

Education sector still in disarray

Reforms necessary to ensure quality, end disparities

It is deeply disappointing that, even after a year in office, the interim government has failed to initiate any meaningful reforms in the education sector. Expectations were high that it would take decisive steps to improve quality and address longstanding disparities. Instead, the government has not only fallen short of those expectations but has also struggled to manage the turmoil that erupted after the fall of the Awami League government.

Over the past year, students and teachers have repeatedly taken to the streets with demands ranging from salary increases and pay scale adjustments to exam postponements and automatic promotion. Educational institutions have witnessed forced resignations of teachers, politically motivated appointments, and public humiliation of educators. These disruptions extended beyond universities, with protests erupting in numerous schools and colleges, often calling for the removal of institutional heads—exposing the administration's inability to restore order. Despite forming 11 commissions for state reform after the July uprising, the government excluded education from its reform agenda. But why has such a critical sector been so glaringly neglected?

Understandably, it is not possible to reform the entire sector in one year, but the government has failed to do even what was feasible during this period. Educationists argue that, at the very least, it could have formed a reform commission to provide the next government with a solid foundation for essential reforms, and that the ongoing disruptions should have been handled far more effectively. For instance, after the mass resignation of public university vice-chancellors, many institutions struggled to resume regular academic and administrative activities. As a result, students faced prolonged disruptions. At KUET, for example, all academic activities were suspended for over five months until a new VC was appointed late last month.

Primary, secondary, and higher secondary education has also suffered significant setbacks. A sudden return to the 2012 curriculum for classes 6 to 12 created widespread confusion. Meanwhile, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), tasked with revising 50 textbooks, missed its December 2024 deadline, delaying nationwide distribution until April 2025. Consequently, many students began the academic year without complete textbooks, further widening learning gaps. Although a consultative committee was formed for primary education, progress in implementing its recommendations has been disappointing. Additionally, the cancellation of HSC and equivalent examinations—postponed during the July mass uprising—was regarded by many as a serious misstep.

This state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. We strongly urge the government to prioritise the education sector and implement much-needed reforms. Experts have called for the formation of a specialised, non-partisan commission to stabilise the sector and draft a long-term policy roadmap to guide future administrations. This proposal deserves serious consideration. One year has already been lost to uncertainty. The government must not dilly-dally anymore.

A chilling revelation of state policing

Implement safeguards against surveillance system built by AL govt

A recent investigation by this daily into the state surveillance system built by the Awami League government has revealed disturbing details. The report outlines how the ousted regime constructed a digital infrastructure capable of tracking, monitoring, and intercepting end-to-end communication as well as targeting specific individuals. The extent to which this system was used against citizens remains unclear, however. What's more, a year after the fall of the regime, it is not clear how the system is being used at present.

According to our investigation, between 2016 and 2024, the National Telecommunication Monitoring Center (NTMC), Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), and various units of police collectively purchased surveillance equipment worth Tk 1,382 crore. These included IMSI catchers, GPS trackers, mobile and vehicle-mounted signal jammers, speaker recognition systems, and tools capable of intercepting encrypted communication and injecting spyware. Ostensibly, this massive infrastructure was built to "pinpoint targets" actively and passively threatening national security. In reality, as we saw over the years, it was also used to target individuals for dubious arrests, enforced disappearances, and even extrajudicial killings. What was supposed to protect the people ultimately became a tool of oppression against critics and political opponents.

Worse still, this level of surveillance was legally authorised. As a security expert explained to this daily, Bangladesh's surveillance system is "rooted in colonial-era laws that permit spyware use, communication interception, and broad law enforcement access without adequate safeguards." While state surveillance can be necessary to prevent crime, gather intelligence, and address threats to public safety and national security, without proper checks and balances it becomes open to abuse, serving the agendas of the ruling authorities of the day. This leads to violations of people's constitutional rights to privacy, due process, and dignity—something we saw happen repeatedly under the previous regime.

Unfortunately, although more than a year has passed since Awami League's fall, there has been no tangible action by the interim administration to neutralise or dismantle this digital policing system. There is still no clarity on whether—or how—this massive surveillance apparatus, built at the cost of crores of taxpayers' money, is being used. Establishing transparency and accountability must be a prerequisite when it comes to state surveillance. The administration must outline a clear plan to neutralise the system and restrict its use solely to matters of national security and combating serious crime.

One way to do it is to establish an independent oversight body to monitor the activities of the executive branch and the security forces, including intelligence agencies. Another is to introduce strong legal safeguards to prevent abuse of the surveillance system and curb executive overreach. Surveillance may at times be necessary, but it must never override citizens' civic and human rights.

EDITORIAL

What the Global South needs to achieve SDG goals



MACRO MIRROR

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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

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From June 30 to July 3, 2025, world delegates convened in Seville, Spain, for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) of the United Nations. For many Global South countries, the deadline to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is fast approaching, but the financing gap remains staggering—an estimated \$4 trillion every year. Seville was pitched as a moment to both inject momentum into resource flows and reshape the global financial system, making it more equitable and effective.

The meeting concluded with the Sevilla Commitment, outlining over 100 policy actions covering almost all aspects of the development finance agenda: from public and private resource mobilisation to debt relief, tax cooperation, trade, and the fight against illicit flows. Long-standing promises resurfaced, including the benchmark for wealthy countries to allocate 0.7 percent of their national income to official development assistance (ODA), with 0.15-0.20 percent earmarked for least developed countries. Donors were also urged to at least double support for domestic revenue reforms in partner countries striving to raise their tax-to-GDP ratio to 15 percent.

Developing countries, however, wanted fresh injections of public finance, concrete operational steps to expand the lending firepower of multilateral development banks (MDBs), and faster, fairer procedures for resolving debt crises. They also pressed for a more representative process to write global tax rules, as well as dependable new revenue streams through solidarity levies—a small, targeted tax on certain activities or goods, like airline tickets, collected to raise money for global causes such as development or climate action.

In some respects, the conference moved the needle. A coalition of nations, including France, Spain, Kenya, and Barbados, pledged to design

taxes on premium airline travel and private jets, with proceeds ring-fenced for climate and development. Though the measure is still at a blueprint stage, and will require legislative follow-through, it marks a shift from theory to actionable policy.

Another tangible outcome was opening the way to use Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to strengthen the capital of MDBs. Under new rules, these SDRs can be used as "hybrid capital" to increase their financial impact three

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