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Will there be no end to mob violence?

Nine beaten to death in first 10 days of August

To have to return to the discussion on mob violence week after week feels like a Sisyphean exercise by now, an unlikely fate given the promise of the July uprising to make a break from past authoritarian practices. This is a grim testament to the state's continued failure to enforce the rule of law. Given the rate at which mob incidents are occurring, it is hard to say whether law enforcement has totally lost control of the streets or is simply not enough to contain a multidimensional crime like this.

That said, any failure to prevent mob violence is primarily a law enforcement failure. And of late, this failure has been on a frightening display. The first 10 days of August alone reportedly saw at least 13 incidents of mobbeating, leaving nine people dead. Since January 2025, the death toll from mob attacks stands at 87, according to the rights platform Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) puts the number even higher, at 111. Even on August 11, an unidentified man was killed after an attempted mugging in Tongi, Gazipur. But the killings of Rupalal Das (40) and Pradip Das (35) in Rangpur's Taraganj upazila on August 9 stand out as a particularly chilling example.

According to a report, around 9pm that day, Rupalal and Pradip were on their way to the former's home in a van when a few locals stopped them on suspicion of van theft and, joined by more people later, beat them to death. Even though police arrived at the scene while both men were still alive, they allegedly fled "out of fear" of the mob, only returning an hour later accompanied by army personnel. But it was too late then. The question is, why would the police be afraid or reluctant to deal with mobs head-on?

In a recent interview, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul offered a hint: that the force that once opposed the July uprising finds it difficult to confront mobs often instigated by factions claiming to represent that uprising. This may be the case to some extent, but the blame for the failure to take effective measures must be shared by the government. We also must acknowledge the role of political actors behind mob formation. Incidentally, in the Rangpur case, there were three incidents of theft and robbery as well as a murder in just eight days prior to the August 9 incident—all within a three-kilometre radius of where it occurred. This reportedly caused anger and fear among locals who began to organise night-time patrols. Rupalal and Pradip were simply victims of their paranoia. But had locals seen effective law enforcement before, perhaps their reactions would have been different.

We must put an end to such desperation. As per a recent survey, 80 percent of people are worried about mob violence. They want to see effective steps both to control unruly mobs and punish everyday crimes that create scopes for desperation or exploitation in the first place. Equally important is overhauling our justice system to restore public trust in it. The truth is, without comprehensive and coordinated measures from all stakeholders, including political parties, this menace cannot be stopped.

Fisherwomen's rights must be honoured

Mindset change, effective policymaking needed for due recognition

A recent study on the fishing communities has brought to light a painful reality: that fisherwomen still face deep-rooted bias and discrimination. The study has found that 90 percent of fisherwomen in Bangladesh are victims of gendered bias as their work is often disregarded as "less important" compared to men's. Experts have pointed to the patriarchal mindset that still prevails in society, including within our policymaking mechanisms, as the root cause of this situation. As such, giving all their due recognition requires a reset in the prevailing attitude.

Of the fisherwomen surveyed, as many as 83 percent have not yet received their National Fisherfolk ID cards, which are essential to access government aid programmes. Without the ID, they are excluded from social safety nets, cooperative membership, and leases on state-owned water bodies, thus limiting their chances of gaining economic independence. Also, unregistered fisherwomen cannot access low-interest loans through cooperatives, which means when they need funds, they must turn to informal lenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest, placing these women under a huge debt burden.

As experts have pointed out, there is an inherent bias against female participation in fishing labour that keeps women invisible while unjustifiably favouring male fisherfolk, even though they often perform the same work. Rather than being acknowledged as fully fledged fishers, they are labelled as mere "assistants." Lack of formal recognition also means fisherwomen's needs remain ignored in policymaking. The study has also highlighted health-related challenges that fisherwomen face due to exposure to saline water, which is worsened by the impact of climate change. Lack of proper access to clean water and hygiene products is also a cause for concern. What's worse, local clinics often dismiss women's symptoms when they try to access healthcare services.

This state of affairs must change. Giving fisherwomen their due recognition is of utmost importance if we want to see the country's fishing community rise above poverty. For that, we need a gender-sensitive social outlook as well as policymaking, where fisherwomen's labour, economic independence, health, and well-being are considered equally valuable as those of fishermen. As a first step in that direction, an easy, transparent registration process must be put in place so that fisherwomen can obtain their IDs without hassle. This should be followed by access to healthcare services and affordable credit, so they don't have to turn to informal lenders for funds. Above all, we must do away with the mindset that women's labour is less valuable than men's.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Aztec empire falls

On this day in 1521, Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés captured Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) after a 93-day siege, thereby ending the Aztec empire and winning Mexico for the crown of Spain.



Journalism is still fighting for its voice



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ZILLUR RAHMAN

Following the mass uprising of 2024, many in Bangladesh thought that a fresh dawn would emerge over the nation's long troubled media landscape. The overthrow of an oppressive regime provided a glimpse of hope for increased press freedom, accountability, and an end to years of political and legal persecution of journalists.

Instead, one year after that momentous occasion, Bangladeshi media is still under political, institutional and psychological pressure.

Over 250 cases have been brought against journalists nationwide in the last 12 months alone. While some of these examples seem to be intentional attempts to strangle critical reporting, others are the result of straightforward social media posts. There is no denying the trend: journalists who challenge authority continue to suffer significant consequences.

It may be argued that journalists can be protected from unfair prosecution and protracted harassment, either politically motivated or contrived, by the recently adopted Section 173A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1898. The new clause allows for the discharge of an accused during investigation if a high ranking police officer supervising the probe asks for an interim investigation report, and it reveals insufficient evidence against the accused. The question, however, remains whether this mechanism will be employed selectively or impartially.

In addition to legal consequences, the profession was recently rocked by the horrific killing of journalist Asaduzzaman Tuhin while on duty on August 7. The incident served as a sober reminder that speaking the truth can be deadly. The day before, another journalist named Anwar Hossain came under brutal attack while trying to report on extortion at a CNG-run auto-rickshaw stand in Gazipur. These instances are not unique; they are part of an increasing trend of violence and intimidation aimed at stifling the media. The profession as a whole receives a terrifying message: be quiet or suffer the repercussions.

Even the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO), 2025, which replaced the stringent laws such as the Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018 and the Cyber Security Act (CSA), 2023, contains

problematic provisions. Though the interim administration abolished some contentious sections of the DSA and CSA from the CSO, Section 42 allows the application of repressive tools previously used to harass and prosecute journalists. It states that, unless otherwise specified, provisions from the ICT Act of 2006, the Evidence Act of 1872, and the CrPC will still apply.

Similar to its predecessors, the CSO includes ambiguously worded provisions like "public confusion," "threats to national security," and "anti-state acts." Without definitions,



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

these concepts are easy to abuse and misinterpret. Such wording has historically made it possible to carry out extensive crackdowns on civil liberties, journalism, and opposition.

Furthermore, a complicated web of corporate domination, editorial compromise, and political influence has silenced media in Bangladesh for years. Once a thriving pillar of democratic accountability, investigative journalism has virtually vanished. There is little space for journalistic independence because many prominent media outlets function at the whim of their owners' political and commercial interests.

There has not been any organised institutional reform since the

government shift. The Journalists' Protection Ordinance, 2025 and the National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025, proposed by the Media Reform Commission, are two potentially promising measures that have been put on hold in bureaucratic limbo. Implementation of the "one house, one media" policy—prohibiting individuals or organisations from holding numerous media outlets—which is an admirable concept proposed by the commission, remains elusive.

Even the law that established the Bangladesh Press Council is filled with control-oriented clauses. The council risks becoming another tool of governmental supervision rather than a platform for journalist protection if its legal mandate is not entirely revised.

The structural flaws in journalist unions and media organisations are at the core of the media crisis. There are still significant political differences among many professional journalist associations, with some factions leaning

reporting. Reporters self-censor because they fear legal issues or professional retaliation. Sensitive stories are put away. Whistleblowers choose to not hear anything. Risk assessments tend to overshadow investigative reports.

A national framework for self-regulation is desperately needed. Adopting an internal editorial code of conduct, grievance redressal mechanism, anti-harassment policy, and straightforward complaint resolution process should be mandatory for all media outlets. This needs to be true for both public accountability and internal ethics. Furthermore, a transparent, independent process should be used to handle grievance or defamation claims against media outlets made by the public, political actors, or public officials. An unbiased, non-partisan media ombudsman organisation can investigate such allegations.

In the end, media reform in Bangladesh is a matter of institutional

bravery, political determination, and democratic maturity rather than merely being a legal or administrative matter. Reforms run the risk of becoming cosmetic if the top leadership is not committed. Furthermore, change will not materialise if journalists do not stand together.

Ownership of the media is another issue. It is said that political allegiance determines the allocation of new broadcast licences. Media outlets are often run to serve the vested interests of their owners, many of whom are deeply embedded in the corporate or political elite. Any departure from "approved" tales may result in regulatory harassment, licencing obstacles, or tax audits.

In newsrooms, this poisonous atmosphere often deters truthful

offers a chance to rethink media freedom in Bangladesh. But time is running short. Every delay erodes public trust, silences more journalists, and buries more truths. Bangladesh must have a free, secure, and independent press if democracy is to be more than just elections and voting booths. Our democracy will continue to be dangerously unfinished until that time.

Why is the ICJ silent about the gender aspect of climate justice?



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FARAH KABIR

On July 23, 2025, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a landmark advisory opinion on states' obligations related to climate change, a long-awaited milestone in the global push for climate justice. However, the opinion falls short in addressing crucial justice dimensions, particularly from a feminist perspective.

The ICJ addressed two key questions: what legal obligations states hold concerning climate change, and what consequences arise from failing those obligations, especially for vulnerable populations and future generations. The court confirmed that these obligations stem both from climate treaties and customary international law, human rights law, and general principles of international law.

Substantively, the court affirmed that all states must act to prevent "significant harm" to the environment and to human rights threatened by climate change. This includes a duty of due diligence to regulate emissions and a binding obligation to cooperate globally. Crucially, the court elevated the 1.5-degree-Celsius target of Paris Agreement from an aspirational goal to a legally relevant benchmark, meaning the countries' climate pledges may

now be judged against it in legal terms.

The opinion underscored that inaction violates core human rights: the rights to life, health, food, water, and a healthy environment. It emphasised that states could bear international responsibility for failing to act in accordance with scientific evidence and well-established legal norms. This pressurises countries to enhance their next Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and scale up financial and technical support for developing countries, based on the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

The ICJ's recognition that climate-vulnerable nations like Bangladesh and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) can retain legal personality even if rising seas physically submerge them is groundbreaking. It enhances their legal standing in climate negotiations and opens the door to potential reparation claims in case of climate inaction by states or corporations.

However, the ICJ's opinion stops short of addressing one of the most persistent blind spots in global climate governance: the gendered dimensions of climate justice.

From a feminist lens, the opinion

remains overly abstract and state-centric, failing to recognise how intersecting vulnerabilities shape real-world experiences. Although it references "vulnerable groups," it does not disaggregate or meaningfully analyse how women, indigenous peoples, gender minorities, and those at the margins of poverty and displacement face disproportionate climate impacts.

Feminist legal scholars argue that this was a missed opportunity to incorporate gender-specific obligations into the climate governance framework. By not applying an intersectional approach, the opinion risks reinforcing structural inequalities rooted in patriarchal systems that govern access to resources, political voice, and burdens of unpaid labour. Women in the Global South, for instance, often serve as frontline defenders of the environment while being excluded from formal climate decision-making and finance. The ICJ's silence on this reinforces a justice framework that is procedural but not transformative.

Equally problematic is the court's omission of gender-responsive remedies. For instance, it does not specify how reparations in case of litigations should meet the distinct needs of women and marginalised communities. As a result, future remedial mechanisms may be gender-blind, failing to ensure access to climate-resilient infrastructure, relocation support, or climate finance tailored to the most affected.

The ICJ advisory can be contrasted with the 2024 advisory opinion by the

Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which explicitly linked climate harms to gender-based violence, land rights, and systemic disenfranchisement of women. This reflects deeper epistemic and representational gaps within international law. The ICJ's bench remains predominantly male and drawn from elite legal circles. While representation alone doesn't guarantee justice, diverse perspectives, particularly from the Global South and feminist legal traditions, are essential to developing jurisprudence that responds to the full complexity of climate injustice.

Still, all is not lost. Feminist activists and legal advocates can leverage the ICJ's affirmation of human rights and intergenerational equity to press for gender-sensitive laws and policies at national and regional levels. Courts around the world may cite the opinion when interpreting state obligations, and civil society can invoke it to demand inclusive governance, reparative finance, and gender-responsive climate budgeting. Feminist principles can be embedded into the architecture of mechanisms like the Loss and Damage Fund and the Green Climate Fund at forums like the COP negotiations.

Whether ICJ's opinion leads to a more just climate order will depend on how civil society, legal practitioners, and policymakers push its boundaries. Without centring those most impacted by climate breakdown, the law risks becoming a tool of legitimacy rather than liberation. Thus, the ask at national level is, Bangladesh should adopt a climate justice legislation that is gender-sensitive and transformational.