THREE YEARS AFTER 7 OCTOBER

When a date became an alibi for genocide

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Three years on, and the nightmare continues. The 7th of October 2023, a date, has been asked to do something no date can do. It has been used to explain, excuse and close debate about everything that came after. In Gaza, Palestinians have paid for that perverse logic with their lives, their homes and their future. The question since then has been what has been done in its name, and who has been left out of the story.

The numbers are hard to hold in the mind. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, at least 74,016 Palestinians have been killed and 175,068 wounded since October 2023. Women and children make up around half of the dead, while 1,145 people have been killed since the ceasefire took effect in October 2025.

The harm goes beyond death. About 90 per cent of Gaza's people have been forced from their homes, many of them several times. The UN Environment Programme found that 78 per cent of Gaza's roughly 250,000 buildings have been damaged or destroyed. Hospitals, schools, bakeries, sewage and water systems and universities have been hit. In 2025, the global hunger monitor declared famine in parts of Gaza.

If one date can explain all of this, then we must ask what kind of explanation it is.

In the days after 7 October, Israeli leaders set out a new framework. The aim was no longer to respond to a specific threat but to dismantle an entire system of governance and, with it, much of Gaza's civilian life. Statements by officials described Palestinians in Gaza in dehumanising terms, including the phrase "human animals". A full siege was announced, cutting off all essentials, including food, fuel, water and electricity.

Collective punishment of a civilian population is prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention. So is starving civilians as a method of war. Yet Israel's policies treated these rules as obstacles to be explained away rather than limits to be respected.

The central tool was the language of self-defence. States do have a right to defend themselves, but that right has conditions. Force must be necessary, proportionate and directed at military targets. Civilians must be protected. And it is far from settled that a state can claim self-defence against territory it occupies and controls. In its 2024 advisory opinion on Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, the International Court of Justice found that presence unlawful and said it must end.

Still, "self-defence" became a phrase that closed conversations rather than opened them. Each strike, each evacuation order, each blocked aid convoy could be placed under it. In Western media, the more the word was repeated, the less anyone asked whether the conditions behind it were being met.

Three tools deserve attention because they shaped how the world understood events.

The first is the "human shield" argument. Israel describes civilian deaths as the fault of the other side. International law does not work this way. Even where soldiers operate near civilians, especially in densely populated areas like Gaza, the attacking side must still distinguish between military targets and civilians, and must weigh the harm to civilians against any expected gain.

Simply claiming that civilians were in the way does not remove the duty not to kill them en masse. Although



People bury unidentified bodies of Palestinians returned by Israel at a mass burial site, during a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, 22 October 2025. PHOTO: REUTERS

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Israeli occupation forces describe civilians as collateral damage while targeting "militants", the argument here is that civilians themselves have been deliberately targeted. The killing of six-year-old Hind Rajab, who sat defenceless in a car that was reportedly hit by at least 335 bullets, raises profound questions about how civilians, including children, have been treated during Israeli military operations.

The second is the evacuation order. Warning people to move south, then to move again, was presented as a measure to protect civilians. It pushed a population into shrinking areas with little shelter, food or medicine, and these areas were later struck as well. At times, civilians were also struck while they were in the process of evacuating. For Palestinians, who carry the memory of 1948, when hundreds of thousands were forced from their homes and never allowed back, the fear that displacement might become permanent evoked a history repeating itself.

The third is the label. When Israel describes civilians as "militants" or "associated with terror" after its occupation forces kill them, as has been alleged even in the cases of journalists and aid workers, the label creates a justification for their deaths. It turns a question of law into a question of identity.

International institutions have not been silent. They have been slow, and often blocked. In January 2024, the International Court of Justice found it plausible that some of the rights South Africa invoked under the Genocide Convention were at risk, and ordered Israel to take steps to prevent acts of genocide and to allow aid in. Israel strongly denies the accusation of genocide and says its operations target armed groups, not the Palestinian people. The substance of that case will take years. The written phase may not finish until 2029. Palestinians in Gaza cannot wait that long, and many will not live to see a ruling.

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israel's prime minister and its former defence minister over allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Israel rejects the court's jurisdiction. In September 2025, a UN Commission of Inquiry concluded that Israel had committed genocide in Gaza, a finding Israel once again rejected. A state facing some of the most serious legal accusations in the world has been able to continue its military operations without being held accountable, while some of its closest allies have shielded it from consequences, supplied it with weapons and, in some cases, attacked the courts themselves.

This matters beyond Gaza. International law is only as strong as the willingness to apply it equally. When rules are enforced against some and waived for others, they stop being law and become politics. People have noticed. That is why trust in the so-called rules-based order has fallen so sharply, especially across the Global South.

There is another way 7 October has been used. Israel has presented it as the beginning of history. Many news reports and political speeches begin the story on that morning, as if there were not decades of history that came before it. Beginning in 2023 removes more than seven decades of displacement, military occupation, the expansion of settlements that international law prohibits, and a blockade of Gaza that has strangled daily life since 2007. It also removes and belittles the experiences of the people who have lived through all of it since 1948.

When Palestinians are mentioned at all, they often appear as casualties, as numbers, or as a "humanitarian problem" to be managed. They are rarely described as a people with rights: the right to self-determination, the right to live safely in their homes, the right to return, and the right to be counted as individuals rather than as a threat.

Palestinians have also been told what their future should look like by people who are not Palestinian. Plans for Gaza's "day after" have been announced by outside powers with little say from those who live there. Proposals to move people out of Gaza, however they are dressed up, ignore a basic principle. A people cannot be rescued by being removed from their land.

And yet the story has not gone the way those who wrote the framework expected. Ordinary people across the world refused to accept that one date could justify all of this. Governments also began to move. South Africa took its case to the world's highest court. Several countries cut or reviewed ties with Israel, and more have recognised the State of Palestine. These steps came late and were not enough, but they show that the framework built around 7 October is not as solid as its authors hoped.

What drove this response was not hatred, as critics often claim. It was a simple moral instinct and an urgent need for justice.

If 7 October is to be remembered honestly, it must be remembered as part of a longer story, and not as a licence to commit unimaginable atrocities against Palestinians. A fair reckoning would include at least four things.

First, the law must apply equally. Courts must be allowed to do their work, and states must stop attacking or ignoring them when their findings are uncomfortable.

Second, Palestinians must be seen as a people with the right to self-determination. Any future plan for Gaza and the West Bank that excludes Palestinian voices will fail, morally and practically.

Third, the facts of what happened must be established independently. That means allowing open access for journalists, investigators and aid workers, so that the record is not written by one side alone.

Fourth, the root causes must be addressed. As long as the illegal occupation, attacks, blockade and displacement continue, there will be people who resist them.

Three years on, Palestinians are still digging their loved ones out of the rubble and sleeping in tents. They are still being killed even after the "ceasefire". They are not asking for special treatment. They are asking to be counted, protected and heard like everyone else.

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NAVIGATING THE US-CHINA RIVALRY

Bangladesh cannot outsource its AI sovereignty

AYESHA TARIQ

On the morning of August 1, the United States (US) Special Envoy for South and Central Asia, Sergio Gor, met Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in Dhaka and suggested that Bangladesh join Pax Silica, the State Department's coalition for artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductor and critical mineral supply chains. Later that day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Bangladesh would join the Shanghai-based World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO), initially as an observer. Dhaka faces a diplomatic balancing act, even if it has made few concrete commitments so far.

The two blocs offer different things. Pax Silica, launched in Washington in December 2025, began with seven signatories, including Japan, Singapore and the United Kingdom, and had grown to twenty-five by August, according to the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation. It is widely seen as an effort to reduce reliance on China. WAICO, founded in Shanghai on July 16 by twenty-nine countries, including Russia and Pakistan, presents itself as a development-focused and more inclusive alternative. Its pitch is aimed at developing countries that regard Western technology controls as a barrier.

Dhaka has reasons to maintain close ties with both. China supplied between 28% and 30% of Bangladesh's monthly imports in the last quarter of 2024, making it the country's largest source of imports. The US, for its part, is the largest single destination for Bangladeshi goods. Beyond Washington's existing ties with Dhaka, Gor saw considerable potential in information technology, and the two sides discussed American investment in warehousing and agriculture, as well as financing through the US International Development Finance Corporation. Those talks point to a partnership that is broadening beyond exports, much as China's role already extends across trade, industrial zones and river management, as demonstrated by the 13 memorandums signed during the Prime Minister's visit in June.

For now, Dhaka can maintain ties with both blocs because it has made no binding commitment to either. That could change once each bloc establishes rules governing which vendors and data it trusts. A country whose systems can operate under either set of rules can negotiate over the terms, while one tied to a single supplier must accept the conditions set by that supplier's bloc.



US Special Envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor meets Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at the Prime Minister's Office in Dhaka on August 1, 2026. During the meeting, Gor proposed that Bangladesh join the US-led Pax Silica initiative, which focuses on artificial intelligence, semiconductors and critical mineral supply chains.

The draft National AI Policy for 2026 to 2030 shows what sovereignty requires. It promises a national computing strategy with phased upgrades to high-performance computing infrastructure at the National Data Centre, and it requires sensitive datasets, including health, biometric, financial and national security data, to be stored and processed in Bangladesh or in jurisdictions designated as trusted. The policy has yet to be approved by the current government, but its proposed guidelines are sound. However, we must remember that computing depends on electricity, and a national data centre will compete for a power supply that must already serve homes, industries and hospitals. The energy crisis we faced this year made it particularly apparent that we need better planning and a more reliable electricity supply. A facility that cannot rely on the grid cannot host a state's most sensitive systems, so the final policy should link the computing strategy to an agreed electricity plan.

The hardware question leads back to geopolitics. Bangladesh does not manufacture advanced chips, so every processor in a national data centre will have to be imported through supply chains that one bloc or the other controls. The policy's reference to 'trusted' jurisdictions raises the obvious question of who determines which jurisdictions can be trusted, and Washington and Beijing will answer it differently.

The Philippines offers a warning about moving too quickly. Its planned economic security zone at New Clark City, covering 4,000 acres, could require up to three gigawatts of electricity at full development, according to estimates by the agency in charge. The mayor of Capas in Tarlac province has said that the plan was not formally presented to his local government, the Daily Tribune reported. Joining a coalition does not eliminate the need for the power supply, local consent and legal groundwork that a project of that size requires.

In the AI era, strategic autonomy is as much a matter of system design as it is of diplomacy. A government that can move its workloads between cloud providers and replace one AI model with another without rebuilding its services keeps its options open. A government whose public services depend on a single company's technology has effectively chosen a side. The draft policy already recognises this, requiring public-sector AI systems to use open standards, interoperable data formats and portable models specifically to prevent vendor lock-in. The task now is to incorporate those requirements into every contract before the first large-scale systems are built, since retrofitting them later would cost far more.

The choice of AI model is where this matters most. Open-weight models, which can be downloaded, hosted domestically and adapted using Bangla-language data, offer one of the most practical routes to developing systems that the state can control. However, open models also have national affiliations. Meta's Llama and Alibaba's Qwen are both freely available, yet a ministry that standardises on either one ties its developers and their tools to an ecosystem anchored in either Washington or Beijing. Dhaka should test competing models against the same Bangla-language benchmarks and ensure that its systems remain capable of running more than one model. The choice of model should be treated as a procurement decision that can be reversed when a better or safer alternative becomes available.

The second test of sovereignty is people. AI capability cannot be bought once and for all, because models are regularly replaced and the threats they address continue to evolve. A ministry that relies on foreign advisers and vendors to operate its systems holds a service contract, while the knowledge remains with the supplier. Without that knowledge at home, Bangladesh risks becoming a low-cost site for other countries' systems, with the valuable design work and profits remaining abroad, regardless of which bloc supplies the technology.

Bangladesh should retain its observer status in WAICO and continue discussions about Pax Silica, while refraining from fully joining either until it can offer capabilities that its partners need.

These issues matter most in national security. AI has made it cheaper to conduct disinformation campaigns and harder to verify what is real, and security agencies are likely to be among the government's earliest and most demanding users of the technology. They are also among the most likely to purchase complete systems from abroad, even though dependence on a foreign supplier in this sector carries particularly high costs.

The measure of progress should be how quickly Bangladeshi officials take over the work, and the vendor certification framework proposed in the draft policy is the natural place to make this a requirement. Every significant AI contract should set deadlines by which local staff must take responsibility for operating the systems and making technical decisions, with suppliers' payments tied partly to the success of that handover. Bangladesh has around 700 chip designers and produces more than 20,000 computer science and electrical engineering graduates each year, providing a potential talent pool for developing domestic AI capabilities. The state's challenge is recruiting and retaining enough of them by offering salaries that can compete with those in the private sector.

Over the next two years, both blocs are likely to move from broad declarations to specific conditions, attaching rules governing vendors, data and computing access to their offers of investment and technology. Bangladesh should retain its observer status in WAICO and continue discussions about Pax Silica, while refraining from fully joining either until it can offer capabilities that its partners need. In the meantime, the final policy should ensure a reliable power supply for national computing facilities and establish a technically skilled cadre within the government capable of operating and evaluating AI systems, supported by enforceable portability requirements in every public-sector technology contract.

At the UN General Assembly on September 24, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said Bangladesh did not want today's digital divide to become tomorrow's AI divide. Closing that gap will depend less on which bloc Dhaka eventually joins than on whether it develops systems it can operate, modify and manage on its own terms. A country with that capacity can work with Washington and Beijing simultaneously and negotiate with both, while a country without it will find that its suppliers have effectively made the choice on its behalf.

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