

The fishbones of Bangladeshi capitalism

What the poor are eating informs the power they have over the economy



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We are what we eat. Following that logic, those who are resorting to buying the carcass of pangas fish from a Jatrabari market, as seen in a recent The Business Standard report, are like the bones of a fish. They constitute the structure of a fish, but are not palatable enough for those who can afford the fish's meat. The metaphorical fish here is the Bangladeshi economy, and the people who have to resort to eating the refuse of the upper or working classes are its skeleton. But it seems that the propellers of our economy are doing very little to care for its skeleton—they are only feeding its ever-expanding belly and underbelly.

Bangladesh has seen extraordinary economic expansion over the last 15 years. The GDP has grown at a remarkable pace. However, it has not resulted in an improvement in the living standards of the middle and lower classes, many of whom are one shock away from going below the poverty line. The growth of our economy has been grossly uneven, with the number of millionaires skyrocketing and the lower classes failing to make ends meet simultaneously. The height of

this is the inability of the working class to afford its daily meals. For many, buying meat or fish has become a far cry. Price hikes have gone to such a level that regular people are not even able to buy eggs, seasonal vegetables, rice, and lentils. This is why more and more people are crowding to these "markets of refuse," where one can buy fish carcasses or chicken legs which the upper classes did not want.

This represents a classic failure of neoliberal economics' trickle-down rhetoric. The idea goes thus: if the capital grows in a country, it will benefit the whole of the economy as more and more wealth will be generated and the ever-growing investments would lead to the rise of employment opportunities, while the standard of living of the lower classes would also rise. In Bangladesh, however, capital here has been appropriated by a small minority of people through patronage and corruption, with only a few exceptions. The working classes have been bound to work at low-paid jobs that do not offer pay raises to keep up with inflation. As such, the earnings of the working class value less over time. Whatever



Like the refuse of the fish, the working class is also a refuse of the capitalist economy.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

savings workers are able to amass also shrinks each year. In times like these, there is no other way to go than to the fishbone market. And man-eating capitalism keeps growing taller atop the labour of the consumers of refuse.

Like the fish carcass, the working classes are also a refuse of the capitalist economy. The workers are seen as completely fungible and their jobs at, say, the garments industry do not give them the option of

career growth but instead trap them in an unskilled position for too long. And when they rebel, demanding higher wages, the state comes in as an arbiter of the capitalists and squashes unrest on the capital's behalf. When seen through the lens of the millionaire capitalist (who can buy another unskilled worker from the reserve army of the unemployed very easily), the price of the worker is less than the Tk 30 fishbone sold at Jatrabari.

The middle class, dreaming of becoming like the bourgeoisie one day, has been subdued into sleep to prolong their petty dreams. They will not express solidarity with their working class brothers and sisters for the demands of a fairer economy. But reform is deeply necessary in the country, because an economy that does not take care of its working class can never be deemed a progressive economy. All the talk of progress that we hear on the news

rings hollow today and begs the question: progress for whom?

Meanwhile, instead of addressing these concerns that involve the lives of millions, the government is doing more to harm the ones who are already in crisis. Bailing out millionaires, printing money, and waiving loans will only depreciate the value of the taka and worsen the economic crisis. We only hear assuaging rhetoric from politicians, but no proper actions are taken to permanently put a rein on the ever-increasing prices of commodities. TCB trucks that sell daily necessities at a lower price are stopgap solutions, not real economic reforms—and even they are hard to access.

We need to implement proper economic solutions which include provisions of welfare and social safety nets to make sure that the working class is taken care of and that nobody has to resort to eating fishbones to survive on their monthly budget.

Only words are not enough for this task. Action is necessary. An organised people's movement is the need of the time. But who will organise such a movement? Who has the courage or the interest? The role of leftist political parties could be essential here, but even they don't seem to care much anymore beyond their own rhetoric and infighting. Still, as history has shown many times before, when people are left without any choice, they may rise to the occasion and lead their own movement. It is time for the fishbone to reclaim its position within the whole fish.

Paving the path to an accessible Dhaka

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PRIYANKA KOCHHAR and MURTEZA RAFI KHAN

As rush hour traffic buzzes by, Rahim, a wheelchair user, carefully navigates the cracked and uneven sidewalk in downtown Dhaka. Oblivious pedestrians jostle past him, while street vendors block large stretches of the walkway, forcing Rahim to repeatedly veer onto the road.

The journey to his office, just half a kilometre away, is always an obstacle course. Rahim Khan must contend with missing curb

cuts, steep ramps, and perpetually "under-repair" foot overbridges with no lift access. But he has learned to start his trip earlier, move slowly, and keep a watchful eye.

Rahim's daily commute epitomises the challenges people with disabilities face in accessing urban infrastructure, transport, and other services in Dhaka. With over 18 million people, Dhaka is one of the world's most densely populated cities. While its rapid growth has enabled economic progress, the city's infrastructure and development have failed to keep pace.



FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

For persons with disabilities, the affordability of assistive devices like wheelchairs is another barrier.

for government support and legislative enforcement to promote accessibility and inclusion.

Yet, glimmers of hope do exist. The newly opened Dhaka Metro Rail (MRT Line 6), the country's first urban rail system, integrates accessibility features like elevators, ramps, tactile paths, and priority seats. Rifat Ali, a metro rail official, says, "Our stations have help desks for passengers with disabilities. Staff are trained in disability etiquette."

For Parveen Ahmed, a wheelchair user, the metro allows self-reliant commuting. She says, "Earlier, I had to rely on my brothers to take me out. The metro gives me independence." The 20-station MRT-6 aims to enhance urban mobility and reduce congestion. Its universal design approach sets an important precedent.

Even so, while laws mandate accessibility, guidelines are overridden when it comes to execution, especially in older infrastructure. Md Ashikur Ali, an urban planner, explains, "We often

persons with intellectual disabilities can benefit from pictorial signage and route maps. Audio announcements and buzzers aid those with vision impairments.

Ruksana Reza, a banker who is blind, advocates for Braille displays and tactile banknotes. She says, "I can identify currency notes by folding the corners in different ways. But accessible ATMs could allow for self-service."

The affordability of assistive devices like wheelchairs and hearing aids is another barrier. To combat this, urban livelihood schemes must proactively cover persons with disabilities.

Encouragingly, some private entities are embracing accessibility to expand their consumer base. E-commerce platforms allow the use of screen readers and provide shipping exemptions for the purchase of assistive devices. Rideshare companies offer wheelchair-friendly cars, while hotels incorporate access features in room designs.

recommend accessibility measures in project plans, but these are value-engineered out to reduce costs."

The Dhaka North City Corporation installed tactile ground surface indicators on sidewalks a few years back for visual guidance. However, Tehmina Aziz, from a disability rights group, says, "New poles, trees, and even police boxes obstruct these paths, rendering them ineffective."

Development partners should ensure that large-scale infrastructure projects follow universal design principles. Accessibility requires more than ramps and lifts. For instance,

suggests, "Access audits of existing infrastructure can identify feasible retrofits like installing ramps or non-slip flooring."

Additionally, employers should actively recruit persons with disabilities, invest in their skills development, and improve workplace accessibility. The Bangladesh Business and Disability Network (BBDN), under the Bangladesh Employers Federation (BEF) with support from the International Labour Organization, engages in inclusive employment opportunities across Bangladesh, and recently put together a platform in collaboration

with UN-Habitat to bring together the CEOs and top executives from leading businesses and organisations to facilitate a discussion and actions related to building disability-inclusive organisations. The CEO forum focused on enablers necessary to make organisations more accessible, and saw industry captains pledge enhanced recruitment and workplace modifications for disabled employees.

As Bangladesh progresses towards a middle-income status, disability-inclusive urban development can ensure that all citizens benefit equitably from socioeconomic growth.

But political will must be strengthened through public-private collaboration and community participation.

Progress on implementing identified strategies should be monitored through regular reports, and the momentum should be sustained by continuing collaborative efforts between stakeholders. Other sectors and government agencies should be inspired to embrace inclusivity in their own policies and programmes. In short, the tools exist, but relevant actors must now pave the path ahead with empathy and equity at the forefront.

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নং	বিজ্ঞপ্তির শিরোনাম	বিস্তারিত বিবরণ
১	বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রদানকারী অফিসের নাম ও ঠিকানা	পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয় বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
২	দরপত্র আহ্বানের নম্বর ও তারিখ	২২.০০.০০০০.০৫৩.২৬.০১৬.২২/১৬৪ তারিখ: ০৭/০২/২০২৪ খ্রি.
৩	দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য	৫০০/- (পাঁচশত) টাকা মাত্র অফেরতযোগ্য।
৪	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	২৭/০২/২০২৪ খ্রি.; সময়: বিকাল-৩.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত
৫	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	২৮/০২/২০২৪ খ্রি.; সময়: দুপুর-১.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত
৬	দরপত্র উন্মুক্তকরণের তারিখ ও সময়	২৮/০২/২০২৪ খ্রি.; সময়: দুপুর-২.০০ ঘটিকায়
৭	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়কারী ও গ্রহণকারীর নাম ও ঠিকানা	মো: ফাইজুর রহমান সহকারী সচিব (প্রশাসন-৩) পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয় বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা। ফোন: ০২-৫৫১০০১৫৭
৮	অকেজো মাইক্রোবাস পরিদর্শনের স্থান	অফিস চলাকালে বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকায় পরিদর্শন করা যাবে।
৯	দরপত্র জানানত	দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিলকৃত উদ্ধৃতমূল্যের ১০% হারে যেকোনো তফসিলি ব্যাংক হতে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার দাখিল করতে হবে।
১০	যার অনুকূলে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার দাখিল করতে হবে	মো: ফাইজুর রহমান সহকারী সচিব (প্রশাসন-৩) পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয় বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।

শর্তাবলী:

- দরপত্র সিডিউল ক্রেতার রশিদ এবং ক্রয়কৃত সিডিউলের মূল কপি দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে।
- জামানত ব্যতীত কোনো দরপত্র গৃহিত হবেনা।
- দরপত্রে উদ্ধৃতমূল্য স্পষ্ট করে অংকে এবং কথায় উল্লেখ করতে হবে। কোনো প্রকার ঘষামাছা গ্রহণযোগ্য হবেনা।
- দরপত্র দাতার ১(এক)কপি সদ্যতোলা পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ছবি, TIN সার্টিফিকেট ও হালনাগাদ আয়কর সনদপত্র দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে।
- কর্তৃপক্ষ কোনো কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যেকোনো দরপত্র গ্রহণ ও বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

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