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Reverse Gaza famine at all costs

Israel must stop using starvation as a method of warfare

We remain deeply concerned by the unfolding man-made famine in Gaza. On August 22, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system officially declared a famine in Gaza City and nearby areas, warning that it could soon spread across the entire enclave. This is the first time the IPC has declared a famine outside of Africa. According to this global hunger monitoring coalition, around 514,000 people—nearly a quarter of Gaza's population—are already experiencing famine. This number is expected to rise to 641,000 by the end of September.

Over the past 22 months of this unjust war, Israeli forces have destroyed a significant part of Gaza's vital infrastructure, including hospitals and bakeries, blocked humanitarian aid, and targeted and killed desperate Palestinians seeking food aid. But despite overwhelming evidence of the deliberate starvation and obstruction of aid, Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed the IPC's findings as an "outright lie." This denial is deeply disturbing, albeit not surprising any more.

Israel has been going ahead with its plan to seize Gaza City despite international outcry. Its ongoing bombardment continues to claim lives daily. A classified Israeli military database reportedly shows that the vast majority of Palestinians killed so far are civilians. During this war, nearly 200 journalists have also been killed, according to Reporters Without Borders. The recent deaths of four Al Jazeera journalists—including 28-year-old Anas al-Sharif—have again triggered global outrage. These targeted killings have made it clear that Israel is deliberately targeting journalists to suppress the evidence of its war crimes. Netanyahu's dismissal of the IPC famine report further suggests an attempt to prevent global awareness of the humanitarian crisis and hints that Israel wants to expand its offensive in Gaza no matter what.

According to UN aid chief Tom Fletcher, the unfolding famine was entirely preventable, but "because of systematic obstruction by Israel," food could not get through to Palestinians in need. UN Secretary-General António Guterres demanded a ceasefire, saying that the ongoing crisis must not be allowed to persist without accountability. World leaders must, therefore, raise their voices in unison and demand immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The famine in Gaza must be averted at any cost. As food and medicine sit idle at border crossings, innocent civilians, including children, face deadly consequences. The IPC's projection that over 132,000 children under five will be at risk of death from acute malnutrition by June 2026 is a stark warning that the international community must act now. It must increase pressure on Israel to agree to the ceasefire proposal from Egypt and Qatar, rather than escalating its military action. The people of Gaza deserve more than sympathy; they deserve action.

Another mob, another killing

How will the govt stop this brutality, and when?

Another appalling mob killing took place in Chattogram's Fatikhkhari upazila on Friday. This time, a 15-year-old boy was beaten to death, while two other teenagers accompanying him were left critically injured. Reports suggest it may have been a premeditated attack, as the assailants shouted that the three teenagers were thieves, giving them the "license" to ambush them, tie them to the guard rails of a bridge, and beat them mercilessly. Only the other day, two men were beaten to death by a mob in Rangpur on suspicion of being van thieves. By now, this has become a frightening trend—where anyone, anywhere may become a victim. But why is mob violence persisting, despite all the criticism and heightened security?

In the Rangpur case, the police were present while people were mercilessly beating the two men, as seen in a widely circulated video. But they left the scene as the beating continued, possibly feeling outnumbered. Eight police personnel were already suspended for negligence. Incredibly, the police have submitted a case statement that, according to the victims' family members, casts aspersions on the victims and makes no mention of police presence during the attack. What message does this send to the public, and especially to the perpetrators of this heinous crime? That law enforcers are intimidated by mobs and will do nothing when collective violence occurs. That the police can give false case statements to save themselves or to serve the interests of those who take part in such activities.

Four men suspected of taking part in the Rangpur incident have been arrested. As there is video footage, it should not be hard to identify the others. The government, therefore, must ensure that the police arrest all perpetrators regardless of their connections and that they are given exemplary punishment through speedy trials. It also must take responsibility for the low morale and ineptitude of the police in controlling such situations. Mob justice will largely stop when the public realises it will be punished by law, and when they begin to trust the legal system, especially the police.

Unfortunately, in the first year of the interim government, there have been no effective steps specifically addressing mob violence. But the frightening regularity with which such incidents continue occurring, it is extremely crucial that the government ensures that all attackers are arrested and punished to signal its toughening approach.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Eruption of Mount Vesuvius



Italy's Mount Vesuvius is believed to have erupted on this day in 79 CE, destroying the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the excavations of these sites in mid-18th century precipitated the modern science of archaeology.

The architectonics of mob violence



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Mob violence has become one of the most pressing challenges confronting Bangladesh since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian government. The collapse of her iron grip, once held together through coercion, patronage, and a politicised security apparatus, has not translated into institutional stability. Rather, the vacuum has been filled with volatile eruptions of mob anger, pointing less to isolated law-and-order failures than to a deeper structural malaise embedded in the country's political, social, and governance fabric.

At first glance, mobs appear as spontaneous, combustible gatherings—neighbours, strangers, onlookers suddenly transforming into perpetrators of violence. Yet beneath this spectacle lies a complex architectonic of rage, frustration, and dispossession. Crowds become mobs not simply out of irrational frenzy but through a convergence of unresolved grievances, weakened state authority, and decades of systemic impunity. The collapse of credible justice mechanisms and accountability structures has habituated citizens to taking matters into their own hands when possible, blurring the boundary between community defence and collective lawlessness.

Law enforcement's role in this configuration is crucial. For years under Hasina, the police were weaponised to protect regime interests rather than the public good. Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and partisan policing corroded public trust in the force. In the current interim dispensation, the police remain demoralised, under-resourced, and often inert, even after the passing of a year since the uprising. Citizens, too, continue to have little expectation of justice from them. Thus, law enforcement is both largely absent and complicit in this scenario: absent in preventing mob flare-ups, complicit in having created the culture of impunity that fuels them.

The civil bureaucracy, similarly, has shown inertia at a moment

when nimbleness and credibility are required. Bureaucrats, long accustomed to following the dictates of political masters rather than serving the public, now operate in a fog of uncertainty. The interim government, lacking a direct electoral mandate, cannot yet command the kind of accountability structures necessary to restore confidence. Governance drifts, and in the drift, mobs flourish.

Youth gangs warrant special attention in this equation. They are



'If left unchecked, mob violence risks becoming a permanent feature of our political landscape.'

FILE VISUAL: STAR

not the prime movers of mob violence but rather a symptom of broader dislocation. Many of these groups emerged during the Awami League years, nurtured through patronage politics, and tolerated as muscle for electoral dominance. Deprived of political sponsorship in the post-Hasina vacuum, they now reappear as free-floating agents of disorder. Their presence highlights the blurred line between politics, criminality, and mob behaviour in Bangladesh's urban and rural spaces. To treat them as the "cause" of mob violence would be a misdiagnosis; they are better understood as symptoms of a deeper breakdown in governance, justice,

and political accountability.

The psychology of the crowd adds yet another layer. Individuals, once submerged in the anonymity of the mob, undergo a transformation: responsibility diffuses, moral inhibitions dissolve, and violence becomes not just possible but contagious. This contagion is intensified by an environment of generalised distrust—distrust of the police, the courts, the bureaucrats, and the political elites. The mob, for all its destructiveness, paradoxically becomes the only arena where these individuals feel a fleeting sense of empowerment.

But this pattern is not merely sociological; it is political, and also neuropsychological. The absence of an elected government has created a profound accountability deficit. The interim authority, by definition temporary, cannot claim to embody the sovereignty of the people. Its legitimacy rests on its ability to

Mobs thrive in the interstices of this transitional moment not only because institutions are weak but also because individuals, swept into collective frenzy, undergo a neurological shift that lowers inhibitions and amplifies aggression. In the absence of political actors capable of channelling discontent into democratic expression, this volatile fusion of structural instability and neuropsychological susceptibility turns the street into the most immediate outlet of power.

If mob violence is the symptom, then the disease lies in the long legacy of authoritarian rule, politicisation of state institutions, and the systematic hollowing out of democratic accountability. The Hasina years entrenched a logic of patronage and fear: those within the circle of loyalty enjoyed impunity, while dissenters faced harassment or worse. Over time, this produced not only a culture of fear but also a culture of resentment. When the edifice collapsed in July-August 2024, the resentment had no institutional outlet. It spilled onto the streets.

Mob violence, then, cannot be reduced to "bad people doing bad things." It is the visible surface of a subterranean crisis that spans governance, justice, politics, and social psychology. To address it requires a multidimensional strategy. Law enforcement must be depoliticised and re-professionalised, beginning with visible steps to restore public trust. The bureaucracy must be jolted out of its inertia and made responsive to citizen needs. Youth gangs must be disengaged from the circuits of patronage that sustain them today and redirected towards constructive civic and economic opportunities. Above all, the interim government must remember that it is not an end in itself but a bridge: its most urgent task is to prepare the conditions for a credible election that reestablishes accountability at the top.

Without such steps, mob violence risks becoming a permanent feature of Bangladesh's political landscape. If that happens, the interim government's promise of stability will curdle into further disillusionment, and the very idea of democratic transition may be undermined rather than bolstered post-election. For ordinary citizens already battered by economic precarity, price hikes, and a fraying social fabric, that would be the final betrayal.

What Bolivia's election can teach us?



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The first round of Bolivia's national election, which took place on August 17, produced an unprecedented runoff and a decisive shift in the country's political balance. With centrist Rodrigo Paz leading on 32 percent and former president Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga second on roughly 27 percent, voters will return to the polls on October 19 under a clear two-round rule that requires either 50 percent plus 1 or 40 percent with a 10-point lead for an outright win. Notably, close to a fifth of ballots were null or blank—an outlet for protest, yet still counted transparently. Polling day itself was calm by regional standards, results were accepted as preliminary, and the system moved towards a conclusive second round.

Three design choices underpinned that experience. First, Bolivia separated a rapid preliminary tally from the official count, promising final certification within days while making preliminary data public on the same night. The new OEP's SIREPRE portal—an official, public-facing system—streamed these preliminary results in real time and was trialled openly ahead of polling day. Second, authorities welcomed robust international scrutiny: the European Union (EU) deployed around 120 observers, and the OAS mission issued a same-day preliminary assessment. Third, the law's runoff threshold ensures the eventual winner commands broad legitimacy rather than a narrow plurality.

Bangladesh's recent experience could hardly be more different. Its 12th parliamentary polls held on January 7, 2024 were boycotted by the principal opposition and widely

criticised; Washington stated plainly they were "not free or fair," while rights groups documented a pre-election crackdown that poisoned the environment. Official turnout was just over 40 percent—a figure that, even if accurate, speaks to deep public disengagement.

Today, however, Bangladesh has an opening. The National Consensus Commission (NCC)—formed in February, with its tenure recently extended till September 15—has already brokered agreement on significant constitutional and electoral reforms, while circulating the July National Charter to parties for signature. Among the areas of emerging consensus are a law to govern the Election Commission, curbs on Article 70 to allow MPs to vote their conscience on key matters, independent delimitation, and opposition control of crucial parliamentary committees. The debates over a caretaker-style election-time government, term limits for the prime minister, and an appointments process that reduces partisan capture are ongoing but have shifted from taboo to negotiable policy.

What, then, are the Bolivia-to-Bangladesh lessons the NCC should bring squarely to the fore? First, ensuring radical transparency in results. Bangladesh should legislate an OEP-style public portal for the next election that publishes, in real time, the image and data of every polling station result form as soon as it is logged, clearly labelling the feed as preliminary until the official tabulation is complete. Domestic observers should be guaranteed access to those same images for parallel vote tabulation (PVT), and

parties' agents should be protected by law and police directives to obtain copies at source. The aim is not speed for its own sake but a transparent chain of custody that builds public confidence as the count proceeds. Bolivia's SIREPRE shows this is feasible with paper ballots and modest technology.

Second, credible, invited scrutiny is a must. The NCC should recommend an open invitation to full-fledged international missions (EU, Commonwealth and credible regional networks), with guaranteed nationwide access from pre-election through post-results dispute resolution. Bolivia's experience illustrates how such missions can

scaling. Bolivia's two-round rule is explained in contemporary coverage and statute; the principle is what matters here.

Fourth, ensuring election-time neutrality with teeth. However it is structured—whether a revived caretaker format or a functionally equivalent, time-bound neutral administration—the mechanism must be codified and verifiable. That means a clear legal mandate, ground rules for police and administration postings, a transparent process for appointing and disciplining election officials, and rapid judicial remedies for campaign violations. The NCC's charter already outlines some of these elements; it should bring them

Bangladesh's last election was judged wanting and left scars. Bolivia's was imperfect too, with high protest votes, elite churn, and economic pain. However, its institutions offered citizens a visible, comprehensible path to closure. If the NCC can translate these lessons into enforceable rules, such as open data on results, protected observers, a legitimate mandate-building formula, and real neutrality, it can give February's election a chance to be believed.

help deter abuse and make technical recommendations that all sides can accept precisely because they stand outside the domestic trench war.

Third, bringing forth a winner that the country can live with. Our first-past-the-post system routinely hands a seat to candidates with thin pluralities in fractured races, which can tempt manipulation at the margins. The NCC need not copy Bolivia's presidential runoff, but it should consider recommending either ranked-choice voting in single-member seats or carefully piloted two-round runoffs where the winner fails to reach a floor (say, 40 percent). The goal is to raise legitimacy, not to engineer outcomes. If that feels too ambitious for 2026, the Commission can still propose ranked-choice pilots in city mayoral polls to build confidence and skills before

together into a unified "election confidence package" to be applied in the 2026 election, with political parties pledging that the newly elected parliament will adopt it at the earliest opportunity.

Finally, name the stake. Bangladesh's last election was judged wanting and left scars. Bolivia's was imperfect too, with high protest votes, elite churn, and economic pain. However, its institutions offered citizens a visible, comprehensible path to closure. If the NCC can translate these lessons into enforceable rules, such as open data on results, protected observers, a legitimate mandate-building formula, and real neutrality, it can give February's election a chance to be believed. That, far more than who wins, is the reform the republic needs most right now.