

## The reality of teenage gangs

How society has failed its youths

THE Rapid Action Battalion has arrested eight teenage gang members responsible for the sensational killing of ninth-grader Adnan Kabir in the capital's Uttara last month. Adnan, who himself was a member of a local teenage gang called 'Nine Star', was brutally beaten to death with hockey sticks by members of rival gangs 'Disco Boys' and 'Big Boss'.

The three teenage gangs were involved in a feud and were beating up rival group members for quite some time. Things eventually took a deadly turn when one such beating resulted in the death of Adnan. There are about 30 or more teenage gangs in and around the area reportedly. Thus, one can only imagine how many more there are throughout the entire city.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the gang members apprehended by RAB were school dropouts. Given that 25 percent of all individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 in our country are neither in the education system, nor participating in the economic cycle, what we are witnessing may well be the early ramifications of a frustrated youth population. Lack of opportunity for youths to get involved in productive and extracurricular activities, in the absence of public spaces, libraries, etc., in particular, have all contributed to the chilling reality society is now having to wake up to.

Nevertheless, it is a reality that society must comprehend and fast. Law enforcers must, of course, be wary of such gang activities; however, without bringing about positive social changes, bringing youths back on track might be difficult.

## Keeping the city clean

Is it only the Mayors' responsibility?

THAT well-intentioned actions can lose their purpose without active participation of the people is highlighted by the three pictures carried in Thursday's *The Daily Star*. Those show three different and dismal states of the road - side waste bins put up by the two city corporations as part of the effort of the two mayors to keep the city clean. These pictures are fairly representative of the general condition of the several thousands of such receptacles set up by the city corporations all over the metropolis. Either they are damaged, tied upside down or only the iron frame, meant to hold them up, is the only thing standing. And even those that are standing are not being used correctly.

The common refrain from most quarters would be that the city corporations did not carry out the necessary awareness campaign before setting up the waste bins. Admittedly, there is woeful lack of civic sense amongst us, and from time to time the authorities should conduct awareness drive, particularly on using civic facilities. But the level of civic sense one possesses or does not possess, is not correlated to the level of education or affluence of a person. It has to do more with his or her innate sense of right and wrong. Not one of the motorcyclists who run their vehicles on the pavements is indigent, but nonetheless defies the law without any qualm. But one wonders if it requires much awareness campaign for the city dwellers to realise exactly what these light waste containers are meant for.

As for disappearance of the bins, there are ruffian groups that go about stealing these things, and perhaps volunteer groups in each locality can be organised to watch over these.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Cricket musings

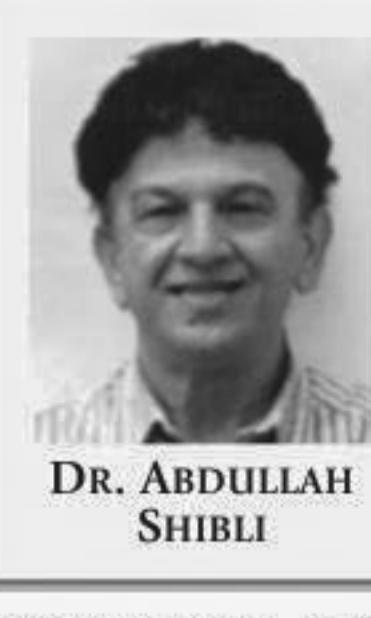
Much is being said and written about the missed run-out chances of Murali Vijay by Mehedi, although it wasn't unlikely for it to happen. There have been many instances of missed easy run-outs and more difficult run-outs that were surprisingly achieved. We must remember that the Indian batting lineup is quite strong. Even if Vijay had been able to achieve the run-out, there would have been the other batsmen to take care of.

Talk shows and the media seem to be wary of what Virat Kohli will do next, and many believe that he might play more aggressively now than before despite scoring a century. However, both Taskin and Taijul have bowled well. The question remains as to whether Rabbi will get Kohli's prized wicket.

Luthfe Ali

On e-mail

# The humble economist



DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

ALL indications are that the world economy will experience robust growth in the coming months barring any oil shocks, outbreaks of open hostilities in the Far East, collapse of the British economy following Article 50 notification, and a financial crisis akin to the Greek economic crisis of yesteryears. Economic models, revised since the election of Donald Trump and his recent economic policy pronouncements, indicate that notwithstanding all the uncertainties that befall us now, economic growth and international trade will see modest to decent acceleration this year.

This is a pretty rosy picture and might appear to contrast sharply with the title of this article. However, allow me to throw in a word of caution about the sunny outlook I project. As a decent economist, I will first of all concede that my predictions are not 100 percent certain, i.e. I have only 75 percent confidence in my forecast. Secondly, I will also share with my readers about my heightened sense of foreboding given that 2017 has been widely characterised as a "year of uncertainty". Why does uncertainty matter? Human beings are driven not only by their economic instincts but also by their urge for self-preservation. When uncertainties increase, consumer confidence goes down and that leads to cutback in spending and business investment.

Before I get into the details of my forecast, let me confess at the outset that the title of this op-ed came to my mind from the book *The Argumentative Indian* by Amartya Sen. But the similarity ends there. While the book by the Nobel Prize winning economist is based on his writings on Indian history, culture and identity, mine is a parody of the role and performance of fellow economists. In fact, my title can be considered an oxymoron. Economists are not humble and I have not come across any writing or theory by an economist that could be considered to reflect any modesty.

As I look into the future of the world economy in the post-Brexit and the post-Obama era, I am awed by what we have not done so well as economists. Why do I bring it up at this juncture? At the end of each year as I review my forecasts from past years, I often discover that I missed a few shots. Last year, I forecast, too boldly I will now admit, that British

economy would prosper after Britain decided to vote for Brexit. Well, the results have been mixed so far. According to *Financial Times* economists they surveyed are gloomy on UK prospects for 2017, and feel that, "Growth will slow, incomes will be squeezed and investment delayed."

On this side of the Atlantic, everybody was wrong, even the economists last year. The pollsters, political pundits, the print media, and all the prognosticators failed to see the mood of the voters and predict the election of Donald Trump. And the economists failed to see that the election results would give the economy an immediate boost. On February 3, the

that our forecasts are only as good as the assumptions underlying the models, and that in reality unpredictable forces, or uncertainties, can often derail our best laid plans, we hate to proclaim that "our forecasts have a margin of error of 50 percent."

Fortunately, the pendulum is swinging and the mood has definitely changed even at the US Federal Reserve Board. The Fed, which sits at the helm of the world's largest economic body and is entrusted by the Congress to steer the economic ship of the nation judiciously, is throwing up its hand and announcing "we don't know". During the meeting of the Federal Reserve's Federal Open

federal funds rate."

Add to this, the cloud of uncertainty hanging over Europe where upcoming elections might overturn the cart in France, Germany and the Netherlands. Add to that the fate of the negotiations between the government of Theresa May and EU as Brexit terms are being worked out. Let us for a moment parse the sentence, "we do not know". Are we completely in the dark? The predictions were always encased in "margins of error" but now the margins have become wider. Another factor is that politics is now a "key driver of uncertainty". And most economists can relate to the anguish expressed by the Fed when it admitted that there was "considerable uncertainty about the timing, size and composition of any future fiscal and other economic policy initiatives, as well as about how those policies might affect aggregate demand and supply."

However, all said and done, 2017 will be a good year for emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) including India, China, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Indonesia, even amidst heightened uncertainty. Global growth in 2017 is projected to rise to 2.7 percent up from 2.3 percent in 2016, led by a robust US economy. Growth in EMDEs will benefit from receding obstacles to activity in commodity exporters and continued solid domestic demand in commodity importers.

Commodity prices, protectionism and China's economic performance are areas that present uncertainty. China is suffering from "financial imbalances" driven by corporate debt which surged by more than 60 percent to top 165 percent of GDP. According to Stratfor, "a nationwide debt crisis looms at Beijing's doorstep amid business defaults and bankruptcies, low industrial profits, winnowing returns on investment and the very real prospect of yet another slowdown in the real estate sector. How well Beijing manages these problems in the months ahead will, to a great extent, determine China's economic, social and political stability for years to come."

Similar uncertainties remain closer to home. Areas of uncertainty for Bangladesh are currency, trade, and European markets. The reforms that various quarters are asking for remain a far cry affecting both domestic and foreign direct investment, and growth. While elections are two years away, we can only hope that the uncertainty and the maneuverings by political parties jockeying for power will not derail our march towards middle-income status.

The writer is an economist and a contributor for *The Daily Star*.

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE

# No hidden figures: Success stories can help girls' STEM careers



PHUMZILE MLMAMBO-NGCUKA

WHAT makes a young girl believe she is less intelligent and capable than a boy? And what happens when those children face the "hard" subjects like science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)? A recent study, "Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests" showed that by the age of 6, girls were already less likely than boys to describe their own gender as "brilliant", and less likely to join an activity labelled for "very, very smart" kids.

Research tells us repeatedly that girls and boys are strongly influenced in the development of their thinking and sense of themselves by narratives and stereotypes that start to be learnt at home and continue at school and through life, reinforced by the images and the roles they see in advertising, in films, books and news stories.

So, how do we change this, and what should girls learn now that sets them up to thrive in a transformed labour market of the future? The answer is not simply more and better STEM subject teaching. They must also learn that girls have an equal place in that future. This isn't a given. A major and underestimated obstacle for girls in STEM is the stereotype that has been created and perpetuated that boys are better at these subjects and careers.

Not only do we have to ensure that children enter and stay in education, we must equally pay close attention to what they are learning. The changing future of jobs means that fields of study for children now in school should include equipping them for "new collar" jobs in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Jobs that do not exist today may be common within the next 20 years, in the green economy, or areas like robotics, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and genomics.

The media plays a powerful role in biases, with the power through effective storytelling to reinforce negative perceptions and norms or to set the record straight and create new role models. *Hidden Figures*, Margot Lee Shetterly's book, that tells the "untold story of the black women mathematicians who helped win the space race" is now released as a film and brings recognition to those who were doubly invisible at NASA—as

they are far higher levels of success in science than fiction tells us. Alarmingly, best-selling movies have tended to significantly underrepresent the facts. A 2015 global study supported by UN Women showed that, of the onscreen characters with an identifiable STEM job, only 12 percent were women. This tells us that women are still hidden figures in science—and it has a chilling effect on girls' ambitions.

UN Women is working with partners around the world to close the gender digital gap. For example, in Moldova, GirlsGoIT teaches girls digital, IT and entrepreneurial skills and specifically promotes positive role models through video; similarly in Kenya and South Africa, 20 Mozilla Clubs for women and girls teach basic coding and digital literacy skills in safe spaces.

We need to deliberately and urgently



women and as black women. Making accomplished women scientists visible is important for the accuracy of news and of history. It is also an essential part of building further scientific success.

Census data in the United States of America shows that women comprise 39 percent of chemists and material scientists, and 28 percent of environmental scientists and geoscientists. These are not the equal proportions that we ultimately want—but

According to a 2016 Girlguiding survey, fewer than one in ten girls aged 7 to 10 in the UK said they would choose a career as an engineer or scientist. Un-learning this bias and changing the stereotypes is not a simple matter, yet it's essential if we are to see boys and girls able to compete on a more equal footing for the jobs of the future. This goes hand in hand with the practical programmes that teach immediately relevant skills.

un-stereotype the ecosystems in which children play, learn and grow up. Across the world, in schools, at home, in the workplace and through the stories we tell—we all need to reflect and enable a world where girls can thrive in science, so that their success becomes as probable as they are capable.

The writer is United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women.

PHOTO: STAR