-military relations, are the kinds of gaps that get exploited. And that’s the real takeaway: before we even think about foreign policy, we need to clean house.

Let’s not pretend the West isn’t still playing its old games. But they’ve updated their software, so to speak. It’s no longer about boots on the ground—it’s about hearts and minds, hashtags and headlines. William Blum’s classic *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* gives a deep dive into the mechanisms of regime change, from Guatemala to Libya. The methods shift, but the pattern remains: identify division, fuel dissent, apply pressure, then step back and let it burn.

What makes this even more



Crowds gather in Tehran on June 28, 2025, for the funeral procession of Iranian military commanders, nuclear scientists and others killed in Israeli strikes.

PHOTO: REUTERS

dangerous now is that with social media, surveillance capitalism, and hyper-connected systems, it’s easier than ever to destabilise a country without ever firing a shot. Blum documents how often “human rights” or “democracy promotion” are used as soft fronts for deeper strategic goals. The script is predictable: paint the regime as corrupt, amplify internal conflict, freeze their access to global systems, and watch the legitimacy crumble from the inside.

Bangladesh is not exempt. We are already experiencing soft pressures—from conditional loans to global labour narratives to digital data regulation. This is not paranoia; this is historical pattern recognition.

If there’s one thing Iran lacked, besides internal unity, it was a clear, codified doctrine that linked its civilian institutions, military, and intelligence in a fluid, responsive way. And Bangladesh? We’re in an even worse spot. We have pieces—a few national strategies, a security wing here, an IT ministry there—but no integrated doctrine that acts as the spine of national defence and strategic projection.

So, here’s a rough sketch of what that doctrine could look like. Call it the National Cohesion and Strategic

Intelligence Doctrine (NCSID). At its core, it would weave together four key sectors—intelligence, strategic communication, digital sovereignty, and civil-military integration.

Intelligence synchronisation bureau: This would act as a coordination hub linking military intelligence, border security, digital surveillance, and political intelligence.

This isn’t about turning Bangladesh into a surveillance state. It’s about developing a smart, flexible framework that ensures we aren’t caught napping while others draw up the map of our future.

Bangladesh needs unity, not just as a slogan but as an operating principle. In *Killing Hope*, Blum describes how external players consistently succeed

We must never again allow freedom to be lost



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

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As we celebrate the first anniversary of the July uprising, we must remember the spirit and the sacrifice that led to this historic event. To strengthen our newfound freedom and to solidify our onward march, we must remain ever vigilant and nip in the bud any attempt to insinuate a family-based dynasty, once and for all.

The nation is now bracing for some interesting developments in the nation-building process, one that was derailed during the last two decades. Our march towards democracy has been repeatedly thwarted by our elected representatives, most notably in 1974-75, 2005-06, and following the 2014 elections. In Bangladesh, elections bring up good memories and some bad ones. Our history books need to remind the new generation that after we gained independence, only four of Bangladesh’s 12 elections have been considered to be “free and fair”. The rest have frequently been mired in violence, protests, and allegations of vote rigging.

Is the country ready for elections, and another trial with an elected government? Social media is awash with appeals to the interim

government (IG) and especially to Prof Yunus to stay longer. Thus wrote Prof Adil Khan of the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, in “Bangladesh: Then and Now” (*South Asia Journal*, May 7, 2025). Prof Khan is cautious, though, and adds that this view emanates from “the personal accounts of people who report that these days they encounter fewer hassles to get jobs such as those relating to the issuance of passports, land registration works, etc, done, which until recently were unthinkable.”

I have also heard that the younger generation is disengaged from the political process. The results of a national survey conducted by SANEM earlier in May this year were published last week. SANEM Executive Director Selim Raihan said that this survey aimed to capture the perspectives of young people aged 15-35 and came to the conclusion that 83 percent of the youth show no interest in politics.

Our thought leaders need to ask: why this disinterest? It is also tempting to ask: can we not ask the IG to stay longer? Have we lost faith in the current crop of political leaders

and the political system?

In this context, I read with interest an op-ed published in this newspaper written by Bobby Hajjaj. He alluded to a mood of disenchantment, a summer of discontent, and painted a picture of doom and gloom. His disillusionment is probably triggered by the ongoing round of discussions on the various consensus-building efforts and the electoral process.

However, there is no reason to be disheartened by the “slow” progress of reforms and the jockeying for power. We have achieved some important goals. To mention a few: “The mass upheaval toppled the (Hasina) regime and untangled Bangladesh from the shackles of an external entity’s hegemonic control of the country,” as Adil Khan wrote. The efforts of the IG have placed a number of interesting ideas on the table: a term limit on the prime minister’s position, the role of the caretaker government, proportional representation in parliament, and the creation of an appointments commission for constitutional/statutory bodies.

We can see the optimism among the intellectuals. In an interview aired on the BBC on July 9, Professor Mushtaq Khan of SOAS, University of London, who is in Bangladesh now, unequivocally expressed his sense of relief at the progress achieved in the last year in the realms of politics, economics, and press freedom. However, when asked to comment on a BBC documentary which aired a verified recording where the former prime minister can be heard

ordering the police to shoot at young demonstrators on the street, Khan urged the IG to work on the criminal case as “a warning for the future that such acts cannot happen with impunity.”

A puzzle that remains unsolved is why, even in this day and age, rulers use force to resolve any differences, either with their own citizens or with their neighbours. Why did the ruling party resort to killings, arrests, and torture to cling to power? In a paper entitled, “Might Unmakes Right: The Catastrophic Collapse of Norms Against the Use of Force”, Yale Law School Professors Oona A Hathaway and Scott J Shapiro (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2025) conclude that often those wielding power feel that might is right and they can justify any use of force by bending the rule of law.

The nation must take a vow never again to allow the tragedy that befell us during last July and August. The “never again” creed signifies a moral obligation to learn from past tragedies, particularly the Holocaust and other genocides, and to actively work towards preventing similar atrocities and defending human dignity in the future.

At this juncture, the IG just needs to complete the reforms and ensure free and fair elections. The new PM has to keep the candle of freedom and reforms alight, and promise to fight tooth and nail to never let the culture of corruption that bedevilled the last few decades even raise its head.