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Campaign clashes are a worrying sign

Political parties, EC, and police all must act to stop further violence

The number of clashes and injuries reported across at least five districts in just a few days is indicative of a dangerous normalisation of political violence during elections. We have seen this trend in the past, and we are seeing it again even after a mass uprising dismantled the old, authoritarian order. According to our report, at least 24 people have been injured, while another newspaper has put the figure at 40. So far, it seems that the clashes are largely between BNP and Jamaat, the two major parties of the present moment, which makes the situation all the more disconcerting. Why must election campaigning become so acrimonious that it descends into physical scuffles and violence?

The parties in question were part of a coalition in the past, and then were united in their participation in the 2024 uprising to pave the way for a democratic future. They also sat together to amicably discuss the July National Charter during long sessions held by the National Consensus Commission. Yet today, as they compete with one another, their activists and supporters are resorting to violence over the most trifling matters. Social media, meanwhile, has become more of a weapon to defame opponents rather than a platform to win votes through inspiring messages.

The details of the clashes reported are particularly revealing. In Shariatpur, five people were injured after a Jamaat activist published a Facebook post accusing a BNP female leader of campaigning for a "No" vote in the referendum. This prompted some BNP men to go to the local Jamaat office where an altercation broke out between the two groups, eventually leading to a physical fight. In Netrokona, seven people were injured in clashes between supporters of a BNP candidate and a rebel candidate formerly of BNP. Elsewhere, clashes have occurred over allegations of obstructing rival campaigns, erecting banners, harassing women supporters, activists going door to door, and collecting NID cards and bkash numbers. Scuffles involving alliance partners have also been reported.

We are worried that such clashes may escalate as election day nears, so there is an urgent need to de-escalate tensions. The onus for that lies primarily with political parties and their leaders. They must send a clear, unequivocal message to their candidates and supporters that violence against rivals will not be tolerated, and that serious consequences will follow any breach of this directive. The police and the Election Commission must also be far more proactive in preventing violence and in identifying and punishing those involved in clashes.

As it is amply clear by now, online misinformation and disinformation, including AI-generated content, are now capable of igniting real-world violence, so the EC must remain vigilant against the circulation of AI-generated and other incendiary content, while political parties must rein in not only street-level activists but also digital instigators. Finally, we want to remind political parties, especially BNP and Jamaat, that the broader objective for the nation is a fair and credible election in which citizens can once again exercise their fundamental democratic right freely. So, their commitment to restraint and fairness is a must.

Why is Rab getting new vehicles?

Govt must reconsider its decision, focus on reform proposals instead

We are concerned by the interim government's decision to approve the purchase of 163 vehicles for the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)—that, too, at the end of its tenure. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, the vehicles are to be procured through direct purchase without any tender under a revised project aimed at enhancing Rab's "operational capacity." While the government has said the vehicles cannot be purchased before the national election due to procedural requirements, the approval itself raises questions. At a time when Rab's very existence is under national and international scrutiny, this decision sends a wrong signal.

For years, Rab has been accused of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other grave human rights violations. These allegations are not confined to domestic rights groups; they have been echoed by international organisations and UN bodies. Consequently, in 2021, the US imposed sanctions on Rab and several of its former and then-serving officials. The role of this force was questionable during the July uprising, too. The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, formed by the interim government itself, recommended disbanding Rab after identifying it as the worst offender in cases of enforced disappearances. The Police Reform Commission also proposed reviewing Rab's past activities and allegations of abuse to assess whether the force is needed at all. Citing this widespread criticism, the TIB chief has pointed out that Rab's dissolution has become a national demand.

Against this backdrop, the decision to strengthen Rab's logistical capacity is not only misguided, it also ignores prevailing reform proposals as well as well-documented facts and findings. We must ask why the government has made such a decision, and what purpose it serves. Proceeding with direct procurement worth hundreds of crores of taka at a time of economic stress and political uncertainty is equally questionable.

If the interim government is serious about reform, justice, and restoring public confidence in law enforcement, it must reconsider this purchase and act upon the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and the Police Reform Commission. Instead of enhancing Rab's capacity, the government should focus on disbanding the force or fundamentally rebuilding it through a transparent process that addresses its structural flaws, lack of accountability, and history of political misuse.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

King George III dies

On this day in 1820, ten years after mental illness forced him to retire from public life, King George III, the British king who lost the American colonies, died at the age of 81.

BANGLADESH'S T20 SNUB

ICC failed a key test of sporting governance



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International sport depends on a simple bargain: athletes accept risks, including physical and monetary, but governing bodies accept responsibility. When that bargain fractures, the question of credibility follows. The International Cricket Council's (ICC) handling of Bangladesh's request to relocate the country's matches for the Men's T20 World Cup from India to tournament co-host Sri Lanka due to security concerns—and its subsequent decision to replace Bangladesh with Scotland—represents one of the most consequential governance tests that cricket has faced in recent years. The controversy is not about diplomacy or rivalry, but about whether global sports regulators still operate within the constraints of fairness, consistency, and reasoned discretion that modern sports law demands.

Bangladesh's request was framed as a security precaution, supported by government advice and recent precedents within cricket itself. Changing venues is not exceptional in the sport's history; it is a recognised move for managing geopolitical and security risks. Pakistan's frequent venue adjustments, Sri Lanka's war-era relocations, and multiple ICC events staged outside the territory of host nations all testify to that reality. What makes this episode an issue is not that the ICC disagreed with Bangladesh's assessment—regulators are entitled to disagree—but that it escalated disagreement to exclusion without publicly demonstrating why less disruptive alternatives were unworkable.

The ICC has argued that it conducted internal security assessments and found no credible threat warranting relocation. That may be so, but in regulatory governance, assertion is not explanation. Modern sports governance, shaped increasingly by the jurisprudence of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), requires decision-makers to show not merely that they considered an issue, but how they weighed competing interests. Transparency in this regard is not a courtesy; it is a legal safeguard.

CAS panels have consistently held that international federations exercise a form of quasi-public power. With that power comes obligation. In *FC Sion v FIEA*, CAS stressed that governing bodies must provide reasoned and transparent decisions,

particularly where the consequences for participants are severe. Exclusion from a global tournament is among the most severe sanctions available in sport. The ICC rejected relocation of matches without making the independent security assessment public, without demonstrating proportionality, and without showing that graduated remedies had been exhausted. The message, intentional or not, was that compliance mattered more than safety concerns raised in good faith.

Replacing a qualified team is much more than administrative housekeeping; it is the regulatory equivalent of a

Then there is the matter of consistency. When rules are applied unevenly, trust erodes, especially among smaller or less powerful member states.

In *Guillermo Cañas v ATP Tour*, CAS recognised that inconsistent application of regulations undermines regulatory legitimacy and may give rise to legitimate expectations. Bangladesh could reasonably argue that the ICC's long reliance on neutral venues created an expectation that similar accommodation would be available when comparable concerns arose. This is not an argument for automatic approval, but for consideration with equal seriousness. When India refused to play in Pakistan, citing security concerns and political tensions, it was treated as a systemic challenge to be managed. Bangladesh's concern about playing in India was treated as an obstacle to be removed.

This distinction matters. Replacing a qualified team with a non-qualified one—without disciplinary proceedings,

The ICC's decision has also alarmed player representatives. The World Cricketers' Association (WCA) has warned that punishing teams for raising safety concerns creates a chilling effect: players and boards learn that silence is safer than candour. Neutral venues, security bubbles, and independent assessments were not gifts from governance; they were concessions wrested by past experiences. When a governing body signals that safety concerns will be met with replacement rather than mitigation, it disincentivises transparency.

This controversy should not be misread as a geopolitical quarrel between boards or states. It is a policy failure rooted in centralisation of power without corresponding accountability. The ICC has spent the past decade consolidating authority over scheduling, revenue distribution, and tournament design. Centralisation can bring efficiency, but only if matched by transparency and restraint. Otherwise, it becomes coercive.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

nuclear option. CAS jurisprudence is unambiguous on this point. In *Matuzalem Francelino da Silva v FIEA*, the panel rejected excessive regulatory discretion and held that sanctions must be proportionate and must not violate fundamental rights, including the right to pursue one's profession. Although the case concerned football, its principles apply across sports. The proportionality test requires regulators to ask three questions: i) whether the measure is suitable to achieve a legitimate aim; ii) if it is necessary, or if less restrictive alternatives are available; and iii) whether it imposes an excessive burden relative to its objective. Applied here, the ICC's decision struggles at the second hurdle.

without formal sanctions, and without an appealable decision grounded in published reasoning—stretches the ICC's regulatory discretion to its limits. It also exposes the organisation to legal risk, even though Bangladesh has signalled that it will take no further action beyond what's already done. Under ICC regulations, disputes ultimately fall within CAS jurisdiction. CAS rarely intervenes in sporting merits, but it intervenes readily where procedure, proportionality, or consistency fail. Remedies could include annulment of decisions, declaratory relief, or compensation—outcomes that would damage the ICC far more than a negotiated venue compromise ever could.

The ICC, therefore, needs a course correction. First, the ICC should publish a clear framework for handling security-based relocation requests, including independent assessments and graduated remedies. Second, it should reaffirm that neutral venues remain a legitimate governance tool, not a concession of last resort. Third, it should ensure that exclusion is treated as a sanction requiring heightened procedural safeguards, not an administrative shortcut. Cricket is a global game only so long as its governance treats all participants as equally entitled to safety, voice, and reasoned judgement. The Bangladesh episode suggests that assumption can no longer be taken for granted.

Trump's Board of Peace is no UN, but an aberration



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The proposal for a "Board of Peace" (BoP), spearheaded by US President Donald Trump with an initial focus on Gaza but with declared global ambitions, raises profound questions about the future of international diplomacy and multilateralism. At its core, the initiative appears less as a spontaneous peace endeavour and more as the latest, and perhaps most explicit, gambit in a long-running US struggle with the existing United Nations (UN) system. To understand its prospects, one must first examine the US discontent that fuels this proposal.

For decades, the US has been the UN's principal funder as well as a dominant force within its secretariat and many of its specialised agencies. Western influence, with Washington at the helm, is palpable in the staffing of senior posts and the general orientation of UN programmes. However, this dominance runs up against a formidable wall in the UN Security Council (UNSC). The veto-wielding power of China and Russia has repeatedly thwarted US and generally

Western initiatives, turning the council from an instrument of US policy into a chamber of constraints. This is the central headache for Washington: a system it heavily bankrolls but cannot fully control on matters of supreme geopolitical importance.

Consequently, the US has often bypassed the UN when anticipating a Russian or Chinese veto. The unilateral economic sanctions against Russia and military strikes, such as those in Iran, stand as recent, stark examples. The logical, if radical, extension of this frustration is not mere bypassing but the creation of a parallel structure. The BoP, complete with plans for an International Stabilization Force (ISF), is not a novel concept in spirit. It echoes past failed initiatives like the proposed League of Democracies, championed by Joe Biden in his Senate years.

Trump, however, introduces a distinct, transactional approach to this idea. Learning from prior failures, he has chosen a title that is emotionally potent and vaguely bureaucratic, potentially

obscuring its confrontational underpinnings. The design of the logo is reminiscent of that of the UN's, which suggests an attempt to borrow the legitimacy of the established order while seeking to supplant it. Trump's obsession with a Nobel Peace Prize adds a personal dimension; a laureate Trump would undoubtedly have leveraged that prestige to lend credence to this new venture.

The tactics for enrolment appear to follow Trump's well-documented playbook: a mix of persuasion and pressure. Invitations are dispatched, with an implicit or perhaps explicit threat of punitive trade tariffs for those who decline. This coercive potential may sway some nations dependent on the US market, but it simultaneously undermines the project's credibility. An organisation born from strong-arm tactics will struggle to be perceived as a genuine forum for equitable peacebuilding.

This is where the BoP faces its most significant hurdles. Major global powers are likely to abstain. China and Russia would naturally view it as a hostile, US-centric alliance designed to marginalise them further. Crucially, many European nations, despite being traditional US allies, remain deeply invested in the UN framework and are wary of initiatives that explicitly undermine multilateralism for a unilateral, transaction-based world order. Their participation is doubtful without guarantees of shared,

substantive leadership—a concession unlikely from a Trump-led project.

Therefore, the most probable outcome is not the birth of a robust new UN, but the accelerated weakening of the current one. The Board of Peace may not stand firm as a functional alternative, but the very act of its promotion by a figure like Trump inflicts damage. It encourages further disengagement from the UN, legitimises non-cooperation, and deepens the rift between Western and non-Western visions of global governance. The world would not gain an effective new peace body but instead lose faith in the existing one, without a viable replacement.

In conclusion, Trump's Board of Peace is unlikely to find deep or widespread diplomatic traction. Its divisive genesis, coercive recruitment strategy, and exclusionary premise alienate the very actors necessary for global stability. It is less a vessel meant to hold water and more a wrecking ball aimed at the foundations of the post-war multilateral system. Its legacy may not be a new era of peace, but a deepened global crisis: a world where the rules-based order is further fragmented, leaving behind a dangerous vacuum where ad hoc alliances and raw power politics hold greater sway than ever before. The greatest risk is not the board's success, but the collateral damage its pursuit will cause to international cooperation.