

## CU violence points to institutional failures

### Stern action against mob violence key to preventing such incidents

We are shocked by the recent violence that occurred near the Chittagong University (CU) campus, leaving more than 300 people injured, including CU's pro-vice-chancellor, proctorial staff, journalists, and scores of students. More than 20 students sustained serious injuries. The brutality that was on display is condemnable, but equally disturbing was the incident that triggered it—the alleged harassment and assault of a female student apparently for arriving home late.

According to media reports quoting the female student, around 11pm on Saturday, the security guard of the building where she resided allegedly assaulted her verbally and physically for returning late. She claimed that when her roommates intervened, the guard fled. Students who chased after him were then allegedly attacked by locals with brickbats. The incident occurred near CU's Gate No. 2, in Jobra village, Hathazari. As the night progressed, tensions further escalated amid counterattacks. Around 12:45am, two assistant proctors and the campus security chief attempted to reach the site, but were blocked by locals. The situation was brought under control after the army was deployed around 3:30am.

However, violence flared up again around 12:20pm on Sunday, when the pro-vice-chancellor and other university officials visited the area to mediate. A large group of agitated students followed, and locals—angered by students' earlier attacks on their homes and shops—responded with renewed violence. Law enforcement authorities then imposed Section 144 in Hathazari municipality from 3pm Sunday to 3pm Monday. All classes and exams at the university have also been suspended. As of 6pm Sunday, our correspondent reported that locals were still blocking the road from CU's Gate 2 to Hathazari, and no one had yet been arrested.

This chain of events highlights multiple institutional failures. The university administration failed to act swiftly and effectively to contain the unrest and ensure student safety. Police were reportedly late to respond, and their inaction during both the early and later stages of the violence is deeply concerning. While police have used excessive force on peaceful protests in some incidents recently, in this case they failed to even deploy basic, non-lethal riot-control tools despite the attackers' use of weapons. These issues need to be addressed.

Given the continuing threats of mob violence, with the CU incident being its latest example, we urge the interim administration to take effective steps to uphold the rule of law. Failure to do so only emboldens groups seeking to destabilise the country. We also urge a thorough investigation into what propelled the CU violence, including identification and prosecution of those involved. The authorities must ensure the safety of students both on and off campus but, equally importantly, must also look into the allegations of shops and homes being vandalised by students.

## July trials must never be compromised

### Concerns raised by ICT chief prosecutor warrant scrutiny

Given our political history, there could be some substance in the fears that a political administration may not be as unbiased in the conduct of July trials as a non-political interim government. But compromising thoroughness in favour of expedited trials is not the answer either. However, the apprehension aired at a recent event by the chief prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal—that the next government may not continue the trials or may not continue with the current prosecution team—indicates a more serious concern. If it happens, he suggested, the justice process may stall. From our vantage point, this seems a bit premature and alarmist. And for the prosecution team to be bogged down by this fear, and consequently to "rush" their work, is deeply concerning.

There are less than six months left before the planned election in February. The Election Commission has already announced a "roadmap," itemising all the preparatory steps to be taken to hold the polls in the first half of that month. But trials cannot be tied to a timeline as it may compromise them. While there is clearly public pressure to hurry the trials of the crimes committed during the July uprising as well as enforced disappearances perpetrated under the Awami League regime, it is extremely important that prosecutors remain unswayed by this so that the trials can provide the justice that both the victims and the accused deserve. Otherwise, they risk being discredited both at home and abroad.

That said, prosecutors must ensure that the process is not lengthened unnecessarily. The higher leadership, both present and upcoming, must also allow it to run its course while removing existing roadblocks, including the dubious cases that are only overwhelming those involved. The July trials, for example, have had to encounter many such cases. The chief prosecutor is right to highlight the caseload, "There are more than 1,800 cases of enforced disappearances, each with multiple layers. Is it realistically possible to investigate them all thoroughly in just a few months?" He adds, "Whoever comes to power next must understand why this process must continue. If they fail to grasp that, there could be no greater misfortune for the nation."

It is heartening to know that the government is taking steps to address some of the concerns. Speaking at the same event, the law adviser assured the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, which is coordinating with the tribunal on such cases, that cases lacking evidence would be withdrawn (except those related to militancy or terrorism). The government, he said, is also expediting the enactment of the draft Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, 2025 to transfer investigative responsibility to the National Human Rights Commission. So, there are reforms and amendments necessary to expedite ongoing investigations, which the government must undertake without delay. As for the questions raised about the commitment of a future political government, we can only strengthen institutional safeguards but, in the end, we must trust that they will have the sense to help, rather than disrupt, the justice process. But under no circumstances can the trial process be made questionable.

## THE FEBRUARY ELECTION

# Democracy's burning test



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There comes a time in the life of every nation when the air grows thick with lies. A time when slogans and rumours, like soot from a factory chimney, cloud our sight until we no longer recognise our own reflection in the mirror. For Bangladesh, that time is now. The national election scheduled for February 2026 is not merely another turn of the political wheel; it is the test of whether our long-suffering republic still belongs to its people, or whether it has already been stolen by bureaucrats, backroom engineers, and their chosen political pets.

Let us not mince words: those who argue that elections can wait, that the people's voice can be deferred until reforms are completed or until the stars align, are consciously or otherwise hindering our democratic transition. Democracy is not a favour dispensed by a caretaker regime or a prize handed down. Democracy, in its most elemental form, is the ballot box—messy, imperfect, vulnerable to manipulation, yes, but the only mechanism through which sovereignty flows from people to government. Delay it, deny it, derail it, and you reveal yourself for what you are: not committed to democracy.

And yet, astonishingly, some are just showing that tendency. One party, birthed in the laboratory of the interim government, is implicitly claiming to be the sole heir of the July movement. Their leaders—young, articulate, photogenic—speak as though the revolution was theirs alone, as though millions of others who bled, suffered, and marched were mere extras in their scripted drama. This stance is of the most cynical kind. This is, however, not to discredit anybody but to put things in perspective.

To be frank, prominent leaders of this new party did not march to tear down Sheikh Hasina's dictatorship. They cut their teeth in the anti-quota movement, an agitation narrow in scope, focused on government jobs. They questioned Hasina's policy but did not seek her downfall, at least initially. One can say that their purpose was entry into the system, not its dismantling. To now allow such a party to monopolise the July

uprising is an insult to history.

The July movement was not the triumph of any one group. It was, in Ernesto Laclau's words, a convergence, a tidal wave of anger where diverse grievances found a single nodal point: hatred for Hasina's tyranny. Students, farmers, workers, mothers, intellectuals, small parties, large parties, citizens with no party at all—all came together to tear down a dictatorship that had outstayed



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every welcome. To watch a party claim that legacy as its own is to stand by while truth itself is mugged in broad daylight.

The interim government and its chosen favourites now spin another fiction: that unless they stay in charge, the criminals of July will never face justice. Let us pause here. The parties most likely to win in the upcoming election are the very ones who were hounded, imprisoned, shot at, and vilified by the dictatorship that the movement toppled. Their leaders have tasted tear gas and prison bars. Their activists have carried their dead on their shoulders. Are we to believe that such parties, if chosen by the people,

will suddenly shrug off the duty of justice?

Another myth whispered in diplomatic corridors and blared in compliant media is that elections will "derail" reforms. What reforms, one might ask? The major structural changes—consensus over judicial independence, acceptance of a bicameral parliament, institution of a national commission to oversee electoral finance—have already been hammered out in the dialogues conducted by the National Consensus Commission. What remains is not endless caretaker tinkering, but the people's verdict. A constitution, after all, is not a technocrat's report; it is a living covenant between the governed and those who govern. Until reforms are ratified through elections, they remain paper promises.

And then there is the chorus

each party lobbies for the system that best serves its own interest. That is politics. What is not politics—what is sheer sabotage—is the insistence that unless one's preferred formula is imposed, elections themselves cannot proceed.

Most chilling of all is the open declaration by some leaders that they will not "allow" the February election to take place. Think about that. A political party now presumes the authority to veto the people's right to vote. This is not dissent. It is not a debate. It is imposing one's will dressed in revolutionary garb, an ultimatum to democracy itself.

The interim government, for all its moral pretensions, is in danger of losing its way. This cannot go on. The February election is not a procedural detail. It is the very heartbeat of the

# How to elevate our public universities in global rankings



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For years, I have observed ongoing debates on strategies to improve the global ranking of Bangladesh's public universities. This is indeed a positive sign, as we have been making sincere efforts to accelerate the process of achieving higher scores in various categories set by global ranking platforms such as the Times Higher Education (THE) and QS Rankings.

While reviewing strategies to improve public university rankings, I have closely observed many leading universities, where I have also served as a visiting professor. Several Asian universities are engaged in healthy competition to rank among the world's top twenty universities according to global ranking indicators.

For Bangladesh's public universities to be among the globally recognised and prestigious institutions, a strategic plan is essential. What we need is a timely and practical framework. Below, I present a concise framework for the consideration of the highest authorities of public universities.

Each department of a public university should strive to enrol at least five international students each academic year. The admission process must be entirely independent, conducted online from application to

final admission. All procedures should be carried out under the supervision of the pro-vice-chancellor (Education). Before admission, widespread dissemination of admission notices is necessary, along with communication with universities across South Asia, East Asia, the Far East, and the Middle East. Additionally, through coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the university may arrange admission fairs via Bangladesh's embassies and high commissions abroad, when necessary.

To institutionalise this process, a separate office may be established, which, in coordination with respective departments, will deal with the online selection process and finalise admissions. To accommodate international students, a specific block in residential halls or an entire hall may be designated.

Public universities must develop their own fund management systems and strengthen their reserves. Funding is required to encourage research. A collaborative model with industry should be adopted. Industrial leaders, including those from EPZs, can be invited and briefed on funding opportunities. On occasions such as university anniversaries or other special days, they can be honoured

and given recognition, which would encourage them to contribute to research funding.

The fund should be allocated for Master's thesis, MPhil, and PhD researchers, with an honorarium for supervisors to enhance the quality of research. To ensure merit-based distribution of research grants, a committee should be formed under the leadership of the treasurer, comprising all deans and directors of the faculties and institutions. Within each faculty, a committee headed by the dean should propose names of researchers and supervisors for grant selection. At the end of the year, each faculty should publish an edited volume that compiles its research outputs. This will foster an environment that promotes undergraduate research and healthy competition.

Each public university must also establish its own publishing house to publish the best research papers. A portion of funding should be allocated for this purpose. The press should be overseen by a committee of distinguished professors.

Every department and institute should host at least one internationally recognised scholar annually for a period of one to three months as a visiting professor or scholar. Most of our respected faculty members have some association with foreign universities or research institutions, and they can facilitate these engagements. Invited scholars should be accommodated at the university's guest houses. Their expenses can be partially covered by industry collaboration funds and partially by external funding mobilised by the

republic. It is the one remaining bridge between the sacrifice of July and the promise of tomorrow. Delay the election, and you betray the martyrs. Derail it, and you mock the millions who marched. Deny it, and you betray the very people of this nation.

Bangladesh is tired of lies. Tired of experiments carried out on its body politic by those who imagine themselves above the people. Tired of manufactured saviours and unelected custodians. In February, the people must speak. And their voice, fractured, noisy, contradictory, yet undeniably sovereign, will be the only mandate that matters.

departments and institutes, often through the support of distinguished alumni.

Each department and institute should also organise at least one international conference annually and publish a book as the outcome. This will significantly improve university rankings. Departments and institutes should take the initiative to secure funding, again drawing on support from distinguished alumni.

The implementation of the above-mentioned model has now become imperative for Bangladesh's public universities. While older, established universities have already made progress in this direction, newer universities may find it more challenging. Moreover, it is difficult for the central administration alone to execute such a model. Therefore, collective efforts are required to achieve excellence in teaching and research. The corporate sector must come forward with a positive mindset to support research at public universities.

I strongly believe that through public diplomacy, global educational partnerships must be built. To achieve this, distinguished faculty members must be engaged in every research initiative. Seminars on higher education, led by faculty with experience in both teaching and research at home and abroad, should be organised. This will inspire students to become more research-oriented and facilitate the smoother implementation of the model. Ultimately, excellence in higher education will be achieved, leading to a substantial rise in the global ranking of Bangladesh's public universities.