

Student protests can challenge the status quo



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What comprises our rights as humans? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights aim for "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

The fundamental issue is about achieving equal rights for all fellow humans. Hence, the collective shaping of the structures that govern our lives, i.e. politics or society, is even more crucial. However, today, we have less and less control over politics globally; we vote and choose the people that govern us, but more often than not, the political parties that hold state power overlook popular demands and become threats to the collective humanity as evinced by wars and the destruction of the environment for profit-making ventures.

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Then, how could we overcome the socio-political structures that dominate us and reclaim our right to politics?

The student encampment movements in the US recently reflected how we could regain control of what is ours. We all know by now that students on campuses across the US have built encampments, occupied buildings, and led protests urging educational institutions to divest their endowments from companies profiting from the Israeli war against the Palestinian people. However, through police brutality, arrests, and negotiations, many of the encampments are cleared from campuses. Nonetheless, some universities have

committed to reviewing their investments. There are some encampments still holding their places. However, we are not sure how long they will survive. The student protests may shrink without ensuring any drastic changes in the US policies regarding their support towards Israel. Still, how students protested reflects possibilities for egalitarianism and a shared vision for reclaiming our right to politics and ensuring peace and liberty for all.

I witnessed student protests at the University of Oregon. On May 10, the 12th day of their encampment, the student protest took a significant turn. They momentarily took control of the main administrative building and chanted slogans for divestment. One basis of their demands is reflected by the slogan, "Whose university? Our university" or "We are the University [of Oregon]." Later, when they came out, some students delivered speeches from the entrance staircase to a



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establishment protests in Bangladesh. We can recall large student protests for ensuring road safety and enacting new traffic laws, restructuring the quotas in government jobs, and eliminating imposed VAT on tuition fees, etc. All these protests reflect similar aspirations for equality and justice and, more importantly, the power of unity. Students without centralised leadership took control of spaces, even if momentarily, shaking the centres of power to their core—even though they did not aim to overthrow the regime.

This form of prefigurative protest is pivotal in reclaiming our right to politics. David Graeber, in the book The Democracy Project, reflected how a popular movement's hostility to the political establishment is reflected through its refusal to take any political positions at all. Unlike other political movements, recent student movements in the US or Bangladesh do not seek state power. Still, by not aiming for power, these movements envision a society without an authoritarian structure.

An atmosphere of equality and fairness, the ability to organise and mobilise through digital media, the peaceful takeover of infrastructures such as roads and administrative offices, and a gradual movement expansion are all key features of student protests. In the US, there was another crucial factor: the protesters were from different races and cultures, but they were united in their shared vision for an equitable future. Student protests exhibited a new form of organising discontent by endorsing a prefigurative strategy—without having a political structure. The movements themselves are critical achievements. In Alain Badiou's words, the student movements can womb an "[idea] capable of challenging the corrupt, lifeless version of 'democracy', which has become the banner of the legionaries of Capital." The frequency of student protests worldwide indicates the possibility of forming a more egalitarian society.

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that anarchism is philosophically grounded in the belief that humans are capable of reason and can flourish without being subjected to coercive force. In contrast, traditional governing structures often perpetuate unequal power structures. For this reason, following the student protests, we must embrace our capacity for reason and come together to reclaim our rights to politics and create a more just world. This will not be easy, as our experiences of the student protests tell us.

The questions that might remain in our hearts are: What future lies ahead of such prefigurative protests? What can we possibly do once such protests succumb to the existing political forces? Frankly, there is no blueprint. Instead, it should be an experimental process. For now, the momentary experience of real freedom is what the protest participants will have once all the encampments are cleared across the US. Many of us will have a first-person account of such political moments and stories to tell, possibly leading to a revolutionary or creative epoch.

We need to act on AI now, not have an act for it



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When Bangladesh embarked on its journey towards Digital Bangladesh in 2009, many were sceptical about it. But as time progressed, we all saw how the vision started to become a reality.

This vision, at its core, aspires to create a nation that is adept at solving problems at all spheres of life through innovative application of digital technologies. The government has made it abundantly clear that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is going to play a pivotal role in implementing the Smart Bangladesh vision. Following this vision, the government has recently unveiled a draft National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy 2024 for public consultation.

There is a good reason why the government has decided to use AI as the fulcrum to realise the goal of Smart Bangladesh. Unlike other digital technologies, the potential of application of AI is literally all around us. Starting from our personal lives, to modernising public service delivery, the scope for AI is limitless.

Be it public transport or AI-driven personal vehicles, personal healthcare solutions or the public healthcare system, from individual human resource productivity or national competitiveness in productivity levels, every imaginable aspect of our individual, societal, as well as national issues can have a transformative impact if we can smartly apply AI to solve our problems.

But the question is this: how do we facilitate AI to deliver the dividends for us? If we look around, we can see that every country in the world is trying to strike a balance between innovation and regulatory oversight. There is palpable consensus on adopting more of a business-friendly approach to AI regulation, by avoiding excessive restrictions. The government has been

trying to create a pathway for AI in Bangladesh by preparing the National Strategy for AI in 2020, followed by the recent release of the draft AI Policy in 2024. Having read the draft policy on AI, I felt that it provides an excellent template to foment the use of AI in every sector. The institutional framework outlined in the policy to pursue AI projects is well thought through. On top of that, the sectoral plans for application of AI provides an excellent starting point.

But what puzzles me is the stated desire of the government to introduce an Act for AI. When we are supposed to allow as much room as possible for our AI practitioners to fully demonstrate their talent, we are planning to limit what they can and can't do along with defined punitive measures through the AI Act. I am certain that this is not how you invite people into the fold of new technology.

As of now, the European Union (EU) is the only entity to have enacted an AI Act. At the heart of the Act, it is mandatory to ensure that AI platforms are monitored or overseen by human beings, not another AI platform. It's worth noting that many AI experts have termed this as a knee-jerk reaction as they consider a law on AI to be too premature at this stage.

The US does not have a federal law covering AI, nor is there any universal definition for AI. It is currently governed by a mix of decentralised existing federal and state legislations, industry itself and the courts. Through an executive order last year, every US government agency was tasked to set up working groups to evaluate AI, develop regulations and establish public-private engagement.

In United Kingdom (UK), the government has unveiled its response to AI Regulation White Paper consultation in February

2024. They don't have any plans to codify that into law for now. It advocates a context-sensitive, balanced approach, using existing sector-specific laws for AI guidance.

In India, the upcoming Digital India Act is set to focus on the regulation of high-risk AI applications. No plan to enact separate legislation is afoot. Singapore also doesn't have any AI legislation; they have a sector-specific approach to overall governance and regulation. Japan also has a relatively hands-off approach and has been encouraging AI development and application across various sectors.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has issued a guide to AI governance and ethics in February 2024. The national-level recommendations include nurturing AI talent, upskilling workforces and investing in AI research and development. Australia also doesn't have any AI legislation; the government there is approaching it with a voluntary ethics framework.

It's worth noting that the core purpose of having a law is to create a framework for dos and don'ts in a particular area with the option to resort to the legal system to settle disputes or punish offenders of the law. The question here is, how do we know what is doable and what is not, when we don't have any prior experience with AI in Bangladesh.

Even if we consider enacting a law, we need to ascertain areas where government regulation is needed, in light of the global best practices. AI law or policy considerations should include the use and processing of personal data, privacy, infringement, surveillance, algorithm bias in customer interactions, data sovereignty, monitoring AI based platforms, cybersecurity, and social norms and values etc. Most importantly, we need to focus on the fundamental ethical aspects of AI, which are more universally agreed upon compared to specific AI regulations.

We must realise innovation involves a very messy and unstructured process. The key to innovation is to have a creative mindset that can go beyond conventional thinking to come up with the simplest of solutions to complex problems. Putting barriers on this through an AI Act is the last

thing we need at this moment.

If we want to meet the export earnings target of \$5 billion from the ICT sector, we need to facilitate our developers to catch up with the rapid

pace of AI development globally, instead of scaring them off with an act that comes with punitive measures. More AI regulation risks stalling new start-ups who lack the resources of the

globally dominant platforms. We need to focus on creating a large pool of highly skilled human resources in AI. The draft AI policy provides a baseline to embark on this AI journey.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
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পুনঃ নিলাম দরপত্র আহবান বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-০২/২০২৩-২০২৪ খ্রিঃ।
পাবনা গণপূর্ত বিভাগের অধীনস্থ পাবনা মেট্রিকেল কলেজ ও ৫০০ শতাংশ বিশিষ্ট হাসপাতাল এলাকায় অবস্থিত পুরাতন জরাজীর্ণ ব্যবহারের অযোগ্য পরিমাণে ০১(একটি) অংশ যেখানে সে অবস্থার সাথে সেই অবস্থার নিলাম বিক্রয় এর জন্য অত্র নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর প্রতিক্রিয়া, আমল ব্যবসারী ও ব্যক্তিবর্গের নিরীহ হইতে নিলামের প্রকৃত খামে পুনঃ নিলাম দরপত্র আহবান করা যাবে।