

# Seven colleges, one crisis

Dhaka University’s affiliation nightmare



BLOWIN’ IN THE WIND

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The ongoing demand by students to decouple seven Dhaka-based government colleges from the country’s premier university is a by-product of an ill-conceived and overhasty decision. When these colleges were integrated with Dhaka University in 2017 following the then prime minister’s directive, ostensibly to improve their academic standards, no one was sane enough to point out the impracticality of the move. The DU lacked the necessary logistical resources to manage the additional workload of nearly two lakh undergraduate and graduate students who were being taught by teachers recruited through the Public Service Commission (PSC)—many of whom also taught higher secondary courses. Seven years later, the issue still persists.

It has thus become a classic case of neglect where the students of these seven colleges find themselves grappling with an identity crisis. They experience a sense of betrayal, as the promised academic environment appears to be absent. The one who ordered affiliation may have had noble intentions. However, in reality, it turned out to be a whimsical decision with long-lasting repercussions, jeopardising the future of thousands of students.

Disenchanted students are now demanding the creation of a “Dhaka Central University” comprising the seven colleges. Although this demand partly stems from subpar management, it also reflects the need for a distinct academic identity, dedicated resources, and a community they can truly call their own. The current status has left the students in a state of limbo, as they are neither fully recognised as part of DU nor as independent institutions. During the last convocation, the DU asked its affiliated

graduating students to watch the event online from their respective colleges, but did not formally recognise their high achievers. The present system treats college faculty, students and staff as extras, rather than integral members of the DU community. After the recent ranking debacle, the DU blamed its affiliated students for negatively impacting its teacher-student, doctoral, and publication ratios.

Unlike public university teachers, the college teachers are subject to the service rules of the PSC, which don’t mandate any additional research degrees or publications, with the exception of centralised examinations for promotion. The number of PhDs in the colleges is negligible. In addition, issues such as insufficient classrooms, delayed exam results, and inadequate access to resources are prevalent. To make matters worse, a dedicated floor in the DU Registrar’s Building is notorious for its bureaucratic legacy. Students often feel that they have unduly failed as the university benefits from exam scrutiny and re-examination charges.

We need to draw lessons from this top-down approach to imposing affiliation. Political and bureaucratic decisions often disregard the nuances of educational administration and pedagogy. Once the top desired it, the embedded structure clashed to vie for the attention of the decree-giver. Internal conflicts within the DU intensified as numerous reform proposals or demands continued to be overlooked. By that time, some administrative staff started to see certain benefits from this affiliation, which in turn slowed down the proposals for autonomy within these colleges.

Conversely, students from these colleges felt unwanted by their DU peers. The insignia of affiliated colleges in the certificates testifies to their “second-class” status. Then again, these college students don’t want to return to the National University, to which they once belonged. Enrolling in a “university” instead of a “college” holds significance for them. This explains the impossible demand for another public university in the capital.

colleges perceive their classroom instruction as one thing, but when they receive grades from some Dhaka University teachers, they encounter a different set of expectations. The inconsistent results, coupled with chronic delays in their publication, aggravate the situation further. Session jams at the colleges force students to complete a four-year degree in six to seven years. And the dropout rate is alarming.

symbolic gestures, often impose decisions without understanding the complexities involved. Decisions that should ideally be made through consultation, research, and careful planning instead become tools of political manoeuvring, leaving students trapped in a cycle of broken promises and inadequate resources.

In the last seven years, the college students were forced to protest on the streets, demanding a solution to problems that should never have existed in the first place. Various committees and reform proposals have emerged in response to these demands. A potential solution lies in adopting a more humane and structured approach to decoupling. Give these colleges autonomy instead of tying them to an institution that can’t meet their needs. A proposal suggests adopting a collegiate university model analogous to those at Calcutta University or Tribhuvan University. In this model, each college could retain its unique identity while benefiting from a shared administrative and academic framework.

Alternatively, a phased transition towards autonomy could provide these colleges with the time and resources needed to build their own infrastructure and academic identity. The university colleges should not cater to higher secondary students. There should be an independent body to align the teaching materials and lesson plans with the set rules of the University Grants Commission (UGC). An interim commission can oversee the focused development in each college, with faculty, facilities, and resources tailored to the specific needs of their students.

Ultimately, this issue highlights the necessity for a change in Bangladesh’s educational decision-making process. Rather than relying on political mandates from the top down, the government and educational institutions must prioritise consultation, long-term planning, and a commitment to the welfare of students. The future of hundreds of thousands of students should not be subject to the whims of political power play or the limitations of a single university’s administrative capacity.



Students of the seven government colleges affiliated with Dhaka University have been protesting recently, demanding solutions to problems that should not have existed in the first place.

PHOTO: STAR

Despite National University’s superior efficiency in managing government colleges, these seven colleges now perceive themselves as unique from the rest. If the government accedes to their demands, the recruitment and assimilation of teachers for government colleges is likely to spark a new round of rifts.

One of the challenging issues pertains to assessment. Students of the affiliated

Ironically, the former education minister made a political pronouncement in January this year to affiliate more colleges with other divisional public universities, rather than learning from past mistakes. Thankfully, that decision stalled. However, the situation has exposed a fundamental flaw in the decision-making process in our education sector. Politicians, driven by short-term gains or

# 124 years on, gender gap in Nobel Prize still persists



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Every October, the Nobel Prize committee awards the coveted prize to laureates in six categories: physics, chemistry, physiology and medicine, literature, peace, and economics. Economics was added in 1968 by an endowment “in perpetuity” from Sweden’s central bank, Sveriges Riksbank.

Since December 10, 1901, when the first Nobel Prize was awarded in Stockholm, Sweden, only 66 out of 976 have been given to women. This year, there were 11 recipients 10 men and one woman (literature). The peace prize was awarded to Nihon Hidankyo, a grassroots Japanese organisation of atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As unlikely as it may seem, 2023 was a banner year for women four female laureates stand opposite seven male honourees.

Clearly, the choice of who gets the Nobel Prize is heavily biased towards males. Physics has the worst record. Out of a total of 226 recipients, only five are women, with three being awarded in the last six years. The numbers, though disheartening, should not come as a surprise, because the Nobel Prize has a history of a sexist attitude of not recognising the groundbreaking work and discoveries made by women in science.

The list of women who should have received the Nobel Prize in physics, but did not, is long. Listed below are some egregious cases of brilliant women physicists and astronomers who were snubbed by the Nobel Prize committee because of their gender.

Otto Hahn was awarded the 1944 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the discovery of nuclear fission, overlooking Lise Meitner who collaborated with him in the discovery in 1938. Along with her nephew Otto Frisch, she also gave the first theoretical explanation of the reaction in which an atom splits into smaller atoms. Hahn published their work without including her as a co-author. He did not even acknowledge the part she played in his success because he maintained Meitner was his junior assistant, not a peer.

Not winning the Nobel Prize did not have any effect on Meitner’s reputation as a scientist. On the contrary, she was seen as an exemplary noble scientist by the 1922

physics Nobelist Niels Bohr, while Einstein called her the “German Marie Curie.” She received the Enrico Fermi Prize, conferred by the US President, and the element 109, Meitnerium, was named in her honour. The headstone on her grave reads, “A physicist who never lost her humanity.”

Austrian physicist Marietta Blau was the first to develop the use of emulsions to track and identify relativistic particles. She was nominated for the chemistry Nobel once and the physics Nobel four times, but the prize remained elusive.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Cecil Frank Powell won the 1950 Nobel Prize in Physics, in part for the discovery of the elementary particle pion using the emulsion method developed by Blau.

In 1956, Chien-Shiung Wu experimentally confirmed the prediction of parity violation by Chen-Ning Yang and Tsung-Dao Lee. Parity is a symmetry transformation under which the spatial coordinates of a particle change sign. In 1957, the men and not Wu became physics Nobel laureates.

One of the most outrageous and shameful instances of a female scientist being denied the honour of Nobel Prize

Prize is often called the “No-Bell” prize. To add insults to injuries, pulsars have led to two more Nobels. Russell Hulse and Joseph Taylor, Jr were awarded the prize in 1993 “for the discovery of a new type of pulsar.” In a 2004 essay in *Science*, Jocelyn Burnell suggested that besides gender, her student status may have contributed to her omission.

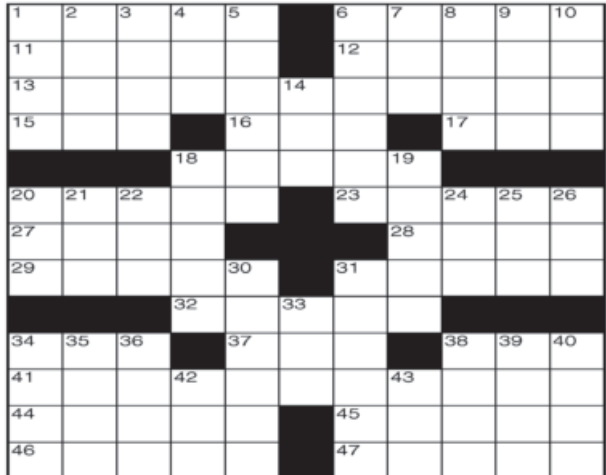
Vera Rubin, one of the most brilliant astronomers of the 20th century, did not win a Nobel Prize for her precise calculations showing that galaxies and stars are immersed in the gravitational grip of vast clouds of Dark Matter, one of

the Nobel Prize. But for sure, the number is not large. Also, the Nobel Prize committee is patently reluctant to consider minorities and people of colour for the award in physics.

Despite pushing the sciences to new heights with trailblazing contributions in a male-dominated world of scientists, it is a shame that women still have to deal with biases against them. It may be impossible to fix the bias in awarding the Nobel Prize without changing its fundamental design. Otherwise, this is just another example out of too many to list of the kind of pervasive “old-boy sexism in science.”

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS  
1 Planet’s path  
6 Trivial  
11 One of the strings  
12 Put on a pedestal  
13 Ibsen play  
15 Rent out  
16 Rap’s — Nas X  
17 Silent assent  
18 Apple centers  
20 Smallest mammal  
23 African charger  
27 Bucket  
28 Persia, today  
29 Really stoked  
31 Hang loosely  
32 Sired  
34 Cry loudly  
37 “The Matrix” hero  
38 Carnival city  
41 Ibsen play  
44 Central  
45 Shady spot  
46 Cowboy contest  
47 African scavenger
- DOWN  
1 Track shape  
2 Take the bus  
3 Wader, e.g.  
4 Ailing  
5 Animal suet  
6 Composer Gustav  
7 Wedding words  
8 Person, place, or thing  
9 Words of approximation  
10 Oboe part  
14 Knight’s address  
18 Star  
19 Polo, for one  
20 Relaxing resort  
21 Deli meat  
22 Tear  
24 S&L offering  
25 Snooze  
26 Count start  
30 “Raging Bull” star  
31 “Camptown Races” snippet  
33 Hair goo  
34 Blend  
35 Cry of distress  
36 Flex  
38 Bumpkin  
39 File stand in  
40 Gumbo vegetable  
42 Tiny  
43 Use a towel



3-14

## WEDNESDAY’S ANSWERS



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