

## Banning hall politics may not be the answer

Ensure healthy student politics and nonpartisan administration

The sudden decision by Dhaka University to uphold a ban on all forms of student politics within the residential halls—as declared by its proctor in the early hours of Saturday—reflects the tendency of knee-jerk reactions by university authorities whenever a crisis emerges, rather than a willingness to find solutions through dialogue. Reportedly, students began protesting after the announcement of hall committees by the DU Jatiotabadi Chatra Dal (JCD) convening body. They rejected the vice-chancellor's call to initiate discussions with student organisations to reach a consensus on hall politics, and continued their protests. This prompted the proctor to announce that all types of hall politics would be banned.

The protests are understandable, given the terrifying legacy of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and other ruling party wings before it, which carried out all kinds of abuses in the halls in the name of politics. After the BCL's violent attack on the quota reform protesters on July 15, 2024 and the subsequent protests in the halls, the administration had declared a ban on all politics in the halls on July 17, 2024. The demands of student protesters to remove hall-based domination were valid. At present, no one wants a revival of the past, when students were coerced into joining BCL and punished if they refused to comply with the student wing's leaders.

But the current administration's buckling under late-night protests without involving stakeholders will not yield long-term solutions. It is also baffling how a ban on "covert" political activities can be enforced. As some student leaders have noted, banning visible, declared student groups will allow certain factions operating under a façade of neutrality to gain an unfair advantage, undermining the level playing field ahead of DUCSU elections. It may also result in a return to the old tradition of hall domination by a particular group.

The goal should not be to ban politics on campus, but to ensure that it fosters democratic practices and values among students. Student politics is an enduring reality of our campuses. Historically, student movements have played critical roles in social and political change, including the July uprising of 2024 which was led by students. We must ensure that student political groups serve the interests of all students, not just their own cliques. These groups must be held to clear standards with zero tolerance for violence, intimidation, control of the halls, or undue influence over university affairs. The university authorities should create a forum where student organisations, general students, legal experts, and officials can collectively decide how politics should function on campus.

Most importantly, the university administration must be committed to being strong, independent, and free from any kind of political bias. Only then can student politics be healthy and free from the toxicity of the past.

## Ensure gender equality in sports

BCB and CWAB's neglect towards women cricketers unacceptable

We are frustrated to learn of the neglect faced by our women cricketers at the hands of the country's two leading cricketing bodies—the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB). Reportedly, the BCB has failed to arrange any international series for the national women's team since they qualified for the ICC Women's World Cup in April. Meanwhile, CWAB recently held several meetings ahead of its September 4 election, attended by numerous current and former male national team cricketers. There was no representation from female cricketers, however. These incidents not only highlight the lack of institutional support for women cricketers but also expose the glaring absence of female representation within these bodies.

It has also been reported that the BCB has done little to facilitate adequate practice for the women's team ahead of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup, scheduled to start next month. All it arranged were a few practice matches against the men's U-15 side at the BKSP. As a result of such neglect, the team will have to participate in the tournament without any real match practice. This is simply unacceptable. Moreover, in terms of equal pay, our women's team lags far behind their male counterparts. At a time when India, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa are offering equal match fees to male and female cricketers, a significant pay gap persists in Bangladesh.

In a recent interview with this daily, former Bangladesh team captain and all-rounder Rumana Ahmed expressed her frustration at being treated differently for being a woman and also voiced concerns over the dwindling domestic opportunities for women cricketers. Sadly, this disparity is not limited to cricket. Our women footballers also face the same inequalities. Despite having achieved far greater success than their male counterparts in recent years, they are still given far fewer opportunities and paid significantly less. Removing such inequalities is essential if our women players are to continue excelling in their respective fields.

We urge the BCB and CWAB to ensure that both the women's and men's cricket teams are treated equally in every respect. They must organise regular domestic leagues and tournaments for the women's teams and create opportunities for them to participate in international matches to foster their development. Ensuring equal pay is also crucial. Equally importantly, the voices of women players must be acknowledged and represented in all decision-making forums.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Hip-hop is born

On this day in 1973, at a back-to-school party in the Bronx in New York, US, DJ Kool Herc (Clive Campbell) introduced the technique of playing the same album on two turntables and extending the drum section; the night is widely recognised as the birth of hip-hop.

# The anatomy of post-uprising disillusionment



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When Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government finally fell on August 5, 2024, after over 15 years in power, many saw this as the end of not just a regime but also its legacy of nepotism, elite capture, and weaponisation of bureaucracy. In its place, an interim government, strengthened by student leaders and civil society figures, promised a new beginning. But now, on the first anniversary of that momentous transition, we are left to confront a dispiriting paradox: the more things seem to change, the more they seem to remain the same.

To observe this trajectory is not merely to diagnose political stagnation; it is to confront a deeper malaise that grips the postcolonial state. The Bangladeshi polity, like many postcolonial entities, remains haunted by what Partha Chatterjee termed the "derivative nature" of its politics, importing forms of democracy and revolution without addressing their foundational preconditions: ethics, justice, and institutional integrity.

Instead of dismantling the Hasina-era architecture of inequality, the uprising appears to have inherited its scaffolding. The bureaucracy, once subservient to a party machine, remains largely unchanged, save for new masters who often replicate the performative gestures of the old. The passport office is still a Kafkaesque labyrinth; BRTA still delays issuing licences; roads are still cleared for convoys of newly minted VIPs—the list goes on. The "sir" culture persists not because of policy failure, but because it is rooted in a psychology of entitlement and feudal deference cultivated over generations.

What is equally disturbing is the appropriation of the movement's moral capital by those who once fought under its banner. Many students who braved tear gas and rubber bullets in the name of justice now find themselves accused of replicating the very practices they once condemned. Extortion, influence peddling, and administrative favouritism are no longer exclusive to career politicians; they have found new agents among the revolution's own. This is what Hegel would describe as the "tragedy of history," wherein noble ideas are often corrupted by the dialectic of power.

History offers many such warnings. The Bolshevik Revolution, once heralded as the dawn of proletarian

emancipation, ossified into Stalinist terror. The post-Mubarak transition in Egypt collapsed into military authoritarianism. Even the French Revolution, perhaps the most emblematic of all, devoured its own architects in the Reign of Terror. In each case, the moral legitimacy of mass uprising was squandered by the inability—or unwillingness—of its leaders to reimagine governance



'It is time to confront a painful possibility that the July movement was not about systemic transformation, but about renegotiating power.'

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

beyond the idioms of control and domination.

The failure of Bangladesh's post-July regime lies not in its slow pace of reform—radical change is rarely instant—but in its abandonment of ethical seriousness. What was meant to be a foundational rupture has congealed into a cynical continuity. The deeper structures of clientelism, bureaucratic aloofness, or institutional dysfunction remain unmoved. July, a symbol of defiance, is now turning into a brand rather than a beacon. The very mechanisms that animated resistance—solidarity, courage, and truth-telling—have been commodified.

Perhaps nowhere is this more visible than in the movement's treatment of

women. It was women who reignited the movement on the night of July 14, 2024, when they marched from Rokeya Hall in defiance of curfews and repression. Their audacity shifted the moral centre of the uprising. And yet, a year later, discriminatory rules still bind women within university halls, harassment on the streets remains rampant, and the societal reflex to rehabilitate predators with garlands of social forgiveness is unchanged. Simone de Beauvoir once warned that no revolution is truly revolutionary unless it transforms the condition of women. In this sense, the July uprising has not merely fallen short; it has betrayed its most courageous constituency.

It would, however, be too easy, and too comforting, to lay blame solely at the feet of the new leadership.

possibility: that the July movement was never about systemic transformation, but about renegotiating power; that the anti-discrimination rhetoric was instrumental, not intrinsic; and that the struggle was less about eliminating privilege and more about redistributing it.

Still, all is not lost. The disappointment of the past year may yet serve as a crucible for a more serious reckoning. We must resist the temptation to romanticise revolutions or demonise reform. What is needed is a deep reimagining of the moral foundations of public life in Bangladesh. We must ask: What does it mean to govern ethically? What does it mean to dissent responsibly? What does it mean to rebuild institutions that serve, rather than dominate, the people?

The deeper problem is cultural and civilisational: our collective fascination with the theatre of change and our reluctance to pursue the rigours of transformation. The Bangladeshi elite, intellectual and political alike, have mastered the aesthetics of protest but remain averse to the ethics of reform. We chant slogans with lyrical passion but balk at the demands of justice when they challenge our privileges. Nor can we ignore the complicity of the populace. When civic memory is short and historical amnesia is encouraged, authoritarian residues thrive. When corruption is normalised as a tool of survival, and influence is celebrated as success, revolutions cannot endure.

It is time, then, to confront a painful

Education, too, must rise to this challenge. Universities must become sites not only of resistance but also of reflection. Students must be taught not only to demand rights but also to practise justice. We must return to the basics of civic education as a collective pursuit of wisdom, integrity, and service.

To the young who marched last July, and dreamed of a Bangladesh without discrimination, let this be a reminder: that revolutions are not events—they are obligations. Their legitimacy lies not in what they destroy, but in what they dare to create. The golden Bengal we dreamed of was never going to be inherited; it must be built, word by word, act by act, truth by truth. And that work is not yet done.

## Legal enforcement can protect our children from lead poisoning



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Widespread lead exposure continues to pose a serious but under-recognised threat to public health in Bangladesh, with devastating consequences for millions of children. Experts from icddr,b and international collaborators recently presented alarming findings regarding the extent of the crisis. Data from a 2022-2024 study in Dhaka revealed that 98 percent of children aged two to four years had blood lead levels ( BLLs) exceeding the reference threshold of 35 µg/L set by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with a median BLL of 67 µg/L. Not a single child tested had a lead-free result. These figures are not only medically concerning but also represent a national emergency requiring immediate legal, regulatory, and social attention.

Bangladesh was identified as the fourth most lead-impacted country globally by UNICEF, with 35 million children affected. The UNICEF report and icddr,b findings serve as a grim reminder that this is not merely a health issue but a rights-based crisis. Lead exposure severely impairs brain development, causing irreversible cognitive deficits,

behavioural disorders, and stunting. These effects violate the rights of children under both domestic and international legal frameworks. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Bangladesh, requires the state to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for children, including protection from environmental pollution. Similarly, Article 18(l) of the Constitution of Bangladesh obliges the state to improve public health and nutrition. The fact that lead poisoning continues to spread largely unchecked demonstrates an institutional failure to uphold these commitments.

While commendable interventions, such as reducing turmeric adulteration from 47 percent in 2019 to under one percent by 2021, have been achieved through research collaborations and actions by icddr,b and the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA), some sources of lead—cookware, cosmetics, dust, and informal industries—remain unregulated. The Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009, prohibits harmful goods and authorises penalties under Section 43. However, enforcement is weak. Agencies like

the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Department of Environment (DoE) must take responsibility for monitoring consumer safety and environmental risks to children's health.

The ongoing crisis underscores the urgent need for institutional accountability in monitoring industrial approvals and certifying product safety, including cosmetics and cookware. In the absence of science-based regulation and consistent enforcement, harmful products and practices continue to circulate, endangering public health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), lead exposure during pregnancy, which can cross the placenta and harm the fetus, poses serious intergenerational risks. Despite clear evidence of danger, polluting industries still operate near densely populated areas, exposing children to toxic fumes and dust. Coordinated regulatory action is essential to prevent long-term harm and protect the health and rights of future generations in Bangladesh.

The judiciary in Bangladesh has, in principle, recognised the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental constitutional guarantee. In the landmark case of Dr Mohiuddin Farooque v Bangladesh (1996), the Supreme Court announced that environmental degradation could amount to a violation of Article 32 of the constitution, which ensures the right to life. Later, in a writ petition, the court ordered the government to take action against harmful air pollutants,

reinforcing the legal doctrine that public health is inseparable from environmental protection. Such precedents must be invoked again to protect children from lead exposure by filing fresh public interest litigations under Article 102 of the constitution and demanding accountability from regulatory bodies.

Along with legal reform, public awareness campaigns must be dramatically scaled up. While isolated health education initiatives exist, they have not reached the scale required to change public behaviour or pressurise informal industries. Community education through schools, religious institutions, and local government bodies is crucial, especially in urban slums and industrial belts where exposure rates are highest. Parents must be informed about the risks of using lead-based cookware and cosmetics.

Addressing the lead poisoning crisis demands a coordinated national strategy that aligns with the country's constitutional duties, international human rights obligations, and established judicial interpretations. Regulatory agencies must strengthen oversight, ensure compliance, and apply penalties where necessary. At the same time, the legal community should utilise available remedies to hold negligent actors accountable. Lasting progress will require sustained legal action, active institutional responsibility, and widespread public awareness to ensure that every child grows up in a safe and healthy environment.