

Goodbye to a firebrand—Sharif Osman Hadi

We demand justice for his murderer

The thousands of people who turned up at Shangshad Bhaban, for the state funeral of Sharif Osman Hadi, a co-founder and spokesperson of Inquilab Moncho and an independent candidate for Dhaka 8 in the upcoming national elections, speaks volumes of the extent of his influence and the depth of the grief he has left behind. An important figure of the student-led July uprising of 2024, he became prominent as a unique, fearless voice speaking for the ordinary people of Bangladesh. We mourn the loss of this young man, who vehemently spoke against authoritarianism and the corruption it produced. He was unapologetic about his views and communicated them with passion and candidness.

His importance has been aptly recognised by the chief adviser in his address to the nation and the announcement of a one-day state mourning on Saturday following his untimely death. The national flag was flown at half-mast at all government, semi-government, educational institutions and private buildings. Special prayers have been organised in all mosques across the country as well as other places of worship.

On December 12, Hadi suffered critical head injuries when assailants on a motorbike shot at him while he was travelling in a battery-operated rickshaw in Purana Paltan area. He was first taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, then to Evercare Hospital and later airlifted to Singapore on December 15 for advanced treatment. But despite all efforts, Hadi could not be saved leaving his child without a father and his wife a widow. Although suspects have been identified, they have not been apprehended yet.

Known for his fiery speeches and straightforward attitude, Hadi was also a private university teacher and a poet, greatly inspired by national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, next to whose grave he was laid to rest. He was unique in his simplicity and straightforwardness. His followers were beguiled by the warmth he extended to them and his genuine interest in listening to their struggles. He was a champion of youth and their aspirations.

While mourning his loss we must, as a nation, confront the painful questions about the safety of political actors and engagement, the protection of dissenting voices. The brazenness with which he was targeted and left with fatal injuries, is a severe blow to our democratic aspirations and in particular the security situation surrounding the upcoming elections. We demand that the government conduct the investigation of this murder with extreme rigour and fairness so that the assailants are brought to book and the conspiracy behind his killing is revealed.

For now, we express our sorrow and condolences to Hadi's loved ones and countless supporters. Rest in power, Hadi.

When waste becomes threat, not nuisance

Bangladesh's waste problem is a public health emergency

Bangladesh's waste crisis has long ceased to be a mere civic inconvenience; it has become a serious environmental and public health emergency. Across cities and towns, waste generation continues to outpace both the capacity and the commitment of authorities to manage it sustainably. That failure is laid bare in Thursday's front-page photograph of this daily: a vast mound of garbage dumped along the roadside at the entrance to Rangamati town. Local authorities admit that around 30 to 40 tonnes of waste from the town are discarded daily in this open space, sliding down hillsides and polluting nearby streams and ultimately Kaptai Lake.

Over the years, media reports have repeatedly shown how municipal and tourism-related waste is dumped on hill slopes and along lake banks, despite official assurances of proper disposal. During the monsoon, this waste contaminates vital water sources, triggering waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera, as confirmed by local health officials. Now, the gateway to one of the country's most scenic tourist destinations has become an indicator of administrative neglect.

Sadly, across the country, the dominant approach to handling waste remains dumping rather than treatment, with little attention paid to reduction, segregation, recycling or recovery. Dhaka, for instance, generates nearly 7,000 tonnes of waste every day and only about 37 percent of waste is collected regularly. The rest clogs drains, contaminates water bodies, burns in open air or accumulates in landfills already close to collapse. Besides, landfills such as Aminbazar and Matuail are dominated by mixed waste and lack proper leachate and gas management systems. Medical and industrial waste are frequently disposed of alongside household refuse, significantly increasing the risks of toxic exposure and disease. Despite spending around Tk 3,323 crore on waste management over the last seven years, hundreds of uncontrolled dumping sites continue to operate across the capital. Financial allocations, in the absence of systemic reform, have delivered little meaningful improvement. This situation does not stem from a lack of awareness, but from chronic deficiencies in planning, enforcement and political priority.

The way forward requires a decisive shift away from the linear "take-make-dump" model towards a circular and sustainable system. Waste reduction must be prioritised, segregation made mandatory, organic waste composted, recycling industries strengthened, and hazardous materials treated safely. Without urgent, coordinated and accountable action, waste will continue to degrade our landscapes and water bodies, while steadily eroding public trust in governance. Also, we cannot allow the scenic terrains and tourist sites of the country to drown in heaps of waste.

EDITORIAL

The press under fire, and the cost of mistaking destruction for change

A CLOSER LOOK



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TASNEEM TAYEB

The image of a burnt copy of *The Daily Star*, dated Victory Day, is difficult to shake off. It stays with you long after you scroll past it on your social media newsfeed—not because it is dramatic, but because of what it reveals.

Bangladesh was born through fire and grit. Liberation came through sacrifice, endurance, and an extraordinary capacity to resist injustice. Today, that same fire appears to be consuming us from within. What once signified defiance now risks becoming a force of self-destruction.

Ours is not a society unfamiliar with rage. Years of political repression, shrinking civic space, and the erosion of trust in public institutions have created an environment where frustration runs deep. In such circumstances, arson and vandalism can feel like acts of defiance—providing

the case in our country—this role played by the press becomes even more crucial. Undermining the press does not return power to the powerless; it concentrates power further in the hands of those already powerful.

The burning of *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo* buildings is particularly troubling because it goes beyond violence. Acts like these risk destroying years of journalistic documentation—records of a nation's history, political decisions, social struggles, and civil society debates that cannot simply be retrieved. When archives are lost, it is not a newspaper alone that suffers; society loses part of its collective memory.

The events of the early hours of December 19 should also force a reckoning with how public anger, particularly among the



The image of a burnt copy of *The Daily Star* is deeply unsettling and is difficult to shake off.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

momentary relief and a fleeting sense of power in a system that often feels tone deaf and unresponsive.

But we must understand, that sense of power is only illusory.

Destruction and vandalism have never dismantled unjust systems. They have only made it easier for those systems to tighten their grip on the people, on the society, on the same very systems, often in the name of control and so-called stability. When anger is channelled through violence and destruction, the result is not reform but regression—sometimes to conditions worse than those we sought to escape.

Unfortunately, the press is almost always among the first to bear the brunt of any form of anger from any quarter. Politicians uncomfortable with too much scrutiny, criminals and corrupt activities exposed by investigative journalism, powerful lobbyists threatened by transparency—all have, at different times, undermined and attacked the fourth estate. Increasingly, however, the press is also being targeted by the public itself, accused of perceived bias, complicity, or failure.

Criticism of the media is not only legitimate; it is necessary. No newsroom should be above scrutiny. But there is a thin line between critique and silencing. Crossing that line weakens democratic rights rather than strengthening them.

The press exists as the fourth estate precisely because it questions power, documents history, and preserves public memory. As a photojournalist colleague grieved not only the loss of his workplace, but the loss of thousands of images—fragments of our collective history—consumed by the fire, it underscored the irreplaceable role of the press in preserving public memory.

In contexts where other accountability mechanisms are weak or compromised—as is often

youth, is being directed. Young people in Bangladesh have shown indomitable courage, resilience, and a remarkable willingness to challenge entrenched power. That perseverance is necessary. But they must understand, anger—on its own—is not a political instrument for justice or democracy.

Violence against any institution—and especially those that serve as checks on power—risks entrenching the very conditions that generate the anger in the first place. It is worth asking whether such acts bring us any closer to accountability, or whether they simply leave us more exposed to the machinations of political systems that remain deeply flawed and corrupt.

The image of a Victory Day newspaper reduced to ash is deeply unsettling. Bangladesh's independence was not achieved through blood and fire alone, but through a commitment to justice, equal rights, and democratic values. Turning that legacy inward, against platforms that seek to question power and record the truth, is not resistance. It is a self-defeating act driven by recklessness.

The Daily Star building may have been burnt—my old workstation perhaps charred. But the values on which it was built have not been erased. Journalism without fear or favour does not reside in walls, computers, or printing presses. It lives in professional norms, institutional practices, and a shared belief that truth matters.

The press in Bangladesh has endured pressure, intimidation, and attacks before. And for sure, it will face them again. But it will also regroup and reemerge—because there is no other mechanism capable of even partially equalising power in a deeply unequal society, such as ours.

Fire can destroy buildings. It cannot build a progressive future. As for *The Daily Star*, we will come back: stronger, bolder, and more united than ever.



Losing Hadi is like losing a compass because his courage gave language to frustrations many of us were too scared to name.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Hadi's death will haunt us forever

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MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

In July 2024, we, the Gen-Z, stepped into the streets, frightened yet resolute, wounded yet unwilling to break, because we believed Bangladesh could be rewired around dignity. We believed that power could no longer be exercised through a gun or the shadow of intimidation. And we believed that violence would finally lose its legitimacy as a political language. Sharif Osman Hadi's death shattered that belief.

Hadi, a man whose integrity felt like an act of rebellion in itself, died from bullets in broad daylight. He was killed in full view of the nation he tried to uplift. He is now a martyr to Bangladesh, a country which was not ready to protect him. His death feels like a personal tragedy that should haunt us for the rest of our lives. I do not speak on behalf of his political community. But I speak as a Bangladeshi who recognises that the bullet that ended his life tore through the promise of July. We said never again, and yet here we are, as if July was a mere fever dream rather than a turning point. Hadi embodied that change, and he died in the most preventable and brutal way. If July was supposed to redraw the boundaries of the nation, then Hadi's death shows those boundaries have been violated in broad daylight.

Political violence is not random. It often sends a deliberate message. It tells you who is allowed to participate and who is meant to be silenced. It tells you which voices are considered inconvenient enough to eliminate. And more than that, it tells you that the fundamental promise of July—building a political environment grounded in accountability, justice, and moral courage—is already corroded. Those of us who believed in that promise are left asking ourselves uncomfortable questions. Did we overestimate our collective strength? Did we underestimate the forces that thrive on chaos and fear? Or did we fail to realise that revolutions do not end on the day the crowds disperse? The real fight begins only when systems try to reassert the old order.

Hadi's death sends a clear message: anyone who dares to imagine a politics built on courage, honesty, and moral clarity will be confronted with the oldest instrument of power in this region. Hadi spoke the truth with a steadiness that unsettled the corrupt. He terrified those who depend on intimidation to survive. And so they killed him. But if history teaches us anything, it is that a man can be killed, but his ideas cannot. Not when they grow roots in the collective conscience of many youths. Did we fail him? Because revolutions lose when

symbol of principle in a landscape where principles are often liabilities; he was brave and sincere. Losing someone like him is like losing a compass. It is because his courage gave language to frustrations many of us were too scared to name. Because he made us believe that maybe the future was not a myth; it was inching towards us.

This should haunt us forever. This death feels personal, national, generational, and foundational. And if we do not confront that fracture, if we do not let this loss change us, then we will lose far more—the future he died trying to build. And that is something we cannot afford to do.



Yesterday, thousands of people turned up at Shangshad Bhaban for the state funeral of Sharif Osman Hadi.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN