

## KUET crisis is turning into a farce

### Govt, teachers must help resolve it urgently

It is quite shocking that the KUET stalemate has now dragged on for an unprecedented five months. With each passing day, this crisis is becoming more farcical, more frustrating, and more detrimental—not just to the students but also to the entire university ecosystem. And the longer it lasts, the more difficult it will be to repair the damage caused. On Wednesday, organisers of a human chain protest comprising teachers, students, and guardians demanded the immediate appointment of a VC and resumption of academic activities. On Tuesday, the KUET Guardian Forum submitted a memorandum to the education adviser, highlighting the toll of prolonged academic closures and worsening session backlogs on students. The students, they warned, are falling behind their peers from other universities, many of whom have progressed through sessions, graduated, or even entered the job market.

The interests of students and teachers seem aligned for now, but that may be temporary. Teachers have made the appointment of a VC a precondition for resuming classes, while students simply want classes to resume regardless of who holds the post. This subtle difference also underscores the evolving development since February 18, when the crisis first started, with two student groups clashing over the issue of on-campus student politics. As we know, following that violence, students demanded the resignation of the then VC and pro-VC. Prolonged protests, including a hunger strike, eventually led to their removal. But although a new VC was appointed on May 1, he resigned on May 22, citing pressure and a lack of support from the KUET Teachers' Association. Despite a directive from the education ministry to resume academic activities from May 4, the association has continued to boycott all academic and administrative activities citing grievances forged during student protests.

So, while there is no alternative to the swift appointment of a VC, questions remain not just over how long another VC will last, when appointed, but also whether it will help put the accumulated distrust between different stakeholders to bed. This only goes to show how tumultuous the environment in public universities has become since the July uprising—the effects of which have been frequently on display. And as always, it is the ordinary students who have suffered the most. At KUET, the protracted stalemate has also meant that teachers, officers, and staff members have not received salaries in the past two months, as per a report. Besides, as we have previously highlighted, other administrative and financial functions have remained similarly suspended because of the absence of a VC, whose signature is mandatory for official transactions.

Teachers, therefore, must bear an additional responsibility for the turnaround in the KUET stalemate, especially its damaging perpetuation. While some of their grievances are justified—and we agree that academic activities cannot resume properly without a VC—they must be flexible and resume classes on their own given the threat to the academic future of 7,565 students. The government, on the other hand, must immediately appoint a VC and address other underlying issues.

## Why can't we contain dengue?

### Govt must make all-out efforts to control spread in August

With every passing day, the dengue situation is getting worse in the country. As of July 23, the total number of cases rose to 18,000 while 65 people died from the disease this year. Public health experts have warned that the situation may become severe in the August-September period due to the ongoing rainfall patterns, which are creating ideal conditions for Aedes mosquitoes' breeding. Although the two city authorities of Dhaka claim that they have undertaken year-round mosquito eradication efforts as well as several other initiatives, experts have criticised them as being inadequate. The question is: why do we continue to fail in controlling dengue? Have the relevant authorities taken the right approach to tackle this persistent crisis?

Entomologists have repeatedly said that our approach is flawed as combining mosquito control with dengue control is not the way to go. If we try to control dengue by targeting Culex mosquitoes, it will never work. Culex mosquitoes breed in drains, sewers, ditches, and stagnant dirty water, and those who spray insecticides focus on these areas. But the breeding rate of Aedes mosquitoes in such places is extremely low. Aedes mosquitoes tend to breed in residential areas, office premises, and spots where water collects, such as construction sites and building basements. Unfortunately, mosquito control teams often struggle to access these locations, leaving many breeding zones untouched. To tackle this, health and city authorities must make more targeted interventions. Experts have also suggested prioritising larviciding and elimination of breeding sources over widespread fogging, since fogging has largely proven ineffective.

They have also suggested that the two city corporations should undertake door-to-door operations in areas with high dengue incidence. This should involve inspecting every household to identify and eliminate Aedes breeding sites, applying larvicide where necessary. If Aedes larvae are found in a residence on the first and second inspections, a warning should be issued; however, from the third occurrence onwards, penalties must be enforced. Active participation from local residents is essential to succeed in these efforts.

We also need a comprehensive, year-round strategy including eliminating breeding sources, destroying larvae, managing hotspot areas, and ensuring community involvement at every stage of the effort. As dengue has spread to all the districts this year, special attention must be given to regions outside Dhaka, not only to contain the outbreak but also to ensure that health complexes and hospitals are adequately equipped to treat patients. The continuing loss of lives from this disease is simply unacceptable.

# Questions over Gopalganj violence deserve answers



Sabir Mustafa is former head of BBC Bangla service, and former managing editor of VOA Bangla.

SABIR MUSTAFA

Bangladesh has been in a state of flux ever since a mass uprising toppled former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League (AL) government on August 5 last year. But even for these uncertain times, the violence and killings in Gopalganj on July 16 have taken on a different, more sinister significance.

On the face of it, the violence appeared to be an outcome of old-fashioned muscle-flexing by two political parties: the newly-formed National Citizen Party (NCP), and one of the oldest parties in the country, AL. They squared off in a confrontation that was as predictable as tomorrow's sunrise.

Such clashes are nothing new in Bangladesh. Since 1991 in particular, the AL, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jamat-e-Islami have regularly battled it out in the streets, with the police usually intervening on the side of the party that was in power at the time.

From 2013 onwards, however, the intent of anti-government protesters appeared to become more deadly, while the police response degenerated into outright brutality.

The incident in Gopalganj appeared to incorporate all the dark elements of Bangladeshi political culture, while the response of law enforcers quickly moved from "proportionate" to the lethal and brutal, leaving at least five local men dead.

In a society still reeling from the trauma of the killings of last July-August, one would have expected the death of five people in firing by security forces to compel the government to set up an independent enquiry. But what happened was almost a replay of an old drama, where new actors read off an old script.

The interim government's statement on the day failed to even acknowledge that five of its citizens had been shot dead, almost certainly by the security forces. The statement was more concerned with apportioning blame on the supporters of the AL, while praising the law enforcers and the NCP for their role.

The government then followed it up by setting up an official enquiry committee, headed by a top bureaucrat in the Ministry of Home Affairs. The call for an independent enquiry by human rights groups such as the Ain o Salish Kendra went unheeded.

Police acted as if time had stood still: it filed four murder cases where 5,400 nameless/unknown people were shown as the accused. Under cover of curfew, security forces rounded up several hundred suspected AL activists in rural areas of Gopalganj district.

Police actions seem designed to strike fear into people of the area, rather than ascertain the causes of the violence. All this harks back to the days of Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian rule, and not the bright new dawn promised by the victors of the 2024 uprising.



Army troops on guard during a curfew in Gopalganj town's launch terminal area on July 17, 2025.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

#### Original sin

When analysing incidents which escalate quickly, it is customary to search for the "original sin"—who ate the forbidden apple? In Gopalganj, the consensus appears to hold the AL and its student wing Chhatra League responsible for casting the first stone.

Constitutionally speaking, that line of argument is irrefutable. Gopalganj is an integral part of Bangladesh, and the NCP, like any other political party, has every right to hold a rally there. The AL, on the other hand, had no right to attack the rally and chase the NCP leaders out of town.

The local police also had a duty to protect the rally venue and participants, not just because the current government is apparently biased towards the NCP (whose leaders have been described by the

chief adviser as "our employers") but because the party was exercising their constitutional right.

However, in a fragile and fledgling democracy like Bangladesh, politics is not conducted purely on constitutional or legal grounds. There is such a thing as "common sense," and that is often used to arrive at a judgement on what is possible. The constitution does make allowance for such complicated scenarios by adding a little caveat, "with reasonable restrictions," to every fundamental right.

#### Mission of conquest

The home affairs adviser told the media that he had "intelligence reports" about possible trouble in Gopalganj during NCP's programme. But he said he did not know the magnitude of the trouble. This sounds rather pathetic for two reasons.

Firstly, anyone who follows political banter on social media would have known there would be big trouble in

Gopalganj. The NCP's programme in that particular district was not just a walking tour. It was billed by its top leaders as "March to Gopalganj."

They posted cards on their respective Facebook pages making the announcement, almost as if they were embarking on a mission of conquest. The date chosen for the Gopalganj adventure—first anniversary of Abu Sayed's death—was probably not a coincidence.

There were a series of statements by people associated with NCP which saw the march as an occasion to declare the death of "Mujibism" and the end of Mujib's legacy right on the soil of Gopalganj.

Given the triumphalist drumbeat from the NCP, it is most unlikely that the supporters of the AL would have seen the planned march as a mere

exercise of constitutional rights. Having seen the destruction of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhaka on February 5, it is quite possible that they feared the NCP would try to demolish Mujib's tomb as well.

Secondly, given the nature of intelligence gathering in Bangladesh, with security agencies having access to technology that allows them to snoop on people's mobile phones and web-based conversations without needing court orders, it is inconceivable that they would not have known how the NCP's programme in Gopalganj was viewed by AL supporters and what kind of disruption they were planning.

#### Army's 'self-defence'

All this should have raised the alarm bells in the home ministry, and appropriate measures should have been taken to prevent violence. The measures could have included attempts to persuade the NCP to refrain from the march or at least tone down the rhetoric.

The failure to anticipate the violence and then allow the security forces to shoot their own citizens puts a major black mark on the already-questionable report card of the interim regime.

The army has already taken a step towards accountability, by admitting they "used force," even though they wrapped it within a "self-defence" justification. It is worth noting that the army statement did not mention any use of fire arms by what they termed "unruly people."

Live broadcast on TV showed soldiers firing from their assault rifles. Clips of the video circulated on various social media platforms, which probably made it impossible for the army to deny they opened fire.

The big question now is whether the victims of the violence will see justice.

The immediate call from the government and various political parties is for the arrest and prosecution of AL supporters who attacked the NCP rally. If such prosecutions are followed up with action against the mob violence that has been going on across the country with impunity since last August, then most people would heave a sigh of relief. Otherwise, it would be seen as yet another case of "selective justice."

How the government may deal with the question of accountability for the death of five citizens is an even bigger question. Would the official enquiry committee be able to probe outside the parameters set by the government through its statement, where no mention was made of the death of its citizens? Would they be able to hold army officers accountable for the loss of lives? Without an independent investigation, that would seem most unlikely.

# Why Bangladesh needs de-Awamification



Dr Sibbir Ahmad is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Virginia and president of Sochchar Torture Watchdog Bangladesh. He can be reached at sibbirahmad520@gmail.com.

SIBBIR AHMAD

When fascism falls, its institutions may crumble, but its ghosts linger. Bangladesh, after the end of Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime, faces not only the challenge of rebuilding democratic structures but also of purging a toxic political culture—a process I call "de-Awamification," borrowing from the post-World War II "de-Nazification" of Germany.

For over a decade, Bangladesh has lived under an increasingly authoritarian system where fascist slogans, intimidation tactics, and ideological absolutism were normalised, especially through cultural tools like slogans. These slogans, often chanted at political rallies, became expressions of deep intolerance and were used to dehumanise dissenters. "X-er chamra tule nebo amra" (We will skin them alive), "X-er Banglay, Y-er thai nai" (In X's Bangladesh, there's no room for Y), or the chilling "Jalo re jalo, agun jalo" (Light the fire, burn it all),

"Ei muhurte Bangla char" (Leave Bangla right now), "Dhoira dhoira jobai kor" (Catch and slaughter one by one); these are not mere words. They are weapons, as dangerous as batons and bullets, used to shape a political environment rooted in fear, violence, and exclusion.

This culture did not end with the fall of the regime. Alarming, some groups who opposed the fascist state have now adopted the very language of their oppressors. Mobs calling for the "slaughter" of political rivals, or threatening to banish ideological opponents from the country, mirror the same authoritarian mindset they once resisted. This is not democratisation; this is replication.

The idea of de-Awamification is not about banning a party or erasing a political identity. It is about dismantling the fascist cultural apparatus that the Awami League normalised, starting with the language of violence. Like Germany's

post-Nazi transition, this requires a conscious, state-led programme of re-education. After 1945, Germany banned Nazi symbols, outlawed hate slogans, and initiated civic education programmes to teach democratic values. Bangladesh must follow suit.

Some might argue that slogans are just rhetoric, exaggerated for effect. But social psychology research tells

**The idea of de-Awamification is not about banning a party or erasing a political identity. It is about dismantling the fascist cultural apparatus that the Awami League normalised, starting with the language of violence. Like Germany's post-Nazi transition, this requires a conscious, state-led programme of re-education.**

a different story. Repeated exposure to hate speech and violent rhetoric desensitise individuals, embed extremism in public discourse, and even manifest in physical and psychological harm. Studies show

that hate slogans can increase aggression, anxiety, blood pressure, and ultimately fracture the very social fabric of a nation.

Moreover, such slogans sabotage any attempt at pluralism. They make politics a zero-sum game, in which there is no room for coexistence—only conquest. In such an ecosystem, the judiciary becomes irrelevant, public trust collapses, and political competition devolves into tribal warfare.

What Bangladesh needs now is a cultural detox. The media, political parties, educational institutions, and civil society must lead this transformation. Banning violent slogans should be a starting point, not an end. Schools should teach the importance of dissent and democratic values. Political leaders must publicly commit to non-violent language, and party training materials must include modules on ethical campaigning and speech.

Let us be clear: the fall of fascism does not automatically bring democracy. To build a truly pluralistic Bangladesh, we must not only remove the autocrats from power; we must remove the autocrat from within us.

De-Awamification is the moral and cultural surgery needed to excise fascism's remains from our language, our politics, and our minds. Only then can we begin the work of healing and rebuilding.