

## Don't let babies be casualties of war

World must come together to save Gaza's children

The UN's warning on the state of Gaza on Tuesday—that two million people face starvation and 14,000 babies face death within 48 hours if aid doesn't reach them on time—paints a picture that is not just dire; it is the epitome of distress. These people are being subjected to a war they had no part in making. World leadership has failed to put a stop to this blatant disregard for human lives in a largely one-sided war that has violated all international conventions on armed conflict and human rights. The current situation should have a sobering effect on world leaders, and from recent reports, it seems it has, at least on the surface. However, whether they can capitalise on that and come together to restrain Israel from causing further damage remains to be seen.

According to reports, Israel on Monday allowed humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip, which it had blocked for more than two and a half months, letting five aid carrying trucks through. But this happened not because Israeli leadership decided to uphold human rights; its prime minister explained to supporters that preventing a famine in Gaza was necessary for "diplomatic reasons" as "images of mass starvation" could delegitimise their war efforts. Just a few days ago, however, he launched a fresh military offensive in Gaza—a move Israel's war cabinet approved earlier this month, aimed at "taking control" of the entire strip.

The lack of empathy in Israel's leadership for the starving residents of Gaza boggles the mind. Its actions, including blocking aids, have drawn widespread condemnation, including from some of its allies. On Monday, the UK, France, and Canada warned of "concrete actions" against the country if it continued its operations in Gaza. But this is nothing new. Countries and people worldwide have been criticising Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza since the beginning of its military offensive in retaliation to the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. That has made no difference whatsoever, as their concern has never translated into effective action to stop Israel from indiscriminately killing innocent civilians. The ceasefire deal finalised in January this year fell through in less than two months. Israel continues to do as it pleases, having killed more than 53,000 people in over 20 months now.

Evidently, mere warnings will no longer cut it. The time has come for Israel's friends to force its hand through stern measures. If that means imposing targeted sanctions to make it follow international laws and allow humanitarian efforts in Gaza—without any conditions—then so be it. There is absolutely no time to waste when people, including babies, are starving to death.

## Prevent bird strike hazards at HSIA

CAAB must address the issue to enhance flight safety

We are concerned about the rising incidents of bird strikes at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) that have often resulted in flight cancellations, aircraft damage, and even crash landings. On May 20, a Turkish Airlines flight was forced to make an emergency landing after a bird strike ignited its second engine shortly after takeoff. Thankfully, all 11 crew members and 280 passengers aboard the Istanbul-bound flight remained unharmed. Reportedly, the dense bushes in the airport area are good habitats for grasshoppers and butterflies, which attract different types of birds. The presence of waste collection centres and landfills near the airport also attracts birds, particularly black kites, posing significant risks to flight safety.

Unfortunately, while flight safety officials from various airlines have called on the authorities to take proper action to address the threat, the latter have been unable to do so effectively. Bird strikes are a common phenomenon at airports around the world, but HSIA seems particularly prone to it. In 2023, a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight on the Dhaka-Bangkok route had to abandon takeoff after a bird strike caused one of its tyres to burst. The same year, a Fly Dubai flight aborted takeoff after a bird strike on its left engine damaged three propeller blades.

Such incidents continue to happen. According to a research paper presented at a recent workshop, 10 major bird strike incidents occurred at HSIA between May 2023 and May 2024. International Air Transport Association data shows that from January 2023 to October 2024, HSIA recorded 1.73 bird strikes per 1,000 flights, compared to just 0.5 at other international airports. The situation is clearly concerning, and must be addressed before a major accident occurs.

We urge the authorities to take all necessary measures to deter birds in and around the airport. Airports across the globe use both modern and conventional technologies to drive birds away from key aviation installations. Our airport authorities must learn from their experiences. Reportedly, HSIA has two bird shooters and some equipment—machines that emit certain frequencies to deter birds, as well as gas cannons—which should be properly utilised. Most importantly, the hundreds of open garbage spots surrounding the airport must be removed. Airport authorities must coordinate with relevant agencies to encourage birds to seek alternative nesting and feeding grounds to ensure flight safety.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Hitler, Mussolini sign the Pact of Steel

On this day in 1939, Adolf Hitler of Germany and Benito Mussolini of Italy signed the Pact of Steel, a full military and political alliance between their countries.



# How not to describe the Awami League



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When the Awami League government initiated the prosecution of Jamaat-e-Islami leaders at the International Crimes Tribunal in 2010, it justified the use of an unamended International Crimes (Tribunal) Act, 1973 by arguing that the act was modelled on the legal framework used in the post-World War II Nuremberg Trials. According to the government and its supporters, the act reflected international legal standards because it paralleled the laws under which senior Nazi leaders were prosecuted.

This justification, however, ignored the substantial evolution of international law between 1945 and 2010. While the Awami League may have been correct in saying the 1973 act adhered to the standards of the 1940s, it failed to recognise that international legal standards and definitions had significantly developed over the subsequent six decades. As such, relying solely on the Nuremberg framework in 2010 was highly problematic.

Today, we see a troubling echo of that historical distortion. Some proponents of banning the Awami League draw comparisons between the party and the Nazi Party, citing the Allied powers' postwar dissolution of the latter as justification. Such analogies are frequently accompanied by the claim that the Awami League is comparable to the Nazi Party.

There are profound and fundamental differences between Nazi Germany and the Awami League's governance in Bangladesh. Nazi Germany was a totalitarian dictatorship, enforced through institutions like the Gestapo and SS, that invaded countries across Europe in pursuit of global domination. It implemented the industrial-scale genocide of six million Jews and millions of others, including Roma, disabled individuals, political dissidents, and more, through a system of concentration camps and gas chambers.

To equate this with the Awami League is both to trivialise the enormity of Nazi crimes and distort the reality



FILE PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Burnt remains of the Awami League office at Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka on August 6, 2024, a day after the party's ouster from power.

of Bangladeshi politics. While serious criticisms of the Awami League are both valid and necessary, they must be proportionate and grounded in fact.

There were extrajudicial killings during the Awami League rule—deplorable and indefensible—but between 2009 and 2023, according to Odhikar, these numbered below 200 annually, comparable to the average yearly figures of killings recorded during the five years of the previous BNP government: just over 200 killings per year. The Awami League government did suppress media freedom and censor free speech more generally, shutting down *Amar Desh* and *Sangram*, imprisoning at least two editors, closing a couple of TV stations and arresting hundreds under restrictive social media laws. Yet, independent media continued to operate, with plenty of criticism. Under the BNP rule, ETV, a popular independent TV station, was forcibly closed.

200 cases of individuals who either remained missing or were later found dead throughout the 15-plus years of Awami League rule—a tragic and deplorable figure, but far below the scale seen in Argentina or Chile in the 1970s and 1980s, or Sri Lanka, where tens of thousands were disappeared and killed.

Elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024 were deeply flawed, with the 2018 election widely regarded as rigged. Still, elections were held, and opposition parties had the option to participate—unlike in Nazi Germany, where from 1933 onwards, all political parties and opposition of any kind was banned.

Yes, the Awami League promoted a cult of personality and a divisive form of nationalist ideology, but it was neither racist nor supremacist in the way Nazi ideology was. The Awami League's nationalism was rooted in the legacy of the Liberation War, not in theories of ethnic superiority.

So any comparison of the Awami League government with Nazi Germany does not stand up to scrutiny. Nor does trying to justify the ban on its activities on the back of what the Allied powers did in 1945 after the end of a six-year global war and genocide. The ban on the Nazi Party is no "global precedent," nor is it "conceptually similar" as some have argued in seeking to justify the ban.

It is telling, and somewhat troubling, that the current government must reach back 80 years to 1945 to defend its decision—just as the Awami League once did when invoking history to legitimise the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act. Far more recent examples of political party bans offer cautionary tales, even if they are not historically analogous: the banning of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq in 2003, which helped ignite a civil war, or the proscription of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2013, which led to widespread human rights abuses. These cases highlight the dangers of outlawing major political forces in a polarised society, without being direct historical comparisons to contemporary Bangladesh.

The misuse of Nazi analogies is part of a broader pattern of rhetorical distortion. The Awami League is casually described as "fascist." Key characteristics of a fascist party include the glorification of war and an aggressive belief in the superiority of the nation or an ethnic group. While elements of the Awami League's conduct may well resemble certain authoritarian traits of a fascist party, it is inaccurate to describe it as one.

Apart from all these descriptions being intellectually inaccurate, they are politically reckless and dangerous. Such rhetoric helps to legitimise repressive actions—whether through baseless arrests of party members and supporters, which have been going on in recent months, or in outright party bans, as has just been announced.

For more than 15 years, Bangladesh endured a political climate in which the Awami League frequently distorted public discourse. Critics were branded as "Razakars" (collaborators), and even the main opposition party, the BNP, was routinely labelled "anti-liberation" or a "terrorist" organisation. This rhetoric served to justify a series of repressive actions. Now, with the fall of the Awami League, the question arises: is Bangladesh simply going to mirror the same manipulative rhetoric—only with new vocabulary and different targets?

# The price of unchecked protest politics



THE STREET VIEW

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Once a symbol of resilience, Dhaka has now become synonymous with relentless street protests and processions with various demands. What was once a means of voicing collective grievances has turned into a spectacle that is chaotic, disruptive, and at times alarmingly close to being anarchist. In today's Dhaka, the fastest way to be heard is not through dialogue or democratic processes, but by blocking roads and disrupting public life. The more disruption one causes, the more likely they will gain attention and concessions.

This shift reflects a deeper crisis: the breakdown of institutional governance. The streets have replaced the parliament and other platforms for voicing demands and shaping national discourse. Negotiation has given way to confrontation. Tragically, public suffering—once something to be avoided—has become a calculated strategy. Disorder is now the norm.

What we are witnessing is more than just a wave of protests, however. Since the July uprising, a troubling new trend has emerged. Under the guise of "mob justice," various groups, including students, have taken the law into their own hands. Empowered by public sympathy and a sense of impunity, they have often engaged in unlawful activities without accountability. What began as a

broad-based movement for democratic renewal is now at risk of being hijacked by those seeking power, recognition, or revenge.

Is this the spirit of July? Did people sacrifice their lives for lawlessness to prevail? The movement was not led by students alone—it was a national awakening that drew strength from people across social, political, and

revenue.

We've seen such patterns before. The Shahbagh movement, too, began with high hopes on the streets. But without structural backing, leadership, and clear goals, it faltered. That history should be a warning: revolutions that remain on the streets are vulnerable to being co-opted, lost, or crushed.

Meanwhile, the interim government, entrusted with steering the nation towards its most critical election in decades, is faltering. Reform was promised. A fresh start was envisioned. But instead, we see delay, dysfunction, and drift. While some argue that the government is overwhelmed, others believe it is using the unrest to justify

prolonging its stay in power. Either way, public trust is eroding, and expectations are fading.

What's most disappointing is that capable individuals are in key positions, yet they appear paralysed by indecision or political caution. The government has either failed to set its priorities right or has chosen to linger in power.

As the days pass, the distance between the people's aspirations and the state's actions only grows.

The Yunus administration's signature stance has been to turn a blind eye till a street campaign begins to disrupt civic life and cause serious public suffering. But by that point, the one immediate and most expedient recourse has been to capitulate and agree to the demands.

The interim government has thus far failed to show a convincing resolve to reject demands from the streets, no matter how unreasonable. Whether it was to increase the age limit for government jobs or the demand for a separate university for certain colleges, the government has not been able to dissuade protesters in most cases. Nor has it been able to foil such campaigns.

The path forward must begin with restoring law and order, not through repression, but through principled leadership. Parliament, not the streets, must once again become the centre of democratic discourse, which demands an immediate, transparent, and credible election roadmap. Only then can the people's voice return to its rightful place: within the institutions built to serve them.

If this moment is squandered—if the hopes of July dissolve into infighting and opportunism—the consequences will be devastating. Bangladesh has waited too long for democratic rebirth. It cannot afford to be betrayed again.

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