

KUET violence is deeply troubling

We must prevent the resurgence of toxic student politics

We are deeply alarmed by what happened on Tuesday on the campus of Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET) and the subsequent tensions spreading across multiple universities. The violent clashes between activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the pro BNP student wing, and the Students Against Discrimination platform—leaving about 50 injured—signal a troubling return to the age-old toxic student politics that long vitiated our campuses. At a time when the nation eagerly awaits a shift in our political culture after 15 years of autocratic rule by Awami League and ongoing commitments by political parties to building a “new Bangladesh,” this development is both shocking and disheartening. It shows that, unless checked, the ghosts of the past may easily resurface and undo our hard-earned progress.

There are conflicting accounts about who initiated the violence and the identities of those involved, with JCD blaming Chhatra Shibir's influence under the banner of the student platform. But this only adds to the confusion surrounding the shifting political allegiances and narratives in the wake of the July uprising. According to our report, tensions had been brewing at KUET over JCD's campaign to lift the existing ban on student politics, leading to protest rallies by anti-discrimination activists. On Tuesday afternoon, both groups faced off, resulting in a series of clashes, chases, and counter-chases that lasted until the evening. By then, photos of men wielding large scythes and machetes, as well as injured students, went viral on Facebook. Later, Jubo Dal, BNP's youth wing, expelled Mahbubur Rahman, vice president of its Daulatpur unit in Khulna, after he was seen brandishing a sharp weapon.

By now, we know about the protests and show-downs that followed the KUET incident, including at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, and Jagannath University. On Wednesday afternoon—after an ultimatum from KUET students demanding a complete ban on student politics, punishment for the attackers, and the resignation of top officials—the university authorities decided to prohibit all forms of political activities on campus. Students found engaging in politics will face permanent expulsion, while teachers, staff, and officials are also barred from any political involvement. A four-member committee has been formed to investigate Tuesday's violence, including the role of outsiders. All academic activities will also remain suspended until February 28.

While we welcome the prompt response by KUET authorities, it is not enough to defuse the tensions brewing within the wider community of politically minded students. The bellicose rhetoric from some student leaders is only making matters worse. If this is a preview of what lies ahead, it is deeply disturbing. This calls for a sober reflection by all parties involved, including the warring student factions. While we support the emergence of a new student-led party and acknowledge that differences of opinion are natural, all parties must ensure that their activities do not harm the interests of general students. The student politics of old has no place in post-uprising Bangladesh.

Ensuring economic stability is paramount

Govt must rein in inflation, adopt more business-friendly policies

We are concerned about the sluggish business environment that has persisted in the country for the past several months now. According to a report, in the October-December period of 2024, most listed companies experienced a decline in profits compared to the same period in the previous year. This decline is primarily due to rising borrowing costs, high inflation, and other economic stresses. Out of 213 listed firms, 97 reported higher profits, while 116 saw a drop. While 18 of the profit-making companies recovered from previous losses, 32 of the loss-making firms reported fresh losses. During this period, GDP growth slowed, and consumer spending shrank. These factors, combined with persisting political uncertainties, have exacerbated the situation.

Reportedly, while large corporations such as Power Grid Bangladesh PLC, Square Pharmaceuticals, and DESCO are in a comparatively better position due to their diverse portfolios and vast market base, small and medium-sized businesses are still struggling to recover. Many have adopted a wait-and-see approach to business expansion due to political uncertainties and volatile law and order, while high interest rates and inflation have further increased the cost of doing business. According to Bangladesh Bank, the weighted average interest rate in the banking sector rose from 6.60 percent in October 2023 to 10.23 percent by December 2024—a 55 percent increase. And despite relatively stable foreign exchange reserves, driven by record remittance inflows and growing exports, private sector investment remains sluggish. Meanwhile, persistent high inflation has eroded people's purchasing power, and the recent increase in value-added tax (VAT) may worsen the situation. Since taking office, the interim government has introduced several initiatives to stabilise the economy. But clearly, more needs to be done to ensure macroeconomic stability. To this end, controlling inflation remains a major challenge. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the country's inflation fell to 9.94 percent in January from 10.89 percent in December, but further measures are needed ahead of Ramadan when inflation typically rises. Besides, the government must prioritise improving political stability and law and order to support business growth. Political parties also have a major role to play in this regard. They must refrain from actions and statements that could destabilise the country.

Finally, the government must engage in dialogue with the business community to address their concerns and grievances. Our economy has been going through a difficult phase for quite some time now. Only coordinated, well-thought-out measures can help it recover.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Volcano Paricutín erupts

On this day in 1943, the volcano Paricutín in Mexico's Michoacán state erupted, eventually burying two villages.

EDITORIAL

WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Imperialism, war, and the fight for a just world



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Since 2009, the World Day of Social Justice has been observed on February 20 with the goal of raising awareness and promoting efforts to combat social exclusion, poverty, and unemployment. It primarily focuses on promoting global harmony among people, reducing inequality, alleviating poverty, and establishing a fair social system.

Beyond this designated day, social justice remains a significant global issue, with people in different countries expressing their aspirations for fairness in various ways. However, without questioning the power exercised by major global players, ruling classes, or imperialist forces—as well as the dominance of anti-people and anti-environmental justice groups in different countries—the concept of international social justice cannot be truly meaningful. Therefore, this question needs to be raised in our country as well as globally.

We know that the largest allocation, or the biggest single sector in terms of expenditure worldwide, is the industry dedicated to human destruction—the war industry, armaments, and surveillance. The amount of money spent on them now is nearly \$2 trillion, with 50 percent of this expenditure being made by the US alone. The spending of this money and its allocation drive activities that fuel war, violence, and repression across countries. They strengthen authoritarian regimes and are used by the most parasitic, anti-people, and anti-environment corporate powers to consolidate their dominance.

In recent history, we have seen this in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, various parts of the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Surveillance, interventions, and the patronisation of war-mongering groups in different countries have further expanded this system. Alongside this expansion, we witness the rise of plundering elites and authoritarian, autocratic ruling classes in many countries.

This clearly indicates that our current world order is completely against international social justice. Therefore, whenever we talk about international social justice, we must question the present global (dis)order. To challenge the current global system, it is essential to establish agendas focused on public rights.

If we take Bangladesh as an example, the Liberation War was fundamentally fought to establish social justice and build a society free from inequality, exploitation, oppression, and dominance. However, in the post-war period, we have witnessed various

phases of betrayal. Over time, a class has emerged that holds highly concentrated wealth, leading to rising inequality and poverty. Instead of achieving sustainable development, we have ended up with sustainable poverty, increasing deprivation, widespread environmental destruction, and deepening ethnic, class, and religious disparities.

If we look at India, we see a similar pattern. Despite the extreme levels of poverty and inequality, a few Indians are consistently listed among the richest people globally.

However, India is also home to the highest number of the poorest people in the world, with extreme inequality and deprivation. At the same time, the militarisation of the state is evident. Similarly, in Pakistan, we see

genocide have reached unprecedented levels. Despite the killing of over 45,000 people in recent months, those responsible in Israel have not been prosecuted as war criminals. On the contrary, the US administration has welcomed, honoured, and supported them, even encouraging further aggression against Palestine.

Nevertheless, there is hope because we also see that various universities in the US have organised massive protests against Israel's actions. Many Jewish individuals, including religious leaders, have also spoken out against Israel's aggression. In many places, large-scale protests have taken place, and people across the world have demonstrated against Israel's genocide and occupation.

The solidarity emerging through these protests—against war, aggression, neo-colonialism, neo-liberal aggression, and environmental destruction—is genuine and meaningful. The public mobilisation, protests, and gatherings happening in different countries reflect a strong and significant global unity.

This solidarity presents a real possibility for human-led change in the global order. Given the current

for dominance will continue, with both forces working in tandem. The fourth possibility is a revolutionary transformation of the global order.

These four possibilities are on the horizon, and within this framework, the desire to establish social justice, equality, and an environmentally friendly economy is rising. This urge emerging within people is driven by the need to sustain human society's existence in the face of capitalist aggression and the madness of the global ruling class.

The entire planet is facing an existential crisis, primarily due to the destruction of the environment and climate change. Across the world, insecurity and health hazards are increasing, and the quality of life for people is being threatened. In this context, the environmental movement is becoming a powerful force for challenging and changing the current global order. The environmental movement, along with the anti-war movement, the anti-imperialist aggression movement, and the equality movement creates the potential for international people's power needed to establish social justice on a global scale.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Thousands of demonstrators protest in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, in London, Britain, on October 21, 2023.

continuous militarisation of the state along with poverty and inequality, with power being increasingly concentrated in the hands of the military, while a vast number of people remain deprived of their rights.

Following the election of Trump in the US, global tensions have escalated. Instead of fostering solidarity and unity among people worldwide, there is growing concern over increasing US domination and imperialist aggression in various regions. This has raised fears of a new phase of war or the emergence of a new chapter of global conflict.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, Israel's aggression, colonial occupation, and

state of the world, I see four potential possibilities emerging from this situation.

One possibility is that the world becomes increasingly fascist. In other words, the entire global system could turn into a fascist system, with the US as its leading power, and this could take on a more extreme form both globally and in various individual countries.

The second possibility is that multiple centres of power will emerge in the world, leading to competition between them, and no single dominance will prevail. The third possibility is that the struggle for change will intensify, and the fight

However, international agencies that are supposed to promote justice often end up compromising with those who create injustice, rendering both the international social justice agenda and the observance of the day itself meaningless.

To make this day meaningful and to turn social justice into a reality, it is crucial for people in all regions of the world to engage in meaningful struggles to establish social justice in their own countries. Additionally, solidarity between the struggles of people across all countries must be built to ensure social justice on a global scale, which is urgent for all of us.

KUET CAMPUS VIOLENCE

Are we returning to divisive student politics?



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The events that unfolded at Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET) on February 18 serve as a stark reminder of the direction Bangladesh's educational institutions are heading. It should be looked at as more than just an isolated incident, but more as a preview of what the future holds if we continue down the same perilous path. The rapid resurgence of age-old toxic practices on campuses is alarming. What happened at KUET is nothing less than a betrayal of the sacrifices made during the upheaval of 2024—a time when people bled and endured lifelong suffering in pursuit of a better future. Those who wish to understand the true essence of 2024 need only revisit the videos and graffiti from that time. The message was clear: the stranglehold of partisan blindness, campus violence,

and opportunistic hypocrisy had to end.

For the last four to five decades, how many true leaders have emerged from student politics? If we examine the legacy of recent campus-based politics, the results are disheartening. Instead of nurturing responsible, visionary leaders, student politics has often devolved into factional brawls, extortion, deception, dormitory takeovers, and the exploitation of campus resources for personal gain.

The repercussions of this flawed system are evident in the country's governance today. Many of those who once indulged in student politics have moved on to become police officers, bureaucrats, teachers, and tax officials. The practices they learnt on campus—intimidation, manipulation, and corruption—are now deeply

embedded in the fabric of Bangladesh's institutions.

What kind of educational environment do we truly want for our students? What should a university campus represent? We envision a campus where students exhibit such discipline and responsibility that they, alongside a few administrative staff, can efficiently manage their residential halls. This model, followed by top universities worldwide, not only streamlines administrative functions but also nurtures future leaders.

Universities should be hubs for intellectual discourse, debate, and dialogue. Students must learn to engage with diverse perspectives, embracing inclusivity and critical thinking rather than blind allegiance to any political ideology. A politically aware student body should prioritise education-centric activism—demanding increased funding for academic research, well-stocked libraries, nutritious food in canteens, and better living conditions in dormitories. These are the real concerns that affect students' lives and futures. When injustice occurs anywhere in the country, students should rise above political affiliations and speak out. Corruption and oppression know no political colour,

and neither should the voices of the youth.

If student politics continues to promote division rather than unity, how can these same students later contribute to building an inclusive society? The primary duty of students is to pursue education and research. Beyond that, they should engage in social service, sports, and cultural activities. But under no circumstances should they allow themselves to be used as pawns in partisan power struggles—especially not during their formative years.

For a while now, politicians have been uttering nice words—words designed to erase the memory of 2024, like an eraser slowly wiping away hard-fought progress. Now, every political party seems eager to erase the lessons of that transformational year, rushing to restore the very system that so many fought to change.

If we do not act now, if we do not demand accountability and resist the return to divisive politics, our universities will continue to be breeding grounds for corruption and chaos rather than institutions of innovation and learning. The events at KUET are a warning—one we ignore at our own peril.