

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

We do not want any more police excesses

They give uneasy signals to the public

We are appalled at the way a Dhaka University (DU) student and two journalists were manhandled by the police on Monday, February 23, during an anti-narcotics drive at Suhrawardy Udyan. The total disregard for the constitutional rights of civilians is indefensible. Such use of disproportionate force on individuals gives uneasy signals to the public.

Reportedly, the DU student was apprehended at the Suhrawardy Udyan, and the Ramna Division deputy commissioner (DC) started questioning him. A video on social media shows that while the DU student was speaking with the DC, another policeman grabbed him from behind, pushed him to the ground and beat him with a stick, leaving him seriously injured.

Two multimedia journalists, who were trying to film the incident, were also beaten up by the police. Four of the officers involved were withdrawn, and departmental action against them is apparently underway. Would there be such prompt action if no videos were circulating on social media?

It is puzzling, moreover, that no action has been taken against the DC under whose watch such violence occurred. The arguments given do not justify police assaulting civilians. Allegations of police abusing their power during anti-narcotics drives in some city parks and other districts have also been reported.

The newly appointed IGP, Md Ali Hossain Fakir, has stated that he will ensure the police will be more professional and people-friendly. But these incidents do little to reflect such goals. Instead, they amplify the negative image of the police. The memory of police brutality during the July uprising is still fresh, and these incidents trigger mistrust, anger and fear. The protests by DU students in front of Shahbagh Police Station are a manifestation of this lack of public trust.

These are warning signs to the government. Law enforcers must be trained to respect basic human rights of civilians and realise that violation of those rights will have consequences. The sense of impunity that law enforcers enjoyed in the past must end. Merely withdrawing police or transferring them is not enough. Those who assault individuals without justifiable reason must face legal action and be punished. The independent police commission that has been formed should ensure that the use of force is applied as a last resort, and prevent arbitrary arrests and custodial torture.

Law enforcers must prove to the people that they are the protectors of the law and the people. Anti drug and anti-crime drives are necessary, but they must be conducted professionally. Sweeping arrests, roughening up suspects, harassing people just for being out at night—these fear tactics are those of past repressive regimes and must stop. A depoliticised, corruption-free and modern law enforcement is crucial for our democratic journey.

A hospital building sitting unused

Recruit doctors, staff at new Rangamati hospital building immediately

It is unacceptable that the newly constructed six-storey building at Rangamati General Hospital—built at a cost of Tk 48.5 crore—remains unused months after its completion. Reportedly, construction ended in June 2024 and the building was handed over to the local Health Department in November last year. But no services have yet been provided at the new building. At a time when patients in remote areas struggle to access basic healthcare, allowing such a major public investment to sit idle reflects a systemic failure in our health sector planning.

Equipped with modern operating theatres, a 20-bed ICU, isolation units, and diagnostic facilities (including MRI and dialysis), the building can expand the hospital's capacity from 100 to 250 beds. However, services have not been shifted due to a shortage of manpower. The old 100-bed hospital, meanwhile, is operating far beyond its capacity, with patients receiving treatment on floors and in corridors.

For residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the hospital is a crucial healthcare facility and often the only one they can turn to. It is therefore unacceptable that a fully equipped expansion cannot open because doctors, nurses, and technicians have not been deployed. Why was staff recruitment not planned alongside construction? Why is there no temporary plan to assign staff from other facilities until permanent posts are filled? According to the Public Works Department, if the building remains unused for long, the elevators and other electrical equipment could be damaged.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Across districts and upazilas, infrastructure projects are often completed on schedule but human resource planning lags years behind. According to a recent report in this daily, at least 80 health facilities across 18 districts currently remain unused. These include children's hospitals, community clinics, trauma centres, and extensions of existing hospitals. Many buildings have been idle for years, some for over a decade, due to shortages of doctors, nurses, equipment, as well as bureaucratic delays. As a result, patients are being denied healthcare close to home. In several cases, expensive medical equipment has already been removed from idle facilities, further delaying service delivery.

Authorities must act immediately to make the new expansion building of Rangamati General Hospital fully functional so that people from remote areas across the CHT can receive better treatment. Urgent staff recruitment, temporary posting of medical personnel, and quick administrative approval are essential. The Tk 48.5 crore public investment cannot be allowed to go to waste. In future, all infrastructure expansion must go hand in hand with manpower deployment. Public healthcare in remote districts and upazilas should not remain hostage to bureaucratic inertia.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Napoleon escapes from Elba

On this day in 1815, French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte escaped from exile on the island of Elba and, gathering support en route, retook power on his return to Paris on March 20, ushering in the Hundred Days.

Economic priorities the government should focus on



Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha is pro-vice chancellor and professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Dhaka.

SAYEMA HAQUE BIDISHA

The newly elected BNP government has inherited an economy with diverse challenges. The crises of persistent inflationary pressure, sluggish private investment, and unemployment needs to be dealt with simultaneously, with careful policy planning. In addition to such macro challenges, the country's long-standing struggle with domestic resource mobilisation is another area for which policy emphasis is mandatory. Stabilising the economy against these challenges should, therefore, be the new government's top priority.

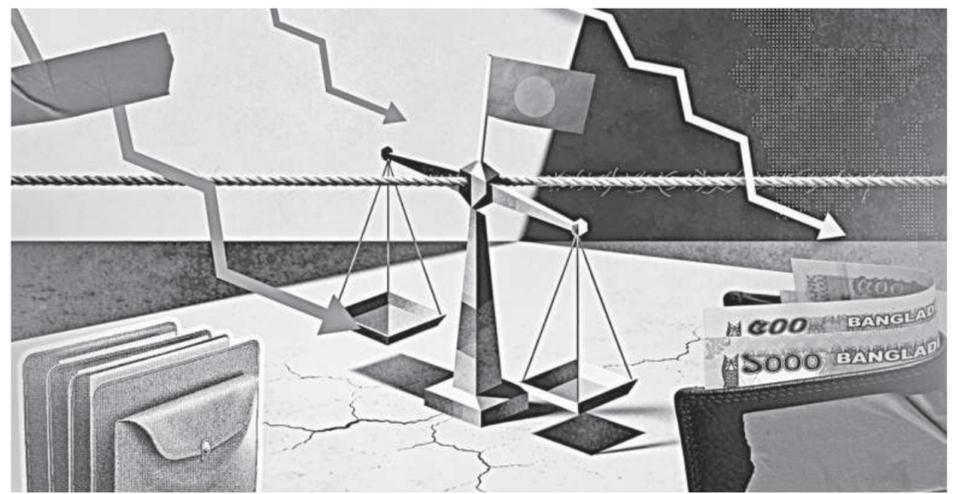
In the aftermath of the July uprising in 2024, the hardest economic challenge faced by the interim government was taming the double digit inflation, which escalated to as high as 11.66 percent in July 2024. By employing contractionary monetary and fiscal policies, the almost uncontrollable trend of inflation was brought down within the range of eight to nine percent, with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data of January 2026 showing point-to-point inflation at 8.58 percent (food inflation at 8.29 percent and non-food inflation as 8.81 percent). However, it should be noted that, with a slump in private investment and employment generation, monetary and fiscal instruments previously used to curb inflation no longer appear to be sustainable policy tools.

The newly elected government should, therefore, opt for a balanced mixture of monetary instruments and efficient market management. The latter means ensuring a competitive environment in the market and constraining non-competitive and collusive behaviour and hoarding practices. Additionally, ensuring the availability of demand and supply data, effective coordination among relevant authorities/ministries, reducing time lag of imports at ports, and the overall efficient management of supply chain should be considered.

From the economic management point of view, sluggish private sector investment stands as a major challenge, resulting in low GDP growth and job creation. The private sector credit growth plummeted to as low as 6.49 percent in 2024-25, according to the Bangladesh Bank. This has been caused by a wide range of factors, including infrastructural bottlenecks,

high interest cost of borrowing, and high cost of doing business. The slowed pace of private sector investment correlates to sluggish industrialisation, which is argued to be linked with political uncertainty in the absence of an elected government. The new government should, therefore, prioritise ensuring stability in its policy design and a private sector-friendly environment.

An often overlooked yet fundamental economic challenge is persistent unemployment and low



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

absorptive capacity of the economy. A fall in public and private sector investment, caused by contractionary policies, has arguably led to lack of job creation in recent years. The demand side story is, however, more complex: data of the employment elasticity of growth, which measures the pace of employment generation in relation to the growth of an economy, reveals low elasticity for the economy as a whole (0.34) with negative elasticity in the manufacturing sector (-0.05) from 2016-17 to 2022. On the other hand, there is a large youth population in the country who are unemployed (youth unemployment rate 8.07 percent) and a high prevalence of NEET (youth not in education, employment or

technical and vocational education.

Besides the macro challenges, a major concern for economic management in Bangladesh is persistently low domestic resource mobilisation. The tax-GDP ratio is argued to be one of the lowest in the world (less than seven percent in FY2024-25). Such a poor state of revenue mobilisation acts as an impediment towards government spending in critical sectors, i.e. education, healthcare, and safety net. Improving domestic resource mobilisation goals through suitable instruments while maintaining the inflation and inequality levels is crucial. To this end, greater emphasis should be given on direct taxation with digitalisation of the tax structure. Bringing all potential taxpayers into

rural economy, increased and transparent allocation for social safety net programmes, and a progressive and equitable tax structure must be prioritised.

Having come to power through a landslide victory in the February 12 election, the BNP government should set its initial economic priorities by focusing on containing inflation, accelerating private sector investment, generating decent and productive employment, and mobilising domestic resources to attain the development goals. Strong political commitment as well as efficient and timely policy direction and resource mobilisation can accomplish such daunting tasks, thereby ensuring inclusive development for the entire population.

Return of the authoritarian reflex in policing?



Tagabun Taharim Titun is a content executive at The Daily Star.

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

The memory of the July uprising remains vivid in my consciousness. As a student participant, I recall those afternoons of protests not only as a struggle against an authoritarian regime but also as a decisive rejection of an entrenched culture that treated citizens with suspicion, turned streets into sites of surveillance, and used the police as instruments of fear. We marched for a Bangladesh where the relationship between the governed and those who govern would be rooted in dignity and mutual respect.

Recent debates about nighttime policing and public safety show that changing rhetoric does not necessarily alter institutional mindsets. The education minister's call for nighttime policing, framed as protection for students and citizens, has prompted an important conversation. Although the intention is to ensure security, the implementation tends to reveal an authoritarian reflex we had pledged to overcome. The state's duty should be to expand freedom and enable citizens to live without fear, not to regulate their movements.

When police officers harass people in parks or on streets at night, question their right to occupy public space, or use physical or verbal aggression, we must ask whether the nature of law enforcement has truly changed. The July uprising reflected a generation's determination not to let a policing mentality seep into everyday life, to live under constant supervision, or to allow dissent to be crushed.

Security should never serve as a pretext for moral policing or the erosion of civil liberties. If an area is unsafe, the right response should be to increase visible patrols or introduce transparent, formal restrictions when necessary. It must not be left to individual officers to act as arbiters of public morality and to decide who belongs on a street based on the officers' private bias. The power to protect must not be confused with a licence to humiliate. When a citizen is harassed for simply being present in a public space, that is an abuse of power and a breach of trust.

The recent incidents of assault and harassment by police officers

are therefore not merely a string of isolated incidents, but a signal about institutional health. Public anxiety has increased, evidenced by the comment section of videos circulating on social media showing verbal harassment of youths by law enforcers. Many interpret this as a reversion toward policing that requires constant contestation. Thus, there is a renewed call to disentangle policing from arbitrary authority and to establish a clear and enforceable accountability mechanism to rebuild public trust.

For decades, police have been trained to maintain order through intimidation. That muscle memory does not disappear overnight. The current administration has a historical mandate to recalibrate the existing system. The demand is not for a perfect tomorrow but for a clear break with the past. Leaders must speak and act in ways that demonstrate commitment to a rights-based framework. Directives for nighttime security should be accompanied by training and oversight of law enforcers, as well as swift consequences for misconduct.

During the July uprising, we saw how quickly a force lost legitimacy when it stopped protecting and began preying. To avoid repeating that chapter, we must move toward consent-based policing. Police presence should be justified by the safety it produces, not by the fear it provokes. Physical violence employed against the public is not a security measure. It is a human rights violation that corrodes the foundation of the

democratic state we are trying to build.

We should not have to protest every instance of administrative heavy-handedness. We need a government that addresses abuses proactively and recognises institutional reform as a prerequisite for lasting stability. The authoritarian practices and the urge to moralise and control through force persist within institutions. The reform we seek must prioritise institutional change and restore public trust by replacing coercive behaviour with a spirit of service, transparent procedures, and accountable oversight.

Our expectations are high because the sacrifices were high. We deserve a governance structure that treats youth not as problems to be managed but as architects of a free society. This demands more than policy adjustments. It requires a reimagining of what the state owes its people and an honest admission that the state is not the parent of citizens but their employee.

Progress should be measured not only by economic growth or political stability, but by how citizens feel when they see a police officer at night. Until citizens feel unequivocally safer, the work of the state remains unfinished. Upholding the constitution through comprehensive institutional reform is the difficult but necessary path to securing a democracy that protects rights and enforces the rule of law. What we ask for is a state that respects our presence in it and that secures the street for the people both by day and by night.