

Gaza flotilla seizure violates int'l law

World leaders must make Israel allow humanitarian aid into Gaza

The interception of the Global Sumud Flotilla, with most of the activists on the boats being detained by the Israeli forces (as of 6:15pm, Bangladesh time), is a clear violation of international law. The flotilla, which includes more than 40 civilian boats and about 500 activists, is carrying basic humanitarian aid—food and medicine—for war-torn Gaza, where a genocide continues and starvation has set in.

According to the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, the mission is lawful and protected under a comprehensive set of international legal instruments. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) guarantees freedom of navigation on the high seas. Security Council Resolutions 2720 and 2728 are binding instruments and demand unimpeded humanitarian access and the removal of all barriers to aid delivery. The Fourth Geneva Convention imposes an obligation to permit the free passage of humanitarian aid and prohibits interference with relief operations and the targeting of civilian infrastructure. These internationally accepted legal instruments, among others, confirm the legality of the flotilla and show that Israel is violating them by intercepting the fleet.

Israel has intercepted boats carrying humanitarian aid many times before. The deadliest case was in 2010 when Israeli commandos boarded a Turkish ship that was a part of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. Clashes broke out and 10 activists were killed as a result, drawing global condemnation and straining Israel-Turkey relations. In June, environmental activist Greta Thunberg along with other activists departed from Catania, Sicily with food, medical supplies, baby formula and other essential goods. They, too, were intercepted and sent back home. This time, the flotilla is much bigger with a higher number of activists, many of whom have been detained by Israeli forces. Many countries, including Turkey, Malaysia, Colombia, and South Africa, have condemned such "illegal detention" of their citizens.

Even the UK, a close ally of Israel, has called for the country to solve the "atrocious humanitarian crisis" and allow the humanitarian aid from the flotilla to be handed to humanitarian organisations on the ground. Yet, Israel continues to bombard Gaza and kill Palestinians, while blocking humanitarian aid, resulting in the starvation of civilians, including infants. We applaud the courage and resolve of the Freedom Flotilla activists who have risked their lives to conduct this mission driven by their sense of humanity and outrage. These heroes must be left unharmed. While a US proposed "peace plan" to bring about a ceasefire in Gaza is in the discourse, the international community must keep pressuring Israel to lift all restrictions on humanitarian aid and allow the remaining Palestinians to get the food and medicine they so desperately need. The world cannot remain silent anymore.

Free Golartek playground

Playgrounds are for children, not for dumping seized vehicles

Over the past decades, we have witnessed many of Dhaka's playgrounds disappearing either due to the greed of powerful businesses and individuals or simply due to poor urban planning. Recently, the Golartek playground in Mirpur-1, largest playing field under the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), was found to be occupied by Darus Salam Police Station. The police station has turned a part of the four-acre field into a dumping ground for more than 50 seized vehicles, ranging from trucks and buses to motorcycles and rickshaws.

According to locals, seized vehicles started taking up space in the Golartek field just two years after the establishment of Darus Salam Police Station in 2008. More than a decade has passed since then, yet the police station continues to use the field as a dumping ground. They claim that the vehicles are case exhibits and that they have no alternative storage space. And despite repeated demands from the locals to clear the field, there has been no concrete action from the police. According to the station, they have written to the city corporation requesting land, but no allocation has been made to date.

Is that a viable reason to turn a public playground into a dumping ground for seized vehicles? The deputy commissioner of police for the Mirpur division has cited the absence of a permanent station building as the root of the problem. But why should the community suffer for this? The lack of urgency from both the police and city authorities to clear the field is unacceptable.

Dhaka has already lost most of its open areas, including parks and playgrounds. Many of them have been converted into commercial spaces, and plans are underway to destroy the few that remain. The impact of this on our children is immense. Deprived of outdoor spaces, they are forced to stay indoors, their eyes glued to screens, harming their health and overall well-being. We urge the government to take immediate action and ensure that the Golartek playground is freed from occupation. The DNCC authorities and Darus Salam Police Station must work together to resolve this issue without delay. Furthermore, the government must save all remaining playgrounds and parks in the city from illegal encroachment. Playgrounds are not a luxury, they are a vital infrastructure for a healthy and liveable city.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Germany reunified



On this day in 1990, after four decades of Cold War division and with pressure from German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to a unified Germany within Nato, leading to Germany's reunification.

Will an Upper House solve our governance woes?

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The interim government has been pursuing reforms for balancing the concentration of power focusing on three core pillars of the republic: legislative, executive, and judiciary. Introduction of an Upper House in parliament was initially raised by the Constitution Reform Commission, later by the National Consensus Commission, and finally considered by political parties for the next level of action. Currently, Jamaat-e-Islami and allies demand proportional representation (PR) in both Houses, while the BNP opposes it in both and the National Citizen Party (NCP) wants it only in the Upper House. However, the fundamental issue is whether the Upper House would be able to ensure accountability of the majority party and its leaders and, more importantly, such a House could improve governance practices and judicial independence.

But global evidence on whether these reforms work remains unexplored. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has conducted a quantitative study to unearth this evidence. The study examined parliamentary institutions' impact on governance, accountability, and effectiveness, using data from 108 countries over 25 years.

The suitability of any reform depends on the institutional arrangement of a country. And as the current political landscape of Bangladesh stands, these reforms are idealistic at best and chaotic at worst. Governance is a social contract between people and their representatives to carry out their will. The design of the legislative system should have the goal of ensuring accountable and effective representation and governance. To achieve this, the incentive of these representatives must align with this goal.

Weak institutions and clientelist politics have created an elite ruling class serving itself and its patrons. This fundamental lack of quality in governance remains unaddressed in the reform agenda. Simply having more representation with the scope of competition will not ensure quality. In this environment, a bicameral parliament or PR system does nothing to improve the quality of governance.

Our study shows the negative effects of bicameralism on several

governance outcomes. These include corruption control, effectiveness and accountability as measured in the World Governance Indicators. We also examine social spending and judicial independence. Cross-country regressions show that bicameralism and the PR system generally weaken governance, though bicameralism raises social expenditure. Parliamentary systems improve corruption control and accountability, while military executives show gains in those areas but reduce effectiveness. Alignment between Houses and higher levels of political polarisation are both negatively related to governance indicators. The method of Upper House selection by plurality shows mixed results, with positive associations for corruption control and accountability but negative associations for social expenditure and the judiciary. Finally, a higher GDP per capita (PPP) is negatively associated with government effectiveness and government social expenditure.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Control of corruption

We find that the presence of an Upper House is negatively associated with the control of corruption. Without competition, fair elections, and distinct constituencies, an Upper House cannot ensure scrutiny; its suitability depends on institutional context. In the weak institutional environment of Bangladesh, it only doubles the number of representatives who are susceptible to capture by moneyed interests.

Parliamentary systems better control corruption than presidential or assembly-based ones. Along with this, polarisation in the legislature weakens control over corruption. When both Houses are aligned under one party, scrutiny weakens. Polarisation can become debilitating and make the legislature ineffective.

Single party dominance makes the Upper House simply a rubber stamp without any incentive to hold the

government accountable. This implies the requirement of robust opposition participation in parliamentary procedures and empowerment of standing committees of the legislature. Proportional representation in electoral systems also negatively affects corruption control when adopted in both Houses. Without campaign finance limits, the Upper House risks becoming a lobbying tool to block laws. In political environments dominated by tribalistic voting, simultaneous House elections risk creating legislative supermajorities with very little incentive to provide scrutiny.

Governmental effectiveness

Governmental effectiveness is heavily dependent on having clear resolution mechanisms in place for legislatures to move forward despite differences in opinions and having proper participation of the opposition parties in the parliamentary proceedings. Without proper incentive mechanisms for working together and competitive

executive branch. The tendency we observed in the previous regime of bureaucratising governance through increasing empowerment of the executive branch ought to be reversed.

The analysis also shows a positive association with the plurality electoral structure of the legislature compared to the PR system. It also shows a negative relationship with bicameralism. This shows that the span and structure of legislative representation do not ensure voice and accountability of the people; rather, it is largely dependent on the institutions and quality of said representation. The mere existence of the Upper House will not guarantee any protection against autocratic tendencies or ineffectiveness.

Government social expenditure

We find that upper houses are positively associated with health and education spending as a share of GDP. The PR system also has a positive effect on social spending. We can infer that the more diverse representation of the population in the legislature provides an incentive to increase allocation in the health and education sectors. This provides some insight into the welfare orientation of bicameral legislative structures.

Judicial independence

The presence of proportional representation in upper houses has shown a positive association with judicial independence. However, this is heavily dependent on the appointment procedure of the judges. In a more diverse and multiparty composition, the legislature may prevent judicial capture if the appointment of judges is conducted through parliamentary vote. Under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, the judiciary's independence and role as a co-equal branch of government determining the constitutionality and legality of the policies weakens. Bangladesh has seen first-hand how a subservient judiciary legalised authoritarian tendencies under the previous regime. An independent judiciary is crucial for accountable governance; without it, the legislature cannot limit abuse of power.

Overall, structural reforms are necessary to maintain a participatory and accountable governance structure in Bangladesh. Bicameralism and proportional representation are not the panacea to solve all our woes of abuse of power. The fundamental problems of the country's unicameral legislature are getting no attention. Simply increasing centralised systems of power without incentives for participation, resolution and resilient rules-in-use will jeopardise reducing the reform process to just a performative populist exercise.

focus on passing legislation, legislatures can be deadlocked or become a rubber stamp in effect. The perception of governmental effectiveness is negatively associated with bicameralism, PR, and high political polarisation. This implies that while PR may offer more diverse representation in the legislature, their ability to work together and convince the people of the government's effectiveness remains in question.

Voice and accountability

The impact on voice and accountability remains positive for parliamentary structures compared to presidential ones. Parliamentary systems show consistently better association with improved governance outcomes compared to presidential systems. Thus, proper accountability must be ensured through due parliamentary oversight rather than leaving it up to the goodwill of an empowered

Women in coastal regions need better social security



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Bangladesh is recognised as one of the countries vulnerable to climate change, ranking seventh globally in the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index published by Germanwatch. Between May and August in 2024, the country experienced four major natural disasters, including Cyclone Remal and widespread flash floods in south-eastern regions. The southwest coastal districts are often at the epicentre of this crisis.

In areas like Shyamnagar, Gabura, and Burigoalini in Satkhira, evidence shows a growing pattern of forced displacement, destruction of agricultural livelihoods, and the feminisation of climate vulnerability. Studies show that salinity intrusion and decline in crop production in several upazilas of Satkhira disproportionately affect women, who are often responsible for subsistence farming, collecting water, and managing household food security.

A study titled "Menstrual hygiene management in flood-affected Bangladesh: Addressing socio-cultural barriers, infrastructure gaps, and policy responses," published in the *Frontiers in Public Health* journal this year, shows how women face

challenges in managing menstrual hygiene during floods in districts like Noakhali, Feni, Barishal, Khulna, and Satkhira. The study identifies multiple barriers, including a lack of access to sanitary products, inadequate sanitation infrastructure in shelters, and deeply rooted cultural stigmas around menstruation. It highlights how women are forced to use unhygienic materials like cloth, leaves or even newspapers, risking infections and health complications. Emotional distress due to a lack of privacy and social stigma further exacerbates their suffering. However, menstrual challenges are just the tip of the iceberg; women are among the most vulnerable groups during and after natural disasters.

Because of these ground realities, it is urgent to transition from conventional poverty-targeted programmes to adaptive social protection (ASP), a framework that integrates social safety nets with disaster preparedness and climate resilience.

Bangladesh has made notable progress in building a social protection system that supports vulnerable populations. Since the launch of the National Social Protection

Strategy in 2015, the government has implemented various programmes, including the Maternity Allowance Programme for the Poor, Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled, Allowances for the Widowed, Deserted and Destitute Women, and Old Age Allowance. Emergency response efforts like Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Food for Work have helped during crises. The use of digital platforms and mobile payment systems has also improved service delivery.

However, these systems often fail to reach climate-affected women in coastal regions. Many of them are excluded from official lists because they lack formal documents or fixed addresses. They often lose everything to river erosion or storm surges, and thus remain invisible to the system. This is where ASP becomes critical, because it not only addresses poverty but also build resilience to environmental shocks. In countries like Ethiopia and the Philippines, this model has already shown results by helping vulnerable communities prepare for and recover from climate stress.

For Bangladesh, especially in places like coastal Satkhira, ASP must be tailored to the unique needs of women. This means making a few essential changes.

First, the criteria for selecting beneficiaries must include climate vulnerability. Women who are displaced, landless, or living in disaster-prone areas should be prioritised, even if they do not meet traditional income-based qualifications. Second, cash transfers should be sent directly to women's mobile accounts. Many women already use mobile financial

services. This approach ensures fast, safe and dignified delivery of aid during emergencies.

Third, skills training should move beyond stereotypical jobs like sewing or poultry farming. Instead, training should focus on areas such as climate-resilient agriculture, healthcare, information technology, and construction. Mobile learning units or local community centres can help make these trainings accessible to women in remote areas. Fourth, women must have a voice in community-level planning. Early warning systems, disaster response teams, and local adaptation plans should include women not as beneficiaries but as decision-makers.

Fifth, menstrual hygiene and maternal health support should be embedded into disaster preparedness. During floods and cyclones, women's basic needs are often overlooked. Providing hygiene kits, private spaces, and trained female volunteers can significantly improve health outcomes.

The good news is that Bangladesh already has the building blocks. The use of digital cash transfers during recent disasters shows that rapid and targeted support is possible. Now the focus must shift to inclusion, accessibility, and gender sensitivity.

Adaptive social protection is not about temporary relief. It is about long-term dignity. It ensures that the next disaster does not wipe out years of progress or push the same families back into crisis. Strengthening adaptive social protection for women in coastal regions is not only a development priority, but a national responsibility and a matter of justice.