

A new chapter for Dhaka-Delhi relations

Mutual respect and fairness are vitally important

The first high-level official talks between Bangladesh and India should be seen both as a recognition of the challenges straining our bilateral relationship and as a welcome attempt to recalibrate it in light of the new reality following Bangladesh's political changeover four months ago. During his daylong visit to Dhaka on Monday, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held separate discussions with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain, as well as his Bangladeshi counterpart Md Jashim Uddin. Media reports on the meetings indicate that both camps used the occasion to address areas of contention while laying the groundwork for what they hope to be a mutually beneficial partnership.

This is something we indeed welcome, as a constructive partnership between our two nations is essential not only for addressing existing challenges but also for unlocking the vast potential of mutual cooperation in areas of shared interest. The first step towards meaningful progress, as Prof Yunus has also highlighted, would be addressing the “clouds” or sources of tension that have overshadowed our relationship in recent months—in which India must take the lead.

Chief among these issues is the harmful narrative propagated by certain Indian media outlets and politicians about the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh, undermining its reputation and sovereignty. It is imperative that the Indian authorities take decisive steps to counter such propaganda to ensure that the trust between our peoples is not eroded by sensationalism. Of equal concern are Sheikh Hasina's inflammatory statements broadcast from her place of refuge in India, which is further fanning the anti-minority tensions and divisions. While Vikram Misri has asserted that India's ties with Bangladesh transcend party politics, the continuation of such rhetoric from its territory must be prevented to rebuild confidence in our shared journey.

The longstanding issue of border killings—with the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) gunning down a suspected cattle lifter along the Panchagarh border as recently as Friday—remains another test for the sincerity of the drive to recalibrate our partnership. The recurring loss of Bangladeshi lives at the border contradicts the spirit of neighbourly interactions. While we acknowledge India's concerns about border crimes, there is no justification for extrajudicial killings. We urge India to adopt humane and sustainable solutions to all border law enforcement issues.

The recent talks have also covered other key bilateral issues including trade, agreements on transboundary rivers, including the Teesta, flood management, electricity imports from India and beyond, Rohingya repatriation, etc. The future of our ties with India will largely depend on how India responds to these and other issues going forward. One thing is certain: increasing collaboration and cooperation from both sides will not only boost regional stability and economic integration, but can also help build a partnership that is reflective of the aspirations of both nations. As our closest neighbour, we value our ties with India. We also appreciate its desire to work closely with the interim government of Bangladesh. But our relationship must be grounded in mutual respect and fairness.

Treatment costs must not shorten life

High cost of kidney dialysis taking away hope from many patients

A recent study by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on the cost and burden of kidney dialysis has revealed a grim picture. Conducted on 477 patients across public, private, and NGO-run hospitals, the study has found that 93 percent of families experienced financial distress in accessing kidney dialysis—the primary treatment option for end-stage kidney failure (ESKF) patients.

In a country where an estimated 200–250 people per million develop ESKF each year and require dialysis, the average monthly treatment cost of Tk 46,426 is too high considering that our average monthly household income, according to an official estimate from 2022, is just Tk 32,422. As per the BIDS study, 19.5 percent of the surveyed kidney patients received fewer dialysis sessions than medically recommended because of the high cost, jeopardising their health further.

Bangladesh is already struggling with a high rate of out-of-pocket health expenditure. The exorbitant cost of kidney dialysis adds another layer to the challenges of our health system that often pushes people below the poverty line instead of safeguarding their right to health. While wealthier patients face higher absolute costs, poorer patients bear a disproportionately heavier financial burden. Unfortunately, the alternative treatment option—a kidney transplant—is often unattainable for the poor due to its high one-time cost and the risk of exploitation by unscrupulous donors.

Another interesting finding of the study is that most patients prefer NGO-run treatment centres to public and private ones, even though public hospitals offer the lowest dialysis costs. This raises questions about the quality and trustworthiness of our public health infrastructure. While reform is required in our overall health system, the issue of high kidney dialysis costs can be addressed in the short term by following the recommendations made in the research report.

The recommendations include subsidising the costs at private hospitals, expanding access to treatment by establishing facilities in semi-urban and rural areas, encouraging local pharmaceutical production of kidney disease drugs to lower prices, and incorporating low- and middle-income patients into the government's social safety net programmes. However, the long-term goal should be to reduce the disparity in our health sector by regulating fees and treatment costs across the public and private health facilities.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

UNICEF established

On this day in 1946, UNICEF, a United Nations programme devoted to improving the health, nutrition, education, and general welfare of children, was established.

We must act in the ICJ Rohingya genocide proceedings



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On Monday, marking the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus strongly condemned the persecution of the Rohingya and reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to justice and accountability for the victims. This came a day after Dr Khalilur Rahman, the high representative on the Rohingya issue, urged for global consensus on Rohingya repatriation at an international conference in Doha. Meanwhile, Slovenia's recent declaration of intervention (filed on November 29, 2024) in the Rohingya genocide case (*The Gambia vs Myanmar*) at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has reignited global attention on the issue.

Despite hosting over a million Rohingya refugees for more than seven years, Bangladesh has conspicuously remained silent on the possibility of intervening in the ICJ proceedings, raising critical questions about its commitment to international justice and the future resolution of the Rohingya crisis. The Gambia's decision to institute proceedings against Myanmar regarding the latter's breach of several obligations under the Genocide Convention brought momentum to ICJ history. In particular, The Gambia, despite being a non-affected state situated 11,570 kilometres away from Myanmar, successfully filed the proceedings based on its community interest in preventing and punishing genocide.

Though ICJ proceedings are limited to the disputant states, the interest of third states are protected by Article 59 of the ICJ statute. The ICJ statute facilitates the procedure of intervention, allowing any third state to participate in such a proceeding to safeguard its legal interest or promote its political interest. Two categories of intervention are available under the ICJ statute: (i) Article 62, which protects “an interest of a legal nature”; and (2) Article 63, which implicates the “construction of a treaty.”

In the aftermath of The Gambia's institution of proceedings, some states expressed their interest in intervening in the case. Eventually, seven states—namely Canada, Denmark, France,

Germany, the Netherlands, UK, and the Maldives—filed a joint declaration of intervention, and the Maldives submitted a sole declaration of intervention on November 15, 2023. On July 3, 2024, the ICJ issued the Order on Admissibility of Intervention, declaring the admissibility of both declarations. Interestingly, both the joint declaration of the seven states and the declaration of the Maldives



FILE PHOTO: AFP

Rohingya refugees disembark from a boat on the shoreline of the Naf River after crossing the border from Myanmar in Teknaf on September 30, 2017.

are related to Article 63, i.e. the construction and interpretation of the Genocide Convention.

Though Bangladesh supported The Gambia both financially and politically, it has omitted, despite being an affected state by Myanmar's genocidal atrocities, to enlist its name as one of the intervening states. While Bangladesh expressed its intention to intervene in the Gaza genocide case, which has no direct relevance to it, its hesitation to intervene in the Rohingya genocide case in the last five years, which has immediate bearing, is truly surprising.

The ICJ's Order on Admissibility of Intervention resurfaced the issue of whether Bangladesh will submit any declaration of intervention. This is a vital issue for the Rohingya genocide case, given that Bangladesh hosts the majority of the displaced Rohingya, many of whom are also

genocide survivors. In fact, the ICJ acknowledged Bangladesh as the directly affected state in its Preliminary Objections Judgment (Para 113). One of the remedies asked by The Gambia is “the safe and dignified return of forcibly displaced Rohingya.” The merit judgment of the ICJ will have a direct impact on Bangladesh.

It is to be noted that Bangladesh does not have the entitlement to institute direct proceedings against Myanmar due to its reservation to Article IX of the Genocide Convention. Article IX confers the jurisdictional basis over any dispute regarding genocide to the ICJ. However, Bangladesh has continued to offer diplomatic and financial support to The Gambia regarding the Rohingya genocide case. Admittedly, it is very surprising and equally disappointing that Bangladesh has yet to submit

explore whether Bangladesh fulfils such requirements.

First, there should be an interest of a legal nature, not a right or a legal interest. Article 81(2)(a) also speculates a legal interest that “may be affected” by a decision. Thus, there exists a very low threshold of evidence. It is apparent that the remedy sought by The Gambia related to the Rohingya repatriation is closely linked to Bangladesh's continuous endeavours to repatriate the Rohingya to Myanmar. Bangladesh may also underscore its potential legal duties owed to the Rohingya genocide survivors currently taking shelter in Bangladesh after the final judgment. Thus, it is safe to assume that Bangladesh can successfully argue that it has an interest of a legal nature that may be affected by the eventual judgment of the proceedings in the discussion.

Second, Bangladesh should highlight the precise object of its intervention. In earlier cases, intervening states sought to inform the nature and description of the legal rights and interests that may be affected by the eventual judgments. In the present proceedings, Bangladesh may claim that it seeks to inform the court of its legal rights and interests in relation to the repatriation of the Rohingya who took refuge in its territory.

Third, the ICJ has clarified in its case laws (*Honduras/El Salvador* and *Cameroon vs Nigeria*) that no such jurisdictional link is required in the case of an Article 62 Intervention. As a result, Bangladesh's reservation to Article IX may not bar it from intervening under Article 62 of the ICJ statute.

At this juncture, it is to be investigated whether Bangladesh may still avail itself of the opportunity to intervene in this case, especially after the order of July 3, 2024. As per Article 82(2) of the Rules of the Court, an application for permission to intervene shall be filed on or before the deadline for filing the last written pleading. In the present case, the deadline for submitting the last written pleading, i.e. Myanmar's Rejoinder, is December 30, 2024. Accordingly, Bangladesh is still within its time limit to intervene. But time is slipping away.

It is important to emphasise that Bangladesh's decision to intervene in the Rohingya genocide case will not jeopardise its repatriation efforts. On the contrary, this intervention could positively influence the upcoming repatriation process. Therefore, Bangladesh should proceed with its intervention application to clarify its legal rights and interests in the proceedings, thereby assisting the ICJ in making a more informed deliberation.

Are our information systems secure?



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MAMUN RASHID

The recent surge in cyber-attacks globally, coupled with increasing digital adoption in Bangladesh, has magnified the vulnerabilities within our own cyber ecosystem. Cyber threats are evolving at an alarming rate, becoming more sophisticated and harder to detect. We know of the central bank money heist. Reputed media operators also reported of IT firewall break. Apart from that, many of our public undertakings have also reported repeated cyber-attacks or hacking. In the same line, phishing attacks, ransomware, and data breaches are becoming increasingly common, affecting both individuals and organisations. Organisations must adopt robust measures to protect their data and systems from unauthorised access, misuse, and potential breaches. An effective Information Security Management System (ISMS) is the backbone of any organisation's information security strategy. It encompasses various activities to safeguard information assets, including software, hardware, services, data, staff, and intangible assets.

Identifying and classifying assets is crucial as they are categorised based on their importance and the impact their loss or compromise would have on the organisation. This includes software, hardware, services, data, and other assets. Proper asset management ensures that all assets are protected according to their classification.

Implementing strong access controls is essential to prevent unauthorised access to sensitive information. This includes role-based access, secure log-in procedures, password management systems, and session timeouts. Access to information should be granted based on the principle of least privilege, ensuring that individuals only have access to the information necessary for their role.

A robust incident management process is vital for identifying, reporting, and responding to security incidents. This includes having a dedicated team to handle incidents, conducting root cause analysis, and implementing corrective actions to prevent recurrence. Regular reporting and review of incidents help in the continuous improvement of the security posture. Secure coding practices and effective management of the application development lifecycle are critical to preventing vulnerabilities. Regular security testing, including vulnerability assessments and penetration testing, helps identify and mitigate potential threats.

Employees are the first line of defense in information security. Comprehensive training and awareness programmes ensure that staff are knowledgeable about security policies and practices. Background checks, security training, and adherence to the code of conduct are essential components of human

resource security. Regular audits and compliance checks are necessary to ensure that the Information Security Management System is effective and aligned with industry standards. For instance, ISO/IEC 27001:2013 provides a framework for managing information security. Internal and external audits help identify gaps and areas for improvement, ensuring that the



VISUAL : COLLECTED

organisation remains compliant with regulatory requirements.

Business continuity and disaster recovery plans are essential to ensure that operations can continue in the event of a disruption. This includes having redundant systems, regular testing of recovery procedures, and continuous monitoring to address emerging risks. An ISO 22301 certification, for example, demonstrates an organisation's commitment to maintaining business continuity.

Bangladesh faces significant challenges in access to affordable information due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of appropriate education. The absence of an integrated computer security system and education on cybersecurity compounds these issues. Cooperation, collaboration, and investment in cybersecurity are crucial to develop a culture of security and trust. Despite improvements, many organisations still use outdated security protocols, especially SMEs,

which are highly vulnerable due to limited resources and awareness. The absence of a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy exacerbates these vulnerabilities, leaving critical sectors like banking, healthcare, and telecommunications exposed to cyber threats.

Bangladesh has implemented several key policies to advance its ICT sector, including the National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy 2018, National Digital Commerce Policy 2018, Cyber Security Act, 2023, and the Electronic Transaction Act. These initiatives aim to develop a comprehensive ICT infrastructure across the country, ensuring that all citizens have access to information, which in turn fosters empowerment, good governance, and sustainable economic growth. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission has issued various guidelines and directives to enhance cybersecurity in the telecommunications sector. This includes requirements for telecom operators to implement robust security measures and report cyber incidents. The Data Protection Act 2023 sets out guidelines and best practices for both organisations and the government on managing personal data. It governs how personal data is processed and ensures the protection of individual rights.

While no system can be entirely impervious to threats, a comprehensive and proactive approach to information security can significantly mitigate risks and enhance the overall security posture of an organisation. By adhering to established standards and continuously improving their security measures, organisations can ensure that their information systems remain secure in an ever-evolving threat landscape.