

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Unwarranted clash

### Maintain peace at all costs

THE sudden clash between BNP activists and the police on Wednesday in front of the BNP office was both surprising and distressing. The violence was a rude interruption to the otherwise peaceful atmosphere prevalent since the election schedule was announced.

One can question the heavy-handedness of the police as well as the unwarranted aggressiveness of the BNP cadres, which led to the unwarranted events. At least two police vehicles were torched and many people including opposition activists and policemen wounded. Such incidents harm the prospect of a peaceful election that the nation wishes to see.

However, it could have been avoided had the Election Commission been proactive about enforcing the electoral rules and regulations from the beginning. After the election schedule was announced, the way potential candidates of major political parties collected nomination papers clearly violated the Electoral Code of Conduct set by the EC. But it took no action at that time. Such an approach would create an impression that the commission is selectively enforcing rules.

The police, too, could have shown more restraint in dealing with such a large crowd of people. Nonetheless, the aggressive attitude shown by some BNP activists is inexcusable. BNP high-ups must remember that such a posture will damage its own public standing and, what's more, will hurt the atmosphere needed to ensure a peaceful election.

Political parties, in general, should discourage their grassroots activists from resorting to violence and urge them to divert their energy towards peaceful electioneering. All parties need to make efforts to ensure that such violent incidents aren't repeated.

## Why is RTA not being gazetted?

### The administration must not cave in to pressure

IT is very demoralising for all citizens to see the apparent foot-dragging on implementing the Road Transport Act 2018 (RTA 2018), which got the president's approval on the same day as the Digital Security Act 2018 a month ago. While cases have been lodged related to the latter, the former is yet to be implemented. The only logical surmise for this delay is the pressure exerted by the transport unions who have been demanding leniency in punishment for drivers. That the Act was passed, in much diluted form though, in the face of countrywide protests by students demanding safer roads, is waiting to be put into effect, is an affront to all commuters in the country who continue to be victims of rash driving on our roads.

The reason offered for the delay that it takes years to formulate rules of an Act does not hold true, especially since we had the Digital Security Act enacted into law at record speed and under which people have been filing cases. Shortcomings of the RTA 2018 have been raised by organisations advocating for safer roads and transport unions. The 48-hour strike enforced nationwide recently by transport unions resulted in the deaths of three infants who were on their way to seek medical assistance.

Such is the hold of the transport workers that they had the gall to stop ambulances from plying roads, and now we have a situation where policymakers appear to be cowering in the face of their threats for further agitation. And we wish to be known internationally as a law-abiding country! The Road Transport Act needs to be implemented immediately so that people can be safe on roads, and this is non-negotiable.

# Quantum of disarray

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WHAT with difficult t-to-deal-with Mr Trump on one side and "revanchist" Mr Putin on the other, the world seems to be in a turbulent place right now. It appears others in

the world arena are also queuing up to join this disarray to make matters worse for years to come.

What do the developing nations make of it and plan for it right now? In his weekly column of "American Account" in the *Sunday Times* on November 4, Irwin Stelzer laments, "...my colleague Walter Russell Mead argues that the 'crashing sound you heard in world markets last week wasn't just a correction. It was the sound of the end of an age...of relatively stable international relations.... The world has entered a new, complicated and dangerous era of nationalist competition...reverberating through the world's financial markets.'" The "crashing sound" was referring to a plunge in share prices in October that vapourised USD 4.5 trillion of the world's wealth, with almost half of that loss occurring in the US.

Worse still, we are entering that "dangerous era" devoid of weapons with which to fight or slow down a recession.

Jamie Dimon, CEO, JPMorgan Chase, voices a similar note of uncertainty on the world's economic performance with the threat of further tariffs by Trump and narrowing on nationalism. He, however, during a long interview on Bloomberg last weekend, stressed on efforts (by nations) to shore up on the economic front building on the positives that are already there.

The IMF whittled down the forecast for the global economy in 2018 and 2019 to 3.7 percent—0.2 percent below its prior estimate for both years. *The Guardian* warns, "If the current trade disputes were to escalate further, they could deliver a shock to a broader range of emerging and developing economies." The emerging countries' GDP growth rate may taper off to 4.7 percent. But if it comes to that, this will negate the consistent incremental growth pattern regarded as crucial to attain the SDGs by 2030.



Traders work on the floor at the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange in New York.

PHOTO: BRYAN R. SMITH/AFP

Sweden, Denmark and Norway cope better with an economic downturn than most countries despite having an expensive welfare system. Two factors contributed to the Scandinavian success story: tighter regulation of the banking sector since the 1990s and a strong public sector employing five out of every eight workers in the region.

Bangladesh had come out virtually unscathed from the 2008-09 recession because of its huge domestic market and high volume of local demand sustaining the economy. Besides, it had fewer externalities linking it to the pulls and pressures of international financial markets.

Nevertheless, owing to the expansion and diversification of the economy or the size of its GDP over the last decade, there is need for caution.

On the positive side, we must step up efforts to optimise the benefits of a window of opportunity opening up to our garment manufacturers and exporters on account of the China-US

trade war. Now we export cotton-based low- and middle-end apparels to the US market. We can of course raise the volume of such specific items with lower price tags. We will have to enter the higher-end non-cotton-based garments business to maximise earnings for the RMG sector. Let's have backward linkages for weaving and knitwear units. China can help us with technology, relocation and investment through the special economic zones we envision with the country.

The current account deficit crossed USD 10 billion in the recently concluded year. The deficit-to-GDP ratio was about 3.5 percent at the end of last fiscal year. Historically, the ratio had been between one percent and 1.5 percent in a fiscal year. If the trend continues, Bangladesh risks being an indebted country in the not-too-distant future.

Professor Naoyuki Yoshino, Dean of Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) and Professor Emeritus at Keio University, Japan advocated for "Hometown Investment Trust (HIT)" in

Dhaka last month. It envisages a "stable way to supply risk capital" to support "poor people around big infrastructure projects—roads, railways and highways—through funds." This can help them start their own business, according to Professor Yoshino. Thus, a heartless abandonment of the poor under mega infrastructure projects will be replaced by inclusive and participative growth pattern. HIT has spread from Japan to Cambodia, Vietnam, Peru and Mongolia.

Exploring insurance, pension funds and other forms of savings may go hand in hand with bringing in increasing numbers of taxpayers who gleefully evade any semblance of accountability. This stands in cruel contradiction to banking defaults, capital flight, and splurge abroad in second-home glory. Some quality inward thinking is due.

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CRISTIANA PA CA PALMER and ANNE LARIGAUDIERE

THE quality of the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink depend directly on the state of our biodiversity, which is now in severe jeopardy. We need a transformational change in our relationship with nature to ensure the sustainable future we want for ourselves and our children.

Largely overshadowed by other concerns in coverage of the recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was a section on how much better it will be for

the figures double for plants (16 percent) and vertebrates (8 percent), and triple for insects (18 percent). The knock-on effects for people would be severe.

Similarly, forest fires, the spread of invasive species and other biodiversity-related risks to human well-being are substantially lower at 1.5 degrees Celsius relative to 2 degrees Celsius of global warming.

Ocean temperatures and acidity will rise higher, and ocean oxygen levels will drop further, in a 2 degrees Celsius warmer world, leading to irreversible losses of marine and coastal ecosystems, less productive fisheries and aquaculture, less Arctic sea ice and fewer warm water

November 17-28 for the UN Biodiversity Conference. A central focus of the meeting will be a move towards a new set of global biodiversity action goals and targets.

The current goals, established in 2010 in Aichi, Japan, expire in 2020, when they are expected to be formally replaced.

Thankfully, we can point to meaningful progress on the protection and conservation of biodiversity over the past 10 years. For example, the annual rate of net forest loss has been halved; global protected areas have increased to 13 percent of coastal and marine areas and 15 percent of terrestrial areas

To make better decisions on biodiversity, we need the best-possible understanding of the problems and the best evidence on which to act. Authoritative expert assessments, such as the IPCC report, and those of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the IPCC's counterpart in biodiversity, provide this evidence.

Founded just six years ago, IPBES has already published seven major assessment reports on, for example, pollination and food production; land degradation and restoration; and regional assessments of biodiversity in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and the Americas.

IPBES also has a landmark new assessment report in the pipeline, to be released in Paris next May—the first comprehensive global assessment of biodiversity since the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005—it will describe the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services around the world.

For almost three years, about 150 experts—including natural and social scientists, and indigenous knowledge holders—from almost 50 countries have contributed to the report, which covers land-based ecosystems, inland waters and the open oceans.

They have evaluated the changes that have occurred over recent decades, a range of possible scenarios through 2050, and the end results to expect from the pursuit of various policy options, including "business as usual".

Once published, the IPBES global assessment will inform not just the critical deliberations on the world's post-2020 biodiversity goals and targets, but all policies and actions related to biodiversity for the next decade and beyond—decisions fundamental also to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

The choices humanity makes now will profoundly affect the world's biodiversity, which in turn will impact the future economies, livelihoods, food security and quality of life of people everywhere. We must get them right.

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biodiversity—the essential variety of all life on Earth—if global warming can be held to 1.5 degrees Celsius rather than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Based on one modelling study, involving 105,000 species, the IPCC report estimates that 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming will dramatically alter the world for 8 percent of plants, 4 percent of vertebrates and 6 percent of insects—eliminating more than half of their geographic range.

In a world 2 degrees Celsius warmer,

coral reef ecosystems (70 to 90 percent losses at 1.5 degrees Celsius; more than 99 percent at 2 degrees Celsius), with the loss of all the natural benefits that these provide to people around the globe.

One model projects a more than 3 million tonne drop in the world's annual catch of marine fish at 2 degrees Celsius of global warming, twice the loss anticipated at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

It is against this deeply worrying backdrop that member States of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meets in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt

(although not all world ecoregions are adequately covered, and most protected areas are not well connected); and the number of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in conservation facilities has risen.

These successes are not, however, nearly enough to halt the ongoing loss of plant and animal diversity on Earth—a fundamental worldwide extinction crisis, deepening every year, and severely aggravated by climate change.

So, what can world policymakers do next?

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### It should be easier to pay taxes

Income tax is the second biggest source of revenue for the government, according to our national budget, second only to Value Added Tax. Taxpayers have long complained that our tax system is complicated and has remained so, despite changes.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue, an independent think-tank, had recently carried out a survey which found that some 68 percent of people in our country do not pay taxes. Out of this 68 percent that did not pay taxes, 25 percent of people belonged to the affluent class.

This, despite 75 percent of respondents saying that they feel that our tax system favours the upper classes, while nearly half of them believed that it was overly complex.

It should be mentioned that the tax-GDP ratio in our country was only nine percent in FY 2016-2017, far below the 15 percent average among developing countries. Bangladesh's per capita income is almost double that of Nepal's, but our tax-GDP ratio is still lower than Nepal's 14 percent.

The tax authorities should recognise that by simplifying our tax system it could ease the process for more people to pay taxes, which would in turn increase the government's revenue earnings.

Md Zillur Rahaman, *By e-mail*

