

May this Eid be peaceful and joyous

Let festivities and harmony take centre stage

As we bid farewell to Ramadan, it is vital that we carry forward the lessons this holy month imparts. The patience, charity, and restraint encouraged during the month are all much-needed values for us at this time that we should try to emulate throughout the year. Let the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr mark a new beginning characterised by harmony rather than division or conflict at every turn.

With millions of people leaving the capital and elsewhere to celebrate Eid with their loved ones, it is crucial that safe, hassle-free journey is ensured for everyone. Understandably, given the war in the Middle East and the resulting strain on fuel supplies, there are fewer buses on the roads, leaving operators struggling to accommodate the surge of passengers. Moreover, long queues at the refuelling stations are lengthening the journey time. Many stations are also running out of fuel, adding to the uncertainty faced by both operators and travellers. Add to that poor road conditions, incomplete construction work, unauthorised bus stops, and slow toll collection in many places, which are contributing to kilometres of gridlocks on major highways.

As in previous years, road safety remains a major concern this time, too. On Wednesday morning, a speeding microbus lost control and overturned on the Dhaka-Bogura highway, killing three people and injuring 10 others. It is imperative that the authorities work diligently to ensure that citizens reach their destinations safely. This means directing traffic efficiently, reducing delays wherever possible, and enforcing the law to prevent reckless driving.

Despite the Middle East crisis, remittance inflows are reportedly seeing a boost. According to Bangladesh Bank data, expatriate Bangladeshis sent home \$2.20 billion in the first 14 days of March, up 36 percent from \$1.62 billion during the same period last year. However, while our reserves benefit from the surge of dollars sent by migrant workers, many at home are still being deprived of their due pay and bonuses. As of Tuesday, at least 31 percent of garment factories in six key industrial belts were reportedly yet to pay Eid bonuses to workers, despite the government-set deadline having already passed. Another report in *Prothom Alo* stated that 1,026 factories across Dhaka, Chattogram, Mymensingh, Khulna, and Sylhet had yet to pay February wages and bonuses as of Tuesday afternoon. It is unacceptable that so many workers are having to face this crisis despite RMG being hailed as our largest export sector. This must be addressed without delay.

This Eid season, we wish for a Bangladesh that reflects kindness, empathy, and honesty. We urge the authorities to fulfil their duties proper to ensure a quality life for all citizens. Amid the festivities, we also hope citizens will act with kindness towards one another in every circumstance. We wish our readers and well-wishers a safe and happy Eid.

Partisan selection of VCs is concerning

Public universities need merit-based leadership

The government's latest decision to appoint vice chancellors to seven major public universities—including Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi—has once again brought into focus the continued trend of political considerations in academic appointments. Despite repeated calls for a merit-based and accountable system at our public universities, the latest selections appear to signal a return to the old practice of partisan appointments, which is regrettable.

Among the newly appointed VCs, most have direct or indirect affiliations with the ruling party, either holding party positions or having been active in the aligned teachers' organisations. We saw a similar trend during past regimes when leadership positions at universities were often awarded on the basis of political loyalty. Such practices have historically encouraged academics to engage in partisan activities. After the July uprising, people hoped for a break from this culture, but those expectations remained unfulfilled as institutional procedures were not followed in VC appointments even during the interim government's tenure.

While the rules in several universities require the VCs to be appointed by senate-elected panels, the senate elections themselves have frequently been delayed or not held at all, allowing appointments to proceed without proper consultation. Even where mechanisms such as search committees have been established, they have not been consistently employed. BNP, in its election manifesto, pledged to build a "non-discriminatory, merit-based and accountable state" and to establish a "merit-based, transparent, efficient and people-oriented administration in all state institutions." The latest VC appointments do not appear to reflect these commitments.

The education minister has defended these appointments, arguing that political engagement is not a disqualification and that selections were based on qualifications and performance. While participation in politics is a democratic right, it cannot be allowed to overshadow the need for neutrality and integrity in academic leadership. Universities require administrators who can rise above partisan lines and uphold the principles of fairness, transparency, and academic excellence. Otherwise, they risk becoming extensions of political interests rather than centres of independent thought and learning.

We urge the government to break away from the old practice of partisan appointments at public universities. It should lead by example, strictly adhering to established procedures when filling key academic positions. It must learn from past mistakes and ensure academic freedom at all costs. Otherwise, it will be difficult to strengthen academic standards and institutional credibility. Overall, the government must act decisively to prioritise merit, transparency, and independence in university governance.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First encounter with Pakistani troops

On this day in 1971, on the 18th day of the non-cooperation movement in then East Pakistan, people locked into a clash with Pakistan Army troops in Joydebpur. At least two civilians died.

Reflections on the moral crisis of modern leadership



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RUBAIUL MURSHED

"A fish rots from the head"—this ancient proverb reminds us that when leadership loses its moral compass, the entire system begins to decay.

One of the most overlooked leadership skills among political and corporate leaders these days is not intelligence, strategy or technological expertise, but something far older and far more essential: moral values and virtues. Amid an unprecedented technological advancement that the world has been witnessing, humanity stands at a paradoxical moment in history. Nuclear weapons, artificial intelligence, and cyber warfare systems have given modern societies extraordinary power, yet our ability to manage this power wisely remains deeply uncertain.

The ongoing tensions and confrontations surrounding the US-Israel war against Iran illustrate this challenge clearly. As geopolitical rivalry intensifies in the Middle East, public discussions are often focusing on military capabilities, strategic alliances, and deterrence policies. However, underneath these calculations lie a deeper concern: the erosion of moral restraint in leadership. Pride, rivalry, and political ego are shaping decision-making these days, which means conflicts that could have been resolved through diplomacy are ending up spiralling into dangerous crises.

As history shows us, good people operating within flawed systems can still produce harmful outcomes. Leaders may believe they are defending national interests or protecting economic

stability, but if institutions reward aggression, competition, and short-term advantage, even well-intentioned individuals can become agents of destructive decisions. This pattern has appeared throughout history. As societies grow more technologically sophisticated, they often continue to repeat the same moral mistakes: war, exploitation, injustice, and rivalry. Many philosophers have argued that the true struggle of civilisation is not between nations but between

Corporations may command enormous global influence, generating immense wealth, but some of them also exploit labour or natural resources without regard for fairness or sustainability.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell warned that humanity might achieve "technological power without moral progress." Today, that warning feels more relevant than ever.

Part of the explanation lies in human psychology. While societies have evolved dramatically, many of our instincts remain ancient. Tribal loyalty, fear of outsiders, competition for status, and the desire for dominance once helped humans survive in small communities. In modern societies, however, these same instincts can manifest as nationalism, prejudice, corporate greed, and geopolitical rivalry. Even

than 300 books, essays, and academic studies on moral leadership published between 1970 and 2018 found that leaders who prioritise ethical values consistently build stronger and more resilient organisations. These organisations tend to see lower employee turnover, while individuals working under morally grounded leaders are more creative, proactive, engaged, and satisfied.

These findings challenge the common assumption that ethical restraint reduces competitiveness. In reality, leaders guided by integrity and responsibility often create more sustainable and effective institutions.

For leaders, ego may be the most dangerous invisible weapon. Decisions driven by pride, prestige or personal ambition can escalate small disagreements into major

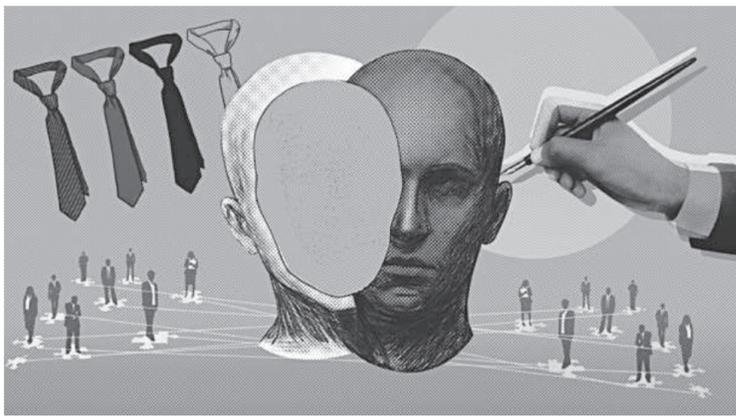
underestimate adversaries, increasing the likelihood of unnecessary escalation.

Compassion plays a crucial role in responsible leadership. When leaders consider the human consequences of their decisions, they are less likely to pursue policies that cause unnecessary suffering. Justice must also guide decision-making. Short-term incentives often reward aggression or exploitation, but leaders who prioritise fairness help build societies that are more stable and less prone to conflict. Leaders must recognise that their choices echo far beyond their time in power. Ego-driven decisions may produce immediate political or economic benefits, but they can endanger future generations.

The importance of ethical leadership is not a new idea. Across civilisations and spiritual traditions, moral values have long been recognised as essential to responsible governance. In the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the sanctity of human life is a central principle. Similarly, peace and reconciliation are promoted as moral ideals across cultures. Leaders who pursue dialogue rather than domination align themselves with values that have guided civilisations for centuries.

Political and business leaders today hold unprecedented influence over global stability. Their decisions shape economies, societies, and international relations. Without humility, compassion, and ethical restraint, that power can easily become destructive. History's lessons are clear: without moral wisdom, societies risk repeating the same catastrophic mistakes.

Therefore, the future of humanity may depend not on the power of our weapons or the sophistication of our technologies, but on the wisdom, integrity, and moral courage of those who lead.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

two forces within human nature itself: wisdom and ego.

One of the central dilemmas of modern civilisation is that technological intelligence and economic capability have evolved far faster than moral maturity. A nation may develop nuclear weapons capable of annihilating entire populations but be missing the ethical framework to prevent their use.

highly educated leaders are not immune to these impulses. When ego goes unchecked, intelligence can easily transform into arrogance, strategy into hubris, and negotiation into confrontation.

Importantly, the value of moral leadership is not merely philosophical; it is supported by research. A comprehensive review examining more

conflicts. By contrast, leaders guided by humility and empathy remain open to dialogue, cooperation, and peace. Ego-free leadership is, therefore, more than just a moral ideal—it is a practical necessity. Humility allows leaders to listen, learn, and adjust their strategies when circumstances change. Arrogant leaders frequently misjudge risks or

The cost of politicising university leadership



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Is involvement in politics a crime? Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon posed that question while defending the government's decision to appoint vice chancellors to seven universities and a new chairman of the University Grants Commission on Monday. The answer is no. A scholar does not surrender the right to political belief by entering academia. Nor would it be fair to dismiss the new VCs simply as political operatives.

However, that is not the question these appointments raise. The real question is whether a public university can remain autonomous when its highest offices are handed to academics closely tied to the ruling party's political structure.

The new VC of Dhaka University is also the education affairs secretary of BNP central committee. The new UGC chairman sits on the party chairperson's advisory council. At Dhaka University, such appointments do more than fill offices; they show whom the state considers trustworthy enough to run its oldest and most sought-after university.

And the concern is not only political—it is institutional. Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar universities are supposed to have VCs appointed from senate-elected panels. But that structure has repeatedly been delayed, bypassed or drained of meaning, now even under an elected government.

The government says it reviewed research output, publications, citations, and academic credentials before making the appointments. That may well be true. But the public has not been told what criteria were used, whether there was a shortlist, who else was considered, how partisan office was weighed against academic independence, or why these names emerged as the best choices. If merit truly guided these decisions, the government should make the basis public. The fact that every successful candidate is linked to Sada Dal, Zia Parishad or the Nationalist Teachers' Forum makes one conclusion hard to avoid: that political comfort came first, merit later.

To understand why this is so problematic, we need only look at recent history. The first casualty is recruitment. A VC who arrives through patronage is often expected to reward the network that helped secure the post. Rajshahi University under former VC Prof M Abdus Sobhan remains a clear example. In 2021, this daily reported that he publicly said Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men would get the highest priority in university jobs. On his last day in office, defying a government embargo, he oversaw the mass appointment of 137 teachers and staff.

The second casualty is campus governance. A partisan VC often comes to rely on ruling party student cadres

to maintain control. At Jahangirnagar University, former Awami League-backed VC Prof Farzana Islam faced allegations of distributing money from a major development project to BCL leaders to keep them pacified in 2019. The result was protest, violence, and institutional paralysis.

The practice of partisan appointments is bipartisan. Under the Awami League, the Blue panel, a teachers platform backed by AL and allied bodies, became a pipeline to vice chancellors. A 2022 report by this daily found that 39 of 48 VCs had held posts in pro-government teachers' organisations, and that 12 teachers associated with DU Blue panel had become VCs elsewhere.

Then came the July uprising in 2024. The interim government took charge, with the promise to break away from this culture, among others. But that promise did not last. As *The Daily Star* reported in December 2024, the interim administration quickly gave in to the same political logic, appointing 30 VCs and 18 pro-VCs and treasurers with links to pro-BNP and pro-Jamaat teachers' bodies. Instead of dismantling the machinery of patronage, it merely changed the list of beneficiaries.

When the interim did form a search committee in May 2025, they did so after the top administrative posts in at least 47 public universities had already been filled. Reform arrived after the spoils had been distributed.

The latest appointments suggest that the BNP government has now dropped even that limited pretence, returning openly to executive selection through partisan comfort.

As a result, Bangladesh remains trapped in a cycle in which successive governments rely on politically driven appointments because no credible system has been built to restrain them. But warnings have

existed for decades. The 1991 interim government's education task force, the 2003 education commission, and the UGC's Strategic Plan for 2006-2026 all recommended an independent, legally empowered national search committee.

More than five decades after independence, Bangladesh still has no uniform policy for appointing VCs. Even where the law envisages a senate-based route, the process is too easily delayed, bent or bypassed. Elsewhere, the space for executive discretion is wider still.

So, why has reform failed for so long? Because the current arrangement serves governments too well. It gives them manageable campuses, loyal administrators, and leaders less likely to resist partisan recruitment, challenge student violence, or defend dissent when it becomes inconvenient.

That is why this issue is bigger than the names announced this week. VCs shape recruitment, promotions, procurement, discipline, research culture, and the moral tone of a campus. Once the office is politically captured, the damage spreads through departments, halls, and classrooms.

If the government is serious about building a merit-based administration, it must prove it where it matters most. It must establish a legally binding and uniform appointment framework for all public universities, publish clear eligibility criteria and shortlists, ensure that senate elections are held on time where required by law, and introduce meaningful performance reviews for the sitting VCs.

This is the real test of the post-uprising era. The question is not whether a teacher's involvement in politics is a crime, but whether the state is willing to stop treating universities as conquered territories, to be managed through blind loyalty.