

Resolve NBR reform crisis without delay

Protests by tax, customs officials disrupting services

We are concerned by the continued turmoil at the National Board of Revenue (NBR) which puts a question mark not only on the viability of any tax reforms but also the future of proposed institutional reforms in other sectors. According to a report, the turmoil deepened on Wednesday as disgruntled tax, customs, and VAT officials launched a fresh five-day protest demanding the NBR chairman's removal and the repeal of the May 12 ordinance that split the NBR into separate entities for tax policy and revenue collection. The protests were triggered in particular by a clause in the ordinance that allows officers from the general admin cadre to lead the new divisions, raising fears of marginalisation of revenue cadre officers.

The government argues that the structural overhaul is aimed at preventing conflicts of interest between policymaking and implementation, but revenue officials say some provisions of the ordinance are discriminatory. However, while their grievances seem to have a point, their methods of expression—an initial five-day pen-down strike, and the subsequent escalation of protests after a failed talk with higher authorities on Tuesday—are unacceptable considering their disruptive effects across the tax administration. Reportedly, the protests have considerably hampered customs clearance and trade operations, leading to delays in tariff assessments and goods release, which in turn is disrupting supply chains and affecting businesses. The unrest also threatens the government's ability to meet its revenue collection target of Tk 463,500 crore, with Tk 178,500 crore still to be collected in the final two months of the current fiscal year.

The protesters, organised under the banner of NBR Reform Unity Council, insist they are not opposed to NBR reform or the separation itself, but want transparency, fairness, and proper inclusion of experienced revenue officers in the restructured framework. But if their protests escalate into a full work stoppage as planned, it would have a disturbing consequence on trade, revenue collection, and public finance overall. Clearly, there can be no justification for the way the protesters chose to make their point, exploiting their privileged position as government employees to bring vital public services to a halt. But the government also must take responsibility for failing to anticipate this crisis, and urgently initiate meaningful dialogue to resolve it.

Given the objections raised by the protesters, we think it is only fair that a comprehensive review of the ordinance is conducted, incorporating inputs from the NBR reform committee's report as well as international best practices. It is also crucial that institutional reforms like this do not become a battleground for bureaucratic turf wars. Nor should they create an environment in which vested interests can resist necessary change. Given that Bangladesh has one of the lowest tax-GDP ratios in the world, it is extremely important that the long-overdue reform of its tax administration goes on uninterrupted.

Make highway travel safe, esp for women

Another bus robbery raises questions about preventive efforts

The similarity between the highway robbery on the Dhaka-Tangail route on Tuesday night and the one that occurred over three months ago on the same route raises troubling questions about what the authorities are really doing to maintain law and order. According to a case filed by a victim of the recent incident, the robbers boarded the bus posing as passengers, took control of it using knives and machetes, looted passengers, and sexually assaulted several female passengers. The case statement also said the robbers drove the bus for several hours before disembarking at different points along the highway.

Victims of the February 17 robbery, where several women were also assaulted, also described similar tactics used by robbers. Following that incident, protests were held demanding safety for women in public spaces, including public transport. Yet, harassment and assault of female travellers by criminal gangs or the so-called "moral police" continue to occur, with the relevant authorities often unaware of or unmoved by these crimes until they cause a stir on social media.

In response to the February incident, the government deployed additional police forces along the routes to the northern districts. However, the occurrence of the recent robbery suggests that such measures, even if implemented dutifully, are not sufficient. We also need stronger surveillance and swifter, stricter legal action against perpetrators to deter prospective criminals. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, similar incidents occurred in 2023 and 2022 as well, but trials have yet to begin due to procedural and legal loopholes. This lax enforcement clearly emboldens criminals.

At the same time, the effectiveness of increased patrols should also be questioned. As a report published in this daily a month after the February 17 robbery revealed, the highway police lack adequate logistical support and modern, technology-driven policing systems. Are there enough CCTV cameras installed along highways? Are there properly staffed control rooms to monitor vehicle movement? Are officials capable of identifying erratic or off-route bus movement? The answers are not hard to guess.

Therefore, to prevent such attacks, the government must not only increase police presence but also work with stakeholders, especially transport owners' associations, to find sustainable solutions to highway robberies and ensure that long-distance travel is safe, particularly for women. With Eid-ul-Azha only about two weeks away, it must act fast. During such festivals, many unauthorised buses operate on long routes to meet heightened transport demand, increasing chances of untoward incidents. So, such operations must be strictly monitored and brought under control. Whether by road or river, long-distance journeys must be safe for all.

We must save the youth from losing their way



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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has repeatedly emphasised the importance of youth and their potential to drive positive change. He believes that young people are passionate about building a better world and should be central to strategies for addressing global challenges. Today, Bangladesh stands at the edge of a demographic paradox. With over 27.96 percent of its population aged between 15 and 29 years, the nation ought to be thriving on youthful energy, innovation and resilience. Yet, beneath the surface of this demographic dividend lies a troubling reality: a growing crisis of ethics and civic responsibility among a section of our younger generation. The signs are all around us.

The rise in drug addiction is perhaps one of the most alarming aspects of this crisis. According to the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), around 75 lakh people in the country are addicted to drugs, with approximately 80 percent of them aged between 15 and 30. In recent years, law enforcement agencies have seized drugs such as cocaine, LSD, crystal meth (ice), yaba, heroin, phensedyl, cannabis, and injectable substances like buprenorphine, etc. A survey on street children conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), in collaboration with UNICEF, found that over 34 lakh homeless children were without parental care. In another research, the DNC estimated that 58 percent of the street

children use one or another type of drug, and 21 percent are being used as drug carriers.

Another worrying issue is the growing lack of respect for law and order. More and more young people are taking the law in their own hands, using violence to punish others. There have been several media reports of young individuals harassing or attacking people in public over matters like clothing or personal relationships. Young girls have been targeted in public places, their attackers often claiming to be defending "cultural values." One



We owe it to our youth to provide them with support and guidance so they can grow up to become citizens with high moral standards, empathy, and a strong sense of civic responsibility.

SOURCE: FREEPIK

shocking example took place on May 9, 2025, when a video that went viral on social media showed a youth beating two underage girls with a belt to "discipline" them, on a launch docked at the Munshiganj launch terminal. Even more alarming was that around 50-60 men stood by, filming the incident and even cheering for the youth. Such actions not only endanger public safety but also weaken the rule of law and damage the social fabric.

Unemployment and economic uncertainty are also major causes of frustration among the youth. At present, Bangladesh has about 26 lakh unemployed people, with 83 percent of them aged 15-29. Some experts believe they are contributing to the rise of teenage gangs, often involved

Economic Forum found a staggering 82 percent of young people aged 15-29 having no intention of living in Bangladesh. Undoubtedly, it is the utter failure of our political leadership that it has created a sense of disillusionment and disengagement among our young people.

Education, which should be the foundation for moral development, has also failed in its duty to instil ethical principles in the younger generation. Although literacy rates have improved, our education system does not effectively promote critical thinking, compassion, or civic responsibility. Schools and universities have, in many cases, become platforms for political indoctrination rather than spaces for moral growth. Public universities

are frequently dominated by student organisations aligned with political parties. These groups, often backed by institutional powers, operate with impunity, suppressing academic freedom and fostering a culture of fear, bullying, and violence. Political activism, once considered noble, has become a tool for intimidation, power, and control.

One of the most consequential changes, particularly in recent decades, is the deterioration in the bond between parents and children. In the rush to make a living, many parents are unable to provide their children with adequate emotional support or guidance. Instead of spending time with their children, they offer gadgets and unlimited freedom. As a result, many children grow up knowing how to use a smartphone or computer, but not how to care for others or show kindness. They are growing up with weak parental attachments.

We must acknowledge the severity of the situation. The problem is not simply that young people are losing their way. They are being let down, by political leaders who exploit their frustrations, by schools that fail to nurture their conscience, by families too overwhelmed to connect, and by media that misguides more than it mentors. The path to recovery requires a bold and coordinated national response. Families must reclaim their role as emotional anchors, not merely as providers. Schools must embed moral education at their core, teaching respect, responsibility, and empathy as essential life skills. Political leaders must stop exploiting the youth for short-term gains and instead involve them meaningfully in democratic processes through dialogue, policymaking, innovation, and volunteering.

Law enforcement agencies must operate with fairness and impartiality, free from political interference. Crimes such as gender-based violence, gang activity, and online abuse must be addressed promptly and transparently. No cultural or political justification should be allowed to shield wrongdoers. Media platforms—both traditional and digital—have a pivotal role in reshaping youth aspirations. Rather than sensationalising violence and rebellion, they must spotlight role models who embody ethics, service, and integrity.

Nelson Mandela once said, "Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation." Bangladesh cannot afford this erosion. If we continue to neglect the moral and emotional nourishment of our young generation, we may end up with a socially bankrupt nation.

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Education in a world of AI



EDUCATING EDUCATION

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"Don't use Google"—that was the warning in our time. When the internet was just beginning to spread its wings, teachers feared this new tool would lure us away from books and "real" learning. Ours was perhaps the last generation to straddle two eras: the analogue world of TV guides in newspapers and the digital age of streaming and smartphones.

Today, the fear isn't about Google anymore. It's about AI, digital classrooms, and how technology is reshaping education. What is the future of learning in a world where AI evolves rapidly and knowledge is freely available online? Can digital education replace classrooms, or should it only support them?

When it comes to education, we need clear guidelines to navigate these uncharted waters. Tools like ChatGPT offer possibilities, but we must decide how—and how much—to rely on them. Especially for children, we must distinguish what helps from what could harm. For students' sake, we must learn how to control technology, not let it control us.

For countries like ours, the digital divide is real. It's never just about

buying tablets for online classes. We must think about every child—the one in a remote village, in a slum, and in a Dhaka apartment. If we are serious about equity, we must ask: is this the time to prioritise digital education? Is EdTech truly the best solution to deepening educational inequality?

The truth is, we don't know yet. But we must not ignore the reality of AI and EdTech entering our teaching-learning spaces. Students will use AI; teachers will, too. How do we ensure that we become more productive, creative, and efficient with AI, rather than lazier, more corrupt, and quick to cut corners?

Soon, every educational institution will need AI experts, just as they need mental health professionals. We must consider AI training to inform us of the pros and cons in our educational and daily lives. We also need to listen to scholars studying AI and EdTech—like the stimulating work being done by Global South researchers on what it means to decolonise our thinking and perceptions in the age of AI, with all its embedded biases.

Let's be honest. AI does hold potential—if used wisely. One powerful

promise of AI is its ability to level the playing field. In a deeply unequal society, AI tools can offer students from less privileged backgrounds access to explanations, resources, and support they wouldn't otherwise get. A student in a rural school can now ask questions, practise problems, and receive feedback—all for free. AI won't erase inequality, but it can offer

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opportunity based on curiosity and ability, not just privilege.

Still, we must brace ourselves. AI in the hands of someone unable to think critically is like handing a sharp knife to an unknowing child. And teaching someone to think critically isn't just about teaching someone new tricks—it's about helping them lead more meaningful lives.

The reality is that education is more than content delivery. A strong system must also be engaging. The

popularity of digital platforms among students reflects real gaps in our traditional classrooms: gaps in excitement, motivation, and relevance. Until students enjoy learning and want to go to school—not just have to—we can't blame them for turning to the internet for what schools fail to provide. Yet, no matter how good online material is, education is more than learning facts. A classroom offers discussion, debate, and interaction, not just with teachers but with peers. A 10-minute video might teach you something. But it's not the same as being in a classroom.

With AI already popular and accessible, it's time to stop being in denial and accept that it's naive to say, "Don't use AI" and expect to be obeyed. If we embrace AI wisely—with rules, access, equity, and intention—we can harness its strengths without losing the essence of what education really is. In this new world, our challenge is not to resist change, but to shape it. To ask the right questions. To pause before we leap. To make sure that, in fixing education, we don't forget its purpose. Let's not forget that education is not just about what we learn; it's also about how we learn, whom we learn with, and the journey it takes us on.

The key is to stay critical and vigilant, but also realistic. We couldn't stop the internet from taking over our lives, and we won't stop AI either. The challenge is to figure out how to co-exist—and how to use these new tools for better, not worse. Learning where to draw the line remains the greatest lesson.