

## Bangladesh as a 'developed country': 'Graduating' imperatives

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Every "developed country" needs Main Street footprints to impact ordinary pedestrians. Have the expanding RMG export income (currently more than USD 30 billion annually, while targeting USD 50 billion) and foreign exchange reserves (currently over USD 45 billion annually), trickled down to Main Street—through meaningful jobs, expanded purchasing power, consumption shifting from basics towards luxury, and so forth? The proportion of net attention paid to these sectors will structure and institutionalise the country, thus breeding the instincts: how much education one has, what that education translates into for a consumer (that is, what one spends on), and if the slow and steady replacement of paisa-conserving plebeian attitudes yield to noblesse oblige gestures, indeed, in all mannerisms.

Other SDC platforms echo similar tones. There is no way SDG 16 (on "institutional growth and fairness") can be satisfactorily fulfilled without advancing SDG 17 (on "partnership-building"). With only one free-trade agreement (FTA) in the kitty, Bangladesh desperately needs more to climb any ladder. Ongoing negotiations with Southeast Asian countries must quickly become the spark of a global FTA flurry—all dependent upon how rapidly we relax our protectionist infrastructures, institutions, and instincts. Balancing India or China from dominating our economy should become less the concern than strengthening the very kernels of partnerships: trust, reciprocity, fairness, mutuality, and so forth, in every direction. Having only just scraped the surface of world-wide bilateral trade and investment opportunities, we are beginning to understand how institutions strengthen as much with these as the partnerships they construct, and why the new infrastructures and institutions angle reshape instincts differently.

Bangladesh's Covid-19 responses



and recovery explain why. How they helped the country shift from face-to-face education to online counterparts speaks to the resiliency levels of our schools, colleges, and universities. Private universities adjusted faster than public universities, but overall, Bangladesh is not deeply entrenched in knowledge-building arts/sciences to notch success: poor connections, unpredictable power-supply, and a paucity of services handicap rural students. These threaten SDG equalising efforts and weaken the second and third CDP pre-requisites, while also leaving the new infrastructures, institutions, and instincts too raw to survive this first round. Nonetheless, we were exposed

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PHOTO: STAR

to internet-based Third Revolution and artificial intelligence (AI) based Fourth Industrial Revolution, demonstrating our capacity (not our mastery) to shift from the physical-based First and Second industrial revolutions to the intellectual domain. With two decades or so for full "Vision 2041" translation, we barely have the time to make it.

Lapses like these could be listed ad infinitum, but the underlying messages of building robust practices and mindsets, then aligning them abroad through collaboration could not have been more timely.

Inside the country we will find (and have no choice but to resolve) the same rich-poor divisions development hopes

to minimise between countries: the symbolic Gulshan-Gulistan schism can only be restructured if the instincts drive us to do so, such that future Bangladeshi metropolitans in the 2040s look more like Gulshan than Gulistan and the countryside escapes returning to a zamindari system, this time not under ancient aristocrats but newly-minted bourgeoisie. Only with multiple marriages of "graduating" processes can the five-year LDC transformation supply the infrastructures, institutions, and instincts to worthily reflect the mindset and reality of a "developed country." Few, if any, "less developed country" can be better poised to deliver than Bangladesh, if the right buttons are pushed.

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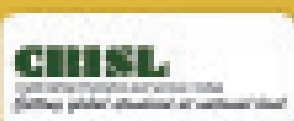
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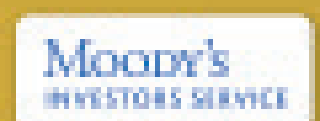


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