

# What 50 years of World Bank partnership meant for us



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ANU MUHAMMAD

Fifty years of partnership between Bangladesh and the World Bank was celebrated recently. Events were held, praises were sung, and the organisation’s managing director of operations visited the country to join celebrations. Now that we have crossed this landmark, perhaps it’s time we analysed what this relationship has truly meant for Bangladesh.

The World Bank is generally known as a donor agency and a development partner. It is also an integral part of our foreign loan infrastructure. “Foreign aid” and “donor agencies” are frequently uttered terms, but their usage is actually misleading. If we take a loan from any bank, such as Sonali Bank or Krishi Bank or Agrani Bank, we don’t call them donors. Neither do we say that they are providing aid to us. We say that we are doing our work using a loan from these banks. The World Bank functions in a similar way, and the money to pay them back comes from the taxpayers. Therefore, what is known as World Bank’s money is actually people’s money.

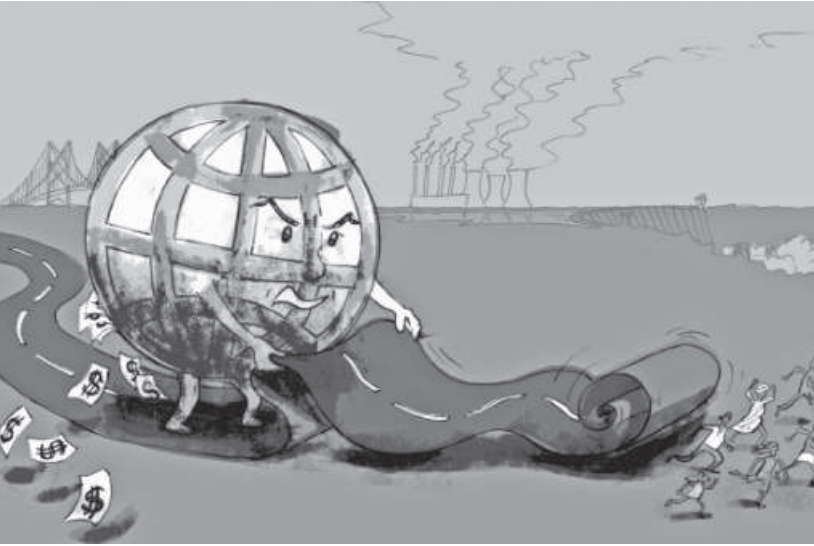
Officially, the World Bank lends money to countries for “development.” The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is its closest ally in monitoring the monetary systems of different countries. There is the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the Asian region, too. They are highly ideologically biased financial partners, so there are similarities between these three agencies in terms of policy outlines, methods of operation and their relationship with different countries. It is not possible to take a loan from one agency when another is hostile.

SCAN TO WATCH THE VIDEO

When a country takes loans from these organisations, the burden of paying off the debt and the incurring interests builds up. But this is not the major component of the whole process. The main agenda of these agencies is to carry out programmes to control and shape policy frameworks or push for structural changes in the countries seeking loans, to make it convenient for big capital. With various conditions and terms, they try to change the direction of the economies to make more space for big business groups.

To this end, these global agencies have been very successful in Bangladesh, accomplishing many things here that they could not in other countries. They have been able to create a strong support base among the elites – politicians, bureaucrats, university teachers, think tank leaders, policymakers, consultants, etc. – to push forward a neoliberal agenda. These agencies talk a lot about transparency and accountability, but they themselves have none of those qualities.

For example, the World Bank gave loans for the “development” of Bangladesh’s jute sector, but people never knew the details of those loans – the documents were highly confidential. In approving USD 247 million as “Jute Sector Adjustment



SOURCE: BRETTON WOODS PROJECT

Credit” (JSAC), the bank did not ask to diversify the industry, remove corrupt officials, regularise jute purchase system, strengthen innovation and development, and modernise the mills. Rather, their conditions to disburse the loan in instalments included closing the public mills and downsizing others, reducing the number of permanent workers, wage restructuring, etc. What happened then? We saw a large number of jute factories close down since that loan was granted in 1994, including the world famous Adamjee Jute Mill, which was shut down in 2002. The present government closed down the remaining jute mills in 2020. The huge potential of this environment-friendly industry was sacrificed.

We hear the organisation works as a “development partner in the energy sector” by giving us aid and loans. But, in reality, it works to hand over public resources and services to profit-making private entities. Since the early 1980s, it has been pushing for privatisation and commercialisation of this sector. The first elaborate report by the World Bank on Bangladesh’s energy sector, released in 1982, assessed that the size of the country’s gas reserves was 10 trillion cubic feet and asked to “secure the participation of foreign oil companies in this area.” It also argued that since the supply of gas is “likely to remain well in excess of Bangladesh’s expected internal needs,” exporting gas was the best option. Later, during the late 90s, there was huge pressure from the bank, company, consultants and embassies to export gas through a pipeline to India.

These agencies also tried to push for open pit mining in Phulbari to export coal by destroying three crop lands, water resources, and evicting about a million people to give business to a fraudulent British company. All those would have happened and made the situation worse had the people not put up a resistance.

These organisations don’t like the growth of national capability; they consider it an obstacle to the free market process. Instead of developing our national capacity to explore and produce natural gas in still-unexplored areas, and also developing institutional capabilities to mainstream renewable energy, the government opted for highly expensive, import-oriented “solutions”: coal, nuclear power and LNG. This whole policy structure that came from their energy sector policy guidelines gave big profits to some

local and foreign businesses, but put our whole industry and businesses in a vulnerable position and the country in a severe energy and financial crisis.

The same World Bank took another initiative in the late 1980s to “help” Bangladesh after the massive floods of 1987-88, and finalised a megaproject titled “Flood Action Plan” in 1990. The plan was all about the construction of 4.5-7.5-metre high and nearly

4,000km long embankments on both sides of three major rivers in the country, with the initial loan of USD 5-10 billion. This was a disastrous plan for the country’s river system which people also had to resist. But they have still seeped into the government policies under different names and projects.

Drinking water has also become a costly commodity as an outcome of their projects. Dhaka Wasa, for example, has increased its water tariff a total of 15 times since 2009. Dhaka Wasa has undertaken many projects with foreign loans; these projects brought good fortune for many people including the officials, consultants, contractors and suppliers, but could not ensure safe drinking water for the people.

There are allegations that these agencies, not only in Bangladesh but worldwide, have an incentive programme for various key people as a form of bribes, and they prefer corrupt partners as it is convenient for them to sell their agenda, as described by John Perkins in his book *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, or as narrated by Graham Hancock in his book *Lords of Poverty*.

From the very beginning, Bangladesh needed to work on three things: national capability, universal public education, and universal healthcare. These three could never flourish because of the dominant development model. Instead, in the last 50 years, a super-rich class was consolidated, inequality deepened, and environmental disasters made people’s lives miserable. This is the result of the policy structures formulated and/or supported by these agencies.

The World Bank et al like to claim that all of these responsibilities fall on the governments. Yes, governments must bear the primary responsibility for all anti-people, anti-environment policies, looting and wastage, but these agencies must also be brought under scrutiny, because they play the key role behind all these. Therefore, people in many countries, including the US and Europe, organised people’s tribunals to make them accountable; we also did so in 2007. Unless we make these organisations along with their local partners accountable, we cannot claim true freedom or create a development policy that will serve all of our people.

Transcribed and translated by Anupam Debashis Roy.

# Politics of aid

## How Syria suffers due to shortage of critical aid



A CLOSER LOOK

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TASNEEM TAYEB

The three devastating earthquakes last week that rocked Turkey and Syria have claimed the lives of more than 41,000 people (as of 3:30 pm Bangladesh time, February 15) and caused the displacement of millions in the region. While the international community did come forward with aid and rescue efforts to support the affected people, Syria – war-ravaged and in the grips of abject poverty and inexplicable human sufferings – was given a second-class treatment.

From sanctions imposed by the West, including the US, to the international community’s slow response in pledging aid and support and mobilising resources – except for a few countries including Bangladesh – to the earthquake-ravaged Bab al-Hawa land crossing connecting northwest Syria with Turkey (the only access point internationally acknowledged), aid reaching Syria has been inadequate, to say the least.

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, volunteer group the White Helmets, also known as the Syria Civil Defence, which operates in the rebel-held northern areas, took on the rescue operations and saved thousands from under the rubbles of levelled infrastructure with their bare hands, thanks to an acute shortage of rescue tools. Videos and pictures flooded the internet as White Helmets struggled to rescue as many people as they could. Meanwhile, in the critical first 72 hours, when chances of saving lives and rescuing people are the highest, the world watched the human tragedy intensify in Syria, like silent spectators.

Death toll in Syria currently stands over 5,800 (as of 3:30 pm Bangladesh time, February 15). With every passing hour, chances of finding survivors are becoming slimmer.

While initially adamant, in the

face of continued criticism from various quarters, including the United Nations – Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, “This is a moment in which everybody must make very clear that no sanctions of any kind should interfere with relief to the population of Syria in the present moment.” – international organisations, relief and rescue organisations, and human rights bodies, the US has finally relented and exempted earthquake aid into Syria from sanctions for 180 days. But not before the damage has been done and the critical 72-hour window has closed.

Even the UN acknowledged their failure to reach the much needed aid and relief supplies to Syria, in the face of the denunciation from the rescue workers working night and day. “We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn’t arrived,” tweeted Martin Griffiths, UN’s aid and relief chief.

It was shocking to see that no aid convoys reached the affected areas in Syria for the first three days after the earthquakes. Damage sustained by the Bab al-Hawa crossing have been cited as the reason. However, this could have been avoided had the West, for once, risen above the politics of aid and worked hands-on with the Assad regime and the opposing forces to provide for the victims, equitably.

Syria is already struggling from the shocks of a 12-year civil war; the Syrian people have been subjected to the vicious trauma of war, death, poverty and displacement—6.9 million people are internally displaced and about 13,000 children have endured death or sustained injuries since 2011. A UN report released last year revealed that more than 306,000 civilians have been killed in the civil war that began

in March 2011. Around 13 million people – about half the country’s population – have been forcibly displaced during this time.

Some of the people have been displaced up to 20 times since the civil war unfolded. They have very limited access to food (more than 12 million people are food insecure in Syria, which has seen an increase of 51 percent since 2019), safe accommodation, medical care or basic utility supplies.

These should have been enough reasons for the international community to rise above politics and come to the aid of the Syrian people in the aftermath of the earthquakes. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Even before the earthquake, only 50 percent of the required USD 4 billion aid could be secured. And even as lives in Syria got buried – perhaps forever – under the wreckage of the earthquake, the White Helmets could do little to save lives, despite their best efforts, due to a lack of resources.

“We could have saved many more people if we had the technology and heavy machinery needed to lift debris.. All of the aid and necessary provisions given to the overcrowded relief centres are donated by volunteers, civil organisations and charities on the ground,” shared a 26-year-old White Helmets volunteer, Fatima Obeid.

Perhaps kindness and compassion are afforded only to a selected few, and the helpless Syrians are certainly not among them. Had this been the scenario in some Western country – victims with whom people in power can relate to – perhaps it would have elicited empathy and prompted forthcoming support.

The West once again failed the people of Syria, and it did not even come as a surprise. But where the West failed, the others – governments, organisations, and individuals from various corners of the world – rose to the occasion. But Syria needs more. The shortages of aid and relief supplies are acute. The least the countries that have taken advantage of the civil war – directly and indirectly, by participating or by selling arms to and partnering with the attackers – can do is repay the people of Syria for everything they have taken from them.

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### “মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়া দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি”

কাস্টমস, এক্সাইজ ও ড্রাট কমিশনারেট, কুলানা এর অধিক্ষেত্রস্থ এলাকার ভ্রমণ আদার তত্ত্বাবধানে ও ভাড়া বর্ধক নিয়োগ, কর্তব্যকর্তাদের স্বাক্ষরিত এবং নৈমিত্তিক দায়িত্ব-এর মাধ্যমে ভ্রমণ আদার সুবিধা পক্ষে কার্যকর উপস্থিতি তারিখ হতে ৩০.০৬.২০২৩ খ্রি পূর্ব মাসিক ভিত্তিতে ০১ (এক) টি মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়া দরপত্র প্রস্তুত মণিক/প্রতিষ্ঠান-এর নির্ধারিত পদ্ধতি প্যাকেট সিস্টেমের মাধ্যমে বামে সরাসরি অর্পণ করা যাবে।

ক্র. সনাক্তকরণ নম্বর	১	কাস্টমস, এক্সাইজ ও ড্রাট কমিশনারেট, কুলানা।
০২. ক্রয়ের নাম	১	নুনতম ০৭ (সাত) অসল বিশিষ্ট ১৩০০ সিএস এর নিম্নে এবং ২০১৬ বা তার পরবর্তী সনের ভালে কমিশনের মেসেজের ০১ (এক) টি মাইক্রোবাস (মালিক নাম) ভাড়া।
০৩. ক্রয়ের উদ্দেশ্য	১	সরকারি অনুমোদিত বাজেট।
০৪. দরপত্র পদ্ধতি	১	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি।
০৫. মর্যাদাবাদের বৈধতা	১	নিজের বা প্রতিষ্ঠানের নামে গাড়ীর মালিকানা সম্পর্কিত কুল দলিলাদি অবশ্যই থাকতে হবে। (মালিকানা নথ্যভুক্ত ট্রাক লাইসেন্স, মালিকানা আদার সনাক্তকরণ নং, সি, আই, এন), ড্রাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন সনাক্তকরণ, সরকারি/ব্যক্তিগত গাড়ীর মালিকানা কুল, ড্রাক ট্যাক্স, ফিটনেস, ইন্সুরেন্স এবং গাড়ি মালিকানা কুল ড্রাইভিং লাইসেন্স সহ অন্যান্য কাগজপত্র বা দলিলাদি সনাক্তকরণ মতাবেক।
০৬. দরপত্র দাখিলের সর্বশেষ তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	১	০২/০৩/২০২৩ খ্রি তারিখ ১২.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত রাজস্ব কর্তৃক (সদর), কাস্টমস, এক্সাইজ ও ড্রাট কমিশনারেট, কুলানা।
০৭. দরপত্র বেগারের তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	১	০২/০৩/২০২৩ খ্রি তারিখ ১২.০০ ঘটিকা কাস্টমস, এক্সাইজ ও ড্রাট কমিশনারেট, কুলানা (সদরকক্ষ)।

### দরপত্রের শর্তাবলী

১০১. দরপত্র প্রার্থীদেরকে অবশ্যই বাস্তব/প্রতিষ্ঠানকে কুল কমিশনার, কাস্টমস, এক্সাইজ ও ড্রাট কমিশনারেট, কুলানা বরাবরে সীলমোহরকৃত বামে তাদের নিজস্ব প্যাকেট পদ্ধতিতেই অবেগন করতে হবে। অবেগনের সাথে উপরে ‘মর্যাদাবাদের বৈধতা’ এর বিশদীকৃত উপস্থিতি সকল কাগজপত্র/দলিলাদি মতাবেক। (১ম স্টেপের মেসেজের কর্তব্যকর্তৃক সনাক্তকরণ) অবশ্যই দাখিল করতে হবে।
১০২. সীলমোহরকৃত বামে উপর মর্যাদাবাদের নাম ও ঠিকানা, টেলিফোন নম্বর উল্লেখ করতে হবে।
১০৩. মাইক্রোবাসের জন্য প্রস্তুত নথি হিসেবে সৈনিক ভাড়া হার এবং মাসিক ভাড়া হার সুস্পষ্টভাবে (অনেক এবং কমা) উল্লেখ করতে হবে। (স্থানীয় ও সকল প্রকার স্বাক্ষর সহ)।
১০৪. দরপত্র কোন প্রকার কমা-মোজা এবং গভীর রাইটিং করা সম্পূর্ণ নিষিদ্ধ এবং কোনরূপ শর্ত আরোপ করা যাবে না।
১০৫. সীলমোহরকৃত বামে দরপত্র আগামী ০২/০৩/২০২৩ খ্রি তারিখ বেলা ১২.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে এ দপ্তরে প্রদত্ত টেকার ব্যাল্ট ফেল হাবে, যা একই দিন ১২.০০ ঘটিকার সময় দরপত্রদাতাদের উপস্থিতিতে (যদি কেউ উপস্থিত থাকেন) খোলা হবে। উক্ত দিন ভাঁসের সন্নিবিষ্ট গাড়ি এ দপ্তরে পরীক্ষা/ভাড়াইয়ের জন্য উপস্থিত রাখতে হবে।
১০৬. মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়ার মেয়াদ কার্যকর উপস্থিতি তারিখ হতে ৩০/০৬/২০২৩ খ্রি তারিখ পর্যন্ত মেয়াদ কাল্য থাকবে।
১০৭. মাইক্রোবাসটি সূপাত কুলানা কমিশনারেটের সকল সেলার ব্যবহৃত হবে। তবে প্রয়োজনে পার্শ্ববর্তী অন্য কোন সেলারও ব্যবহৃত হতে পারে। মাইক্রোবাসটি প্রতিদিন সকাল হতে হতে ১০.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত প্রয়োজনে চলতে হতে পারে।
১০৮. সাক্ষরিক বস্তের দিন এক সাক্ষরিত ড্রাটের দিন প্রয়োজনে মাইক্রোবাস সরবরাহ করতে হবে। এ জন্য মাসিক ভাড়ার অতিরিক্ত ভাড়া লাই করা যাবে না অর্থাৎ এ হিসেবে ভাড়া মাসিক ভাড়ার মধ্যে অন্তর্ভুক্ত থাকবে।
১০৯. মাইক্রোবাস সরকারি/কাস্টমসের মাধ্যমে সাক্ষরিত ভাড়া হার গাড়ি মালিকানা বিলি খতের কিংবা গাড়ি মালিকানা/বিক্রয় গাড়ি মালিকানা বিক্রয় গাড়ির স্বাক্ষর করতে হবে।
১১০. মাইক্রোবাসের মালিকানা, মালিকানা ড্রাইভিং লাইসেন্স ও কোন প্রকার দুর্ঘটনা সনাক্তকরণ যে কোন প্রকার আইনগত দায়িত্বের স্বাক্ষরিত মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়া প্রদানকর্তা প্রতিষ্ঠানকেই বহন করতে হবে। টেকার গ্যেঞ্জিং টিকের সিলেট যে দপ্তর প্রেরণ গাড়ি প্রদান করবে উক্ত গাড়ীর দায়িত্ব বহন করবে বহন করা যাবে।
১১১. সরকারি বিধান অনুযায়ী প্রয়োজ কুল সাময়িক্যন কর (ভ্যাট), অসিআয়কর (এ আই টি) ও প্রযোজ্য অন্যান্য করাদি প্রাপ্ত হিা হতে কর্তন করা হবে।
১১২. দরপত্র সম্পর্কিত সকল কর্তব্য The Public Procurement Act-2006 and The Public Procurement Rules-2008 অনুযায়ী পরিচালিত হবে।
১১৩. কোন কারণ দর্শনো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র আশিষ্ট বা সম্পূর্ণ গ্রহণ বা বাতিলের ক্ষমতা কর্তৃক সংরক্ষণ করেন।

১৫.০২.২০২৩

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