

'We are doing well'



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Bangla.

GOLAM MORTOZA

The epic line from Nachiketa Chakraborty's song "Ei Besh Bhalo Achhi (We are doing well)" instantly came to mind after hearing what Awami League General Secretary and the Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader recently said.

"Compared to the other South Asian nations, we are doing well. We are better than even many advanced nations," he said on January 28. How are we doing well? What does it mean to be well? This discussion aims at unearthing these answers.

If we look back at the past decades since our independence in 1971, it is clear that the living conditions of Bangladeshi people have improved without a doubt. We are ahead of other South Asian countries in some indicators. Bangladesh is ahead of India and Pakistan in terms of nutrition and child mortality rates. But we should also mention the huge contribution that private actors, especially Brac, have made to this achievement in these areas. In fact, in many sectors' development, private actors have played a more vital role than the government actors.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is in a good position in terms of per capita income. The Maldives holds the top position in this regard; in terms of economic prowess, the country is way ahead of Bangladesh. But Bangladesh is doing better than Sri Lanka, Nepal, and definitely Pakistan. If we consider per capita income, we are even ahead of India.

However, these are not the only indicators to measure a country's prosperity.

US science-based journal *Nature* released the report of a country-based research in 2022. According to the Nature Index, Bangladesh holds the 102nd position, falling behind India (10th), Pakistan (39th), Nepal (91st), and even Sri Lanka (86th).

Let alone the developed countries,



ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

Bangladesh has the lowest spending in the education sector in South Asia. If we look at the budgets of the last three or four years, Bangladesh's budgetary spending for education has been around two percent of GDP. It was 2.09 percent in FY21 budget, 2.08 percent in FY22, and 1.83 percent in FY23.

Meanwhile, India (3.08 percent), Pakistan (2.76 percent), Afghanistan (3.93 percent), Maldives (4.25 percent), Nepal (5.10 percent) and Sri Lanka (2.81 percent) have significantly higher spendings in education.

The situation is similar in our health sector; Bangladesh spends the least for the health sector in South Asia.

On the knowledge and talent-based indicator, Bangladesh ranked 123rd among 134 countries in 2021, again the last in South Asia. Other South Asian countries fared much better: India ranked 88th, Sri Lanka 93rd, Pakistan 107th, and Nepal 113th.

After "Digital Bangladesh," we are now talking about "Smart Bangladesh." It's great as a slogan.

But the digital and/or smart Bangladesh, ranked 137th out of 140 countries in terms of internet speed in 2021. The Maldives ranked 40th, Nepal 114th, India 126th, and Pakistan 120th – all ahead of us. Because of slow internet connection, freelancers in Bangladesh face difficulties on a regular basis.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) has played a vital role in the worldwide surge of paddy production – so has Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI). They invented more than 100 types of high-yield paddy over the last five decades. They got great results through continued research efforts,

many countries around the world. Even here, the biggest contribution comes from the relatively poorer members of society. Their cheap labour enables the RMG factory owners to get more orders and enhance their business.

There is a growing trend of building massive urban infrastructure, which the government wants to showcase as large-scale progress. There is no denying that infrastructure development does indicate progress. However, we should also consider that infrastructure itself is not progress; it is merely a progress-enabler, and a very small part of the population directly benefits from such progress. It seems these glittery, haphazardly planned progress is an attempt to hide the general public's sufferings. A report published by the World Bank in October 2022 tells us that as many as 50 million people in Bangladesh are suffering from a food crisis, and more than 20 million people go to sleep at night hungry.

Be it research, knowledge or science, we are falling behind the rest of the world consistently. We are not even in a comfortable state when it comes to having three proper meals per day.

"We are doing well" – this shouldn't have been a mere political statement; it should have been the reality. But the current government policies are not in line with that goal. Our poor citizens migrate to other countries to earn livelihoods and send dollars home, and the rich ones in the country launder that money away. People deposit their hard-earned money in the banks, and a few rich people take that money as loans but lack the decency to pay them off. These people are usually connected with those in power.

The person who should have been tagged as the country's top loan defaulter is now fixing policies to deal with the "real" loan defaulters. The person whose name comes up in the government investigation of the share market scandal has gotten the job of dealing with the country's finances.

Thus, the number of poor and hungry keeps growing. "We are doing well" – this statement can only be found in songs, speeches and slogans.

The Cambodian nightmare



A CLOSER
LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb
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TASNEEM TAYEB

In recent years, more and more Bangladeshi nationals have travelled to Cambodia in search of better economic prospects. According to an investigative report by this daily, since 2020, more than 3,500 individuals have gone to Cambodia, with more than 2,200 people going there in 2022 alone, and 86 in the first 12 days of this year.

It is interesting to note that, despite Cambodia's GDP per capita at USD 1,625.2, being reasonably lower than Bangladesh (USD 2,457.9) – as of 2021 – more and more Bangladeshis are travelling there, especially in the wake of Covid.

There could be multiple reasons for this trend. First, a lot of migrant workers were forced to return to Bangladesh empty-handed from their destination countries when the pandemic broke out, and with little hope of securing another job, they are now desperate to find alternative livelihood options. Second, our economy took a significant blow because of the pandemic and the global economic stress due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, resulting in high inflation and low purchasing capacity, and an alarmingly high youth unemployment rate of 10.6 percent (as of October 2022). Thus, as Cambodia opened its doors for foreign workers, offering decent salaries, our aspiring migrant workers took the opportunity to find livelihood possibilities abroad.

But how is Cambodia absorbing so many foreign workers?

The answer lies in the thriving online cybercrime marketplace in Cambodia. One of the top corrupt countries in Asia, according to Transparency International's 2022, Cambodia provides the perfect breeding ground for sleazy businesses, including cybercrimes. As many as 100,000 could be involved with the

industry, according to media reports.

And unsuspecting, aspiring migrant workers from Bangladesh and various other countries are being lured into this vicious cycle by an extended network that is feeding this business with resources, including manpower.

The migrant workers who have managed to escape this vicious cycle of deceit, torture, servitude and trauma, have recounted harrowing tales of their journey into slavery and how they were forced to commit inexplicable crimes against their will, through various forms of physical torture and even death threats. And they found little help from the locals there, including the law enforcement because of their potential complicity with this crime ring. It is only after mounting international pressure that the Cambodian government cracked down on this criminal business, and rescued some of the victims – some of whom are Bangladeshis – which many experts term just an eyewash to shake off the pressure.

What is more appalling is the lackadaisical approach of the Bangladesh embassy to Thailand – Bangladesh does not have an embassy in Cambodia – in helping these trafficking victims. Some of them alleged that despite seeking help, the embassy officials have been rather slow and reluctant in their response. In fact, an administrative officer (labour wing) in the Bangladesh mission in Bangkok allegedly took bribes from the victims in exchange for help to secure travel permits or request letters for the victims to travel back to Bangladesh. Unsurprisingly, when contacted, the concerned officials either denied the allegations or failed to respond at all.

The recent surge in human trafficking to Cambodia from Bangladesh raises certain questions about the intentions and capability

of the relevant authorities in addressing this situation. First of all, when contacted by this daily, the additional secretary (employment) at the expatriate welfare ministry denied having any knowledge about the enslavement of Bangladeshis in Cambodia. The director-general (Southeast Asia Wing) at the foreign ministry said he was not aware of any such development at the Bangladesh embassy in Bangkok, although the embassy has provided the travel permits or request letters for the return of the victims.

Moreover, there seems to be a disconnect between the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) and the Probashi Desk and immigration officials at Dhaka airport, as many of the victims were able to travel to Cambodia without the mandatory BMET card or even having their fingerprints matched. If, as the BMET director-general has claimed to this daily that "no expatriate worker can get clearance to fly unless their fingerprints are matched," how could these victims travel to Cambodia in the first place?

While the government and the related development agencies should immediately roll out a mass awareness campaign about the situation, the brokering agencies should also be thoroughly checked with the help of intelligence agencies. At the same time, officials of the relevant ministries, departments, embassies, and other offices should be stringently investigated in order to weed out the culprits and clean up the system.

The government should also focus on emotional counselling and economic absorption of these rescued victims, and also take a proactive joint initiative with the Cambodian authorities to bring back the workers still trapped there.

Our migrant workers are our assets; the remittance they send home keeps our forex reserves strong. The least we can do is ensure they have a safe and conducive environment when they go abroad in search of jobs, because clearly it is due to our own inability to provide for them that they are having to make these desperate journeys into uncharted territories. We must own up our responsibilities.


In which aspect is Bangladesh doing well, then?

We are doing well in food production – our farmers produce food for about 170 million people. However, our farmers' individual efforts shine much brighter than that of the government. The Awami League government's success in ensuring that our farmers get fertilisers, seeds and irrigation facilities is greater than any other government. And yet, a farmer is hounded for defaulting on the payment of a Tk 40,000 loan.

and our farmers implemented those results in the field.

Another major reason behind Bangladesh's progress is its 10 million-strong expatriate base. Most of them went abroad on their own accord. They are relentlessly working to earn money, which they are sending home, contributing to our remittance earnings.

Another big foreign exchange earner for us is the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. The owners of RMG factories here surely deserve praise. They are competing against



Bangladesh Bank
Common Services Department-1
(Equipment Section)
Head Office
Dhaka-1000.
Website: www.bb.org.bd

Invitation for Tenders

Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Dhaka

1	Procuring Entity name	Bangladesh Bank		
2	Procuring Entity code	Not used present		
3.	Procuring Entity district	Dhaka		
4	Invitation for	Procurement of Original HP Black Print Cartridge for HP Laser Jet Pro M404dn Printer of Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Dhaka.		
5	Invitation ref no	CSD-1 (Equip)69(3)/2023-110		
6	Date	31/01/2023		
Key Information				
7	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method		
Funding Information				
8	Budget and source of funds	Own Source		
Particular Information				
	Date			
9	Tender publication date	31/01/2023		
10	Tender last selling date	Not applicable		
	Date	Time		
11	Tender closing date and time	14/02/2023	02:00PM	
12	Tender opening date and time	14/02/2023	02:30PM	
13	Name & address of the office(s)	Address		
	-Receiving tender document	BB website and hard copy of Tender Security		
	-Opening tender document	Common Services Department-1, 6 th Floor, Annex-2 Building, Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Dhaka.		
Information for Tenderer				
14	Brief Eligibility of Tenderer	Tenderers having 5 years overall business experience and minimum specific experience as supplier in supply of similar goods of at least 3 (three) contract(s) of similar nature successfully completed within the last 3 (three) years.		
15	Brief description of goods or works	Supply of 300 (Three hundred) PCs Original HP Black Print Cartridge (76A) for HP Laser Jet Pro M404dn Printer of Bangladesh Bank, Head Office.		
16	Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location	Tender Security Amount (Tk)
				Completion time in Weeks/ Months from the date of contract signing/Award of Contract
	1	Original HP Black Print Cartridge (CF276A) for HP Laser Jet Pro M404dn Printer	CSD-1	Tk. 1,00,000.00
				8 Weeks
Procuring Entity Details				
17	Name of official inviting tender	Shafayet Arefin		
18	Designation of official inviting tender	Director		
19	Address of official inviting tender	Common Services Department-1, Bangladesh Bank, Head office, Dhaka.		
20	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel: 9530148	Fax: 9530120	E-mail: shafayet.arefin@bb.org.bd
21	The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender proceedings			

ব্যাবসায়িক ও আর্থিক সেবা পেতে হয়রানির শিকার হলে কিংবা কোনো অভিযোগ থাকলে ১৬২৩৬ নম্বরে ফোন করুন।

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Date: 01-02-2023
GD-171

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