

Banning Hasina’s words risks strengthening her legacy of fear



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When George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm*, he surely did not know that his allegory would fit Bangladesh so perfectly. But the story of animals who topple one master only to discover their new rulers are no different, captures our political cycles with painful clarity. The slogans change, the faces change, but the instinct for control, particularly control of speech, remains stubbornly the same.

The interim government’s recent warning to the media against broadcasting or publicising Sheikh Hasina’s speeches is the latest episode in this cycle. To the casual reader, it looks like an administrative step in line with court directives. But for anyone who has lived through the past decade or so, it feels like an old play staged with new actors. Before, it was Tarique Rahman whose words were deemed too dangerous for the public ear. Today it is Sheikh Hasina. The justification shifts, but the script remains unchanged.

The case for the latest prohibition may seem convincing. For over 15 years, Hasina ruled Bangladesh with an iron fist, reducing parliament to a one-party theatre, weaponising the judiciary, and turning law enforcement into her party’s private militia. Her hands remain stained with the blood

of thousands of innocent citizens. By every meaningful measure, she was an autocrat. Here lies the irony of the speech ban: a leader who for years silenced critical voices by using force now finds herself treated the same way.

It is poetic justice, yes. But it is also a dangerous precedent. The question here is not whether Hasina deserves to be silenced, but whether a government should resort to silencing at all. If the interim authorities want to remind the people of her sins, the way is not to ban her words but to let them flow. The more she speaks, the more her arrogance resurfaces, and the more her irrelevance is exposed. Every speech she delivers is less a threat to the nation than a reminder of the darkness she imposed.

Contrast this with the situation of Tarique Rahman, once treated as a ghost voice under the Awami League government. In 2015, the court ordered his speeches off limits because he was a “fugitive”—the same label is now used against Hasina. For nearly a decade, his voice was muted across television channels and newspapers. But this silencing only magnified his significance to his followers. The interim government must recognise this paradox. If his words could eventually return to the public domain without catastrophe, so



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

could Hasina’s. Banning them only elevates her, cloaking her in forbidden importance, and worse, it casts the interim administration in the same mould as the autocrat it replaced.

The claim that Hasina’s speeches amount to “hate speech” holds little water. Tyrants often reveal themselves best in their own words. Let her speak, and let the people remember the arrogance with which she dismissed student protests, the disdain with which she treated the opposition, and the authoritarian logic with which she justified enforced disappearances and mass arrests. A government that truly believes in democracy does not fear the words of an ousted

autocrat. If Hasina’s era was indeed rejected by the people, her speeches will only reinforce why they chose to rise against her.

Silencing her, on the other hand, risks creating martyrdom. Already her statements are circulating on YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp. History also teaches us that silencing or censorship never works. Both Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman were subjected to attempts at political erasure at different times in our history, but they deepened their symbolic weight eventually. Far from burying their legacies, silence transformed them into larger-than-life figures. The same mistake now risks giving

Hasina a stature she does not deserve. Censorship can turn ordinary speeches into forbidden fruit, to be consumed with greater appetite. It also signals insecurity, which the interim government cannot afford to project.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh never seems to learn these lessons. Every regime inherits the tools of suppression from the last and convinces itself that they are necessary for survival. Surveillance, censorship, and repressive policies are rarely dismantled. The Awami League silenced Tarique Rahman; now the interim government silences Sheikh Hasina. Tomorrow, another regime will silence someone else. With each repetition, the principle of free speech—so vital for democracy—risks eroding further.

To break this cycle, the interim government must dare to trust the people. Let all voices—whether popular or poisonous—be heard. Citizens, too, have a big role to play in this, as they must learn to confront lies or provocations without yielding to authoritarian tendencies. The strength of a democracy lies not in silencing words but in confronting them openly, dissecting them, and defeating them with reason. Hasina’s autocracy thrived because she feared dissent and muzzled it. The interim government must not follow her path, however tempting it may seem.

In the end, the choice is simple. Bangladesh can continue down the Orwellian path, where each new ruler repeats the sins of the last, and the barn wall is rewritten to justify fresh contradictions. Or it can break the cycle by allowing speeches, even by the people we don’t like, to circulate freely. Our decision will determine the kind of democracy we want for ourselves.

Humanity is losing the war against an impossible predator



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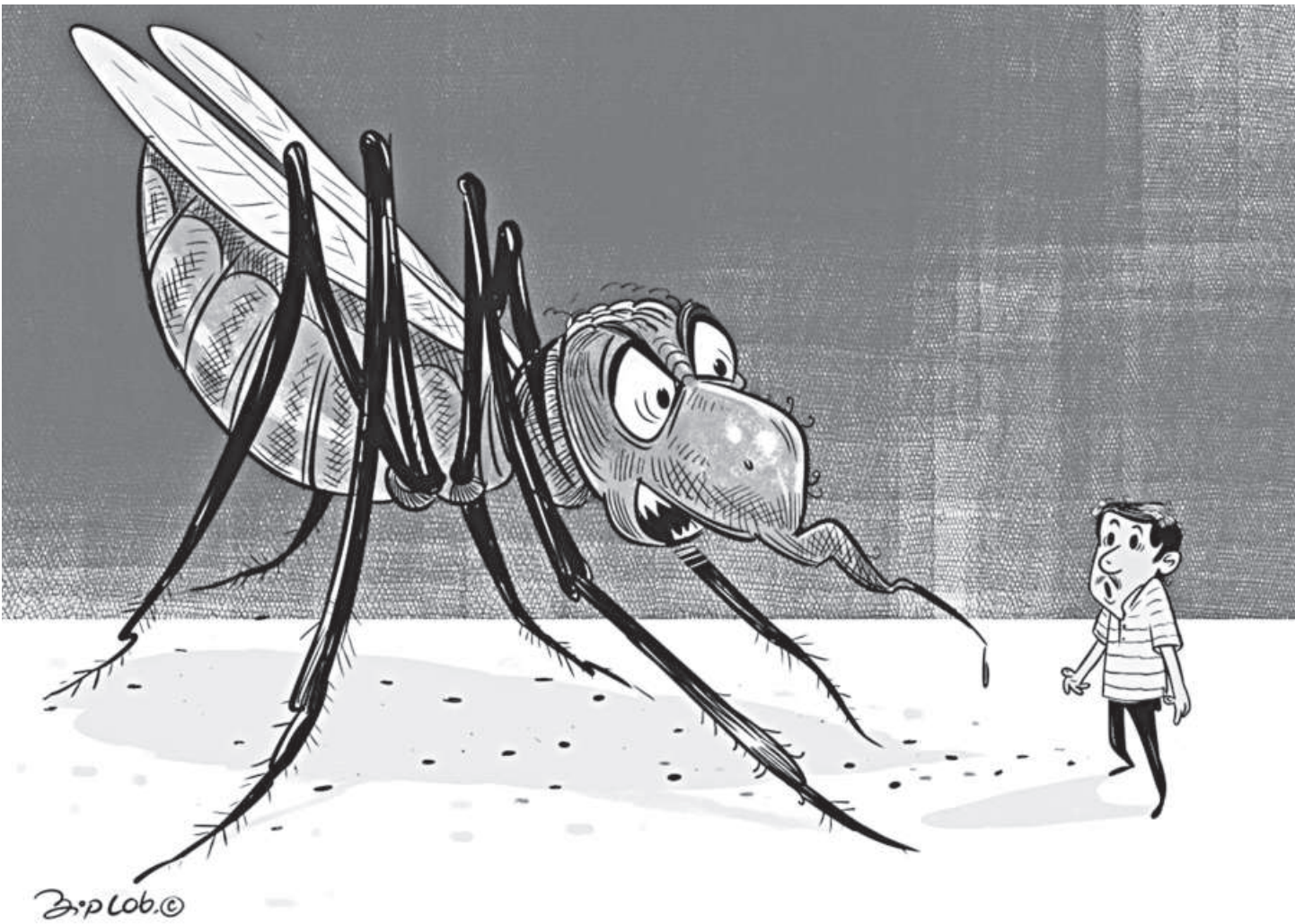
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From Beowulf’s Grendel to Camus’ plague-stricken Oran, literature has long grappled with terrors that haunt humanity—monsters, contagion, invisible adversaries that test the limits of survival. Yet, no antagonist has been so enduring, so real, and yet so underestimated as the mosquito.

Even as science races to outpace the mosquito’s insidious advance, a quieter failure shadows our response—not one of technology, but of imagination. Despite being the deadliest predator in human history, the mosquito remains strikingly underrepresented in both classical and modern literature. When it does appear—whether in Aesop’s fable *The Lion and the Mosquito*, Virgil’s *Culex*, or Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*—it is cast as a petty irritant, a moral aside, never a true antagonist. Even *Thoreau*, in *Walden*, admired its persistence, likening its hum to “Homer’s requiem,” yet still relegated it to background noise.

This absence is telling. Unlike lions or metaphysical plagues, the mosquito kills without spectacle—its victims slip away in silence, far from poetry and pageantry. That silence has enabled a deeper neglect, blinding us to a predator of mythic scale and slow, unrelenting lethality. Analogous to the warning etched on the rear-view mirror of the very transport we are driving, the mosquito’s presence looms closer than we think—trailing us, gaining ground, and poised to prey.

In *The Mosquito: A Human History of Our Deadliest Predator*, Timothy C Winegard chronicles how this tiny insect has reshaped human destiny—from decimating Alexander



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FILE ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

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the Great’s army to undermining colonial forces in the American South, influencing the outcomes of wars and the rise and fall of empires. Winegard estimates that mosquitoes have been responsible for the deaths of some 52 billion people, nearly half of all humans who have ever lived. This insect has stalked humanity across time and space, asserting

its power not with sound (sans buzzing) and fury, nor with a bang or a whimper, but with veritable torrents of fever and blood. And yet, in the third decade of the 21st century, it is not we who are winning the war; but the mosquito, deftly keeping us on a slippery slope, turning each step forward into one back.

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In 2024, South Asia witnessed its worst dengue epidemic in history. Bangladesh and India recorded thousands of deaths as hospitals overflowed. Latin America faced

Texas. West Nile virus and Eastern equine encephalitis are expanding, and local malaria cases have returned in Florida and Texas—the first in two decades. Bangladesh, ground zero for the 2024 dengue crisis, offers a stark preview of what happens when mosquito prowl meets state paralysis: hospitals overflow, science lags, and death becomes routine.

The mosquito thrives on inequality. It does not discriminate in whom it bites, but it kills disproportionately—affecting the poor, the displaced, and those without access to clean water, sanitation, or healthcare. Winegard captures this paradox: mosquitoes are democratic biters but undemocratic killers. And yet, the world’s attention remains fleeting. Funding for mosquito-borne disease prevention spikes during crises and vanishes in the aftermath. The structural

percent, while malaria incidence also declined significantly. Ghana and Sierra Leone are testing AI-enabled drones that identify breeding sites and deliver larvicides with precision.

Asia is scaling smart surveillance systems. Singapore’s Dragonfly robot scans traps and uses deep learning to identify species with 82 percent accuracy in real-time. India’s Smart Mosquito Surveillance System (SMoSS) relays mosquito density data to municipal teams for intervention. Microsoft’s project Premonition combines robotic traps, drones, and DNA sequencing to detect mosquito-borne pathogens.

Genetic strategies have opened new fronts. In Brazil, genetically modified *Aedes aegypti* males are released to mate with wild females, producing non-viable offspring and suppressing local populations by up to 96

percent. Wolbachia-based methods, which use bacteria to block virus transmission, have cut dengue cases by over 75 percent in Indonesia and Australia.

Other tactics include the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT), where irradiated males are released en masse to reduce breeding. Supported by the IAEA and FAO, SIT is being tested from Réunion Island to Valencia. China’s Photon Matrix laser prototype uses LIDAR to detect and kill mosquitoes mid-air—30 per second—without harming other insects. Spatial repellents like SC Johnson’s Mosquito Shield™, approved by the EPA, are proving effective in humanitarian settings.

Yet, these innovations risk becoming tools of the privileged. High costs, infrastructure demands, and patent restrictions limit their use in low-income regions. Bed nets remain the primary defence in many areas—unevenly distributed and often compromised by resistance.

This is not just a scientific challenge. It is a political and moral reckoning. A coordinated response must integrate classical tools, such as source reduction, repellents, education, with high-tech innovations. Surveillance must inform health dashboards. Gene technologies must be ecologically reviewed, transparently governed, and locally approved.

Above all, interventions must address the inequality mosquitoes exploit—poverty, overcrowding, poor infrastructure. The mosquito adapts quickly. So must we, through inclusive innovation and sustained investment.

Winegard ends his book with a sobering truth: we may never eliminate mosquitoes. But we can alter the terms of coexistence. We must treat them not as nuisances, but as existential threats, on par with pandemics and climate change.

The hum in the dark is not just an insect’s wingbeat. It is a historical echo and a future warning. If we fail to act with foresight and equity, the battle will not end in a dramatic crescendo, but in slow attrition: more childhood deaths, more failed pregnancies, more disrupted lives, and deeper global divisions. The mosquito did not merely accompany human history—it stalked it. To ignore its power is folly. To confront it requires not just scientific progress, but moral clarity and political will. In the end, humanity may not lose to a nuclear bomb or artificial superintelligence, but to an impossible predator we still underestimate: the mosquito.

In Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, dreams are undone by forces just beyond reach—misunderstood, underestimated, and ultimately lethal. The mosquito belongs to a similar register of fatal irony. It is small, almost laughable in scale, yet it kills with impunity, thriving on our negligence and inequality. As we confront this ancient adversary, we must shed our illusions—of technological supremacy, of immunity by wealth, of victory by indifference. The story of *Of Mosquitoes and Men* is not over yet. But unless we confront its protagonist with urgency, imagination, and justice, it may end as Steinbeck’s tale does: with a quiet devastation we saw coming all along, but still failed to stop.