

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Police must stop using lethal weapons

There are many better ways to control crowds

The proposal to restrict the use of lethal weapons by the police while controlling crowds is a timely and welcome step. According to a report published in *The Daily Star*, a special committee in the Police Headquarters made such recommendations in its arms policy, which will be sent to the home ministry and Armed Forces Division for approval.

The recommendations include a ban on the use of revolvers and lead pellets in shotguns, replacing 7.62mm calibre pistols with 9mm ones that have a shorter range, and replacing 50 percent of long barrel firearms with short barrel ones to lower casualties. Many of these ammunitions were used during the July uprising, killing more than 800 and injuring over 11,000 people, according to the health ministry data. Lead pellet injuries alone took away the eyesight of more than 400 protesters. This daily's analysis of 204 fatalities showed that 95 percent of people were shot with live rounds or shotgun pellets, mostly in the head, chest, and stomach. The committee also recommended that only two officers in a 30-member platoon will carry lethal weapons for use in extreme cases and officers will be instructed to target lower body areas to reduce fatality risks.

The police force has been increasingly militarised over the last 15 years. In fact, as this daily reported, the use of lethal weapons for crowd control began in 2012 and gradually increased with time. Police became a political tool to intimidate the opposition and squash dissent rather than a public agency that is responsible for protecting and serving the people and upholding the law. While the unnecessary use of force by police during the July uprising was unprecedented in our history, the gradual militarisation of this law enforcement agency has given it an aggressive outlook. In the past one and half decades, the force has engaged in widespread human rights violations during numerous protests and movements.

The first response of police in controlling unruly crowds should be de-escalation, followed by warning. Even the use of non-lethal weapons should be limited while lethal ones should be the very last resort—only to be used in life-threatening situations. However, we have not seen our force practise such restraints.

While the recommendations police made are positive, a mechanism should be in place to review police actions during any crowd-controlling operations. An independent body should be formed to assess whether the use of lethal weapons by an officer or even non-lethal ones was justified—with persons responsible for unnecessary use being held to account. Since the Police Reform Commission also made similar recommendations restricting the use of lethal weapons, we hope that the de-militarisation of the police force will take place soon. In Bangladesh, no more lives should be lost or maimed at the hands of police for protesting wrongs or demanding justice.

Economy needs more private investment

Govt and other stakeholders must work together for its growth

It is worrisome that private sector investment isn't rising in the country, even though our foreign exchange reserves demonstrate promising stability, driven by record remittance inflows and growing exports. According to the latest data from the Bangladesh Bank, private sector credit grew by 9.86 percent year-on-year in August but slowed to 7.66 percent in November of the previous year. Furthermore, during the July-November period of the current fiscal year, the settlement of letters of credit (LC) for capital machinery imports declined by 21.9 percent compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year, while LC openings for such imports fell by 26.45 percent. Economists have identified political instability as a primary factor behind the lack of private investment activity, along with other contributing factors. They also warn that this sluggish growth could persist for another year unless the government implements effective measures. Since taking office, the interim government has introduced several initiatives to stabilise the economy. For the first time since the interim administration assumed power in August, the country's forex reserves surpassed \$21 billion, reaching \$21.36 billion on December 31. This achievement is largely attributed to high remittance inflows, creditable to both our overseas workers and government initiatives. Additionally, Bangladesh's exports reached \$50 billion in 2024, reflecting an 8.3 percent year-on-year increase. In December alone, exporters earned \$4.62 billion, an 18 percent rise compared to the same month the previous year. These successes have been facilitated by the central bank's foreign currency policies and stable exchange rates.

However, such progress may not be sustainable without an increase in private investment. The country's private investment levels have been low for several years, and the current political uncertainty has exacerbated the challenges. Rising business costs, high interest rates, liquidity shortages, and a distressed banking system are key barriers to growth. Additionally, many business owners with ties to the previous government have ceased operations or are struggling, further deterring new investments. Persistent high inflation and interest rates have also increased business expenses, making it difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to secure loans and expand.

To address these challenges, the government must prioritise maintaining political stability while taking immediate steps to curb inflation and eliminate barriers to doing business. Many local and foreign investors believe that certain rules and regulations from the National Board of Revenue and the Bangladesh Bank hinder investment. The government should engage with investors and other stakeholders to make these regulations more business-friendly. Furthermore, fostering greater collaboration with the private sector in policy-making during ongoing reforms is crucial.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Dwarf planet Eris discovered

On this day in 2005, the dwarf planet Eris was discovered in images taken two years earlier at Palomar Observatory in California.

A school curriculum to nurture thoughtful learners



Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at Brac University, chair of Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN) and adviser of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE). The views expressed in this article are the author's own.

MANZOOR AHMED

As an interim step, the education authorities under the interim government have decided to revert to the curriculum introduced in 2012. Textbooks for the school year 2025 have been printed according to the old syllabus. The old system of secondary-level three-way arts-science-commerce separation starting from class 9, which had been deferred to class 11, has now been restored. Secondary-level public examinations have been conducted according to a curtailed old syllabus (with some tests cancelled due to the turmoil).

In the wake of the political change, the default position of the government has been to discard the work on the new curriculum initiated by the previous regime, which had been under heavy criticism from educationists, teachers, and parents since its inception in 2021. Obviously, there was no time to recast the curriculum and the learning content for the academic year 2025. However, the idea of rejecting every past curricular initiative without weighing

Work on curriculum and learning content undertaken in 2025 is likely to be reflected in the academic year 2026 and beyond. At this point, it appears that the focus will be on assessing students' learning and preparing and supporting teachers to achieve the learning objectives in the classroom—two areas identified as most problematic in the reform



FILE VISUAL: AFIA JAHIN

Experience with advanced educational systems indicates that the critical issue with the school curriculum is not its content—what is written in the curriculum—but the ancillary and supportive actions and provisions that ensure the curriculum is actually applied in the classroom and that students acquire the skills and competencies they are expected to gain.

its merits cannot be considered rational. For instance, reverting to separate streams from class 9 is an ill-considered move, according to many educationists. Most countries have moved away from compelling youngsters to choose their future irrevocably at such an early age.

efforts of the past government.

Experience with advanced educational systems indicates that the critical issue with the school curriculum is not its content—but the ancillary and supportive actions and provisions that ensure the curriculum is actually applied in the classroom and that students acquire the skills and competencies they are expected to gain. This is where our schools have failed so far, and this remains the challenge.

It is hoped that an education commission will be formed to consider objectives and priorities in education and to address the challenges holistically. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) has proceeded to name a nine-member committee, headed by this writer, to recommend quality improvement measures in primary and non-formal education. Crucial curriculum-related questions have arisen in the committee's deliberations, as noted below.

1) Since we are not doing a good job of teaching foundational literacy and numeracy skills in primary schools, how can much greater emphasis than at present be given to Bangla reading and writing and basic arithmetic in the learning content, learning time, student assessment, and teacher training? Should the current six subjects in primary school and the tendency to treat them equally be reconsidered? Can much of the content of subjects other than Bangla and math be incorporated into supplementary reading and writing rather than as separate subjects?

2) We have observed that the rigid and uniform classroom routine of 35-minute periods does not allow lessons to be conducted and completed properly, making classroom teaching a mechanical exercise. Can there be

printed on high-quality paper with colourful illustrations so they can be used for at least three years by making them the property of the school, lent to students for the year, and taken back at the end of the year (as is done in many developed countries)? This would save money, spare millions of trees, and prevent the annual scramble to print and distribute millions of books.

6) Multi-year textbooks require that textbooks are not changed annually due to current political events and demands. Is it necessary to include materials in school textbooks, especially at the primary level, that stem from contemporary political and social demands which may be more suitable for older students? Can children's textbooks focus on neutral and foundational content that successive governments will not be inclined to alter?

7) There is much confusion regarding student learning assessment and examinations. Some wrongly advocate for the return of the Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) and scholarship exams. Can guidelines and manuals be provided for ongoing school-based (formative) and periodic (summative) assessments for each grade? Can assessment tools, including multiple sets of sample periodic exam questions, be made available online for subject and grade teachers? It is surely the wrong message to parents that there is no assessment or test in grades one to three, as testing is an integral part of teaching and learning. What should be the stance on system assessment (large sample surveys of grade-wise competencies, such as ASER in India or simplified National Student Assessments in Bangladesh)?

3) Given the inadequate total learning time in schools (with 80 percent operating double shifts), the importance of foundational skills in Bangla and math in the early grades, and the shortage of qualified English teachers, should Bangla and math be prioritised in the first three grades, and English language lessons deferred to class 4, with proper English teaching emphasised in the secondary grades? At present, neither English nor Bangla is taught effectively.

4) Should physical exercise, games, and co-curricular activities be made essential (rather than optional) components of daily primary school instruction? These are crucial for children's small and large motor skills, mental development, and social growth.

5) Can textbooks be made more attractive, properly bound, and

Other questions remain, such as transforming the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) into a truly professional body with skilled personnel capable of curriculum and learning content development, research, and evaluation; separating the technical tasks of curriculum and textbook development from the printing and distribution of textbooks and learning materials; and ensuring coordination with the directorates for teacher training and student assessment, as well as the education boards. These are broader educational system issues, rather than just primary education, to be considered by a commission on the education sector.

The goal surely is to make the curriculum a guide to help teachers and schools nurture our children to become thoughtful and capable learners.

Signs of hope emerge for human rights and fairness



Magdalena Sepúlveda is director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and a member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation (ICRICT).

MAGDALENA SEPÚLVEDA

Do you wonder if the world is crumbling before your eyes? You are not alone. The global human rights map is alarming: everywhere wars, massacres that aggravate natural disasters and other crises whose solution requires urgent funding. However, recent advances in multilateralism at the Brazil-led G20 and at the United Nations indicate that not everything is lost.

"I don't read news anymore," this phrase is not a trend only in my environment. A Reuters report indicates that "interest in news continues to decline, fuelling disconnection and selective news avoidance."

It's not hard to empathise with disconnected citizens. A quick glance at the headlines is enough to dampen the mood.

Wars in Ukraine, Africa and the Middle East add to geopolitical tension unprecedented since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The threat of nuclear war, which used to keep me awake at night in my childhood, is more latent today than ever before. The wave of polarisation and extreme thinking threatens multilateralism, the foundation of global coexistence and the protection of human rights. Moreover, the extreme concentration

of wealth and power in the hands of multinationals and the super-rich is eroding the democratic system of governance and depriving states of essential revenues to finance public services and protect human rights.

According to a recent Oxfam report, the wealth of billionaires increased by 46 percent during the Covid pandemic, while the wealth of the poorest half of the world's population declined by 2.5 percent.

So much for all of us wanting to stop reading. However, all is not lost.

There are spaces where things are changing. I am referring not only to social initiatives that protect victims and the environment, but also to advances in the global multilateral system.

In September, UN member states agreed on a new roadmap to save multilateralism and avoid the obsolescence to which the inaction of the UN Security Council or the corporate lobby seems to want to throw it. In the Pact for the Future, world leaders have pledged to create mechanisms that better reflect the realities of the 21st century and can respond to the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow. The goal is to achieve a more secure, peaceful, equitable, egalitarian,

inclusive, sustainable and prosperous future.

These efforts are beginning to be reflected in actions. In late October, the UN General Assembly approved the Terms of Reference (TOR) for a Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, a significant step towards a fair global tax system that will raise the resources

Implementing global minimum taxes on transnationals and the super-rich, and sharing information on corporate profits are crucial steps towards a fairer and more equitable economy. In November, Australia passed the world's first legislation on country-by-country public reporting of taxes and profits recorded by multinational corporations.

needed by all countries to close the development gap, combat inequality and address the catastrophes of climate change. Negotiations for further progress on this framework convention will begin in 2025, and the new tool is expected to be operational by 2027.

This progress has been largely due to the efforts of developing countries and emerging economies. In just a few months of negotiations at the UN, these countries have made significant progress in rectifying the global tax

system. The green light is now in sight, to achieve a fair allocation of taxation rights between countries, and to ensure that countries do not undermine human rights around the world through selfish and short-sighted tax policies.

Shortly before, G20 leaders under the leadership of Brazil had issued a communiqué that marked a significant milestone in the global quest for fair and progressive taxation, opening the door to make the ultra-rich pay their fair share of taxes.

Implementing global minimum taxes on transnationals and the super-rich, and sharing information on corporate profits are crucial steps towards a fairer and more equitable economy. In November, Australia passed the world's first legislation on country-by-country public reporting of taxes and profits recorded by multinational corporations.

Strengthening global tax cooperation is vital if all countries are to have the resources they need to meet today's challenges of human rights and the climate crisis. The current international tax system is outdated and unfair and allows corporations and super-rich individuals to evade their responsibilities to contribute their fair share. The adoption of a specific UN Framework Convention is the way in the right direction. South Africa's presidency of the G20 begins this month in an auspicious way, following in the footsteps of Brazil.

These advances may not be enough to bring disconnected people back to trusting news. But it offers hope that progress is possible, and that all is not lost.