

Memory, museums, and the danger of forgetting



A CLOSER LOOK

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Recently, while rereading The Museum of Innocence, I was struck again by Orhan Pamuk’s insistence that memory does not disappear all at once. It fades quietly and slowly, fragment by fragment, often under the cover of necessary historical revisions. While Kundera helps us understand the weight expectations place on those in power, Pamuk, in his own poetic way, offers a gentler reminder that memory, too, demands care, or it begins to slip away. Sometimes it survives not because it is institutionally preserved, but because someone or a particular quarter insists on keeping it, object by object, story by story, even when the world around it moves on.

This thought has stayed with me, with a disquieting sense of concern and urgency as Bangladesh navigates its post-July political moment.

There is no denying that the July uprising represented a reawakening, perhaps even a rapture of sorts. It unsettled a long-standing political order and challenged a narrative monopoly that had solidified over time. For many, this felt overdue. For others, it was destabilising. Both reactions are anticipated and understandable. What deserves a closer look, however, is not the reawakening or rupture itself, but what seems to be unfolding in its aftermath: a gradual erasure of our shared public memory—our national legacy—projected as reckoning and correction.

While penning this concern, one must also admit, without nostalgia or selective amnesia, that Bangladesh’s political class has long treated our national history as a political instrument that can be moulded and presented to suit its cause, often with a Kundera-esque lightness. Regime after regime has rewritten, reordered, and reframed the past to meet their political agenda. History has shifted in school textbooks with each government. National days have been declared, scrapped, and reinstituted. Heroes have been lionised, debated, or replaced altogether, depending



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

on who held power at the time.

Each revision was justified as a correction of distortion; each, in turn, produced its own distortions. This pattern cuts across parties and decades. The danger now is not that history is being rewritten, which has happened before, but that the rewriting has become so frequent and so brazen that history itself begins to feel fragile, owned not by the nation but by whoever happens to be in power.

Yet something about the present moment

feels different, not only in intent, but also in pace: in how quickly it is being carried out without pausing to contemplate the consequences.

Selectively, monuments have been dismantled. Certain national days are being observed quietly; others are being blatantly ignored, including ones that mark the milestones through which the nation was shaped with blood and sacrifice. Language

correcting excess and suppressing facts.

What is emerging, particularly among some political actors, is a tendency to treat history with suspicion—valuable only if it can be detached from the immediate past regime, disposable if it cannot. In this framing, erasure passes as neutrality, and silence is justified as balance. This approach is not right.

Public memory is not merely about monuments or slogans. It is about continuity.

strewn with messy nostalgia; it is incomplete, and sometimes it can be very inconvenient. Bangladesh’s political actors, new and old, would do well to accept that discomfort rather than rush to “fix it.”

The urge to correct history after years of narrative monopoly by a specific quarter can be very tempting. But correction demands care. It requires polyphony and meaningful public discourse, agreement among historians and key stakeholders, correct documentation, a transparent procedure, and most importantly, a willingness to live with complexity. What it does not require is destruction driven by revenge, or the sidelining of milestones simply because they were previously overused.

There is also a generational cost to this mayhem that we rarely acknowledge.

Young Bangladeshis are growing up in a political environment where history seems easily negotiable. Textbooks change. Public symbols change. Heroes turn villains, and then reverse again, resembling Bakhtin’s carnivalesque—only stripped of irony, and made more grotesque. The danger is not that they will forget the past, but that they will stop believing that the past matters. When everything becomes political, nothing retains credibility. And when nothing feels stable, national identity loses its moral legacy.

Such conditions do not nurture critical thinkers. More often, they raise disengaged ones. A society that loses its shared memory becomes vulnerable to simpler myths and louder narratives. They become vulnerable to versions of history that are easier to accept than to examine. Over time, the space for nuance—the very space democratic politics requires—shrinks.

This is not inevitable. But it does require restraint.

Political transitions are always characterised by an eagerness to reshape the past in their own image. The challenge is to resist that temptation long enough to ask harder questions: what do we preserve even when it is inconvenient? What do we critique without erasing? How do we create spaces for facts, which are not necessarily comfortable for all parties, to coexist?

Bangladesh does not need a new history to replace an old one. It needs political restraint to live with a complicated one. If we fail at that, the danger is not that we will forget who we were, but that we will no longer recognise who we are becoming.

Venezuela attack and the geopolitics of oil control



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The US strike in Venezuela has triggered a crisis with potentially global consequences. Early on Saturday, strategic sites across Caracas, including military complexes, were reportedly targeted in what the United States described as a “large-scale operation.” The situation escalated when US President Donald Trump announced that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro had been captured during the strike. According to Washington, Maduro faces charges of narcotics trafficking, conspiracy to flood the US with cocaine, links to armed groups, and narco-terrorism. While the legality of this entire episode is highly questionable, there is little doubt that the detention of a sitting head of state through a military strike on a sovereign state constitutes an act of war.

At a press conference, Trump described the operation as a major success, saying the US would temporarily “run” Venezuela to manage what he called a “safe and responsible” transition. He stressed that the US would “be there to stay” until a leadership that truly serves the Venezuelan people is in place. Trump also said that major American oil companies would invest billions of dollars to rebuild Venezuela’s oil infrastructure.

International law, however, is clear about this forced intervention. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter forbids the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. Heads of state enjoy sovereign immunity and cannot be treated as military prizes. Following news of the attack, France and Brazil have rightly condemned it as a violation of international law. China called it “hegemonic,” and the UN Secretary-General warned that the attack set a dangerous precedent, while Mexico, Chile, South Africa, and the EU urged restraint. Russia



This grab taken on January 3, 2026, from UGC video footage shows smoke billowing over Caracas, Venezuela, after a series of explosions during a US military operation that led to the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

PHOTO SOURCE: AFP

Control over Venezuelan oil offers Washington something strategically priceless: insulation. US dominance in the Persian Gulf has long been vulnerable to disruptions. Confrontations with Iran—whether through war or sustained escalation—threaten shipping lanes,

refineries, and production facilities that underpin the global economy. Venezuela alters that equation. With heavy crude under US influence in the Western Hemisphere, disruptions in the Gulf become more manageable. Military pressure becomes easier to justify domestically and to sustain internationally.

Another, quieter layer is equally consequential: control over oil also means control over pricing, contracts, and currency. Influence over Venezuelan production reinforces the dollar’s central role in global energy markets. The petrodollar system, often declared moribund but remaining persistently resilient, would receive renewed reinforcement.

Seen this way, the Venezuela attack is no longer just a Latin American issue. It signals how economic pressure, political manoeuvring, and military action can fundamentally

alter the trajectory of a country and those associated with it. But history does not always cooperate with seemingly neat strategies. If the US becomes bogged down in Venezuela for long with hardening internal resistance, events may not unfold as planned. A prolonged crisis would

drain its political capital, stretch its military and economic resources, and weaken its influence elsewhere, particularly in the Middle East. Allies would hedge, rivals would test limits, and the world would once again ask a familiar question: how far can US power realistically stretch?

The echoes of Iraq are unavoidable here. Large-scale strikes in Caracas evoke Baghdad in 2003. The justification then was the presence of “weapons of mass destruction”; now, it is “narco-terrorism and criminal networks.” Different slogans, similar actions, each wrapped in moral urgency built on false or contested evidence. The irony is also stark for Donald Trump. Having risen to power condemning the Iraq invasion as a “big, fat mistake,” he now presides over an intervention that mirrors the same flawed logic: that force can deliver order without consequences.

For South Asia, this situation

demand attention. Energy security, strategic independence, and respect for international law are closely intertwined. But if a global power can seize a sitting president to control resources, no country is entirely safe. Most countries in South Asia depend on stable oil supplies from the Middle East, where the threat of disruption from hostile US Iran relations looms perpetually. A US-backed Venezuelan oil network could shift supply chains and prices, giving Washington indirect leverage over Asian economies. China, with significant investments in Venezuelan oil, also faces a major strategic risk. Its Belt and Road-linked energy projects could be disrupted if US-backed authorities restrict Chinese access or renegotiate contracts, affecting both financial returns and long-term influence in the region.

The broader strategic message here is unmistakable. If a superpower

can abduct a sitting president to secure energy leverage, Asia’s smaller states cannot assume immunity from coercive global politics. This underscores the need for diversified energy sources, regional energy diplomacy, and adherence to international law as a protective framework. For Bangladesh, heavy reliance on global oil supplies makes it particularly vulnerable. The country needs to diversify its energy sources, strengthen regional partnerships, and practise smart energy diplomacy to safeguard its interests, as any spike in oil prices or supply shock could hit the economy hard.

In the final analysis, what happens in Venezuela will not remain confined within its borders. It will shape how energy is controlled, how sovereignty is respected—or disregarded—and how far American power can be pushed before it bends or breaks.

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