What does 'good history' look like?

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It is impossible not to ask this question, given the current state of *history* as a public discourse in Bangladesh. But what is "good history" in the first place? What does the qualifying adjective *good* imply? The question, ahem, might be understood less as an inquiry than as a provocation—a prompt for indulging in a bit of soul-searching about such perennially indeterminate concepts as nationhood and national identity, and about their intersection with history.

Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the history of the country's liberation war has been the site of competing political claims, denials, suppressions, glorifications, centralisations, and partisan orthodoxies. In the wake of the August 2024 uprising, a new generation of spontaneous efforts has emerged to revisit the "history" of Bangladesh's Liberation War, ranging from reassessments of the roles of different historical figures to renewed debates over the political origins of the war itself. What has unfolded since independence—especially before and after August 2024—is a systematic erosion of history as a subject of critical inquiry, one grounded in evidence and pluralism.

Given our civil society's failure to cultivate a robust public understanding of history, one driven by fact-based research and reasoning rather than personal beliefs or social-media-driven partisanship, it is crucial to articulate what "good history" is or could be in the sociopolitical context of Bangladesh. It would not be illogical to assume that the question—*what does good history look like?*—should be a worthwhile public conversation on history as a key driver of human capital, citizenship, and nation-building.

When, last year, Badruddin Umar stated, albeit in a sensationalising tone, that 80-90 percent of the "official" history of Bangladesh's Liberation War is false, he must have had some thoughts on what "not false" history might be instead. I wish he were alive today to articulate his thoughts on the question of good history.

No historian should be able to answer the question on good history without a degree of trepidation, ambivalence, and uncertainty. Yet a serious historian, or anyone who believes in history as a reasonable way of understanding the past, would at least pose a counterquestion: How does one define "good history"? And that, in turn, gives rise to another difficult question: What is history in the first place?

Let's imagine some hypothetical scenarios. If we asked Aristotle what a good history of Bangladesh's Liberation War would look like, he might suggest examining the war objectively and sincerely, narrating what actually happened on the ground and what caused those events. He would recommend distinguishing between history and poetry or philosophy, which, in his view, are primarily concerned with what could or should happen.

German philosopher Hegel would answer the question differently. He would present history of the war as the Bangalee nation's progressive journey toward reason and freedom, a piece in the puzzle of macro-history's self-rationalising movement toward the highest consciousness. If we posed the same question to another German, Leopold von Ranke, he would advise us to write the war's history based on empirical sources. The task of the historian, he would argue, is not to judge, but to understand how things happened by examining hard evidence, while avoiding philosophy and speculation.

How would Rabindranath Tagore define the history of the Liberation War? If Hegel's history represented the forward march of reason—of which Bangladesh's Liberation War was one part, as was the French Revolution—then Tagore's history of the war would be the Bangalee nation's journey towards spiritual realisation, a humanist and moral unity that transcended nationalist and *swadeshi* narratives. If we asked Mahatma Gandhi the same question, he would likely encourage us to write the history of the war from the perspective of the masses (*aamjonota*) and the *Muktijoddhas* with their armed struggles, rather than from the grand narratives of heroic leaders.

Thus, the question—what is history?—depends on whom you ask. The diversity of

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answers itself indicates history's power to tell human stories from myriad angles. There is, indeed, a history of histories.

Today, within liberal academic circles, the fair-minded historian tends to view history as a broad disciplinary practice in which the "grand old histories" of civilisational scale—meta-narratives, causation, teleological progress, hagiography, and "Western civilisation"—have been extensively challenged by critical histories of "other" peoples and their experiences, social history, cultural history, economic history, gender history, histories of technology, and, more importantly, an empathetic and justice-oriented search for historical evidence that has been traditionally ignored or silenced in favour of the triumphant narratives of victors.

Contemporary critical historians tend to avoid either-or dichotomies, linear narratives, and false nation-centrism. Instead, they reveal how peoples, regions, nations, and cultures have encountered one another through broad networks of trade, human mobility, cultural exchange, technology transfer, and what the American sociologist and historian Immanuel Wallerstein called world-systems—a unitary economic system that binds all nation-states of the world.

The interaction of macro- and micro-histories produces a wide range of perspectives on any historical event. The global and the national interweave in infinite varieties to give rise to histories of multiple dimensions, scales, and philosophies. From this angle, any contemplation of "good" histories must be a dynamic and open-ended process of thought. How, then, can we begin to situate 1971 within the broad arc of "good" histories?

Muyeedul Hasan's *Muldhara '71* (1986), M. R. Akhtar Mukul's *Ami Bijoy Dekhechi* (1993), Archer Blood's *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh* (2002), Nurul Islam's *Making of a Nation* (2003), and Gary Bass's *The Blood Telegram* (2013), among others, are all valuable sources for constructing an intellectually nuanced history of Bangladesh's Liberation War.

Whether a particular approach to history is acceptable or not is less important than understanding history as a vigorous inquiry that avoids the traps of deterministic certainties, linear causalities, hagiographic exuberance, and sweeping generalisation. Unfortunately, critical, unafraid-to-tell-the-whole-truth histories have faced severe backlash over the last few decades, particularly in the United States. What has been pejoratively described as "woke" histories—those that bring to the fore the experiences of marginalised peoples and uncomfortable truths—have become political targets. In these uncertain times, many nations and their political leaders continue to weaponise history to advance partisan or nationalistic agendas.

The current US administration, for instance, seeks to create a "beautiful" American history—one unblemished by the histories of slavery, racial and gender discrimination, the traumatic struggles for civil and human rights, and genocide. In this discriminatory view, history must serve as an uplifting project that reinforces political domination. Similarly, anti-immigrant politicians in Europe frequently invoke the historical and racial unity of European civilisation, now allegedly threatened by the "invasion" of incompatible communities.

In Bangladesh, the recent "reset button" proclamation has unwittingly promoted a history of erasure in the name of building a brand-new future. The reset argument seems to imply: *What is the point of getting stuck in the past?*—as if the past has nothing to do with the ways the future takes shape.

We are indeed passing through a crisis of conscience. We find ourselves increasingly unsettled by the militarisation of history—its ability to divide and make people confrontational, to invent new nationalist myths and alternative triumphs, to provoke radical religiosity, and to cultivate a convenient culture of amnesia in which the past becomes a playfield for selective remembrance. Can a public conversation on "good history" serve as an antidote to this growing culture of weaponised history?

Is there a "good" history that we can champion, one that keeps us committed to the pursuit of knowledge as a fundamental means of understanding our existence, or to public interests greater than ourselves, our parties, and our self-comforting, social-media-shaped beliefs? Ultimately, the question about a "good" history should be understood less as a question than as an aspiration, one essential to a democratic society.

BTRC's new policy undermines the affordable internet goal

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After assuming office as Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) chairman, Maj Gen (retd) Md Emdad ul Bari, known for his practice of listening to all stakeholders before making any decision, expressed his intention to lower internet prices, stating that they should be brought down to the cost of water to increase digital penetration.

He took multiple steps, from simplifying the complex licensing process and lowering bandwidth costs to ultimately reducing broadband prices.

Though many users alleged they were still paying the previous prices and some broadband providers claimed they had recently doubled bandwidth while keeping prices unchanged, the initiative demonstrated a commitment to affordability.

However, in the proposed guidelines, which are part of the broader Telecommunication Network and Licensing Policy 2025, the internet regulator seems to take a complete U-turn.

The introduction of new taxation provisions by the BTRC to different licensing layers could increase costs for broadband service providers, potentially pushing up prices for end users and undermining the chairman's previous efforts.

On the other hand, the new "Regulatory and Licensing Guidelines for Fixed Telecom Service Providers" could have a significant impact on broadband internet providers, particularly small and mid-sized operators already operating with thin profit margins.

The most contentious aspect of the guideline is the mandatory 5.5 percent annual revenue sharing with the regulator, in addition to a one percent contribution to the Social Obligation Fund (SOF). Earlier, BTRC used to collect a SOF fee only from top ISPs. In the proposal, the charge applies to all, including small and medium providers.

While these provisions mirror those imposed on mobile operators, the two industries operate under vastly different market dynamics.

Unlike mobile operators, broadband providers cannot adjust their internet prices freely, as the internet regulator has imposed a price cap for broadband internet.

This restriction prevents providers from offsetting the new financial burdens through pricing adjustments. It could also erode profitability, forcing many small internet service providers (ISPs) to scale back operations, delay infrastructure expansion, or even exit the market.

Investment in network upgrades and service quality could also take a serious hit, as providers may struggle to expand fibre coverage or adopt newer technologies like Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6) with reduced financial flexibility.

The cost pressure could also slow innovation in customer service and local content delivery networks, ultimately affecting user experience and internet speed.

The BTRC's new move appears rooted in its dual role as regulator and revenue-collector. The experts have long been arguing that BTRC is increasingly functioning more like the National Board of Revenue than a sector-enabler. The commission has shifted its focus from facilitating growth to imposing higher fees, revenue shares, and licensing burdens.

According to the World Bank's "Digital Progress and Trends Report 2023," Bangladesh remains behind its regional peers in overall internet usage, smartphone penetration, and connection speed, despite notable progress in affordability, digital transactions, and coverage expansion.

The report, published in March 2024, shows that only 39 out of every 100 people in Bangladesh use the internet—higher than Pakistan (36 percent) but lower than India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

In terms of speed, the World Bank cites International Telecommunication Union (ITU) data showing that Bangladesh's average mobile download speed is 16.1 Mbps, while fixed broadband average is 36 Mbps—both below the South Asian averages of 26.7 Mbps and 43 Mbps, respectively.

However, according to experts, Bangladesh performs relatively well in broadband affordability, as a single broadband connection costs only Tk 400–500 per month.

The BTRC's recent proposals could undermine this sole advantage of low broadband prices in Bangladesh, where broadband internet penetration stood at 8.24 percent as of September, 2025. Fixed broadband contributes more to economic output than mobile internet does because it provides stable, high-capacity and low-latency connectivity, essential for digital industries, cloud computing, e-commerce, and remote work.

While mobile internet expands access, fixed broadband drives productivity and innovation across sectors. According to a research finding, a 10 percent increase in broadband penetration can raise GDP per capita by 1–1.5 percent, and research across the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries shows that doubling broadband speed can increase GDP by 0.3 percent. If broadband becomes more expensive or less accessible, these potential economic gains could be reduced, limiting Bangladesh's ability to leverage digital infrastructure for sustainable growth.

According to the ICT use survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics published in August, only 48.6 percent of individuals in Bangladesh use the internet, but just nine percent use a computer in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2024-2025. This indicates that participation in computer-based activities, which generally rely on broadband connections and contribute more directly to economic output, is already very low. If fixed broadband becomes less accessible or slower, the potential for growth in sectors that depend on high-speed, reliable internet, including e-commerce, IT services, and digital entrepreneurship, could be negatively affected.

However, the financial burden does not stop at broadband providers' revenue-sharing and SOF contributions. The BTRC has also proposed higher taxes on the international broadband supply chain and increased licensing fees across different categories under the new guidelines. These measures could lead to higher internet prices for both broadband and mobile internet users, making access less affordable.

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The regulator should revert to its foundational role, such as promoting competition, safeguarding service quality and easing market entry rather than prioritising tax-like collections.

The fixed broadband sector in Bangladesh is already in a precarious state, partly due to the previous regime granting thousands of licenses without ensuring quality or capacity. If the BTRC seeks to streamline the sector through new levies, it risks burdening users and providers without addressing the root problems. A more effective approach would be to rationalise the number of licenses and cancel those held by operators who fail to maintain compliance or service standards.

For BTRC to function as a true sector regulator, it must prioritise improving service quality, fostering investment, and ensuring market efficiency rather than relying on fees and levies. Strategic innovation in licensing and enforcement would strengthen the broadband ecosystem without penalising consumers or responsible operators.

Jagannath University
Faculty of Life and Earth Sciences
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Department of Pharmacy
Admission Circular (Batch: 09P)
Spring 2026 (February-July)

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Completed application can be submitted to the office of Dean, Faculty of Life and Earth Sciences, Jagannath University. Or, the application fee (1000 taka and transfer charge 20 taka) can be sent to 01670117946 by bKash and then the full application set can be mailed to monir@pharm.jnu.ac.bd as the PDF file along with the bKash reference number.

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