

India must protect Bangladesh missions

Hostile rhetoric, mobilisations by Hindutva groups fuelling unrest

We are alarmed by the hostile rhetoric and mobilisations by India's Hindu nationalist groups targeting Bangladesh, which culminated on Monday in an attack on the Asstt High Commission of Bangladesh in Agartala, Tripura. We strongly protest this blatant violation of the Vienna Convention that guarantees the inviolability of all diplomatic missions. It also marks a dangerous provocation that risks further straining Bangladesh-India ties and undermining regional stability. India has "regretted" this incident. That said, if India genuinely wants a "stable relationship" with the post-uprising Bangladesh—as its external affairs minister had said in September—the government must act decisively to de-escalate tensions and counter disinformation rather than being a bystander on the sidelines of what appears to be a coordinated anti-Bangladesh campaign.

Monday's attack was reportedly led by the Hindu Sangharsh Samity, an affiliate of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). A group of about 150 protesters stormed the premises, damaged property, and desecrated the Bangladesh flag, while security officials stood by passively. On the same day, the VHP also led another group of protesters near the Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Mumbai, just days after a similar protest outside the Deputy High Commission in Kolkata where demonstrators burned our flag and the effigies of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus. The coordinated nature of all such hostile actions suggests a worrying pattern of hostility surrounding the arrest of former ISKCON leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in Dhaka—a legal matter unrelated to his faith, but exploited nonetheless to support the false narrative of minority persecution in Bangladesh.

To say these actions were an expression of "longstanding resentment"—as a top official of the Tripura government did—is nothing but an attempt to justify the orchestrated chaos for which local political interests are equally to blame. A case in point is West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's statement in which she urged the Indian government to seek the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in Bangladesh to "ensure the safety of minorities". Such rhetoric plays into the disinformation campaign by sections of the Indian media that continue to exaggerate isolated incidents of minority attacks in Bangladesh, giving Indian nationalist politicians a tool to rally domestic support and distract from India's own challenges. Calling for UN intervention—an appeal repeated by Mamata's Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Tuesday—is also an affront to Bangladesh's sovereignty, which we vehemently protest.

We urge the Indian government to thoroughly investigate the recent string of violent protests and ensure the safety of our diplomatic missions and staff. So far, it has reportedly arrested seven individuals and suspended three policemen following the Agartala security breach. However, much more needs to be done to improve safety and restore confidence. Equally important is to actively counter, through fact-checking initiatives, the anti-Bangladesh campaign that has been ongoing ever since Sheikh Hasina's fall. We also urge Mamata Banerjee to refrain from her offensive posturing against Bangladesh, which will only further inflame tensions. Bangladesh wants a "normal and friendly" relationship with India, as our foreign affairs adviser has reiterated, and if India wants the same, it must demonstrate its commitment by addressing any bilateral issues through dialogue and mutual respect, not hostility or misrepresentation.

Education must not lead to joblessness

Align education and economic policies to utilise our labour force

The stagnant condition of our labour market, as revealed in the recently unveiled white paper on economy, sends out a concerning message. It shows how we have failed to prepare and utilise our demographic dividend—our youth—so they can effectively contribute to the economy. Instead, our universities have churned out thousands of graduates who remain unemployed. In fact, the unemployment rate among educated youth has risen 2.5 times since 2010, according to the white paper.

Most graduates are also ill-prepared for the job market, according to the paper, as they lack the necessary technical know-how. Experts have been warning about this mismatch between our education system and the job sector for quite some time. In a world driven by science and technology, 60 percent of our youth are studying arts and social sciences, while only 12 percent are currently pursuing STEM subjects in public universities. This lack of interest is largely due to the lack of industries and jobs requiring STEM graduates. Meanwhile, tertiary-level educational institutions continue to offer courses that push graduates towards clerical positions in the service industries, which have become oversaturated. As things stand, the job market offers disproportionately inadequate white-collar jobs for university graduates.

The white paper also observed that technical and vocational education and training (TVET), despite its reputation for high employability and decent salaries, has failed to attract top students. There seems to be a perception that TVET is somehow inferior to a tertiary degree, discouraging many young people from pursuing this field. Furthermore, the paper highlighted that our policies and strategies are not aligned. Instead of creating a business-friendly environment that promotes investment in private sector, encourages entrepreneurship, and rewards innovation, successive governments have focused on equipping public-sector jobs with better benefits and power. Such politicised strategies served the interests of the ruling class rather than the nation. As a result, educated young people largely aspire to the limited number of government jobs, which ultimately contribute little to economic growth.

To turn this situation around and harness Bangladesh's underutilised youth potential, our policies should encourage private-sector job creation. To achieve this, a stable law and order situation and security for doing business must be ensured. Impediments such as bribery, extortion, and nepotism must also be removed. Additionally, the image of TVET needs to be enhanced, and the proliferation of universities and degrees offering education with no job prospects must be stopped.

How Bangladeshis of all faiths can build mutual trust



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The recent killing of a Muslim lawyer in Chattogram, allegedly by deviant supporters of Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, a former leader of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), has reignited discussions about interfaith relations in Bangladesh. While the act was committed by individuals, its implications reverberate across the broader fabric of our society. It is, therefore, essential to scrutinise the responsibilities of both "majority" and "minority" communities within the ethical and philosophical framework of coexistence—not as a way to apportion blame, but to illuminate the path towards mutual trust and harmony.

In a nation where Muslims form the overwhelming majority, the responsibility to protect and respect minorities is both a moral and political imperative for them. However, this perspective often overlooks a crucial philosophical question: what are the reciprocal responsibilities of the minorities in a shared society? Cultivating trust requires a joint effort grounded in mutual accountability. Although the Muslim majority bears the primary responsibility for safeguarding minorities, the Hindu community, despite being vulnerable to political exploitation and social marginalisation, holds a vital role in promoting a collective vision of coexistence that transcends religious identities. Addressing this sensitive issue demands thoughtful reflection on both historical and contemporary dynamics, as well as a candid exploration of shared responsibilities.

At the heart of this issue lies the notion of recognition. Philosopher Charles Taylor describes recognition as a vital human need, a mutual acknowledgment of dignity and value between individuals and groups. In our context, the Hindu community often finds itself subjected to "reductive identities" imposed from the outside: as pawns in political games, as an extension of Indian influence, or as a monolithic bloc aligned with a single political party. These narratives not only undermine the community's agency but also erode the trust that is foundational to social harmony.

The first step towards building trust is the rejection of such imposed

identities. Hindus in Bangladesh must assert their individuality and diversity while resisting the temptation to align unquestioningly with any political faction or external power. This resistance is not merely pragmatic—it is an ethical stance against the instrumentalisation of identity. Political loyalty, like trust, must be distributed broadly and judiciously to avoid becoming a source of division.

Similarly, the perception of India as a "natural ally" or even a



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"saviour" of Bangladeshi Hindus requires critical reflection. While cultural and historical ties between the two neighbouring countries are undeniable, India is a foreign nation whose actions are guided by its own interests. Over-reliance on India risks alienating the Hindu community from the broader Bangladeshi populace and reinforces the narrative that they are not fully integrated members of the nation. From a philosophical standpoint, loyalty to one's homeland is not just a pragmatic necessity, but an ethical obligation as well. A minority community that reaffirms its belonging to the nation strengthens the social contract as well as the foundation for mutual trust.

This sense of loyalty can be further demonstrated by challenging external narratives, particularly those from India, that exaggerate or distort the reality of Hindu experiences in Bangladesh. Propaganda in Indian media about the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh often paints

a skewed picture that inflames tensions and mistrust. If Bangladeshi Hindus remain silent on such matters, they inadvertently reinforce suspicions within the majority Muslim population. By publicly rejecting exaggerations and urging balanced narratives, Hindus can showcase their commitment to truth and national unity.

Similarly, when the Indian government comments unduly on Bangladesh's internal matters, Hindus in Bangladesh can express their disapproval, affirming that they, too, are concerned about external interference in their sovereign nation. Bangladesh's restraint from commenting on the systemic discrimination of minorities in India reflects a commitment to the principle of non-interference, a value that Hindus—as equal stakeholders in the nation's sovereignty—can actively

Philosophers like Hannah Arendt emphasise the importance of active participation in the public sphere as a means of claiming agency and recognition. Hindus in Bangladesh can engage in civic and cultural initiatives that emphasise shared national goals and values to create a narrative of unity that transcends religious divisions. By contributing visibly to the nation's social and cultural life, the community can challenge stereotypes and demonstrate its integral role in the country's development.

Equally important is the ethical responsibility to resist the manipulation of religious identity for political gain. The poor and vulnerable within the Hindu community often suffer the most when religious identity becomes a tool for division. This is not a challenge unique to Hindus; it reflects a broader pattern in which the powerful exploit differences for their own ends. Philosopher Iris Marion Young speaks of "structural injustice" where systems perpetuate inequality not through direct acts of oppression, but through the cumulative effects of exploitation and marginalisation. Hindus, along with other communities, must actively resist these structures by advocating for policies and practices that promote justice and equity for all.

The philosophical imperative of trust extends beyond individual actions or community efforts. It is a collective project that demands a reimagining of Bangladesh's pluralistic identity. Trust is not built on silence or avoidance of differences—it requires a shared commitment to ethical principles that prioritise human dignity and shared belonging over sectarian divides. This requires a shift in perspective, where the Hindu community is not seen as merely a minority to be protected, but as an equal partner in shaping the nation's future.

At its core, the challenge facing Bangladesh is not just about interfaith relations; it is also about navigating the complexities of living together in a world of diversity. Trust, as a virtue, is both fragile and transformative. It requires the courage to extend goodwill without guarantees, and the humility to recognise the limits of one's own perspective. For both Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh, this means embracing a vision of coexistence that is not merely pragmatic but profoundly ethical.

In this vision, trust is not a gift bestowed by the majority, nor a demand made by the minority. It is a shared responsibility, built through dialogue, recognition and a collective commitment to justice. Only by embracing this collective responsibility can Bangladesh fulfil its promise as a nation united in its diversity.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Ensure justice for rural women



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In the verdant landscapes of rural Bangladesh, a devastating crisis lurks beneath the surface: a systemic violence that threatens to crush the spirit of women and girls. A groundbreaking meta-analysis by UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women in 2023 unveiled a truth so stark that it demands a collective moral reckoning: 93 percent of women in Bangladesh have either experienced violence themselves or know another woman who has suffered gender-based violence (GBV). In rural areas, this crisis represents a predatory system that traps women in a cycle of abuse, fear, and systemic neglect.

The journey to justice for rural survivors is fraught with insurmountable challenges. Institutional inadequacies plague the system, with rural areas suffering from a critical lack of trained law enforcement and judicial personnel capable of handling sensitive cases. Many police stations are ill-equipped to process complaints, with officers often displaying bias or indifference. Social stigma further compounds the problem, as community norms frequently normalise domestic violence, discouraging women from reporting abuse. The fear of social ostracism and potential retaliation silences many survivors.

Legal access remains a distant dream for most rural women. With few female lawyers and minimal legal aid services in rural regions, survivors face

significant barriers in seeking recourse. The nearest specialised courts are often hundreds of kilometres away, making legal pursuit financially and logistically impossible for many.

The Covid pandemic has catastrophically exacerbated these challenges. During lockdown, reported incidents of violence against women increased by nearly 70 percent, with a rise in first-time victims of abuse. Rural women, already marginalised, became even more vulnerable during this period.

The current infrastructure for survivor support is woefully inadequate. An estimated 21 government-run shelters exist for over eight crore women. Most shelters have strict eligibility criteria, excluding many desperate survivors. Short-term shelters typically allow stays of just a few days, and no comprehensive witness protection mechanisms exist.

The One-Stop Crisis Centres (OCCs), initially conceived as a comprehensive solution to support survivors of gender-based violence, reveal the stark gaps in support infrastructure. While these centres were designed to provide integrated services—including medical care, legal support, counselling and safe shelter—their implementation in rural areas exposes critical systemic failures.

As of 2023, Bangladesh has established approximately 81 OCCs nationwide, with 67 operating at

district- and upazila-level hospitals. However, the reality of these centres falls far short of their intended purpose. Rural OCCs are chronically understaffed, with many operating without full-time specialised personnel trained in GBV response. Medical professionals often lack comprehensive training in trauma-informed care, and the centres frequently suffer from a wide range of issues, including severe resource constraints, inadequate privacy protections, limited psychological support services, and inconsistent documentation and follow-up mechanisms.

The geographic distribution of these centres further compounds the challenge. In vast rural regions, a single OCC might have to serve hundreds of thousands of people, making access a significant hurdle. Transportation costs, social stigma, and fear of community backlash prevent many survivors from reaching these limited support points.

Moreover, the centres often operate within a patriarchal framework that inadvertently perpetuates the very power dynamics they aim to dismantle. Survivor testimonies highlight instances where centre staff prioritise family reconciliation over individual safety, effectively invalidating the experiences of women seeking protection. Many survivors report experiencing secondary trauma during their interactions, with staff displaying insensitive attitudes or creating additional barriers to seeking justice.

Addressing this critical issue demands a multifaceted approach. Comprehensive training programmes must be implemented, providing mandatory sensitivity training for police, judiciary, and healthcare workers. Specialised GBV response units should be developed in rural

police stations, with regular workshops on trauma-informed approaches.

Community-based interventions are equally crucial. Grassroots awareness campaigns must challenge harmful social norms, engaging local religious and community leaders in anti-violence initiatives. School-based education programmes on consent, gender equality, and personal rights can help transform generational attitudes.

Legal and institutional reforms are imperative. Mobile legal aid clinics must be established in rural areas, accompanied by a centralised, accessible case management system. Strict accountability measures should be implemented for law enforcement agencies handling GBV cases.

Support infrastructure requires significant enhancement. The government must increase shelters with flexible, survivor-friendly policies, develop a robust witness protection framework, and create economic rehabilitation programmes for survivors. Technology can play a pivotal role, in confidential reporting mechanisms, multilingual helplines, and remote counselling services.

The fight against gender-based violence in rural Bangladesh is not just a legal challenge—it needs a profound social transformation. It requires unwavering commitment from government institutions, civil society, community leaders, and all citizens. We cannot continue to accept a status quo where 93 percent of women in the country experience violence, and where justice remains an elusive dream for survivors. The time for comprehensive, compassionate, and decisive action is now.

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