

Govt must stop abuse of justice system

Dubious cases keep eroding police, judicial credibility

It is deeply regrettable that even now—nearly 10 months since the August 5 political changeover—dubious cases filed in connection with the atrocities committed during the July uprising continue to make a mockery of our justice system. The latest victim to face the guillotine of such a case is Dr Anowara Begum, a retired professor of Jagannath University and a freedom fighter. Reportedly, Anowara was sent to jail by a Dhaka court on Thursday, following her arrest the previous day. She, along with 192 others, faces the charge of attempted murder in a case filed by former JnU Chhatra Dal General Secretary Sujon Molla, who was injured during clashes in July. Filed about seven months after the incident, the case naturally raises questions not only about the motive behind its lodging but also the lack of evidence linking the accused to the alleged crime.

In fact, all such cases can be distinguished by their mass listing of accused and the incredulous nature of the allegations themselves. And as we have argued before, the lumping together of those who aided or committed the July atrocities and those who merely extended moral support to the Awami League regime is not just legally tenuous; it also opens the door to exploitation, complicates the trial process, and invites question marks over the outcome of ongoing trials. The implication of Anowara, who has no known history of violent activism, further reeks of personal/political vendetta as evidenced by the list of the accused, which includes, among others, 10 teachers and five officials from JnU itself. Only fair investigations may reveal whether their selection was random or carefully orchestrated to settle old scores.

The question is, why do police keep accepting or acting on cases that clearly exhibit such red flags? We understand that the current process for filing cases does not require officers to verify claims at the outset, allowing anyone to lodge complaints. But officers were instructed not to arrest innocent individuals implicated in such cases. Why, then, did they arrest a 69-year-old retiree who could not possibly have been involved in the crime she's accused for? Why did the investigation officer demand in court that she be denied bail? Why did the magistrate concerned accept it and send her to Kashimpur? Why could the home or law ministry not intervene over the two days when this saga played out? We cannot just blame the justice system or those filing dubious and retaliatory cases if those involved in the system itself keep failing to do their jobs properly.

We talk about these failures mostly when people of some repute are implicated in dubious cases, but what about the many ordinary citizens and professionals whose lives are being disrupted? All the talk of police and judicial reforms would be meaningless if such injustices are allowed to persist unchecked. Reforms must begin with mechanisms to prevent the misuse of legal provisions, ensure accountability of law enforcement and court officers, and guarantee that no citizen is denied justice or protection from legal harassment. The interim government can no longer look the other way.

Hospitals need doctors, not just beds

Long-vacant posts at Barguna hospital exposing healthcare failures

As in many other sectors in Bangladesh, it often takes little time to undertake projects to build or expand infrastructure in the health sector, but properly staffing these facilities can take years, sometimes even a decade or so. The Barguna General Hospital, upgraded from a 100-bed to a 250-bed facility in 2013, has been suffering from this ailment—a chronic manpower shortage lasting 12 years.

According to a report, nearly half of the 233 sanctioned posts at the hospital—including doctors, consultants, nurses, medical officers, and mortuary staff—remain vacant. Most of the unfilled positions are among medical officers, doctors, and senior consultants. Alarming, there is only one senior consultant—an anaesthesiologist—despite there being 10 sanctioned posts. This means departments such as cardiology, orthopaedics, gynaecology, medicine, paediatrics, pathology, surgery, ENT, and ophthalmology have no senior consultants. Ironically, patients usually require a specialist's consultation for issues involving the heart, bones, reproductive health, and other critical areas before they ever need an anaesthesiologist.

There is also a dire shortage of medical officers (with 22 out of 29 positions vacant) and doctors (with 39 out of 55 vacant). Even basic medical consultation has become difficult to obtain, and patients are frequently referred to hospitals in Barishal or Dhaka. What, then, is the point of expanding a hospital if it cannot serve the local community? We have consistently emphasised the importance of decentralising healthcare to make it more accessible and affordable. But how can this be achieved in the absence of sufficient recruitments, or when medical professionals avoid serving in towns and rural areas? While it is true that such locations often lack the amenities found in major cities, these areas will never develop if essential public services, like healthcare, are not provided. The lack of access to proper, timely care often pushes patients towards private clinics, where they must pay exorbitant fees.

Bangladesh already has one of the lowest doctor-to-patient ratios in South Asia, and the uneven distribution of medical professionals worsens the situation for those living outside cities. The health sector also suffers from chronic underfunding and underutilisation of allocated resources. Against this backdrop, the need for a comprehensive overhaul of public healthcare cannot be stressed enough. Achieving this will require more than just government policy or political will; it demands the sincerity and commitment of medical professionals, too. Those who take the Hippocratic Oath must also rise to the occasion.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Netanyahu elected as Israel's PM

On this day in 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres was narrowly defeated in national elections by Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Peres, leader of the Labor Party, became prime minister after Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing Jewish extremist.



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The fourth chapter of the report by the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC), constituted by the interim government, offers crucial recommendations on reforming the behaviour and mindset of public service holders. The commission underscores that to help achieve the government's policy goals and uphold democratic values at the same time, a set of core professional values must be instilled in civil servants. To this end, it recommends the formulation of a Civil Service Code incorporating these values. The proposed values include: people-centric attitude, accountability, transparency, integrity, leadership and innovation, equity, and professionalism.

It remains unclear whether the interim government is in the process of formulating a Civil Service Code based on these recommendations. However, it recently amended the Public Service Act, 2018 and issued the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, which emphasises ensuring the subordination of government employees. This amendment is not in line with the original vision of PARC, because while the commission emphasised accountability and transparency, the new ordinance defines a vague and undefined concept—"insubordination"—as a punishable offence.

Under a new provision concerning misconduct and disciplinary measures, the 2025 ordinance stipulates that any act of insubordination, incitement of insubordination among peers, disruption of discipline, or obstruction of official duties by a civil servant will be deemed as misconduct, punishable by demotion, dismissal or termination. Government employees fear that this ordinance will force them to follow unfair orders from their superiors in the office. If they don't, they will risk losing their jobs. They have launched a movement against this ordinance.

There are laws and regulations already in existence that provide sufficient grounds to penalise insubordination, corruption or negligence. The problem here is the slow, improper, and inadequate implementation of these laws and regulations. It is unclear what role the promulgation of a new ordinance, with provisions for punishment for vaguely defined "insubordination," will play in resolving this issue. It is necessary to ensure transparency and accountability among government employees and to make them provide public services promptly, without bribery and corruption. It is not clear why it is necessary to ensure blind obedience in this case. PARC has made

many important recommendations to eliminate irregularities, corruption, and negligence among government employees, but I have not seen any recommendation to enact a law to terminate employees from their jobs for insubordination.

According to the Government Employee (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 2018, misconduct is one of the grounds for which serious punishment can be given to government employees, ranging from temporary suspension to dismissal from service. This rule also clearly explains what is meant by "misconduct": i) disobedience of lawful orders by superiors; ii) negligence of duty; iii) ignoring government orders, circulars or directives without a lawful



Employees from various ministries and departments have been staging a demonstration inside the Secretariat premises for several days in protest of the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

reason; iv) filing frivolous, baseless or false complaints against other employees; and v) any action defined as misconduct under any other existing laws or rules.

Importantly, the rules only penalise disobedience of lawful orders, not any order. In contrast, the new ordinance criminalises "insubordination" without clarifying what it entails. Insubordination to whom: the government, the state, or one's superior officer?

This opens the door to abuse, where senior officials or political authorities might compel subordinates to act unlawfully under the threat of punishment for insubordination. Conversely, public servants could also use this clause as a shield to justify illegal actions—such as electoral fraud—by claiming they were merely being "loyal."

Under the Government Employee (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 2018, as misconduct is defined as "disobedience of lawful orders by superiors," such justifications would not hold.

Another concerning aspect of the new ordinance is the disciplinary procedure it outlines. Under the existing rules, punishment follows a multi-step process with proper safeguards: (in order) i) framing of charges; ii) show-cause notice; iii) reply; iv) hearing; v) formation of an inquiry committee; vi) inquiry findings; vii) another show-cause notice based on the findings; viii) consultation with the Public Service Commission; and ix) final decision.

The new ordinance trims down this process to (in order): i) framing of charges; ii) show-cause notice; iii) reply; iv) hearing; v) show-cause based on the hearing; and vi) final decision.

There is no provision for an investigation or mandatory consultation with the Public Service Commission. While excluding the latter may help expedite cases, the elimination of investigation into the charges is troubling. It creates a risk of politically motivated or personal vendetta-

introducing online service tracking systems; simplifying service processes; adopting token-based systems; enforcing service delivery timelines; and evaluating the performance or failure in delivering services.

The commission also recommends establishing an institutional grievance redress system in all ministries and departments, following the formation of the ombudsman's office. Community-based feedback collection systems could help assess public satisfaction and improve responsiveness. Citizens wronged by service failure should be entitled to compensation.

To evaluate government officials' effectiveness, PARC calls for the introduction of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and a new Annual Performance Evaluation (APE) system to replace the outdated Annual Confidential Report (ACR). Officials would submit Annual Work Plans (AWPs), and evaluations would be conducted at the year's end through a discussion with superiors. Employees' performance can be evaluated in four categories: unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, and excellent. Financial benefits, training, and other amenities may be provided to the employees based on their performance.

To ensure neutrality of public administration, the reform commission also recommends abolishing the practice of seeking political background information for promotions, and limiting police checks to verifying pending criminal charges only during recruitment. It proposes banning civil servants from attending political programmes, restricting appointments of private secretaries from outside the civil service, setting clear boundaries for political intervention in administrative decisions, and prohibiting changes to official decisions without written instructions.

Over the past five decades, Bangladesh has seen 26 commissions and committees for public administration reform (Public Administration Reform Commission Report, January 2025, Pg 2). But they were not fully implemented and sustained for two main reasons. First, the political leadership did not accept all the recommendations, neither were they sincere or determined to implement the recommendations they did accept. Second, the concerned bureaucrats did not cooperate in their implementation due to conflict of interest.

To avoid repeating this cycle, the government must act with conviction and foresight. Hastily issuing flawed and undemocratic ordinances could backfire, inviting criticism and eventual retraction under pressure. Broad consultation with political parties, civil society, and stakeholders is essential to build consensus and ensure the sustainability of meaningful reforms.

Bangladesh needs a bureaucracy that serves its citizens with professionalism and integrity, not one driven by blind obedience. Real reform lies not in enforcing subordination, but in ensuring proper service.

A dangerous surrender



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SUBRATA ROY

commissioner's office and issued a 48-hour ultimatum for her removal.

The very next day, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education officially transferred Yeasmin. Local Hefazat officials expressed satisfaction with the move.

This series of unnerving developments brings a handful of disturbing questions to mind. Do the threats of pressure groups still wield the power to manipulate authority? Should any educator, writer, artist, rights defender, or journalist who dares think critically and voice their opinion be wary of such treatment? Does it make sense for their career, dignity, and safety to hinge on the whims of hardliners?

This is not just a transfer order. It's a dangerous surrender. With this, the government has legitimised an extrajudicial demand. By reacting to this demand without an investigation or giving the teacher a chance to defend herself, the state has undermined its own institutions and authority. Speaking to Prothom Alo, Yeasmin said, "From the very beginning, Nari Angan has operated with sensitivity to religion, society, and the times we live in. We

have never considered ourselves above accountability. Given the accusations raised, we feel it is important to clarify our stance. Nari Angan believes—as do I—that when the public demands accountability from a person or organisation, it often stems from a place of expectation and hope, not hostility.

"If anyone had approached us with a spirit of dialogue and cooperation before things escalated, we would have gladly engaged in conversation. Even now, I truly believe the entire situation has arisen from a misunderstanding. We see no one—certainly not religion—as our adversary."

Yeasmin was involved in last year's July uprising, standing with students against injustice, just as teachers before her did during the Language Movement, the Liberation War, and countless other struggles that shaped Bangladesh's democratic aspirations.

It's no wonder her sudden transfer has sparked outrage online and triggered a conversation about the shrinking space for women's freedom of speech in Bangladesh. Samantha Sharmin, senior joint convener of the National Citizen Party (NCP), said, "I strongly protest the decision to transfer Nadira Yeasmin by surrendering to mob violence. This decision should be reversed immediately." Social media group Bangladesh Feminist Archives condemned the government's move, saying it went against the values of democracy and principles of free speech. "Nadira Yeasmin committed no crime. She simply voiced an opinion in a public debate. Even if her position were

controversial, she had every right to express it," the group said. "The state's duty was to protect her, not surrender to mob pressure." Academic Tanveer Hossain Anoy warned that "what begins as a protest against one woman's voice ends as a warning to every woman who dares to speak."

Nadira Yeasmins are the moral and intellectual backbone of a nation. They educate, challenge, and inspire the next generation. They are a voice for progress. When the government gives in to extremist pressure, it silences progressive voices—like teachers, activists, and critical thinkers. Soon, fear takes over open discussions, and democratic values start to crumble. The government's role is not to appease such threats but to uphold justice, just as the role of educators is not to parrot conformity but to provoke thought and lead society.

Promoting equal rights isn't just about fairness—it's a strategic necessity in an interconnected world. A country that empowers both men and women thrives politically, economically, and socially.

The future of this country depends on how we respond to this moment. Will we defend our teachers and thinkers? Or will we allow mob pressure to write the rules of our republic?

The government should reverse this transfer—if only to show the courage to stand with its teachers, not against them. Because a nation that silences its educators is a nation that jeopardises its future.