

Why reforming the NHRC as per the Paris Principles matters



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On August 29, 2024, Bangladesh signed the UN convention on enforced disappearance, hence completing signing all nine core international human rights treaties. This step by the interim government symbolises our respect towards international human rights norms and commitment to uphold those. On several occasions, the chief adviser emphasised his government’s commitment to upholding human rights and freedom of speech in the country. Among many important initiatives required to fulfil this commitment is reforming the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh, which needs immediate attention.

Due to widespread criticism of the NHRC, particularly in terms of civil and political rights, one may question the importance of the commission. However, it cannot be denied that the success or effectiveness of such an institution depends on political will, enabling environment, and the institution’s leadership.

Considering discussions about crucial reforms, the NHRC staff now see a light of hope to make the organisation stronger and credible at home and abroad.

First, we need to realise the importance of an independent and credible national human rights institution (NHRI). Over the last five decades, most countries, including Bangladesh, have signed, ratified, or acceded to the major human rights treaties. When it comes to honouring their commitments to implementing the rights embodied in these instruments, many states have conspicuously failed in important respects. Moreover, development assistance has, since the end of the Cold War, increasingly been conditioned by both multilateral and bilateral donors based on respect for human rights and reforms designed to enhance good governance. NHRIs have been recognised by them as an important element in this regard.

As a matter of fact, as of April 2025, 118 countries have established NHRIs, among which 91 have A status while 27 hold B

status. This accreditation is crucial for such an institution as it enhances the image of a country in the international arena, and also, fully compliant or A status NHRIs enjoy several rights and powers, such as voting power in the annual meeting of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and the opportunity to become a bureau member of GANHRI.

However, it is unfortunate to note that only two NHRIs in South Asia—Bangladesh and Maldives—were awarded B status while those of India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka were awarded A status from the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of GANHRI. SCA accredits the status to an NHRI based on compliance with the Paris Principles, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. The Paris Principles provide a broad normative framework for the status, structure, mandate, composition, power, and methods of operation of the principal domestic human rights mechanism.

The Paris Principles require NHRIs to have as wide a role as possible, with two main responsibilities: human rights promotion and human rights protection.

Human rights promotion includes creating a national culture of human rights where tolerance, equality, and mutual respect thrive. Human rights protection, on the other hand, means helping to identify and investigate human rights abuses, bringing those responsible for human rights violations to justice, and providing a remedy and redress for victims. Core protection activities should focus primarily on the prevention of torture, arbitrary detention, disappearances, and the protection of human rights defenders. Linked to this is the role of NHRIs as watchdogs, reviewing conditions in detention facilities, visiting facilities unannounced and requesting private interviews with detainees. The inability to directly investigate law enforcement agencies is a critical flaw that is preventing the

NHRC in Bangladesh from getting an A status, regardless of how broad its general mandate might seem on paper.

The Paris Principles require that an NHRI be provided with an appropriate level of funding in order to guarantee its independence and ability to freely determine its priorities and activities. The also require that government funding be allocated to a separate budget line item applicable only to the NHRI. India and Pakistan’s NHRIs have complied with this requirement, and these NHRIs receive a parliament-approved grant. Although the NHRC Bangladesh has overcome dependency on donor budget and now fully operates with funds from the government, financial independence is still to be achieved as the commission does not receive its budget directly from parliament.

Another crucial criterion for an NHRI to be fully compliant with the Paris Principles is related to the selection and appointment of NHRI leadership. It requires the selection process to be transparent, through broad advertisement, maximising the number of potential candidates from a wide range of societal groups. The SCA recommends that NHRIs advertise vacancies and establish clear and uniform criteria upon which to assess the merit of eligible applicants. Another vital point is the long-term vacancy of NHRI leadership. In this matter, incorporating a provision in the NHRC Act on appointing alternate commissioners during the period following the resignation of a commissioner may be considered.

To move forward, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the importance of NHRC in a civilised, democratic country is undeniable. Kofi Annan in 2002 said that building strong human rights institutions at the country level is what, in the long run, will ensure that human rights are protected and advanced in a sustained manner. For long now, the NHRC and human rights defenders have been advocating for amending the NHRC Act as per the Paris Principles, arranging for a permanent space, increasing its budget, and providing lucrative service benefits to the staff. We hope that the interim government will consider reforming the commission as per the Paris Principles to make a stronger and credible NHRC that will pave the way for promoting and protecting human rights in Bangladesh, and will enhance the country’s dignity in the international arena as well.

The war that Israel lost



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Since its highly contentious and controversial founding in 1948, Israel, backed by its all-weather ironclad ally across the Atlantic and exploiting Europe’s collective guilt, has gotten used to flexing its military muscle on the people of Palestine and illegally occupying their lands with impunity. The ongoing genocide in Gaza is only the latest episode of this brutality and its total disregard for international law and human lives.

Emboldened by his “success” in the most gruesome and uninterrupted genocide in Gaza and its unarmed population, Israel’s murderous Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu and the extreme hardline Zionist partners in his government believed that they could carry out a repeat act on Iran using mid- to long-range missiles, ostensibly targeting Iran’s nuclear facilities. Only this time, Bibi met his match. After Iran retaliated in equal—and at times more effective—terms, within less than two weeks Netanyahu was begging for a ceasefire before Iran wrought greater damage on key Israeli cities and military and intelligence installations in Tel Aviv and other parts of the country. It was only with the direct intervention of US President Donald Trump that Bibi managed to save his skin, at least for now. President Trump has publicly stated of the huge damages that Iran’s counter-offensive had caused in Israel.

Clearly, Israel’s political and military leadership did not do their homework on Iran—its rich culture and long history, its resolve to defend itself against all kinds of adversity. Intoxicated by what he has done and continues to do in Palestine, Netanyahu believed Iran would be an equally easy target. He forgot that Iran had fought and survived a much longer war, one that lasted eight years, against Iraq when Saddam Hussein was lulled into believing that Iran was still in a political, social and military flux following its historic revolution and the overthrow of Shah regime in 1979. Egged on by players who perceived that the new Iran was unstable and weak, Saddam launched his military into Iran in 1980 and the prolonged and bloody conflict between the two neighbouring countries lasted until 1988. The war was sparked by a complex mix of territorial disputes, mostly over the contested Shatt al Arab waterway, a vital oil shipping route, and ideological differences.

The war quickly devolved into a bloody stalemate, characterised by trench warfare, human wave attacks, and the use of chemical weapons by Iraq. Iran launched counter-offensives, pushing back the Iraqi forces and even invading Iraq’s territory. Although the war concluded without a

clear military victor, leaving both nations with massive casualties and economic hardship, for Iran not to have lost territory meant a major victory. It was a most graphic reflection of the Iranian people’s resolve and conviction to stand as one when facing an enemy, even if the odds are against them. Journalist Christian Amanpour of CNN, who is of Iranian descent, recalled recently how an uncle of hers, who was a high-ranking military officer in Shah’s Iran and who had gone into exile following the 1979 revolution, chose to return to Iran to defend his country against the Iraqi invasion. He saw active action in the battlefield and was wounded multiple times. According to Amanpour, while an individual Iranian may nurture deep opposition against the government in Tehran, when the country is under attack, the priorities shift and defending it becomes a moral and a societal responsibility. This is when the civilisational Persian DNA comes into play.

Obviously, Bibi and his headline colleagues were suffering from deep amnesia. The supreme irony is that they even chose not to remember that it was Cyrus II, or Cyrus the Great of Persia, who is exalted in Judaism for freeing the Jewish people from the Babylonian captivity following the Persian conquest of Babylon in Sixth Century BCE. This event is described in the Hebrew Bible as the return to Zion whereby displaced Jews were repatriated to what had been the Kingdom of Judah. This enabled the resurgence of Jewish life in the Land of Israel. Cyrus also facilitated Jewish aspirations for a new temple in Jerusalem, where the original Solomon’s Temple had once stood before being destroyed during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. His efforts resulted in the completion of the Second Temple, which marked the beginning of the Second Temple period of Judaism. According to the Book of Isaiah, Cyrus the Great was anointed by Yahweh and explicitly designated as the “messiah” for his seminal role in bringing Jews back to Jerusalem. Cyrus is the only non-Jewish figure to be revered in this capacity. For the ungrateful Zionists of today, as symbolised by the likes of Netanyahu, history has no place in their genocidal narrative. They ventured to bite the hand that had saved them and got bitten instead.

At the outset of Israel’s missile attacks on Iran, Netanyahu made what can best be described as a comical appeal to the people of Iran to rise against the regime—in other words, a call for regime change. In fact, a change of regime is still a possibility, but that’s more likely to happen in Tel Aviv, not Tehran.

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ACROSS

1 Card collection

5 Burglar’s crime

10 Verdi pieces

12 TV sound

13 Skater Harding

14 Nursery resident

15 Summer in Paris

16 Tick off

18 Pot fill

19 “Cold as ice,” e.g.

21 Thatcher, for one

22 Kitchen containers

24 Composer

Bruckner

25 Capone’s cohorts

29 Steamed

30 Capital north of Syracuse

32 Lobbying org.

33 Low digit

34 Big shot

35 Tony or Oscar

37 Monsoon weather

39 In shape

40 Burn a bit

41 Goes downhill

42 Base meal

DOWN

1 Sees socially

2 Steamy

3 Film

4 Bandleader Kyser

5 Carpet fastener

6 “What was that?”

7 Book worker

8 1040 users

9 The present

11 Regatta activity

17 Uses for support

20 Foolish

21 Precept

23 Walks unsteadily

25 Leave base, perhaps

26 Secret

27 Deep chasm

28 Playground fixtures

29 Minor arguments

31 Church areas

33 Casino figure

36 Sunburned

38 Target

7-1

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Viva-Voce	: 11 August 2025; 10 AM to 4 PM
Publication of Final Result	: 13 August 2025
Admission from Merit List (From First Merit List)	: 17-19 August 2025 upto 11:59 PM
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Admission from Waiting List (Second Merit List)	: 24-27 August 2025 upto 11:59 PM
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