

2015 in Perspective

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proper action against the violators. One of the election commissioners in utter helplessness even appealed to the Prime Minister, to intervene and stop her party men from blatantly breaking the electoral rules.

NATIONAL ECONOMY - BETTER THAN EXPECTED

The beginning of the year saw inflation continue its downward trend, coming down to 6.11 percent - the lowest in 25 months, mainly due to falling commodity prices on the global markets.

The overall inflation rate, which has been on the decline for the last several months, was 6.21 percent in November.

According to the FBCCI, the daily cost of *hartal* and *oborodh* amounted to around Tk 500 crores. They even thought of meeting the BNP chief to reconsider her decision to continue her programme.

Despite improvements in labour, corruption, and monetary indicators, Bangladesh remains stuck in the category of "mostly unfree" countries in an international survey on economic freedom. The country's economic freedom score is 53.9, making its economy the 131st freest - the same as last year's - among 186 countries in the 2015 Index of Economic Freedom, an annual guide published by Washington-based Heritage Foundation and *The Wall Street Journal*. Bangladesh was ranked 132nd in 2013 and 130th the previous year.

In 2015, Bangladesh's position in Human Development Index (HDI) remained unchanged compared with 2014. The Human Development Report 2015 put Bangladesh in the medium human development category. Bangladesh ranked 142nd out of 188 countries and territories.

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves hit the \$25 billion mark for the first time on the back of stable growth in exports and remittance earnings.

For the first time in the country's history, a drone was used to gather farm data (Jhalakathi, Barisal) in March, 2015.

2015 ended with a historic event for Bangladesh. On December 12, the prime minister formally inaugurated the work of the Padma Bridge whose completion, projected by end of 2018, will have a huge impact on the country's economy.

In 2015, Bangladesh continued its progress in increasing food production. According to FAO's Agricultural Statistical Pocket Book-2015, Bangladesh was ranked 16th among countries that procure food from natural sources and fifth in fish cultivation. Farmers bagged a record 1.91 crore tonnes of boro rice last season, enabling the country to log in its highest rice output and attain self-sufficiency in staple food.

However, Bangladesh has slipped down to 73rd position in Global Hunger Index 2015 despite making significant long-term achievements over the last quarter-century in fighting hunger.

This year the power sector achieved stable growth. As of October 31, 2015, the country's power generation capacity has increased to 11,877 MW (without captive and SHS) with 74 percent of the population having access to electricity. However, implementation of major power



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a cheerful mood as she visits the Padma bridge project site at Janjira of Shariatpur. She inaugurated construction of the bridge and the river training work in December, 2015.

projects was not satisfactory, particularly, large coal-fired and gas-fired private power projects.

On the renewable energy front, Bangladesh has become the first country to get funds from the United Nations for its fast growing solar home systems, which are not only lighting up houses in off-grid villages but also showing the world the way to a low-carbon future. In August 2015, The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) issued 395,286 carbon credits worth €3.56 million to two Bangladeshi organisations -- Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL) and Grameen Shakti.

DOMESTIC CRIMES - UNPRECEDENTED, SHOCKING Blogger Killings

The brutal murders of bloggers and publishers brought home the growing level of intolerance towards free thinkers. On February 27, blogger Avijit Roy was hacked to death in public near the Ekushey Boi Mela ground, and his wife was seriously injured in the attack. FBI personnel were in town in March to help with the investigation. This murder followed by several other murders and attacks on bloggers, writers and publishers created a sense of panic and established the growing presence of religious extremists. The lukewarm response from the state and apathy of the law enforcement agencies in investigating these cases added to the fear among the progressive minded intelligentsia.

In 2015, till November, as many as five bloggers were made targets of Islamic extremists; the latest of the killings took place on October 31, when two simultaneous attacks were carried out in Dhaka, resulting in the death of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan and severe injury to three others.

Pahela Baishakh Sexual Assault

At least 20 women were sexually assaulted for over an hour, allegedly under the nose of police, by a group of rowdy youths on the evening of April 14 during Pahela

Baishakh celebrations. The incident sparked a wave of protest throughout the country with people from all quarters condemning the incident and demanding immediate arrest of the culprits. No arrests have been made thus far.

Rajon Killing

13-year-old Sheikh Md Samiul Alam Rajon was brutally tortured to death in Sylhet by a group of men. A 28-minute clip of Rajon's torture went viral, triggering a firestorm of protests on social media and public outrage. Four men have been sentenced to death, including the prime suspect Kamrul Islam who was deported from Saudi Arabia and was caught by Bangladeshi expatriates in that country where he fled immediately after the murder. Similar incidents of torture and murder of children continued to horrify the nation including the brutal killing of Rakib, a minor.

Killing of foreigners

In late September, an Italian national, Cesare Tavella, was shot dead by armed criminals in the capital and a Japanese national, Kunio Hoshi, was shot dead in Rangpur in the first week of October. IS claimed responsibility for both the attacks but the Home Minister insisted that there were no IS activities in the country. The law enforcement agencies have arrested

several JMB men in connection with the murder of the Japanese national.

Police work in preempting the Islamic extremist group went on commendably. Several groups belonging to the ilk of these extremists were apprehended by the law enforcing agencies, some of them caught in the process of revitalising their organisation in an attempt to join the so-called AQIS.

Attacks on Minorities

Since the beginning of the year, the country was besieged with terrorist attacks with confusion regarding who the masterminds were behind it. The responsibility for the attacks on the police, Christian priests, Kantaji temple, and Shia establishments (that left 1 dead and 80 wounded) were taken by IS through a single foreign website. Hindu congregations and temples were also targeted.

On December 24, law enforcement agents raided a JMB den and recovered 16 improvised grenades, other ingredients, including power gel enough to make over 200 bombs and grenades, and a suicide vest. Six young men were arrested during the raid.

On December 25, a bomb blast in an Ahmadiyya mosque in Rajshahi left the alleged suicide bomber dead and three others injured.

While foreign governments seemed to insist IS presence in the country, the government has repeatedly rejected such claims, saying that these were the work of local terrorists aimed to destabilise the nation. Travel alerts, however, were issued by some western countries to their citizens working here prompting foreign buyers, tourists and even the Australian cricket team to avoid coming to the country.

The feeling of unease has continued with death threats to eminent intellectuals, attacks on Christian priests and on Hindu establishments towards the end of 2015. Most of these incidents have been linked to extremist groups within the country.

CENSORSHIP OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT HOME

The BTRC briefly blocked social messaging applications on January 18, 2015 for four

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Two men in their 90s, in Banshpachai enclave of Lalmonirhat, embrace on the eve of the exchange of enclaves between Bangladesh and India.