

# A mirror needs no monument

The irony of India's lecture on minorities



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It was one of those moments in subcontinental diplomacy where irony takes a drag from a *biri* and smirks across the table. When India slammed Bangladesh for expressing concern over the safety of Muslims in West Bengal following the Murshidabad riots, the news moved with the sound of a stainless steel pot being called black by a soot-covered kettle. Bangladesh's call for "full security" for minority Muslims in India was met with indignation from New Delhi. One might say India is in no position to dish out lectures on minority treatment, yet here we are.

The incident itself was a grim reminder of how quickly a secular society can be undone by identity politics. In Murshidabad, a district with a dense Muslim population, protests erupted over India's new Waqf legislation, a law passed by Lok Sabha and rubber stamped by Rajya Sabha earlier this month. Critics argue that the law erodes protections for Islamic charitable properties. The demonstrations, predictably labelled "violent," turned deadly. In a nation where dissent now rhymes with "anti-national," the crackdown was not long in coming. By April 12, three were dead, several injured, and Muslim-owned shops were set on fire overnight. Yet, it was Bangladesh's response that caused Delhi the most heartburn—not the deaths, not the discrimination.

What makes India's indignation especially rich is the continuing dehumanisation of its own Muslim citizens in recent years. Since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, India has witnessed a frightening acceleration in communal rhetoric and policy. A report by the Washington-based India Hate Lab showed a 74 percent spike in hate speech incidents in 2024 compared to the previous

year, with a staggering 98.5 percent of them targeting Muslims. The majority of these hate-filled events unfolded in BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In May alone, during the heated general election campaign, 269 hate speech incidents were recorded.

Despite what the Indian government may claim, this isn't the work of fringe elements or rogue sadhus. These provocations frequently come from the very top. In fact, top leaders of the current ruling party have been named among the most frequent purveyors of hate rhetoric. The BJP, through its political machinery, organised over 340 hate speech-related events in 2024 alone—a 580 percent increase from 2023. The speeches included calls for economic boycotts of Muslim businesses, threats of demolishing mosques, and warnings that Muslims must "prove their loyalty" to India or face consequences.

India's moral posturing becomes all the more risible when juxtaposed with data from Bangladesh. Nobody claims Bangladesh is a utopia for minorities—far from it. Attacks on Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist communities have occurred and must be condemned without hesitation. Between 2013 and 2021, Ain O Salish Kendra recorded 3,710 attacks on Hindus alone under Sheikh Hasina's rule. Yet, to say minorities are persecuted as a matter of state policy—as some Indian commentators suggest—is patently false.

Since the interim government came to power on August 8, 2024, there has been an unprecedented push to address minority grievances. In just the first six months, Bangladesh filed 88 cases linked to minority attacks and made 70 arrests. In a country where political instability is a feature, not a

bug, this represents a notable institutional shift.

Contrast this with the legal paralysis that follows attacks on Muslims in India. In Uttar Pradesh, three Muslim men were beaten to death in November 2024 for opposing an archaeological survey at the Shahi Jama Masjid, accused of being built over a Hindu temple. There were no meaningful convictions. Indian media outlets, ever alert

introduced as a criterion for citizenship, and Muslims were pointedly excluded. Or the National Register of Citizens (NRC) implemented in Assam, which left nearly 20 lakh people stateless, many of them Bangla-speaking Muslims. It's telling that "Bangladeshi" has become a slur in Indian political vernacular, thrown about by ministers and media alike.

The situation has become so toxic that even

the consulate was attacked. The Indian government did not urge restraint.

One wonders: is justice still blind, or does it now squint through saffron-tinted glasses?

The weaponisation of Bangladesh's internal affairs has become a staple of Indian electoral politics, especially in states like Assam, West Bengal, and Jharkhand. The BJP routinely paints Bangladeshis as infiltrators—vote-stealing, job grabbing "aliens"—who must be expelled to preserve India's mythical purity. Ironically, this very narrative is now being turned on its head with the claim that Bangladeshi miscreants were behind the violence in Murshidabad. No evidence has been offered. No investigation concluded. Just the usual scapegoating, now export-grade.

Meanwhile, the relationship between the two neighbouring countries has frayed considerably since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina. India has grown wary of the new political players in Dhaka, especially those student leaders who led the uprising and are perceived as less pliant than their predecessors. On the Bangladeshi street, the sentiment towards India has turned from indifferent to frosty.

Perhaps it's time for both countries to recalibrate their approach to minority rights—not through sanctimonious statements, but through joint action. A regional commission on communal harmony could be a starting point, composed of independent observers, human rights experts, and media watchdogs. It could publish transparent, verifiable data on communal incidents and recommend policy changes on both sides.

For the long haul, interfaith youth exchanges, joint cultural festivals, and collaborative journalism can serve as antidotes to the poison being peddled by populist media and politicians. If hate can travel across borders, perhaps so can empathy.

Until then, India would do well to hold the mirror a little longer before pointing fingers. Because when it comes to minority rights, Bangladesh may be limping, but India is crawling backwards with a blindfold and a torch.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

to cows and cricket, remained strangely silent.

Even the act of existing has become perilous for Indian Muslims. From 2010 to 2017, cow vigilante violence claimed the lives of 28 people, 24 of them Muslims. Another 124 were injured. The 2019 elections saw a spike, and the 2024 elections did not disappoint either. Nine more Muslims were lynched by mobs, accused of transporting beef or stealing cows. These incidents are not spontaneous combustion of communal angst; they are meticulously orchestrated theatre for electoral dividends.

Consider the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in 2019. For the first time in India's legislative history, religion was

slums in Ghaziabad—populated by Indian Muslims—were vandalised in late 2024 by the Hindu Raksha Dal. Why? Because some residents "looked like Bangladeshis." The ghost of Partition is a permanent tenant in India's nationalist consciousness, haunting every mosque and madrasa.

And yet, when Bangladesh moves to arrest a monk—Chinmoy Das—for allegedly inciting violence and engaging in anti-state activities, Indian media erupts in collective outrage. Das's followers allegedly murdered a Muslim government lawyer in Chattogram. But what was the narrative in India? That Das had been "persecuted." Protests were staged outside Bangladeshi embassies. In Agartala,

## Is economics a science?

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Economics is a study of meeting unlimited wants of human beings with limited resources. Lionel Robbins, a well-known economist, defined economics as the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between given ends (unlimited wants) and scarce means (limited resources) that have alternative uses. Another prominent economist, Alfred Marshall believed that economics deals with individual and social actions for the attainment of material requisites of wellbeing.

Internationally acclaimed economists like Adam Smith, JS Mill and Milton Friedman influenced economic thinking through scientific enquiry and advocated for free markets, and using both theoretical reasoning and actual policy-making, they proved it to be the best model for human prosperity. While building theories, they assumed that consumers are rational actors working for maximising happiness and well-being. Mill's work was more modern in outlook. He advocated for addressing social issues and establishing women's rights since economic activities cannot alone establish a just society.

Whether economics is a science, a social science, a behavioural science or an art depends on the approach taken by economists to empirically analyse different economic phenomena and test models to recommend and draw conclusions based on their analysis. Paul A Samuelson, an influential economist believed that economics is not an exact science, but a combination of art and science. In fact, many scientific research have been conducted in areas such as consumer behaviour, financial market, performance of industries, international trade, exchange rate, employment, taxation, and economic growth and development. And these in depth economic analyses, research and studies help governments make informed and efficient policy decisions.

During the latter half of the 19th century, economic theories from 18th and 19th centuries were empirically tested using mathematical tools. Most of these theories used quantitative methods of analysis which have great power of predictability and thus have scientific validity. One of the main areas of study was determining price level through the interaction of demand and supply of

various commodities. It is a critical area of research since price governs the allocation of resources for goods and services production. Using elaborate mathematical models, economists predict future demand and suggest where producers should invest in the future. The validity of the prediction depends on availability of sound data, accurate information and reasonable assumptions. Paul Krugman feels that economics is indeed

**Globally, economists mostly focus on helping more than a billion poor people lift themselves out of extreme poverty and boosting the incomes of the poorest 40 percent of the people in developing countries. To do that, the government needs to find inclusive economic growth strategies that help all segments of society to be part of the market mechanism.**

characterised by scientific methods. Another prominent economist, Raj Chetty believes that economics in some way is a scientific field as many economists test theories using empirical research methods.

The use of correct methodology and quantitative techniques is very important for a discipline to be considered a science. In most areas of economics, such methodologies

and techniques have been applied for many decades, which makes economics a science. In fact, economists must possess a thorough understanding of mathematics, statistics and human behaviour to establish new economic theories or re-examine existing ones.

Both economists and non economists attack ideological choices to classify economists either as free-market practitioners or as those who pursue state control mechanisms. Two influential economists, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman believe that the distinction between free market and state control is not so distinct. The difference is more complicated in the real world. Both these ideological thoughts are present in all the economies in the world. A comprehensive understanding of the functioning of an economy is essential for striking a right balance between the two ideological approaches in policy decisions, which makes economics more of an art rather than a science.

Strong economic growth in developing countries is believed to be crucial for poverty reduction. Globally, economists mostly focus on helping more than a billion poor people lift themselves out of extreme poverty and boosting the incomes of the poorest 40 percent of the people in developing countries. To do that, the government needs to find inclusive economic growth strategies that help all segments of society to be part of the market mechanism. Ninety percent of all jobs in developing countries are created by the private sector. If we are to help the poor and vulnerable, we need the private sector to flourish, by attracting private sector investment which creates jobs.

Whether economists try to prove it as part of their scientific endeavour or not, economic and social realities would dictate that policies in developing economies need to first ensure that growth is inclusive; second, nations include women, ethnically backward people, religious minorities, poor children and their families in social and economic policies; and third, invest in quality education and training, health and environmental protection. All these will pay off in a major way to improve people's lives, which will contribute directly and indirectly to economic growth with equity. However, economics is not self-fulfilling despite its numerous sound theories, which can be used for policymaking. This is because politicians ultimately implement the economic policies. If they do not see political gains in the policies, they may not always use economists' proposals.

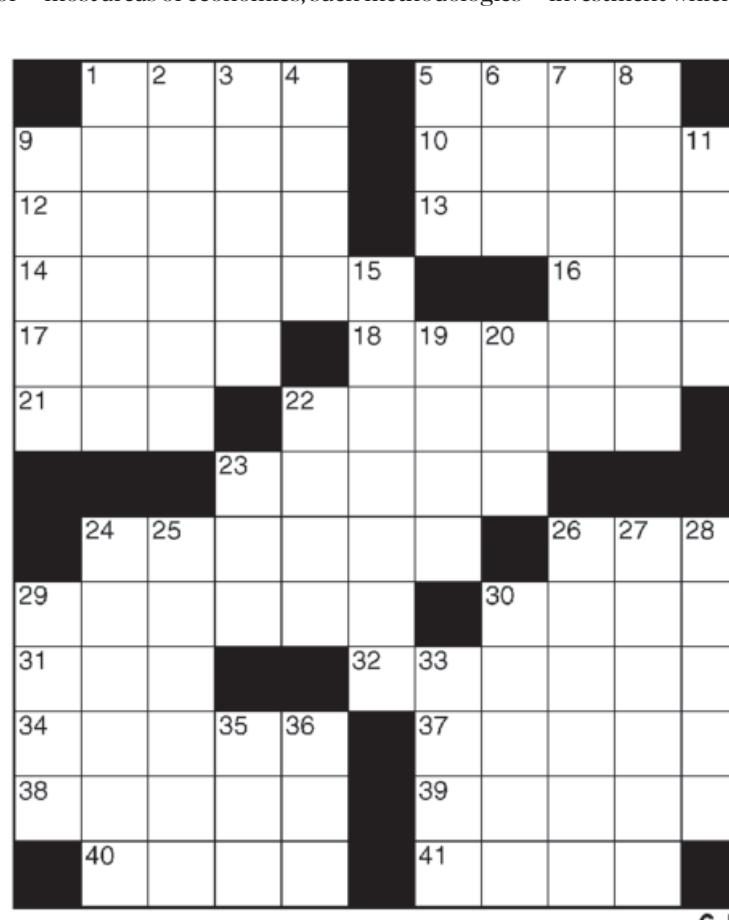
A wide range of topics are taught in economics departments in universities around the world including Bangladesh. These may range from consumer behaviour, inflation, and unemployment, to human capital development, statistical methods and mathematical modelling and research methodology. However, not all the universities in Bangladesh prepare students adequately with practical knowledge so that they can compete in the job market effectively. The students should be taught practical applications along with economic theories. For this, a good part of their teaching learning should be arranged in collaboration with commercial banks, government departments, development partners, NGOs etc, so that the students can acquire practical knowledge.

## CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

|                        |      |                  |    |                     |
|------------------------|------|------------------|----|---------------------|
| ACROSS                 | 29   | Coloring need    | 8  | Out of bed          |
| 1 Drained of color     | 30   | Surrounded by    | 9  | Ready for bed       |
| 5 Mother of Castor and | 31   | Singer Phair     | 11 | Ship pole           |
| Pollux                 | 32   | Looking intently | 15 | Pasture activity    |
| 9 Used a stopwatch     | 34   | Leaves out       | 19 | Pub brews           |
| 10 Flies high          | 37   | Yield slightly   | 20 | Performed           |
| 12 Furious             | 38   | Choir member     | 22 | Painter Joan        |
| 13 Open, as a jacket   | 39   | Longings         | 23 | Tofu base           |
| 14 Tearing down        | 40   | Gets older       | 24 | Black Sea peninsula |
| 16 "Patience — virtue" | 41   | Golf pegs        | 25 | Taking it easy      |
| 17 School near Windsor | DOWN |                  | 26 | Wee amount          |
| 18 Gilda of "SNL"      | 1    | Buccaneer        | 27 | Door parts          |
| 21 Bear's lair         | 2    | Warrior woman    | 28 | Borders             |
| 22 Libel               | 3    | Admit            | 29 | Artery problem      |
| 23 Measured            | 4    | Genesis spot     | 30 | Blue hue            |
| 24 Leachman of "Young  | 5    | Baton Rouge sch. | 33 | Touch on            |
| Frankenstein"          | 6    | Long, long time  | 35 | Sock part           |
| 26 That lady           | 7    | Stupefying       | 36 | Fourth yr. students |

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## TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| O | S | L | O |   | S | P | A | R | K |
| B | U | E | N | A |   | L | A | D | E |
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