

## Teachers must not hurt students' future

### Secondary school teachers' strike just before year-end exams alarming

There is rarely a convenient time for a strike, but the timing of the latest strike by secondary school teachers comes across as particularly surprising. As the annual school examination season begins—a period of high anxiety for students and parents alike—a set of educators have abandoned their duty in an attempt to force the government to meet their demands. We find this move totally irresponsible.

The timing could not be worse. According to the government's schedule, annual exams were set to run from November to December, followed swiftly by selection tests and junior scholarship exams wrapping up on New Year's Eve. This is the crunch time of the academic calendar. Yet, instead of quiet concentration in exam halls, students are having to face administrative anarchy.

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education attempted to regain control with stiff directives, warning that any "negligence" in conducting the exams would trigger punitive action. But teachers, organised under various associations, have chosen to ignore these orders. The result is chaos across the country: while some schools held exams, many institutions have suspended tests, according to our reporters. As the coordinator of the movement has said, the boycott is well underway, rendering the government's late-night circulars largely ineffective.

The teachers' grievances are numerous and significant, and we urge the government to review and address them properly. Their demands include the upgrading of entry-level assistant teacher posts, the creation of a separate Directorate of Secondary Education, and the reinstatement of benefits withdrawn as far back as 2015. It is possible that these demands have merit. But to hold the future of children hostage in their push for pay and perks is a totally unethical tactic.

Education is not a factory line where work abstention merely delays a shipment; it is a time-sensitive endeavour in which disruption can derail academic progression and inflict psychological stress on students. The teachers' coordinator has argued that the government's circulars are an attempt to suppress their movement. He may be right about the government's steps, but he is wrong to assume that this gives his colleagues the moral licence to jeopardise the academic year.

The teachers must respect their primary responsibility to students. They claim they will only return if the education ministry sits down with protest leaders. This is the language of blackmail, plain and simple. The teachers may believe they are teaching the government a lesson in power dynamics. In reality, they are sending the wrong message. They should return to classrooms and exam halls immediately for the sake of the students. The government, meanwhile, must expedite efforts to resolve the issues at the root of this crisis.

## A marine crisis we must not ignore

### Urgent action needed to curb overfishing, protect ocean health

Bangladesh is facing one of the most substantial declines in marine fish stocks in its history. According to a new comprehensive fisheries survey, the stock of small pelagic species in the Bay of Bengal has dropped by a staggering 78.6 percent in just seven years—from 158,100 tonnes in 2018 to only 33,811 tonnes in 2025. This collapse follows earlier warnings, including the 2019 Department of Fisheries assessment, that categorised several species, such as tiger shrimp, Indian salmon, and large croakers, as severely depleted. Overfishing remains the central driver of this transformation: the number of commercial trawlers has nearly tripled since the mid-1980s, from around 100 to 273, putting heavy pressure on the bay's fragile ecosystem. Officials and surveyors caution that the shrinking number and size of commercially important species reflect a marine environment under acute stress.

The recent findings also point to deeper patterns of ecological disruption, with excessive and unregulated fishing, improper use of technology on industrial trawlers, rising microplastic pollution, and depleting oxygen in coastal zones—all playing a part in it. The survey recorded 418 microplastics, mapped abnormal jellyfish proliferation across the trawl stations, and observed that bycatch and wastage have increased due to poor monitoring. Notably, of the country's 20 major commercial fish species, only five are now viable for harvest, down from nine in 2018. Experts have repeatedly warned that without effective management, Bangladesh risks losing both biodiversity and the marine resources on which coastal communities depend.

This accelerating degradation, we must say, is largely a consequence of policy failures. Despite years of warnings, licences for industrial trawlers have continued to rise while monitoring mechanisms remain weak. Of the 273 industrial trawlers currently operating, 72 use advanced technology, yet its misuse has worsened bycatch. Oxygen depletion, high concentrations of microplastics, and collapsing pelagic stocks have all combined to threaten not only fish populations but also long-term food security, livelihoods, and the credibility of state-led conservation commitments.

We urge the government to take this crisis seriously. Going forward, the issuance of new trawler licences should be strictly limited, and the total fleet size must be reduced in phases. Industrial trawlers using illegal nets or violating designated zones should also face immediate suspension. Equally importantly, the state's marine research capacity must be strengthened to ensure continuous monitoring and informed policymaking. Protecting our marine resources is no longer an environmental preference; it is an economic and ecological necessity that demands urgent response and sustained commitment.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

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# EDITORIAL

## Has our ADP governance gone backwards?



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Fifteen months have passed since the interim government assumed office, bringing celebrated development thinkers and outspoken reformers into the cabinet. Their inclusion raised hopes among citizens and development activists that the long-standing weaknesses of the annual development programmes (ADPs), the central mechanism through which the nation's development agenda is operationalised, would finally be addressed or at least meaningfully initiated. The absence of party-driven pressures and the strong record of many advisers in advocating for efficient public spending further amplified these expectations. As the tenure of this interim administration draws to a close, a pressing question emerges. Have these vibrant reformers strengthened the ADPs in any meaningful way, or have they simply allowed long-standing failures to continue under a new banner?

In this context of heightened public expectation, it is important to recall how the ADP evolved under the previous government. During their sixteen years in office, the allocation expanded dramatically, rising from Tk 25,600 crore in fiscal year (FY) 2009 to ten times that size at Tk 2,63,000 crore in FY24, a scale that signalled the country's steady economic progress. Implementation performance was also notable, reaching a high of 94.66 percent in FY19 and falling to 80.18 percent in FY20, a year heavily affected by the Covid-19 disruption. This period contributed to broader gains in growth and development, and the World Bank recognised Bangladesh as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. At the same time, the government also faced legitimate criticisms about faulty feasibility studies, last-minute spending surges and governance gaps that often undermined project quality.

Given this trajectory, the interim government entered office with ample scope to strengthen the ADPs and address longstanding weaknesses in development management. It inherited the ADPs



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

for FY25 and revised the fund to Tk 2,26,125 crore after an 18 percent cut, and it also designed a fresh ADP of Tk 2,30,000 crore for FY26. Yet, these opportunities did not translate into meaningful progress. ADP implementation fell to a historic low of 67.85 percent in FY25 and reached only eight percent in the first four months of FY25-26. In this backdrop, it becomes essential to review recent patterns of development spending and determine how far the interim government has delivered in the priority sectors of health, education and power and energy, given their central role in socio-economic development.

A closer look at the health sector presents one of the clearest illustrations of the interim government's shortcomings. In FY25, the sector's allocation was cut by 50 percent from the original budget despite being classified as a priority area, and by year's end, the Health Services Division delivered an implementation rate of only 21.74 percent, among the lowest of all

cuts, administrative inertia and weak coordination came together to halt progress, leaving essential projects without direction and the broader health system without the capacity to respond to national needs.

Turning to education, the sector has consistently been allocated around 11-12 percent of the total ADP, well below the Unesco recommendation of 15-20 percent of total public expenditure. Yet, even with a steady share, utilisation has weakened over time, with spending declining from 102 percent in FY10 to 79 percent in FY24. Under the interim administration, the situation has worsened. In FY25, education began with 11.36 percent of the total ADP, but the revised allocation imposed a sharp 34 percent cut. For FY26, the education ADP stands at about 12.1 percent of the total, still below the global standard and insufficient for meaningful reforms. Implementation has been weak as well. In FY25, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education spent only 58 percent of its development allocation, placing it among the five lowest-performing

caring, sensitive, or fragile, even when they don't feel that way. Memes like "the feminine urge to say 'I'm fine' and hold a grudge for eternity" romanticise this emotional management. They turn emotional suppression and self-contradiction into an aesthetic, rather than a symptom of a social structure that expects women to regulate their feelings for others' comfort. In this sense, these memes transform emotional labour into cultural entertainment. Also, emotions are not isolated experiences but are shaped through interaction and social reinforcement. Platforms like Instagram function as digital support groups where users share emotional expressions that gain validation through likes, comments, and shares. When thousands of women engage with the same "feminine urge" memes, they collectively affirm that these exaggerated emotional tendencies define femininity itself. What might start as humour becomes a form of emotional conformity.

Charles Cooley (1902) argues that our sense of self develops through imagining how others perceive us, which he called the looking-glass self. The "feminine urge" meme turns this reflective process into a digital mirror: women learn to see themselves through the imagined gaze of society, a gaze that already expects emotional excess, instability, and self-obsession. When a woman laughs at or reposts such memes, she may also be internalising that gaze, subtly shaping her emotional self-image to fit what is socially acceptable or recognisable as "feminine."

As a result, the "feminine urge" becomes a cultural mechanism for

ministries. Early FY26 indications show the situation deteriorating further. In the first quarter, the Medical Education and Family Welfare Division spent just 0.003 percent of its Tk 4,809 crore allocation, while the Health Services Division managed to spend only 1.13 percent of its Tk 7,484 crore allocation. These trends reveal a sector where financial

ministries. In the first quarter of FY26, spending reached only 4.25 percent for primary and mass education and only 6.52 percent for secondary and higher education. Taken together, these figures expose a sector where investment levels remain inadequate and administrative capacity remains limited, resulting in a widening gap between policy ambition and actual learning outcomes.

When the interim government took office, the power and energy sector already held a central place in the national development agenda, with ADP allocations supporting major gains, including universal household electrification. The sector has also demonstrated strong execution with the Power Division implementing 101 percent of its revised fund in FY24, an exceptional outcome in public investment. During the interim period, however, the sector has clearly lost momentum. Although allocations remain substantial, project delivery has slowed, and strategic reform has stalled. In FY25, the Energy and Mineral Resources Division recorded 85.95 percent implementation, a respectable figure but significantly lower than earlier performance. The spending pattern has also shifted. Allocation for power generation projects fell by six percent from the previous year's revised ADP, while transmission and distribution claimed larger shares. Analysts warn that this shift again prioritises visible infrastructure over deeper issues such as subsidy pressure, fuel cost volatility and persistent system losses. In effect, the interim government has maintained large budgets but failed to set a coherent reform plan, leaving the sector without measurable gains in efficiency, financial stability or service quality.

Across these sectors, the evidence shows that development governance has not only weakened under the interim government but has moved in reverse, falling far short of the public expectations it sought to embody. Instead of strengthening the foundations of the development system, it has overseen collapsing implementation, drifting priorities and a clear distance between stated intentions and actual outcomes. What began with the hope that experienced reformers would correct long-standing weaknesses has ended with a development machinery more fragile, uncertain, and less capable than the one they inherited, raising serious questions about the cost of this transitional period for the country's development trajectory.

## Packaging the patriarchal gaze as 'relatable' content



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A few days ago, during a class break, I was scrolling through Instagram and came across a post with the quote: "the feminine urge to open a coffee shop that is also a library and a flower shop." While many people are sharing this out of a cute and cosy sentiment, I wanted to dig a little deeper. Shortly after seeing that post, I stumbled upon another one featuring multiple texts that read: "The feminine urge to impulsively cut off eight inches of hair for a fresh start." "The feminine urge to rewatch my own Instagram story 56 times." "The feminine urge to take 300 selfies and hate them all." "The feminine urge to overthink a text I sent three days ago at 2:47 p.m." "The feminine urge to say 'I'm fine' and hold a grudge for eternity."

At first glance, these posts might seem harmless, funny, or even relatable. They appear lighthearted and sometimes even empowering, as though embracing chaos is part of a shared feminine experience. However, beneath the surface, there's something deeper happening. For instance, the phrase "the feminine urge to open a coffee shop that is also a library and a flower shop" may sound cute and cosy, but it reinforces a stereotype that women's aspirations are solely

emotional and decorative. It suggests that women's "dream spaces" should be charming and serene. But why does this seemingly harmless framing matter?

Because these posts and memes normalise a specific emotional image of women—impulsive, dramatic, unstable, and self-absorbed. In doing so, they reproduce long-standing patriarchal stereotypes under the guise of relatability. These memes don't reflect "natural" feminine emotions; they reflect culturally constructed rules. As Barbalet (2006) explains, emotions are shaped by social and cultural expectations rather than biology. What we call "feminine emotions" comes from cultural scripts that dictate how women should feel and behave. These memes work because we already share an understanding that women are expected to act irrationally or emotionally. The more one identifies with the meme, the more one unconsciously or consciously reproduces that cultural expectation.

This is not spontaneous; it is sustained through emotional performance, something Hochschild (1979) describes as emotion work. Women are taught to perform emotions that align with social norms to appear

upholding patriarchal emotional norms. It instructs women on how to feel, what to desire, and even what types of emotional chaos are socially permissible. This dynamic trivialises women's complex emotional lives, packaging them into digestible, performative traits. It also minimises women's untreated and unhealed emotional vulnerabilities, which can grow throughout life as their desires go unfulfilled. These emotions stem from a social structure that assigns women the burden of emotional expression while denying them the legitimacy of emotional depth.

Ultimately, these memes tell us less about femininity and more about how societies organise emotion. They expose how digital culture turns emotional stereotypes into commodities, clickable, shareable, and monetisable. When women engage with these memes, they are not only reproducing patriarchal emotional norms but also negotiating their own identities within themselves. There is a space of contradiction here, a simultaneous participation in and resistance to cultural control. It appears the story isn't one-sided. When women share these memes, they are not necessarily endorsing patriarchy. Many use humour as a form of survival, a way to express frustration, exhaustion, or irony. There's a hint of rebellion in the laughter, an attempt to make sense of contradictions that words alone can't express.

But irony is a tricky weapon. It can challenge stereotypes, but it can also reinforce them. The more we laugh at our collective chaos, the less we question why chaos feels so natural to us.

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