

The alarming state of private healthcare

Licence renewal failures are undermining healthcare integrity

It is deeply concerning that thousands of private hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres across the country continue to operate without renewing their licences, largely due to inadequate monitoring by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Reportedly, out of 19,627 registered private hospitals and clinics, only 914, or just 4.66 percent, renewed their licences as of April 27. The previous year saw slightly better compliance, with 2,754 facilities renewing their licences. Likewise, only 1,790 of the 35,597 registered private diagnostic centres—around 5 percent—have completed their renewals this year, compared to 5,735 last fiscal year. This situation poses serious risks to patient well-being and safety, treatment quality and overall service standards, as well as hygiene in these facilities. A lack of oversight by the authorities could also lead to the use of substandard medical equipment or unsafe practices, as experts have warned.

According to the acting president of the Bangladesh Private Hospital, Clinic, and Diagnostic Owners Association, 90 percent of hospitals and diagnostic centres have applied for renewal this fiscal year. However, the process faces delays due to the limited inspection capacity of the DGHS. The requirement for environmental and narcotics clearance further slows down the renewal process. Previously, facilities could submit proof that they had applied for clearance, which was considered sufficient for licence renewal. However, a recent policy change now mandates the submission of an environmental clearance certificate, adding another obstacle to timely renewals.

The authorities' failure to conduct inspections efficiently has also allowed some healthcare providers to exploit the system, submitting renewal applications without necessary or up-to-date documents while continuing operations unchecked. This issue demands immediate attention. Over the past two decades, private healthcare facilities have proliferated across the country, mainly due to gaps in the public healthcare system. Unfortunately, many of these hospitals prioritise profits over patient care, treating healthcare as a secondary concern. Some even operate without the required credentials, a situation made worse by the inefficiency of the regulatory bodies. Without regular renewals, maintaining quality healthcare will become increasingly difficult.

A renewed licence ensures that a healthcare facility has the necessary manpower, equipment, and operational standards in place. Therefore, we urge the DGHS to expand its inspection team and improve resource allocation to ensure thorough evaluations of these institutions. While the renewal process should be simplified to avoid unnecessary hassles, private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres must still comply with standard procedures and submit proper up-to-date documents. Additionally, the DGHS must proactively scrutinise the thousands of private healthcare facilities that have mushroomed across the country over the years. And institutions failing to meet required standards should have their licences revoked to uphold healthcare integrity and protect patient welfare across the country.

Our flawed education system must be fixed

Why is there no education reform commission?

Speakers at an award ceremony of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro raised one of the biggest challenges in education—the stark disparities in the quality of education across different streams, resulting in intensified social inequality. We have three major streams of education: Bangla medium, English medium, and the madrasa system, which mostly offers education to the less privileged sections of society. The glaring discrepancies in the quality of education in each stream result in differences in opportunities, creating an elite class (a tiny portion of the population) that enjoys the most opportunities, while the majority of students fall behind in terms of securing the best jobs and achieving financial prosperity.

There has been, moreover, no assessment of market realities—whether the number of jobs available coincides with the number of university degree holders. Thus, we see many young people with Master's degrees remaining unemployed or working in low-paid jobs. Vocational education, on the other hand, can provide many young people with skills that are in demand both at home and abroad and can lead to better-paying jobs. But very little thought has been given to improving and expanding vocational education.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, the founder of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, has also pointed out the lacklustre curricula followed by most schools in the country. Textbooks currently do not engage students and therefore will not be able to produce the kind of enlightened individuals needed to build a nation. The archaic method of rote learning does not lead to critical thinking or analytical skills.

We also agree with one of the speakers that it is disappointing that although an education committee was formed to address reforms in the primary and non-formal education systems, the interim government has yet to form an education commission to holistically address the challenges of the education sector. What could be more important than proposing reforms to this flawed education system, where the quality of education a student receives depends on their family's social and economic status?

We know that in the past there have been many commissions that have made recommendations to address the challenges of an unequal education system, but successive governments have done little or nothing to implement any of them. We expect, however, that the next democratically elected government will give education the priority it deserves, as it is a critical factor in Bangladesh's progress. Education must be accessible to all, enlightening, and relevant for today's world. To that end, establishing an education reform commission is a necessary step.

EDITORIAL

'Peace at the border is Bangladesh's duty'

In light of a United Nations' proposal for establishing a humanitarian channel into Myanmar's Rakhine state, Dr Khalilur Rahman, national security adviser and chief adviser's high representative for the Rohingya issue, speaks to Ramisa Rob of The Daily Star clarifying Bangladesh's position and what lies ahead.

What is the current status of Bangladesh's involvement in humanitarian assistance in Rakhine state?

The question of humanitarian support to the Rakhine state arose when we learned about the acute humanitarian crisis it was facing. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) predicted impending famine-like conditions. We were concerned that this situation would drive more people from Rakhine into Bangladesh.

We are already shouldering the burden of sheltering over 1.2 million forcibly displaced Rohingya from Myanmar and cannot simply afford another wave of refugees. It's already a big burden for us.

Given the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Rakhine state, the UN and Bangladesh began consideration of the provision of humanitarian support. Since all other aid delivery avenues are not viable due to conflict, Bangladesh turned out to be the only feasible option. The UN would organise distribution of aid through its channels within Rakhine, and Bangladesh would provide logistical support to transfer aid across the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

We also considered that aid to Rakhine would help stabilise the state and pave the way for creating enabling conditions for the return of the Rohingya people to Myanmar.

There has been informal discussion between the UN and Bangladesh on humanitarian aid to Rakhine but no formal proposal has been made by any party. Like elsewhere in the world, such support would require consent of all relevant parties and satisfaction of a number of prerequisites for aid provision. These include, among others, unimpeded access of aid providers and recipients, non-discrimination in the provision of aid, non-weaponisation of assistance and suspension of armed activities.



Dr Khalilur Rahman

FILE PHOTO: STAR

How is Bangladesh balancing between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar ruling junta?

We realised the need for keeping contact with the AA when they took control over the Myanmar side of our border. It is our duty to protect our border and keep it peaceful. For this reason, we decided to make contacts with the AA.

We have continued to engage them in the context of humanitarian support, repatriation of the Rohingya, and the inclusion of the Rohingya at all levels of the emerging governance and security structure in Rakhine.

Our contact with the AA is due to practical necessity. We are also maintaining contacts with the Myanmar government. We need to keep in touch with all relevant actors with a view to sustainably resolving the Rohingya issue.

The foreign adviser has recently said certain conditions will need to be met for Bangladesh's agreement to the UN proposal for humanitarian assistance. What are those conditions and has there been any progress in such discussions?

All the relevant parties need to agree. Moreover, the AA needs to ensure that access of aid providers and recipients is not impeded, aid is not weaponised and there are no armed activities.

Moreover, the AA needs to sincerely demonstrate its commitment to an inclusive society in Rakhine by including Rohingya at all levels of Rakhine's governance and security structure. Otherwise, it will appear to the world as a picture of ethnic cleansing, which we will not accept. We are awaiting the AA's response.

What are the security stakes and risks for Bangladesh?

Giving aid in a conflict situation is

likely to jeopardise safety and security of the aid providers and recipients. Prevalence of landmines and IEDs is another threat to safety and security. These issues need to be addressed ahead of the provision of aid.

What would China's position be regarding the UN humanitarian assistance to Rakhine? What would India's position be?

Saving lives from an impending humanitarian disaster is a collective responsibility of the global community. All of us need to join efforts to tackle this problem. Stability in Rakhine is our priority. We can't make much progress towards repatriation without achieving it.

We are already seeing more Rohingya coming into Bangladesh. If this continues, how does Bangladesh plan on addressing another influx?

We don't want another influx of refugees. We simply can't afford it. There was a sizable influx of Rohingya from Rakhine during intensified conflict between the AA and Myanmar forces from 2023 until autumn of 2024. Rohingya refugees have continued to enter Bangladesh thereafter, albeit in smaller numbers.

We are coordinating with the relevant actors to prevent another wave of refugees into Bangladesh. In particular, we have signalled to the AA that they must ensure that there is no further violence, discrimination and displacement of Rohingya inside Rakhine. They have the responsibility to observe international law including international humanitarian law. And the world is watching. Our continued contacts with them will depend upon their action in this area, as well as on Rohingya representation.

Our path to a peaceful and equitable society

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MD. LAWHA MAHFUZ and AHMED ABID

The fall of Awami League's 15-year rule on August 5, 2024, was a turning point in the socio-political history of Bangladesh. The movement was sparked by student movements, social mobilisations, and civil disobedience against deep-rooted injustice. Nine months on, as the administration of Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus struggles to attain stability, one painful question lingers: can Bangladesh escape retribution and move onto the path of justice, reconciliation, and peace?

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report categorically puts gross human rights violations in the protests on the doorstep of the Hasina regime. To comprehend the present, we have to trace the roots: after half a century of independence, Bangladesh remains entangled in its colonial legacy. As Johan Galtung argued, when state institutions are based on structural violence, but justice must reach further than the courts. Reconciliation—political, social, and moral—is the basis for healing a divided country. The violence in 2024 killed many, injured others, and traumatised a multitude.

Students, forced to restore order and help with flood relief, returned to schools without recognition or healing—channeling their pain and hope onto the walls in graffiti.

For lasting peace, truth-telling and acknowledgment must be national priorities.

Around the world, truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs), such as South Africa's, have assisted countries in dealing with past atrocities and healing. Bangladesh also requires such a process, both to

punish perpetrators and to remember victims, record abuses, and create a shared memory for generations to come.

The interim government, though unelected, bears a historical responsibility. It must institutionalise a national reconciliation mission, which must ensure several matters.

First, public recognition and reparation for victims of violence, both from the protest movements and state responses, must be provided. Secondly, there should be support for the wounded individuals and families of the deceased, including psychological counselling and financial aid. Third, transparent investigations into abuses of power, especially extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and use of excessive force is crucial. And finally, public archives or commissions to preserve the truth about the 2024 movement including the war crimes of 1971, allowing space for dialogue and memorialisation should be established.

Besides, justice is not merely a function of courts, rather, it is a collective ethical commitment. As philosopher John Rawls argued, a just society is one in which institutions protect the least advantaged and where citizens accept moral responsibility for upholding justice in both public and private life. In Bangladesh's case, this means more than rebuilding institutions; it calls for a shift in societal values.

Citizens must ask themselves: how do we contribute to the systems of injustice, either by action or by silence? Are we complicit in discriminatory practices, or do we stand in solidarity with the oppressed? An emergent new Bangladesh cannot be engineered through isolated legal or administrative change from the top. Without a general moral awakening in which empathy, equity, and civic courage become settled cultural imperatives, any political transformation will remain superficial

and vulnerable. Real justice does not just demand new laws, but new ways of living together as a society.

Therefore, renewal at the institutional level is required. Police, judiciary, education, and financial systems must be reconstructed on the foundation of transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability.

The policies must address the most vulnerable, with stronger social safety nets, education reform, and decentralisation of development.

No less important is the safeguarding of freedom of speech, press freedom, and academic freedom—freedoms eroded by the previous regime. Democratic growth demands strong culture of dissent and dialogue. Equally important is the protection of religious-ethnic minorities, including Indigenous people. The state must ensure that secularism, pluralism, and human rights are not abstract ideals but lived realities.

Bangladesh is at a moral and political crossroads. The collapse of the previous regime in 2024 was revolutionary as well as an opportunity to construct a new social pact based on justice, equality, and reconciliation. In the era of the Fifth Industrial Revolution, the colonial paradigm is obsolete. Technologically empowered youth can reveal facts hidden by political elites even in the face of suppressive laws by autocratic regimes.

However, genuine peace cannot be achieved by demanding vengeance or eliminating history. Brave questioning, communal healing, and concerted action are called for. Claiming the entirety of 1971 history is important; limiting it to just the 2024 movement would be a fatal mistake.

The way forward requires more than fresh politicians or statutes—it requires fresh ethical vision. Bangladesh must have a choice between timeless injustices and a world of freedom, dignity, and solidarity.