The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Campus violence a betrayal of July spirit

BNP and Jamaat must rein in their student fronts

It is deeply disappointing to see an escalation of violent clashes between members of Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Islami Chhatra Shibir, making us apprehensive that the old days of regular campus violence during Sheikh Hasina's regime have returned.

After a clash between JCD and Shibir members at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur left several injured the day before, violence spread to educational institutions in Dhaka and Barishal. So far, more than 90 people, including student leaders and journalists, have been injured at Begum Rokeya University, Jagannath University (JnU), Dhaka College, and Government Madrasah-e-Alia in Bakshibazar. Ironically, these clashes occurred during July uprising commemoration programmes.

The video footage and images are evidence of the anarchic situation—activists wielding sharp weapons, iron rods, and bamboo sticks can be seen attacking each other with abandon, leaving ordinary students in fear and uncertainty about attending classes or taking exams.

The violence was worst at JnU, with around 70 people injured. The clashes started when representatives of JnU Central Students Union (JnUCSU) and members of Inquilab Mancha attempted to enter the university's auditorium during a documentary screening. Their demands were all for better housing and medical facilities for the students. However, there was no good reason to interrupt the university's programme. JCD tried to keep them out, but why did it turn into a violent clash? It is unthinkable that the violence even spread to National Medical College Hospital, where injured students were receiving treatment. Student leaders, journalists, patients and attendants were injured.

Clearly, these groups affiliated with the two major parties—namely Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP—are not interested in education or improving campus life for all students. Rather, they are too immersed in turf battles and who will get "control" of the campus. During the July movement, one of the biggest triumphs of the general students at many universities, including Dhaka University, was to rid the campus of Chhatra League, which used to wield unfettered power and terrorised any student deemed to have crossed their path. Haven't Shibir and Chhatra Dal learnt anything from that bitter experience?

While members of both student fronts are solely responsible for their belligerent actions, their parent parties cannot absolve themselves of blame. Both Jamaat and the BNP must rein in their student organisations and make it known that violence will not be tolerated. The BNP, being the ruling party, must take all steps to maintain peace on campus. Jamaat must make sure its student wing members do not engage in provocative acts such as having banners that insult our Liberation War or witch hunts to catch "Chhatra League" members.

The respective administrations need to be in control and not act like passive spectators they were during the Awami League era. We expect strict administrative action against all those who have participated in this violence. Ordinary students must go back to their campuses free of fear and intimidation.

Agri support must reach small farmers

Poor income level of marginal farmers must encourage policy redesign

It is shocking to learn that more than half our farmers—people whose labour and sweat provide the food on our plates—earn less than Tk 34,000 a year, an amount 10 times lower than our current per capita gross national income. According to a new survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 53.65 percent of all food producers in the country operate on a small scale, earning Tk 33,639 on average annually, whereas the rest of the farmers, who are large-scale agri-producers, earn Tk 1,29,956 on average—almost four times higher.

This income disparity reflects decades of agricultural policies and subsidies that have often failed to benefit small-scale producers who constitute, as per BBS definition, the bottom 40 percent of food growers across the country in terms of land area, livestock holdings and annual agricultural revenue. In fact, a World Bank study published in June found that the top 20 percent of farming landholders receive about half of all fertiliser subsidies, while the bottom 40 percent get only 15 percent. Ironically, the majority of our agriculture budget is spent on fertilisers. Despite such subsidy support, farmers are leaving this profession, which is increasingly becoming unprofitable because of unpredictable weather patterns, frequent natural disasters, price volatility of agricultural inputs in the international market, loss of agricultural land, limited market access, and weak post-harvest management.

The current government has taken several initiatives to support farmers, such as introducing the Farmers' Card, waiving agricultural loans up to Tk 10,000 with interest, and slightly increasing the agricultural budget. However, the allocation as a percent of the total budget has declined by more than five percentage points over the last 15 years. ADP implementation in this sector has also been slow. This is where the government should divert its attention and heed expert recommendations. Measures can include mechanisation of agriculture, ensuring fair prices, strengthening post-harvest management by establishing strong cold storage chains, removing or shrinking the layers of middlemen, syndicates and extortion, and making credit more accessible for small-scale farmers.

The government's plan to introduce crop insurance to protect farmers from loss caused by natural disasters is a welcome step. But the insurance must not be designed in a way that makes it difficult for marginalised farmers to reap its benefits. Policymakers cannot continue to overlook the woes of the small-scale food producers or allow the corporatisation of the sector to reach a point where food becomes an oligarchic tool.

CORRIGENDUM

On August 4, 2026, we published an article titled "For women, a degree must build a vision, not just a biodata," in which the author's name was incorrectly spelled. The correct spelling is "Shimu Akter." We apologise for the unintended error.

Public universities must not fall back into partisan control



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ANU MUHAMMAD

Universities in Bangladesh, especially the public ones, are facing a new kind of crisis. During the Awami League government's rule, universities were turned into instruments of authoritarian domination and violence. Vice-chancellors were appointed on the basis of partisan loyalty rather than academic merit, while student dormitories became hubs of intimidation and violence perpetrated by ruling party goons. Intellectual inquiry, academic freedom, and the overall learning environment were severely damaged. We saw the most extreme consequences of this phenomenon in July and August 2024, when universities became the sites of brutal attacks as well as fierce resistance.

In the aftermath of the mass uprising, it was expected that the way universities had been governed so far would change. Instead, there is now growing disappointment and concern.

If universities cannot function properly, and teachers and students cannot concentrate on teaching, research and the pursuit of knowledge, then the country's intellectual growth, political maturity, and democratic development suffer. We witnessed this decline under the previous regime. Unfortunately, some of those patterns still remain.

One of the most urgent concerns is the VC appointment. After the uprising, it was expected that VCs would be appointed based on their academic contributions, teaching record, research, administrative ability, and independence, through a transparent and accountable appointment process. All public universities were expected to do so under a common framework.

Instead, many recent appointments appear to reflect the same old patterns. VCs have been appointed at a number of universities following the national election, and in some cases, their credibility as teachers, researchers or administrators is questionable. There has been no consistent institutional process for appointments. Decisions appear to have come from above. There are also allegations that money may be influencing these appointments. If true, t his is deeply alarming. Removing existing teachers and creating vacancies could also open the door to ill-motivated recruitment.

Another disturbing development is the growing influence of vested interest groups. Recent events at Dhaka University are particularly worrying: disciplinary action has been taken against several teachers, while a section of teachers aligned with the ruling party has allegedly prepared a list of 231 teachers who had reportedly opposed the July uprising, demanding action against them. This indicates another attempt to turn the university into a partisan institution, and the justification of this move must be examined carefully.

During the uprising, students were violently attacked by the ruling Awami League and its affiliated organisations. Some university administrators and teachers played deeply reprehensible or even criminal roles in this crackdown. So anyone found to have participated in such attacks must be held accountable. But accountability must follow due process. Allegations must be properly investigated. Those accused must be given an opportunity to defend themselves, and decisions must be made through a transparent and impartial process. Two years after the uprising, it cannot be acceptable to suddenly prepare a list of teachers, harass them or declare them unwelcome on campus without proper investigation.

Other public universities are seeing similar developments. In certain cases, some student groups have declared teachers they don't like unwelcome on the campus. That is not the role of a student group. If students have complaints, they should convey them to the university authorities through proper channels. The allegations should then be investigated and action taken according to the established rules.

At universities, freedom of opinion is highly important. Simply because someone did not support the July uprising, or supports the Awami League, does not make that person unfit to remain at a university. Universities must include people with different political views, and freedom of expression is essential to academic life.

Some of the universities where these incidents are occurring are governed by the 1973 university orders. The Dhaka University Order, for instance, protects teachers' right to political participation and expression. But academic freedom does not depend only on this order. Without the freedom to think, question and express ideas, teaching and research cannot exist. Some opinions may be wrong or even harmful. Those should be confronted through argument, evidence and scholarship, not administrative punishment. A person may oppose the July uprising, disagree with it, or hold critical views about it. That position may be objectionable to many, but it is not, by itself, a punishable offence. It belongs to the realm of political, social and ideological debate. Only by maintaining this distinction can universities preserve an environment where scholarship can flourish irrespective of political opinion.

Today, there are teachers who are unable to go to their classes. Some are afraid to enter their campuses. A university teacher develops expertise through years of teaching and research. If fear and intimidation keep teachers from teaching, conducting research or entering their workplace, the resulting damage goes beyond the individual: students are deprived of education, and the country suffers an intellectual loss.

There is also the issue of development funds. A number of public universities receive large allocations for infrastructure projects. These funds may be one of the reasons groups with vested interests are so eager to grab administrative positions in universities. Under the previous regime, powerful networks reportedly grew around these allocations. Contractors, sections of the administration, and a small number of teachers and even student leaders allegedly benefited from commissions, inflated costs, unnecessary projects, and irregular procurement. There are signs that this pattern still prevails. If power changes hands but the same corrupt system is preserved, universities will continue to decline. The crisis in education and knowledge production will remain unresolved.

The government must restore universities as functioning institutions. From VC appointments to the wider administrative structure, there must be safeguards against coercion, political patronage, and financial corruption. Transparency and accountability must guide the entire process.

There are also concerns that new student groups on the campuses have started to behave like their predecessors from the Awami League era. Recent reports of intimidation and violence must be taken seriously. Preventing the rise of another student group resorting to mob violence is a crucial responsibility of the government. If it refuses to patronise such groups of students and teachers and ensures that they receive no administrative protection, universities will have a better chance of functioning as they should: as places of learning, critical inquiry, and free intellectual exchange.



VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

Our garments cannot come at the cost of our rivers



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SAMIM RAHMAN BHUIYAN

Bangladesh's garment industry has transformed the country's economy, but one part of that success rarely appears in export statistics. It is the unfortunate environmental costs borne by the country's rivers. International buyers benefit from low production costs, while weak environmental enforcement allows part of those costs to be shifted onto Bangladesh's rivers and surrounding communities, and this is the hidden environmental subsidy behind cheap fashion.

This is not an argument against the garment industry, but an argument for recognising its unseen environmental costs. According to the World Bank, Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry accounts for nearly 80 percent of the country's export earnings. The same report also identifies the sector as the country's largest source of industrial water pollution. Over 7,000 factories in the greater Dhaka region dump over 2.4 billion liters of untreated effluents into nearby water bodies every day. This does not mean that all factories pollute equally, but they do suggest that the current regulatory system has struggled to prevent widespread pollution.

Many multinational fashion brands publicly commit to ambitious sustainability goals such as "carbon neutrality", "circular fashion", or "net-zero supply chains." Yet, the physical and institutional distance between global brands and their production sites often allows environmental costs to remain disconnected from corporate sustainability reports. However, it would be a gross mistake to pin the blame entirely on others. The Department of Environment remains constrained by limited staffing, lack of financial resources, and enforcement capacity, while political and economic forces tend to hamper its enforcement process. The real question is whether effluent treatment plants operate consistently and effectively. The problem is therefore not simply the absence of environmental laws but their inconsistent implementation.

Bangladesh now has 273 LEED-certified green garment factories—factories recognised for their commitment to sustainable building practices and reduced environmental impact—which indicates that there has been some progress. But green buildings alone cannot restore polluted rivers. Green certifications alone do not automatically guarantee that wet processing, dyeing, washing, and wastewater discharge are being managed across the entire production chain. For decades, Bangladesh's industrialisation has treated environmental protection as something to address after economic growth rather than alongside it. Even though this model generates short-term economic gains, in the long run, it creates a lot of environmental and public health liabilities. The human cost is also larger than the language of "environmental degradation" suggests. The Lancet Commission's Bangladesh brief estimated that pollution in air, water, and soil was responsible for 26.6 percent of all deaths in Bangladesh. This does not mean the garment industry alone is responsible for that burden, but it shows that environmental pollution is simultaneously an environmental, public health, poverty, and justice issue. The people bearing these costs are the farmers who can no longer irrigate with river water, garment workers whose lungs have absorbed years of textile dust, and children in riverside slums whose developmental delays will never appear in a corporate ESG (environmental, social, and governance) disclosure. They simply exist in the geography of someone else's profit margin.

This matters for Bangladesh's international credibility as well. We rightly speak on global platforms as a victim of climate injustice, but credibility becomes harder to sustain when we tolerate preventable pollution at home in the name of export growth. Bangladesh cannot ask the world to recognise environmental justice while ignoring the environmental injustice suffered by its own river communities. We cannot be simultaneously the world's climate conscience and its pollution convenience.

So, now the question is what has to change? "The polluter pays" framework must become real rather than theoretical. If the cost of treating waste exceeds the expected penalty for illegal discharge, pollution becomes the economically rational decision. So, the government should raise the fines for polluters substantially, publish the names of those who violate the laws, and make the monitoring data available to the public. This issue is becoming increasingly urgent because environmental compliance is evolving from a domestic regulatory concern into a condition for maintaining access to international markets. "Made in Bangladesh" must mean dignity, skill, and strength. However, it should not mean that the final price of a shirt is kept low because the real cost has been transferred to a river. The Buriganga should not be a balance sheet, the Turag must not be a dumping ground, and the Karnaphuli should not be collateral damage in an export strategy.

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