

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Prime Minister's call to students

### Address systemic flaws too

THE PM has called upon the protesting students to return to their classes, to where they belong. We appreciate the appeal and reiterate her feelings because it is not desirable that students should be on the streets rather than where they ought to be. But while echoing her sentiments, we feel compelled to ask a very fundamental question and seek an answer as to why the students are on the streets and not in their classrooms in the first place.

It is clear but needs restating that the reaction of the students is the manifestation of a helpless and hapless majority at the mercy of a very powerful few. Helpless because of a system gone completely haywire, compounded by the unwillingness of those responsible to address and cure the ills of the transport sector virtually abdicating their responsibility.

In the same address, the PM has referred to road safety and improvement of road infrastructure in the country and all that her government has done in this regard. That is all very well and good but merely improving the facilities would not cure the flaws which have come to be embedded in the system and became the norm. The statistics that this paper carried yesterday in first page speak volumes about the disorder in this sector. Who will explain why nearly half the vehicles on the roads are unregistered, and why the number of license issued is a third of the registered vehicles.

We would suggest that alongside the improvement of infrastructure, the central flaws like untrained and unlicensed drivers and unfit and unregistered vehicles on the roads require urgent cure. Thus the BRTA must employ all its resources and funds, seek more of both from the government if need be, and work on a war footing and a precise time-bound plan to filter all the unfit vehicles and unlicensed drivers, among the several important flaws, to restore some modicum of sanity in this sector, and thereby ensure more safety of the passengers and pedestrians.

## An indefensible offence!

### Attack on journalists is an attack on democracy

WE strongly condemn the attack on the members of the media by the activists of BCL and the police. It is shocking that journalists would have their phones, cameras and other equipment snatched and destroyed, harassed and physically assaulted for doing their duty. This reprehensible violation of free expression, press freedom and the right to information, which should be available to all in any democracy, is simply unpardonable.

At the same time, we are equally surprised that the police commissioner should seek the assistance of a select student body to control the demonstration and identify non-students, as reported in the press. It is the duty of the police, and not of any political party appendages, to maintain law and order. Under special circumstances, the police can, of course, call on citizens for assistance and support. But instead of doing that, why did the police commissioner specifically have to call on a particular student body? Meanwhile, allegations have also emerged that the law enforcers did nothing to prevent the attacks on students, journalists and others by the BCL cadres which, again, begs the question as to who the police are serving.

Such attacks on the press is an attack on press freedom and free expression in general, which is extremely alarming. We call on the government and law enforcers to ensure the safety, security and physical integrity of all journalists who are simply doing their job, and to hold those responsible for the attacks to account, in order to uphold the very fundamental of a free society.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Just cause, unjust attacks

From class 1 to 12, students are being taught about the history of Bangladesh—how the country took birth and what its cost was. So many stories and poems about our liberation struggle have made the students familiar with the word *shangram*. They have been taught how the then ruling Pakistani government had unjustly attacked peaceful demonstrations. Even at that time, the government used police and military to take actions against the protesters. My question is, who gave the authority to a party to attack the protesters on the streets of an independent country? Why did the police let the activists of a party beat the peaceful protesters? Why are they above the law?

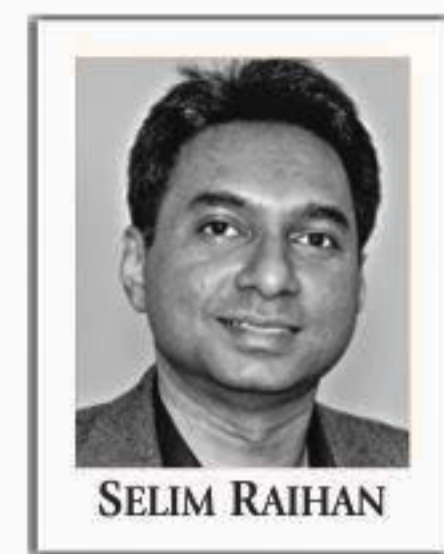
The students have been protesting for a just cause—a cause, if fulfilled, will reshape the transport sector that is in trouble. Beating them up was a direct attack on the independence of the people.

Monjurul Islam, By e-mail



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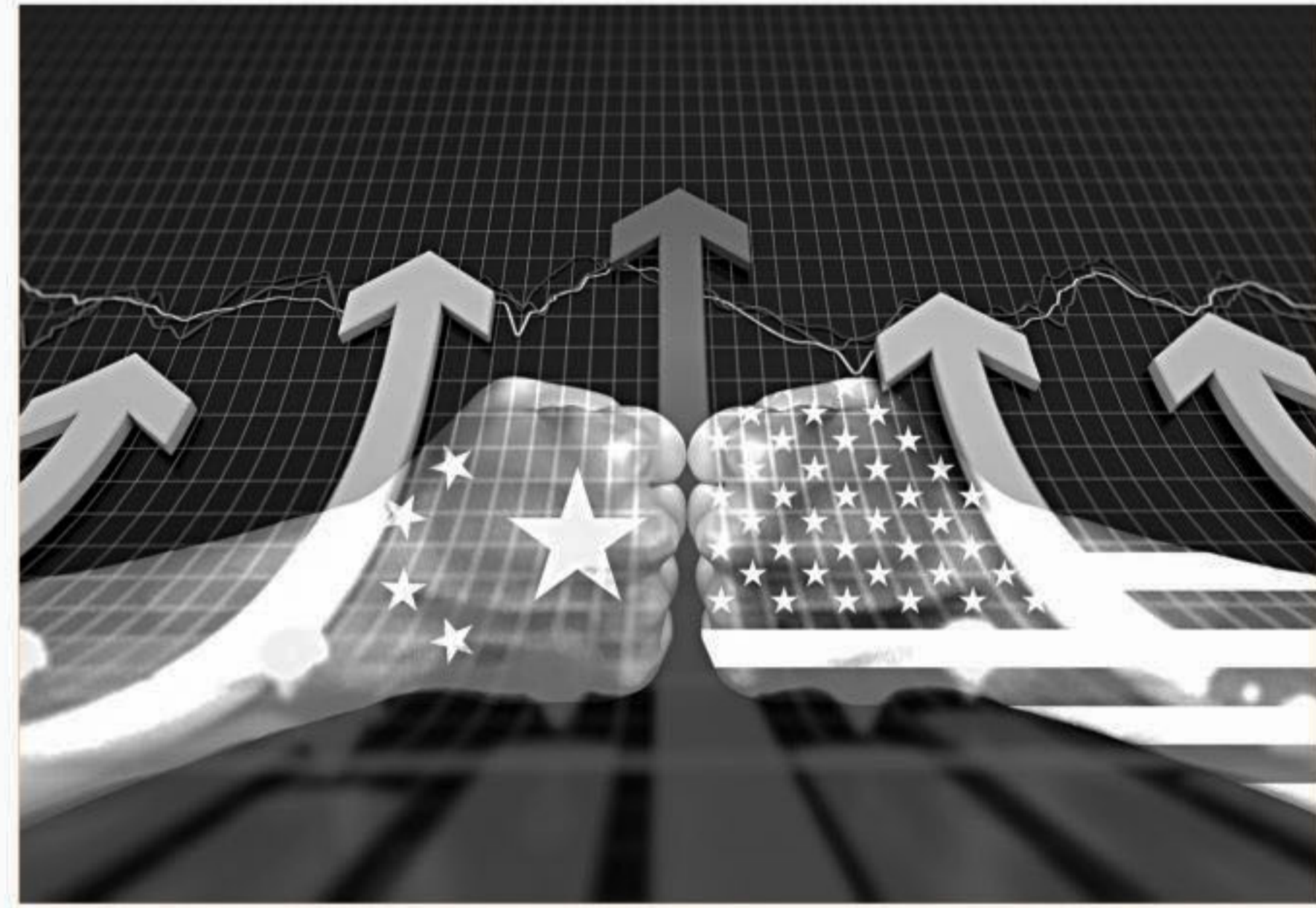
# The world cannot afford a full-scale trade war



SELIM RAIHAN

THE idea of globalisation and free trade has gained prominence in the world over the past three decades. Despite some limitations, globalisation and free trade regime are seen as beneficial for economic development, poverty reduction, and enhanced integration among countries. Recently, with the emergence of a trade war between the US and its leading trade partners, especially China, the question appears to be whether globalisation has started walking in the opposite direction. It is true that until very recently, nobody had anticipated such an unprecedented

depends on how long this war will last and how intense it will get. Its effect can be both short- and medium-term and even long-term. In the short term, the imposition of substantial additional tariffs by the US on imports from its leading trade partners, especially China, and vice versa will significantly affect the volume of bilateral trade between them. This may lead to a rise in exports from some countries to the US, as the US would then seek cheaper imports from those countries. If the trade war continues in the medium to long-term and intensifies, with the involvement of more countries, there is a high risk of a global economic recession as the trade war would affect consumer demand in the major economies of the world, especially in North America and European Union.



event. After the formation of the GATT in 1948 and eventually with the emergence of the WTO in 1995, trade agreements and rules have prevented such a trade war. It is also important to mention that WTO rules have compelled even powerful countries to honour international agreements on trade rules. Needless to say, a trade war is not consistent with the global development initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

What would be the effect of this war between the US and its leading trade partners in the global market? The effect

In order to explore the effects of a large-scale trade war between the US and China, we have simulated a scenario using the global general equilibrium model, namely the GTAP model. This scenario considers a targeted 10 percent tariff on US imports from China and a targeted 25 percent tariff on China's imports from the US. The simulation results show that all major economies in the world would suffer export losses because of this trade war. The largest loss in exports would be for China as its exports would decline by 2.7 percent, which is equivalent to USD 61 billion. In

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case of the US, the export loss would be 2 percent, which is equivalent to USD 31 billion. The EU's export loss would be 0.14 percent, which is equal to USD 27 billion. Four major economies in South Asia would also experience a decline in exports. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka would encounter losses in their exports by 0.2 percent, 0.04 percent, 0.06 percent and 0.57 percent—which are equivalent to USD 72 million, 120 million, 13 million and 63 million respectively. It can be mentioned that the size of the aforementioned losses can grow if more countries get engaged in the trade war. All these might contribute to a prolonged global recession, which is not conducive to the attainment of SDGs by 2030.

It is, however, important to note that the length and depth of the trade war are yet to be clear, which is creating a lot of uncertainties around the global trade regime. An uncertain trade regime is not conducive to developing countries like Bangladesh that have become trade-dependent over the years. When the global trade regime is guided by some rules and principles, as those rules and principles have been achieved over the past six decades through the GATT and WTO processes, all countries in general and the developing countries in particular are benefited from those rules and principles. However, with the escalation of the on-going trade war, the effectiveness of those rules and principles is at stake. In particular, the role of WTO is greatly undermined, which can lead us to an uncertain global trade regime. If the US pulls out of the WTO, the global trade regime will probably face the biggest challenge after the Second World War.

During the trade war, some other parallel scenarios can emerge too. For example, since Chinese exports to the US market are facing escalated tariffs, Chinese firms may consider relocating their factories to other countries to avoid the additional tariff burden. This may lead to soaring foreign direct investment (FDI) from China to other developing countries. The major contenders of this FDI would be countries from South Asia and Southeast Asia. However, much of the success in attracting those Chinese FDI would depend on the status of the domestic business environment, infrastructural constraints, and several political economy issues including quality of institutions in the host country and geopolitical relations the host country has with China and other neighbouring countries.

Another worrying scenario could emerge if the US—which imposed additional tariffs on imports from China based on the logic of a huge negative trade imbalance—also imposes additional tariffs on imports from developing countries like Bangladesh based on the similar logic. This will certainly have a shocking effect on those developing countries' exports to the US.

The world cannot afford a full-scale trade war. It is now essential to reemphasise the importance of a rules-based global trade regime. The need for re-energising the WTO is increasingly felt given the emerging challenges and complexities in the global trade regime.

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The two best ways to reduce infant mortality



MELVIN SANICAS

quarter of the current rate in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Given the magnitude of the challenge, huge investments will be needed in health-care infrastructure and planning. Perhaps the most effective way to reduce infant mortality would be to encourage uptake of two readily available resources: maternal vaccinations and breast milk.

Protecting children from early deaths begins before they are born. When a woman is vaccinated against common illnesses like influenza, her body creates antibodies that recognise viruses and boost natural defences against pathogens. When she becomes pregnant, these protective proteins are transferred to her baby across the placenta.

Remarkably, the benefits continue after birth. For example, while the flu shot is not approved for infants younger than six months old, clinical trials have shown that children born to mothers who have been vaccinated are better protected against the illness. In one study of mothers and their babies in Bangladesh, researchers recorded a staggering 63 percent reduction in influenza cases among infants born to vaccinated mothers, a 36 percent reduction in the number of serious respiratory illnesses for mothers, and a 29 percent reduction in such illnesses among infants.

Maternal immunisation against the flu also helps protect infants from pneumonia, a common cause of childhood mortality. A 2018 analysis of flu-vaccine trials conducted in Nepal, Mali, and South Africa found that infants were 20 percent less likely to develop pneumonia if their mothers had been inoculated. Children too young to be completely vaccinated against *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and influenza were the biggest beneficiaries. Armed with data from these and other studies, governments in low-income countries should be able to plan smarter immunisation campaigns and substantially lower rates of infant morbidity and mortality.

The second way to reduce childhood mortality, breastfeeding, arguably has a greater impact. Breast milk is the perfect nutrition for a baby, providing all the

proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and enzymes that a young body needs to stay healthy. Best of all, mothers create new antibodies in real time, which help strengthen young immune systems.

Unfortunately, rates of breastfeeding and breast-milk consumption are well below desired levels. Only 40 percent of infants worldwide are breastfed exclusively until they are at least six months old, as the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends. The reasons are complex, but in many countries, lack of education, together with aggressive marketing by makers of baby formula, has

type 2 diabetes. Many of these gains derive from the fact that breastfeeding helps break down the extra fat that accumulates in a woman's body during pregnancy. In fact, producing milk for a single infant burns as much as 500 calories a day.

Even though the majority of new mothers are able to breastfeed, not all women can produce enough milk, owing to exhaustion, depression, or physical weakness following postpartum surgery. Some mothers are simply unable to meet their child's needs, while others lack the medical or social support to navigate the logistics of breastfeeding. Nonetheless, for those who can supply their babies with at least six months of



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PHOTO: STAR

contributed to a decline in breastfeeding. Recently, the United States has been accused of siding with the formula industry by opposing a WHO resolution in support of breastfeeding.

Convincing mothers to breastfeed should be easier. For starters, breastfed babies are less likely to contract ear infections and meningitis, or to suffer gastrointestinal illnesses and diarrhoea. These advantages continue for as long as a baby is breastfed.

Mothers also benefit from breastfeeding. Research shows that women who have breastfed during their lives are less likely to develop non-communicable diseases like cardiovascular illness, breast cancer, and

breast milk, the benefits are significant.

If the international community is serious about meeting the health targets set by the SDGs, it must redouble its efforts to encourage more mothers to be vaccinated against preventable illnesses and to feed their newborns breast milk. These two practices alone could do more to reduce infant mortality than just about any other global health initiative.

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