

Gaza is heading for complete erasure

Palestine's plight demands immediate global actions

The world has likely never witnessed horrors of the kind we are now seeing in Palestine—not, at least, since the end of World War II. According to Gaza's health ministry, over 56,300 people have died in Gaza since Israel launched its latest campaign against the Palestinians in October 2023. But even that figure appears to be greatly understated, according to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*. The newspaper estimates that nearly 100,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, which represents about four percent of its population.

According to *Haaretz*, in addition to the high number of deaths directly caused by Israeli attacks, many have also died from indirect effects such as hunger, cold, and disease amid the collapse of Gaza's healthcare system. Earlier, the World Health Organization reported that at least 94 percent of all hospitals in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed as a result of Israel's continued aggression. There is, therefore, every reason to believe that the death toll is much higher than the ministry's estimate. Only last week, 400 people were killed and over 3,000 wounded during an "aid" operation. As starving civilians gathered for aid in massive numbers, Israeli troops opened fire, killing dozens as they tried to collect a few kilos of flour or canned goods. Palestinians have dubbed this "the hunger games." That people are willing to risk their lives to collect aid, despite knowing the brutality that awaits them, is an indication of the level of desperation and destitution they have been reduced to.

The *Haaretz* report was based on a study conducted by Prof Michael Spagat, a leading expert on mortality in violent conflicts. His findings suggest that 56 percent of those killed have been either children under the age of 18 or women—an exceptional figure compared to almost every other conflict since World War II. Moreover, while the overall number of war victims in Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan may be higher in absolute terms, Gaza appears to rank first both in the ratio of combatants to non-combatants killed, and in the death rate relative to population size. These are staggering findings that clearly reveal the severity of the war crimes being committed by Israel against the Palestinians.

It is apparent that Israel is on the verge of completely eradicating—or displacing—the remaining population from Gaza and, perhaps eventually, from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories. While this is unfolding, US President Donald Trump recently stated that he believes a ceasefire could be reached within a week. The unfortunate reality, however, is that we have heard such rhetoric many times before. The fact remains that Israel has continued its genocidal campaign with both direct and indirect support from the West, including the US. This must stop. The West must abandon its double standards regarding whose human rights matter, and compel Israel to end its aggression. A permanent solution to the Gaza crisis must be found by recognising and ensuring full autonomy for a Palestinian state.

Universities must give research priority

JU-DU research allocations speak of institutional apathy

We are concerned by the continuing neglect of research at public universities, as evidenced once again by the just-announced budget of Jahangirnagar University. According to a report, out of a total Tk 323.35 crore budget for FY2025-26, JU allocated only 2.85 percent—just over Tk 9 crore—for research and innovation. Earlier this month, Dhaka University approved a Tk 1,035 crore budget with only Tk 21.57 crore—about 2.08 percent—allocated for research. The trend in other universities is more or less similar, and aligns with the similarly poor allocations for education in the national budget approved by the interim government, all of which shows how little priority knowledge creation or education in general holds in the country.

This is certainly not what one expected after a bloody uprising that sought a departure from the anti-people, anti-student practices of the past. To see the continuation of this trend of neglect feels like a betrayal to the promise of collective progress that can only be achieved through proper support for merit and innovation, especially at the universities where the leaders of tomorrow are forged. When it comes to research, the problem is not just underfunding. It's the entire public university ecosystem that seems designed to disincentivise research.

For instance, one persistent problem has been the underutilisation of even the measly funds provided for research, which reflects the poor absorption capacity of the universities. The process of accessing funds is often mired in bureaucratic hurdles, discouraging faculty members from applying for grants. Thus, many opt for NGO or external funds instead. The lack of priority given to research or higher academic standards in case of faculty promotion also indicates a lack of institutional commitment. It is no surprise then that Bangladesh doesn't have a single university that qualifies as a real research institute. We remain trapped in a teaching-focused, degree-producing system that rarely nurtures scholars. Just imagine: over 92 percent of the JU budget has been allocated for salaries, allowances, pensions, goods and services!

This trend must change. Our universities cannot remain merely teaching institutions if we want to build a knowledge economy. The time has come to invest in research infrastructure and initiatives, not just in salaries or buildings. We urge the university administrations and higher education authorities to take this matter seriously, and ensure an enabling environment for research in our universities.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Night of the Long Knives

On this day in 1934, the "Night of the Long Knives" took place, in which German dictator Adolf Hitler had his elite SS guards summarily execute many leading officials of the SA, a Nazi paramilitary group.

NBR crisis is the result of institutional egos clashing



Md Asaduz Zaman is a business journalist at The Daily Star. He can be reached at asaduz.zamanjbd@gmail.com.

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

"As a young civil service officer, I never imagined I would have to take to the streets to defend my professional career," an income tax cadre official told me on the first day of the indefinite shutdown at the National Board of Revenue (NBR) headquarters. "Refraining from my official duties and standing in protest wearing a badge, under the adverse weather—this was never what I signed up for. But we have been pushed into a corner. There is no other way," said the official, who travelled from outside Dhaka to join the "March to NBR."

As of Sunday, the second phase of the protest entered its sixth day, under the banner of the NBR Reform Unity Council, a platform created by the protesters. Following four consecutive days of pen-down and sit-in programmes, the protesting NBR officials enforced a complete shutdown starting Saturday.

When revenue officials go on strike, containers pile up at the ports, raw materials stay locked behind paperwork, exporters miss deadlines, and small businesses suffer cash crunches. Yet, the silence from both policy bureaucrats and the officials on strike has persisted for days, each waiting for the other to blink.

The first phase of the protest ran from May 14 to May 25, while the second phase began on June 23. The situation had started to simmer down after the Eid-ul-Azha holidays after the first round of protests as the officials received assurances regarding their demands from the government. However, a recent transfer order involving some protesting officials, coupled with restrictions on the use of the NBR conference room for meetings and the deployment of law enforcement members, rekindled tensions and reignited anger within the tax administration.

The mistrust between the senior leadership, particularly the NBR members, and the lower-tier officials, who are mostly protesting, has only

deepened the crisis. When Finance Adviser Dr Salehuddin Ahmed called a meeting with the NBR officials on Thursday, only 16 members attended instead of the protesters; the protesting officials boycotted the meeting saying they did not get any "official invitation."

A day later, the finance ministry said the NBR protesters had agreed to withdraw the shutdown programme. But just hours after that announcement, the NBR Reform Unity Council dismissed it and reaffirmed their commitment to continue the protest.

It was a complete misstep on the government's part to handle such a critical issue while ignoring the protesters.

In addition, the government again said a follow-up meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday [July 1], aiming to discuss the Revenue Policy and

be disrupted," he further added.

The protesters, meanwhile, signalled their willingness to sit for talks, but insisted on the NBR chairman being removed from his post beforehand.

On Sunday, as of 6:20pm, the protesters did not make an announcement of ending the shutdown. The government issued another statement urging the

on strike has persisted for days, each waiting for the other to blink.

In a joint press conference on Saturday, the country's top businesses, including industry leaders from apparel, pharmaceuticals, leather goods, textiles, and accessories, raised alarm over the mounting financial losses and operational gridlock caused by the NBR shutdown. They warned



The ongoing NBR crisis belongs not in the streets, but at the negotiating table where mature dialogue should lead the way. FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

protesters to withdraw from "activities against the law and against national interest," warning that it would be forced to take a tough position otherwise.

However, the ongoing shutdown has truly cut through the noise. At a time when the state is counting every crore to manage a strained budget, this standoff between government high-ups and the revenue officials has laid bare the high cost of delayed dialogue, deep-seated bureaucratic mistrust, and bruised institutional egos.

This is no ordinary administrative dispute. This is a paralysis at the very nerve centre of Bangladesh's revenue system—one that underwrites over 88 percent of the national budget. With June being the peak month for collections, contributing nearly Tk 58,000 crore last year, each passing day of disruption bleeds the economy and deepens uncertainty in trade and business.

When revenue officials go on strike, containers pile up at the ports, raw materials stay locked behind paperwork, exporters miss deadlines, and small businesses suffer cash crunches. Yet, the silence from both policy bureaucrats and the officials

that prolonged disruption would have serious economic consequences for Bangladesh.

For instance, the RMG sector alone is facing trade disruptions worth more than \$230 million per day as the movement of goods and raw materials through Chattogram port, land ports, and airports remains stalled due to the shutdown by revenue officials. One business leader remarked that customs operations are never halted except in times of war.

In this situation, one might argue that the protesting officials are holding on to their egos. But while they stand firm, it is the economy that suffers and ultimately, it is the people who pay the price for this prolonged stalemate.

And that raises a fundamental question: why should ordinary citizens bear the burden of a bureaucratic breakdown? This is not a crisis that belongs in the streets. It belongs at the negotiating table where mature dialogue, not institutional ego, should lead the way. If the government and the protesters truly care for the country and not just their institutional ground, then they must speak, listen, and act so that this stalemate is resolved as soon as possible.

The weaponisation of religious sentiments



Debrata Kumar Adhikary is a development practitioner. He can be reached at adhikarydeb111@gmail.com.

DEBRATA KUMAR ADHIKARY

On June 22, 2025, in Lalmonirhat, a 70-year-old Hindu barber named Paresh Chandra Shil and his son Bishnu Chandra Shil were brutally attacked by a mob following accusations of hurting religious sentiments. The two were beaten in public, reportedly with the involvement of local religious leaders, before being handed over to the police.

This is not an isolated incident. It signals a deeper and more dangerous crisis: the weaponisation of blasphemy laws against minorities. In a country where any perceived insult to the majority religion triggers swift and sometimes violent reactions, mere allegations—without verifiable evidence—often ignite mob justice.

What happened in Lalmonirhat reflects a disturbing pattern across Bangladesh, where accusations of hurting religious sentiments increasingly target, silence, and punish minority communities. These claims rarely lead to proper investigations. Instead, they fuel immediate, extrajudicial violence, with law enforcement agencies often turning a blind eye.

Other tragic incidents have also been triggered by blasphemy allegations over the years. In Ramu, Buddhist temples were torched over a false Facebook post in 2012. In Nasirnagar, Hindu homes and temples were

attacked following rumours in 2016. In Lalmonirhat in 2020, a mentally ill man was killed and his body burned based on another unverified claim.

This time, the spark was allegedly a petty personal dispute over Tk 10. Such is the fragile reality: a rumour, a whisper, a grievance can destroy lives. Blasphemy accusations in

while some majority religious figures freely make derogatory remarks about other faiths, without consequence. The issue isn't blasphemy, it's who is speaking.

In this system, Hindus, Christians, or Buddhists—especially if poor and powerless—remain vulnerable. A rumour can erase decades of coexistence. A lie can destroy a life.

The most haunting aspect is the state's lack of proper action. Politicians issue condemnations. The police arrive too late. Investigations stall. Perpetrators go free.

This failure sends a clear message: in the absence of state protection, sometimes justice can bow to public fury.

Some political actors even benefit from this divide, posing as defenders

justice, mercy, and coexistence upheld by all faiths.

If Bangladesh is to break this cycle, accountability must come first. Mob violence and hate crimes must be prosecuted swiftly and transparently. Accusations of blasphemy should follow due legal process, not public retribution. Law enforcement must be trained to prevent incitement and protect the accused until facts are verified.

There will be no real change without the rule of law. The police, judiciary, and administration must be completely free from political and religious influence and operate independently and impartially. Swift, transparent, and strict legal action is necessary to effectively address religious incitement and mob violence. If perpetrators are not held accountable firmly, such incidents will continue to recur.

The media in Bangladesh is not free from blame either. In many cases, their reporting makes the victims appear as the offenders. Biased reporting misleads the public and deepens social divisions. Such media partiality increases the vulnerability of victims and obstructs the path to justice.

Justice must be blind to religion, wealth, or politics, and it must be swift.

Paresh Chandra Shil was not a threat. He was a fixture of his community, offering shaves and smiles for decades. But one rumour was enough to mark him for violence.

Let us not forget his name or his story. If mobs are allowed to play the roles of judge, jury, and executioner, we abandon justice. And when justice dies, no one—majority or minority—is safe.

It's time to reclaim justice for all Bangladeshis.

There will be no real change without the rule of law. The police, judiciary, and administration must be completely free from political and religious influence and operate independently and impartially. Swift, transparent, and strict legal action is necessary to effectively address religious incitement and mob violence.

Bangladesh have become tools of power, not matters of faith. They settle personal scores, assert communal dominance, or provoke political chaos. For the poor, marginalised, and religious "others," these accusations could be death sentences—no defence, no protection, no voice.

This is not about religion, it's about scapegoating. There are glaring double standards in how religious speech is treated. Minority voices face silencing and attacks over perceived blasphemy,

of the majority faith while quietly enabling violence that consolidates their power. In this environment, defending minorities becomes an act of courage, not a civic duty.

Make no mistake, this is not a religious problem. It is a political and social crisis disguised in religious language. Religion is the excuse, not the cause. It is a mask worn by those who seek to dominate, punish, and terrorise.

Mob violence in the name of religion is fascism. It betrays the principles of