The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Trump's Gaza plan is a weak foundation for peace

The proposal's unilateral terms show glaring weaknesses

A cessation of two years of bloodshed in Gaza is an urgent moral and humanitarian imperative. The ceasefire proposal advanced by US President Donald Trump would deliver a pause in the colossal human cost. The guarantee of full aid is a vital lifeline for a population grappling with famine. This would bring immediate, if immense, relief to the people of Gaza. Even so, it is a proposal that offers peace without a viable political horizon, and in doing so, risks becoming a recipe for the next conflict. It is a political document that, while halting the violence, seeks to impose a unilateral new order.

According to the document, after the reform of the Palestinian Authority, conditions "may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood." This is nothing but diplomatic ambiguity. This vague promise is then rendered almost meaningless by the political reality it enables. It becomes more fragile as Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu has reaffirmed his stance to resist Palestinian statehood.

As critics have rightly pointed out, it provides all guarantees to one side and almost none to the other. The mechanisms, such as the withdrawal of Israeli troops contingent on opaque conditions and the establishment of a "Board of Peace" under Trump's stewardship with a controversial figure, Tony Blair, are designed to ensure Israeli security concerns are met. But what about Palestinian political and human rights? What about the overarching issues of justice and accountability? It makes no mention of genocide against the Palestinian people, allegations detailed by human rights organisations. Instead, the plan offers a governance vacuum. An international board, no matter how well-intentioned, is a poor substitute for legitimate, representative Palestinian leadership. This approach not only disenfranchises the Palestinian people but also sows the seeds for future instability.

Furthermore, Trump's heavy-handed ultimatum is a form of coercive diplomacy that may not build a lasting peace. It reinforces a damaging power dynamic where the terms are dictated by the party that wields superior military force, funded and diplomatically shielded by its superpower patron. A durable peace must be built on mutual recognition of rights and needs.

This arrives at a curious diplomatic moment. Just as the US and Israel pursue this unilateral track, a significant shift is occurring among Western allies. The recent recognitions of Palestinian statehood by several European nations, however symbolic, are a clear signal that the international community is seeking to re-anchor the conflict to the principle of a two-state solution. Trump's plan, by contrast, seems to ignore this consensus. Nevertheless, despite its flaws and ambiguities, the framework's immediate goal is to halt the bloodshed in Gaza, which is significant. And we welcome any respite for the people of Gaza. But a lasting solution requires a credible political process that addresses the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians. Without that, today's ceasefire will only be an interlude before the next explosion.

A generation left waiting

Govt must address unemployment, particularly among educated youth

That one in three university graduates in the country remained unemployed for up to two years last year is deeply worrying. It highlights one of the most concerning aspects of how our economy is functioning. These findings come from the latest Labour Force Survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, which also reveals that one in seven university graduates has been without work for one to two years, while one in six has been unemployed for more than two years.

According to the survey, there were 26.24 lakh unemployed people in 2024, including 8.85 lakh university graduates. An earlier report by this daily shows that the unemployment rate among graduates, which was already high, rose further to 13.5 percent in 2024, up from 13.11 percent the previous year—the highest among all education levels. This points to another persistent problem. The most highly educated segment of our population has consistently struggled to find employment, even in comparison to those who are less educated. This indicates a serious mismatch between the jobs available in the market and the academic training our graduates receive. It also underscores the lack of investment in the economy, which is failing to generate quality jobs that require highly skilled individuals.

Bangladesh is currently experiencing a demographic dividend, with the working-age population growing larger than the dependent population. This shift offers the country a unique opportunity to accelerate growth. Yet, instead of harnessing the energy, creativity and talents of our young people, we are squandering it. Experts warn that long-term unemployment can have a scarring effect on young people's careers. Those who begin work after a delay of one or two years are likely to remain behind for the rest of their professional lives. This would not only cause immense financial difficulties but also take an immeasurable mental toll. The government must recognise that rising unemployment, particularly among the youth, is a matter of national emergency and treat it accordingly. It should engage experts, businesses and other stakeholders to devise ways of facilitating higher investment, improving education and creating jobs at the scale and quality our young people deserve.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

International Day of Non-Violence

Based on a 2007 resolution of the United Nations, today is observed as the International Day of Non-Violence to honour Mahatma Gandhi, who was born on October 2, 1869.

FROM CASE BACKLOG TO JUSTICE

A practical blueprint for our courts

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KHAN KHALID ADNAN

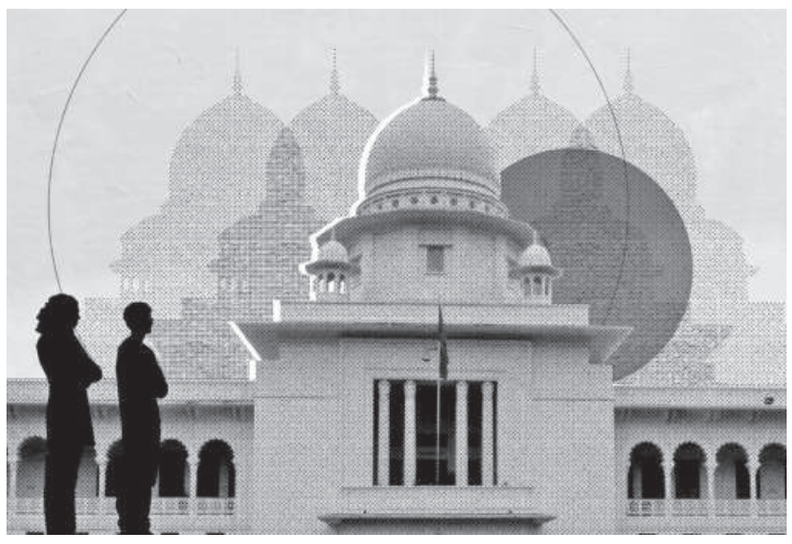
The courts in Bangladesh are running on scarcity and delay. The docket contains above 45 lakh pending cases (as of December 31, 2024) and the judge-to-population ratio is among the weakest in South Asia. Women hold only 11 of 118 seats in the higher judiciary, which is neither fair nor smart management of national talent. These facts depict a structural failure that prices ordinary people out of timely justice and erodes public trust.

There have been some encouraging developments of late, however. The High Court recently restored the Supreme Court's authority over postings, promotions and discipline for the subordinate judiciary, and directed the government to create a separate judicial secretariat. This decision reconnects constitutional principle with operational control. But it will only work if the secretariat is staffed with planners, analysts and court managers who, among other long-overdue reforms, enforce a workforce plan that ties judge numbers to caseloads, retirements and expected filings by district. If it turns into another office that moves files rather than moving cases, the reform will die of bureaucracy.

Appointments must leave personal politics behind. The new Supreme Court Judges' Appointment Ordinance, 2025 establishes a council led by the chief justice. The council can raise quality and legitimacy if it publishes criteria, advertises vacancies, releases reasoned shortlists, and discloses how conflicts are managed. Without radical transparency, it risks becoming a new wrapper on an old practice. It should also set measurable goals for women's representation and state, in plain language, how caregiving breaks and family postings are treated so that merit is not gamed by gendered penalties.

Structure beats slogans. The government has now separated civil and criminal work at district level and created dedicated criminal courts. Specialisation helps only if it follows discipline. The Supreme Court should consider issuing binding practice directions that cap adjournments, fix hearing windows, and require each court to publish and meet a daily hearing capacity. That is how you turn policy into throughput. The cause list must be a contract with the public, not a wish list for tomorrow.

And digital must become the default. The judiciary already runs an electronic cause list, a litigant portal, electronic certified copies, a judicial payment gateway, and a monitoring dashboard. A company bench has begun paper-free proceedings. Make routine filings electronic by default, move service of process to verified digital channels with a physical fallback, and publish a monthly open-data release on filings, disposals, and age of cases by courts.



FILE VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

Civil procedure has finally been updated. The Code of Civil Procedure (CPC) was amended in May to cut dead time and quicken case flow. These textual changes must be translated into daily practice through directions that enforce time standards from summons to arguments, block serial adjournments without recorded exceptional reasons, and require early case conferences for complex matters.

Criminal delay needs its own toolkit. Create standing bail benches during peak seasons to stabilise custody numbers. Put police and forensic witnesses on day-certain schedules with automatic notices and proportionate penalties for absence. Use the law already on the books to divert minor matters. Compounding of offences exists under Section 345 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and it can be applied swiftly under judicial oversight. Bangladesh does not yet have a formal plea-bargaining regime, but policymakers can pilot structured plea discussions for defined non-violent offences with strict safeguards and recorded reasons, drawing on regional and domestic experience.

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is the unspent currency of reform. Section 89A of CPC makes court referral to mediation mandatory in civil suits, yet practice remains timid. India has enacted a dedicated Mediation Act, 2023, and is pushing institutional mediation. Bangladesh should pass a modern mediation law and ratify the Singapore Convention on Mediation to make internationally mediated settlements enforceable. The case for action has been made for years; it is time to move from seminars to signatures and from pilot rooms to default routes. Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed has also notably emphasised the importance of ADR in the country.

Also, the bench environment needs to be professionalised. Every High Court judge should have a law clerk or judicial researcher. Every district judge should have a trained case manager certified by the Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI). Expand JATI's mandate to cover modern scheduling, digital service, and dispute resolution training for case managers and list officers.

Moreover, it is crucial that access to courts is decentralised without fragmenting quality. The establishment of permanent High Court benches in divisional cities—which all political parties agreed on during talks with the National Consensus Commission in early July—would cut cost and travel time for citizens while aligning appellate oversight with regional needs. Design is key here: a single digital registry and a unified listing system should be maintained so that practice standards stay consistent nationwide.

Clean governance is not optional. The scandals surrounding former chief justices remain a standing warning. Wealth declarations for judges every three years, published online with a clear review mechanism, would make integrity checks routine rather than performative. The Judiciary Reform Commission pressed for this, yet recent reports show how implementation stalled for years due to lack of rules. Draft the rule, publish the data, and act on irregularities. Trust grows when the system chooses light over shadows.

The huge case backlog in courts will not shrink by wish alone. Pair the above reforms with a surge plan. Contract retired district judges with proven track records on fixed terms to clear aged tranches of routine appeals and revisions under appellate supervision with public metrics. The Judiciary Reform Commission also recommended this. Publish district-wise targets for filings, disposals, and age of cases, and track clearance rates monthly in a dashboard accessible to citizens. Use the existing digital rails to make performance visible.

The path forward is now clear enough. In short, appoint more judges, and appoint them better. Bring more women to the top through transparent criteria and family-aware postings. Enforce time standards with real case management. Make digital the default. Turn ADR from theory into practice. Decentralise wisely. Open the books on assets and performance. Do all of this, and the case backlog will bend. But keep doing what we have been doing so far, and nothing will change except the number on the pending board. The choices we make today will determine whether justice will remain delayed, and denied in turn, or be delivered on time in the future.

The eternal curfew: When paying rent doesn't buy freedom

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PARTHIB MAHMUD

Here's the absurdity: you pay rent for a flat in Bangladesh, but come midnight, you may or may not be allowed inside it. Most buildings shut their gates at midnight. After that, unless you claim an emergency, the guard has orders to bar you from entering or leaving. Arrive home at 12:30am, and you're no longer a tenant but an unwelcome guest loitering outside your own building. It is a Bangladeshi irony: you pay rent but live like a boarder in a hostel. Most rental buildings in the city, even in relatively posh neighbourhoods, close their gates at midnight.

What's striking is how normally this is treated. In middle-class neighbourhoods, tenancy is seen less as possession of a home and more as admission to a dormitory. Rent is supposed to buy the use of the premises for the tenancy period. Furthermore, the irony is cruel: in a city where commuting can take longer than the workday, your reward is sometimes a locked gate.

The midnight gate is just the most visible rule. Others are softer but no less intrusive: no rooftop access after dark, or guest restrictions based on gender. They are rarely written into leases. They are enforced through frowns, questions, and the quiet threat of being labelled "difficult."

The Constitution of Bangladesh has a straightforward position. Article 36 guarantees that "subject to any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the public interest, every citizen shall have the right to move freely throughout Bangladesh..." The important part is the phrase "by law." A building committee's circular or a landlord's whim is not law. Reasonable restrictions must be grounded in legislation, not in the preferences of whoever holds the keys.

The Transfer of Property Act, 1882, still the basis of tenancy law, goes further. Tenancy is not charity. Section 108 says tenants paying rent are entitled to enjoy the property "without interruption." Locking the gate after hours is plainly an interruption. You cannot sell uninterrupted possession and then interrupt it nightly.

Moreover, if the aforementioned laws do not suffice, the Penal Code offers language that should make landlords nervous. Section 339 defines wrongful restraint as preventing someone from going in a direction to which they have the right. Section 340 defines wrongful confinement as wrongfully restraining someone so that they are unable to leave a location from which they have the right to leave. Refusing entry or exit, absent a genuine security emergency, begins to resemble just that.

To see why it matters, you must understand how Dhaka eats time. The city's road network covers just seven to eight percent of land, far below the 20 to 25 percent in planned megacities. Dhaka ranks among the most congested cities; a 20-minute trip can stretch to two hours.

For the middle class, the workday doesn't end at 5pm. Private-sector professionals routinely work 9-10 hours without overtime pay. Adding the commute makes it 12 hours away from home. By the time you have eaten or seen a friend, it is late.

There is also a safety angle often ignored. A tenant forced to linger outside in the dark, waiting for a guard to wake up or a landlord to grant permission, is exposed to greater danger than if simply let inside. For women, night-shift doctors, nurses, delivery riders or transport workers, this is not indulgence—it is about safety and dignity. The "security" argument collapses: you do not protect tenants by leaving them stranded on the street.

I have seen relatives sprint out after dinner to catch the gate by 11:59pm, breathless as if catching the last train. I have heard of tenants skipping hospital visits to avoid arguing with the guard. I have also seen friendships fade because meeting after work risked a lockout. These small inconveniences add up. They corrode your autonomy—your home is not truly yours. They turn adults into boarders, citizens into subjects of control. It also reflects Bangladesh's discomfort with private life extending into late hours. To step outside after midnight without excuse is to invite suspicion.

None of this is to say that security concerns are irrelevant. Burglary is real, and residents want assurance. However, the solution is not a blanket curfew. Alternatives exist, and they are neither costly nor complex. Buildings can ensure 24/7 access with electronic locks or multiple keys issued to tenants. Guards can maintain entry logs without denying access. Noise can be addressed through quiet-hours rules, targeting real concerns without controlling movement. Above all, lease agreements should explicitly guarantee uninterrupted access.

Where negotiation fails, there are legal remedies. Tenants can invoke their rights under the Transfer of Property Act. Documented wrongful restraint—such as being locked out despite paying rent—may justify a general diary (GD) with the local police station. Legal aid groups, such as BLAST or Ain o Salish Kendra, can provide support. The essential point is that tenants need not accept midnight curfews as part of city life.

A rented flat is a home, not a dormitory with a curfew. Living in Dhaka already means sacrificing hours to traffic, patience to bureaucracy, and serenity to noise. To then be told your freedom to walk through your own gate expires at midnight is one indignity too many.

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