

Myanmar made lives of the Rohingyas a nightmare

The Gambia tells ICJ in genocide case

REUTERS, The Hague

Gambia yesterday told judges at the United Nations' top court that Myanmar targeted minority Muslim Rohingyas for destruction and made their lives a nightmare in a landmark case accusing Myanmar of genocide.

It is the first genocide case the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is hearing in full in more than a decade. The outcome will have repercussions beyond Myanmar, likely affecting South Africa's genocide case at the ICJ against Israel over the war in Gaza.

Myanmar has denied genocide. In total, the hearings at the ICJ will span three weeks. Gambia's Minister of Justice Dawda Jallow told ICJ judges the Rohingyas were simple people with dreams of living in peace and dignity. "They have been targeted for destruction," he said.

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The National Election (2014, 2018, 2024) Investigation Commission handing over its probe report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Jamaat holds views-exchange meeting with retired army officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said there is no alternative to sincerely respecting the army, as it has helped the people of the country hold their heads high.

He made the remarks at a views exchange meeting with retired armed forces members at the capital's Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday evening.

Jamaat organised the event titled "In Recognition of Service and Sacrifice: A Salute to Our Distinguished Veterans" in honour of the former armed forces members.

Speaking as the chief guest, Shafiqur said, "There are some mismatches in our culture. For some reasons, a lack of confidence is sometimes visible. For example, our defence ministry remains in the hands of the state's chief executive. He already has lots of responsibilities, he has to supervise all the ministries and acts as their guardian. If such-and-such a ministry remains under him, how will he individually ensure its due rights?"

"Instead, what is the problem if we bring in potential people from among those who are experienced and who have served the nation by

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'State scripted last 3 polls'

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After receiving it, the chief adviser said, "We had heard about vote rigging, we knew some of it. But the way the entire process was shamelessly distorted, the system twisted and crushed, and a verdict written on paper as they pleased... this [report] must be placed before the nation. A full record must be kept."

Adding that the entire nation was punished in the name of elections organised with people's money, he said, adding, "The people of this country looked on helplessly. They could do nothing."

"To give the people some relief, the faces of all those involved must be brought to light. We must know who did it, how they did it. And we must ensure that such election theft never happens again."

Other members of the commission, formed on June 25 last year, are Shamim Al Mamun, former additional secretary; Kazi Mahfuzul Haque (Supan), associate professor of law at Dhaka University; lawyer Tajriyaan Akram Hussain; and election expert Abdul Alim.

The report said that in 2014, elections in 153 constituencies were uncontested, while the remaining 147 were staged as "competitive" but were entirely arranged and pre-planned. "This arrangement was made at the highest level of the state to keep the Awami League in power," it said.

As the 2014 election was widely criticised globally as an uncontested one, the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League adopted a mission to make the 2018 election appear "competitive". The BNP and other opposition parties failed to grasp the far-reaching nature of this plan and participated in the polls.

According to the commission's estimates, the 2018 polls saw overnight ballot stamping in 80 percent of voting centres to secure the Awami League's victory.

"Within the administration, there was a form of dishonest competition to ensure the party's win, resulting in voter turnout figures exceeding 100 percent in some centres."

In 2024, as the BNP and other opposition parties did not participate, dummy candidates were fielded as a deceptive tactic to project competition in the election.

Since several thousand officials and employees were involved in irregularities across the three elections, and the time allocated to the inquiry commission was insufficient, it was not possible to identify all individuals

or determine their specific roles, the report said.

At a press conference yesterday evening, chief of the commission Justice Shamim Hasnain said the master plan for the three elections was drawn up immediately after the 2008 polls.

The caretaker government system was formally abolished in 2011 through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, as part of a broader, long-term strategy. The ruling party viewed the system as a major obstacle to retaining power at will, he added.

"It [ruling party] selectively appointed loyal individuals while forming the Election Commission. The commission did not exercise independent judgment but followed bureaucratic guidance during elections."

"Many capable BCS officers were available, but they were sidelined, and only a few loyal officers were assigned electoral duties."

LESS TIME, INSUFFICIENT INFO
The report said that considering the scope of the investigation, the commission would have required at least a full year to complete its work. "Given the four-month time limit, it was not possible to conduct the investigation as extensively as planned."

Meanwhile, a lack of necessary information also hindered the process.

After the 2014 parliamentary election, the EC Secretariat was moved from the Planning Commission campus to its own building in Agargaon, during which most 2014 election documents and related records were destroyed.

Additionally, due to weak documentation practices within the EC, not all information and documents required for the probe were available.

Since many people involved in the election process, including candidates, were absconding after the July uprising, it was also not possible to hold hearings with them.

"For the institutionalisation of democracy, it is necessary to conduct a detailed inquiry into the irregularities of the 2014, 2018, and 2024 national elections, including the ninth parliamentary election of 2008, and to take legal action against those responsible," the report said.

ACTS THAT MARRIED THE POLLS
The inquiry committee identified a series of actions that undermined electoral integrity, including the abolition of the caretaker government system and the use of selected parts of state intelligence agencies and the armed forces in shaping electoral strategies.

Other actions included restricting media workers from entering polling centres and filing false cases to harass opposition candidates and activists, many of whom were arrested, subjected to enforced disappearances under false, non-bailable charges, intimidated, or lured into withdrawing their candidacy.

The commission also noted widespread electoral fraud, including casting fake votes, using the executive branch to manipulate results, pre-filling ballot boxes, altering voter turnout figures, and destroying election-related documents and data after voting.

Voters were intimidated, and attempts were made to create splits within opposition alliances.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The commission recommended the formation of a new law for the appointment of election commissioners and cautioned that while a permanent Election Investigation Commission may be formed, it must not undermine the independence of the Election Commission.

It called for an independent and separate delimitation commission with full authority over boundary demarcation, and said parties registered before the 2014 and 2018 polls must be re-examined for transparency.

"Laws must be amended to keep intelligence agencies away from party registration activities. Legal provisions must prevent courts from halting registration processes."

"Intelligence agencies must be barred from involvement in election activities, though the Election Commission may seek their assistance strictly for security purposes, if necessary."

It added, "It is essential to bring transparency to the activities of all intelligence agencies so that they cannot be used in the future as instruments for retaining state power."

The report further said that no officer from the administration cadre should be appointed on deputation to the EC Secretariat. Returning and assistant returning officers should primarily be appointed from the commission's own officials. If insufficient, appointments may be made from other cadres, including the administration.

Journalists with valid Election Commission cards should be allowed direct entry into polling centres without additional permission, it said, adding that they may collect information, take photos, and record videos without permission, though they cannot film inside voting booths unless irregularities occur.

ICC yet to respond to BCB's letter

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cited today [yesterday] by the Adviser for the Ministry of Youth and Sports was in reference to an internal communication between the BCB and the ICC's Security Department related to threat assessments for the Bangladesh team ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup," the BCB said in a press release sent in the evening.

"This does not constitute a formal response from the ICC to the BCB's request for the relocation of Bangladesh's matches outside India," it further read.

Earlier in the afternoon, sports adviser Asif Nazrul spoke to the media after a visit to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), where he referenced a letter from the ICC security team that he said supports Bangladesh's decision not to send its national team to India for the tournament, which begins on February 7.

"There is no new development. We have sent two letters. After sending the letters, we are waiting for the ICC's response. There is one matter I need to inform you all. The ICC security team has sent a letter, which pointed

out three factors that will escalate the security threat to the Bangladesh team," Asif Nazrul said.

"The first is if Mustafizur [Rahman] is included in the Bangladesh team. The second is if Bangladesh supporters walk around wearing the national team's jersey. And the third is the closer the election gets, the higher the security threat would be for the Bangladesh team."

"This statement of the ICC security team has proven beyond any doubt that the situation in India is not at all suitable for the Bangladesh cricket team to play the T20 World Cup over there. If the ICC expects us to form a team without our best bowler, our supporters won't be able to wear the Bangladesh jersey, and that we will postpone the elections in Bangladesh for cricket, then there cannot be a more absurd, unrealistic, and unreasonable expectation than this," he added.

The adviser then reiterated his earlier demand to the ICC to relocate Bangladesh's matches to Sri Lanka, the co-host of the event.

"We believe that the prevailing communal situation and the anti-

Bangladesh atmosphere in India, especially the continuous anti-Bangladesh campaign that has been going on for the last 16 months, have made it impossible for Bangladesh to play cricket in India.

"If the ICC is truly a global organisation and does not blindly follow India's directives, they should provide us the opportunity to play our T20 World Cup matches in Sri Lanka. We will not bow down from this stance."

Prior to the BCB's official clarification, Chief Adviser's Deputy Press Secretary Azad Majumder on social media said that the letter cited by Asif Nazrul was actually "an inter-departmental note on threat assessments ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup in India", not an official ICC response.

The Daily Star sent an email to ICC senior media manager Rajshekhhar Rao for clarification, but did not get a response. Earlier on Thursday, the BCB had sent a second letter to the ICC outlining its security concerns about sending the Bangladesh contingent to India, as the ICC had asked it to do in response to the board's first letter seeking relocation.

Iran ready for war, open to dialogue

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foreign involvement."

Iranian authorities held mass nationwide rallies yesterday to regain control of the streets. Thousands of people filled the capital's Eghelab (Revolution) Square, brandishing the national flag as prayers were read for victims of what the government has termed "riots", state TV showed.

Addressing the crowds, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said Iran is fighting a "four-front war", listing economic war, psychological war, "military war" with the US and Israel and "today a war against terrorists", referring to the protests.

Flanked by the slogans "Death to Israel, Death to America" in Persian, he vowed the Iranian military would teach Trump "an unforgettable lesson" if Iran were attacked.

Araqchi said Iran was ready for both war and talks after repeated threats from Washington to intervene militarily over the crackdown on protests, which activists fear has left at least hundreds dead.

The Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights (IHR) said yesterday it had confirmed 648 people killed during the protests, including nine minors, and thousands more injuries, but warned

the death toll was likely much higher -- "according to some estimates more than 6,000", it said.

IHR added that the internet shutdown made it "extremely difficult to independently verify these reports".

It said an estimated 10,000 people had also been arrested.

Trump said on Sunday evening the US may meet Iranian officials, and he was in contact with Iran's opposition while piling pressure on its leaders.

Turkey, meanwhile, has warned that any foreign intervention in neighbouring Iran would deepen crises in both the country and the wider region, and it called for US and Iranian negotiations to resolve existing problems.

Russia yesterday condemned what it called attempts by "foreign powers" to interfere in Iran.

Trump is due to meet with senior advisers today to discuss options for Iran, a US official told Reuters. The Wall Street Journal reported that the options included military strikes, using secret cyber weapons, widening sanctions and providing online help to anti-government sources.

Despite the massive scale of the anti-regime protests, there are no signs of splits in the Shia clerical leadership, military or security forces,

and demonstrators have no clear central leadership. The opposition is fragmented.

In verified video footage, Iranians gathered at the Kahrizak Forensic Centre in Tehran on Sunday, standing over rows of dark body bags.

The ambassadors of Britain, Italy, Germany and France in Tehran were summoned to the foreign ministry, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported yesterday, and asked to relay to their governments Tehran's request to withdraw their support for the protests.

European Parliament President Roberta Metsola has banned all diplomatic staff and any other representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran from all European Parliament premises, she said on social media X.

Araqchi said yesterday that a total of 53 mosques and 180 ambulances had been set on fire since the protests erupted, adding that "no Iranian would attack a mosque".

CCIV footage from inside Tehran's Abuzar Mosque showed a dozen people, most wearing face masks, ransacking the structure, throwing books onto the ground and destroying furniture last week. Reuters verified the timestamp and location. State media reported that the mosque was set on fire on January 9.



Bodies lie in body bags on the ground as people stand amid the scene outside Kahrizak Forensic Medical Centre in Tehran, Iran, in this screen capture from a video obtained from social media.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Dhaka's interest in joining Gaza

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some Muslim countries are interested in participating in the force. We are also carefully considering the matter," Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said.

He made the remarks yesterday in a written response to The Daily Star's queries, sent on Sunday. The newspaper sought clarification on why the interim government was considering participation in the ISF just weeks ahead of the election, the nature of Bangladesh's possible role, and whether the foreign policy implications had been duly assessed.

Shafiqul said that as the world's third-largest Muslim-majority nation, Bangladesh has consistently condemned Israeli genocide in Gaza and called for its immediate end, along with the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territory.

He noted that the UN Security Council on November 17, 2025, adopted Resolution 2803, which, among other provisions, approved the establishment of an ISF for Gaza. He added that all Muslim country members of the Security Council voted in favour of the resolution, while several Arab and Muslim states jointly recommended its adoption.

Bangladesh, he said, recognises the importance of the Security Council's decision and is assessing its position in that context.

On January 9, National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, during a meeting with US officials in Washington, DC, expressed

Bangladesh's interest in principle to "be part of the international stabilisation force" to be deployed in Gaza.

In response, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker said Washington was willing to work with Bangladesh on the issue.

Shafiqul yesterday said, "As one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces and an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause, Bangladesh's interest in participating in the ISF is contingent on the fulfillment of a number of principles."

"These include, among others, that the ISF should be temporary and operate under a clear UN Security Council mandate; that there must be permanent ceasefire and complete withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza; and that the responsibilities for Gaza will be transferred to the Palestinians," he said.

Bangladesh, he added, remains steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with Al Quds Al Sharif as its capital.

Political reactions to the government's position were mixed.

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said he did not want to comment on the issue at this stage. Another BNP leader, requesting anonymity, said, "The interim government could have avoided taking any such decision on sensitive matters when the election is only a month away."

Jamaat-e-Islami Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said any decision must be transparent, well explained to the public, and taken strictly in the national interest.

"People will not accept anything beyond this," he told The Daily Star, adding that the party would issue a formal statement after internal discussions.

Sultan Muhammad Zakaria, head of the National Citizen Party's international relations cell, supported the government's stance, saying, "I think the government's interest to be part of the International Stabilisation Force is right. We want stability in Gaza at the earliest."

Ending the war and restoring law and order were prerequisites for peace in Gaza, he said, adding that Palestine is a friend of Bangladesh and any effort to support its cause should be welcomed.

Meanwhile, the Palestine Solidarity Committee, Bangladesh on Sunday condemned the interim government's interest in joining the proposed ISF and demanded an immediate reversal of the position.

In a statement, Prof Md Harun-or-Rashid, member secretary of the committee, said the ISF's primary role would be to disarm freedom fighters in Gaza under the guise of ensuring Israel's security, effectively dismantling the Palestinian resistance.

He said it was unfortunate that the national security adviser expressed Bangladesh's interest in participating in the ISF during his meeting with US officials.