

BNP must get its house in order

Persistence of unruly activities by party members raises concerns

After having weathered a difficult 15 years in the opposition camp, it is natural that there would be chaos in a big party like BNP as it goes about reorganising its house with an eye on the next election. But after over two months since the fall of Awami League, BNP still seems nowhere close to establishing internal discipline. Rather, reports of widespread extortion, infighting, and other illegal and unruly activities by party members are overshadowing its pro-people messages to become the dominant narrative surrounding the party. If morning shows the day, then critics are perhaps right to wonder if a BNP regime would be significantly different from the one it helped to oust.

This concern has again come to the fore after a report by Prothom Alo revealed how two BNP leaders, including the convener of BNP's recently dissolved Dhaka North unit, have taken over extortion operations at key transportation hubs in Dhaka, including the Mohakhali bus terminal, where over a million taka is allegedly collected every day. After August 5, they took control of the Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association. They also established control over local businesses and even mosques in areas previously controlled by Awami League's inner circle. At the terminals, extortion is taking place in various forms, such as charging fees for using various facilities like toilets, entry or exit fees for long-distance buses, etc. Clearly, little has changed in terms of abuse of power despite the change of power.

This is despite what appears to be a large-scale purge within the party. To date, according to another report by Prothom Alo, some 1,023 leaders have faced various disciplinary actions over the past two months—with 523 receiving show-cause notices, 437 expelled, and over 60 others suspended, warned, or reprimanded for various criminal and unruly activities. There have been even instances of dissolution of committees. Despite all such measures, the persistence of unruly activities by party members points to deep-seated structural issues within the BNP that need to be resolved first.

The time has come for a critical rethink by the BNP leadership. They must recognise that the stakes now are higher than ever. If BNP cannot get its house in order, it risks alienating not just the reformists within the party but the broader population who expect real change after decades of political instability and corruption in the country. So, besides ensuring sustained disciplinary actions, BNP must find out what's emboldening errant party members and undertake comprehensive reforms by placing ethical and democratic conduct at the heart of its operations.

Govt should prioritise dengue control

Areas outside Dhaka deserve particular focus

It is quite concerning how dengue has been spreading fast outside Dhaka, with Chattogram emerging as the new hotspot. While previously dengue cases were higher in Dhaka, the trend changed last year with more cases reported in other districts. This year, as of October 13, 24,169 out of the 42,470 dengue cases reported across the country have been from outside Dhaka. Unpredictable rainfall patterns in recent months may have played a major role in spreading the disease, but the lack of effective action from the government is also responsible for the situation. Already, at least 214 people have died this year—47 in the first 12 days of this month alone.

To effectively control dengue spread in districts outside Dhaka, it is crucial to investigate the underlying reasons and take targeted measures. According to some entomologists, besides the lack of public awareness and anti-mosquito drives, the risk of infection by all dengue serotypes has contributed to the surge in cases. According to them, people in Dhaka may have gained some form of immunity from sustained exposure to the disease, with approximately 50 percent of Dhaka's population infected by different serotypes of the virus since 2000. But since people outside Dhaka have not been exposed to the virus as frequently, they are now more vulnerable, raising concerns for health experts and people alike.

Therefore, the government must intensify its mosquito control measures across all cities with equal importance. It must raise awareness about the need to keep people's houses and surroundings clean as well as the warning signs of dengue, so that they can make informed decisions and go to hospitals in time. Since the city corporations and municipalities are still struggling to conduct adequate mosquito control drives in the absence of elected representatives, exclusively depending on them will not be wise. The government must also engage local youth groups as well as people from all walks of life in its dengue control programmes.

As for the health ministry, it must properly equip all government hospitals outside Dhaka to deal with the surge in critically ill dengue patients. The DGHS also must develop an efficient mechanism to register the data of all dengue patients and conduct regular surveys, which are essential for dengue hotspot management. With coordinated efforts from all agencies concerned as well as citizens, the dengue situation can certainly be improved.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk receive the Nobel Peace Prize



On this day in 1993, South Africans Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk were named the recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize "for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa."

A bumpy road ahead for the economy amid risks and reform

MACRO MIRROR

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FAHMIDA KHATUN

Bangladesh's economy has been under tremendous pressure for over two years. The previous government (that was ousted), led by Sheikh Hasina, left behind a fragile economy marked by high inflation, low foreign exchange reserves, rising debt, high fuel prices, poor tax collection, low investment, a high rate of loan defaults, unemployment, inequality, and other challenges.

The mass movement in July and August 2024 had not only resulted in the tragic death of hundreds and severe injuries to thousands, but also subdued economic activity. The industrial and service sectors experienced losses, though the agricultural sector remained largely unaffected during this period. Soon after the new interim government took office, parts of eastern Bangladesh were flooded due to heavy rainfall and water from upstream sources, causing severe damage to lives and livelihoods in 11 districts. The cost of the damage was estimated at Tk 14,421 crores, equivalent to 0.26 percent of the projected Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the fiscal year 2025, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. This estimation includes the agriculture and forestry, infrastructure, housing, health, education, and industrial sectors. It is estimated that until August 30, 54 people had died, and 5.4 million were affected by the floods in those districts. Unfortunately, before the water could fully recede, several northern districts were also struck by floods.

Following the success of the student-led mass uprising, the country's law and order deteriorated as the police were largely absent from performing their duties. The interim government has been working to improve the situation by granting the military magistracy powers, but law and order has yet to be fully restored. This has raised concerns not only for ordinary citizens but also for potential domestic and foreign investors interested in Bangladesh.

The government has launched several reforms aimed at strengthening institutions and improving the political and economic conditions of

the country. The Bangladesh Bank has formed task forces to improve the banking sector, and the planning ministry has formed a task force called "Re-strategising the economy and mobilising resources for equitable and sustainable development." The chief adviser has established six commissions to reform key areas, including the constitution, public administration, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the judiciary, the police,



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

and the electoral system.

One of the main demands of the July movement was for a country free from discrimination and injustice, and the people of Bangladesh are eagerly awaiting the recommendations of these reform initiatives. Of course, neither the interim government nor the next elected government has a "magic wand" to fix the deeply entrenched socio-economic and political problems that have developed under years of corruption and exploitation. Implementing the necessary reforms will take time as the best rules need to be practised and absorbed over time before the

ideal situation that the students and mass people dreamt of can truly be observed.

However, in the short term, restoring law and order and resuming economic activities are the government's most important tasks. Controlling high inflation and ensuring businesses and the economy are functioning properly are crucial to recouping economic losses and maintaining growth.

Recently, in its South Asia Development Update released in October 2024, the World Bank revised its economic growth forecast for Bangladesh, lowering it to four percent for FY2025, down from an earlier estimate of 5.7 percent in April 2024. This represents a sharp decline, marking the lowest growth estimate in several years, except for 2020, which was affected by Covid—when Bangladesh experienced a growth

purchasing power of ordinary citizens, as their incomes will not increase while inflation continues to soar. The Bangladesh Bank's contractionary monetary policy is not working due to rent-seeking and syndication in the market. With agriculture being affected due to the ongoing floods in the country, prices are likely to increase further. Third, economic indicators, including growth numbers, will have to be realistically estimated to ensure they are seen as credible and reliable. The World Bank's estimate stands in stark contrast to the previous government's projection of 6.8 percent growth for FY2025. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has long highlighted the issue of unrealistic growth projections in the absence of private investment and macroeconomic stability.

In view of the subdued economic

rate of 3.5 percent. Unfortunately, while South Asia is projected to be the fastest-growing region globally, with a growth forecast of 6.4 percent, Bangladesh's economic outlook has worsened.

The revised growth projection for Bangladesh sends three key messages to policymakers. First, uncertainties due to political turmoil have affected the confidence of both domestic and international economic players regarding the country's economic prospects, despite its huge potential—reducing private investment and slowing industrial growth. Second, lower growth will further diminish the

prospects, the interim government needs to work hard towards addressing the immediate issues in overcoming the uncertainty and providing respite to common people by containing inflation, while preparing for the medium-term issues through reform measures. Unlocking the untapped potential of human resources—including that of women—through quality education and skills development, is crucial for driving economic growth going forward. The government's ability to navigate these challenges will determine whether Bangladesh can achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

2024 BANGLADESH CLIMATE ACTION FORUM

Building a climate-resilient future

RMG NOTES

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MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

The Bangladesh Climate Action Forum 2024 which recently concluded in Dhaka was a huge success and surpassed all expectations. Key to the event was the scale in terms of the number of delegates and the quality of the speakers; and the international element, with the event shining a light on Bangladesh and its efforts to take a leadership role on climate issues.

The event exemplifies the power of global collaboration in addressing pressing climate issues. Bringing together over 450 delegates from various sectors—government, industry, academia, and NGOs—this event fostered a platform for cross-sector dialogue. International stakeholders' participation highlighted the climate crisis's global nature, where local actions must align with global goals.

The forum enabled Bangladesh, one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, to build relationships with global leaders and access international expertise, technologies, and resources. The event showed that climate action cannot be siloed, rather partnerships across national and sectoral boundaries are required to develop sustainable strategies tailored to Bangladesh's unique challenges.

At the forum, significant emphasis was placed on decarbonisation,

particularly in renewable energy and industrial processes. The launch of the "Better Mills Initiative" and the OnetrueSOLar Fund reflects Bangladesh's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, especially in garment production, which is a major contributor to global emissions.

Presentations on solar rooftop system optimisation and thermal energy system optimisation showcased the potential of these technologies to revolutionise energy consumption in industrial settings. The push for energy usage reduction in manufacturing is vital not only for reducing emissions but also for positioning Bangladesh as a leader in sustainable production. By embracing these technologies, the country could attract more green investments and strengthen its global competitiveness in garment production since global fashion brands seek to green their supply chains.

Bangladesh also faces the dual challenge of increasing its energy supply while transitioning to renewable sources. With only two percent of its energy coming from renewables, the country is far behind global sustainability targets. Speakers at the forum, including government representatives and European Union delegates, stressed the critical need for Bangladesh to enhance its

energy security in a way that is both sustainable and resilient to the effects of climate change.

The European Union's pledge to mobilise up to 300 billion euros in investments by 2027 offers a lifeline for countries like Bangladesh to access much-needed resources for green energy projects. As Bangladesh continues to develop as a regional economic power, its ability to meet energy demands through renewable sources will not only mitigate environmental risks but also secure long-term economic growth.

One of the forum's central themes was rethinking climate action as a business strategy, rather than a regulatory obligation. Delegates were encouraged to see sustainability as an opportunity for growth. A key point made at the event was that "cheap labour is no longer a competitive advantage." Instead, meeting the sustainability targets set by international clients can differentiate Bangladeshi businesses in global markets. The apparel sector, a central plank of the nation's economy, is particularly poised to benefit from sustainable production practices.

As global brands increasingly demand eco-friendly products, businesses that invest in sustainability will likely gain a competitive edge. This shift in perspective is crucial for Bangladesh's long-term economic success, especially as the country strives to transition from being a low-cost manufacturing hub to a leader in sustainable innovation.

Sure, investing in climate action comes at a cost. There is no sugar-coating that, and how this cost is met is a question we should not shy away from. Regardless, there is a return

on this cost—this investment—in the form of access to international markets. It's no different from the many other compliance costs supply chains need to cover such as social auditing, factory safety, and so on.

The forum's workshops, attended by over 300 engineers from the apparel manufacturing sector, played a pivotal role in empowering technical professionals to lead sustainability efforts within their organisations. Companies like Forbes Marshall and Jinko Solar provided hands-on insights into practical decarbonisation strategies.

Empowering engineers is vital because they are the ones who will implement the technologies and systems necessary to achieve sustainability goals. By focusing on skills development, Bangladesh is building a workforce capable of driving the transition to greener practices. This is particularly important for sectors like clothing, which is under increasing scrutiny for its environmental impact.

The broader significance of these workshops lies in their ability to equip engineers with the tools and knowledge to make immediate changes, ultimately contributing to the nation's long-term climate resilience and industrial sustainability.

In summary, Bangladesh Climate Action Forum 2024 showed that the Bangladeshi business community and our friends and partners in the international business community are now leading the way when it comes to climate planning. There is still much work to be done but the signs are evident: we are taking practical, thoughtful steps to plan for a climate-resilient future.