

Empower the police, end mob rule

Govt, political parties must collaborate to restore law and order

The frightening number of incidents of mob violence resulting in deaths or critical injuries highlights how fragile public safety has become. Crime in general has continued to rise despite various efforts. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, crimes such as murder, robbery, abduction, and rape have increased since last year, while mob violence is proving the most difficult to control. Unfortunately, despite the passing of a year since the July uprising, police morale still remains low, making the force largely ineffective in tackling crime, particularly mob violence.

The recent incidents of two innocent men being beaten to death in Rangpur by a mob, and a journalist viciously attacked by extortionists in broad daylight, demonstrate how the police, despite being present on the ground, often lack the confidence to take action. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) has recorded 111 deaths from mob violence between January this year and August 10. Meanwhile, according to police sources, in the past year there have been 560 cases in which police personnel were attacked or beaten. From last September to this February, around 225 cases were recorded in which mobs attacked police, as per *Prothom Alo*.

The picture that emerges from this is clear: police are still feeling unempowered while criminals and mobs continue feeling invincible. In some cases, mob violence occurs at the instigation of politically connected individuals or those claiming to be "pro-uprising" actors. Given the police's horrific role during the July uprising and the subsequent violent backlash after August 5, 2024, it is unsurprising that officers are hesitant or afraid to take forceful action, particularly when a mob is involved.

The government thus faces an enormous challenge. It must empower the police by significantly increasing recruitment and training, ensure competent replacements for senior officers who have been removed or are absent, and issue firm directives regarding the maintenance of law and order. The government can also establish specially trained, well-equipped units to prevent mob violence, capable of rapid deployment to volatile areas and trained in crowd control and de-escalation. Community policing can be introduced or strengthened to rebuild trust between the public and the police. However, these measures will be effective only if political parties proactively support the police when crimes are committed by individuals under their patronage. Political parties must do more—much more—than expel a member accused of a crime, as they do now.

The home ministry should also ensure that each case of mob violence is properly investigated, with as many perpetrators as possible arrested and punished. At the same time, the government can launch a coordinated awareness campaign to educate citizens that mob justice is illegal and punishable, while simultaneously building trust in the justice system through proper prosecutions and convictions for crimes. In the days leading up to the election, the government, political parties, and the public all must work together to prevent mob violence.

Chalan Beel must not be harmed

Environmental assessment key before any approval of Rabindra University project

With the permanent campus project of Rabindra University in Sirajganj set to be placed for approval at this week's Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) meeting, environmentalists have voiced concerns over the proposed site at Chalan Beel, which spans 1,000 square kilometres across 41 upazilas in six districts. They warn that constructing the campus there will damage the beel's aquatic ecosystem and obstruct natural water flow, potentially increasing waterlogging and flooding in surrounding areas. The Chalan Beel Rokhha Andolok has already urged the planning ministry to relocate the proposed site from Buripothajia in Shahjadpur. However, university teachers and students say these concerns are "unfounded", arguing that the chosen site lies far off the centre of the beel. The question is: before selecting the site, did the authorities conduct any environmental impact assessment?

Rabindra University was established in 2016 with classes beginning in April 2018. For the past seven years, however, academic and administrative activities have been conducted in eight rented buildings scattered across Shahjadpur municipality. To meet students' long-standing demand for a permanent campus with improved facilities, 100 acres of land were designated for the university in a part of Chalan Beel at Buripothajia, about 11 kilometres from Shahjadpur town. Over the past week, students staged several road blockades pushing for the project's approval.

However, according to a government report, the proposed site remains submerged under water for four months of the year. To build the campus, the area will need to be filled to a height of 9 to 14 metres. Additionally, a road and bridge will be required for access to the campus, along with an embankment. Already, the filling of four acres of the designated 100 acres has begun obstructing the Baral River's water flow. If the remaining 96 acres are filled, environmentalists claim, water flow in Chalan Beel and Baral River will be severely affected during monsoon while the biodiversity will also suffer. The VC of Rabindra University, however, claims that the proposed site is not classified as beel land, and that the Department of Environment cleared it back in 2019.

These contradictory statements from university authorities and environmentalists create confusion about the actual situation on the ground. We, therefore, urge the government to conduct a proper environmental impact assessment before approving the project. If needed, the campus can be built elsewhere, such as in the Sirajganj Economic Zone, as many have suggested. While Rabindra University definitely needs a permanent campus, it must not be built at the cost of damaging the environmentally crucial Chalan Beel.

EDITORIAL

Can monetary policy rescue the economy?



OPEN SKY

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Recently, the Bangladesh Bank announced its monetary policy for the first half (July-December) period of FY2025-2026. Unlike the finance ministry's budget speech that had praised the government and blamed the past regime, the monetary policy statement (MPS) remains professional and sober. The goal is clear: the monster of high inflation, whose 12-month average is still 9.8 percent in July 2025, must be reined in even at the cost of a bitterly high policy repo rate of 10 percent.

BB indicated the possibility of a reduction in the policy repo rate only if inflation falls below seven percent. Meanwhile, the exchange rate—the amount of taka per US dollar—will remain broadly market-based, although BB may intervene to iron out market volatility, so that stability is ensured in the foreign exchange market. The question remains whether this policy can rescue the economy from the doldrums and place it firmly on the path of vibrancy.

If the morning shows the day, BB has made commendable progress in achieving its goal. Not all arms of the government are functioning well enough to earn that level of accolade. Some agencies related to law and order have performed poorly, and that puts the financial industry on the ropes. But BB has spearheaded efforts against all odds by prioritising its foremost duty of fighting inflation under the leadership of Governor Dr Ahsan H. Mansur. He assumed office at a time marked by a two-year-long decline in foreign reserves that threatened national stability. He turned the trend around by adopting knowledge-based tools that previous bureaucratic governors had often overlooked, whether deliberately or negligently.

The current level of reserves stands at \$25.2 billion, while it was \$20.5 billion in early August last year. The increase of around \$5 billion is not a tremendous achievement, but reversing the trend from a decline to a crescendo is a feat worth recognising. And that marks the best success of Dr Mansur's leadership at the central

bank. Still, BB has miles to go before it can really celebrate its success.

Given an import bill of around \$6 billion per month, the current reserves can cover about four months of imports—an inadequate buffer, especially when compared with some comparable economies, given heightened geopolitical tensions surrounding Bangladesh. India's economy is usually eight to ten times larger than Bangladesh's, but its current reserves are around 25 times

returns, straining our reserves again. So, BB cannot feel complacent until reserves hit around \$40 billion, which would still be less than the highest level of reserves held in August 2021.

The central bank's dual mandate is to maximise employment or growth after maintaining a tolerable level of inflation, which seems to be around four percent for a developing economy. Given the interim government's weakness in handling mob violence and political uncertainty surrounding the election, most investors remain conservative or nervous about what happens next. Domestic private credit growth slowed to as low as 6.5 percent in June 2025—the lowest in two decades. BB aims to achieve private credit growth of 7.2 percent by December 2025 and 8 percent by June 2026. But that seems inadequate to support the government's target of 5.5 percent GDP growth in FY2026, which

show any credible improvement in this regard.

BB's policy objective is to tame inflation by reducing credit growth, a task that requires raising the policy rate substantially. But unchecked credit expansion in the public sector may fuel inflation again, jeopardising the policy objective of BB. If inflation is not contained, it could prompt further depreciation of the exchange rate and consequently another round of imported inflation. This raises the question of where BB is compromising its intent to reduce inflation through its own actions.

Average inflation was 9.9 percent in July last year. It peaked at 10.34 percent in January 2025 and then fell to 9.8 percent in July 2025. This decrease, despite being desirable, is not quite encouraging. Rather, it suggests a state of inflation persistence, requiring an investigation into whether monetary



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

policy alone can weaken inflation. Probably not.

Additionally, institutional factors such as syndication, extortion, threats, and business insecurity have formed hidden rigidities that prevent inflation from falling. Monetary policy cannot handle these institutional and political factors, which are contributing to the sustenance of high inflation, debilitating investment spirits, low revenue, and rising unemployment. Thus, the effectiveness of monetary policy remains constrained despite the pressing need for low inflation, respectable GDP growth, and increased job opportunities.

There is no automatic demographic dividend



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Bangladesh's population has reached 17.57 crore, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), making it the eighth most populous country in the world. With an annual growth rate of around 1.22 percent, approximately 21 lakh people are being added each year. While some see this huge population as a potential economic strength, others view it as a growing burden. To put it differently, is Bangladesh's rising population a challenge or an opportunity for sustainable development? To answer this, we need to examine key aspects of the nation's demographic and socio-economic realities.

Turning the population into an asset requires a strong focus on improving education and skill development to create a more capable and innovative workforce. It also demands greater investment in healthcare, human development, and policies that promote economic opportunities and social inclusion. Unfortunately, in our so-called "role model" approach to development, education and healthcare—two of the most vital pillars for building human resources—have been largely neglected. Bangladesh spends only around two percent of its GDP on education, the lowest among South Asian countries. As a result, nearly 40 percent of adults in Bangladesh remain illiterate, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Literacy Assessment Survey 2023. The survey shows that 60.77 percent of people aged 15 and above are

considered literate, with literacy rates of 62.84 percent for males and 58.24 percent for females.

Although Bangladesh has recorded steady GDP growth of over six percent annually over the past decade, this economic growth has not created enough decent, well-paying jobs for its growing young population. Official data shows that more than seven crore people are currently employed in the country, but about 85 percent of them are engaged in the informal sector—working as rickshaw-pullers, street vendors, day labourers, or in farming, transport, and construction. Such jobs lack job security, fair wages, and social protection. Presently, around 27.4 lakh people are officially unemployed, with the unemployment rate estimated at 4.63 percent. However, experts believe the real figure is considerably higher. The data also reveals that nearly 68 lakh people are underemployed or underutilised, including more than 13 lakh graduates who remain unable to find suitable employment matching their qualifications. This growing mismatch between education and job opportunities remains a major challenge for sustainable development.

The link between population health and economic progress is well established. Without a healthy population, a healthy economy is impossible. Currently, the country invests only 0.7 percent of GDP and two percent of the national budget in health. In the 2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI), Bangladesh ranked 84th

out of 127 countries. The GHI measures hunger and malnutrition using four key indicators: undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting, and child mortality. According to the report, around 12 percent of Bangladesh's population is undernourished, 23.6 percent of children under five are stunted, 11 percent are underweight, and 2.9 percent die before reaching their fifth birthday. Bangladesh is also falling behind in ensuring proper nutrition for infants and young children, with high rates of micronutrient deficiencies, especially vitamin A, iron, iodine, and zinc. A UNICEF report titled "Child Food Poverty: Nutrition Deprivation in Early Childhood" shows that two in every three children under five in Bangladesh suffer from child food poverty.

Rapid population growth is also reducing the availability of capital per person and limiting access to essential services such as food, water, housing, sanitation, healthcare, education, and employment. This, in turn, fuels poverty, inequality, crime, and environmental damage. Bangladesh is already one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with nearly 1,300 people living per square kilometre. This intense demographic pressure is straining its natural resources, including forests, rivers, and agricultural land. Each year, the country loses a significant amount of farmland, driven not only by population growth but also by rapid industrialisation, unplanned urbanisation, and rural settlement. According to the Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI), nearly 69,000 hectares of farmland are disappearing annually, threatening future food security.

The environmental consequences of this are far-reaching. Several studies have shown that growing population, coupled with poor governance and flawed urban planning, is accelerating the degradation of rivers, wetlands, and forests. A recent report by the National River Conservation Commission

revealed that of the 770 rivers that once flowed across the country, only 405 remain, with over 100 having vanished since independence. Many houses have been built on wetlands. As a result, wetland areas have been shrinking, particularly in and around Dhaka. This has led to serious environmental problems.

According to a report by this daily, since 2010, Dhaka has lost approximately 43,200 acres of wetlands out of a total of 187,958 acres. This means that around 22 percent of the city's wetlands have vanished in just over a decade. Deforestation has also reached alarming levels, with an estimated 246,000 hectares of forest lost between 2001 and 2023, according to Global Forest Watch.

To end on a slightly positive note, Bangladesh's growing population presents both a challenge and an opportunity. At present, around two-thirds of the population—nearly 11.5 crore people—are of working age, between 15 and 64 years. Some policymakers describe this large working-age population as a "demographic dividend." However, the term is often misunderstood, with many assuming its benefits will come automatically. That is far from reality. Unlocking the true potential of this demographic advantage depends entirely on strategic investments in education, skills development, healthcare, and decent job creation. Without these critical measures, the growing number of unemployed and underemployed youth will only fuel social frustration, inequality, and unrest. The sooner we recognise this and take effective action, the greater the chances of transforming our population burden into an opportunity—not only for economic growth but also for social stability and environmental sustainability. The future depends on the choices we make today.