

# The de-escalation deficit in our campuses



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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Our campuses are becoming increasingly unrestful, with a decline in civic patience and a growing culture of direct action. The episodic student rage is becoming more frequent than ever. While many are sparked by genuine causes which merit urgent attention, some are aimed at making territorial claims, scoring political mileage or asserting supremacy. Such tensions on our campuses have become a barometer of national stress. The timing and nature of the unrest and escalation have the potential to spread beyond the classroom and influence our national politics and mood, which is already strained by inflation, unemployment and factional rivalry, especially ahead of the general election. So, the question is: do the stakeholders of our academic institutions realise that the stake is higher?

Take, for instance, the recent clash between City University (CiU) and Daffodil International University (DIU). The entire CiU campus in Savar was vandalised, and buses were set alight. Students from the neighbouring university raided the campus, reducing it to ruins. Even when a representative from the DIU visited to assess the damage, he appeared genuinely apologetic, promising that his top management had decided to compensate for the losses. However, based on subsequent statements and actions from DIU, it seemed that the institution had reneged on its earlier promise while portraying its students as the primary victims. They are emphasising the mistreatment of students caught by CiU

authorities during the vandalism.

The incident had a trivial start. A student of CiU was accused of spitting at the motorcycle of a student belonging to DIU. An altercation broke out, and later a gang of CiU students ransacked a privately owned property that was inhabited by DIU students. The proctor of DIU tried to calm the situation. He, too, came under the abuse of CiU students. The, hundreds of angry DIU students gathered and attacked the CiU campus in the middle of the night. The disproportionate response is both story and history (Latin root of history—history—implying both story and history).

Now, let us use this incident as a case study for the escalation of violent activities on campuses since the uprising last year. The impact of mass mobilisations to press home maximalist demands (removals, expulsions, and burn/ban threats) has become the order. Gone is the system of institutional incremental grievance processes. Most of our universities have failed to establish clear, trusted, time-bound complaint pipelines, leading disputes to spill into the street or someone else's space. The rapid jump from minor scuffles to arson or blockade demonstrates basic disregard for democratic norms.

The tension in the physical space gets amplified on social media, where an echo chamber creates outrage cycles. Ideological disagreements can easily be transformed into an all-out campaign for a "ban." The DIU-CiU case shows a lack of inter-campus coordination, enabling tit-for-tat escalations.

The situation was reportedly worsened further by the false ego created by the ranking myth—one university is touted as better than the other, which made the spat a test of egos. While universities should indulge in battles of wits, we are back to the primitive law of the jungle and search for the alpha male. We have seen similar clashes between Dhaka College and Dhaka City College, who act like Capulets and Montagues, two feuding families

communication team, and student welfare and its counselling units. This is a standard de-escalation ladder where dialogue and shuttle diplomacy with vetted student representatives can be used before imposing sanctions, only after due process. There should be monitoring of social media discourses as well as preservation of CCTV footage for verification and investigation. Tracking risk indicators (rumour spikes,

has caused the general mood of distrust in academia. Universities must create rapid review panels comprising students, faculty, and legal participants with 10-14 day clocks for social media disputes. The culture of apology, teach-ins, or formal inquiry must be established to avoid mob penalties. Inter-campus pacts can be strengthened through joint hotlines, non-aggression agreements, and mutual patrol alerts; shared protocols for hostel incidents and crowd dispersion.

Students at their prime can get involved in activities that can affect their entire life or family. Often, peer pressure can turn a student into a perpetrator. Therefore, there should be restorative justice options. We need to replace the "ban/expel" reflex with mediated dialogues or community projects as punishments when feasible. Expulsion should be reserved for repeat or violent offenders. Teachers and staff also need to feel safe on campuses.

The success of the de-escalation process will lie in transparency. Each case of calibrated penalties (from warnings to suspension) tied to specific acts (arson, assault, vandalism, intimidation) must be in the public domain to deter "collective punishment." The suspicion of ad hoc bargaining and cash dealing has already hampered our academic image.

Most importantly, the academic code of conduct must be introduced to all incoming staff and students. This may include mandatory short modules on non-violent action, digital citizenship, and grievance pathways for freshers and student leaders. What is now required are even-handed disciplinary actions to set a national precedent.

Universities must stop acting like wrestling rings and start behaving like conduits for creative and critical minds. Unless we de-escalate the tension, our campuses will forget the original aim and scope of a university: knowledge creation and dissemination, academic and cultural leadership, innovation and community engagement. Universities are designed to build the nation, not break it.



FILE PHOTO: AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH  
Wreckage of buses torched during clashes between students of Daffodil International University and City University over a trivial matter early this week.

featured by Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet. The prevailing climate of polarisation has not helped the situation either.

Universities must come up with their own playbook to de-escalate the situation. This must begin with the formation of a 24/7 incident command comprising student leaders, the proctor office, the

doxxing posts, "ban/remove" hashtags) can help us prepare to prevent street action.

The existing harassment policies and code of conduct need to be reviewed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to separate protected speech from misconduct such as harassment, incitement, and doxxing. The tendency to prolong the cases

## Legal reform is key to protecting intellectual property rights of Indigenous culture

centuries.

The essence of this issue rests in the epistemic disparity between Euro-American legal understanding and Indigenous knowledge systems. While IP law prefers creativity, innovation, permeance and profit-oriented schemes, Indigenous cultures are ever-changing, communally shared and deeply connected to ecological and spiritual interdependence. Copyright protection ends at a certain time, while the traditional cultural knowledge survives an evolving journey. This ontological discord makes regular IP regimes foundationally insufficient.

Moreover, Bangladesh has introduced reforms in IP laws in 2023 that include the copyright and patent act, but unfortunately failed to close the gap between traditional knowledge systems and the conventional IP regime. The Copyright Act, 2023, recognises folklore, but it falls short in acknowledging Indigenous communities as the right holders or custodians. The Patent Act, 2023, decrees revelation of the sources regarding traditional knowledge but does not introduce a process for acquiring consent or sharing benefits. The promising geographical indications are dominated by commercial benefits without Indigenous participation. At its core, these legal frameworks treat Indigenous heritage as economic artefacts instead of living systems that deserve cultural sovereignty.

To acknowledge these pitfalls, activists and scholars are continuously advocating for the introduction of a sui generis (unique) legal system that surpasses the barriers of current IP regimes. Such a framework should be established by assessing Indigenous world views, ensuring community governance, institutionalising collective rights and perpetual ownership. Comparative study from Peru, India, Bolivia, and Panama

showcases the implementability of such mechanisms in the current IP regime. The Law No. 2781 of Peru underpins sharing benefits, oral transmission of culture and community consent as the pillars of legal recognition. Whereas, the Indian Traditional Knowledge Digital Library deliver a defensive system against biopiracy. This might be a good example for Bangladesh, except for the facts of community exclusion and state control. The development of a sui generis system in Bangladesh must begin with the legal recognition of Indigenous peoples as separate legal entities rather than as ethnic minorities under the Constitution of Bangladesh. Bangladesh should also incorporate Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) while engaging with Indigenous heritage. It must also ensure that communities have the authority and right to monitor the use, access and dissemination of their knowledge. Indigenous councils such as Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge (BARCIK) will maintain a national registry concerning traditional knowledge, which can propose defending documentation by adhering to and honouring ethical protocols and cultural secrecy, respectively.

The key foundation for any transmitting legal system is to recognise the Indigenous customary law. The communities of Chittagong Hill Tracts and other regions follow ornate systems of knowledge governance by defining who may perform, access and transmit specific traditions. These unwritten laws are comprehensive legal orders in their own way. Avoiding them or not accepting Indigenous traditions into law not only violates Indigenous integrity but also accelerates cultural misappropriation. The concept of cultural sovereignty is asserted in international law documents such as the UN

Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and is fundamental to the recognition of Indigenous cultural heritage. Bangladesh should endeavour to adopt it in its legal and constitutional culture. Though Bangladesh abstained from voting in favour of the adoption of UNDRIP, a non-binding treaty, that does not legally prevent us from following or implementing the principles of the declaration. Also, cultural sovereignty as a core idea of racial freedom underpins the rights of Indigenous peoples to monitor their rituals, languages, symbols and epistemologies. Without its formalisation, legal safeguarding becomes extractive instead of emancipatory and participatory governance remains ornamental.

Some comprehensive legal changes should be introduced along with institutional systems to ensure Indigenous participation. The foundation of a national body on cultural heritage and Indigenous knowledge, consisting of legal experts, cultural practitioners and Indigenous representatives, would give monitoring oversight, ensure ethical compliance in sharing the benefits, and regulate heritage registries. This authority shall keep liaison with several ministries to ensure the Indigenous concerns are included in the environmental, cultural, technological and educational policies along with decentralised governance. Customary bodies and local authorities shall be acknowledged as valid authorities in decisions, including traditional expressions and knowledge. Cultural protocols and community consent must guide documentation efforts, whether it is commercial, governmental or academic. Sacred knowledge of the Indigenous communities must not be exposed or recorded without overt community approval. Reformation of the current legal system

alone will be insufficient without empowering the grassroots communities. Indigenous communities should be made aware of their rights via culture-sensitive legal literacy programmes in their own languages. Women, who are the guardians of ritual knowledge, culture and tradition, can be the focus of these initiatives. National curricula must be revised to incorporate Indigenous languages, histories and cosmologies. This will help foster intergenerational cultural pride and transmission. Technological drivers, such as digital databases, offer new scopes of heritage protection. However, all of these mechanisms should be established through participation and consultation with the communities represented. Also, these measures should conform to the "cultural firewalls" constraining access based on Indigenous governance rules. Technology should ramp up Indigenous agency, not substitute it. Bangladesh's engagement with UNESCO, World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the Convention on Biological Diversity should be revitalised. Regional cooperation through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could lead to generate shared strategies for protecting cross border heritage and countering cultural homogenisation.

The safeguarding of Indigenous intangible cultural heritage in Bangladesh is not a matter of conserving folkloric traditions for posterity; rather, it is a question to be resolved through cultural justice. It asks for a legal revolution that goes above integrationist approaches of legal frameworks and asserts Indigenous communities as the rightful custodians and stewards of their cultural legacies. Through these, the state can craft a trail toward an equitable, inclusive and resilient cultural future.

### CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

## ACROSS

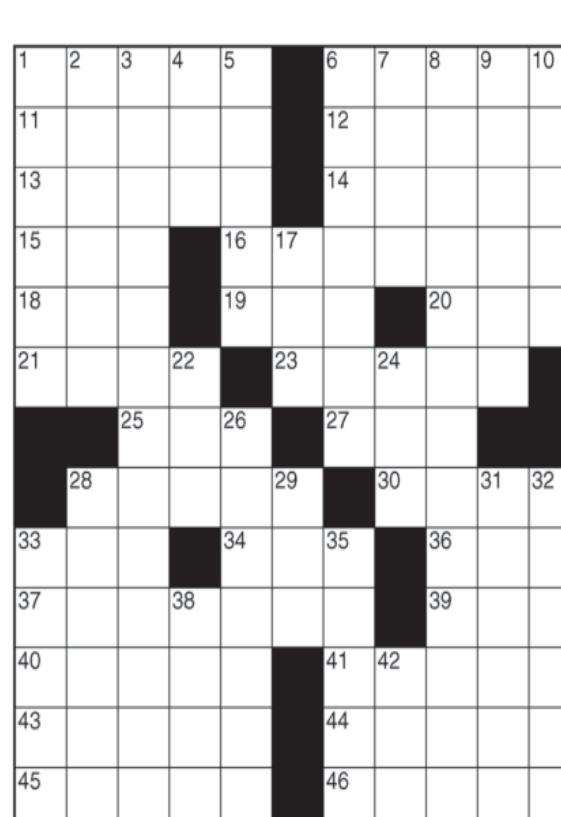
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- 34 Drake's music
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- 33 Church tenet
- 35 Dove's desire
- 38 Speed
- 42 Brewery sight



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