

STUDENT PROTESTS IN THE US

A déjà vu of 1968



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SHAMSHER M CHOWDHURY

Anyone from my generation would remember how the protests by university students all across the United States in 1968, and the strong-armed response from law enforcers, ended President Lyndon Johnson's plans to run for re-election and marked the beginning of the end of the US's bloody war in Vietnam. That anti-war student movement was a watershed in the country's political history. It was the period of counterculture where anti-establishment sentiments were vocally and virulently expressed by the society's younger generation. The classic film *The Trial of the Chicago 7*, based on real events, is a most graphic reminder of that turbulent and dark period, where the court chose not to remain impartial and even the judge himself became a party to intimidating defence witnesses.

The world is now witnessing a return to similar student protests, in some of the most well-known universities in the US, this time against Washington's inability to stop Israeli genocide against Palestinians, many of the victims being children and women. This is because of the establishment's "ironclad" and unqualified support for Israel, a policy that cuts across the entire political spectrum of the country, the likes of Independent Senator Bernie Sanders being the very minuscule exceptions. The younger generation finds

they have generated a stronger and wider movement—not just by students, but by a larger segment of society, from coast to coast, seeking justice and end of genocide.

The Constitution of the United States guarantees freedom of assembly and the right to free speech. These are well-founded values that the US and other Western countries profess loudly when it comes to a "value-based world order." It seems that the university authorities clearly look at things differently when it comes to Israel. Revelations that many of the universities in the US receive sizeable monetary endowments from businesses/companies with links to Israel and some other Jewish groups seem to be the main cause why the authorities choose to ignore provisions of the country's constitution written by its very founding fathers.

A university is not just a place where one goes to get a degree; it is meant to be a centre of excellence. Its very name suggests that it is the vortex where the universal values of free thinking, justice and ethics are nurtured and embedded in the minds of the youth. It is where the greatness of innovation and creativity are encouraged and rewarded. In the land of the free and the home of the brave, a university cannot be a



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

Women breaking the glass ceiling? Not so much in sports



A CLOSER LOOK

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TASNEEM TAYEB

We are all aware of the recent fiasco during a Dhaka Premier League (DPL) match when two veteran cricket teams, Mohammedan Sporting Club and Prime Bank Cricket Club, reportedly expressed dissatisfaction over the appointment of an on-field female umpire to officiate their match. Though initially it was thought to be a gender issue, both the clubs later clarified that it was not due to the gender, but rather the experience of the umpire that they were concerned with. Nonetheless, this incident once again brought to the fore the issue of gender in our sports scene, and gender disparity that so pervasively prevails here. From pay disparity to a concerning lack of gender diversity in leadership roles in various sporting bodies, women have a long way to go to secure equity in Bangladesh's sports arena.

Traditionally, sports have been seen as the men's forte. Unfortunately, despite courageous women breaking the glass ceiling over the last few decades and emerging successful in sports—be it in kabaddi, football, chess, judo or cricket, to name a few—the biased perception about women being unfit for sports has remained ingrained in our collective memory. As a result, we as a people have been unable to appreciate women's sports or their achievements.

How many of us have taken the time to watch a women's cricket match with as much enthusiasm as we do when the Tigers take the field? How many of us can name the country's first woman international master in chess? For those who do not know, Rani Hamid became Bangladesh's first woman international master in chess in 1985. How many of us remember Sabina Khatun? She was the captain of the women's football team that won the nation's maiden South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Women's Championship title in 2022.

Most of us might not have even heard of Shathira Jakir Jessy—the first female umpire to officiate a DPL match, and also one of the four Bangladeshi female umpires in the ICC development panel of umpires—had it not been

for the controversy surrounding her appointment.

The bias against women in sports is a systemic one and has always been in the system. Let's take the pay disparity, for instance. Up until June last year, an A grade female cricket player would get paid Tk 50,000, in comparison to the Tk 4 lakh that her male counterpart would get; the pay discrepancy was about one-eighth. The match fee for a female cricketer would be less than Tk 9,000, whereas a male cricketer would get paid a decent Tk 3 lakh. Even with a pay hike up to Tk 100,000 ceiling that was given in June 2023, this amount is insignificant compared to the salary of a male player of the same grade.

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In football, the scenario has improved a little since last year, when the women football players—after numerous protests—got Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to agree to a pay raise. Women have been getting "token wage" from the BFF for some years now, and in 2023 it had to agree to pay them increased wages with the Pool A players making Tk 50,000 each, and Pool C players allowed between Tk 15,000 and Tk 20,000 each. Still compared to the male players of the national football team—who do not get wages from the BFF, but rather allowances during training camps and are also handsomely remunerated by the clubs, make around Tk 50-60 lakh per year, according to media reports—the amount is paltry. Since there are no organised leagues for women's football in our country, the BFF wage increment at least gives some respite to the players.

The lack of parity is also evident in the leadership teams of the various bodies governing different sports. Take, for instance, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). In the Standing Committee list published on the BCB website, one would not find a single woman in any of the committees. Even the Women's Wing Committee consists of all male members. Isn't there a single woman in the cricket scene who can fill in the position of the member, if not the chairperson or vice-chair in the Women's Wing Committee? At least in the BFF, we have Mahfuza Akhter Kiron, the deputy chairman of BFF Women's Wing.

Having gender diversity in sports leadership not only helps in developing ecosystems that are conducive to the growth of female talents, but the different perspectives and worldviews that women bring to the table can play a pivotal role in driving transformations, if leveraged properly. The corporates are reaping the benefits of having diverse leadership teams—and not confined to gender diversity alone; our sporting bodies would be wiser to learn from them.

Having said all this, the fact remains that in Bangladesh, we have a long way to go in encouraging, promoting and creating a conducive ecosystem for the inclusion of more women in sports. We inherently hold on to this anachronistic idea that women are not fit for sports; as a result, the sports development bodies do not invest the required time, energy and money to nurture female talents. There is a lot that can be done to create an environment that supports their growth and that would encourage more female talents to take up sports as a profession.

With the world evolving fast, it is important that we come out of our comfort zones and challenge our own thought process to let positive change flow in. For one, we could take an interest in women's sports and support in creating an environment that accelerates their inclusion and growth in this as much as in other areas.



The students' protests have nothing to do with anti-Semitism, and everything to do with the quest for justice for the people of Palestine who have been victims of illegal occupation, continuous suppression and utter injustice at the hands of Israel. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

such a biased policy unethical, immoral and unjust, and hence demands course correction.

The students' protests have nothing to do with anti-Semitism, a narrative that successive Israeli governments and the powerful Jewish lobby in the US have cultivated with deadly effect. It must be noted that many among the protesters happen to be Jewish. The protests have everything to do with the quest for justice for the people of Palestine, who have been victims of illegal occupation, continuous suppression and utter injustice at the hands of Israel for more than seven decades, while the West looked on with deafening silence, even condoning them more often than not.

What is shocking this time, though, is the high-handed reaction from the leadership of the universities. Faculty members who support the protests have lost their jobs; hundreds of students, and counting, have been arrested and expelled; police are being called in to confront the protesters. This is happening even when the protests have largely been peaceful. The actions of the university leaderships, however, have not quelled the protests; if anything,

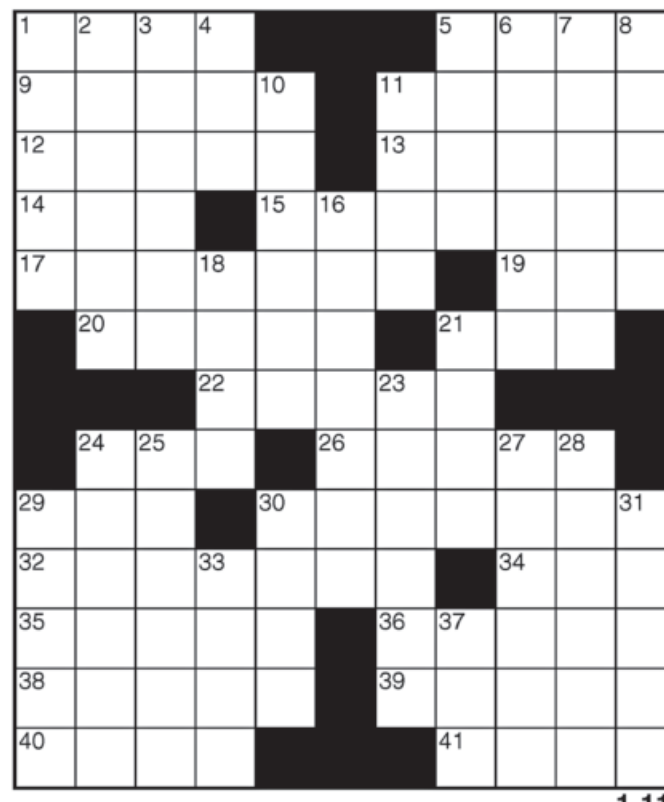
place where the right to speak out freely against visible injustice is culled, and the bravery of condemning genocide is met with harsh punitive measures. Such actions by the universities involved strike at the very roots of democracy and humanity—things the United States so vocally professes elsewhere but stops far short every time Israel is at the centre of the talking point.

The strong-arm tactics of these universities deserve condemnation in the strongest possible language. Are the leadership of these universities blind to what is happening in Gaza today? Are they deaf to the frantic cries for help of a six-year-old Palestinian boy in Rafah before he was silenced by an Israeli bomb?

The youth-led anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s had a seismic impact on the US's body politic. What the current movement, which is fast acquiring a global character, will mean for the policymakers in Washington remains to be seen. The first one led to Vietnam's emergence as a nation-state after decades of fighting. One hopes the sequel will lead to a similar outcome for the Palestinians, and an end to granting impunity to Israel for all its crimes.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Across | 30 Old-fashioned ingredient | 7 Blackened |
| 1 "Waterloo" group | 32 Tops, as toast | 8 Neigh sayer |
| 5 Robe feature | 34 Boar's mate | 10 Gets serious |
| 9 Fixes, as holey socks | 35 Old market | 11 "Dog gone!" |
| 11 Mercutio's friend | 36 Blown away | 16 Craft show's cousin |
| 12 Deceive | 38 "Olympia" painter | 18 Warty critter |
| 13 Cheering loudly | 39 Original | 21 Easy run |
| 14-- bind | 40 Pub brews | 23 Chooses to participate |
| 15 Players at the plate | 41 Water source | 24 Thrifty |
| 17 Improves | | 25 Play opener |
| 19 Small worker | DOWN | 27 Make a backup copy, say |
| 20 Brief | 1 Make up lines | 28 Mason's tool |
| 21 Young fellow | 2 Johnson's middle name | 29 44th president |
| 22 Concerning | 3 Exhalation | 30 Trounce |
| 24 Passing craze | 4 Small worker | 31 Expand |
| 26 Left on a liner | 5 Classify | 33 "-- bien!" |
| 29 Middle earth baddie | 6 One-celled organism | 37 At present |



TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

