

Time for a decisive role

Election Commission must act as political violence rises

The unexpected spike in targeted killings and political violence since the announcement of the election schedule—amid a deteriorating law and order situation—must be taken seriously by the Election Commission (EC) and the interim government. As the election process gets underway, the EC must assert effective control over law-enforcing agencies and direct them, along with the interim administration, to strengthen security using all necessary measures. It is regrettable that the ongoing Operation Devil Hunt, i.e., the joint forces operation, the issuance of gun licenses to candidates and the provision of armed guards to leaders of the July uprising and a few others following the fatal attack on Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi, appear to have had little impact on improving overall law and order.

According to data from the Human Rights Support Society, 60 incidents of political violence were recorded in December alone, leaving four people dead and 528 injured. At least 10 attacks on political leaders and activists resulted in 10 deaths, including three members of the Awami League, four from the BNP, and one from Jamaat-e-Islami. Meanwhile, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), citing its own records and media reports, has documented at least eight political killings since the unveiling of the poll schedule on December 11.

The EC and the authorities must review why the measures taken so far have failed to adequately address rising crime and political violence. They should take note of emerging trends highlighted by human rights defender Noor Khan Liton, particularly the targeting of political activists and members of minority communities. Moreover, the misguided reluctance to confront mob culture and the lack of preventive action have allowed lynching to spread, creating a pervasive climate of fear in society. If these trends persist, they will severely undermine voter confidence and discourage turnout at polling stations. The Election Commission must take decisive steps to remove uncertainties surrounding the election and ensure that citizens feel safe to exercise their right to vote without fear.

Greater visibility of law enforcement patrols, intensified intelligence-led operations to prevent crimes, and swift legal action against perpetrators can help restore public confidence in policing. To ensure a participatory election, the government must create a secure and festive polling environment. However, its current approach to guaranteeing a safe political atmosphere appears to be faltering.

Political parties also bear responsibility. They must proactively defuse internal factional conflicts, confront the alarming spread of hate on social media, and educate their members about the dangers of violence while equipping them with basic safety guidance. At the same time, researchers and policymakers should examine the root causes of growing intolerance and the increasing tendency to resort to violence to settle disputes—trends that are fundamentally incompatible with democracy and corrosive to the social fabric.

Finally, the Ministry of Home Affairs' decision to deploy law enforcement agencies nationwide only for seven days around the election is unlikely to be effective if authorities cannot maintain law and order now. An immediate security review and a revised strategy are essential to facilitate a free, fair, impartial, peaceful, and genuinely festive election.

Resume rail-freight between Ctg–Dhaka

Sustained investment is required for smooth freight services

A recent report in this paper highlights an operational lapse within Bangladesh Railway (BR) that has far-reaching implications for the country's economy. The prolonged shortage of locomotives on the Chattogram–Dhaka route has severely disrupted rail-based container transport, creating congestion at our principal seaport and consequently driving up costs for businesses.

According to port officials, at least four pairs of container trains per day, meaning around 240 trains per month, are needed to keep cargo flowing smoothly. But for months, container transport between Chattogram port and the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot (ICD) in Dhaka has fallen far short of the demand. While more than 112 container trains on average ran monthly between January and September last year, operations dropped sharply from October onwards, hitting a low of just 74 trains in December. This disruption has had knock-on effects across the board. Overflow containers have been pushed into export yards and distant storage areas, which is complicating operations, slowing retrieval, and raising handling costs. Importers are paying the price through mounting overstay charges, delayed deliveries, and increased uncertainty. In a trading economy, already grappling with high costs of doing business, such inefficiencies are further eroding competitiveness.

Although BR now says freight operations have resumed and the backlog may clear within days, policymakers and authority figures should still take note of the underlying challenges. Rail is meant to be a cost-effective alternative to road transport, especially for containerised cargo moving between the port and the capital. But the chronic underinvestment, poor asset management, and reactive decision-making are leaving freight services increasingly vulnerable. The problem had persisted for nearly a year, worsening gradually before reaching a crisis point.

What is needed now is more than temporary relief and band-aid fixes. We urge BR to develop a framework to ensure that container trains, which are critical to trade and revenue, are not sidelined. Accelerating locomotive procurement, reducing repair backlogs, and improving maintenance are essential. At a broader level, the government must recognise rail freight as strategic economic infrastructure. Without sustained investment, management and accountability, similar disruptions will recur, adding further burden and costs on businesses and, ultimately, the wider economy.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First UN assembly held

On this day in 1946, the first United Nations General Assembly met in London. Delegates representing 51 nations attended the first session.

The day cricket needed a therapist



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Fizz is a case study. When Mustafizur Rahman, a.k.a. Fizz, the unassuming fast bowler with deceptive slow cutters, was auctioned for Rs 9.2 crore, Bangladeshi media once again started paying attention to the Indian Premier League. It was a smart move for the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), the franchise that bottled “Fizz”, to keep Bangladeshi audiences emotionally and financially invested in their city. In pure market terms, getting Mustafiz made perfect sense: he brings Bangla-speaking viewers, advertising revenue, and cross border traction.

Then comes the news of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) fudging the Fizz issue. They cited instances of “atrocities against the Hindus” in Bangladesh to ask KKR to release their prize catch. Fizz was released, not because of form, fitness, or franchise strategy, but because of “security.” Cricket shifted pitch. Bangladesh's response was immediate and bold. If security cannot be guaranteed for one Bangladeshi player, how can it be guaranteed for an entire national team that is expected to participate in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka? Such diagnostic reasoning placed the hosts in a difficult situation. If the “security” concern is valid, then the three matches that Bangladesh is scheduled to play in India in February should be moved to Sri Lanka.

The International Cricket Council seems unconvinced. Changing the schedule with only a few days remaining presents a logistical challenge, along with issues of ticketing, viewership, ad revenues, hotel bookings, air travel, broadcast grids, and match sequencing and so on. Therefore, it is no surprise that ICC reacted with a language of power, threatening exclusion and loss of merit points. Although there are precedents of venue changes in cricket history, ICC is a bit taken aback by the unusual resistance posted by Bangladesh. Then again, they need to understand that this demand is not the tantrums of a small team but an attempt to protect the national dignity of a country of 18 crore.

Fizz is no longer the focal point; cricket has taken that role. Let us imagine the rectangular cricket pitch as a psychoanalytic couch and allow Cricket to speak. Let us locate ourselves beyond the border, outside the ring, to psychoanalyse the game incarnate. The patient cricket has presented Mustafiz as a symptom that will reveal deeper anxieties. Cricket will tell us how the manufactured hype over the shorter version of the game is driven by the logic of money and haunted by the

spectres of neocapitalism. Cricket is the new religion that provides “opium for the masses.” It stages a spectacle in a modern-day arena where players are like gladiators brought in from across the globe. They are bought and sold like slaves, and every action is translated as data points. Audiences are data, monetised by entrepreneurial franchise owners.

As we move from the manifest content to the latent content of cricket, we will become aware of the national and, by extension, international ecosystem where commerce is tied to geopolitics. When capital collides with ideology, even capital is reminded of its limits. The Mustafiz episode serves as an example. KKR belongs to the microstructure of



In the Fizz episode, unlike the commonsensical diplomacy of Jaishankar, Jay Shah pitched cricket as an arena of security paranoia and punitive discipline.

VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

viewers and revenue, while the state owns the macrostructure. KKR wanted “the fizz” to keep bubbling; the state declared the imported carbonation to be dangerous.

This selective reasoning denotes an asymmetrical power system where a big nation identifies itself as the Self and views the rest as the Other. The timing of “othering” Bangladesh could not have been worse. Just last month, the participation of the Indian minister of external affairs, S Jaishankar, in the funeral of Begum Khaleda Zia was seen as an attempt to thaw a frozen relationship between neighbours. The decree by the ICC boss and former BCCI honorary secretary, Jay Shah, dented the attempt. The “commonsensical” diplomacy of Jaishankar met the “crowd-pleasing” powerful cricket diplomacy of Jay Shah.

From its couch, Cricket will tell us of its colonial past when displays of power were common. The memory of domination leaves behind a

once controlled by others. The alleged attempt to exclude a Bangladeshi player under the rhetoric of “security,” therefore, revives the familiar grammar of colonisation, resulting in an assertion of power that is not merely offensive but retraumatising. Already, the Bangladesh team is threatened with loss of points, future scheduling disadvantages, and institutional penalties.

Sigmund Freud claimed that civilisation survives by repressing aggression and channelling it into sanctioned outlets through a process called sublimation. Sport is one of humanity's most effective sublimatory inventions. It allows hostility, domination, rivalry, and loss within a sanctioned package. Sports, particularly between neighbouring states with unresolved histories, can divert tensions away from borders and into scoreboards and convert geopolitical anxiety into sporting rivalry.

The Fizz episode has done the opposite. Instead of hiding the

allows them to enjoy the enacted aggression.

Cricket acts like the carnival of mediaeval times, when ordinary people were allowed to invert rules and mock authority. Mikhail Bakhtin claimed that carnivals protected society by letting aggression laugh at power instead of attacking it. Stadiums permit shouting, humiliation, emotional excess, and symbolic violence so that real violence remains unnecessary.

Realpolitik, the commonsensical diplomacy of Jaishankar, would have allowed this sporting licence. But Jay Shaha had pitched cricket as an arena of security paranoia and punitive discipline. Instead of letting aggression burn itself out under lights and rules, they are forcing it back into politics, where it becomes volatile. If cricket could speak from the psychoanalyst's couch (i.e., the pitch), it would say, “I was created to control your aggression, not to incite fear. I am not the border. I am the cushion.”

Our children, the unseen casualties of chaos



Farzana Misha
is associate professor at Brac James P Grant School of Public Health.

Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

FARZANA MISHA

I recently started encouraging my children to read the newspaper every morning, hoping it would nurture awareness and civic curiosity. After a few days, they asked to stop. The news, they said, made them anxious. The constant stories of violence and injustice left them feeling unsettled, “as if the world has gone bonkers,” they said. Their response was not dramatic; it was honest. And it forced me to confront a difficult reality: what once served as civic education may now function as an unfiltered source of distress for young minds. While public attention understandably focuses on political consequences and security concerns, far less attention is paid to those who quietly absorb these events every day: our children.

Much has been written about

the political awakening of Gen Z. Yet, an even younger generation is coming of age in a climate shaped by violence-filled headlines, social media saturation, and contested truths. As a parent and an academic, my concern is not primarily about political mobilisation. It is about the social, emotional, ethical, and civic environment we are creating for the inheritors of this country.

This raises an uncomfortable question: are we informing the next generation or overwhelming them? When violence becomes a daily headline, when stories of children burned alive, communities attacked over identity, or media institutions set on fire dominate public discourse, it is difficult to argue whether such exposure builds resilience or

democratic responsibility. Instead, it risks normalising brutality and eroding empathy before it has fully formed in the young minds.

Children are not passive observers. They listen closely, absorb language, tone, and moral cues. The cumulative psychological cost of growing up amid constant narratives of fear, injustice, and impunity cannot be dismissed as incidental. A society must ask itself what it considers acceptable collateral damage during periods of unrest, and whether children are being treated as invisible casualties of public disorder. The problem is not only political instability, but a deeper moral disorientation.

As the country stands on the verge of electing a new political leadership, these questions become even more urgent. How aware are those seeking power of the social and psychological realities with which children are growing up today? How invested are they in shaping a future that goes beyond seeing children merely as beneficiaries of nutrition programmes, stipends, or enrolment statistics?

Children deserve a holistic understanding of the world around

them. They need help making sense of complexities: injustice and accountability, environmental change and climate risk, shared responsibility and coexistence. Ignoring reality does not shield them from it.

This is not a call for censorship or silence. It is a call for responsibility in media, politics, and public life. Reporting matters. Language matters. It also matters that we recognise children as part of the audience, forming their earliest understanding of justice, humanity, and belonging.

In several European countries, children and future generations are treated not as abstract beneficiaries of development, but as stakeholders whose well being, mental health, and rights must be actively considered in policymaking. Political decisions are increasingly assessed not only for their immediate outcomes, but for the world they leave behind.

Periods of unrest will pass; history suggests they always do. The deeper concern is what kind of citizens are shaped during these moments, and what moral landscape they will inherit once the noise subsides. That responsibility cannot be deferred. Our children are listening.