

Opinion – UN Secretary-General’s Visit Empowers Bangladesh

Written by Md Tariqul Islam Tanvir and Shafi Md Motofa

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MD TARIQUL ISLAM TANVIR AND SHAFI MD MOTOFA, MAR 27 2025

The recent four-day visit of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to Bangladesh marks a pivotal moment for the nation on multiple fronts. Amidst a complex geopolitical landscape and internal transitions, Guterres’ presence underscores the international community’s commitment to addressing critical issues facing Bangladesh. His visit is particularly significant for three reasons: securing support for Rohingya refugees amid U.S. aid cuts, bolstering the interim government’s image and reform agenda, and countering India’s anti-Bangladesh propaganda. These outcomes highlight the visit’s diplomatic and humanitarian importance, positioning Bangladesh as a key player in regional stability and global humanitarian efforts.

The Rohingya refugee crisis remains one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of our time. Since 2017, over a million Rohingya Muslims have fled persecution in Myanmar, seeking refuge in Bangladesh. The Cox’s Bazar refugee camps, now the largest in the world, house a vulnerable population that relies almost entirely on international aid for survival. However, recent cuts in humanitarian assistance have exacerbated the crisis. The U.S., under the Trump administration, significantly reduced aid to Rohingya refugees, and the World Food Program (WFP) announced a halving of food rations due to funding shortfalls. This reduction, from 12.50 to 6 USD per person per month, has dire consequences, with child malnutrition rates soaring and living conditions deteriorating rapidly.

Against this backdrop, Guterres’ visit to the Rohingya camps in southern Bangladesh serves as a beacon of hope. His historic iftar speech at a refugee camp not only highlighted the plight of the Rohingya but also reaffirmed the UN’s commitment to their cause. “We cannot allow the world to forget about the Rohingyas,” Guterres declared, vowing to “speak loudly” to global leaders about the urgent need for increased support. His presence refocused international attention on the crisis, reminding the world that humanitarian aid must remain a priority even as new conflicts emerge. By leveraging his platform, Guterres has galvanized efforts to secure funding and resources for the refugees, ensuring that their basic needs are met and their dignity preserved.

The Secretary-General’s visit also underscores the importance of collective action. With 95% of Rohingya households dependent on humanitarian assistance, the international community must step up to fill the gap left by U.S. aid cuts. Guterres’ advocacy has the potential to mobilize donor countries and organizations, ensuring that the Rohingya crisis remains on the global agenda. His visit is not just a symbolic gesture but a call to action, urging nations to uphold their moral and humanitarian obligations.

Guterres’ visit also holds immense significance for Bangladesh’s interim government, which has been navigating a delicate transition following the fall of the Hasina regime. The interim administration, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda aimed at addressing systemic issues in governance, administration, and the electoral process. These reforms, demanded by the students and civilians who led the popular uprising, are critical for ensuring a sustainable and equitable future for Bangladesh.

During his meeting with Yunus, Guterres expressed full support for the reform process, stating, “I want to express our total commitment to the reform process. We are here to support your reforms. We wish you all the best. Whatever we can do, let us know.” This endorsement is a significant diplomatic win for the interim government, as it reinforces its

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credibility on the global stage. By aligning itself with the UN, the interim administration gains legitimacy and recognition, which can encourage other international organizations and donor countries to provide financial aid, technical assistance, and diplomatic cooperation.

Guterres' support sends a strong message to the Bangladeshi people, assuring them that the international community stands behind their aspirations for a more democratic and transparent government. This backing strengthens Yunus' position and enhances the prospects of a successful transition, paving the way for long-term stability and development. In a region often plagued by political instability, Bangladesh's reform efforts, supported by the UN, could serve as a model for other nations undergoing similar transitions.

The visit also serves as a strategic counter to India's anti-Bangladesh propaganda, which has sought to delegitimize the interim government. Since the fall of the Hasina regime, India has raised concerns about the protection of minority rights in Bangladesh, often amplified by its media. Indian outlets, ranked highest for the risk of misinformation and disinformation, have spread false narratives exploiting sensitive issues such as minority rights. These efforts have not only undermined the interim government's credibility but also strained bilateral relations.

Guterres' visit has shifted the dynamics. By expressing solidarity with the interim government and offering assistance, the UN Secretary-General has bolstered Bangladesh's position on the global stage. His endorsement challenges India's narrative, highlighting the international community's support for the interim administration and its reform agenda. This show of support creates tension for the Indian government, as it undermines its attempts to isolate Bangladesh diplomatically. Furthermore, Guterres' visit underscores the importance of fact-based diplomacy in countering propaganda. By aligning with the UN, Bangladesh has gained a powerful ally in its efforts to combat misinformation and present an accurate portrayal of its political and humanitarian efforts. This alignment not only strengthens Bangladesh's international standing but also fosters a more constructive dialogue with its neighbors, promoting regional stability and cooperation.

The UN Secretary-General's visit serves as a reminder of the power of international solidarity in addressing humanitarian crises, fostering democratic transitions, and combating misinformation. As Bangladesh continues its journey towards stability and prosperity, the UN's support will remain a cornerstone of its progress, ensuring that the nation's challenges are met with resilience, dignity, and hope.

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