

No alternative to Israel-Iran ceasefire

As the side responsible for starting war, onus lies on Israel to end it

There is no denying that Israel, having started the war based on a false claim that Iran was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons, bears primary responsibility for ending it. Not only did it impose the war unilaterally, but it also manipulated the US into joining it. What followed then—with US bombers dropping 30,000-pound bunker-buster bombs on three Iranian nuclear facilities, and Iran responding by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz and carrying out strikes on a US military base—had the world sitting on the edge of its seat. The dramatic announcement of a ceasefire early Tuesday only underscored how dangerously close the world came to a wider, multi-front, and far more impactful war. Donald Trump, despite having lost any credibility to be a moral voice in this crisis, has urged both sides not to violate the truce.

Moreover, both sides certainly cannot be held to the same standards of responsibility. Still, given the deaths, destruction, and disruptions the war has already caused, we do hope both will exercise the restraint now expected of them. Israel, with a perpetually battle-ready leadership, may be on the lookout for any excuse, real or manufactured, to derail the peace effort. Early signs show how fragile it can be. Soon after the ceasefire announcement, Israel's military accused Iran of breaking the truce by launching two ballistic missiles—an allegation the latter denied. But the Zionist state still vowed to retaliate. So, while we welcome the ceasefire initiative that both sides had agreed to, we must acknowledge the persistent lack of trust and goodwill that may undermine any chance of peace.

We don't need to remind anyone of the wider risks and costs associated with the war, not just in the countries it is being fought. Since June 13, Israeli attacks killed 606 people and wounded 5,332 in Iran as of Monday. Israel had far fewer but still significant losses. But as we have noted in this column before, the war has already left a trail of uncertainty across the global oil markets and supply chains which, should armed hostilities persist, would continue to ripple far beyond the Middle East, reaching even Bangladesh. Bangladesh's energy sector may come under significant threat if the war escalates and Iran follows through on its threat to block the Strait of Hormuz. Already, our LPG shipments have been reported to be stalled. Most developing countries will be similarly affected if the war continues.

There is no alternative to a permanent ceasefire then. This unjust war that two hegemonistic, nuclear-armed states have imposed on Iran must stop, and civilians and the world in general must be shielded from its effects. The onus lies on Israel, and its enablers, to ensure the ceasefire remains firmly in place.

We must stop culture of domestic abuse

State's failure to stop intimate partner violence unacceptable

We are alarmed by the high rate of domestic violence that women in the country have to endure throughout their lives. According to a recent survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), about 82 percent of women in Barishal and 81 percent of women in Khulna have experienced at least one instance of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence by a partner or husband in their lifetime. While the rates are highest in these two divisions, women in other divisions are not in any better situation. Approximately 76 percent of women in Chattogram, 75 percent in Mymensingh, around 75 percent in Rajshahi, and 74 percent in Rangpur have also experienced such violence. In the two divisions—Dhaka and Sylhet—where such violence was found to be comparatively lower, the rate still stands at around 73 percent, highlighting how pervasive intimate partner violence has become.

One of the findings of the survey report—that the rate of domestic violence is higher in disaster-prone areas—deserves particular attention. According to an expert, in disaster-prone areas, men often leave home in search of work, and during their absence, women are burdened with increasing household responsibilities and caregiving duties for family members, yet their opinions are not valued in decision-making. This also increases abuse. Unfortunately, very few victims pursue legal action in such cases. For instance, although Barishal has the highest rate of domestic violence, legal action is taken in only 6 percent of the cases, as the survey reveals.

Over the years, multiple studies have been conducted to assess the extent of domestic violence in the country, all of which came up with similarly alarming results. Data rarely seems to influence policy responses or measures. Even society in general still seems not ready to acknowledge the incidence of domestic violence and the many damaging repercussions of rising levels of physical and sexual violence—including rape—both in homes and public spaces. Only the other day, we commented on how marriage is being used as a cover-up for rape. Such practices and vulnerabilities must end so that women can live with safety and dignity. We have the necessary laws and policies in place, which should be enforced effectively. The state should also take effective steps to inform and enable women about their legal rights in such cases.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Korean War begins



On this day in 1950, North Korea unleashed an attack southward across the 38th parallel, after which the UN Security Council (minus the Soviet delegate) passed a resolution calling on UN members to assist South Korea.



Dr Selim Raihan is professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Dhaka and executive director at the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). He can be reached at selim.raihan@econdu.ac.bd

SELIM RAIHAN

Bangladesh's external debt has doubled since 2017, standing at approximately \$100 billion in 2024. This accelerated growth indicates a significant turn in the country's economic direction. Most of this borrowing has gone towards financing large-scale infrastructure projects, supported by bilateral and multilateral sources. However, the pace and magnitude of this debt increase are a cause for concern regarding long-term financial stability. There is apprehension about the country's ability to repay and service this debt, especially in the face of threats from the prevailing global economic environment, rising interest rates, dwindling concessional loans, and stressed domestic economic and political situations.

The country's development spending has also increased, mostly in transport, energy, and connectivity. The investment, however, has not yielded the desired returns due to a chain of inefficiencies. In the meantime, the global situation has worsened, further taxing the country's economy. These external pressures, in addition to internal problems, necessitate Bangladesh's shift towards a more strategic approach to debt management, where borrowed capital is employed effectively and efficiently to promote sustainable growth. Also, emphasis on avoiding mismanagement and corruption will be essential in maximising the economic dividend of foreign borrowings and placing the country's financial situation on a firm footing.

The debt bubble is ominous, given Bangladesh's narrow export base and heavy reliance on remittance inflows. The country's main foreign income source, garment exports, has not kept pace with rising import costs, further adding pressure on the current account deficit. With Bangladesh graduating from its least developed country (LDC) status, concessional finance will no longer be as readily available as before, and debt repayment will become that much harder. Dependence on one export sector also makes the economy perilously vulnerable to risk, particularly during uncertain global trading times. However, attempts at



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

export diversification have so far yielded nothing spectacular, and the economy remains vulnerable to external shocks. The remittance flows, as large as they have been, have also been unstable and unpredictable, which has helped push the financial scene into volatility. Strategic policy measures for dealing with such issues entail reinforcing export diversification, improving investment efficiency, and tapping alternative sources of foreign funding to achieve sustainable economic growth and stability.

The accumulation of debt can badly hinder the government from withstanding economic shocks and confronting crises. With foreign debt amounting to nearly \$100 billion now, the necessity for thorough tracking and risk evaluation cannot be overemphasised. The country needs a strategic roadmap to ensure that borrowed resources, when wisely invested, generate sustainable returns. Good debt management requires transparent methods, prudent investment decisions, and continuous

overspending, and mismanagement were reported in some of the costly development projects. Corruption not only squanders borrowed capital but also undermines project quality and economic return. Such misdoings erode debt sustainability even further as they divert resources away from productive employment. Consolidation of control and the introduction of a proper monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework into future initiatives are vital to re-establish trust and gain maximum benefit from foreign lending.

The misplacement of borrowed capital through corrupt means in Bangladesh's development is highly distressing. Abuse of borrowed capital deprives the country of economic growth, which is essential for repaying loans. This forms a vicious circle of debt growth with no economic return, increasing fiscal weakness. Fighting corruption requires a comprehensive framework consisting of robust legal measures, oversight, and a vibrant civil society. These

long-term stable growth.

Bangladesh's escalating external debt, while primarily channelled into infrastructure, presents a multifaceted challenge to the country's financial outlook. Navigating this complex landscape requires a concerted effort to fortify the economic bedrock, ensuring that foreign capital genuinely underpins resilient growth rather than perpetuating vulnerabilities. A robust framework centred on prudent fiscal stewardship, diversification beyond narrow export sectors, and unwavering commitment to governance will be paramount for Bangladesh to convert its borrowings into sustained prosperity and secure its long-term financial health. Additionally, addressing inefficiencies in development expenditure and enhancing transparency in project management are crucial steps. Effective use of borrowed funds, coupled with strategic policy reforms, is essential for Bangladesh to avoid falling into a debt trap and to achieve stable, sustainable growth.

The human cost of Bangladesh's dangerous roads



Nafeew Sajed Joy is a writer, researcher, and environmentalist. He can be reached at nafeew.sajed@gmail.com.

NAFEW SAJED JOY

Eid-ul-Azha, a festival of family unity and sacrifice, was marred this year—as it has been for many years—by a tragic undercurrent: avoidable deaths on the road. One story stands out among the growing number of casualties. A teenager, from a remote area, was travelling to Dhaka with his father to sell their sacrificial cow. A road accident claimed his father's life. Devastated and alone, the teenager buried his father, then continued his journey to sell the cow. This story reflects not just one individual's tragedy, but deep societal failures, where survival has taken precedence over mourning and road safety is consistently neglected. It highlights a profound national dysfunction: the economy of survival outweighs the right to grieve, while the failure of road safety continues to claim lives with alarming frequency.

According to the Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity's Road Accident Monitoring Cell, 379 road accidents claimed 390 lives and left 1,182 others injured this year. This marks a sharp rise compared to 2024, which saw 309 accidents, 336 deaths, and 762 injuries—a 22.65 percent increase in accidents, a 16.07 percent rise in fatalities, and a 55.11 percent surge in injuries. Motorcycles were the most vulnerable, accounting for 35.35

percent of all crashes. In 2023, 312 road accidents during Eid-ul-Azha resulted in 340 deaths and 569 injuries. Eid-ul-Fitr this year was similarly tragic, with 315 accidents, 322 fatalities, and 826 injuries. Rail and water routes also saw fatalities, bringing the total to 340 accidents, 352 deaths, and 835 injuries across all transport routes.

The surge in motorcycle use highlights the country's road safety crisis. A decade ago, there were about 1.5 million motorcycles. Today, over 6 million crowd the streets. Alongside them, 6 million battery-powered rickshaws operate largely unregulated. This increase has overwhelmed both infrastructure and oversight. Many motorcycles are driven by unlicensed, untrained youths—some even teenagers. In 2021, students made up 13 percent of road fatalities, highlighting a dangerous lack of safety education.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), responsible for regulating this chaos, faces criticism for inefficiency and corruption. Its focus remains on revenue, registrations, taxes, and renewals, rather than enforcing road safety. Traffic police, often underpaid and overstretched, view fines as income rather than a deterrent. Highways lack pedestrian safety features, and road

audits are infrequent.

Despite the student-led road safety protests in 2018, which subsequently brought the passage of the Road Transport Act, 2018, enforcement remains inconsistent. The act introduced stricter penalties and a point-based licensing system for repeat offenders. However, under pressure from transport unions and political lobbies, implementation has been weak. Laws may exist on paper, but the streets of Bangladesh still operate under a kind of informal lawlessness.

This issue is more than just transport; it's symptomatic of deep governance failure. According to the World Bank (2023), Bangladesh has South Asia's highest road fatality rate, with 102 deaths per 10,000 vehicles, compared to India's 13 and Sri Lanka's 7. What makes this particularly alarming is that Bangladesh has only 18 vehicles per 1,000 people, indicating that the problem lies not in the volume of vehicles, but in how transport is managed. The economic cost is equally grave: the WHO estimates that road crashes cost developing countries up to 3 percent of GDP. For Bangladesh, a country aiming to graduate from least developed country status, this burden is unsustainable.

Moreover, these accidents erode public trust in institutions. When citizens see that road laws are ignored, reckless drivers go unpunished, and victims rarely receive compensation, a culture of impunity develops. The system seems to protect powerful transport owners and syndicates more than ordinary citizens.

What must be done?

The first step is firm and transparent enforcement of the

Road Transport Act, 2018, free from political interference. The BRTA must undergo rapid digitisation to eliminate corruption and increase transparency in licensing and vehicle fitness certification. Its primary focus should shift from revenue generation to regulation.

Unlicensed drivers, especially motorcyclists, must be swiftly identified and removed from the roads. The government should invest in short-term awareness campaigns, particularly among young drivers, and enforce the use of helmets and safety gear.

Additionally, the country must invest in safer road infrastructure, such as dedicated lanes for motorcycles, more pedestrian crossings, and separate corridors for heavy and light vehicles. Public transport systems must be revitalised to reduce reliance on dangerous motorcycles and unregulated battery rickshaws.

In the long term, Bangladesh should establish an independent National Road Safety Authority to coordinate across ministries, hold agencies accountable, and create a cohesive national strategy for road safety that extends to 2030 and beyond. Road safety education should be mandatory in schools, and regular road audits must be conducted—not just before Eid or in response to political pressure.

Bangladesh has demonstrated time and again that it can overcome enormous challenges when the political will exists. The road safety crisis demands that same urgency and determination. Until then, the roads will continue to run red—not from traffic lights, but from the blood of its citizens.