

Don’t hand back keys to ex bank owners

Authorities must not enable a return to failed banking control

The Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB) has taken the unusual step of urging regulators to make it harder, not easier, for former bank owners to reclaim failed lenders—a sign of how deep the sector's governance crisis runs. At the heart of the problem lies a provision of the newly enacted Bank Resolution Act that allows directors and sponsors of failed banks to buy back control by paying just 7.5 percent upfront of the funds spent rescuing them. They have two years to repay the rest at a simple 10 percent interest. It is, by any standard, a remarkably lenient arrangement.

Bangladesh Bank and the government have already injected capital into five crisis-hit Islamic lenders—First Security Islami Bank, Global Islami Bank, Union Bank, Social Islami Bank Ltd (SIBL), and EXIM Bank—before merging them into a new state entity, Sammilito Islami Bank. Meanwhile, five former shareholders of SIBL have applied to reclaim the institution. It raises the question whether the law was shaped less by reform principles than by the interests of those seeking to return. Bangladesh Bank officials have indicated that the particular application will likely be rejected as the merger proceeds.

The history of how SIBL arrived at this point makes the buy-back bid all the more striking. Investigative reporting by *The Daily Star* has documented in detail how SIBL was seized in October 2017 in a brazen exercise of state-backed coercion. Before dawn on October 30, nine bank officials and directors were picked up from their homes by men identifying themselves as members of a state intelligence agency. They were held at the DGF1 headquarters. Resignation letters were prepared, board minutes drafted, and new appointments formalised, all within the intelligence compound. Bangladesh Bank approved the new leadership in a matter of hours, a process that normally takes at least a week.

The man directing proceedings inside the intelligence office, according to multiple officials present that day, was Mohammed Saiful Alam, chairman of the Chattogram-based S Alam Group. Within months of the takeover, SIBL began disbursing enormous loans to entities linked to S Alam and his family. By September 2024, the bank's exposure to the group and its affiliates stood at Tk 7,600 crore. SIBL's non-performing loan ratio reached 62 percent and its capital turned negative, forcing the merger that followed in 2025. What was done to SIBL was organised plunder, facilitated by state officers, and enabled by a regulatory culture thoroughly subordinated to political diktat.

The new government has evidently inherited a banking sector in acute distress, with elevated non-performing loans, depleted capital buffers, a legal recovery system paralysed by case backlogs and the misuse of stay orders, and a depositor base whose confidence has been badly eroded. These problems require serious policy attention. The depositors that have borne the cost of years of politically sanctioned looting deserve, at minimum, a clear answer to a simple question: will those responsible be held to account, or handed back the keys?

Stop objectifying women on Facebook

Authorities should take action against fake news pages

It is alarming that under the guise of journalism, fake news pages on Facebook are objectifying women for engagement and profit. A recent investigation by this daily found at least 30 Facebook pages posting reels that rely on selective framing, zoom-ins, slow motion, and decontextualised visuals to sexualise actresses, academics, politicians, and other women. Such practices violate ethical standards and contribute to a digital culture that normalises harassment and misogyny. Many of these pages also identify themselves as “media/news company” despite having no registration as legitimate media outlets. This raises a serious question: how are such pages allowed to operate on Facebook?

For instance, a page called Daily Biplobi Kantho, with more than 72,000 followers, posted 20 videos of actress Keya Payel, which were made ignoring her objections and focused unnecessarily on her body. Similar tactics were used against Dhaka University teacher Shehreen Amin Bhuiyan during Pahela Baishakh celebrations. In these cases, women were not presented as individuals with voices, professions, or achievements, but as content for online engagement. Some administrators reportedly admitted that the strategy is driven by monetisation. While one such page listed a physical office address in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar, our reporter on a visit found no organisation under that name.

Media experts warn that repeated exposure to such body-focused portrayals reinforces harmful perceptions about women and fuels online abuse, including trolling, stalking, and sexual harassment. The comment sections under these videos further show how such content encourages degrading and offensive behaviour. Although Meta's policies prohibit non-consensual or sexualised imagery focused on intimate or commonly sexualised body parts, such videos continue to circulate widely, pointing to weak enforcement in countries like ours.

Under such circumstances, both regulators and technology companies must act more decisively. Facebook and other digital platforms should strengthen monitoring of such pages and enforce community standards consistently. Pages that violate privacy and dignity for engagement should face swift removal of content, demonetisation, and account restrictions. The government must also enforce existing laws, including Section 509 of the Penal Code, against those using cameras and social media platforms to humiliate women and vulnerable individuals for profit, while strengthening cyber laws to address digital exploitation and misleading media representation.

Unregistered pages using “news” labels must also be brought under proper oversight, with faster reporting and takedown systems through coordination between platforms and law enforcement agencies. Greater digital literacy is needed so users can recognise manipulative content practices and challenge the culture of misogyny that fuels them. Online spaces must not become places where women are routinely exploited for clicks and profit.

Padma barrage must address both water and sediment issues



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As the Padma Barrage Project is placed before the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) for approval this week, an idea that has evolved since the 1960s may finally become a reality. The project, with phase-1 costing Tk 33,474 crore and requiring a total investment of Tk 50,443 crore over seven years, will serve 6.5 crore people across the southwestern and northern regions of the country. The 2.1-kilometre structure that can store 2,900 million cubic metres of water in the Padma River demonstrates Bangladesh's engineering ambition and commitment to addressing water scarcity. The project is designed to address the crisis that five decades of India's Farakka Barrage operation created.

However, it will also potentially accelerate sediment starvation, thus threatening our delta's survival. As a geologist who witnessed the Mississippi Delta's catastrophic land loss, I recognise this pattern and the urgency of choosing a different path.

The Farakka Barrage, commissioned in 1975 to divert Ganges water for Kolkata port, created a downstream catastrophe. A study by River and Delta Research Centre (RDRC) identifies 79 rivers as dead or dying in Bangladesh, while the state minister for shipping of the last Awami League government said in 2024 that 308 rivers have lost navigability. Khulna division has 25 dead or dying rivers, Rajshahi has 19, and Rangpur has 14; most of these rivers are dependent on the Ganges flows. The Padma, which has historically been a deep river, now runs almost dry from February to May in many stretches. The Gorai River, once carrying a significant portion of the dry-season flow of the Ganges to southwest Bangladesh, receives virtually nothing now.

Water starvation forced unsustainable groundwater dependence. In the Barind Tract, the groundwater level has dropped by 10 to 15 metres in many regions. The 2025 government notification prohibiting new irrigation wells in 4,911 villages across Rajshahi, Naogaon and

Chapainawabganj acknowledges that extraction has become unsustainable. It was a politically difficult but necessary directive because continuing extraction will deplete aquifers beyond recovery.

The Padma Barrage responds to this crisis. It will store 2,900 million cubic metres for dry-season release, reviving the Gorai and Madhumati rivers and reducing salinity, which threatens the Sundarbans and the coastal regions. It will also help irrigate



FILE PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Many rivers in southwestern Bangladesh, like Padma River near Kushtia's Bheramara, run dry between February and May.

nearly 29 lakh hectares of farmland. These needs are legitimate and urgent, affecting millions dependent on water availability.

Yet, Professor Mashfiqu Salehin of Buet's Institute of Water and Flood Management warns the barrage “may cause upstream erosion and downstream sedimentation, similar to the effects of Farakka Barrage.” Other experts, too, say that the barrage would exacerbate silting and destroy the Padma River. The reservoir will trap sediment travelling downstream towards coastal areas where it is desperately needed.

Delta physics are well-established: deltas exist in equilibrium between sediment deposition and land loss (subsidence and sea-level rise). When sediment delivery falls below land loss rates, deltas subside and drown. The Mississippi Delta loses one football field

every 100 minutes because structures severed the sediment connection. The Nile stopped growing when the Aswan Dam trapped sediment.

A 2023 *Nature Communications* study examined sediment delivery to the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta. The delta requires approximately one billion tonnes annually to counteract subsidence and sea-level rise. Climate change with more intense monsoons could increase sedimentation delivery by 34-60 percent, but if planned dams and river diversification are fully implemented, delivery could decline by 15-80 percent, leading to catastrophic land loss in the delta. The study concludes that the fate of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta is contingent more on policymakers' decisions than on climate change. Bangladesh still has the agency to prevent a Mississippi-scale catastrophe.

Coastal southwest Bangladesh has already lost 1 to 1.5 metres of elevation from sediment starvation. Studies project significant submersion by 2050-2100 if delivery continues declining. The Padma Barrage compounds this as sediment escaping the Farakka deposits in Padma's reservoir, leaving coastal areas receiving even less.

The barrage is described as a “lifeline for the Sundarbans,” ensuring freshwater and preventing salinity that kills the mangroves. But the Sundarbans grows on land that is subsiding because of reduced sediment delivery. Providing water while cutting sediment creates a paradox. You cannot save a delta by providing water while cutting sediment that builds and maintains the land.

The objective of this article is not to argue against the Padma Barrage.

West Bengal’s right-wing turn cannot be blamed on Bangladesh



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In the aftermath of the 2026 West Bengal election, a familiar pattern has re-emerged across sections of Indian media and so-called secular civil society: the attempt to explain BJP's sweeping success through the “Bangladesh factor.” According to this narrative, political developments in Bangladesh—the post-uprising instability, the interim administration under Professor Yunus, and violence against minorities—allegedly triggered a Hindu consolidation in West Bengal and accelerated the rise of Hindutva politics.

This argument is not only intellectually weak; it is a fallacy of political morality and justice. It shifts responsibility away from the deep structural transformation of Indian politics over the past decade and reduces a complex electoral reality to a simplistic cross-border possibility. More troubling is the fact that a section of Bangladeshi media and intelligentsia is reproducing this narrative uncritically, as though Bangladesh itself is somehow responsible for the right-wing turn in parts of India.

The first problem with this argument is its selective use of truth. Since the 2024 political upheaval in Bangladesh, large sections of Indian television and digital propaganda networks have amplified misleading and at times outright false narratives about “systematic” anti-Hindu

violence in Bangladesh. There were, undeniably, incidents of violence and intimidation during the transition period, and those incidents deserve condemnation. But what was often missing from mainstream Indian coverage is the equally important reality that thousands of ordinary Bangladeshis—students, Muslim community leaders, neighbourhood volunteers, and civil society groups—mobilised to protect temples, Hindu localities, and minority institutions. That reality complicates the communal script. Therefore, it is ignored.

The second flaw in the “Bangladesh factor” theory is historical amnesia. BJP did not suddenly emerge as a dominant political force because of recent developments in Bangladesh. The party has ruled India for over a decade and has systematically expanded its influence across the country, regardless of political conditions in Dhaka. During this period, especially when Bangladesh was governed by a largely secular but overtly pro-India administration, BJP still consolidated power and expanded influence in states such as Assam and Tripura. If a friendly and strategically aligned Bangladesh could not prevent the rise of Hindutva politics there, how can Bangladesh's recent internal crisis be an explanation for West Bengal's electoral outcome?

The answer is obvious: it cannot.

The attempt to externalise the causes of Hindutva's growth obscures the internal transformation of Indian political culture. Over the last decade or so, India has witnessed the normalisation of majoritarian rhetoric, lynching, bulldozer politics, hate speech, hyper-nationalist media ecosystems, and the systematic shrinking of oppositional space. Central investigative agencies have repeatedly been accused of being weaponised against opposition parties. Social media disinformation campaigns have become central to electoral mobilisation. Political dissent is increasingly portrayed as anti-national, while even moderate secular positions are caricatured as “appeasement.”

Within this atmosphere, even inclusive constitutional politics is now attacked. The Congress party and other secular formations are routinely labelled a “new Muslim League” merely for advocating minority rights and equal citizenship (although, to be frank, they have at times themselves compromised on secular principles). This reveals the depth of ideological polarisation within India itself, a reality that cannot be explained away by recent events in Bangladesh.

Equally important is the glaring contradiction that advocates of the “Bangladesh factor” refuse to confront. If the rise of Islamist rhetoric and the visibility of Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh were truly decisive in shaping regional political psychology, then Bangladesh's own February 2026 election should have produced a dramatically different outcome. Instead, despite online mobilisation and heightened visibility of Islamist groups, the overwhelming majority of voters supported BNP—a centrist, nationalist, and comparatively moderate political force. The society,

Bangladesh's water crisis requires a large-scale response. This article presents a case for a fundamentally different design that addresses water and sediment as an integrated challenge. Sediment bypass systems exist and operate successfully worldwide. The Priest Rapids Dam on Washington's Columbia River was designed with a bypass to maintain downstream delivery. Similar approaches operate on the Rhine River in Germany, as well.

Sediment bypass tunnels at Padma would allow controlled passage of sediment-laden flows during monsoon, while storing clear water for dry-season release. This is established engineering that requires recognising sediment as an essential resource. It also demands that the 1996 Ganges Treaty, set to expire in December this year, and which fails to recognise the importance of sediments, be replaced with an agreement that ensures the delta's survival. Building Tk 50,443 crore infrastructure to manage what the treaty was supposed to solve proves diplomatic failure. Therefore, any successor agreement must address sediment alongside water, require India's dams to include bypass systems, and establish monitoring with penalties when infrastructure traps sediment beyond the minimum threshold. Bangladesh's survival as a delta nation of 17 crore depends on sediment—the physical material maintaining land above sea level.

Internally, Bangladesh must manage received sediment effectively through channel re-excavation, distributary restoration, and controlled flooding, allowing the build-up of land. But even optimal internal management cannot compensate for 15-80 percent upstream loss.

The Padma Barrage demonstrates that Bangladesh possesses the capacity to implement large-scale infrastructure when survival demands it. The question is whether that framework enables solutions that take into account delta physics—both water and sediment—rather than forcing choices, solving one crisis while accelerating another. The window narrows once construction begins. The science is clear. The engineering is proven. What is required is political will to demand treaty transformation as well as internal action. The alternative is repeating Mississippi's trajectory: catastrophic land loss that restoration may arrive too late to prevent.

in other words, did not move towards theocratic politics despite intense speculation and learmongering.

Yet Indian commentary continues to portray Bangladesh as the source of communal radicalisation while refusing to examine the radicalisation within India itself.

This is why the current narrative is so dangerous. It transforms Bangladesh into a convenient moral alibi. Rather than confronting the entrenched structures of hate politics, communal polarisation, media sensationalism, and democratic erosion within India, responsibility is projected outwards.

Against this backdrop, it is disappointing that a section of Bangladeshi media and intelligentsia are also echoing these framings almost verbatim. Instead of critically interrogating Indian media narratives—many of which have long been complicit in legitimising exclusionary nationalism and anti-minority hysteria—they are internalising the accusation and engaging in collective self-blame.

Bangladesh certainly has its own democratic crises and a history of political violence and minority rights issues, and no serious observer can deny that. But acknowledging those realities does not require accepting a deeply flawed narrative that treats it as a catalyst for the rise of Hindutva in India.

The electoral transformation of West Bengal must be understood within the context of India's own political evolution: the consolidation of majoritarian nationalism, the collapse of oppositional cohesion, the extraordinary power of propaganda machinery, and the long-term ideological project of the Hindu right.

Blaming Bangladesh may be politically useful. But it is analytically dishonest, and dangerously evasive.