

## An alarming uptick in brutal crimes

People's sense of insecurity must be alleviated

With only a few weeks left before the national elections, one of the most decisive factors potentially affecting voter turnout is people's sense of security. A spate of brutal killings in recent months has understandably heightened fear and uncertainty. Human rights defenders have expressed alarm over the sharp rise in violent crime and the government's failure to rein it in, questioning the state's capacity to ensure a credible electoral environment.

On December 31, businessman Khokon Chandra Das was hacked and set on fire by armed assailants in Shariatpur. On January 3, Alamgir Hossain, a BNP leader, was shot dead by miscreants in Jashore town. On January 5, Rana Pratap Bairagi, the owner of an ice factory, was shot dead in a village in Jashore, while Moni Chakraborty, a grocery shop owner, was hacked to death in Narsingdi the same day. A former Juba Dal leader, Jane Alam Sikder, was also shot dead in Chattogram's Raozan upazila that night. On January 6, Md Shahabuddin, a trader, was hacked to death in Dhaka's Kadamtali area. Overall, at least eight were reportedly killed in the first six days of January.

These murders mark a grim start to the New Year. Even more troubling is the relative ineffectiveness—and in some cases, reluctance—of law enforcement agencies to act decisively against miscreants. Data on the overall law and order situation also compound this concern. According to a Samakal report, 1,333 firearms belonging to the police and 27 belonging to prison authorities, stolen during the 2024 uprising, remain missing to this day. Of the hundreds of convicts who had escaped at the time, 710 are still at large, including individuals accused of heinous crimes such as murder. Meanwhile, the much-publicised "Operation Devil Hunt," under which around 27,229 individuals were arrested in two phases, has failed to reduce crime.

The same Samakal report, citing police sources, records that 197 people were killed by mobs in 2025, alongside 102 political murders. One could easily assume that a major enabler of the murders is the circulation of arms. These realities have cast a dark shadow over the February 12 election. Against this backdrop, the government's foremost responsibility must be to take proper measures to curb crime. This requires ensuring a non-partisan and effective role for security forces. Their drives must target actual criminals, and not involve indiscriminate crackdowns on individuals without reasonable suspicion. Investigations into the recent murders must be rigorous, and perpetrators brought to justice regardless of their ties to powerful groups.

There must also be renewed urgency in recovering the missing and illegally circulating arms. As the chief election commissioner has urged, law enforcement agencies must remain especially vigilant in protecting minority communities, who are often targeted during election periods. While ensuring security is primarily the state's duty, political parties must also act responsibly. All parties should ensure that their activists and workers refrain from violence and criminal behaviour. Their professed commitment to the spirit of July uprising and to democracy will be measured by their ability to avoid the toxic rivalries that have so often descended into violence.

## Improve the plight of Dayaganj-Jurain Road

Neglect and poor coordination have rendered it hazardous

The worsening condition of the Dayaganj-Jurain road, once a vital urban artery connecting Old Dhaka to the city's southern gateways, is concerning. Just four to five years ago, this stretch functioned as a busy two-way thoroughfare with a divider to facilitate smooth traffic flow. However, after Bangladesh Railway (BR) constructed a boundary wall along the rail line, the road has been effectively reduced to a narrow, damaged corridor that poses constant risks to commuters.

The impact of this ill-planned decision is evident along the entire route from Dayaganj Crossing to Jurain Railgate. Half of the road—the western portion—has remained abandoned for years, turning into a dumping ground for garbage, an informal parking zone for trucks and rickshaws, and even a site for makeshift shanties. The usable portion, meanwhile, is riddled with potholes, frequently waterlogged during rain, and forced to carry two-way traffic despite being too narrow. Accidents, especially involving rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, have become a regular occurrence here.

According to locals, if properly restored, the road could once again play an important role in easing traffic pressure. However, the apparent lack of coordination and accountability among the responsible authorities has contributed to its deplorable condition. Dhaka South City Corporation points to jurisdictional limitations and funding constraints, noting that the land belongs to the railway. A rail project was reportedly meant to renovate the entire road, but completed only some of the work before halting work. Now BR remains silent about the situation.

Our road transport sector has long been plagued by corruption, mismanagement, poor planning, and weak oversight. The situation of Dayaganj-Jurain Road is not unique. Across the country, many roads are built or rebuilt at great expense, only to be damaged within a few years due to the use of substandard materials and inadequate supervision. The failures are repetitive, and accountability is rare. This must change.

We urge the government, particularly Bangladesh Railway and Dhaka South City Corporation, to take immediate and coordinated action. A clear decision must be made on the future of this road—whether through proper redevelopment, redesign to ensure safety, or an alternative traffic solution. The Dayaganj-Jurain Road serves a significant portion of the city's population, and it is strategically important too. It cannot be left in the current state of chaos and neglect.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### El Chapo captured

On this day in 2016, Mexican criminal Joaquin Guzman (El Chapo), head of the Sinaloa drug cartel, was captured in Los Mochis after escaping prison some six months earlier; he was later extradited to the United States, where he was convicted of various crimes.

# EDITORIAL

## Is grievance politics clouding the future of Ganges treaty?

### A CLOSER LOOK

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### TASNEEM TAYEB

As Bangladesh and India begin the long, delicate process of discussing the future of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, the real challenge may not lie in hydrology, technical committees, or even climate variability. It lies in politics—specifically, in the temperament and trust that frame diplomacy, at a moment when both are in short supply.

The treaty, signed in 1996 for a 30-year term, expires in December 2026. Its renewal should have been a routine exercise: a chance to modernise an existing framework, accounting for climate stress, and reaffirm a commitment to amicable neighbourly river governance. Instead, it has become entangled in a far more volatile mix of domestic politics, extreme nationalist rhetoric, and shifting regional alignments, particularly within Bangladesh's own political discourse.

Water-sharing treaties do not exist in a vacuum. They are sustained not only by clauses and flow measurements but also by political goodwill and the ability of governments to navigate complexities at home.

Since the ouster of the previous regime—many of whose leaders sought refuge in India—the tone of cross-border rhetoric has hardened, extending beyond official channels into media narratives and public discourse in both countries. It is no longer confined to policy critique or topical disagreement. In Bangladesh, it increasingly draws from a grievance narrative that frames India as a regional power accustomed to setting terms rather than negotiating them. This framing does not emerge solely from a shift in ideology; it is rooted in the perception that past arrangements have too often reflected asymmetry rather than accommodation. For many in Bangladesh, this perception is inseparable from the Farakka issue itself—a dispute that continues to determine how downstream vulnerability is experienced.

Water, in this narrative, has become an even deeper grievance, symptomatic of unequal, constrained relations and unfulfilled promises. It is an emotionally resonant narrative that carries risks.

Rhetoric alone, however, does not undo treaties. Bangladesh's interim administration is pursuing the negotiations. Institutional channels remain open to dialogue. Yet, diplomacy is shaped as much by

atmosphere as by structure. And the atmosphere today is markedly different from the one in which the treaty was signed.

India, too, has changed. The regional power that signed the Ganges Treaty in the mid-1990s, amid post-Cold War optimism and a desire to stabilise neighbourhood relations, shaped in part by the Gujral Doctrine, is not the India of today. Contemporary Indian foreign policy is more domestically constrained, more transactional, and far less inclined to absorb political costs for the sake of neighbourly goodwill. Water-sharing is now increasingly viewed through a

lens. Thus, it binds upstream states to the politics of allocation, diversion, and scarcity. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the river underpins agriculture and carries its own political weight.

In such a climate, public hostility from across the border—even when it does not form part of official policy but surfaces through off-handed, unguarded political remarks—hardens resistance, emboldening those arguing against any accommodation of Bangladesh's needs.

For Bangladesh, the implications are profound. Water security is an existential issue for us. The Ganges sustains our agriculture in the southwest, protects the Sundarbans from salinity intrusion, and underpins rural livelihoods already strained by climate stress. A weakened post-2026 arrangement would not merely be a diplomatic setback for Bangladesh; it would have material consequences for our food security, ecological sustenance, and internal stability.

The next government in Bangladesh, regardless of who forms it following

increasingly diversified foreign relations, particularly its deepening economic ties with China, are often interpreted in India as signals of a strategic shift. While Dhaka has consistently insisted on strategic autonomy rather than alignment, perceptions matter.

Practically speaking, Bangladesh has limited alternatives when it comes to water. Infrastructure partnerships, investment flows, and diplomatic support can be diversified; river water cannot. No external actor can substitute for upstream cooperation on the Ganges. This is a bilateral issue between Bangladesh and India alone. This asymmetry places the onus on Bangladesh to manage relations with India carefully even if domestic politics make that difficult.

The interim administration's more legalistic framing of the issue reflects this awareness. By emphasising equity, international norms, and climate realities, rather than bilateral grievance, it has so far avoided upfront escalation. The question is whether this restraint will hold as electoral politics intensify and nationalist voices grow louder, especially among certain political quarters.

None of this suggests that Bangladesh should mute legitimate concerns or accept inequitable outcomes. On the contrary, the case for a stronger, more adaptive Ganges agreement is compelling. Climate change alone demands recalibration. But strength in diplomacy is measured by outcomes.

The emphasis, therefore, should be on defending our interests without burning the bridges needed to secure them; articulating grievances without turning them into grievance politics, and recognising that temperament in diplomacy, is not cosmetic—it is strategic positioning. The real risk is not that the Ganges Treaty will collapse under the weight of nationalist rhetoric or grievance politics; it is the gradual thinning of the space in which a better treaty could have been negotiated.

What this moment calls for is deliberate political calibration. A renewed Ganges agreement will require engagement that extends beyond formal negotiations at the central level, rebuilding confidence across states, constituencies, and political players that have a direct stake in the river's future. This requires sustained back-channel communication not only between governments but also with state-level actors upstream, where water anxiety is at times acutely felt.

It also demands a more thoughtful effort to shape public discourse at home, one that prepares domestic audiences for the realities of negotiation rather than framing compromise as capitulation. In a region where rivers bind neighbours whether they like it or not, the careful preservation of diplomatic space matters as much as any clause on paper.



The Farakka Barrage on the Ganges in West Bengal, the key control point for upstream water diversion and central to the Ganges Waters Treaty between India and Bangladesh.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

lens of strategic national leverage and internal politics.

This is where Bangladeshi posturing matters: not because it provokes retaliation, but because it shapes India's internal calculations. Any renewed Ganges agreement requires not just the central government's approval in New Delhi, but political buy-in from West Bengal, the Indian state most directly affected by this treaty. That buy-in has always been fragile. With state assembly elections on the horizon and water scarcity sharpening domestic anxieties, Indian negotiators operate within narrow political margins.

The Ganges also flows through four other Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, before reaching the

lens of strategic national leverage and internal politics.

the February elections, will inherit this dilemma. It will face a public less tolerant of perceived deference.

At the same time, it will confront a negotiating partner with little appetite for political risk and significant domestic constraints of its own.

If the next government softens its tone too much, it risks being accused of capitulation. If it hardens its stance, it risks shrinking the very negotiating space needed to secure a sustainable agreement. The danger is not outright failure but a subpar outcome: short-term extensions instead of long-term guarantees, vague review mechanisms in place of enforceable commitments, and continuity without security.

There is also a broader geopolitical landscape to consider. Bangladesh's

### THE SPIRIT OF NORDIC DAY

## Building inclusive societies, stronger together

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Bangladesh stands in the middle of a democratic transition, a chance for a new start. At this defining juncture, the theme of this year's Nordic Day, "Inclusive societies—stronger together," serves as a timely reminder that inclusion is a pathway to democracy.

The Nordic Day marks the signing of the Helsinki Treaty on March 23, 1962, by Nordic countries and symbolises the enduring commitment to cooperation, inclusion, and shared progress.

The Nordic countries are united by a deep commitment to inclusion, equality, and social justice—ideals that form the foundation of our societies. We believe that regional cooperation, trust between citizens and government,

and equality are the pillars of a strong society. These principles are upheld through robust welfare systems, strong anti-discrimination laws, and a culture of openness and accountability.

But these values are not unique to the Nordics. They are universal, and their relevance is especially clear in times of political and social transition. Across the world, and here in Bangladesh, we see that overcoming division through inclusion makes societies stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to achieve collective progress. Most societies are diverse and pluralistic, be it ethnically, religiously, culturally, or in terms of gender and identity. In this reality, inclusion is essential for stability and progress.

One of the clearest examples of the benefits of inclusion is the economic empowerment of women. The Nordic countries have seen firsthand how gender equality fuels economic growth, sparks innovation, and strengthens social well-being. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), closing the gender gap in the labour market could boost GDP by trillions of dollars globally. Among the Nordics, high rates of female employment have driven growth and created some of the world's most equitable and prosperous societies.

Bangladesh, too, has made remarkable progress in women's education and workforce participation. Yet, challenges remain. Too many women and girls still face barriers to education, employment, and equal rights. Removing these barriers is an economic imperative and a matter of justice.

Women and girls still lack equal rights in many parts of the world; many are denied basic rights such as education, livelihood, inheritance, participation in family decisions, and choice of partner. We must work together for a future where equality is a reality.

"Inclusion" isn't just a buzzword. It involves other virtues like mutual understanding, compassion, and reconciliation. Ultimately, inclusion builds peace and solidarity—locally, regionally, and globally.

Religious minorities, numbering around 1.5 crores in Bangladesh, often face vulnerability and fear, especially in the face of radical elements. This fear must be addressed decisively so that all citizens feel secure. Constitutional reforms offer an opportunity to reinforce equality and non-discrimination for all—including ethnic minorities, marginalised communities, and gender minorities alike.

Bangladesh has undergone historic changes since July 2024. The people have asserted their sovereignty. Legal actions are underway against perpetrators of past crimes. Ensuring fair and impartial justice is a solemn duty—one that must be fulfilled with integrity. At the same time, reconciliation is vital.

The Nordic countries believe in democracy beyond elections: stakeholder participation, strong local governance, transparency, trust, and the right to peaceful protest. Bangladesh's upcoming democratic transition is a hopeful sign. Sustaining this progress requires dialogue over confrontation and a political culture rooted in respect for rights, peaceful transfer of power, and willingness to compromise.

Freedom of expression, media independence, good governance, accountability, justice, rule of law, and continuous dialogue are essential for any thriving democracy. Upholding human rights for all will remain at the heart of long-term Nordic commitment and closer cooperation with Bangladesh. Inclusive societies are fair, resilient, innovative, and built for the future. The Nordic countries will remain steadfast partners on this shared journey.