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

Employ better strategies to stop lynching

Death toll caused by mob violence in May is alarming

When it comes to killings, it is only the brutality or the unique circumstances that draw our attention and shock our conscience. Hundreds of other homicides that never make it to the front page leave us with the delusion that certain crimes, such as mob violence, have stopped, until a cumulative statistic is presented. That's exactly why the latest report published by rights organisation Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) feels shocking. MSF data shows that May has witnessed the highest number of deaths by mob beatings this year: 32 people were lynched over allegations of theft, robbery, attempted rape and sexual assault, murder, mugging, drug peddling, and even over insulting remarks.

The report compared this statistic with data from previous months. In April, 21 deaths from mob violence were reported, 19 in March, 18 in February, and 21 in January. The number of people injured in mob beatings in May was also much higher than that in April—71 compared to 49. Even law enforcers were not spared during mob beatings last month. The statistics and allegations indicate a dangerous trend: the increasing tendency to take the law into one's own hands. And such a tendency can grow only when people's trust in the country's law and justice system erodes significantly.

Moreover, mob violence is often perceived as a nameless, faceless crime. People participating in the act don't fear legal retribution as they think they would not be identified amid a crowd committing the crime. Yet, in today's day and age, when technologies such as CCTV cameras and mobile phones are ubiquitous, video recordings of such crimes should dispel the illusion of anonymity that often emboldens participants. But in Bangladesh, that does not happen, because even cases arising from high-profile incidents of mob violence remain stuck in lengthy investigations and legal proceedings. What's more, alleged perpetrators can often take advantage of legal loopholes and roam free, while the victims' families live in fear of retribution.

Thus, enacting new laws to deal with mob violence alone will not prevent this criminal act. Neither will the home minister's warning about not tolerating mob justice. What is needed is a repair of our justice system, its lengthy processes, weak investigations, and its tendency to favour those with money and political influence. Also, the government must come up with strategies to reinstate people's trust in the law and its enforcers. Mere cosmetic changes will not do. Law enforcers' presence should be enough to dissuade crime. Also, civic and moral education that teaches young people to respect the law and rules of the land and to differentiate right from wrong must be mandatory. Incidents of mob violence should not exist at all, let alone be common in a functional democracy.

Can we ever have safe travels?

Transport sector needs major overhaul to reduce fatal road crashes

Every Eid in Bangladesh turns into an unhappy memory for those who lose their loved ones in transportation-related incidents. According to the Road Safety Foundation's (RSF) latest calculations, at least 131 people were reportedly killed in road crashes across the country between May 24 and 30 of the Eid-ul-Azha holidays. On Eid day alone, around 300 injured people were admitted to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor). Going through the news, one feels overwhelmed by reports of not only road crashes, but also of deaths and injuries caused by other transport-related incidents. On May 25, a trawler capsized and sank in the Meghna River, resulting in the deaths of three people, including a son and father. On May 27, three people died in two separate incidents when riding on the roofs of trains while travelling home for Eid.

While there is always an uptick in road crashes during the country's two biggest festivals, with millions leaving and returning to a heavily centralised Dhaka, transport-related deaths and injuries have been the norm in Bangladesh for a long time. At the beginning of the year, the RSF revealed that at least 7,359 people were killed in road crashes in 2025, while another 16,476 were injured. Waterway and railway incidents amounted to 627 deaths collectively.

It is never a surprise for the authorities that roads will be heavily occupied during Eid. It is also not a surprise why hundreds of people die on our roads each year. Should we pretend that it is not the authorities and their own system which allow unfit vehicles, unqualified drivers, and unmonitored highways to take the lives of so many? What keeps the BRTA from ensuring that old, broken vehicles are not allowed to ply the roads? What stops the authorities from ensuring that trains are not overloaded? How are unfit water vehicles allowed to operate until they eventually cause innocent citizens to drown? Why is it that going from point A to point B in this country is a life-threatening venture?

When talking to this newspaper, the additional inspector general of police (highway) said, "If we could enforce stricter control over vehicle speeds, road safety would improve further." We must ask why someone in a position of authority to enforce stricter control over vehicle speeds feels powerless to actually do so. Any person with an ounce of empathy would say that our transport sector needs a complete overhaul. We urge the government to reach this conclusion too, and soon. It is abnormal for any country to be so unresponsive year on year to thousands of preventable deaths.

THSI DAY IN HISTORY

Elizabeth II crowned queen

On this day in 1953, 27-year-old Elizabeth II, the elder daughter of King George VI, was formally crowned queen of the United Kingdom in a coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey.

What the FY2027 budget must prioritise

MACRO MIRROR

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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

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The finance minister is set to present his government's first national budget on June 11. Expectations are high—and for several reasons. The budget comes at a time when Bangladesh is going through one of the most difficult economic situations in decades. Growth has slowed considerably, inflation remains stubbornly high, investment has weakened, poverty has increased, persistent energy shortages and high energy costs continue to constrain production and competitiveness, and the banking sector remains under significant stress. At the same time, the country is set to graduate from the LDC category, which brings both opportunities and challenges. In this context, the FY2026-27 budget cannot be treated as a routine annual fiscal exercise. It must serve as a roadmap to restore macroeconomic stability, protect vulnerable citizens, rebuild investor confidence, and prepare the country for a more competitive post-LDC future.

The last few years have seen low GDP growth. In FY2024-25, the growth rate was 3.49 percent, while the government expects a five percent growth in FY2025-26. Inflation, on the other hand, rose to 9.04 percent in April from 8.71 percent in March this year. The April spike was driven by non-food inflation, possibly reflecting geopolitical tensions intensifying in the Middle East. Employment generation is also weak due to low investment. Between March 2025 and March 2026, credit to the private sector grew at 4.7 percent only. This means while economic activities are weak, prices are high. And when domestic vulnerabilities persist, external risks are felt more.

In this context, the government plans to present a large, expansionary budget proposal for FY2027. Reports suggest that the budget size may exceed Tk 9.30 lakh crore, with a revenue target of around Tk 6.95 lakh crore and a GDP growth target of 6.5 percent. This ambition is in line with the BNP government's election manifesto, which spelt out several milestones to be achieved in the coming years. While the economy must grow faster to generate employment and income, several preconditions must be fulfilled to achieve high growth in the coming year.

First, higher growth will depend on the pace of investment recovery. Private investment has remained weak due to high borrowing costs, energy shortages, policy uncertainty, weak governance, delayed payments, and stress in the banking sector. Private investment accounted for only about 22 percent of GDP in FY2025. This level of investment is insufficient to generate the employment opportunities required to meet the needs of the country's growing labour force. The budget should therefore prioritise measures that directly reduce the cost and uncertainty of doing business. These include reliable gas and electricity supplies for industry, faster customs clearance, timely VAT and duty refunds, improved port logistics, simpler business regulations, and targeted support for export diversification and SMEs. Export diversification beyond RMG products must be supported. Sectors such as pharmaceuticals, information technology, agro-processing, leather goods, and light engineering have the potential for future growth.

Second, structural weaknesses in the energy sector must be addressed. Energy shortages and high prices are currently affecting industrial production, agricultural activities, exports, private investment, and household welfare. Investments should focus on improving transmission and distribution networks, reducing system losses and enhancing the efficiency and financial sustainability of power utilities. Higher investment is needed to facilitate the growth of renewable energy, particularly rooftop solar, as well as domestic gas exploration and energy efficiency measures. Shifting the focus from installed capacity to a reliable and affordable energy supply will help reduce inflation, attract investment, and support higher economic growth.

Third, the quality of public spending must be improved. A large Annual Development Programme (ADP) will not automatically raise growth. Projects should be selected based on completion readiness, employment impact, import-saving potential, and contribution to productivity. Slow-moving and low-priority projects should be postponed. The budget should also allocate more to agriculture, irrigation, storage, transport logistics, health, education, skills, and climate resilience. These areas can directly support productivity and household welfare. A higher allocation to social infrastructure, such as health and education, is urgently needed. Of course, higher allocation does not automatically improve the quality of infrastructure investment, whether physical or social. Spending must be carried out with transparency and accountability.

FILE VISUAL: SYEDA MAISHA ALI

Hopefully, the government will give adequate attention to other urgent issues while preparing an expansionary budget. To control inflation, it must prioritise supply-enhancing spending. This means more spending on food production, storage, transport, fertilisers, irrigation, energy supply and logistics, and less spending on non-essential construction, administrative expansion, and low-return projects. Import duties and taxes on essential food items, fuel, fertiliser, and medicine should be reviewed to ensure that budget measures don't raise prices further. Market monitoring should also be strengthened to prevent hoarding, cartel behaviour, and artificial price increases.

For ordinary citizens, purchasing power remains the central concern. People will not benefit from higher GDP growth if their real incomes continue to fall. The budget should combine inflation control with income protection. The proposed Family Card can help poor families if it is properly targeted and fiscally sustainable. These programmes should be implemented through a clean beneficiary database, digital payments, and strict monitoring, so that support reaches poor and low-income families, marginal farmers, and informal workers.

Purchasing power can also be increased through employment and wage support. The budget should expand labour-intensive public works in rural and climate-vulnerable areas, support SMEs, promote women's employment, and invest in skills training for young people. Minimum wages in low-paid sectors should be reviewed where appropriate, and social protection benefits should be adjusted in line with inflation. The budget should support technical and vocational education, skills development, entrepreneurship programmes, and digital employment opportunities. Investments that create jobs should receive greater priority over those that merely expand physical infrastructure.

The budget must also avoid excessive borrowing from banks. If the government borrows heavily from banks, private investors will face tighter credit conditions and higher interest costs, which will weaken investment and job creation. The government should rely more on concessional external financing for high-return projects, improve revenue collection, reduce wasteful expenditure, and manage subsidies more transparently.

The upcoming budget must also address the worrying rise in poverty. Recent estimates indicate that poverty has risen relative to pre-pandemic levels as prolonged inflation, weak employment growth, and economic uncertainty have eroded household incomes. Many families continue to struggle with the costs of food, healthcare, and education.

The FY2027 budget is the new government's first major economic policy statement. It offers an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to economic stability and social inclusion. As always, the budget's success will not be measured by its size or the number of projects announced. It will be judged on whether it can reduce inflation, strengthen revenue mobilisation, make judicious public investment, revive investment, generate employment, and prepare Bangladesh for a more competitive and challenging future.

Securing the future for our women athletes

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SHAFIQ R BHUIYAN

The government's nationwide "Notun Kuri Sports" initiative is a commendable effort to provide our children with a healthy platform to develop their talents. It is also a timely move to nurture the next generation of athletes who can represent Bangladesh on the global stage. The programme that officially began just a month ago has already seen a considerable number of participants signing up from across the country, which further goes to show that our talent pool is not concentrated to the big cities.

Particularly encouraging is the number of female participants in the initiative—with over 44,133 girls signing up between April 12 and 17, out of some 1,60,779 digitally registered participants in that same period. Bangladesh's women athletes have been making headlines by competing with merit in both domestic and international platforms. Therefore, female participation in sports is a matter of pride and worth celebrating. However, finding talent often is just the beginning of a much larger story. We have a harder question to face: what comes after these girls are discovered?

Most athletes can compete only until a certain age, and few make it to national teams or secure long-term professional contracts. This contributes to uncertainty for many, and particularly for families from rural areas, who often find themselves asking: what happens to our daughter's future after she spends years in sports? Will she ever have educational, financial, and social acceptance?

To build a sustainable sports framework for women athletes, we must address these concerns with utmost priority and take steps to link sports to long-term career paths.

India has increased the number of sports scholarships and jobs across central and state government agencies for athletes through schemes like "Khelo India." Australia has a school-to-club system where young athletes can continue their studies alongside sports activities. In many parts of Europe, too, local clubs serve as community centres where athletes receive coaching, healthcare, and career advice from a young age.

Drawing on these examples, Bangladesh needs to build a solid framework for sustained sports participation by the youth. Programmes like Brac Bank's "Aporajeyo Alo" have already demonstrated how institutions can empower women by providing visibility, support, and confidence. The initiative added four young girls to the national women's hockey team, and in their first outing, the team qualified for the Asian Games 2026.

Beyond partnerships, another challenge that needs to be addressed is unequal access to sports facilities. To develop talent nationwide, modern sports facilities must expand beyond the capital to districts and smaller cities. These should include good turf grounds, athletics tracks, indoor stadiums, pools, physiotherapy support, and trained coaches. We must also ensure proper maintenance of these facilities.

It is equally important to strengthen local sports clubs. In many countries, local clubs act as the backbone of talent development. They find young athletes, organise competitions, provide training, and connect school sports to national teams. In Bangladesh, many clubs struggle financially and lack modern training facilities. Without strong local clubs, talent hunts may become one-off events rather than sustained systems.

Financial support is also a key factor. Many athletes drop out due to the rising cost of transportation, nutrition, and equipment. Providing travel support, stipends, and scholarships would enable more rural families to participate, making sports accessible to those who cannot afford them.

Beyond the financial sphere, safety and social support for women, in particular, demands more attention. For parents to feel confident about their children participating in sports, they need to be reassured that their the young athletes will train in safe places under good supervision and have uninterrupted access to basic amenities.

The government should also increase the number of female coaches, trainers, and administrators at every level. Former female athletes can play an important role here. Building community awareness is also important as social acceptance often determines whether a girl can continue playing after adolescence or not. And to bring all these efforts together, the media can play a unifying role.

We celebrate women athletes when they win championships, but stories from the grassroots rarely get the attention they deserve. The country needs to see more stories from villages and small towns so that they can go on to inspire more people, leading to wider participation.

Considering these intertwined opportunities and challenges, the government deserves credit for reviving a nationwide sports talent hunt. But the real success of this initiative will depend on whether these girls can keep moving forward five or 10 years from now—with dignity, education, financial stability, and professional opportunities.

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