

A hypothesis test for the future of democracy

An unspeakable crime

We demand exemplary punishment

It is impossible to describe in words the revulsion we feel to write about the unspeakable abuse of the five-year-old girl allegedly by Saiful Islam, 42, of Jamirhat village in Dinajpur town on Monday night. Have we become a society that knows not how to protect its children from such horrific crimes which have seen an alarming rise lately?

We want the highest punishment of the pedophile under law without procrastination. But there are deeper questions that need to be addressed. Should our responsibility as a society end with calling for justice or even delivering it? What is going to happen to the future of this child? Can the government and the society guarantee that she will have a normal life? What kind of social programmes does the country have in place for reforming criminals like Saiful? Can the government certify that he will not act again once he is out? And what about all the other children who are sexually abused but silently bear the torture?

We would like to take the law minister at face value when he assures the public of quick disposal of all murder and rape cases including this one. We hope that he keeps his word so that no child has to go through this in a country governed by laws. Failure to do so will erode the credibility of the legal system which is supposed to provide justice to the oppressed.

It is time the government stopped treating it as a mere law enforcement issue. We must acknowledge the reality of child abuse in our society and put an end to it. Social scientists should find out why such crimes against children are on the rise.

A society that cannot protect children is no society at all.

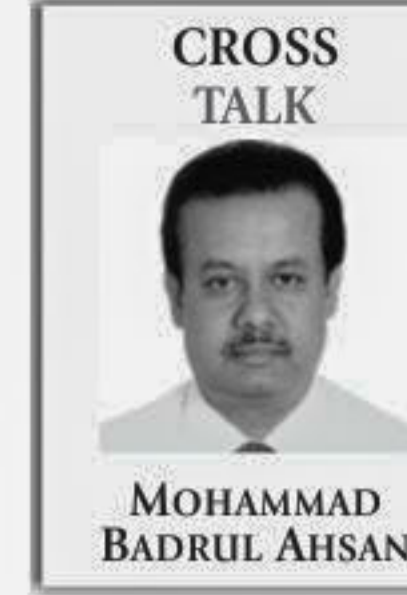
One in four suffer from malnutrition

Greater budgetary allocations needed

ACCORDING to a recently launched study by the World Food Programme (WFP), a quarter of the population suffer from a lack of proper and balanced diet and one in three children suffer from stunted growth. Although we have claimed for some years that Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in food production, the latest findings come as a wakeup call. What is new to us all, including policymakers, is the impact underage marriage is having on malnutrition of children and adults alike. The costs of malnutrition is estimated at USD1 billion a year to the economy, but this can change if prudent measures are taken to address the problems at the root level.

It is good to learn that the finance minister has promised to give more emphasis on allocating more funds in the next budget to address the issue of teenage marriage. The issue remains a social problem and requires a village-level awareness campaign that can be successfully launched if non-stake actors and media are made partners in this most crucial of issues. We also need to raise awareness among mothers on the need for the right type of nutrition that their children must consume in the first three years of birth.

A third of the population suffering from stunting translates into a third of the future labour force being less than productive. The data should serve as an eye opener for policy planners on where resources need to be allocated and better spent. It requires prioritising proper nutrition as a safeguard for a healthy population – one that will not prove to be a burden on the State in later years.



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

In eleven days from today, either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump is going to be elected the 45th president of the United States. But, for the first time in the American history, a cloud of uncertainty is hanging over the election night since Donald Trump said he would accept the election results only if he won. For the first time, a longstanding American tradition appears threatened. It smacks of a tell-tale sign of trouble in paradise, where democracy has thrived for 240 years on the virtue of voters' choice.

The burden of history might eventually bear upon Donald Trump, and he might change his mind if he loses. It's possible he's only holding everybody in suspense like an amusing prankster, and will do the right thing at the right moment. His party, family and friends might be able to exert influence on him to revise his decision and return to his senses.

But what if Trump chooses to be a dog in the manger? What if he sticks to his determination not to accept defeat in good grace? It'll be an awkward moment for his country, and an embarrassment to its image in the world. Even if finally overcome, this break with tradition might leave a fissure to widen further under growing pressure.

The United States is already seething with tensions. Racial, religious and economic contentions are rife amongst a large segment of the American people manifested in the phenomenal rise of a hatemonger like Donald Trump. Never before in the history of US politics has a contender for the top job in the country banked so much on moral bankruptcy.



It's an irony that the present dynamics of democracy is going bottom up, not top down. That means the best examples of democracy are being influenced by the worst, which should have been the other way around. Most countries of the world are ruled by monarchs, despots and an ersatz of usurpers of power, some a blend of any two or all three.

Autocrats are always the people whose minds are obsessed with superlatives verging on the absurd. For example, the Cambodian media has been instructed to address Prime Minister Hun Sen as Lord Prime Minister and Supreme Military Commander. Hun Sen's wife Bun Rany, who never formally graduated from a university, is addressed as Celebrated Senior Scholar. Ayub Khan of Pakistan and Idi Amin of Uganda were field marshals, although the size of their armies may not have supported their titles. Jean-Bédel Bokassa of Central African Republic decided to convert to Islam one fine morning and proclaimed himself emperor. General Antonio López de Santa Anna, three times dictator of Mexico, held a

magnificent funeral for the right leg he had lost in the so-called Pastry War.

Donald Trump has the streaks of an autocrat in him, a deluded mind who sees no wrong in his incessant indiscretions. He has lied, cheated, insulted and groped, a flippant man whose mouth guides his heart. And, nothing sticks to this Teflon man. Not the running list of women, who are accusing him of inappropriate sexual advances. Not the incontinence of tongue that blurs the lines between facts and fictions, decency and denigration. The Republican candidate is a one-man army that ransacks common sense.

But his madness could be the tip of the iceberg. Democracy is undergoing upheaval in its home base as people are often divided over how much concentration of power is safe in their rulers' hands. In Afghanistan, there is growing clamour for the rehabilitation of its bandit king Bacha-i-Saqao, who ruled the country, a century ago, for nine months. In Germany, resurgence of Adolf Hitler is a constant threat, and last January, the publisher of his autobiography Mein Kampf was surprised by the high demand for its reprint.

This month, the Russian city of Oryol unveiled the first ever monument to the 16th-century ruler, Ivan the Terrible. One of the main backers of the monument has argued that strong leaders have coincided with a strong state in Russian history. He cited the example of Alexander II, who freed the serfs and they came to the city and caused a revolution. Again, Gorbachev was weak, as a result of which a great state collapsed.

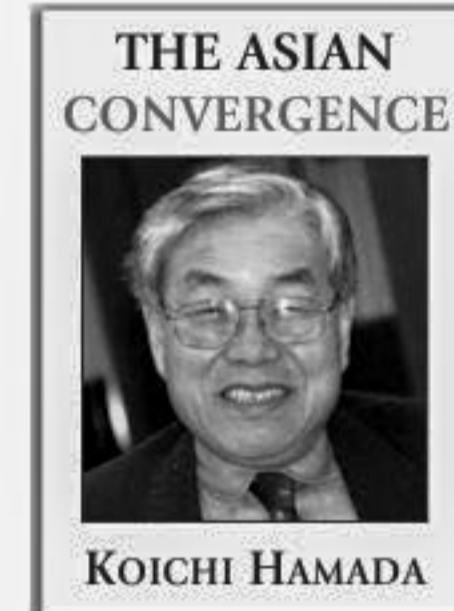
Thus, Donald Trump is the symptom not the disease. He's a mere aberration from the rectitude, which is suffering from fatigue. People are losing hope in the democratic system in the manner a watchman falls asleep after a strenuous night of vigilance.

The US election on November 8 will be a hypothesis test for democracy. Depending on who wins, it will give a seminal hint on its dynamics. Democracy is safe as long as leaders are looking for strength in their people. But when people are looking for strength in their leaders, it loses steam.

The writer is the Editor of the weekly First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The secret success of Abenomics



THE ASIAN CONVERGENCE

KOICHI HAMADA

TOKYO is in the midst of a construction boom, with old high-rise office and apartment buildings being rebuilt in more modern and elegant forms, all while maintaining stringent environmental standards. So bright is Tokyo's gleam – which is sure to impress visitors at the 2020 Olympic Games – that the city might seem like an anomaly,

given gloomy reports that, after decades of stagnation, Japan's GDP growth remains anaemic.

In fact, even the small cities of Kushiro and Nemuro in Hokkaido, located near the disputed islands between Russia and Japan, are being rebuilt and modernised at a brisk pace, as is apparent to any tourist (as I was this summer). What explains this divergence between disappointing national economic data and visible progress in Japanese cities?

It may be a problem of calculation. According to official data, Japan's economic growth slowed by one percentage point, in real terms, in the 2014 fiscal year. Yet, according to Bank of Japan researchers, tax data suggest that growth was more than three percentage points higher than the official figure, implying that GDP was some ¥30 trillion (about USD 300 billion dollars) larger than officially reported.

There is good reason to believe that it was. Tax data account for distributed GDP and cover a broader swath of economic activity than traditional measures of output. And, because few taxpayers have incentives to inflate their reported income, the resultant figures are unlikely to be overestimates.

More insights into Japan's real progress can be derived from another source: the new System of National Accounts 2008, the latest international statistical standard for national accounting by the United Nations Statistical Commission. Tentative calculations using Japanese Cabinet Office data suggest that, according to the standard of the 2008 SNA – which counts research and development, including intellectual property, among firms' capital assets – Japan's 2011 GDP exceeded the published data by 4.2 percent, or ¥19.8 trillion.

A third failing of traditional GDP measurements for Japan lies in the fact that they account only for what is actually produced within the country's borders. But we live in a globalised world, and nowadays, Japan's citizens are acquiring considerable income from Japanese activities abroad.

Given this, Gross National Income (GNI) might be a more

accurate representation of Japan's economic circumstances. In the 2015 fiscal year, Japan's GNI grew by 2.5 percent, while its GDP grew by only 0.8 percent. Because Japan's nominal GDP is now close to ¥500 trillion, the 1.7 percentage point difference between GNI and GDP amounts to ¥8.5 trillion.

To be sure, foreign activities are not the only reason why GNI is growing more quickly than GDP. Even within Japan, many firms have lately been earning revenues at record rates, thanks largely to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic revitalisation efforts. In fact, the gradual economic growth spurred by so-called Abenomics, together with the low exchange rate that

over ¥8.5 trillion, and Japan's economy is nearly ¥70 trillion, or 14 percent, larger than official data suggest. While this is only a rough calculation, it is impossible to deny the potential differences that more comprehensive calculations can make.

This has important policy implications. According to official statistics, which place Japan's GDP at ¥500 trillion, Japan is still ¥100 trillion away from achieving a key goal of the second iteration of Abenomics: to achieve a ¥600 trillion economy. The revised reading of the statistics would reduce that shortfall by 70 percent. Simply put, Abenomics is not getting enough credit.

The incompleteness of the official view can be



has prevailed until recently, has helped to spur the tourism that has enabled cities like Kushiro and Nemuro to fund their reconstruction.

Taken together, the growth of Japan's GNI and the implications of tax data and 2008 SNA suggest that Japan's economy has been doing significantly better lately than the national statistics seem to suggest. Though each new calculation focuses on a different year, we can use them heuristically to estimate unaccounted-for economic progress in Japan.

The result is substantial: a ¥30 trillion annual adjustment for distributed income and ¥19.8 trillion adjustment for R&D and intellectual property. Add the GNI adjustment of

frustrating, especially as Japanese stocks suffer setbacks, even as Chinese stocks increase, despite the fact that, unlike Japan, China faces considerable hidden economic risks. A more comprehensive and accurate representation of Japan's economic progress is vital to give investors the confidence that Japan's economy merits. That, in turn, would bolster the impact of Abenomics even further.

The writer is Emeritus Professor of Economics at Yale University, and a special adviser to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

A WORD A DAY



ILLUSTRATION: CALVIN WONG

LIONISE

Verb [lahy-uh-nahyz]

To treat a person as a celebrity.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Little girl fights for life

Three people were arrested at Lalbagh on charge of raping a girl. We find this kind of horrible news almost daily these days. People demand strict punishment of the culprits, but in very few cases do we come to know about any measures taken after a long time, if any. The victims of physical, sexual and acid attacks are usually women and children belonging to a certain strata of the society and they are

mostly helpless. The time has come to define what we mean by exemplary punishment. In Indonesia they are about to introduce a law to castrate perpetrators of such offenses. Bangladesh must take measures to specify penalties against these hideous crimes and act against the criminals immediately. Shamsuzzoha On email

Brutality against women and children needs action

The names of Tonu, Risha and Khadiza are still fresh in our minds, as is the brutality committed against them. And yet proclivity to perpetrate such savagery, especially against women and children, is not under control. Punishment of these crimes is rarely enforced. Some perpetrators have affluent or powerful affiliations, which further prevents their conviction. These

cases have set up an example of negligence towards horrible acts, and given rise to a situation of panic.

The government must establish the strictest possible punishment against crimes harming people's lives.

Aninur Gomez Computer Science Department, Dhaka University