

Who will answer for Habib's death?

Stop systemic deprivation of workers, ensure their rights

We are outraged by the killing of a knitting worker at the Uttara Export Processing Zone (EPZ) of Nilphamari on Tuesday. Reportedly, workers of Evergreen Products Factory (BD) Ltd, a wig factory in the EPZ, were demanding termination benefits for several days after the factory authorities had laid off 51. Amid their protest, the authorities suddenly announced a two-day holiday, without paying workers' salaries or termination benefits. Enraged, the latter blocked the nearby Nilphamari-Saidpur highway. As police, BGB, and army personnel were deployed to disperse them, a clash broke out, and at one point, law enforcers opened fire, injuring Habib and several others. However, Habib was reportedly not an employee of the factory in question; he worked at another factory. According to his elder brother, after finishing his night shift, he was leaving the EPZ when he was shot dead. That an innocent life was lost in a clash over rights is deeply unsettling, raising fresh concerns about how law enforcement agencies handle such situations.

Over the years, our workers, particularly in the apparel sector, have had to repeatedly resort to protests just to secure the most basic of rights. They often take to the streets over unpaid wages as many factories do not pay on time. During national festivals such as the two Eids, protests over unpaid dues have become a common sight. Sudden lay-offs have also become quite common. Unfortunately, when workers protest against such deprivation and arbitrary lay-offs, they almost always face heavy-handed responses from factory owners and law enforcement agencies. In the case of Evergreen Products Factory (BD) Ltd, the owners used the same tactic. The question is, why would they lay off workers without notice, and that too without providing them termination benefits? This is a clear violation of labour rights.

After the interim government came to power, it established the Labour Reform Commission with a pledge to uphold workers' rights and welfare, and to eliminate the discrimination they systemically face. What has happened to those promises? Have we been able to guarantee minimum wage and other fundamental rights of our workers? The chairman of the labour reform commission recently voiced his frustration over the lack of progress in implementing its proposals. This is quite disheartening.

We urge the government to properly investigate the incident at Nilphamari EPZ and hold to account those responsible for killing Habib and injuring others. The owners of Evergreen Products Factory (BD) Ltd must also be held accountable for pushing the workers to a situation that ultimately led to casualties. In the new Bangladesh that was promised following the July uprising, in which workers had played a vital role, they must not face such violations and discrimination anymore.

A crucial step to restore judicial power

HC ruling raises hope of separation of powers but challenges remain

It is heartening to learn of a High Court ruling that the Supreme Court—not the president—will henceforth have the authority over the transfer, posting and discipline of lower court judges. According to a report, the court has scrapped Article 116 of the constitution, which had vested these powers in the president, as well as provisions of the Fourth and Fifteenth Amendments that upheld presidential control. The ruling thus restores the original 1972 provision of Article 116 that empowered the SC to oversee these activities. The court also ordered the government to establish a separate judicial secretariat. These changes, we must say, are quite significant and mark a crucial step towards ensuring judicial independence.

By restoring the highest court's authority over lower court judges and magistrates, the ruling reaffirms the principle of separation of powers, which is essential for democracy. If implemented in letter and spirit, it can go a long way towards protecting the judiciary from political interference and strengthening checks and balances among various state organs. But the challenge, as always, lies in effective execution, without which the promise of this verdict may remain unfulfilled.

The court ruling followed a writ petition filed by several lawyers, and appears to be a nod to the relevant reform initiatives proposed by the Judiciary Reform Commission in early February. In its 352-page report, the commission, besides recommending the formation of a judicial secretariat and constitutional amendments to limit presidential powers in judicial appointments, had also suggested the creation of permanent High Court benches in all divisional cities, the formation of a permanent attorney service and an independent investigation agency, and enacting laws to ensure the transparent appointment of judges through a Supreme Court Judge Appointment Commission. Some of these proposals have already gained political consensus during discussions with the National Consensus Commission, including the decentralisation of HC benches and reforming the presidential clemency system.

The need for such reforms is compelling. Over the years, we have seen how deeply executive dominance has eroded the judiciary's independence, compromised its functions, and undermined public trust, resulting in a culture of impunity and all sorts of macabre developments including mob violence. So ongoing reform initiatives, again if implemented in letter and spirit, may significantly reverse this trend and even extend judicial services to those previously underserved. One would, however, expect this process to unfold through an organised effort by the higher authorities, rather than through reactive measures such as verdicts on individual petitions. This point is further validated by the state's reported stance on appealing the HC ruling at the Appellate Division, suggesting a conflict of difference that should not have existed.

Clearly, only with coordinated measures, a clear reform implementation timeline, and unwavering political will can the promise of judicial independence be fully realised.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Kodak camera patented

On this day in 1888, inventor George Eastman secured a US patent for his roll-film Kodak camera and trademarked "Kodak," revolutionising photography. The lightweight, pre-loaded box camera made photography accessible to amateurs, and within a year, over 5,000 were sold.



Evolving Myanmar situation calls for a new Rohingya policy



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This August marked eight years since the 2017 Rohingya influx into Bangladesh from the Arakan region. During this time, power changed hands in Bangladesh; many conferences were held both at home and abroad, but the Rohingya refugees could not be sent back. Instead, their arrival has continued. This raises the question: should Bangladesh rethink its Rohingya policy and strategy?

A chain of false hopes

From time to time, both during the previous government and after the mass uprising, false hope arose about Rohingya repatriation. In April 2023, a tripartite meeting was held in Kunming between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar. At the time, the Sheikh Hasina government said that by the end of that year, the Naypyidaw government would take back around 7,000 Rohingya on a trial basis. That never happened.

Earlier in November 2017, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an agreement on the same issue. Bangladesh provided a list of eight lakh people who crossed the border, and Myanmar verified and gave clearance to an insignificant number of them. But not a single person was taken back.

In April this year, a key policymaker in Bangladesh announced that Myanmar had identified 180,000 Rohingya as eligible for repatriation, with an additional 70,000 awaiting final verification. This announcement sparked a wave of optimism, especially among members of a newly formed pro-government political party who created quite a stir on Facebook. The reality of what transpired in the ensuing months is known to all.

However, this year's conferences on the Rohingya issue—one held in Cox's Bazar in August, and the two upcoming ones in New York and Doha, in September and December, respectively—are creating another wave of optimism. They have had at least two positive outcomes. First, the Rohingya issue is regaining renewed international attention, at least to some extent. Second, some additional funds might become available for running the camps.

The fact is, amid the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, attention to the suffering of these displaced Muslims from Arakan has fallen sharply. These conferences will surely bring that back to the fore. Meanwhile, the sharp drop in camp funding is a major concern for Bangladesh. Through three consecutive conferences, Bangladesh will be able to inform the international community about the worsening financial crisis. That too is important.

But whether these conferences will pave the way for repatriation remains uncertain because the Rohingya's return depends on internal and

international conditions. The situation in Arakan today does not suggest the possibility of a safe return or peaceful living for the Rohingya.

Right now, Rohingya armed groups are fighting with Arakan Army (AA) guerrillas. Earlier, some Rohingya were seen fighting for Myanmar's armed forces against the AA. These incidents will only deepen the hostility between the Rakhine people and Arakan Muslims.

Many say the Rohingya can only return if they are granted ethnic recognition and citizenship rights. They are not included in Myanmar's list of ethnic groups. As a result, they are excluded from the country's citizenship laws. Even if the Myanmar government resolves these issues, the Rohingya's return to Arakan will not be easy until the AA and the local Rakhine community accept them.



Even if the Myanmar government recognises the Rohingya as an ethnic community and gives them citizenship, their return to Arakan will not be easy until the AA and the local Rakhine community accept them. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Since the situation in Arakan has changed drastically between 2017 and 2025, the Myanmar government alone cannot ensure their safe return. The situation on the ground suggests changing currents. Even if the AA agrees to take the Rohingya back in exchange for some material benefits from Bangladesh, unless the local Rakhine community is ready for a peaceful coexistence, the Rohingya will be forced to flee again. That has been happening repeatedly since 1978-79.

Against such a backdrop, it is worth considering how far the current fighting between the Buddhist Rakhine guerrillas and Rohingya helps improve the social environment across Arakan. If Rohingya leaders think they can secure dignity in Arakan through war, then Bangladesh must prepare for a different situation. Bangladesh may

face hostility from the AA in that case. The Rohingya issue will become more complex, and the AA may act in such a way or seek such allies that would be harmful to Bangladesh. Perhaps, Myanmar's central government is also hoping for such a situation that would help cover up many of its past crimes.

A completely new reality on the southern border

Unfortunately, because of the Rohingya issue, Dhaka has not been able to move forward with other bilateral issues of economic interest with Sitwe or Naypyidaw. Yet, it was urgent to increase social and economic ties in all these directions. Instead of improving relations with neighbours, our foreign ministry has always been more focused on Europe and America. However, in reality, our security depends most on those next to us.

For instance, the AA now controls 14 of Arakan's 17 townships (equivalent to Bangladesh's districts). The remaining three are under siege and may fall at any time. For our security and economic interests, this situation demands serious attention. Soon, the AA may take full control of all 30,000 to 35,000 square kilometres of Arakan. This new reality is forcing Bangladesh to rethink past considerations of the southern border.

would be a step forward. Since returning Rohingya from Bangladesh to northern Arakan would actually help the junta in their fight against the Rakhines, they might agree. They could even grant citizenship rights without recognising Rohingya as an ethnic group. If that happens, Bangladesh could reasonably pressure the AA too.

China and India's closeness a new factor

Bangladesh needs China's cooperation on the Arakan issue. Beijing has a strong influence over both the AA and the Naypyidaw government. But whether Bangladesh will seek China's help in this matter, or succeed in convincing them, depends on the next elected government. China will likely wait until Bangladesh's elections. Still, the interim government might raise the issue with China during discussions on the Teesta project.

At the same time, China and India are currently enjoying warmer ties, which may be a favourable condition for Bangladesh. India also has major investments in Arakan, like China. So, both countries want stability there. They do not want Bangladesh's relations with the AA to turn sour. Bangladesh's diplomatic challenge is to get China and India to influence both Myanmar's military and the AA.

The hidden cost of cashless convenience



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Once upon a time, budgeting was a conscious ritual. We carried cash, set limits before a trip or shopping spree, and carefully balanced our spending to ensure we did not exceed our means. Today, that discipline is quietly eroding—not because we earn more, but because we spend differently. The rise of digital payments has made money feel intangible and, with that, our sense of control has weakened.

From mobile banking apps to cards and e-wallets, we now have effortless access to our funds anytime, anywhere. This ease has made impulsive spending part of everyday life. Dining out, spontaneous shopping, and quick weekend trips no longer require planning. The tap of a finger is enough. But this new convenience carries hidden consequences.

Nobel laureate Richard Thaler's theory of mental accounting offers a

useful lens that can help us understand our changing spending habits in the digital age. People tend to assign money to specific mental categories, such as "salary," "bonus," or "vacation fund," and treat each category differently. While this can help organise finances, it often leads to irrational choices. For instance, a festival bonus may feel like "extra" money and be spent freely, even while the same person holds low-interest savings and racks up high-interest debt. These decisions become even more distorted when using digital money. Unlike cash, which we physically see and feel, e-payments reduce the "pain of paying," making spending almost effortless. Without the physical cues of cash leaving our hands, we lose the awareness that once kept our budgets in check. As Thaler's work in behavioural economics reveals, such biases can override

rational decision-making, causing us to overspend and ultimately lose control of our financial well-being.

Another worrying trend is the demonstration effect. When we see others spending, we feel pressured to do the same. Whether it is friends dining out, colleagues going on expensive trips, or influencers flaunting their latest buys, we subconsciously follow. This social mimicry disrupts rational decision-making and leads to overspending, even among those who cannot really afford it. This irrational behaviour is further amplified by the use of digital money, as it removes the immediate concern of managing liquid cash, making spending feel effortless and less consequential.

But the implications go beyond personal finance. On a broader scale, these habits influence the economy itself. As e-money accelerates, the velocity of money—that is, how quickly money moves through the economy—increases. People are spending more frequently, pushing up demand. When demand outpaces supply, prices rise, ultimately contributing to inflation. This is not just theoretical; it is a real challenge facing many economies today.

Digital wallets, BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) schemes, and credit lines through apps further reinforce this illusion

of affordability, pushing individuals deeper into unnecessary expenditure. We therefore need to find a way out. We must revisit the forgotten art of budgeting in this digital era, striking a delicate balance. We must decide for ourselves where digital money enhances our lives and where it silently harms them. For essential transactions such as bills, groceries, transport, and medical expenses, digital payments offer safety and convenience. But for leisure spending, such as shopping or eating out, it may help to switch to cash or at least pre-allocate a fixed digital spending limit. This creates a psychological boundary and reinstates some of the lost discipline.

Not all money should be equally accessible at all times. Setting personal rules such as "I will only use cash for dining" or "I will disable one-click purchases on weekends" can reintroduce mindfulness into our financial lives. Financial literacy is not just about knowing how to save or invest. In today's digital age, it also means knowing when not to swipe, click, or tap. If we do not draw the line ourselves, technology will not do it for us. And while e-money may be invisible, its consequences, from broken personal budgets to rising national inflation, are very real.