The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Uncertainty is stifling the economy

Govt must proactively alleviate the concerns of business community

It is hardly surprising that economists and business leaders believe deep uncertainty is stalling businesses. We, too, have been highlighting this issue in this column for months. However, the government's continued failure to effectively alleviate such uncertainty is concerning.

At a post-budget dialogue organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), economists warned that the country's business climate is being weighed down by a pervasive sense of uncertainty, which is slowing economic progress. This is reflected in Bangladesh's GDP growth of just 3.97 percent in the current fiscal year—the slowest in 34 years, excluding the pandemic period. Making matters worse, there have been a significant drop in annual imports—which include essential inputs for production—and a decade-low private-sector credit growth of just 7 percent in the first quarter of 2025, which further underscore the signs of economic stagnation. Additionally, businesses are grappling with rising operational costs, largely due to a steep increase in bank borrowing rates.

As a result, business leaders have expressed frustration at having to bear the burden of high interest rates, despite many not being responsible for the looting under the previous government that contributed to increasing interest rates and business costs. They have also called on the authorities to identify those who misappropriated public funds and bring them to justice, rather than raising interest rates to subsidise the stolen money.

Another important point raised by the economists is about the government's tendency to "listen without responding." Business leaders have similarly criticised the authorities for failing to engage with them over the recent US tariffs. According to them, this lack of dialogue will only worsen the country's business environment, especially if the inflated duties in the American market are not addressed properly.

The recently approved budget has also been criticised by some economists and business leaders for being overly conventional. Much more was expected, they said, particularly given that four members of the advisory council are economists. This reflects a lack of boldness on the government's part and sends a discouraging signal to the broader business community. Moreover, the changes to the income tax threshold—which will disproportionately increase the burden on low- and middle-income earners over the next two fiscal years, while those in higher income brackets face only a modest rise—are also disappointing.

Given the circumstances, the government must not only take these concerns seriously but also engage with relevant stakeholders, especially business leaders, to explore possible solutions. The uncertainties that are stifling businesses must be addressed immediately. Otherwise, the economy will continue to suffer, with potentially severe consequences for both citizens and the country in the long run.

Why can't the govt stop mob violence?

Controversial ex-CEC must face legal process, not violence

We are deeply concerned by the growing culture of mob violence that has almost become a norm in recent times. The latest incident occurred on June 22, when former Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda was assaulted by a mob prior to his arrest in a case filed by the BNP, accusing him and 23 others of electoral irregularities. A video that went viral on social media showed Huda standing with a garland of shoes around his neck, surrounded by a group of individuals. At one point, a bearded man struck him twice in the face with a shoe while others chanted slogans. Moments later, a police officer took Huda by the hand and led him away.

This kind of public harassment and mob trial before any legal proceedings have taken place is totally unacceptable. It poses a serious threat to the rule of law and undermines the legal rights of the accused. The question is: why did the police not take adequate precautions before attempting the arrest? Were they unaware of the risk of such an incident occurring, especially in such a high-profile case?

Among those accused in the BNP case are three AL-time CECs—KM Nurul Huda, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, and Kazi Habibul Awal—and 10 election commissioners. Ahmad and Awal oversaw the national elections of 2014 and 2024 respectively, while Huda oversaw the 2018 election amid widespread allegations of ballot-box stuffing on the eve of polling. Nurul Huda, along with others involved in these controversial elections that enabled a fascist regime, must face legal proceedings. However, any mob assault prior to legal action, or at any stage of the trial, serves only to raise question marks about their chances of getting justice.

Over the past 10 months, there has been a disturbing surge in incidents of mob justice where violent groups have taken the law into their own hands. Sometimes top leaders of Awami League, accused in various cases including those related to the July brutalities, faced assaults even on court premises. Alarmingly, in most instances, the government has remained silent, and the law enforcement authorities have failed to take action against the perpetrators.

This time, while the government has issued a statement assuring that law enforcement agencies will identify those responsible for the incident, as of writing this editorial, no action has been taken yet. We urge the government to identify the perpetrators through available video footage and bring them to book. By arresting them, it can send a strong message to the public that mob justice is unacceptable and will not be tolerated any more.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Napoleon invades Russia

On this day in 1812, French Emperor Napoleon—who had massed his troops in Poland in the spring to intimidate Russian Tsar Alexander I—and 600,000 troops of his Grand Army launched an ill-fated invasion of Russia.

Why Bangladesh needs a second chamber

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RASHED AL MAHMUD TITUMIR

As the nation grapples with complex challenges—from economic equity to climate resilience—the limitations of a unicameral parliament are becoming increasingly apparent. A second chamber is not about importing foreign templates. It is about crafting a Bangladeshi solution for deeper representation, effective legislation, and inclusive nation-building.

This cannot be a mimicry of Westminster or Washington, but must be a deliberate effort to democratise the polity. Yet constitutional change must not be abrupt. History teaches that sudden, sweeping reforms, detached from lived institutions, have a pronounced tendency to destabilise—such as Nepal's turbulent, decade-long transition to federalism, which commenced in 2008. The pathway for Bangladesh, therefore, must be cautious, the steps meticulously deliberate—an evolution firmly grounded in the nation's distinct social fabric and historical journey.

Constitutional architecture, like deltaic landforms, requires patient sedimentation. Bangladesh suffers from institutional anaemia, not mere design flaws. Despite having constitutional provisions for local government, it commands only around five percent of national expenditure, and the state remains lopsided. Forging an upper house atop this hollow base risks consolidating a Dhaka-centric oligarchy. True reform must aim for devolution rather than centralisation, redistributing power downward before horizontally.

Before erecting an upper chamber, the priority must be establishing local self-government at the grassroots, not merely extending the presence of the central state. This, among other reforms, may require amendments to Articles 59-60 to vest upazila parishads with genuine fiscal and legislative authority over core public goods—beginning with primary healthcare and education. Such enhancements echo India's post-73rd Amendment reforms in 1992 or Indonesia's devolution after 2001. The reform for devolution, not decentralisation in its truest sense, is not transplantation—it is constitutional composting: meticulously fertilising the soil before planting the tree.

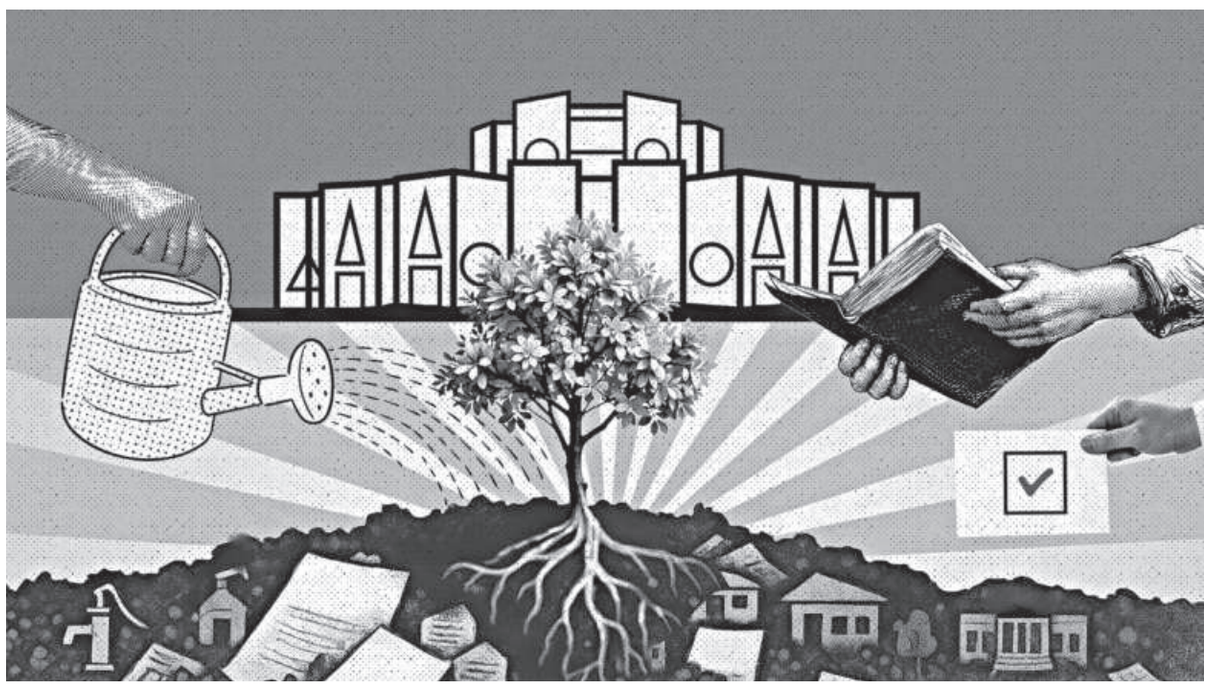
Reform must commence not with dismantlement, but with robust fortification. The unicameral Jatiya Sangsad must be strengthened to enable deeper scrutiny and enhance public accountability. Empowering parliamentary standing committees, for example, with independent research units, significantly improved staffing, and specialised legal expertise, could substantially enhance their capacity to dissect bills and monitor government action effectively—akin to Germany's Bundestag Scientific Service, expanded after 1949, or the longstanding Congressional Research Service in the US.

A formal advisory "Council of Experts" could also be established to offer informed and invaluable input before bills formally reach the parliamentary floor, drawing inspiration from France's Conseil d'État—a model institutionalised by Napoleon in 1799 to ensure legal consistency in policymaking.

Enhanced citizen consultation must unequivocally accompany this. Mandating robust public hearings and structured feedback mechanisms on significant bills would undoubtedly foster broader public buy-in and help uncover critical blind spots—practices now common in many countries.

A gradual approach could be undertaken, laying the groundwork to establish a full-fledged second chamber. There could be a transitional upper house, its composition—blending experts and other members—determined by both MPs and local governments. This chamber would initiate debates and offer reasoned objections without wielding veto power.

Contingent on the success of the advisory stage, it could be granted limited powers through referendum, following Ireland's 1937 precedent. These powers might include a suspensive veto (e.g., delaying legislation for 6-12 months), mirroring France's Sénat under the 1958 constitution, while a qualified veto would require a supermajority in the upper house.



VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

Alternatively, concurrent legislative authority might be conferred in specific areas such as cultural heritage, environmental stewardship, or inter-regional development—domains often overlooked in majoritarian politics. Compositional refinements could be gradually introduced to enhance legitimacy.

The final phase would establish a mature bicameral parliament. Delineating the roles of each house—where the lower house retains primacy in financial matters and government formation due to its direct popular mandate, and the upper house focuses on legislative review—is crucial to an effective bicameral system. This division of labour is evident in most bicameral parliaments globally, including Westminster, where the House of Commons gained financial supremacy through historical struggles culminating in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Comprehensive constitutional amendments would then formalise this bicameral structure, enshrining the powers of each house and ensuring a stable and enduring framework for governance. These may include provisions for resolving deadlocks, such as joint sittings (as in Section 57 of Australia's 1901 constitution) or conference committees (used in the US Congress since 1789). The amendments must also enshrine the financial primacy of the national parliament's lower house, like the Commons' supremacy secured through the UK Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949.

The vision is to see a Garo leader debating climate policy alongside a Dhaka-based economist, transforming democratic imagination into democratic practice.

The hope is up in the air. Most of the political parties want a bicameral parliament. Sceptics may cite costs, yet stable bicameralism is worthwhile. Bicameralism is not an indulgence, it is insurance against democratic decay. By design, it compels dialogue.

Bangladesh did not win its independence hastily. Constitutional evolution demands equal patience. Beginning modestly, there is a greater need to embed checks and balances and expand responsibilities judiciously. Such a governance structure is the people's aspiration, expressed through the July 2024 uprising.

Never again, again

89 seconds to midnight

MIND THE GAP

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After the Holocaust, when six million Jews and millions of others were exterminated by a genocidal regime, the world made a promise: never again would we let hatred escalate into mass murder. Never again would civilians be slaughtered while governments stand by. Never again would we turn genocide into bureaucracy. But here we are. *Again and again.*

The Doomsday Clock now stands at 89 seconds to midnight—the closest we've ever been to global catastrophe. That's not a metaphor. That's nuclear scientists, war analysts, and climate experts saying: we are seconds away from ending the world as we know it. And still, we do nothing.

Gaza is being obliterated. Over 50,000 Palestinians have been killed. At least 15,000 of them are children. The bombs keep falling. The excuses keep coming. Israel continues its assault, calling it self-defence, while wiping out entire families in their sleep. Aid is blocked. Hospitals are bombed. International law is mocked in real time.

Iran has entered the conflict directly. The region is no longer at risk of war. It is at war. A regional one, with global consequences. Iran and Israel are escalating in real time, pulling allies, proxies, and entire populations into the crossfire. The red lines everyone thought were there? Already crossed. The silence from global powers? Deafening. This is no longer about political alliances. This is about war crimes unfolding live.

Amidst this, President Donald Trump stepped onto the stage. After the US launched airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan, Trump hailed the attacks as "a spectacular military success," declaring that "Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated." He didn't stop there. In his national address, he warned: "There will be either peace, or there will be tragedy for Iran far greater than we have witnessed over the last eight days."

Describing Iran as "the bully of the Middle East," Trump asserted, "Iran, bully of the Middle East, must now make peace." He even offered Iran an ultimatum: "If they do not make peace, future attacks will be far greater and a lot easier."

Let's be crystal clear: this is direct military escalation, sanctioned by a US president. Trump has crossed the threshold from political threat to operational violence, stoking a war spiral that could trigger a global conflagration.

And yet, Western governments can't seem to find their voice. The same countries that had lectured the world on "rules-based order" in Ukraine were suddenly unsure when it came to Gaza. The same world that rushed to defend Kyiv keep dragging its feet on Rafah. The hypocrisy isn't just frustrating. It's fatal.

Meanwhile, Sudan is collapsing. Over 14 million displaced. Civil war. Famine. Ethnic cleansing. And no one's paying attention. Congo is bleeding. Myanmar is disappearing. Yemen is starving. Ukraine is still at war. And yet we scroll past all of it as if it's background noise. This is organised abandonment.

And the cost isn't just human. It's planetary. A mass coral bleaching event is killing off 84 percent of the world's reefs. Climate refugees are closing in on the number of those fleeing war. The oceans are boiling. Forests are burning. But governments are still pouring billions into weapons instead of survival. They're fuelling wars while the planet can't breathe.

Let's stop pretending this is normal. Let's stop dressing up civilian massacres as military operations. Let's stop justifying collective punishment with political talking points. Let's stop calculating "acceptable losses" as if human lives are numbers on a spreadsheet. We have seen what war does. We've lived through it. We've buried generations because of it.

But now we're so desensitised, we treat war like it's seasonal. A headline one week, a talking point the next, then gone. Gaza today, Sudan tomorrow, Iran-Israel the day after—just names on a screen until it's your city, your family, your child under the rubble. Let's be clear: this is not a failure of policy. It's a collapse of conscience. Where is the international community that once put Nazis on trial? That drafted human rights conventions? That meant it when it said "never again"?

Gone. Replaced by governments that issue statements, delay ceasefires, and send more weapons. So, let's say it plainly: we are witnessing genocide in Gaza. We are watching a regional war erupt between Iran and Israel, which has extended to the US. We are closer to nuclear conflict than we've ever been in human history. And most of the world is standing by and doing nothing. This is not complicated. This is not nuanced. This is not strategic ambiguity.

This is failure. Of leadership. Of morality. Of everything we claimed to stand for after the last world war. We said, "never again." What we meant was: never again, unless it's politically inconvenient. Never again, unless the victims are brown. Never again, unless we're profiting from it.

The Doomsday Clock says 89 seconds. Not 89 years. Not 89 days. We are out of time. And out of excuses.

So, say it again. But mean it this time. Never again. Not this war. Not this silence. Not this time.

The Daily Star Reg. No. DA 781 | **EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Mahfuz Anam** Printed by him on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd at Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, editor@thedailystar.net | **Registered & Head Offices:** The Daily Star Centre 64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215 Phone: 09610222222 | **Newsroom:** Fax- 58156306 reporting@thedailystar.net | **Advertisement:** 01711623910 advertisement@thedailystar.net GPO Box: 3257 | **Subscription:** 01711623906 | thedailystar.net bangla.thedailystar.net/