

## Killings in police encounter

### Independent probe needed

KILLINGS by law-enforcers have registered an alarming rise over the last three weeks or so. Reports have it that some 13 people have been killed since the January 5 election in different parts of the country, of whom nine were victims of the so-called 'gunfights' with the joint forces, while bullet-hit corpses of four others were recovered later.

This report sends a chill down one's spine. The law-enforcing authorities while explaining the circumstances of the incidents have come up with the very familiar stories of encounters. What remains still unexplained is why the law-enforcers couldn't avoid gunfight in almost every case.

Listing some 15 such deadly encounters taking place in January till date, in which the victims were mostly members of Jamaat-Shibir, Ain-o-Salish Kendra (ASK), a human rights watchdog, has condemned these incidents terming them extra-judicial killings.

In this paper, we have consistently been against such blatant use of power by the police, however serious the allegations against the victims might have been. These victims have been denied their basic human rights of defending their cases in the court of law.

By killing the victims in such encounters, members of the law-enforcement agency have themselves seriously violated the rule of law. They deserve to be held accountable and the guilty punished. We demand an independent probe into the incidents.

## Half-yearly monetary policy unveiled

### Largely about investment and inflation control

THE half-yearly monetary policy statement (MPS) has been unveiled by the central bank. The governor hopes the framework will seek to reduce inflation and provide sufficient space in lending to achieve broad-based investment. Keeping inflation within the 7 per cent mark however will be challenging as banks cut interest rates to make available more funds. The danger of cheaper funds made available to clients by banks could trigger greater borrowing and utilisation in unproductive sectors like the stock market and real estate - not the sort of investments required to boost GDP growth rate that has now been revised down to 6.3 per cent.

Another area of concern remains public borrowing. With the wide range of 'incentive packages' being handed out to various sectors of the economy in an effort to offset losses of the preceding quarter due primarily to hostile politics, to what extent government borrowing from state-owned banks (SCBs) can be curtailed is a major question.

The policy aims to further build up foreign reserves in the second half of the current fiscal. Here too remain significant challenges. Foreign exchange earning depends to a large extent on the ability of government to spur up manpower earnings by exploring new markets and consolidating existing ones.

In the final analysis of things, the success of the monetary policy will depend on investors' confidence and that in turn hinges largely on political stability. Unless normalcy returns to the political arena, wooing back investors in large numbers to any productive sector will be a difficult proposition.

## Money, policy and the economy

FAARIA TASIN

THE two policies, namely monetary and fiscal, coupled together help to achieve the macroeconomic targets of any country. Monetary policy - which deals with the alteration of money supply and interest rate -- was announced by the Bangladesh Bank (BB) towards the end of this month.

The country had gone through significant political turmoil in the last few months, which adversely affected the economy. The central bank had estimated GDP growth rate of around 5.8%-6.1% against the government's target of 7.2% set at the beginning of the current fiscal year. A slump in growth rate is no surprise considering the slowdown in economic activities and a fall in investment levels.

Will the new monetary policy statement help in supporting whatever economic factor comes in? Let us take a look.

BB has decided to bring down average inflation to 7% while keeping broad money growth rate to 17% by June 2014. Contrasting this with the previous monetary policy statement (MPS), we can see that there is little or no change.

Convincing emphasis has been given upon reducing inflation from 7.53% to 7%. As oil prices are expected to rise, the effect will creep into non-food inflation, causing overall inflation to rise. Moreover, inflation in India has been on the rise, which implies domestic inflation can rise as well given the significant volume of our imports from India.

As far as investment levels are concerned, many expected an expansionary monetary policy for giving a boost to the sluggish nature of investment levels. However, it should be borne in mind that private sector credit growth towards the end of last year had been 11.1% only against a target of 16%. The target has been revised to 16.5%, which means that there is sufficient space to accommodate the rise in investment that may take place in the next 6 months. There is idle money lying in the banks which can be utilised for investment. Moreover, BB also intends to strengthen the foreign exchange reserve, which it can do by buying dollars; this will fetch more taka into the system and further cater to the rise in public sector credit demand.

As the economy starts to gain momentum this year, it is important to keep inflation low to achieve high consumption and investment levels for a higher economic growth rate.

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# Shahjalal International: Fortress or airport?

## GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSEN

WE are happy that the arrival of Kevin Steele at Bangladesh Biman has thrown up perceptible signs of the national flag carrier lifting itself out of the bottomless pit it has been falling into over the years. We are told that Biman's flights on its international routes have improved in terms of both quality and maintenance of schedule. We are also aware of the old truth that in this country, whoever does a good job or looks about to do it runs the very grave danger of being turfed out of his position by nefarious elements. Steele can be sure -- and he may already be aware of it -- that barbarians are beginning to swarm around him. The good bit here is that he has not caved in. He must not.

That said, there are some new worries which assail us where the story is of Biman. A proposed new organogram for the airline gives us some cold, unsavoury facts: Biman will have an increase in terms of manpower because, we have been duly informed, it needs such manpower. Its security apparatus, we are further informed, is inadequate, which is why the number of security personnel must go up. The goal, after all, is for Biman to come level with other airlines around the world. The goal surely comes in the fitness of things. If after decades of a bad nosedive, Biman can give us reason for pride, can pull itself out of the hole it has fallen into, who are we to complain?

But, yes, if you have been to Hazrat Shahjalal airport of late, you will know of the thousand and one worries which trouble you about the airline in general and about the airport in particular. How's this for a beginning to those worries? For over two months, in the name of security, primitive measures have been adopted to keep the airport in Dhaka free of people. And this is not for the first time. Over the past two decades, rules of entry to and exit from the airport area have been made and remade and mutilated a good number of times. But when citizens, eager to receive family or friends arriving from abroad or departing for abroad, were finally permitted the use of concourse halls at arrivals and departures, we thought it was a most wonderful thing. Of course, you had to buy tickets from the counter outside the main structure before being let in, but that was fine.

Now, though, it seems we have all been pushed back into Jurassic times. Families and friends of the not-so-well off who turn up at the airport to see their children off or welcome them back home are stopped nearly three hundred feet away from the terminal and roughly informed that they cannot go any further. See what poverty does to you? Rough-behaving security guards tell you you cannot go ahead. His word is law. But why blame him? He is carrying out orders, that's all.

There is something utterly gross and wrong when your state sees in you, all the time, a clear security threat. There

are other airports around the world where strict, impregnable security measures are in place and yet you have no instance of visitors being forced to stay away from the terminal. At Shahjalal, a family driving into the drop-off point is stopped by a young guard at the iron gate, who then carefully scrutinises every face in the vehicle and hurls the rude question: is every occupant a passenger on an outgoing flight? The answer 'no' prompts him into even more rudeness: everyone but the passenger must get out of the vehicle, for the rules say they cannot go in. You try reasoning with him: if you get out of the car, how are you going to get back into it and go back home after dropping your passenger off? The guard remains mechanical, almost robot-like: only the passenger can go in. You do the next best thing. You raise your voice, reprimand him and ask him who his commanding officer is. He relents, but by then you begin to wish you had had no interaction with Dhaka airport.

The civil aviation authorities must sit up and do what decent administrations are expected to do. And that means making life easier for citizens, passengers and visitors alike. You have absolutely no right in the world, in the name of security, to prevent one's access to the terminal. As a citizen, I must be allowed to welcome my sibling back home and bid farewell to my child going abroad in the way other people in other countries do. Besides, there is that other matter of petty corruption. Too few wheelchairs are around at the airport to help elderly passengers and even fewer airport employees to operate the wheelchairs. A senior couple return home by Malaysian Airlines, which apparently has arrangements with Biman or Shahjalal airport about wheelchair facilities for its passengers. The couple wait a long time before two wheelchairs are managed for them. The men pushing the wheelchairs tell them in low voices that they have to be monetarily satisfied for their service. The lady, quite flustered, offers them three hundred taka. They tell her, in whispers, not to give it to them right there but only when they are out of the range of airport officials. And then they grumble that three hundred taka is peanuts! And for service they are supposed to provide anyway. Will Malaysian Airlines take notice? And take up the issue with Biman?

No airport toilets could be worse than those you need to make use of at Shahjalal airport. Human waste, dirty water and bad odours fill the place. You try flushing the toilet. All the liquid in the commode -- urine, water and what not -- comes rushing back at you, spoiling your clothes, soiling your shoes, when it should be going down.

That is a crying shame. But no shame can be bigger than a young, low-paid airport employee swindling foreigners out of some money when they need to use those embarrassing toilets. "Pay, pay," he goes on in the manner of a parrot. Is there no one to check this petty criminality?

This is not Kevin Steele's job. But even he must know of what goes on beyond the runway on which he tries so hard to make Biman Bangladesh Airlines land and depart from in line with global convention.

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## Is North Korea opening for business?

### THE ASIAN CONVERGENCE



LEE JONG-WHA

ORTH Korea's system is failing. The country is facing severe energy constraints, and its economy has been stagnating since 1990, with annual per capita income, estimated at \$1,800, amounting to slightly more than 5% of South Korea's. Meanwhile, a food shortage has left 24 million North Koreans suffering from starvation, and more than 25 of every 1,000 infants die each year, compared to four in South Korea. In order to survive, the world's most centralised and closed economy will have to open up.

A more dynamic and prosperous North Korea -- together with peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula -- would serve the interests not only of North Korea itself, but also of neighbouring countries and the broader international community. After all, North Korea's sudden collapse or a military conflict on the peninsula would undermine regional security, while burdening neighbouring countries with millions of refugees and hundreds of billions of dollars in reconstruction costs.

This should spur international institutions and North Korea's neighbours to provide the food aid, technical assistance, and direct investment that the country needs to escape its current predicament and make the transition to a market economy. But there remain significant obstacles to such cooperation -- not least the North's obscure and often-unpredictable politics, exemplified by the recent execution of its leader Kim Jong-un's once-powerful uncle, Jang Song-thaek.

North and South Korea are natural trading partners. In 2012, inter-Korean trade amounted to \$2 billion -- only 0.2% of South Korea's total trade, but 29% of North Korea's. According to the economist Marcus Noland, normalised trade relations could increase South Korea's share of the North's trade volume to as much as 60%.

With a strong commitment to economic reform and opening up -- backed by robust international support -- North Korea could emulate the success of East Asian economies like South Korea, experiencing annual growth of more than 5% for the next several decades.

But there is more to North Korea's situation than economics. The country is locked in a stalemate with the international community, which wants it to denuclearise and become a "normal" country. Unwilling to abandon its nuclear-weapons programme, North Korea faces economic sanctions from the United States, with official aid and membership in institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on hold.

Given how unlikely North Korea is to denuclearise, at least in the immediate future, an alternative strategy is needed. The international community, especially South Korea, should support North Korea's efforts to build a more open, market-based economy through expanded trade and investment, while continuing to work toward a compromise on denuclearisation. The resulting prosperity and accessibility could, over time, bring about political change.

For ordinary North Koreans, who are suffering the most under the current system, such a transformation could not be more urgent.

## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

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#### It's a threat to cricket

It is good that Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has backtracked from its earlier stance to support the big three countries' proposal where all the power of International Cricket Council would be concentrated in the hands of India, England and Australia. The big three's plan, if materialised, would reduce the number of matches we would play, because there would be no 'Future Tours Plan', and we would have to depend on cricket diplomacy in order to ensure that we may play a decent amount of cricket. What is most worrying is that we will not be able to play Test cricket for at least 4 years, and till then we will only get to play 4-day games against associates. These proposals will not only impact Bangladesh and Zimbabwe badly; they are going to destroy the future of cricket, particularly 'Tests'.

Tauhidul Islam

A Level candidate  
Uttara, Dhaka

#### Spare the schoolchildren

We have read news in the dailies that the new ministers and MPs are getting receptions across the country and the school children of their respective areas are made to stand on the roadside for hours to receive them. This is really inhuman and also a violation of the directives of the ministry of education. Such bad practice must stop.

Khaled Ahsan

On e-mail

#### Discretion expected of PM

PM Sheikh Hasina randomly uses indecent words while speaking against any person she does not like. This is extremely unacceptable to us. She is the PM of 16 crore people of Bangladesh and she must be careful in using words.

The whole world is watching us. The PM should not degrade our image or dignity as a nation by whimsically making offensive statements. She recently spoke against Khaleda Zia and used irrelevant words against her such as 'Golapi'.

Md. Shahjahan Mia  
Development Professional  
Dhaka

#### Comments on news report,

#### "Counter-terrorism runs out of gas,"

published on January 26, 2014

#### A Bangladeshi

Now we see the truth. Majority of people are religious but not violent, only a small section is violent. Pathetic hypocrisy. Solution is much more difficult than you think.

#### Aasif Sarwar

The security forces of Bangladesh have become the biggest human rights abusers. They get license to kill. The rise of violent protests is the direct consequence of state-sponsored terrorism. Today we have a government in office who did not even get 5% vote but still wants to stay in power forever.

#### Sara

Since the fall of JMB in 2006, there has been no militancy in the country (plenty of political violence though). The closest case was the grenade blast in a madrassa in 2013. Looks like counter-terrorism is proceeding well despite the factors described in the article.

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#### "The communal mind"

(January 22, 2014)

#### Tearful Bengali

Non-communalism and non-racism do not exist on earth. People are born free but society makes them racist or communal. In Bangladesh, communalism is impeding country's progress.

#### Nafee Khan

It always amazes me how Syed Badrul Ahsan dismisses General Zia as the likes of some African military dictator and hails Mujib for holding the standard of democracy in the country. Was it not Mujib who was our very first dictator? Is Mr. Ahsan going to deny that he indeed established one party rule? Is he going to deny that Mujib assassinated his political opposition Siraj Sikder and then boasted about it in parliament? Is he going to deny the existence of the Rakhsni Bahini which Anthony Masekarnas described as Bangladesh's very own Gestapo?

I think the writer should refer to Mujib's own memoirs to get a sense of just how secular the man was. The writer should stop dreaming of his Marxist utopian society where all the king's men hail Mujib as "Dear Leader". He should come back to reality and face the "Ground Realities" he so speaks of. If democracy and secularism are the principles we are striving to establish as a nation, Mujib or his daughter are in no way shining examples. A black and white version of history only exists on propaganda leaflets.

#### Dev Saha

Mujib did not seize the power from any democratically elected government but General Zia did. Please study the definition of a dictator if you care. Many countries had their unified national government right after the colonial independence. Those kinds of governments can or should not be treated as dictatorial. The man was not even allowed to rule his first five years term. Besides, a military coup that killed the founding father of a country along with his whole family did not really pave the path for a true democracy. No wonder why Zia too became a victim of the same injustice that he committed against Bangabandhu.

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