

# Economy: Not rocket science

**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**  
  
**SHAH HUSAIN IMAM**

**L**IKE photography, economy cannot lie. It reads like an open book. We feel it in our daily grind. We suffer in or gain from it. On balance, it adds to or deducts from our future. Such is the power economy holds on our lives.

When billions go down the drain through cracks of the state-owned banking sector and a new-genre exploitative financial sub-sector, it is the depositors who are hardest hit. Confidence in the financial system dwindling, an important building block of the economy starts eroding. Unless rolled back with timely intervention -- no band-aiding adhocism -- the dyke will burst.

As if that was not enough, flight of capital and undisclosed incomes slosh through the underworld economy, get used on devious agenda or deposited in tax or confidentiality havens. In effect, huge sums of money are being lost to national exchequer, and more specifically, to investment for rapid national development.

But remittances are a different story. Economist Dilip Ratha, writing in TED Global, 2014, has described remittances as the 'hidden forces' in global economy. They account for \$413 billion, which is three times more than global foreign aid estimated at \$135 billion.

Ratha makes three points: First, remittance makes a significant difference in

the lives of those who receive it and plays a major role in the economies of many countries. He sums it up all as "a promise wrapped with love." Secondly, the thrust of his argument is that this is stifled by "practical and regulatory obstacles." The processing on average costs \$200 in each case, which is exorbitant, to say the least. Ratha's third point underlines the extortionist nature of the raw deal: Back in the country, dalals (brokers) eat up two years of a worker's incomes. They are caught up in an indebtedness cycle.

A good part of the benefits are skimmed off by middlemen as cumbersome procedures breed corruption. So, Dilip Ratha (TED) urges: "Simplify the complicated procedures."

We must always bear in mind that unlike other industries like the garments, pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding or footwear, remittances have no cost attached to them. They provide net income.

The World Bank in its latest development update on Bangladesh forecasts 6.2% growth for the current fiscal year but underscores that it is below potential.

It notes high consumer confidence and a spate in domestic demand reflecting a significant purchasing power of the people by virtue of the record retail sales touching \$ 12 billion mark during the two Eid festivals. But business confidence has yet to pick up. This in turn is mirrored on less-than-expected private investment overall.

The WB development update suggests that to upscale the growth rate to 7.2%, investment-GDP ratio has to be raised from the present 28.7% to 35%.

Boosting investment depends on completion of the Dhaka-Chittagong and

Dhaka-Mymensingh highways, double-tracking of Dhaka-Chittagong highway, the Padma Bridge, the Dhaka metro rail project and the two Bibiyana gas field-based large power plants. Massive FDI infusion is called for, requiring stability.

If these projects are completed GDP growth at 8% is possible, the WB iterates.

Public spending was reduced last fiscal as the budget deficit came to 3.7% of GDP, in place of the targeted 5%.

This meant foreign and bank borrowing fell last fiscal by 44% and 34% respectively. There is data mismatch on bank borrowing between the central bank and the finance division, the former putting it at Tk. 8,000 crore last year compared with finance division's data showing the figure to be Tk. 18,168 crore. Accounting mismatch between the finance ministry and the other ministries usually occurs, but this time the discrepancy is quite large.

What draws special attention is the non-bank borrowing. This has soared almost three-fold year-on-year to Tk. 19,737 crore due to higher sales of saving instruments.

There you come to the declining deposit rates in the banks. But the lending rates are high, practically meaning credit squeeze on the private sector. With the bank deposit rate reducing the spread vis-à-vis lending rate is increasing. Ideally, the spread should have been 5% to 6%.

Interestingly, bankers and industrialists are indistinguishable with the result that they are not unduly bothered by the narrow spread. It is, however, new enterprise that is left to its devices.

Exchange rate policy is pivotal to spurring on investment. We are intent on

appreciating value of taka as against dollar. This means that our export pricing is at a disadvantage compared to some other countries competing with us in certain basket of items. We have to make up with volumes what we are losing through propped up taka.

Bangladesh Bank has lifted \$ 5 billion from the domestic market.

Not only are the imports relating to exportables pricey, there's also a declining trend in import. We import raw materials, intermediate goods apart from machineries so that a drop in import is neither good news for industrial productivity nor in terms of revenue collection.

The under-invoicing of exports and over-invoicing of imports receive impetus from currency appreciation.

In all, our dreams of making it to a sustainable higher growth trajectory hinge on completing the mega projects we have taken in hand. We are slow in fund utilisation, quality is at a discount through rip-offs and mismatch between physical and financial targets is chronic.

Project implementation in which our track record has been, admittedly, below par requires a sea-change in terms of a strategic implementation regime. There should be a four-tier structure by way of a transformational implementation machinery. Experts will give a framework in the shape of TOR, to be precise. The second group will provide finance, consultancy and executive support. At the third but crucial tier implementation machinery of the respective ministries. Last but not least stands the national audit office.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*. E-mail: Husain.imam@thedadlystar.net

## Treat's on Me

**HUMOROUSLY YOURS**  
  
**NAVEED MAHBUB**

**S**ORRY sir, your credit card has been declined." "No, I really think that I've been paying my bills."

Fortunately, the wife (as is usually the case), saves the day with her own credit card.

Yeah, yeah, this is the story of our (men's) lives. What catches our eyes at this restaurant in New York is this super woman, who saves the hubby from having to leave his wrist watch as collateral while going home (far away) to get cash or borrow some cash from the driver, is none other than the First Lady of the United States of America.

Are you kidding me? The leader of the free world carries a wallet AND with a dead credit card (perhaps maxed out from financing Obamacare and drones) AND has to PAY for a meal? And who is this waitress on minimum wage (check her work permit, this is New York!) who has the gall to come within two feet of the President (ah, that explains the recent slacking off of the Secret Service)? Not only that, she also takes the First Couple's order, presents the bill, takes the credit card, swipes the card amidst frustrating beeps of declined transactions and then frowns *sotto voce*, "There goes my gratuity..."

I would have thought that the owner of the restaurant would only be too happy to offer a free meal and then boast the act of magnanimity till posterity -- his bragging rights fifty years later to his grandkids (shaky *dadu* voice armed with full poetic license), "Once upon a time, there was a khaki man who came to my establishment, all hungry and I, with the Statue of Liberty in witness, granted him a shade and a square meal..."

Let's assume the fateful (historic?) card was a Visa card. Just for the sake of a story and NO, I am no brand ambassador of MasterCard or American Express...

I am surprised the waitress' head is not chewed off: "You moron! Do you know who that man is? How dare you even present him with a bill?" And then, as an act of reparation and solidarity to the Democratic Party (line), the restaurant manager (aka, a goat by the name of Scape) is summarily sacrificed for even printing out a bill. The next day, with the news making headlines, the owner of the restaurant is charged with providing unhygienic food and adulterated fruit juice, his other business concerns are brought under FBI scrutiny, the restaurant is suspected of long term tax evasion and is then shut down. The New York Police Department then discovers a tunnel in the back wall of the restaurant leading to the vaults of the nearby Wells Fargo Bank and also a stash of gold bars in the toilet (based on some tip offs from disgruntled chefs). Then, the Head of Cards of the bank in question is fired, the high performing Wharton educated CEO of the bank is summoned to the Federal Reserve and is asked to present his birth certificate to ensure he is not working beyond the mandated retirement age. Meanwhile on Capitol Hill, a high powered congressional team is convened to grill the Fed Chairman for the lax monitoring of regulations, is forced into early retirement and is then made the US envoy to Antananarivo. On the streets, there is a drive of mass crushing Visa cards under road rollers at Times Square, Occupy Wall Street reservists are called into active duty to join in the fray, Visa is banned from the country. Finally, Mitt Romney, back from a recent hostile bid for the White House, is found to be a user of MasterCard which is the source of this whole conspiracy of a declined Visa card...

Naveed, stop! STOP!! You are letting your imagination run wild!!

I guess so. This is what Ivan Pavlov calls *Conditioned Response*...

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

## Ebola response needs preparedness, not panic

**POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH**

**E**BOLA Virus Disease outbreak in three West African countries continues unabated and the number of cases and deaths increase exponentially, sending alarm bells ringing across the world. The actions by national governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone supported by the international community have yet to yield desired results. Greater efforts and more resources are being mobilised to reverse the escalating epidemic of this dreadful disease. So far no case of Ebola virus disease is reported in the WHO's South-East Asia Region. Now is the time to step up our preparedness, and to test our plans to ensure effective implementation should it become necessary.

Strong and comprehensive national preparedness is a prerequisite to prevent and to deal with Ebola cases in unaffected countries. The development of preparedness plans should be coordinated by high level national, multisectoral and empowered coordination committees. WHO has provided a comprehensive checklist of core principles, standards, capacities and practices, for all countries to use. The checklist can be used by countries to assess their level of preparedness, guide their efforts to strengthen their capacities and to request for assistance. Items on the checklist include infection prevention control, contact tracing, case management, surveillance, laboratory capacity, safe burial, public awareness and community engagement and national legislation and regulation to support country readiness.

WHO recommended exit screening is being implemented in affected countries to prevent the spread of infection. In unaffected countries, national public health authorities have already initiated screening of passengers coming from Ebola affected countries. Apart from public health officials, the airlines staff and immigration officials too have been oriented to spot potentially infected persons at ports-of-entry.

However, given the nature of this disease, the likelihood of missing infected patients during point-of-care screenings must be considered and planned for. Detection of such cases -- and their contacts and their quick isolation -- warrants intensive and sustained

surveillance which can be undertaken by rapid response teams. Many countries have these teams in place to investigate and manage outbreaks. It is essential that these response teams are trained well and provided appropriate equipment and tools necessary to fight this disease.

It is also vital that sufficient numbers of well-equipped health care facilities required to isolate and manage suspected Ebola patients are put in place. And these facilities must be managed by properly trained staffs that are knowledgeable and skilled in the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Health care workers must be trained to apply recommended infection control practices. We must recognise that health care staff -- our frontline workers -- are the most at risk and, therefore, require the highest level of skills and protective equipment to efficiently look after patients, contain the disease and, at the same time, protect themselves, their families and their communities. Guidelines for appropriate infection control practices in different settings have also been developed by WHO, and they need to be used vigorously and scrupulously.

The communities too have to play a critical role in this public health emergency of international concern. Many outbreaks of infectious diseases in the past have led to panic amongst people. This invariably creates obstacles in surmounting the challenge of outbreaks.

Fear is our greatest enemy. We need to empower communities with information about the mode of transmission of Ebola and the actions they can take to protect themselves and their communities. Guidelines for appropriate infection control practices and enabling cooperation from communities are the keys in combating Ebola virus disease. WHO stands ready to assist national governments as needed.

One of the most important development since the SARS outbreak has been the implementation of International Health Regulations (2005). Augmenting IHR (2005) core capacities especially pertaining to preparedness, human resource, laboratories, risk communication, response, and surveillance are now benefitting countries in their fight against Ebola. WHO continues to work closely with all countries in augmenting their IHR (2005) core capacities.

Global response to Ebola virus disease is possible through sustained and strong leadership, national commitment and comprehensive preparedness. Recent success in Senegal and Nigeria in rapidly containing the spread of Ebola virus disease not only raises optimism but also demonstrates the need and impact of effective preparedness by countries and an efficient health systems that can manage competently a case of Ebola.

The writer is WHO's Regional Director for South-East Asia.

mortality in West Africa in patients who were provided domiciliary care as compared to those who were immediately rushed to health care institutions.

Secondly, avoiding contact with body fluids of a patient with suspected Ebola and applying simple infection control practices at home are important. Bodies of those who succumb to Ebola virus disease must be handled by people who have been trained to perform these tasks. In day to day routine, hand washing is the most basic and extremely useful infection control practice that everybody should scrupulously practice. It protects against a large number of infections.

Global efforts are underway to develop effective vaccines and medicines against Ebola. Recently, Canada has developed one such vaccine and shared 800 vials with WHO for use in the high risk populations in Ebola affected countries; but this is still in early experimental stage. The widespread availability of such drugs will take more time. Till then, awareness and preparedness for early detection, rapid isolation, proper management, meticulous application of infection control practices and enabling cooperation from communities are the keys in combating Ebola virus disease. WHO stands ready to assist national governments as needed.

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## Yesterday's answer



CRYPTOQUOTE

XWQ CWRVQ OJZORTQ RI QNJPGXERN ET

XR XJZM YEZZRZT EMXR CEMNRCT.

-- TFNOQF B WGZZET

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ONE LEARNS IN SCHOOL? SELF-ESTEEM, SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP.

-- TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

## BEETLE BAILEY



HENRY



4-17

## by Mort Walker



by Don Trachte

**QUOTABLE Quote**

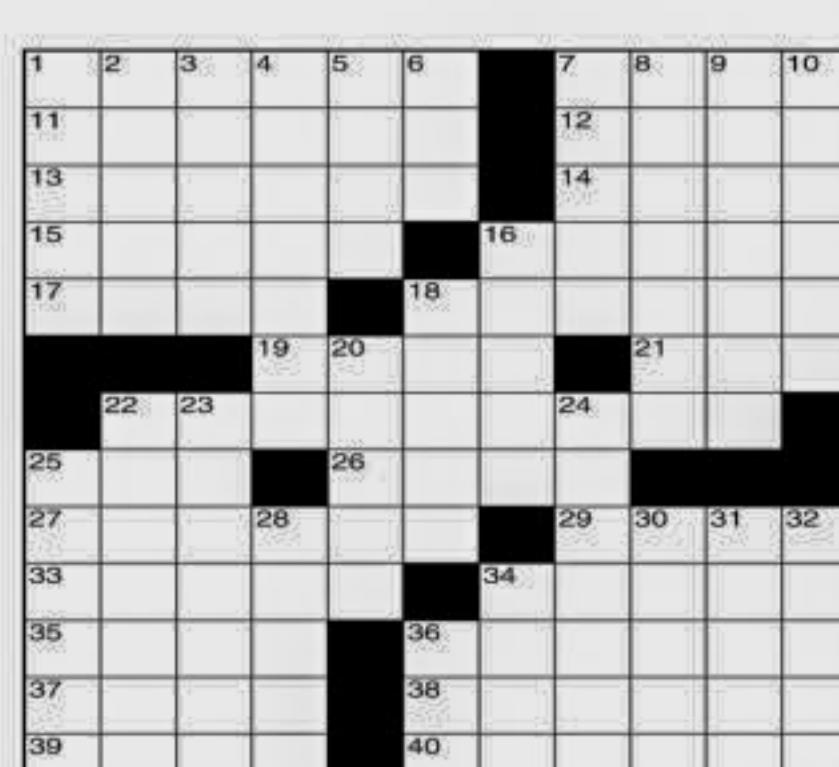
The whole secret of life is to be interested in one thing profoundly and in a thousand things well.

Horace Walpole

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

**ACROSS**  
1 Alarms  
7 Appointment  
11 Tropical fruit  
12 Savvy about  
13 Tooth layer  
14 Much of history  
15 Old traditions  
16 Sub shops  
17 "Why not!"  
18 Holiday event  
19 Malevolent  
21 Checkers side  
22 Civil rights pioneer  
25 Oxford bigwig  
26 Luke's sister  
27 Floors  
29 Swabbing tools  
33 Mystical deck  
34 Infant's sailment  
35 Party to  
36 Pooch  
37 Cairo's river  
38 Irregular  
39 Misses

**DOWN**  
1 Period of time  
2 Camp craft  
3 Set off  
4 Karnak leader  
5 Peer group?  
6 Mineo of movies  
7 DVR button  
8 Just for fun  
9 Long steps  
10 Prepared the salad  
16 Mongolian for "ocean"  
18 Voice, in slang  
20 Man's servant  
22 Hungry neighbor  
23 Doing well  
24 Punk pioneers  
25 Seeing socially  
28 Map areas  
30 Uniform color  
31 Wistful one  
32 Fragrance  
34 Walking aid  
36 Cow's chow



Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ONE LEARNS IN SCHOOL? SELF-ESTEEM, SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP.

-- TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGBAAXR

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.



4-17