

An unnecessary, excessive reaction

Case of a rickshaw puller assaulted and arrested on August 15 raises concerns

We are shocked by the harsh treatment meted out to Azizur, a rickshaw puller, simply for deciding to pay tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15. Not only was he beaten by a mob, he was also arrested by the police and then sent to jail by a Dhaka court in an attempted murder case linked to the July uprising.

The absurdity of the whole situation is beyond belief. Instead of arresting those who assaulted a civilian, the police chose to arrest the victim. Worse, this poor rickshaw puller has been accused of involvement in the attempted murder of Ariful Islam, who was shot in the back on August 4, 2024 during the mass uprising. The idea that Azizur could be connected to this shooting is preposterous. It just shows how the July cases are being made controversial by randomly accusing individuals on flimsy or no grounds. How can justice for those killed during the uprising be ensured if such flawed cases continue to be filed, or people continue to be randomly implicated? Hundreds of murder cases have already been brought against people whose likelihood of involvement in such crimes is very slim.

For Azizur, it is tragic that he was punished first by a mob and then by the police for merely showing respect. When confronted by the mob, he reportedly said that he was just an ordinary citizen, not affiliated with any political party. As we know, the interim government banned all political activities by members of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations. The DMP commissioner later announced that members would face legal action if they attempted offences on August 15. But if placing flowers in memory of Bangabandhu is considered an “offence,” it clearly cannot justify an attempted murder charge. The arbitrariness of this excessive reaction is glaring.

It is also surprising that, despite security being deployed on Dhanmondi Road 32, the police allowed crowds to enter the area and did nothing when the mob attacked Azizur. During the former AL regime, police often remained inert while party goons violently “disciplined” those they considered opponents. We must never again allow the police to be politicised like this or to abandon their role as protectors of citizens’ rights.

We are, however, relieved that Azizur has been granted bail later, but this does not erase the physical and mental trauma he suffered. For this, police members and the magistrate who allowed this baseless case to be filed and sent him to jail should be held accountable. The case itself, with no factual basis, should also be withdrawn. The government must ensure that members of its legal apparatus do not abuse power or take actions that violate citizens’ fundamental rights.

Break the grip of ambulance syndicates

Death of infant in Shariatpur shows how disruptive they have become

We are shocked to learn of the death of a newborn baby in Shariatpur following what appears to be a deliberate obstruction by a syndicate controlling the operation of ambulances. In a country where there is no dedicated lane for ambulances, reports of patients dying in traffic jams are not uncommon, but when a patient dying in an ambulance even before the start of a journey, it is no longer an accident. It is criminal negligence and exploitation deserving of harsh punishment under the law.

According to media reports, the incident happened last Thursday when the newborn, suffering from breathing complications after birth, was being taken to Dhaka following doctors’ advice. The family had hired a Dhaka-bound ambulance, but before it could leave Shariatpur town, a group of men linked to the syndicate stopped the vehicle, snatched its keys, and demanded that the patient be transferred to a “local” ambulance charging higher fare. For about an hour or so, the desperate parents pleaded in vain. Ultimately, the baby died inside the ambulance.

This horrific chain of events is anything but isolated, even though their outcome is not always as tragic. Reportedly, Shariatpur’s ambulance services have long been held hostage by a group led by the civil surgeon’s chauffeur. The superintendent of Shariatpur Sadar Hospital, while talking to this daily, claimed that the ambulance fare for a trip to Dhaka is fixed at Tk 4,000, and anyone charging higher would face disciplinary measures. But syndicate-controlled ambulances routinely charge Tk 6,000-8,000, citing extra “toll fees,” despite exemptions granted at highways and even on Padma Bridge. According to a patient, if families try to hire ambulances from other districts at lower costs, they face harassment, delay, and even forced cancellations.

Unfortunately, ambulance syndicates are not unique to Shariatpur. They are common across the country, especially around large government hospitals. These groups include hospital staff, local political actors, and businessmen who either own ambulances or control their operations. Patients are often forced into their chosen vehicles, while “non-local” ambulances are either threatened, or blocked, or extorted. Thus, a vital emergency service has been turned into an illegal enterprise preying on people at their most vulnerable. The influence of these syndicates has been further evident in the aftermath of Thursday’s tragedy, as ambulance services at Shariatpur Sadar Hospital have sharply dwindled amid heightened scrutiny, leaving patients at further risk.

We urge the authorities to take stern measures against those responsible for the Shariatpur tragedy. At the same time, the government must break the grip of ambulance syndicates nationwide. There should be a clear national policy for ambulance services with strict fare regulations and effective monitoring to protect patients’ rights. No one must die or suffer under such circumstances.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Women win the right to vote in US

On this day in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified after Tennessee, by just one vote, became the 36th state to approve it, capping the 72-year fight to win women the right to vote in the United States.

Bangladesh’s economic performance has been unique post-uprising

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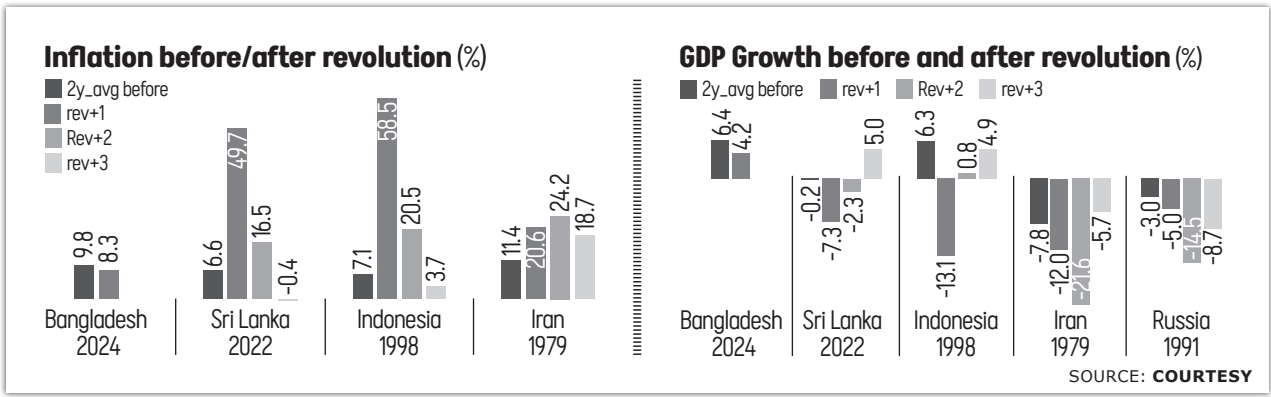
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Last year, after the violent change in power through the mass uprising, when the interim government assumed the responsibility of salvaging the economy from the brink of total collapse, the task to bring it back on track seemed almost impossible. As the true state of the economy emerged from reports of various commissions, people came to know the real depth of destruction that the economy suffered during the previous regime. The unchecked spiral of inflation, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, persistent large trade deficits, gross financial irregularities leading to a near collapse of the banking system, and deeply corrupted governance that destroyed almost all institutions, among others, were identified as the main challenges for the interim government. To stop the freefall of the economy and bring it back on course, we had to take some bold



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR



steps. Monetary and fiscal policies were tightened, stricter austerity measures were put in place, corrective measures were taken to restore discipline in the financial sector, and maximum efforts were employed to fight against corruption.

Major steps under the bold reform and recovery programmes included a detailed asset quality review, structural reform guidelines for ensuring discipline in the financial sector, initiating a process of recovery of the assets stolen from the financial system, and ensuring sufficient liquidity in the banking system. To strengthen fiscal governance, the government employed best efforts to enhance revenue

tide and overcome the seemingly impossible task. Recent figures and macroeconomic indicators available now tell the story.

Almost every country in the world that underwent a violent change of regime experienced output declines and a rise in inflation immediately afterwards. This has been true, for example, in the case of Sri Lanka recently, also in Indonesia when the Soeharto regime fell, in Iran during the early 1980s, and in Russia during the early 1990s. In Indonesia, poverty rate jumped from around 15 percent to around 33 percent in one year. In Sri Lanka, around 26 percent of people lived in poverty in 2023, a year after

But this did not happen in Bangladesh, where rather inflation fell and GDP growth remained in the positive territory.

This remarkable macroeconomic resilience, supported by our government’s policies, is being reflected in growing investor confidence. For example, Dhaka Stock Exchange’s (DSEX) rally in July, surging by 12.5 percent, ranked third among major global market performers, behind only Vietnam’s VN30 (+13.93 percent) and Thailand’s SET (+12.54 percent). The index soared 605 points to close at 5,443, the highest level in nine and a half months.

The right policies taken by the

Is humanity disintegrating, or is violence simply more visible?



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This video keeps replaying in my head: a school field in Taraganj, Rangpur; two men hauled onto a van; a crowd forms; phone flashlights stab the night; cheers rise as kicks and punches fall. Police blow a whistle, then melt away. Someone yells, “Push down, push down,” as the van is toppled onto the bodies. Two lives snuffed out amidst frenzy. Public execution dressed up as “mob justice.” This clip ricocheted across social media in Bangladesh like a dare: look, then keep scrolling.

So, is humanity disintegrating? Are we becoming more desensitised to such violence? Or has it always been this way, only now the atrocity appears on our feed during breakfast? The uncomfortable answer is both simple and messy: the baseline of human violence has fallen over centuries, yet we are living through noisy spikes and watching them in high definition. Homicide data, collected over the decades, shows staggering declines from medieval times to today; it is hard to fathom how violent the past actually was. But “decline” does not mean “extinction,” and progress is jagged, not linear.

In 2021, an estimated 458,000 people were killed in homicides worldwide. Africa bore the highest number of victims; the US had the



FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

highest rate. And war? The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reports a record 61 active state-based conflicts, and 11 of these reached the level of war, with nearly 160,000 people killed in organised violence. Last year was the fourth most violent since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Ukraine remained the deadliest, with about 76,000 battle-related deaths, while Israel’s offensive in Gaza and its war against Hezbollah in Lebanon accounted for roughly 26,000 deaths.

If the macro picture is mixed,

the micro experience is intimate and relentless. We witness violence now, over and over, through a screen we cannot easily put down. Psychologists have long warned that repeated exposure to violent media can desensitise viewers; results vary on whether it makes people more aggressive, but the numbing pattern is real. Pew’s 2025 survey finds teens increasingly believe social media

magnifying glass.

Bangladesh’s recent spike in mob violence is not just “ancient cruelty” resurfacing; it is digitally choreographed. The Taraganj video shows the crowd filming as they strike, performing for an imagined audience beyond the field. Social media does not just document the violence; it scripts it.

So no, perhaps humanity is not uniformly disintegrating. Rights, courts, and social norms have, over the long run, reduced the everyday lethality. But that framework crumbles where institutions are weak and where bystanders outsource conscience to the crowd. The modern twist is visibility. Lynchings once required a town square; now the town square fits in your palm. When the feed becomes the forum and the verdict arrives before the facts, “justice” is whatever the loudest chant decides. Meanwhile, the rest of us become voyeurs – horrified, slightly numbed, and permanently online.

What to do with that despair? Hold two truths at once: violence has fallen over centuries, but right now, it is brutally bad where it counts. Data does not cancel grief; it cautions us against fatalism. Treat social media platforms as engineered environments, not inevitabilities to endure. Slow virality, throttle rumours, punish incitement, protect due process. And maybe, just maybe, stop sharing the gore.

Most of all, choose the opposite of the crowd. Shouting “enough” is unfashionable and sometimes dangerous, but it is the only way the long arc continues bending our way. History suggests we can be better. That video begs us to prove it. Offline, in the hard place, when it counts.