

Famine now playing

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The main UN aid agencies yesterday called for Gaza to be flooded with humanitarian assistance, warning that "time is running out" and that the Palestinian territory is "on the brink of a full scale famine."

Israel's foreign minister yesterday rejected what he called a "distorted campaign" of international pressure for a ceasefire in the Gaza offensive and recognition of a Palestinian state.

Gideon Saar told reporters that if Israel was to halt the conflict while Hamas is still in power in Gaza and still holding hostages it would be a "tragedy for both Israelis and Palestinians". "It ain't gonna happen, no matter how much pressure is put on Israel," he said.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was set to hold an emergency cabinet yesterday to discuss the situation in Gaza and a proposed peace plan as he comes under mounting pressure from his own party to recognise a Palestinian state.

Starmer has taken the rare step of recalling his cabinet during the summer holidays to discuss how to deliver more humanitarian aid to Gaza.

July Charter

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"We must respect the law, but we will never accept this kind of incident."

"Islam does not permit violence against any community. Our religion says the father is not guilty of the son's crime, nor is the son guilty of the father's. The Prophet always ensured the safety of other religions."

Nahid said the people behind this attack did not have religious intentions. "Their intention is political, their intention is communal, and their intention is to loot. And this politics was started by the Awami League."

He demanded justice for both the attack on Hindu homes and the insult to the Prophet.

The NCP convener also called for the recognition of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.

Retributive justice

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Awami League regime during last year's mass uprising.

Türk began by saying he honours the memory of those killed and the thousands more who suffered life-changing injuries. "These protests by the people were a powerful expression of a determination to move away from the spiralling inequalities and human rights violations of the past towards a more just and inclusive society."

The UN Fact-Finding Mission found that the former government and its security and intelligence services engaged in a coordinated strategy to hold on to power at all costs, and it made a detailed series of recommendations to ensure accountability and justice, which are essential in themselves and vital to national healing."

He welcomed efforts by the interim government to move those recommendations forward and said today was an important moment of reflection on how that could be achieved.

Türk said there needs to be accountability for these human rights violations and crimes, and that accountability needs to be in line with fair trial guarantees rooted in international human rights law. "It must not repeat past cycles of retributive justice, including the use of the death penalty."

A comprehensive approach to transitional justice is needed, he said, including truth seeking and reparations for past abuses. "This begins with a national dialogue involving victims, families, and ordinary citizens."

He stressed that Bangladesh needs legal and institutional reforms, including in the security sector, so that "this can never happen again".

The repressive laws and institutions that enabled these violations must either be dismantled or completely overhauled. Today, as we remember the protesters who paid the ultimate price for their dream of a different future for the country, it is a moment to recommit to fundamental change."

The UN rights chief assured that his office is fully prepared and ready to support the government and the people of Bangladesh to achieve that vision.

Earlier this month, the UN Human Rights Office opened a mission in Gulshan.

At the event, rights activist Barrister Sara Hossain highlighted some positive developments since the interim government took office.

These include the formation of a commission to investigate enforced disappearances, probes into past harassment cases, and a more open environment for public discourse.

However, she also noted that while constitutional reform is widely discussed, there's less focus on police and judiciary reforms.

The Supreme Court lawyer expressed concern about the present state of the judiciary, finding it unchanged from the previous regime.

"We see people aren't getting bail in time. We are seeing that anyone can file any case, and those are being accepted."

She agreed that one could be sued for crimes against humanity, but she questioned how one could face a case for flattering ruling party leaders.

She also questioned why there is no adequate women's representation in the reform commission. "We need transitional justice, but we should do it in a way that is not discriminatory."

Arakan Army oppressing

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refugees who had fled to Bangladesh from Buthidaung township in northern Rakhine State for the report.

A Rohingya man, also 62, said he was displaced with his wife and two children five times over the past year.

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incredibly difficult. Travel between villages was restricted, requiring permits that were rarely given."

The Arakan Army also imposed a curfew.

"If they found anyone outside their

homes, they would arrest them. And their whereabouts would become unknown," he added.

The Arakan Army restrictions on

livelihoods and agriculture, compounded by extortion and exorbitant prices, have exacerbated the severe food shortages and the junta's blockade on aid, which has been in place since late 2023.

Some Rohingya said they survived by begging from families who received money from relatives abroad, while the others worked as day laborers for little to no pay.

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The Arakan Army had confiscated

farmland, houses, cattle, fishing hauls, firewood and even cemeteries.

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and other Rohingya armed groups -- after fighting alongside the Myanmar military in 2024 -- are again deploying fighters in clashes against the Arakan Army in northern Rakhine State.

The fighting as well as the Arakan Army's forcible recruitment of Rohingya villagers have inflamed communal tensions between the largely Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine.

"Donors and influential governments need to do much more to protect the Rohingya people, including their right to safety and freedom, whether in Myanmar or Bangladesh," Pearson said.

They should also press the Arakan Army to respect the rights of all communities in Rakhine State, she added.

If consensus is not reached, then the person supported by four out of the five members shall be nominated as the chief adviser of the next caretaker government.

If a chief adviser cannot still be selected, two judges -- one from the Appellate Division and one from the High Court -- would be added to the body, creating a seven-member panel empowered to resolve the matter through ranked-choice voting.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed objected to the inclusion of the judges and ranked-choice voting. He proposed that, in case of a deadlock, the matter be referred to parliament and let the MPs decide on the issue.

The Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party (NCP) strongly opposed the BNP's stance, warning that such a move would politicise the process and risk prolonged uncertainty.

Jamaat and NCP have supported the inclusion of new members and subsequent process, arguing that the inclusion of judges will prevent partisan domination and ensure neutrality.

"We believe ranked-choice voting is more effective than referring the issue to parliament, where a decision would be far more difficult," said NCP Member Secretary Akhtar Hossen.

Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher added,

"The inclusion of the judges is to ensure no single party becomes the deciding factor. We hope the judges will remain neutral and reduce the risk of horse-trading."

Earlier, the commission placed at least four formulas on how to appoint the chief adviser, amid persistent deadlock. On July 13, it had proposed a 13-member search committee. Earlier suggestions included a seven-member panel and an 11-member parliamentary committee, and even a return to the model under the 13th amendment that allowed the appointment of the last retired chief justice as chief adviser.

Besides women's seats and chief adviser's selection, no consensus was reached regarding the inclusion of the process to appoint the Comptroller General of Audit and an Ombudsman to the constitution.

Most of the parties, except the BNP and its allies, are in favour of the commission's proposal to include these to the constitution.

Consensus talks caught up in deepening rifts

FROM PAGE 1

WOMEN'S SEATS

Disagreement also flared over the structure and modality of women's reserved seats in parliament and their nominations in the election.

The commission proposed keeping the existing 50 reserved seats while urging parties to nominate women in at least one-fourth or one-fifth of the 300 general seats.

The BNP proposed another approach: nominating women in at least 5 percent of the general seats in the next election and increasing the share to 10 percent in the following ones. "This would ensure 80 seats for women when combined with the existing 50 reserved seats. This can begin as a gentleman's agreement and be formalised later," said Salahuddin.

But the NCP demanded direct elections to 100 seats for women under a rotating system, where 100 constituencies would be chosen for women in every general election.

The Jamaat proposed expanding parliament to 400 seats -- 300 general and 100 for women -- with the women's share determined proportionally based on party votes under a proportional representation (PR) system.

Several other Islamic parties also backed an increase in women's seats to 100. They, too, want the election through the PR system.

However, Prof Riaz said that all the parties agreed that the women's seats need to be increased to 100.

"As consensus could not be reached regarding the election process of the women's seats, the commission will finalise the decision regarding the issue today," he said.

On July 14, the commission proposed abolishment of the current system of reserving seats for women. It recommended that parties contesting for at least 25 constituencies nominate women in one-third of these seats under the first past the post system, where the highest vote-getter wins.

This issue has been discussed repeatedly during the reform talks, but parties remained divided.

Initially, the commission had proposed increasing the number of reserved seats for women from 50 to 100 and suggested direct elections to these seats.

Besides women's seats and chief adviser's selection, no consensus was reached regarding the inclusion of the process to appoint the Comptroller General of Audit and an Ombudsman to the constitution.

The contrary is not only regrettable but also undermines the broader effort to restore integrity in public procurement—a task the current administration is earnestly undertaking."

Our response:

We strongly reject the insinuation that our reporting is "sensationalism". Investigating the expenditure of over a thousand crore taka of public money and scrutinising the actions of a high-ranking official to ensure accountability is the very definition of constructive, public-interest journalism. It is the duty of a free press to highlight contradictions between the stated goals of "institutional reform efforts" and a government aide's actions.

The Daily Star remains committed to fair, accurate and context-rich reporting. The actions of the special assistant's office in this matter are of legitimate public concern, and we will continue to cover this story with the diligence it deserves.

We would like to emphasise that The Daily Star is fully committed to the journalistic principles of fairness and balance. In line with this commitment, our original report dedicated significant space (a multi-paragraph response of more than 200 words) to Mr Taiyeb's defence, and a government aide's actions.

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We accurately reported his position that no "instruction or directive" was given to the ACC. We included his complete argument for moving the project forward. In his response, he argued that Tk 290 crore has already been spent via an irrevocable Letter of Credit.

Therefore, the arguments presented in the official rejoinder are not new revelations to our readers; they are a reiteration of Taiyeb's extensive defence in our original report.

Secy goes on official foreign trip

FROM PAGE 12

Additional Secretary Nargis Khanom, Director General of the Department of Social Services (DSS) Md Saidur Rahman Khan, Joint Secretary Mohammad Nazmul Ahsan, and DSS's ISO Project Director Golam Mostafa.

After the interim government led by Prof Muhammad Yunus took office, the Chief Adviser's Office issued a directive in December, restricting foreign trips by government officers. It stated:

"Secretaries of ministries and heads of subordinate departments or agencies shall not travel abroad together unless it is absolutely necessary in the national interest."

Despite this, Mohiuddin was accompanied by the director general of DSS, an agency under his ministry.

While no officials have publicly criticised the trip, several expressed surprise over its timing. One official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said,

"The secretaries of the current government are acting just like those of the previous one. In some cases, they are violating the rules even more

on foreign trips at least 53 months before retirement, even though I had around 10 opportunities during that time. We learned such values from our predecessors. That's why I used to encourage junior officials to go abroad instead, so that they could serve the country for a long time by using that experience."

Awal, however, said Mohiuddin should not be held solely responsible. "For a secretary to go on an official foreign trip, the approval of the head of government is required. So, the question is: why didn't the responsible officials at the Chief Adviser's Office catch this?"

However, Social Welfare Adviser Sharmin S Murshid defended the secretary's foreign trip. Speaking to The Daily Star last night, she said that a relevant project has made progress through the secretary's involvement. "Which is why he was sent."

When reminded about the directive from the Chief Adviser's Office, the adviser said, "The secretary was sent considering the project's needs. It's not something that should be seen that way."

Former secretary and writer AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder echoed this view. "During my tenure as secretary, I voluntarily stopped going

on foreign trips at least 53 months before retirement, even though I had around 10 opportunities during that time. We learned such values from our predecessors. That's why I used to encourage junior officials to go abroad instead, so that they could serve the country for a long time by using that experience."

Members of Islam's Bangladeshi community in the Bronx spent Monday evening visiting the late officer's home, which he shared with his family and parents, the New York Times reported.

They described to the newspaper how Didarul had migrated to the US and provided security for a school before becoming a policeman. They said their friend had been an active member of his mosque who had mentored young men in the area.

In Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila in Bangladesh, relatives gathered to mourn his loss at his family home in the Magura residential area.

the shipment of 5G equipment from China". This instruction, passed down to BTCL, constitutes direct executive involvement in an operational matter that falls under the purview of the implementing agency.

4. Conflict of Interest Allegation

"The allegation of conflict of interest is entirely unsubstantiated. Mr. Taiyeb has no personal or financial stake in Huawei or any party involved in the project. The report insinuates malice without presenting a shred of evidence. Repeating such conjectures undermines journalistic integrity."

Our response:

Our report did not allege a direct financial stake. Rather, it highlighted a clear conflict between Mr Taiyeb's role in an administration and his actions in pushing a project flagged for corruption risk. As Mr Iftekharuzzaman, the executive director of TIB, said in our report, the action represents a "clear conflict of interest" for a top government official who should be championing institutional integrity, not interfering with an ACC investigation.

The conflict arises from a public official using his executive position to advocate for an ethically, if not legally, compromised project, thereby undermining the independence of the investigative process.

5. Lack of Context on Procurement History