

Treating some mayors like pawns in chess

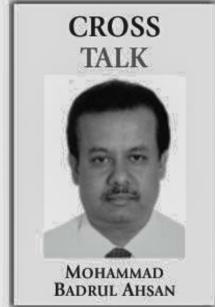
Economic rating remains stable

Bottlenecks limit growth

STANDARD & Poor (S&P), the global rating agency has reaffirmed the 'BB-' long-term sovereign rating for the country. Although termed as stable, economic growth remained sluggish due to a myriad of issues that have yet to be addressed. The vulnerable areas remain infrastructure bottlenecks, political volatility and various limitations the country continues to suffer in terms of administrative flexibility and institutional weaknesses. Sustained investments are needed to improve infrastructure, while political will can bring about institutional reform. All these factors are weighing down better growth. Despite internal shocks and bottlenecks, S&P considers that Bangladesh's average GDP growth rate of 5.2 per cent as healthy.

While buoyed up by healthy remittances, the structural impediments in terms of the energy crunch and the substantial economic disruption caused by agitational politics continue to dog the economy. The confrontational politics that has become a mainstay between major contending parties is by far one of the greatest threats to smooth functioning of the economy. The national debt at present remains within acceptable limits, but the increasing use of national savings certificates with high yields instead of the issuance of commercial bonds, as a major source of government income, is beginning to have a taxing effect.

Fiscal constraints apart, issues of good financial governance, particularly in dealing with nonperforming loans remain a cause for concern. However, the stable outlook cited six times in a row by S&P despite the trials and tribulations, particularly in the political arena, is cause for comfort.



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

ONE by one elected mayors are being suspended with the urgency of an automobile company recalling its defective cars. Three mayors have been

motioned out of their offices so far, all accused but none convicted to this day by any competent court. A number of charges have been raised against each one of them, none of which involves abuse of power, financial corruption or fiduciary failure. At this stage they are mere suspects until the court verdict proves them otherwise. If a man is innocent until proven guilty, these mayors are getting the short end of the stick. They're guilty until proven innocent.

These mayors have been accused of ordering crimes, which certainly are of devious nature. Bombs hurled, people killed and properties damaged; the perpetrators of these crimes deserve the toughest punishment permissible by law. But does mere accusation give enough ground for suspension or sacking of elected officials?

The conflict here is between two entities, both elected to public office by their voters. So what authority does one elected entity have to prevent another elected entity from doing his or her work? Even if that incongruity is ignored, how is it fair to deny someone, based on unsubstantiated claims, the mandate given him by the people? How is it fair to undercut people's confidence in an elected official just because the rulers are suspicious of him or don't like his presence?

Ideally, people who elect an official should have the power to de-elect him. It can be done through impeachment when elected representatives act on behalf of people to decide the fate of a condemned colleague. The other choice is to recall the official through a signature drive and by holding an early election to show that people have lost their confidence in him.

Either of these means can be used only when the accusations against an elected official are beyond any doubt. Constitutions in many US states allow a two-step process for getting a state or local elected official out of his office. Thus the person against whom this process can be invoked has to be convicted of a crime or he has to plead nolo contendere (a plea stating that the defendant will not contest the charge but does not admit guilt or claim innocence) to that crime while in office.

The crimes are also mentioned for the sake of clarity, which include felony, or misdemeanour related to the elected official's public duties and responsibilities and involves moral turpitude, and for which the penalty may be imprisonment. The first step is to suspend the elected official from office. During the suspension, he or she may not receive pay or benefits and the office is filled temporarily.

In the second step the elected official is removed from office if the conviction is not appealed or is affirmed on appeal. If the conviction is reversed or overturned, the elected official is reinstated automatically for the remainder of the term, if any, and all pay and benefits are restored. It's also stated that the conviction doesn't happen until the sentencing.

None of the above has happened in case of the suspended mayors. The charge against the mayor of Sylhet goes back to a murder that was committed eight years before he was allowed to contest the elections in 2013. The other two mayors have been charged for their suspected roles in political violence but no clear evidence has been presented to show they were directly involved.

The question is whether the government can deny an elected official in whom people have reposed their trust to serve them. What if this official is eventually found innocent and acquitted?

Does the government have the authority to extend his term to compensate him for the lost time? Can the government re-elect him by an executive order?

The answer to these questions is obviously no. Only the constituents have the power to put him back in his office through another election. Then why should the government dislocate someone if it can't relocate him? Why should it break something it can't fix?

A recent mayoral scandal that made headlines involved Toronto mayor Rob Ford, who admitted to public drunkenness, drunk driving and illegal substance abuse in 2013. When he refused to resign, the Toronto City Council voted to transfer certain mayoral powers to the deputy mayor for the remainder of Ford's term. It was done because the law didn't allow for the removal of the mayor.

When elected officials are treated like pawns, it diminishes their right to act freely. Above all, it undermines the people who vote for them. And when people are undetermined in a people's republic, what's left of the republic is anybody's guess. Politics should be poker, not chess. Reshuffle cards, deal fresh hands and move on. Don't wait until the last piece is removed from the chessboard.

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Another macabre tale

Security of ordinary citizens have to be beefed up

THE horrific murder of a woman and her uncle-in-law inside her Pallabi apartment exemplifies how vulnerable ordinary citizens have become even in their own home. Sweeti Khanum and Aminul Islam were hacked to death by two assailants who claimed to be relatives of the victims to the security guards. Sweeti's husband, Zahidul Islam who discovered the bloodied bodies of his wife and uncle, had filed a general diary at the Pallabi police station after local extortionists threatened to kill his wife and son if he didn't meet their demands. This is yet another grisly murder in the list of similar incidents all over the country. Earlier this month a mother and daughter were also hacked to death in Chittagong, the murderers fleeing with cash and ornaments, with no arrests being made till date.

The frequency of such murders within the walls of the victims' homes or near them, point out to the lack of police patrolling in neighbourhoods and streets that once used to be deterrents for criminals. It seems the police forces are being spread too thin across the cities with a lot more emphasis on security for VIPs than that of ordinary folk. While it is not possible to predict such ghoulish killings it is possible to deter assassins with adequate security measures. In the unfortunate event when such a murder takes place it is the police's job to properly investigate the case using all the resources available. This includes the use of human intelligence; in such densely populated cities and town, the police can make good use of the wide network of informers at their disposal to find the killers. The successful nabbing of these murderers and more vigilant police patrols can help to bring down such bone-chilling crimes.

"Egotistical" Bangladeshi professionals living in "home away from home"

ANISUR RAHMAN and QUAMRUL HAIDER

WE found the Op-Ed piece "Home away from home" (IDS, May 10, 2015) written by Dr. Fahmida Khatun very interesting. It's interesting not only because it raises some questionable issues, such as Bangladeshi professionals living abroad being "egotistical professionals confined to criticism and cynicism [of their compatriots], instead of attempting to improve the image of their country," but more importantly because it exposes the mindset of the author.

In Bangladesh, generosity, incentive, and bribery have all merged into one; there is no distinction. If someone comes to you and asks you to write a letter of recommendation to your friend or colleague and as a reward that person offers you a small gift, what would you call it, generosity or bribery? It depends on the mindset or the prevailing attitude.

We would like to ask her—will she, as a professional, be prepared to lose her objectivity and give flowery recommendations to an undeserving person, just because that person happens to be her countryman? We wouldn't. Yes, we do recommend Bangladeshis for jobs in academia and other disciplines. But we know this. We know their background, achievements, capability, scholarly output, etc. We advise and recommend students and graduates of Bangladeshi origin for graduate study, faculty positions and post-doctoral work. However, we are objective in our recommendations.

Helping a countryman inappropriately or violating the norms of honest behaviour isn't patriotism, it's corruption. However, if we find our countrymen have been unduly rejected or suffered injustice just because they were black or brown or some other unjust reason, we would protest vigorously and try to remedy the situation as much as we can.

Networking is one thing, but asking for false recommendations is another. The reluctance to go out of the way to prop up somebody isn't unprofessional, it's quite normal in the Western culture. We feel that we must get away from the culture of sycophancy and wallowing in the culture of presumptuous self-importance. Otherwise, we would only help to perpetuate a culture of corruption, which one can see endemic in Bangladesh.

The writers are a Nuclear Safety Specialist (Manchester, U.K.) and a Professor of Physics (Fordham University, New York), respectively.

READERS RESPOND

"Salahuddin in India" (May 13, 2015)

Shifuddin Mamun
It's a government-made drama.

Rasel Ahmed
He can remember his wife's phone number but can't remember how he got there!

Mohsanul Haque Seems
Those who kidnapped him are very clever. They handled everything very carefully.

Kalo Jam
It's an endless drama. Sit tight people, more twists and turns are coming.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Nurul Hossain
BNP and he himself are behind this drama to create problems for the government.

Nijam Uddin Ahmed
Thank God, at least he is alive!

S M Masudul Islam
It's great news that he is alive and we are happy to know this. I hope no one will be made to disappear from his/her family.

Hossain Mohammad Farhad Khondoker
Now the government will arrest him from the airport after bringing him back from India and take him in remand to create more suspense in the drama.

"Protest met with police brutality" (May 11, 2015)



PHOTO: STAR

Mofi
Oh God, is this our police? Are they meant to serve the people of Bangladesh?

Zaman Khan
In our country, the police have always been used by governments to fulfil their own political agenda. The result is an unprofessional, corrupt force.

Abu Elias Sarker
The police have been given a free license to apply brutal force against those who try to disrupt the "rule of law". Nobody should be shocked. Even, being shocked could be an offence and met with brutal force!

Shrabonti Das
What can we say when the police act like goons?

Nirob Sikder
Is it a democratic state or a police state?

Siraz Ibn Malik
On Mother's Day, while people around the world are showing their love and respect for their mothers, in this country women are being harassed and those who stand against the perpetrators are getting kicked by the police. I'm speechless!

Md Anwar Hossain
This is a country where protests against sexual assault will not be tolerated.

"Police brutality again!" (May 12, 2015)



PHOTO: STAR

Mahedi Hasan
The demonstrators didn't break any law; they just raised their voice against the injustice that happened a few days back. It's a kind of aggression from the policemen to terrify people so that they won't take part in any protests like this.

Sakeeb Faruque
Someone needs to teach the police some civic sense.

"Blogger killed, again" (May 13, 2015)

Abrar Amin
Fundamentalists cannot silence people with logic and scientific evidence. That's why they always have to resort to machetes and suicide vests.

Nurul Bashar
We need specific legal definition of free thinkers. A person can definitely have their own ideas but they should not express them if they are against public interest and morality.

Arafath Hussain Muhammad
Sometimes some 'free thinkers' only spread hate speech, not free thoughts.

Farah Piya
I don't support murder. But sometimes it makes me wonder whether if individuals write against Islam, does it immediately make them free thinkers? If I start writing against other religions in a spiteful manner then I would be regarded as a mentally sick person who will need psychiatric treatment in order to maintain peace in the society. My hate speech would not make me a free thinker.

Ahmed Farhad Salim
There are no ifs or buts in this case. No one deserves to die because they expressed themselves. But it's shameful that the government failed to stop

this type of killing. Today a free thinker has been killed, tomorrow they could possibly target teachers, journalists, engineers or ordinary people just because we don't live up to their standard of beliefs.



Hasan Mahmud
No killing is supportable. I condemn Ananta's killing. But I think it would not be wise to jump to conclusions so early about the killers. There remain many reasons behind a killing. We hope a fair investigation will be conducted in this connection. If this killing is seen from a political angle only, utter injustice will be done to the deceased and his real killers will have a hearty laugh.

Muhammad Sarkar
Telling lies and using abusive words against Islam is not free thinking at all.

Reaz Ud
On one hand, some people must stop insulting religion, because it brings nothing but unrest in the society. On the other hand, these kinds of killings must be stopped. Why doesn't the government take stern actions against this?

Sanaul Islam
We want justice. The government from the beginning claimed that they're against terrorism or "jongi-totporota" but they are yet to do anything to prevent such acts. The government should unite people against terrorism otherwise this trend will continue.

Eye Wash
We are afraid and we feel insecure.

Pothik Jon
Without studying the Quran and knowing Islam properly, some people have started writing against Islam.

Shafeen Mahmood
Before people came to know what this person actually said or did, some people have termed him as a "free thinker". Why is that? Could they please provide evidence regarding why they think he's a free thinker? Simply because he might have been anti-Islam? Listen, even Stephen Hawking is an atheist but has anyone ever heard any Muslim say anything bad about him? No, because he doesn't go around maligning others' beliefs without evidence. Anyway, I definitely do not agree with this killing simply because Islam does not support such killings.

PHOTO: STAR