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The new Bangladesh needs a new education system

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Focusing on education is essential to changing the trajectory of a nation, because, at the end of the day, a nation is built by its people—and those people are shaped by education.

Education is like a passport to the future for any nation. If we look at all the world's superpowers and ask why they became superpowers, yes, the economy plays a role, but education is just as important. The highest-ranking universities are in the most developed countries—whether in the UK, the US, Canada, or the Scandinavian nations. Education reflects a nation's prosperity because a sound and educated population produces ideas and innovations that drive the economy forward.

It's important to identify what worked in the past and what is needed for the future. Whether in Bangladesh or elsewhere, one of the best aspects of past education was its focus on morality, ethics, and character-building. These values were always a part of learning. The teachers also used to live morally and thus led by example. In society, they were treated respectfully for their wisdom and were consulted on many issues. Some villages in Bangladesh still have that.

In Korea, the suburbs of the UK, the US, and Australia, basic manners are still taught—not to litter, how to behave at home, how to take care of animals, to have compassion, to be respectful, and even how to hold a fork and knife properly.

We also lack pedagogy- or andragogy-based teaching, meaning that teachers aren't able to transfer the knowledge they have in their respective fields to the students. This is because, even though they acquire education and degrees in certain subjects, they never really learn how to teach.

In Bangladesh, we are no longer doing that. There was a time when education focused on standards, on teaching morality and character. But in our attempt to modernise, we have not only failed to truly modernise but have also lost the essence of what was once there.

The second issue is preparing for the future. We have not done well in equipping our workforce with future-ready skills. According to the World Economic Forum, 65 percent of jobs will require some sort of reskilling. This means that the skills needed in the new world are very different.

Coding, for example, must become fundamental. It should be as important as maths, physics, or history—because that is the future.

Students may not gain as much from history or literature in their professional lives, but they will undoubtedly need technology and an understanding of it. That is where our education system is falling behind. School education has still not integrated these skills, we lack resources, and the focus simply isn't there.

Outcome-based learning is also missing in our curriculum. The way our education is designed is quantity-based. There is a specific quantity of material that needs to be "finished" for one's education to be considered complete. The understanding of the implementation of the syllabus is absent.

The need for a hybrid education model

The education system needs to shift towards a more flexible model—one that follows a "just-in-time" and "just-in-need" approach. Today, people learn more from YouTube, Google, and AI than from traditional education. If someone needs to learn something, they look it up instantly.

The much-talked-about Gen Z

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There are three key areas we need to address:

The gap between industry and academia

Industries often say they are looking for top talent. It's not that jobs aren't available but rather that they aren't finding the right candidates. The reason? The pace at which industries evolve is not matched by academia.

What was taught in the 1990s about marketing is still being taught today, yet marketing itself has changed dramatically. It's no longer just about placing ads in newspapers or on television. Now, it's about digital marketing, influencer strategies, and data-driven decisions. But are students being taught this? Probably not. Yet, in reality, this is what works.

Unlike places like Silicon Valley, we don't have strong collaborations between academia and industry. Most industries have little involvement with universities beyond occasional guest lectures or event sponsorships. They aren't actively shaping the curriculum, brainstorming solutions, or ensuring students graduate with relevant skills. This needs to change. Universities must work more closely with industries; update syllabuses based on real-world needs and involve professionals in teaching.

Lack of research and innovation
Bangladesh ranks very poorly in

research. We don't have enough academic collaborations, and because of this, our critical thinking is weak. This has even bigger national consequences.

We are becoming a follower nation rather than an innovator or leader. Research gives us breakthroughs, new ideas, and critical thinking skills that allow us to challenge the status quo. Without research, we cannot develop new concepts, innovations, or industries.

The focus should not just be on increasing the number of academic publications but on ensuring that research is meaningful and impactful.

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and Gen Alpha are no strangers to technology. In fact, many children belonging to Gen Alpha are exposed to smartphones and gadgets before they are exposed to books and pen-paper. Now, it is a matter of much debate how healthy this is for the development of young minds and what the future consequences of it are. But the fact remains that they are much more comfortable with technology than previous generations. The strength of this should be utilised by properly integrating technology into teaching in schools.

This means we need more specialist modules, more microlearning, and a system that adapts to the realities of how people learn today. Attention spans are shorter, and the demand for quick, relevant knowledge is higher. Education must evolve to match this.

We need to rethink our education system. We need to bring back moral and character-building lessons while also preparing students for the future. We need stronger ties between universities and industries, more research and innovation, and a system that embraces modern ways of learning.

Only then can we build a Bangladesh that is not just educated but ready to lead.

How Mahmoud Khalil's arrest threatens free speech on US campuses

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On a damp March morning, the usual chatter of student life on campuses across the US felt eerily subdued. Just weeks ago, pro-Palestinian student protests had drawn thousands into vibrant encampments, their banners calling for an end to US military aid to Israel. Now, with the sudden arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, a graduate student of Palestinian ancestry, and the looming threat of deportation, a shadow had fallen over student activism. What had once felt like a fundamental right—the freedom to protest—was beginning to feel like a dangerous gamble.

Khalil was detained by federal immigration authorities on allegations that he had engaged in activities "aligned with Hamas." Tricia McLaughlin, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, in fact, said that the arrest was carried out "in support of President (Donald) Trump's executive orders prohibiting antisemitism." His green card now hangs in the balance, and his case has become the latest flashpoint in the escalating crackdown on student dissent. For international students across the country, the arrest signalled a grim new reality: their voices could cost them their future in the US. While Khalil's case has raised concerns among international students, it's important to note that he is a legal permanent resident, not someone on a student visa. However, there are broader implications for student activists.

The US has drawn millions of students from around the world, making its universities global centres of innovation, research, and intellectual debate. But these latest government actions risk dismantling the very foundation of that appeal. International students, often seen as guests rather than stakeholders, have always walked a tightrope—striving for academic excellence while avoiding controversy. Now, their presence on American soil feels even more precarious. The unspoken warning is clear: challenge US policy, and you might find yourself on the next flight out.

The financial consequences of such a shift are staggering. According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, world's largest non-profit dedicated to international education based in Washington, DC, international students contributed over $40 billion to the US economy through tuition payments and living expenses during the 2022-2023 academic year. They fill crucial roles in research labs, technology start-ups, and public health initiatives, forming the backbone of the country's intellectual capital. Universities, especially those heavily reliant on international tuition dollars, are already beginning to feel the tremors of what could become a long-term crisis.

The US government's use of immigration law as a tool to suppress activism has historical precedent. During the McCarthy era, immigrants suspected of communist sympathies were deported without clear evidence of wrongdoing. After 9/11, thousands of Muslim immigrants

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were subjected to surveillance, visa denials, and deportations under the guise of national security. Now, with Khalil's case, a new chapter in this long history is unfolding, one in which student activists—especially those critical of US foreign policy—become targets of the state.

Civil rights activists argue that Khalil's arrest is a politically motivated attempt to silence campus activism. But the government insists that national security is at stake. His legal team has pushed back, demanding to see hard evidence against Khalil, but so far, none has been publicly presented. Is this about safety, or making an example of him?

The chilling effect is already being felt. Students who once spoke freely are now scrubbing their social media accounts, avoiding protests, and hesitating before signing petitions. The phrase "proceed with caution" has become a mantra among activists. Many are asking: where is the line? At what point does political dissent become a deportable offence?

Beyond the personal cost to

activists, the economic and diplomatic fallout of these crackdowns could be severe. US' reputation as a beacon of free speech and intellectual freedom has long been a key driver of its global influence. The ability to challenge authority, to debate openly, to criticise policies without fear of reprisal—these are the principles that have made. The US universities are considered to be the gold standard. But if international students start to feel that their presence is conditional on their silence, they may begin looking elsewhere.

For the US, the long-term economic consequences of losing its international student base could be profound. Universities facing declining enrolment would struggle to fund research programmes, graduate fellowships, and faculty positions. High-tech industries, which rely on a steady influx of international talent, could see a shrinking pipeline of skilled workers. In short, the very system that has allowed the US to maintain its global intellectual dominance could begin to erode.

What remains uncertain is whether Khalil's case will serve as an outlier or a blueprint. Will the government continue down this path, using immigration status as a political weapon against student activists? Or will legal challenges and public outcry force a course correction?

For now, the case hangs in limbo. Khalil's legal team has filed an emergency motion to block his deportation, and civil rights organisations are rallying behind him. But the larger question remains: what does this moment say about the future of activism in the US?

For decades, the US has presented itself as a champion of democratic values, a place where dissent is not just tolerated but celebrated. But for students, now watching their peers face arrest and deportation, that promise feels increasingly hollow.

And so, the banners may come down. The chants may quiet. The crowds may thin. But the fear that has settled over US' campuses will not fade so easily. The next generation of activists will remember this moment—not just for what was lost, but for the warning it carried: in the land of the free, speaking truth to power may come with a price.