

## We condemn violent attacks on students

### Govt totally mishandling the quota issue

We are alarmed by the flaring up of violence in various universities, especially Dhaka University, following nationwide protests demanding quota reforms in government jobs. The prime minister, in a press conference on Sunday, had said that as long as the protesters remained peaceful, they could continue their demonstration. But then, in clear contrast to her statement and quite shockingly, if we may add, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said that Chhatra League would give the student protesters “a fitting response”, which was a clear call for violence, examples of which we have seen before.

Initially, the government handled the protests with relative maturity. However, in recent days, we heard several government ministers indicating that it was preparing to handle the protests with a much heavier hand. Following the prime minister's press conference, hundreds of university students came out at night to protest what they said was a “disparaging comment” aimed at them. And as they continued their protests during the day, Chhatra League activists swooped upon them, beating the protesters indiscriminately with iron rods, sticks, and other weapons, leaving nearly 100 students injured. We strongly condemn such violence. The question naturally arises as to why the AL secretary general would want to quash citizens' grievances instead of resolving them through a constructive dialogue, or why he would call up Chhatra League to deal with a law enforcement issue, and not the police.

The quota issue is a complex matter—with quotas existing in many countries to help underprivileged groups. But what started off as that has been labelled as a matter between “pro-liberation” vs “anti-liberation” forces—which is unfortunate and completely unnecessary. It is a perfect case of an important issue being totally mishandled. Here, it is important to mention that the government could have avoided the recent developments by listening to the legitimate demands to reform the quota system back in 2018, instead of doing away with all quotas, as it did. Back then, the government failed to recognise the genuine concerns of the young people, and that is what has brought us to this debacle now. What's equally unfortunate is that similar to the time of the 2018 movement, Chhatra League has once again been used to unleash merciless beatings on students, whose concerns are being thrown out the window with disdain.

It is essential for the government to not repeat the same mistakes it had made during the 2018 quota movement. The High Court, in a portion of its judgement on the quota system, said that the government can change, reduce or increase the ratio or percentage of the quotas in public jobs if it feels it necessary to do so. As such, it should immediately sit with the protesters and, by involving experts and other stakeholders, reform the quota system in a way that is acceptable to all and in line with the purpose of giving quotas. Moreover, the ruling party must reign in BCL activists, instead of using them as a mercenary force against the students.

## Canals are no one's property to destroy at will

### Strict enforcement of environmental laws vital to protect them

Two recent reports of *The Daily Star* have once again highlighted the worrying trend of canals and such waterbodies being subjected to misuse and exploitation, leading to them being filled up and obstructing their water flow. We have seen the destructive effects of such practices in urban areas, including in Dhaka, which on Friday got severely waterlogged as drainage canals filled with waste couldn't channel rainwater to the rivers. Abuse of canals in rural areas, where they play a crucial role by holding excess water and helping in irrigation—can have myriad other implications.

Our first report sheds light on the woeful state of a canal in Chattogram's Hathazari upazila. The local municipality has been dumping waste there for years, turning a part of it into a narrow drain. Adjacent to the canal is a landfill established without the necessary clearance from environmental authorities. This has only exacerbated the situation, with plastic waste seen littering the banks. Locals have described unbearable stench and adverse effects on their crops, but they are not the only victims. There is a 50-acre protected forest nearby that is being degraded, too. A similar situation prevails in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila, where a local influential has seized a portion of a canal for fish farming. Reportedly, the canal flows through 8-9 bighas of land owned by Bangladesh Railway and the Water Development Board before emptying into Teesta River. But its illegal occupation is disrupting the water flow, causing inundation of farmlands and affecting farmers.

Clearly, the degradation of canals is jeopardising not only local ecosystems but also the lives and livelihoods of people. And often, this is being done either by government bodies themselves, which is deeply alarming, or because of their negligence and inaction. The question is, why are they allowing this to happen despite knowing its devastating effects? While practical issues may sometimes create the scope for degradation of canals, like in the case of Hathazari municipality, the authorities must find a way to resolve them and ensure that no one—however powerful—can compromise these important waterbodies. The government should also ensure strict enforcement of all environmental laws and regulations.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Saddam Hussein becomes president

On this day in 1979, Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq, and his brutal rule, which lasted 24 years, was marked by costly and unsuccessful wars with neighbouring countries as well as atrocities against the Iraqi people.



# Quota reform should be guided by constitutional principles



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The Constitution of Bangladesh in Article 27 guarantees equality for all citizens. Equality in public employment is covered within the ambit of this article. However, the framers of the constitution, while placing a greater emphasis on the equality aspect of public employment, reiterated the guarantee of equality in the service of the Republic in a separate article. Article 29 imposes an obligation on the state to ensure equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment.

The combined reading of Article 27 and Article 29 (1) indicates a “right to equality” for all citizens, especially in matters of public employment. To add more to this, Article 29 (2) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in respect of any employment. As stipulated in our constitution, the right to equality and non-discrimination in matters of employment is also a recognised principle in international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

However, right to equality does not guarantee absolute equality requiring the law to treat all persons alike. All persons in a society are not alike, and nothing can be a greater inequality than to treat unequal as equal. To address this, the right to equality enables a state to take “affirmative action” to reduce or eliminate conditions that cause or help perpetuate discrimination. As per the UN Human Rights Committee, affirmative action refers to undertaking measures of a temporary character, aimed specifically at correcting the position of members of a target group in one or more aspects of their social life, to obtain effective equality.

In the context of Bangladesh, the constitution allows the state to make special provisions in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic (Article 29(3)). The special provision may include reservation, preference, concession, and exceptions.

It is worth mentioning that unlike rights to equality and non-discrimination in matters of employment, reservation or quota provisions cannot be claimed as rights or entitlements. The eminent constitutional lawyer, Mahmudul Islam, in his book *Constitutional Law of Bangladesh*, remarked, “Art 29(3) does not confer any right on anyone, nor impose any constitutional duty on the State to make the reservation.”

To attain the broader objectives of effective equality in public employment, the constitution provides an enabling power to the



Quota reform protestors demonstrate in Dhaka's GPO intersection on Sunday, July 14.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

state to undertake special measures in favour of the backward sections. However, this special provision should not be interpreted or realised in such a way that it nullifies constitutional guarantees of rights to equality and non-discrimination in matters of public employment.

A careful analysis of this “special provision” requires a couple of tests to be fulfilled, and these include the test of backwardness and the test of inadequate representation. In outlining the test of backwardness, our constitution does not provide any definition. However, the Indian judiciary in several cases referred to

representation, fair and adequate representation of the disadvantaged and backward sections in matters of public employment may become essential to ensure better outcomes in decision-making and policy formulation. With such representation, the needs, concerns, and desires of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are duly reflected and integrated into the socio-legal and development landscape of the country.

It should be kept in mind that the special provision enables differential treatment for the sake of uplifting the interests of backward sections of society and such special measures must be stopped after the objectives

for which they were taken have been achieved. This again indicates that special provision should have a temporary character.

This special provision or affirmative action should also confirm the tests of being “reasonable” and “objective.” The reasonableness and objectivity should be understood and interpreted considering the socio-economic and cultural advancement of the country. The constitutional principles of equality, non-discrimination, and social justice can guide us in assessing the real necessity and proportionality of reservation/quota for the backward sections of the country.

For the sake of rational and justified quota reform, the provision of affirmative action should be understood considering the ground realities and ideals of our country while addressing the enormous role and sacrifices of our freedom fighters in the Liberation War and reflecting the aspirations and desires of the current youth population.

To accomplish the development milestone by reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend, Bangladesh needs to harness the potential of the youth who constitute around thirty percent of the population. A discriminatory recruitment policy that arguably nullifies the equal opportunity of merit-based candidates in employment might dishearten young people, which will only increase the ongoing alarming trends of the country's brain drain.

We need to understand the crucial role of our talented and skilled minds in ensuring efficient and effective public administration, and accountable governance. Building strong institutions while leaving no one behind has been crucial for the attainment of SDGs that Bangladesh is aiming to achieve by 2030. To attain the objectives of both strong institutions and inclusivity, assistance need not always come in the form of a quota for the backward sections. The government can increasingly provide educational scholarships, special stimulus, and financial assistance, and initiate skill development programmes for the advancement of disadvantaged people.

It is important to note that the provision of affirmative action (quota system) should ensure a balanced combination so that truly backward sections of society are adequately represented in public employment, and at the same time, the potential of merit-based youth candidates is utilised in building strong public institutions and ensuring effective governance.

# How the Trump assassination attempt might influence US politics



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Former US President Donald Trump was shot in the ear during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13, 2024, in what authorities say was an assassination attempt. The incident occurred while Trump was giving his speech. Trump later confirmed the injuries on Truth Social, detailing the moment he realised he had been shot and the subsequent bleeding.

The shooter, who fired multiple shots from an elevated position outside the rally's security perimeter, was killed by Secret Service personnel, who also evacuated Trump from the rally after the shooting. Stray bullets killed one rally spectator and injured two others. The tragedy has prompted widespread requests for a probe into the security flaws that made the attack possible. Despite the incident, Trump's campaign confirmed that he will still attend the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee.

The impact of the incident for Trump's campaign and the larger political scene might be significant. For starters, the attack is likely to exacerbate concerns about political violence and security at campaign events, resulting in intensified scrutiny of candidate protection measures. Trump's fans are likely to interpret the incident as a reflection of the fierce opposition he faces, potentially

increasing his support base. In contrast, the incident could exacerbate political tensions, with opponents interpreting the attack as a result of the heightened vitriol in American politics.

Although the gunman has been identified, his motivations and potential connections to larger groups are still being investigated. Some suspect that the attacker may be affiliated with extremist political groups or persons with a history of political violence. Given the current political climate, there are suspicions that the attack was planned by those who passionately oppose Trump's policies and rhetoric. Federal agents are also investigating if this is part of a broader coordinated operation or a single act of violence. As the inquiry progresses, additional material is expected to shed light on the assailant's background and motivations, providing better answers about who was behind this incident.

Following the attack on Donald Trump, speculation and conspiracy theories arose, with some claiming it was instigated by his political opponents, including President Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton, while others are suggesting that Trump may have manufactured the incident to elicit sympathy and support ahead of the

election. However, there is currently no convincing evidence to support these speculations. While conspiracy theories might attract the public's attention, they frequently detract from the necessity for a factual and calm response to such situations.

The episode with Donald Trump being shot at a campaign rally is reminiscent of countless political thrillers and dramas from film history. Films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962, recreated in 2004) examine themes of political assassination and manipulation, showing a world in which prominent personalities are targeted to change public opinion and power dynamics. Similarly, *The Parallax View* (1974) digs into conspiracy theories about political assassinations and the unseen institutions who orchestrate them. Another film, *JFK* (1991), directed by Oliver Stone, looks at the assassination of President John F Kennedy, exposing numerous conspiracy theories and the complexity of political violence.

On the other hand, the concept of manufacturing an incident to gain political sympathy has been depicted in films such as *Wag the Dog* (1997), in which a fictitious war is fabricated to divert the public from a presidential scandal. *The Ides of March* (2011) delves into the darker side of political manipulation, in which personal and professional crises are used to alter public opinion and achieve political advantage. These films represent the intense drama and speculation that frequently surround real-life political events, demonstrating how fiction can sometimes mirror reality in unnerving ways, which may be true in this case as well.

The attempted assassination of

Donald Trump has also triggered a rethinking of social media's role in political debate and its possible impact on radicalisation and violence. Following the massacre, attention has focused on the shooter's online actions and potential intentions, generating questions over the role of platforms such as Truth Social, where Trump confirmed the occurrence, in filtering content and limiting the spread of extremist ideology. This incident highlights the difficulties of combining free expression with the need to prevent internet spaces from being used as forums for incitement to violence. Policymakers and internet corporations are under increasing pressure to adopt more effective measures for monitoring and reducing the risks of online radicalisation, particularly in the context of political movements and rhetoric.

The shooting incident involving Donald Trump is expected to have a big impact on the forthcoming US election. For Trump supporters, the event may enhance their picture of him as a targeted and persecuted figure, potentially increasing rally attendance and voter turnout. This episode may also raise security worries for all candidates, resulting in enhanced security measures at campaign events and potentially affecting public discourse on political violence and its implications for the democratic system. Furthermore, the episode may spark broader debates about the status of political speech in the country, with calls for increased civil participation and less polarisation. As the election approaches, the aftermath from this incident is likely to influence campaign plans, voter emotion, and the general tone of the political battle.