

## Fight misinformation with greater urgency

Continued spread of misinformation highlights need for digital literacy

Quite in line with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's warning about rumours being "weaponised" to destabilise the country, we have seen how unrelenting, wide-ranging, and destabilising such rumours have been since the July uprising. This was fittingly reflected in the figures of 2024, which saw misinformation rise by 58 percent compared to 2023, and that momentum has continued into 2025. After detecting 268 instances of misinformation in February and 298 in March, Rumour Scanner, a fact-checking organisation, has now reported 296 cases in April. The persistent nature of those behind this campaign is deeply disturbing, as is the way they continue to find a fertile ground in post-uprising Bangladesh.

Like in previous months, April's misinformation was dominated by national and political themes, with 101 and 95 cases, respectively. Religious, international, and communal topics also featured prominently. Notably, 16 instances of communal misinformation were identified, some originating from Indian accounts, continuing a troubling trend of cross-border disinformation campaigns. Meanwhile, social media platforms remain the primary vectors for spreading such falsehoods. For example, Facebook, the favoured social media platform in Bangladesh, alone accounted for 276 cases, followed by YouTube (54), Instagram (48), X (formerly Twitter, 44), and TikTok (24). Alarming, even mainstream media outlets were implicated in 15 separate instances of disseminating misinformation.

Rumour Scanner has also shed light on the mediums being used for this purpose: 138 cases were text based, 105 involved videos, and 53 were image-centric. Among these, 179 were completely false, 66 misleading, and 48 distorted, but all generally constituting misinformation. Particularly concerning has been the targeting of key political and government figures, which aligns with what Prof Yunus has alluded to as the machinations of the "defeated side" intent on manipulating narratives and undermining trust in institutions. Yunus himself was the subject of 29 misinformation cases. Other advisers, including Asif Nazrul and Syeda Rizwana Hasan, were also targeted. Political parties and security forces were not spared either. Among the parties, BNP was the most affected, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami and National Citizen Party (NCP).

We don't need to remind anyone how hurtful this campaign has been, and it will only intensify as we approach the upcoming elections. This calls for heightened awareness and vigilance from the government and political institutions alike. The press, too, has a huge responsibility as it can stand guard against the circulation of doctored or misleading content by properly informing the citizens. But in the end, no initiative will be enough unless the citizens themselves become aware of the threat. This requires strengthening digital literacy across all demographics so that people can be empowered to critically assess the information they encounter online. There should be countrywide educational initiatives focusing on identifying credible sources and understanding the hallmarks of misinformation.

## Revive Dinajpur's Shishu Academy

Proper workforce, facilities should be ensured

As the country's leading institution responsible for instilling and nurturing the creative spirit in children, it is concerning to see the Bangladesh Shishu Academy falter in this very mission. With establishments in different districts, the academy is struggling to operate smoothly due to a shortage of workers, lack of facilities, and inadequate finances. A prime example of this is its Dinajpur building, which has been receiving much lower footfall than expected. For the sake of our children, this cannot go unaddressed.

The five-storey building is situated near Dinajpur's Gor-e-Shahid Field, with only two floors of it being utilised while the others remain covered in dust, according to a report by Prothom Alo. The library and museum have been abandoned, and the toilets need a major overhaul. There is also a lack of cleaners and night guards, while the position of the district's child affairs officer remains vacant, further underscoring the academy's plight. Only 10 trainers are working on a contractual basis. Their frustration with the absence of proper initiatives to facilitate children's early development is one shared by many.

Many parents, therefore, are taking their children away from the academy. In 2017, around 250 children were enrolled in painting, recitation and presentation, music, dance, and handwriting classes; that number now stands at just 93. While COVID and the establishment's inconvenient location may have contributed to this decline in recent years, many other factors—such as the lack of fun events and toys—make it unattractive. For example, there are complaints that the institution only offers routine, low-budget activities when children need variety.

It must be acknowledged that the academy, even within its limited scope, has helped many children flourish. One mother recounted how her child became more social and happier after getting enrolled. This is the power—and responsibility—the establishment holds: inspiring our little ones. To be successful in this mission, an overhaul is necessary. Events like fairs, film screenings, tours, and competitions must be organised regularly, the academy's activities should be publicised at schools, and a dedicated, adequate workforce must be ensured, along with full utilisation of the building.

Reportedly, a proposal to address these issues has been placed, so we hope the relevant authorities will provide proper direction and a sufficient budget without delay. If all these are ensured, we just might see Dinajpur's children rushing back to the academy.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Margaret Thatcher elected British PM

On this day in 1979, Margaret Thatcher of the Conservative Party was elected the British prime minister, becoming the first woman in Europe to hold that post. She later became the longest continuously serving British premier since 1827.

# EDITORIAL

## The crisis of a fossilised education system



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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I found it adorable when a visiting envoy fondly recalled that the Dhaka University campus reminded him of his home institution in the 1960s. There was another diplomat who mentioned to me that they were striving to preserve their old buildings, which resembled our administrative building, as heritage sites. A pattern of irony emerged. It is no coincidence that people think we are frozen in time.

Then there was this Facebook post of a recent graduate recounting his valid concerns of not getting an equivalence certificate in time to complement his application for higher studies abroad. The DU registrar's office, he claimed, was taking an eternity to send an email. What use is a certificate if it remains unendorsed when necessary? A section of the press picked up the news and published an opinion piece, spotlighting the required reforms. The writer shared his experience of missing two scholarship opportunities in the 90s due to DU's failure to mail the official transcripts.

Indeed, we seem to be stuck in the past. And it is no wonder that newer universities with a greater appetite to grow are outpacing us in ranking.

As a DU insider, I cannot shy away from my responsibilities. The frustrating pace at which things move at this university is as confusing as our



Students from polytechnic institutes are not only demanding proper recognition, but also a comprehensive overhaul of technical education in Bangladesh.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

the joke? I use the perspectives of our foreign friends to show how reality is often different from the situation we have become comfortably attached to.

The other day, an ongoing protest by the polytechnic institute's students delayed a delegation. What's wrong with these students? Why

**In a country starved of mid-level technicians and vocational experts, this systemic neglect of technical graduates is paradoxical and shortsighted. The equivalence of their degree should be on par with global practices. Students should have the right to know the outcome of a degree before joining a programme. Encouraging students to fight for their rights once they are in the system is a sign of poor educational policy.**

traffic signal. The rule is there is no rule, yet there is an abundance of it. To quote one of our Chinese friends about our traffic system, "You guys are so civilised that you don't need the traffic light. Meanwhile, we must maintain constant discipline." Why do we always have to be at the butt end of

do they seek to have their diplomas recognised as equivalent to a fully fledged engineering degree? Perhaps it's time to move past our initial reaction of "how dare they" and try to understand their concerns. The students from polytechnic institutes are not only demanding recognition

protest and managed to get a promise of a university of their own. At the heart of both protests lies the issue of dignity and progression. Even after pursuing a four-year programme, diploma graduates face stunted career growth and exclusion from higher education opportunities. It is the same time required for an engineering degree.

Unlike their peers in public or private universities, polytechnic students often come from rural or lower-middle-class backgrounds. Denying the legitimacy of their demands due to age-old prejudice would be unfortunate. In a country starved of mid-level technicians and vocational experts, this systemic neglect of technical graduates is paradoxical and shortsighted. The equivalence of their degree should be on par with global practices. Students should have the right to know the outcome of a degree before joining a programme. Encouraging students to fight for their rights once they are in the system is a sign of poor educational policy. We pay policymakers to ensure the economic mobility of our graduates. The anti-discriminatory spirit with which the July uprising brewed is at odds with

the inequality that persists and the way human capital is squandered, especially when Bangladesh should be harvesting its demographic dividend.

The much-talked about youth bulge, with over 47 percent of the population under the age of 25 years, will not yield any automatic result unless there are strategic policies to create a healthy, educated, and skilled workforce. Our students don't view their education as transformational. The view that education is just a degree affirms its transactional nature. The repeated demands for reforms highlight an institutional limbo in which our young generation is trapped.

Polytechnic graduates are recruited in government services with little scope for career progression, demonstrating an old mindset that wants to keep disparity intact. The same mindset favours placing faculty members at the bottom of the hierarchy. The inter-service friction within the government has exposed the tension. In the absence of incentives and in-service professional development, teachers and staff often remain underqualified and disengaged.

It will be a crime to miss the post-uprising zeitgeist and not to overhaul our educational sector. The interim government's failure to form an education reform commission is a mystery. Educational rupture often provides an opportunity to shake up the frozen system. Iran formed the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution after the 1979 revolution; South Africa created the National Commission on Higher Education in 1995 in the post-apartheid era; Rwanda prioritised overhauling its technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems following the 1994 genocide. The interim government's handling of the educational stalemate will prove very costly.

Education is more than skills or jobs; it is about belonging, dignity, and the capacity to shape the future. But our systems, especially the public ones, remain fossilised. Our public system continues to ignore the aspirations of its youth. The controlled protests may alienate our youth. History reveals that alienation can transform into apathy or unrest, which can swiftly escalate beyond control. The state must choose. It can allow the public universities to be a site of nostalgia and reminiscence about previous glory. Or it can take bold action: go beyond simply managing the crisis and transform the system. The cost of inaction will be paid not just in student frustration, but in lost generations. And foreign friends will come and visit us with dreamy nostalgia.

## Our current heat emergency and a roadmap to COP30

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As the climate crisis escalates, Bangladesh faces a critical challenge in tackling the intensifying heatwaves in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, undermining health, agricultural productivity, and economic stability. With the upcoming 30th UN Climate Change Conference (Conference of the Parties—COP30) scheduled to take place in November 2025 in Brazil, least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh need to address this emerging heat emergency by taking pragmatic and quick climate actions.

The Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) has predicted more frequent occurrences of heatwaves in the coming decade. The intertwined crisis of rising temperatures and poor living conditions is generating worse conditions and impacting individuals and families living below the poverty line. For instance, informal sector workers working in poor working conditions, such as less ventilation, inadequate water booths, and minimal bathroom breaks, face an ample amount of dissatisfaction, which undermines their well-being. In this case, the ready-made garment (RMG) sector workers, mainly working in small and medium-sized companies, face these devastating challenges.

Agriculture, one of the country's key economic sectors, also witnesses low rice yield due to extreme heat, resulting in a hike in food prices and a rise in poverty levels. Therefore, heat stress also undermines the economic viability and productivity of developing nations like Bangladesh.

The smallholder farmers of drought-prone areas working in scorching heat with less access to drinking water are also heavily impacted during heatwaves. Additionally, marginalised women bear the disproportionate burden of extreme heat conditions, which deteriorate their health and well-being and reduce productivity. A 2022 report published jointly by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) revealed that due to heat stress, an individual from low-income communities spends an additional Tk 516 on healthcare annually; due to the current inflationary pressure, the cost has gone up significantly. Additionally, the report further stated that during an episode of a heatwave, an individual loses 3.12 hours in productivity.

Agriculture, one of the country's key economic sectors, also witnesses low rice yield due to extreme heat, resulting in a hike in food prices and a rise in poverty levels. Therefore, heat stress also undermines the economic viability and productivity of developing nations like Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has made significant strides in climate policy,

heat stress remains critically overlooked in national adaptation strategies. Therefore, integrating heat resilience into the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is now imperative. Rather than a setback, this presents an opportunity for Bangladesh, as the country can leverage international climate finance to drive transformative adaptation. Long-term heat resilience also demands infrastructure reforms, including revised building codes, heat-resistant design principles, and expanded green infrastructure. India's Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan, which reduced heat-related mortality by 88 percent, offers a model that Bangladesh can look into.

By integrating policy, mobilising finance, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration, Bangladesh can effectively combat its escalating heat crisis and build a more climate-resilient future. However, a multi-sectoral approach is still essential and demands fostering collaboration among government ministries and departments, international non-governmental organisations, doctors and healthcare providers, and research institutions to implement capacity-building programmes and awareness campaigns. Alongside, ensuring frontline preparedness is crucial: healthcare workers and emergency responders must be trained to manage heat-related illnesses. Additionally, a localised and continuously monitored early warning system is essential for delivering timely heatwave alerts to communities that are at risk.

Heatwaves don't respect borders, and South Asia must unite to form a regional heat resilience pact. Countries like India, Pakistan, Cambodia, Vietnam and Bangladesh often face higher degrees and intensities of heatwaves. A "South Asian Heat Resilience Pact" could facilitate collaboration on managing these risks, integrating early warning systems, harmonising heat resilience measures, and pooling resources for joint climate adaptation projects.

The Global Cooling Pledge (GCP), introduced at COP28, commits countries to reducing cooling-related emissions by 68 percent by 2050. For Bangladesh, this presents a crucial opportunity to access sustainable cooling technologies and secure climate finance strategically. Drawing lessons from countries like the UAE and Brazil, Bangladesh must develop a national sustainable cooling plan that prioritises vulnerable communities, promotes energy-efficient infrastructure, and integrates climate-smart agricultural practices.

Furthermore, the Global Stocktake (GST) provides a strategic framework for Bangladesh to enhance its climate policies in alignment with global objectives. By incorporating GST recommendations into its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Bangladesh can ensure that heat resilience becomes a core component of its climate response. Inclusive policy development involving diverse stakeholders is essential to craft comprehensive and equitable climate adaptation measures.

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