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

Probe custodial torture independently

Empower NHRC to probe alleged violations by disciplined forces

We second the human rights activists' and advocacy groups' call to establish either an independent body or empower the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to investigate allegations of custodial torture, deaths, and other crimes against disciplined forces. This is because in many instances in the past, when disciplined forces investigated allegations of crimes or human rights violations against their own members, the outcome was often dismissal. This raises serious questions about the fairness and transparency of such probes.

The problem becomes evident when one compares the data on custodial deaths and the number of cases in which the accused law enforcers have been convicted since the passing of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. According to data compiled by human rights organisation Odhikhar, between October 10, 2001, and June 22, 2026, the number of custodial deaths totalled 476, that too under different governments—political and non-political. Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) puts the number of deaths of convicted prisoners and under-trial detainees in jail custody between January 2014 and May 2026 at over 900. However, till today, only in one case filed under the act have police officers been convicted of torturing a detainee, leading to his death. It is the landmark case of Ishtiaque Hossain Jonny, who was picked up along with his brother by the police in February 2014. When Jonny fell ill after being tortured, he was taken to a local clinic. As his condition deteriorated, he was transferred to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. Jonny's brother filed the case in August 2014, and in 2020, a Dhaka court found three police officers and two informers guilty.

This disparity between the numbers of custodial deaths and convictions also drives home the point Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Sara Hossain made at a recent conference in Dhaka. She noted how ordinary citizens often cannot file a case against the police, and even when they do, the investigation process becomes a major obstacle to justice. Indeed, how can an agency be trusted to impartially investigate its own members? This question is particularly crucial when one considers how the law enforcement members often see torture as the only means to extract confessional statements.

Therefore, it is imperative that cases of human rights violations, including custodial torture and deaths, are investigated by an independent body. It could be the NHRC, to which the interim government gave this power through the 2025 ordinance. However, the BNP government not only scraped the ordinance but also left the provision out completely in the new draft NHRC law. This is not expected of a party whose activists have so often faced police brutality during the 15-plus years of the Awami League regime. We hope that the BNP government will do better and ensure independent probes into allegations of custodial torture, deaths, and other human rights violations against disciplined forces.

Heed the dengue warning

The DGHS survey in Chattogram must inspire urgent nationwide action

We find it deeply concerning that several areas in Chattogram city have been identified with an alarmingly high density of Aedes mosquito larvae, indicating a heightened risk of dengue and chikungunya outbreaks. Given that the country enters the peak dengue season between June and September, the survey conducted by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Chattogram should prompt an immediate call to action.

The survey, carried out between June 8 and June 18, during the first phase of monsoon, covered 18 of the 41 wards under Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) and identified eight wards to be at exceptionally high risk of dengue outbreak. Mosquito surveillance is instrumental in preventing outbreaks; however, the suspension of such surveys in recent years due to funding and institutional uncertainties has deprived the authorities of the data needed to identify potential hotspots and deploy preventive and control measures in time. The latest measure by the DGHS, therefore, merits appreciation.

However, we must issue a word of caution that such surveys may not mean much if their findings don't receive the urgent attention they deserve from all relevant authorities. This is especially important this year as half of the dengue deaths and around 78 percent of cases so far have been reported outside Dhaka. According to the DGHS, 10 people have died and at least 5,160 have been hospitalised between January 1 and June 23 this year. Given that this period falls under the leaner season for dengue, the figures are particularly alarming and only suggest a grim forecast for the peak dengue season.

Fortunately, the DGHS survey has already outlined a set of practical recommendations blending both individual and institutional accountability, which, if enforced properly, can considerably contain the spread of the disease. It is encouraging to see that the CCC authorities have already responded by launching a programme to identify mosquito hotspots, but they should ensure that such measures continue as part of a broader year-long monitoring system, backed by community awareness and engagement campaigns.

We find it commendable that the government now requires private hospitals to reserve at least 10 percent of their beds for dengue patients free of charge and to offer discounts of up to 80 percent on diagnostic tests. However, the government response must move beyond treatment strategies, and prevention must remain the priority. We urge the government to strengthen mosquito control efforts and eliminate breeding grounds to prevent further deaths from dengue.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Brazil wins first World Cup

On this day in 1958, Brazil defeated Sweden 5-2 to win the country's first FIFA World Cup. The star was 17-year-old Pelé, who scored twice during the match, becoming the youngest player to score in a World Cup final.

From ambition to execution: The budget's real test

MACRO MIRROR

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FAHMIDA KHATUN

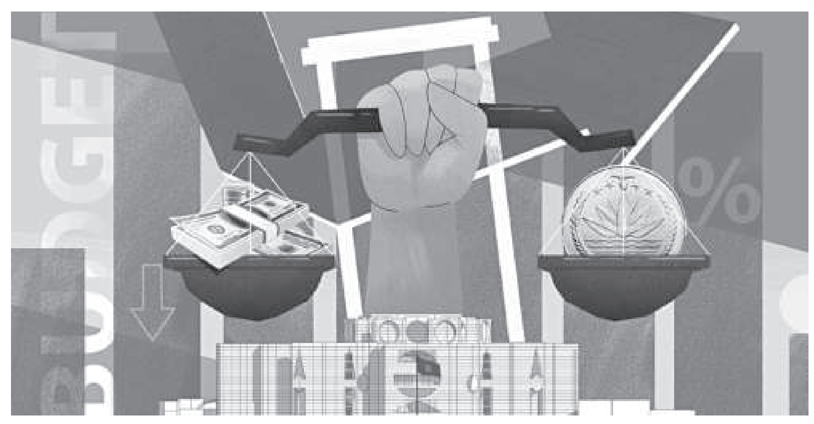
The proposed national budget for FY2026-27 provides an indication of the newly elected government's economic philosophy and development priorities. It identifies 10 priority areas, including investment-led growth, quality education and healthcare, universal social protection, financial sector stability, energy security, digital transformation, environmental management, and accountable institutions, which are broadly consistent with the country's development needs. However, whether the proposed fiscal framework, macroeconomic assumptions, and implementation capacity are sufficient to translate these ambitions into tangible outcomes is the real question.

The new budget projects a GDP growth of 6.5 percent in the upcoming fiscal year, a sharp rise from the revised estimate of five percent for the outgoing year by the finance ministry, and the provisional estimate of 4.14 percent for the same period by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). Achieving such a significant improvement in a single fiscal year would require an exceptionally strong rebound in investment, industrial production, and exports. This target appears ambitious as private investment, the main driver of economic growth, is projected to increase only marginally—from 21.22 percent of GDP in FY2025-26 (revised) to 21.33 percent in FY2026-27—after remaining stagnant for more than a decade. Although public investment is expected to rise from 10.8 percent (revised) to 13.1 percent of GDP, achieving the growth target will ultimately depend on a stronger recovery in private investment.

The inflation outlook presents a similar challenge. The government aims to reduce inflation to 7.5 percent in FY2026-27. However, during the July-May period of FY2025-26, the moving average inflation was 8.63 percent. In Bangladesh, inflation has increasingly become structural rather than purely monetary. It reflects supply-side bottlenecks, high food prices, energy costs, exchange rate adjustments, and persistent market inefficiencies. Bringing inflation down will, therefore, require more than a tighter monetary policy, depending equally on ensuring adequate food supplies, improving energy availability, maintaining exchange rate stability, reducing supply chain disruptions, and strengthening market oversight.

The projection for private sector credit growth also warrants careful scrutiny. The proposed budget expects private credit growth of 9.4 percent in FY2026-27, despite actual growth being 4.75 percent as of April 2026. Weak business confidence, cautious bank lending, and financial sector stress continue to constrain credit demand and supply alike. Unless confidence improves significantly, higher credit growth may prove difficult to achieve.

The external sector projections also reflect considerable optimism. Export growth is expected to accelerate while imports are projected to rise sharply, reflecting stronger domestic demand and investment. Remittances are expected to continue growing, while forex reserves are projected to increase substantially over the medium term. Although these projections are not impossible, they depend heavily on favourable global conditions, stronger domestic competitiveness, and continued macroeconomic stability. Bangladesh's export performance will also be influenced by slowing global demand, geopolitical uncertainties, and preparations for LDC graduation.



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

The fiscal framework underpinning the budget is equally ambitious. Public expenditure is projected to increase by around 19 percent over the revised FY2025-26 budget, while revenue is expected to grow by 18.2 percent. The budget deficit is projected at 3.6 percent of GDP, financed through a combination of domestic borrowing and external loans.

The greatest uncertainty lies in revenue mobilisation. Bangladesh has consistently struggled to achieve its revenue targets over the past decade. Revenue collection during FY2025-26 fell substantially short of expectations, implying that the FY2026-27 target would require an exceptionally large increase in actual collections. Much of the projected revenue growth is expected to come from the National Board of Revenue (NBR), particularly through VAT and income taxes. While measures to improve tax compliance, broaden the tax base, and integrate taxpayer databases are welcome, implementation challenges remain significant.

The new budget assumes a substantial increase in external financing to support higher development spending. However, Bangladesh has long been struggling with delays in project implementation and in disbursement of foreign loans, which raises questions about whether these targets can be achieved. As concessional foreign assistance gradually declines, the country will increasingly depend on external borrowing rather than aid. This will require stronger sovereign creditworthiness, sound macroeconomic management, and compliance with the lenders' requirements. Without improving institutional capacity, implementation efficiency, and the country's credit profile, the projected level of external financing may not fully materialise, posing risks to budget execution.

The fiscal measures of the proposed budget provide greater predictability. A more predictable tax framework allows maintaining personal income tax rates until FY2027-28 and corporate tax rates until FY2030-31, providing greater certainty for businesses and investors. Incentives for timely tax filing, stronger enforcement, and digital integration of tax databases could improve compliance and broaden the tax base. The budget also supports domestic industries, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and digital economy through targeted tax incentives. Tax-free income threshold may be raised to Tk 4 lakh from the present Tk 3.5 lakh, offering some respite to the lower- and middle-income households. However, the government's continued reliance on indirect taxes may add to their financial stress, undermining the fairness of the overall package.

Job creation gets limited emphasis in the proposed budget. It does not appear fully aligned with the government's pledge to create one crore jobs within 18 months. It assumes that stronger economic growth will naturally translate into higher employment. However, recent experience shows that growth alone does not automatically generate sufficient quality jobs. Structural transformation requires deliberate policies that promote labour-intensive industries, expand exports, strengthen entrepreneurship, and improve workers' skills.

The budget includes welcome support for SMEs, freelancers, women entrepreneurs, and the digital economy, all of which can encourage self-employment and innovation. However, these initiatives alone are unlikely to generate employment at the scale envisioned by the government. A more comprehensive employment strategy would have prioritised technical and vocational education, apprenticeship programmes, workforce reskilling, digital job-matching platforms, and stronger links between education and industry. If employment generation is to become the centrepiece of Bangladesh's development strategy, future budgets will need to move beyond growth targets and place much greater emphasis on creating productive, high-quality jobs.

Investing more in education, health and social protection is one of the proposed budget's strongest features. Compared with the revised FY2025-26 budget, allocations to these sectors have increased substantially, signalling a welcome shift towards human capital development. However, larger allocations alone will not guarantee better outcomes. Weak implementation, governance failures, and institutional constraints often reduce the effectiveness of public spending.

The expansion of the Family Card programme deserves particular attention. Providing subsidised essential commodities to low-income households can help protect vulnerable families from the ongoing effects of high inflation and rising living costs. If integrated with digital beneficiary databases and transparent delivery systems, the programme can become an important pillar of the country's social protection architecture. However, its success will depend on accurate targeting, minimising leakages, ensuring nationwide coverage of eligible households, and maintaining regular monitoring.

Overall, the FY2026-27 budget is an encouraging starting point for the new government. But its success will ultimately depend on effective implementation, which has to ensure that every spending delivers meaningful economic and social returns.

Why teacher training needs a complete overhaul

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SUDEB KUMAR BISWAS

As an education and development professional, I participated in a classroom observation once, following training on technology-enhanced English language teaching. The teacher conducted his lesson mostly in English and incorporated an audio resource. However, the lesson seemed largely staged rather than naturally integrated into his teaching routine. Students struggled to understand his English as it was not a regular practice, and his lesson lacked the elements of interactive pedagogy. As a result, the lesson was less effective than his usual teaching practices and did not improve learning outcomes. I observed a similar pattern during a visit to a multimedia classroom, where the use of technology did not translate into "smart" teaching. Instead, it remained a superficial change in content delivery using a multimedia projector, without enhancing interaction or student learning.

Despite the investment to improve teachers' skills to enhance their classroom practices, the outcome mostly remain unchanged. Sometimes, the way the trainings are designed and delivered is fundamentally flawed and unlikely to produce any meaningful change. While we are concerned about the limited impact of training, there is surprisingly little rigorous evidence on what actually works.

Rather than investing in teachers' continuous professional development, we have normalised an event-based training culture that relies on one-shot workshops, with minimal follow-up and long-term support. This is compounded by a "Cascade Model" of delivery, which dilutes the quality of the training as information is passed down through multiple layers before reaching the teachers. Furthermore, as the training lacks follow-on support through effective monitoring, mentoring and other mechanisms, it quickly fades without leaving any lasting impact in the classroom. These short, isolated event-based workshops are typically designed to deliver knowledge rather than to transform teaching to create impact. We introduced competency-based curriculum and experiential learning, but teachers' professional development remained traditional and mostly theory-based, and thus rarely led to substantial changes in classroom practice.

Teaching is a dynamic and practice-based profession that requires continuous reflection, feedback, and adaptation. So, only one-shot workshops cannot transform deeply rooted teaching habits, nor can they address the diverse challenges teachers face in real classrooms, as they often lack contextual relevance. The problem is worsened by a system that prioritises ticking administrative boxes over genuine professional growth.

Our education demands a systemic shift, and it will make more sense if we can create an enabling situation for teachers that provides quality materials, promotes self-study, peer learning and ensures ongoing mentoring and monitoring support. This approach of continuous professional development (CPD) can serve as a change-making process through teachers' continuous and collaborative learning and research so that they can plan and try out new ideas in their classrooms. We need to adapt multiple effective mechanisms of CPD based on real classroom needs, using local examples, global best practices and practical strategies that teachers can immediately implement. We should prioritise transformation over delivery by incorporating more reflective practice, making learning impactful.

The current structure of one-shot workshops can be the orientation of new interventions if it is followed by ongoing and more structured support mechanisms. Ultimately, teachers are their own greatest resource. When peer support is effectively utilised and sustained as a continuous journey, it gives educators the time to apply new ideas, reflect on the results, and refine their craft. For example, Japan established a cost-effective approach of peer learning through "Lesson Study," where peer teachers at schools work collaboratively for their professional development. Bangladesh piloted this idea in primary education, but it wasn't scaled up. In this approach, teachers themselves become critical friends and learn together through group study, observing each other's lessons, and discussing solutions.

Finally, without accountability, even well-designed programmes can fail to produce results. To foster a continuous learning culture, head teachers and supervisors must actively mentor staff. Furthermore, robust evaluations are essential to track a training's direct impact on classroom practices and student outcomes, while also providing actionable data on systemic barriers to guide future decisions. It is time to stop setting our training programmes up for failure. Let's learn from past mistakes and build a system designed to thrive.

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