

End campus paralyses without delay

KUET, Barishal University protests must leave space for compromise

The continued paralysis at the Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET), which has been effectively closed for over two and a half months now, may be a reflection of the present turbulent time itself, but nothing justifies such disruptions as they leave a profound impact on the future of students. The situation, triggered by clashes over a demand of student politics ban on February 18, provides a troubling example of how unchecked disciplinary violations, administrative inertia, political interference, and an inability to compromise can combine to hold an entire institution hostage. Despite the syndicate's decision on Sunday to resume academic activities, the reopening has been stalled due to the reluctance of teachers protesting over assaults and smear campaigns against some faculty members.

KUET teachers have been on strike for five days now. Even though the interim vice-chancellor has been holding repeated meetings and the syndicate has reportedly made progress on the teachers' demands, a breakthrough in the stalemate continues to be elusive. Meanwhile, in an apparent repeat of this chaotic mess, Barishal University is heading towards its own shutdown. Over the past week, a group of students have staged protests demanding the VC's resignation—accusing her of “authoritarianism” and unprofessional conduct—with a section of teachers also extending their solidarity. Students have declared that they will suspend academic activities, excluding semester exams, from Monday if their demands are not met.

These are not isolated disruptions. Since the political upheaval of the July uprising, we have seen repeated episodes of campus unrest across the country, where students, divided into various factions, as well as teachers and administrators clashed over various grievances but effective solutions were rarely achieved. We have also seen such unrest at various colleges and even the polytechnic institutes, where students recently enforced a shutdown over slow progress on their six-point demand. Although the students' platform has decided to temporarily suspend the shutdown programme, allowing classes to resume, exams will remain on hold for now.

This state of affairs in our academic institutions is deeply regrettable. We call on all parties involved to recognise the heavy cost of their uncompromising stances. While some of their demands are genuine, their chosen methods of expression are throwing academic calendars into disarray, delaying exams and graduation, and hurting both current students and future admissions. There is no alternative to proper response from the authorities to address legitimate grievances, but students, and teachers, too have a responsibility here. They must prioritise uninterrupted continuation of academic activities regardless of the issue at hand, while continuing negotiations in parallel. Only through cooperation and compromise can we protect our broader academic interests.

WASA must fix water crisis in Chattogram

Develop master plan, serve neighbourhoods without WASA lines

We are concerned about the plight of Chattogram city residents deprived of access to water from WASA. According to a report by Prothom Alo, despite WASA spending about Tk 8,800 crore since 2009 on eight water supply projects, about a third of the residents still struggle for safe water every day. Their number—considering the variations in population figures given by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and Chattogram City Corporation (CCC)—would be anywhere between 12 lakh and 21 lakh people, underscoring the severity of the problem. Without any supply from WASA, they are forced to rely on deep tube wells, purchased water, or nearby ponds and other water bodies, leaving them exposed to various risks.

The Chattogram WASA has about 98,000 customer connections. Excluding those without WASA lines, the current daily demand is 560 million litres, while daily production capacity stands at 500 million litres. That means WASA is struggling to serve even those connected to its grid. The crisis, according to the above-mentioned report, is most severe in 10 wards: 1, 2, 10, 11, 18, and 37-41. Apparently, WASA connections simply don't exist in over 100 neighbourhoods. What's equally troubling is that WASA has no master plan to address the needs of a growing city even after six decades of operation. A comprehensive master plan based on accurate data and future projections could be useful in mapping out where pipelines are missing, how much water is required in each zone, and how many treatment plants must be built.

Without such planning, the agency has been executing project after project in an ad-hoc manner, which is deeply troubling. We urge the Chattogram WASA to treat this issue with the urgency it demands, as access to safe water is a fundamental right. As things stand, the first step towards resolving the crisis should be to develop a robust master plan. As experts have pointed out, this plan must account for future population growth, area-specific needs, and pipeline expansion to neglected zones. Moreover, given the questionable planning and execution of past projects, WASA must improve its project design and implementation capacity, and also address the mismatches in existing population figures so that everyone benefits from its projects and initiatives without exception.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Mandela becomes South Africa's president

On this day in 1994, Nelson Mandela, whose efforts to end apartheid led to his imprisonment (1962-90) and earned him a share (with F.W. de Klerk) of the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize, became the president of South Africa.



We need more than air purifiers to clean up Dhaka's air



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Almost everyone in Dhaka is a doctor. They can walk into a pharmacy and order common medicine for cold, indigestion, or allergies. One of my health-conscious colleagues even recommended taking a daily dose of medicine for allergic rhinitis, regardless of whether symptoms are present. Given Dhaka's high concentration of air pollutants—150 percent above the air quality guideline limit set by the World Health Organization (WHO)—each citizen involuntarily inhales toxins equivalent to 1.7 cigarettes a day. The nagging itchy sensation in our breathing tracts is no fluke.

The apparently well-intentioned prescription of my colleague belies a dangerous problem: a self-suggested remedy that ignores the bigger picture. Similarly, reading about the plan to install smog towers (air purifiers) in Dhaka city makes me reflect on the paradoxical gap between noble intention and the harsh, wider reality.

As many know by now, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has recently announced the installation of 25-30 industrial-grade air purifiers, donated by a foreign philanthropist as part of a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative. According to media reports, each tower, valued at Tk 50-60 lakh, will be installed under a pilot project that includes options for “limited branding,” while the DNCC will cover the electricity bill.

The introduction of pollutant-fighting giant machines sounds surreal in a city that cannot even fill potholes or guarantee pedestrians the right to walk on footpaths. Yet, there is this new hype created around cleaning the air for city residents with just 25-30 air purifiers. The proposition is as ridiculous as setting up an air conditioner inside an oven. Each of these machines can clean approximately 30,000 cubic feet of air per minute. With 25-30 machines, we may be able to purify 45-54 million cubic feet per hour. Even the DNCC administrator says one machine has the strength of 80-100 trees. If that is the case, might it not be more feasible to provide four large trees to 20 houses in an area rather than pursue such an

ambitious endeavour?

The technology may be useful for temporarily improving air quality in a hospital or school compound, but it can never be a long-term, large-scale solution. The experiences of New Delhi and Beijing, which have used this Dutch technology for ionising pollutants, can offer some insight. As Dhaka undergoes



What we really need to do to keep the air clean is put a stop to hazardous practices like burning garbage out in the open, which directly affects public health.

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

massive modernisation, we are likely to bear the burden of a construction fiesta for years to come. Old buildings are being demolished to make room for new condominiums and business complexes.

Then, there are the ongoing projects of flyovers, metro lines, airport expansions, underpasses, etc. Factory waste, construction dust, and brick kilns, according to the Department of Environment (DoE), are responsible for 60-70 percent of total air pollution. The next culprit is vehicle emissions. The red alert issued against old, rickety buses belching black smoke is a complete joke, as nobody wants to throw stones at the hives of transport workers. Other sources include burning leaves and garbage, road dust, or smoke from substations and generators that we install to deal with load-shedding. The sources of air pollutants are in plain sight. Yet, instead of addressing the root causes, the DNCC has opted

for an initiative that feels less like a cure and more like a cosmetic fix.

Beijing reduced its smog crisis not only through high-tech air filtration systems but also by reforming its overall environmental policies. It shut down or relocated factories, rerouted traffic, enforced strict emission standards, and adopted green policies, including planting millions of trees. If Dhaka wants to replicate Beijing's success, it too needs systemic changes.

The issue with CSR is that companies making the funding often prioritise their own agendas. They rarely include after-service in their contracts. However, these machines need regular maintenance and filter changes, as clogging is a constant issue. DNCC's current reputation for maintenance

policymakers insist on using glass jars for water or fountain pens for writing to reduce plastic dependency—yet they allow the plastic industry to thrive. Their lip service simply allows us to be indifferent to environmental issues. What good is pouring water from a jar at a seminar if the bottle that carried the water was plastic? Has the city corporation taken recycling seriously?

We need to implement green policies that address the root causes of pollution. Modernising brick kilns is a priority. We must phase out the traditional, fixed-chimney kilns and impose taxes on those who don't adopt green materials. Financial incentives and strict enforcement of rules are key. Law enforcement agencies must ensure construction companies use dust nets, water sprinklers, and on-site waste management. Loose gravel and soil near trees can be covered with wood chips. While the need for transportation remains endless, we must invest in electric vehicles, create bike lanes, and ensure regular vehicle emission testing.

As citizens, we also need to be aware of our contribution to the crisis. Our household substations, diesel generators, and AC overloads generate significant pollution. Many of us install solar panels just to meet RAJUK compliance. But by adopting newer technology, we can equip our homes and commercial buildings as neighbourhood microgrids. Smart cities around the world are utilising all available surfaces for alternative energy. Our elevated motorways can be layered with solar panels, and our malls and shopping areas can use kinetic pavement to convert pedestrian footsteps into electric energy.

Air pollution is a crisis that cannot be taken lightly. According to the World Bank, air pollution in Bangladesh was responsible for 78,145-88,229 deaths in 2019, accounting for about 20 percent of the country's premature deaths. The economic impact is equally alarming, with air pollution costing the equivalent of 8.32 percent of GDP in 2019.

The facts are self-evident. We need to make community leaders aware of them. For instance, we can request religious leaders to use Friday sermons to create environmental awareness, promote the greening of public spaces, and encourage people to reject vehicles that belch black smoke.

It's easy to dismiss Dhaka as an unliveable city. The challenge for us is to replace that tantrum with the slogan—“Dhaka is everyone's responsibility”—and act accordingly.

UPHOLDING NATURAL JUSTICE

A true dawn or an illusion?



Barrister Md Anwar Hossen
is advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. He can be reached at anwar.lawvalley@gmail.com.

MD ANWAR HOSSEN

Natural justice stands as a fundamental principle within the common law system, serving to protect fairness, transparency, and integrity in judicial and administrative processes. Although not formally enshrined in legislation, its core tenets—the right to a fair hearing (*audi alteram partem*) and the rule against bias (*nemo iudex in causa sua*)—have been shaped and affirmed through judicial pronouncements over time. These principles function as essential safeguards against arbitrary or unjust decision-making, ensuring that individuals are given a meaningful opportunity to present their case before an impartial authority. Regardless of the setting in which they are applied, the enduring importance of procedural fairness underpins public confidence in the justice system and reinforces the rule of law.

The notion of natural justice has evolved within Bangladesh's legal system from its British common law roots. Though not explicitly enshrined in our constitution, it is upheld through judicial interpretation and case law, influenced by the UK and post-colonial Indian legal traditions. The Supreme Court of Bangladesh, particularly through Article 102 of the constitution, plays a crucial role in enforcing these principles by issuing writs when the legal rights of people are violated. Courts have consistently ruled that administrative and quasi-judicial bodies must adhere to the principle of natural justice, even in the absence of statutory mandates, especially when decisions

affect individual rights, livelihoods, or reputations. Violations, such as denial of a fair hearing or evident bias, often prompt judicial intervention through writs like certiorari, mandamus, or prohibition. The doctrine of legitimate expectation further reinforces the obligation to ensure fair treatment and consultation in public law decisions. While the application of natural justice in administrative matters allows some flexibility, authorities are still expected to act in good faith, ensure fair hearings, and avoid conflicts of interest, with the courts empowered to review and nullify decisions when these principles are breached.

Constitutional status and enforcement of the notion of natural justice vary across countries. While the core values remain consistent, the US provides explicit constitutional protections, the UK relies on common law traditions, India blends constitutional provisions with active judicial interpretation, and Bangladesh upholds natural justice through judicial enforcement of broader constitutional rights.

In Bangladesh, natural justice is not explicitly stated in the constitution but is upheld through Articles 27 and 31, which ensure equality before the law and protection from arbitrary actions. Article 102 empowers the High Court Division to enforce these rights and invalidate decisions violating natural justice. Judicial interpretation plays a vital role in safeguarding fair hearings and impartiality, compensating for

the absence of direct constitutional language. Any person, citizen or not, may invoke Article 102 of the constitution to seek a remedy for violation of natural justice in Bangladesh.

However, despite being fundamental to a fair legal system, the principles of natural justice face numerous systemic challenges in Bangladesh that hinder their consistent application. Procedural fairness and judicial impartiality are often compromised due to factors such as legal illiteracy, excessive bureaucratic discretion, judicial delays, political interference, and corruption. Many citizens and administrative officials remain unaware of their rights to fair hearings and available remedies. Arbitrary decision-making by the officials connected with the affairs of the authorities is common, especially in areas like land acquisition, adjudication of statutory power and licensing, due to a lack of clear guidelines. Court backlogs delay justice, while political and corrupt influences and interference weaken impartiality. Institutional accountability in almost all affairs is limited, allowing procedural impropriety. Moreover, inadequate training of judges, government officials, and personnel connected with the administration of justice often leads to flawed, unlawful, arbitrary, or biased decisions. Consequently, the enforcement of the rule of natural justice remains significantly constrained, undermining both the legal system's integrity and the rule of law.

To overcome the challenges, several key steps should be taken. Legal institutions must be reformed by enforcing a strict code of conduct, ensuring transparency, and holding officials accountable, followed by strict disciplinary action. Anti-corruption efforts should include digital case management systems, regular audits, and strong penalties and disciplinary

action against corrupt practices. Judicial independence must be protected by introducing constitutional safeguards and creating independent and impartial bodies for appointing judges. Compulsory training programmes should be provided to judges, lawyers, and administrative officers regularly to build their understanding of the principles of natural justice, legal and ethical responsibilities. To reduce case backlogs, the judiciary should be strengthened with more manpower, other logistic support, digital tools, and alternative dispute resolution methods. Finally, fair and transparent recruitment and promotion systems must be established in judicial and administrative services to promote meritocracy over favouritism.

As Bangladesh transitions into a new political era after August 2024, there is a renewed sense of optimism about restoring natural justice, an ideal that has been significantly weakened in recent years by persistent allegations of political bias, state repression, and manipulation of legal institutions. The interim government has signalled a clear commitment to reform, emphasising the independence of the judiciary, the importance of fairness, impartiality, and the right to a fair hearing, principles that were often disregarded in the past. While legal experts and civil society groups remain cautiously hopeful, they stress the urgent need for concrete, measurable reforms that uphold the rule of law, good governance, and the access to justice for all to safeguard individual freedoms and protect the administration and judiciary from political influence and interference. At this critical juncture, reestablishing the principle of natural justice is not merely an aspirational goal; it is an essential cornerstone for establishing the rule of law, good governance and access to justice to restore public confidence in democratic institutions.