The bubble boys, the Green Zone and the 99%

What is wrong with the privileged elite of Bangladesh, asks Asif Saleh, that they can be so indifferent to the misery and hardship that surrounds them

WE recently sent an intern from our organization to work for *Ain O Shalish Kendro*. Before she left, I met her in London -- a very excited twenty-something girl out to change the world.

The zeal, however, soon turned into grief on October 28. Her Glasgow-residing father went to visit her in Dhaka. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time on that day. She didn't hear from him all day and night after he went shopping at Baitul Mukarram, the scene of the chaos that broke out in the aftermath of the power handover.

Desperate, she started to look for him in the hospitals of Dhaka. What she saw there was a scene of mind-boggling disaster. The stench, the filth and the scene of how the patients are treated in the name of treatment was something that she did not expect.

Typically, she and others like her are not exposed to this kind of scenes as they would be accessing the privileged services and hospitals. What she saw that day in those hospitals didn't even pass the very basic standard of a health care system, and what's more scary is that if this is the state in our capital city then imagine what is happening in the rest of the country. Well, guess what? That's the kind of system, or worse, that 99% of our population are forced to use.

It is sad but true that, similar to health care, all the basic services that the state is supposed to provide are now so polarized that what is offered to the rich and what is offered to the middle class and poor are beyond comparison. In fact, you can't even call them services.

You just have to start with the educational system to get a glimpse of this inequality. Only the rich can afford good schools and private or foreign universities, education in which leads to guaranteed highly paid jobs. Whereas a certain Abdul Karim from

Kaliganj can never even dream of getting that dream job in Standard Chartered Bank with the broken English that he learnt at Kaliganj Government High School.

So what does he do to break the shackles of unemployment? He sells his *vita mati* for a lakh or two to make his way to Malaysia to do slave labour, change his fortune and break the invisible glass ceiling -- only to be cheated by the *adam bepari* and return home penniless.

If he is lucky to return alive, then the only remaining options require him to choose between becoming a professional *mastan* or a bomber for the cause of Allah. You might say that such a class struggle is there in every country. But what is different in Bangladesh is that more and more, every passing year, the gap between what's offered for the rich and what's offered for the middle class is becoming wider. Let's not even talk about the poor.

Now here is the million dollar question: why is nothing being done about it?

Simply put, it's because our policy



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