

# Waging war against Bangabandhu

## GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

## Investment climate after polls

### Private sector expansion on hold

DESPITE banks having no liquidity crisis, credit to the private sector has all but stagnated. Indeed, going by central bank data, loans taken by the private sector is nearly six per cent lower than Bangladesh Bank's target of 16.5 per cent for the current fiscal. Reasons for such a gloomy picture are multifaceted. With foreign bank borrowings hitting the US\$1.5-billion mark, most Bangladeshi banks have ended up with excess monies on their books. The fact that most banks have tightened their oversight in the face of numerous banking scams last year has had a debilitating effect on loan sanctioning. Then again, it is not surprising to find less enthusiasm to take loans at high interest rates hovering between 14 and 15 per cent.

Despite the calm in the political scene since the last general elections, the private sector has been hesitant in taking loans. Because it is not only political stability that dictates growth, rather, the poor state of infrastructure and the non-availability of industrial gas connections have effectively put industrial expansion on hold. Turning the economy around is going to be a difficult task given the context. Restoring investor confidence depends on a continuation of the relative calm that has existed in the post-election period. Making available sufficient primary energy resources, in our case, gas for industrial production remains a major headache for policymakers. Unless fuel for industry can be ensured, it can safely be assumed that new projects or expansion of existing production base will remain on the backburner for the foreseeable future.

## Mugging on the rise

### Where's matching police action?

MUGGING and snatching in broad daylight in the city have registered a sharp rise. Notably, the target of most of the recent incidents has been a particular money transfer agency, bKash, whose employees have been robbed as they were on their way to banks for depositing their collected money.

From the style and timing of attacks on their prey, it appears the muggers are organized and have a strong network to keep tabs on the movement of their victims. In the recent cases of snatching at Bashabo or Turag area in the city, for example, the muggers pounced on the victims as soon as they came out from their agents' offices with the money. And in both cases, the robbers stabbed or shot the victims before making off with the money unchallenged by any member of the law-enforcement agencies within sight.

This is also not for the first time that robbers carried out their operations on targeted persons with such impunity. Reports of similar incidents of snatching and mugging in the city and its adjacent areas are but the regular stuff the daily newspapers.

Since matching police actions to arrest these criminals are few and far between, it is hardly surprising that the frequency of the crime has recently seen a steep rise.

This is simply unacceptable that the police are clueless about the perpetrators of these instances of organized crime.

Why cannot the Dhaka Metropolitan police deploy patrol police to ensure security of citizens, business people in particular, in the sensitive spots of the city?

The police must swing into action and bust the dens of organized crime.

NOT many days ago, Sadek Hossain Khoka loftily informed the country that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's desire in 1971 was to be prime minister of Pakistan. If you choose to remind yourself, there are hordes of anti-Mujib elements in this country who will keep speaking of Bangabandhu's 'surrender' to the Pakistan army on the night of 25-26 March 1971. You are, therefore, not really surprised at the dissembling such men do in their parochial interest. The problem with Khoka, though, is that he was a freedom fighter and without question waged war against Pakistan in the name of Bangabandhu. He was young, he was idealistic and he knew full well that the supreme leader in whose name the war was being fought was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Why does he undermine himself only because he serves a party that conveniently mangles the truth?

In the days of Hussein Muhammad Ershad, JSD leader ASM Abdur Rab was once asked if he considered Mujib the Father of the Nation. His response was rather intriguing. The nation, said he, was in little need of a father or an uncle or any other guardian. The people of the country, he went on, had waged a war of liberation and had freed themselves of foreign rule. The implication was clear: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not matter, was of little consequence. If one were to go by Rab's understanding of history, Mujib had no role in the making of this country. And yet there was a time, between early 1971 and late 1972, when Bangabandhu did mean a whole lot to Rab and others like him. And Bangabandhu mattered again in 1996, when Rab emerged in his new avatar as a minister in the government formed by Sheikh Hasina in June 1996. Suddenly, Mujib was again Bangabandhu, again Father of the Nation.

There are instances of Bengali officers of the Pakistan foreign service who stayed loyal to Pakistan and its new leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto right till 1974. In all that time, they went around informing other Bengalis stranded in Pakistan that Bangladesh was a fleeting moment in history, that it would soon return to being part of Pakistan. By 1974, the state of Pakistan had had enough of these loyal Bengali-Pakistanis and threw them out of service. One of these diplomats, unemployed and without a country, turned up in Geneva, where Bangabandhu happened to be recuperating after hospitalization in London, seeking a meeting with him. His goal was obvious: he needed a job. And he got it. Once Bangabandhu had been murdered, he went back, like so many other ingrates, to his old business -- that of badmouthing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

So you are really not surprised when a pretender to political leadership, one whose record of academic studies has always been under question, now questions the legitimacy of Bangabandhu's assumption of the office of Bangladesh's prime minister in 1972. The surprise is not that Tarique Rahman has emerged in public with this new instance of nonsense. It is in the fact that like so many others in his paternal political organization, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, he has little knowledge or understanding of history. Or, again like Khoka, he is deliberately twisting history out of shape. Are we surprised? His father took part in the war of liberation, and then made sure that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was wiped

off the pages of national history and stayed that way for twenty one years. His mother, initially unable to decide the precise moment and day when she opened her eyes to life and the charms of God's world, eventually zeroed in on the notion that she was born on 15 August. That is a most wonderful discovery. Here you have a nation steeped in mourning on the day; and there you have a party where the number of candles goes up every year in celebration of the 'birthday' of its leader. History and truth be damned.

Bangabandhu continues to arouse intense emotions among those who have never forgiven him for liberating us from Pakistan. Some months ago, the BNP's Sakhawat Hossain Bakul, clearly intending to introduce new controversy around Bangabandhu's reputation, dished out the untruth on television that the Father of the Nation had been accompanied by Shah Azizur Rahman, the well-known Bengali collaborator of the Yahya Khan junta, to the Islamic summit in Lahore in February 1974. In what he thought was a buttressing of his argument, he produced a photograph where an elderly figure in western attire and Jinnah cap stood beside Bangabandhu at Lahore airport. He did not know, or chose to create a lie, that the man beside Bangabandhu's leader was Pakistan's President Fazle Elahi Chaudhry. He probably had forgotten that there were people in this country ready to put him in his place. And they did.

A Bengali who once served in the Pakistan army and, after his repatriation to Bangladesh, in the Bangladesh army once told a proud Bengali woman here in Dhaka in peacock-like arrogance that he did not consider Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation. She hurled at him a response that surely put him to shame. For ourselves, here is a point we cannot forget: had Bangabandhu not led this nation to freedom, our military officers would have gone no higher than the rank of colonel in the Pakistan army and most of our brilliant civil service officers would likely have retired as no more than joint secretaries in the various ministries.

There are people who had little compunction in linking up with Khondokar Moshtaque after August 1975, who became the pillars in his hideously contrived Democratic League. These men had been raised to prominence by Bangabandhu and yet had turned on him, in the manner of Brutus and Cassius and Casca. For years after 1975, they waged war against the dead Bangabandhu. Today, because circumstances have changed, they never tire of singing, once more, endless paeans to the Father of the Nation. The chameleon always triumphs.

Be forewarned. If you have been told that Bangabandhu was not the first president of Bangladesh, if you have been informed that he wished to be prime minister of Pakistan, if you have been handed the 'new truth' that he was an illegal prime minister, a day might come when these enemies of the Father of the Nation, indeed of this People's Republic, will whisper into your ears that no War of Liberation took place in 1971, that we never went out of Pakistan, that the Mukti Bahini were really a bunch of conspirators out to destroy a beautiful Islamic republic created by their ancestors.

If you can repudiate the founding father of your republic, you can commit any sort of criminality. Because you have forgotten the meaning of shame.

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## VISIONARY VOICES

# The grand global health convergence

GAVIN YAMEY and HELEN SAXENIAN

THE world is at a unique historical inflection point. By making today's medicines, vaccines, and other health tools universally available -- and by stepping up research efforts to develop tomorrow's health tools -- we could close the health gap between wealthy and poor countries within a generation. By 2035, we could achieve a "grand convergence" in global health, reducing preventable maternal and child deaths, including those caused by infectious diseases, to unprecedentedly low levels worldwide. What it will take is a coordinated, future-oriented investment strategy.

A group of 25 global health and economics experts (including us) recently came together to develop such a strategy. In a year-long process, the group identified the tools, systems, and financing that would be needed to achieve global health convergence, and produced *Global Health 2035* -- an ambitious investment blueprint that would save millions of lives and bolster human welfare, productivity, and economic growth.

With aggressively scaled-up health investments, ten million lives could be saved annually, beginning in 2035. And the economic payoff would be enormous: every dollar invested in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to achieve this grand convergence would return \$9-20.

Success will require a global commitment to ensuring that everyone can access today's powerful health technologies and services, like childhood vaccines, treatment for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and prenatal care for pregnant women. It will also require increased funding for the development and delivery of new health tools to redress the conditions that disproportionately kill women and children in LMICs.

To this end, one of the central features of the convergence strategy is family planning. As it stands, more than 220 million women worldwide lack access to modern contraception -- an inexcusable situation, given that scaling up family planning would be remarkably simple and inexpensive. And the benefits would be vast.

For starters, improved access to contraception would prevent an estimated one-third of all maternal deaths, and would have a particularly large impact among those facing the highest risk. These include 15-19-year-old women in poor countries, who currently have the least access to contraception, and women who have multiple pregnancies in quick succession, by allowing them to space out their pregnancies. By reducing the rate of unwanted pregnancies, family planning also decreases the number of deaths from unsafe abortions.

This is not only good for mothers. Reducing high-risk

pregnancies, curbing unwanted pregnancies, and spacing out births have been shown to decrease newborn and child death rates. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that fully meeting women's need for contraception would prevent 600,000 newborn deaths and 500,000 child deaths annually.

Moreover, cutting birth rates, which are very high in many LMICs, would help to reduce the strain on these countries' health-care systems by diminishing the costs of maternal and newborn care and immunization. At the same time, it would facilitate social change that fuels increased productivity and output. According to a study coordinated by the World Health Organization, the economic return from scaling up contraception in 27 countries with very high birth rates, such as Afghanistan and Chad, would exceed 8% of GDP from now until 2035.

So, how much would it cost to ensure universal access to modern medicine and health services? *Global Health 2035* puts the total at an additional \$70 billion dollars annually, with \$1 billion of this increase allocated to family planning alone.

But most of the costs can ultimately be covered by LMICs themselves. In fact, the total bill for global health convergence amounts to less than 1% of the additional GDP that these countries are expected to generate in the next two decades. In other words, public investment of less than 1% of GDP could avert a massive ten million deaths each year.

Innovative partnerships aimed at reducing costs can diminish this burden even more. A group of donor governments, foundations, the United Nations, and private-sector actors recently came together to reduce the price of a long-lasting contraceptive implant (Levonorgestrel) from \$18 to \$8.50 per unit in more than 50 LMICs.

The international community must play a major role in achieving convergence. Specifically, it must increase investment in research and development for the diseases that affect the poor, like childhood pneumonia and diarrhea, which kill around two million children every year. And direct financial assistance to LMICs -- for example, to fund family-planning programs and combat malaria and HIV/AIDS -- will be required for years to come.

The opportunity to achieve a grand convergence in global health outcomes is within reach. We need only to convince ourselves to grasp it.

Gavin Yamey, a professor in the Global Health Group at the University of California, San Francisco, leads the Evidence to Policy Initiative. Helen Saxenian is a senior consultant at the Results for Development Institute, Washington, DC.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Congrats to Salma and her team!

Women cricket team of Bangladesh did what the men's team failed to do in the recently concluded ICC T20 World Cup. Poor performance of Bangladesh men's cricket team including a first round loss against Hong Kong and four consecutive defeats in the super-10 round left the whole nation in tears. Just then, a couple of inspiring wins against Sri Lanka and Ireland by the Bangladesh women cricket team brought a sigh of relief and joy to millions of fans.

Special felicitations go to Salma Khatun, the skipper of Bangladesh women cricket team, for her commendable achievement in the tournament. A personal statistic of eight wickets in bowling and 68 runs in batting helped Salma earn a spot among the world's eleven women cricketers. Besides, Salma Khatun has topped the latest ranking of ICC T20 women bowlers while climbed to third position in the all-rounder category.

Ferdousi  
 Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Make law to stop campus killing

Killing of university students out of political grudge is common in our public universities. Neither the university authorities nor the government take any strict action to stop such killings resulting from political rivalry. On the contrary, the authorities show indifference towards these incidents and forgive the criminals. In order to stop such killings, anarchy and political clashes in public universities, the ministry of education along with the university administrations should frame a law and impose it on all political organisations on the campus.

Md. Rashid  
 Department of Statistics  
 Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur

### Death of a brave journalist

ABM Musa, a veteran journalist, passed away on April 9, 2014. He contributed in different fields of journalism during his 64 year career. I used to watch the talk shows in which ABM Musa was a participant. At some talk shows he was the only discussant. Even though due to old age his words were not much clear, he captivated the audience with his wise statements and disclosure of truths. He was very bold in his remarks and analysis and was never afraid to speak the truth. My family and I were his great admirers. At a time when sycophancy has become the norm for most of the journalists, it was really great to hear from such an honest journalist. The news of this brave journalist's death has shocked us so much. He will always be remembered for his great contribution to the nation.

May his soul rest in peace.  
 Mili Rahman  
 On e-mail

### Comments on news report, "Export rise raises hope," published on April 12, 2014

Afzaal

It wasn't pest problem. Unfortunately, few monopolist exporters from Pakistan were involved in this scam.

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### "AL our friend" (April 12, 2014)

Kabdullah

The statement that Awamis are friends of Hefajotis reflects a scary fact that AL has successfully bludgeoned all its opposition including JP. Indo-Awami axis has taken deep and firm roots in Bangladesh. A new era of despotism has begun and there is no way out.

Barkat

With the amount of torture and government harassment Ahmed Shafi can say anything. It seems the government pressure and harassment have made good effect.

Sara

Then what about all the destruction in May last year? At that time, was it not an attempt to overthrow the government?

Nasrullah Khan

What Hefazat did earlier in May 5/6 last year was unprecedented, causing death and destruction of properties. The massive gathering on May 5 was to end at 5 in the evening. They stayed overnight with so much of havoc done declaring not to leave unless their avowed purpose was achieved. However, they left under the pressure of the force. Can they be trusted now? Are they not required to seek public apology? How could they support Moulvi Izharul Islam responsible for bomb blast at his Madrasa at Ctg a few months back?

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### "No jobs yet touts active" (April 12, 2014)

Chabagan3

The river training job should definitely not go to the Indians, for they will build another Farakka.

## MH370 search

Editorial Desk, *The Nation*

The investigation into the fate of Flight MH370 has been muddled by five weeks of frenzied speculation, none of which has helped the search mission.

Science and data analysis is slowly but surely leading us to the final resting place of Flight MH370. Meanwhile, five weeks of speculation and conspiracy theories have been worse than useless in the quest to find the missing airliner.

The last "ping" from the black-box flight recorder was detected last Tuesday as its battery ran down. But hope among the search crews has not faded, with an assortment of scientific methods and advance technologies zeroing in on the wreckage.

The mystery must be solved not only to provide answers to relatives of the flight's 239 passengers and crew, but also to discover the causes of the accident and take steps to guard against a recurrence.

After picking up several signals believed to be from the Boeing 777's flight recorder, search teams have now narrowed their focus to a 300-square-kilometre patch of the ocean floor 1,550km northwest of Perth.

The black-box battery has exceeded its 30-day lifespan, so the mission has switched focus and is now using sonar and cameras on unmanned subs to scour the seabed. Dozens of aircraft and ships are still patrolling the surface, helping to record and analyse data that are gradually narrowing the search.

Meanwhile, away from the search location, people are still indulging in speculation and conspiracy theories. Armchair analysts are wracking their brains for "solutions" to the mystery. According to one, the Boeing 777 was forced to land at a military base on the remote Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, where a passenger called relatives to say they had been hijacked but were still alive. The US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur quickly quashed the rumour. Meanwhile, a newspaper quoted a Russian "spy" who said the plane had been hijacked and flown to Afghanistan.

These plots might be useful to Hollywood moviemakers, but they only serve as distractions for the search teams, and false hope for relatives of the missing.

Of course, the search mission must remain alert for any clues. Malaysian authorities say they have considered all leads, probing a possible hijacking, terrorist plot or a pilot gone "rogue". The pilots' backgrounds have come under heavy scrutiny. Malaysian Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein on Sunday rejected a recent newspaper report that claimed co-pilot Fariq Abdul Hamid tried to call the tower just before the plane diverted from its course.

In the absence of any significant clues from the investigation, no one should jump to conclusions. Malaysian authorities are facing a tough job handling this crisis, buffeted by frenzied speculation as well as criticism from China. They deserve our faith in their ability to do the job diligently and without cover-ups.

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