

Identify and reject false murder cases

They obstruct justice and victimise the innocent

We are dismayed and baffled by the arrest of Mahmudul Haque, an assistant professor of journalism at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, who is well known for marching alongside students and the general public during the July uprising in Rangpur. He was also vocal in demanding justice for the killing of Abu Sayed, a martyr of the July uprising. Mahmudul has been accused in a murder case involving the death of Samesh Uddin, a grocery shop owner in Rangpur, along with 53 others, including ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader. Samesh died on August 2, and a report in this paper cites residents of the area saying he died of a heart attack while fleeing from his shop after police attempted to arrest a local Jamaat leader. Samesh's son has confirmed that his father had a heart condition.

Mahmudul has become a victim of the spree of false cases against people over the July-August killings by the Sheikh Hasina regime. This paper has extensively reported on and published editorials about the dangerous trend of murder cases (related to the July uprising killings) against hundreds of people. In June this year, Md Selim, a grocer, was listed as the deceased victim in a murder case over the July uprising killings. A report in this daily found that Md Selim was alive, and that he had been declared "dead" as part of a conspiracy by his brothers over an inheritance issue. Thus, murder cases are being filed, and sometimes the accused are imprisoned on flimsy and false grounds.

In many of these cases, the accused are from the hometown (not Dhaka) of the victims, even though the killings in question occurred in Dhaka. These false cases are filed not to seek justice, but rather due to personal vendettas. In most cases, those who have filed the case, usually a relative of the murdered victim, do not even know those they have accused—with the names being supplied by others.

We are disappointed that, despite the law adviser's assurance that no innocent persons accused in these cases would be arrested, this has continued, with Mahmudul's arrest being one of the latest examples. This indiscriminate filing of murder cases against individuals on such tenuous grounds must stop.

Apart from the trauma experienced by the accused, this trend will also hamper the legal process of securing justice for the actual victims of the July uprising killings. The government must immediately take action to ensure that nobody can file a false murder case, and that the police personnel who register such cases are held accountable. The interim government must ensure that each of these cases is assessed to determine whether it is plausible and not filed in order to settle personal scores.

Solution to Rohingya crisis urgently needed

The protracted crisis could pose threat to regional security

We are deeply concerned about the increasingly complex Rohingya situation in the country, with no progress in the repatriation process and the persistent crisis in Myanmar. Global funding cuts have made the situation particularly alarming, depriving Rohingya refugees of their most basic necessities. Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain has therefore rightly warned the UN that, if a sustainable solution is not urgently pursued, the Rohingya crisis could soon escalate into a serious threat to regional security. Highlighting that prolonged crises often stem from systemic marginalisation, the adviser rightly urged renewed international attention and action to facilitate the safe and dignified return of the Rohingya people.

Bangladesh has been hosting 1.2 million Rohingya people for over eight years now, despite the fact that this humanitarian act has placed immense socio-economic and environmental pressures on the country. Unfortunately, despite several attempts, not a single Rohingya sheltered in Bangladesh has been repatriated to Myanmar. In fact, the situation has worsened, with around 150,000 Rohingya people arriving in Bangladesh in recent months, having fled escalating clashes between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's ruling military junta. Bangladesh has already been struggling to provide shelter and basic services to the existing Rohingyas. What will happen if 50,000 more arrive by the end of the year, as a WFP report has projected?

The recent funding cuts have made it increasingly difficult for Bangladesh to provide Rohingya refugees with their basic necessities. Reportedly, only 19 percent of the funds required for Rohingya refugees this year have been secured, even though five months of the year have already passed—out of the \$934 million required, only \$180 million has been received so far. This funding gap has already disrupted numerous essential services, including health, education, family planning and nutrition. Aid agencies warn that the situation could deteriorate further without immediate financial support. Access to healthcare and education in the refugee camps has already sharply declined. For instance, the number of patients seeking medical care fell from 372,000 in February to 205,000 in April. Meanwhile, with the closure of learning centres, the education of 230,000 children—and the livelihoods of hundreds of local teachers—are in jeopardy. Rohingya children's safety is also at greater risk.

Clearly, the situation is critical and may lead to an increase in criminal activities in and around the camps. With worsening safety conditions, more refugees may resort to dangerous sea routes. Women and girls will be particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. We therefore urgently call on the international community to provide much-needed humanitarian aid and to play an active role in finding a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

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On this day in 1986, Argentine football player Diego Maradona scored his memorable "Hand of God" goal to help Argentina defeat England in a World Cup quarterfinal game; Argentina went on to win the tournament.

EDITORIAL

What Bangladesh can learn from Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore

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In 1965, few gave Singapore a chance. Thrust into sudden independence, devoid of natural resources, rocked by communal tensions and political isolation, the island city-state seemed destined to fail. Yet by the 1990s, Singapore had transformed into one of the most dynamic and prosperous economies in the world.

At the helm of this improbable rise was Lee Kuan Yew. His leadership combined bold vision, ruthless pragmatism, and an uncompromising commitment to long-term national development. His immediate assurance to his people was to build a Singapore that would be recognisable and identifiable. But beyond charisma and control, Singapore's rise offers a more replicable asset for a country like Bangladesh today: an economics-driven blueprint for navigating uncertainty and achieving productivity-led growth.

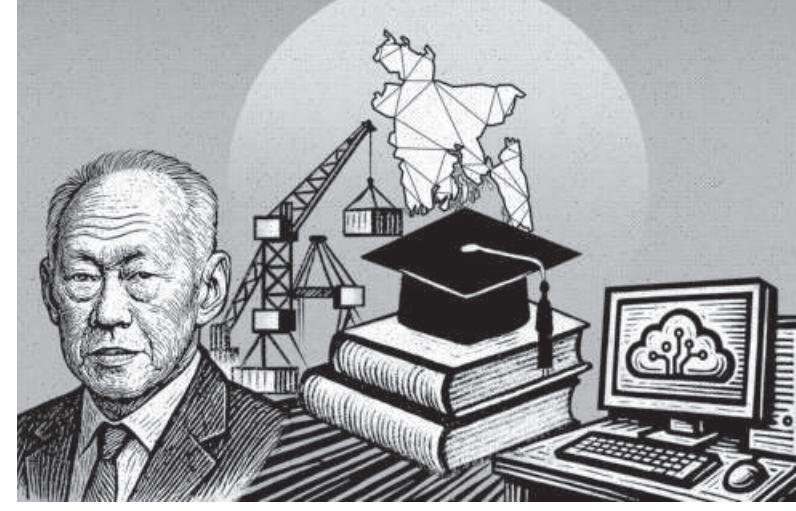
One of my favourite professors at Harvard Business School, Rafael Di Tella, argues that sustainable prosperity depends not just on the quantity of inputs like labour or capital, but on how efficiently those inputs are used—a concept known as Total Factor Productivity (TFP). TFP captures gains made through better resource allocation, continual innovation, and institutional efficiency. If Bangladesh is to achieve its vision of becoming a developed economy by 2041, it must shift its focus from merely adding more inputs to increasing the productivity of everything it already has.

Singapore internalised the TFP principle early. Its economic planners understood that to move up the value chain, the country had to not only produce more, but produce smarter. In the 1970s, the focus was on low-cost assembly and employment generation. By the 1990s, the economy had successfully pivoted to high-value sectors such as biomedical sciences, precision engineering, and financial services. This shift wasn't accidental—rather, it was the outcome of deliberate choices to enhance skill levels, embrace foreign technology, and streamline

policy execution.

For Bangladesh, this means a national growth narrative that is no longer input-driven (labour-intensive, consumption-based), but TFP driven. To do so requires urgent investment in vocational and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, logistics and digital infrastructure, and a regulatory regime that reduces friction and enhances operational efficiency across industries.

TFP growth cannot occur in a vacuum. It depends on institutions that can allocate resources effectively and adapt to new innovations continuously.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Singapore's institutions—particularly the Economic Development Board (EDB)—functioned like strategic investors, not just administrators. Civil servants were rotated across ministries, incentivised through globally competitive compensation, and held to performance standards often exceeding those of the private sector.

Lee Kuan Yew understood that if you want efficiency, you must first reward competence and enforce accountability. This institutional depth made Singapore attractive not just for its infrastructure, but for the predictability and transparency of its policy environment.

Bangladesh must now build this same institutional muscle. Agencies like Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority, and

National Board of Revenue must evolve from being procedural bottlenecks to becoming proactive enablers of growth. Digitisation, depoliticisation, and performance-linked governance must replace outdated practices. Stronger institutions are not a political luxury. They are economic imperatives for sustained productivity growth.

A central element of Professor Di Tella's productivity framework is efficient resource allocation: channelling capital and labour into sectors with the highest potential return. Singapore mastered this through industrial policy that was both targeted and technocratic. Temasek

collection of unaligned ministries.

TFP also depends on the quality of investment, not just its quantity. Singapore's high domestic savings—mobilised through the Central Provident Fund (CPF)—were reinvested in housing, infrastructure, and technology, reducing its dependence on volatile external debt.

Bangladesh's growing external debt and low national savings rate are warning signs. A contributory pension system, linked with sovereign investment funds, could unlock domestic capital for long-term infrastructure and innovation funding—two core enablers of TFP. Financial stability is not just about macroeconomics. It is about ensuring that scarce capital is deployed productively and transparently.

One of the most underappreciated drivers of Singapore's productivity was its predictable, rule-based environment. Investors knew what to expect. Policies weren't reversed overnight, and governance wasn't held hostage to electoral calculations. While Singapore's political model may not be directly replicable, the principle of decoupling long-term economic strategy from short-term politics is essential.

Bangladesh must explore institutional frameworks that protect economic priorities from partisan fluctuations. A bipartisan fiscal council, an empowered planning commission, and a non-partisan sovereign investment board could insulate key economic decisions and build investor confidence over time.

Bangladesh is not Singapore—and it doesn't need to be. Our scale, democracy, and socio-political dynamics are distinct. But the economic logic of Singapore's transformation, led by TFP, is universal.

Lee Kuan Yew famously said, "I always tried to be correct, not politically correct." Bangladesh needs a similar mindset. It's time to move from populist impulses to purposeful planning. From siloed projects to coherent strategy. From incremental input growth to exponential productivity gains.

If Singapore could leap from uncertainty to unmatched success, so can we. The playbook is open. The path is proven. The only variable left is our will.

Justice-based approach needed in reproductive health



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The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo marked a major shift in global development by centring human rights, gender equality, and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the pursuit of sustainability. It moved beyond population control to a people-centred, rights-based approach that emphasised equitable access to healthcare, education, women's empowerment, and reproductive autonomy. Countries were urged to provide universal SRH services, reduce maternal mortality, end gender-based violence, prevent child marriage, and uphold informed reproductive choice. As an early supporter, Bangladesh integrated ICPD principles into national policy, aligning them with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While progress has been made—particularly in lowering fertility, expanding family planning, and reducing maternal deaths—gaps in gender equality, disability inclusion, adolescent-friendly services, and social equity continue to hinder the full realisation of the ICPD vision.

Since the ICPD, the country has succeeded in reducing the total fertility rate (from 4.6 percent in 1990 to 2.0 percent in 2022) and maternal mortality rate (from 574 to 123 deaths per 100,000 live births between 1990

and 2020). These gains align with ICPD commitments, as well as MDG 5 and the SDGs. Government initiatives in midwifery training, institutional deliveries, emergency obstetric care, reducing inequality, ensuring universal SRH access, and advancing gender equality have played a role. The Adolescent Reproductive Health Strategy (2006) and the National Strategy for Adolescent Health (2017-2030) have been implemented. The government has also maintained a progressive stance on menstrual regulation and expanded post-abortion care to reduce unsafe procedures. Legal reforms—such as the Domestic Violence Act (2010) and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017)—signal a growing recognition of structural barriers to SRHR.

However, despite progress on quantitative targets, the country has been less successful in ensuring rights-based SRHR and addressing emerging issues, notwithstanding efforts by the government, UN agencies, and other actors. Initiatives to promote bodily autonomy, shift gender norms, and support informed choice have been limited. Family planning programmes have traditionally focused on women, with minimal male involvement, reinforcing the notion that reproductive responsibility lies solely with them. These programmes have also been target driven, at times resulting in coercive practices to

ensure contraceptive uptake. While contraceptive use initially rose, it has since plateaued, with ongoing issues such as stock-outs and provider shortages.

Child marriage, explicitly identified in the ICPD agenda as a major barrier to gender equality and health, remains widespread in Bangladesh. Over half of women aged 20-24 were married before 18, and 27 percent gave birth before the age of 19. Although the Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017) prohibits under-age marriage, enforcement is weak and often undermined by social norms and legal loopholes allowing exceptions under "special circumstances." Persistent drivers such as poverty, gender inequality, and limited education continue to fuel early marriage—now compounded by digital platforms, including social media and mobile phones. Yet current initiatives have not adapted to these emerging challenges. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) remains largely absent or is delivered by underprepared or uncomfortable educators, constrained by persistent social taboos. These issues, combined with misinformation on social media, early sexuality, and restricted access to contraception for unmarried adolescents—despite growing evidence of premarital sex among them—make them vulnerable to early pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and exploitation. Moreover, although the ICPD calls for inclusion of marginalised groups, such as persons with disabilities and gender-diverse individuals, SRH programmes in Bangladesh often exclude them due to structural barriers and a lack of focus.

While climate change was not originally a central theme of the ICPD, it has become an increasingly urgent concern. In flood-prone and disaster-affected regions, climate emergencies severely disrupt access to maternal health services, contraception, safe delivery, menstrual hygiene, and post-abortion care. These disruptions not only jeopardise health but also increase the risk of gender-based violence—including exploitation, early and forced marriage, and sexual assault—particularly in overcrowded shelters or during displacement. The breakdown of protective systems during crises further limits women's and girls' ability to make informed, autonomous reproductive choices. Despite these clear vulnerabilities, SRHR remains largely absent from climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies. Without integrating SRHR and gender-based violence prevention into climate policies, the compounded risks to women, girls, and marginalised groups will remain unaddressed.

Three decades after Cairo, Bangladesh's progress in fertility reduction and maternal health is undeniable. Yet the deeper goals of the ICPD—centred on justice, equity, inclusion, and autonomy—remain unrealised for many. As Bangladesh approaches ICPD-30 in 2025, a paradigm shift is essential. The country must move beyond demographic targets to a rights-based approach rooted in reproductive justice. This requires dismantling systemic barriers and addressing social and gender inequalities that limit access and autonomy. CSE must be universal, context-appropriate, and delivered by trained educators. Family planning programmes should emphasise choice, dignity, and shared responsibility, actively engaging men and reaching underserved groups, including people with disabilities and gender-diverse individuals. SRH must also be integrated into climate and disaster resilience plans, particularly for vulnerable populations.

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