

Past economic data based on weak foundations

Debapriya says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The economic data presented by the previous government, including the gross domestic product (GDP) and inflation, were based on weak foundations, reflecting a sense of helplessness among officials at the time, according to Debapriya Bhattacharya, the head of a 12-member committee that is drafting a white paper on the state of the economy.

"Initially, we identified that the foundation of past estimates was very weak. Often, individuals who made the estimates felt helpless and were compelled to inflate data," he said at a press briefing at the planning ministry yesterday.

The committee met with representatives from 24 government organisations and ministries to review and discuss the state of data collection.

"At the meeting, it became clear that government

Often, individuals who made the estimates felt helpless and were compelled to inflate data, said Debapriya Bhattacharya

officials were helpless," added Bhattacharya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

He emphasised robust methods to improve future economic estimates.

The meeting also covered issues related to the Annual Development Plan, challenges in the Five-Year Plans, and agreements concerning the energy sector and foreign loans.

The committee plans to continue discussions for another month and will hold town hall meetings outside Dhaka to gather further input.

Bhattacharya said the white paper drafting process will begin shortly.

Among others, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, and Prof Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network and Economic Modeling, were also present.

Representatives from 24 organisations that produce, serve and evaluate government information attended the meeting, including the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, and Bangladesh Investment Development Authority.



PHOTO: STAR/FILE

For chicken, the gap between the government-set prices and retail rates is roughly Tk 10 per kg, while it is Tk 3 for each egg.

Chicken, egg traders defy govt-fixed prices

SUKANTA HALDER

Eggs and broiler chickens – a key source of protein for the poor – are not being sold anywhere in Dhaka at rates set by the government on Sunday this week.

Poultry entrepreneurs say the latest price determination to cool off the local market skipped the demand supply mismatch and ignored the soaring costs of animal feed.

For chicken, the gap between the government-set prices and retail rates is roughly Tk 10 per kg, while it is Tk 3 for each egg.

After apparently failing to calm the rates of poultry products, the authorities now blame the businessmen and traders for price spiral. They say market monitoring will be intensified and unscrupulous traders will be fined.

In the meanwhile, traders fear price capping without assessing the supply demand gap and cooling off the poultry feed prices would add to market volatility.

In previous incidents, price capping to rein in unbridled kitchen items failed in almost every case. Despite failure to enforce the price caps on some daily essentials in September 2023, the government in March this year fixed the prices of 29 commodities from producer to consumer level, but to no avail.

"It's not feasible to control the market by simply fixing prices for such poultry products," said Mohammad Firoz, a poultry retailer of Duaripara area at



Mirpur in the capital.

He was selling broiler chickens at Tk 190 per kg and Sonali chicken at Tk 260 per kg yesterday, while the government fixed rates are Tk 179.59 per kg and Tk 269.64 per kg, respectively.

For the market to stabilise, the supply simply needs to be increased, said the trader.

Muzahidul Islam, an egg retailer in the same area, said he sold eggs at Tk 165 per dozen yesterday, which puts the price at Tk 13.75 per egg, well above the government-fixed Tk 11.87 per egg.

The recent flooding in the 13 eastern and southeastern regions ravaged thousands of poultry farms and affected the supply chain seriously, according to Khandaker Monir Ahamed, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association.

He said the flood-caused

supply chain gap compels the poultry price fixing to falter.

Mohammad Ashiqur Rahman, a retailer at Karwan Bazar, one of the largest kitchen markets in the capital, sold broiler chicken at Tk 180-185 per kg and Sonali chicken at Tk 250 per kg yesterday.

He said the price of Sonali chicken had risen by Tk 10 per kg from the previous day.

Another retailer, Sheikh Russel of the same market bought eggs at Tk 12.60 per piece from the wholesaler and sold them at Tk 13.33 per piece at retail.

"How can we sell at the government-fixed price?" Russel questioned, adding that proper monitoring from production to wholesale markets is key to implementing any price capping.

Kazi Farms Group, one of the 'big five' corporate poultry farms of the country, said it is complying with the government rate for both eggs and chickens.

"The retail price (of chicken) has gone up, indicating that demand is high," Kazi said in an statement."

Similarly, According to Kazi, the retail price of eggs is high because there is a shortage. Production is lower than demand.

The corporate house noted flood-led poultry losses for the supply crunch and subsequent price spiral.

In the meanwhile, Sumon Howlader, president of the Bangladesh Poultry Association, a platform of the marginal farmers, said fixing the price of eggs and chickens without fixing the price of feed and day-old chicks will add to market volatility.

However, claiming the government-fixed prices were reasonable, Reajul Huq, director general of the Department of Livestock Services (DLS), said it was determined after consultations with stakeholders, including the Poultry Industries Association, Feed Industries Association, Breeders Association of Bangladesh and World Poultry Science Association.

Besides, Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council, Bangladesh Poultry Khmar Rakkha Jatiya Parishad, Animal Health Companies Association and Agro Feed Ingredients Importers and Trading Association were consulted.

Huq dismissed claims that the price instability was due to

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Free access to information: The cornerstone of knowledge-driven society

ERIK AAS

In today's information-driven world, the demand for timely and relevant content is insatiable. Whether it is breaking news, government policies, consumer products, entertainment, or technological innovations, people want access to information when they need it. Digital technologies, particularly mobile phones and OTT (over-the-top) platforms, have revolutionised how we consume information.

Mobile phones have overtaken traditional TV sets as the go-to medium for news, entertainment, education and all sorts of information. For younger generations like Gen Z, mobile internet access is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity. Limiting or blocking access to internet-based TV services not only disrupts their primary source of information but also hinders their ability to participate meaningfully in society and make informed decisions.

There was a time when linear TV, also known as traditional or scheduled programming, dominated the media landscape. Programs were broadcast according to a fixed schedule, requiring viewers to tune in at specific times. With the rise of digital technologies, viewing habits have evolved. Watching television through internet-based OTT platforms has transformed how audiences consume media. Unlike traditional TV, internet TV allows viewers to watch content anytime and anywhere, even on the go, as long as they have an internet connection.

At the heart of this transformation is streaming technology.



Whether it's a smartphone, tablet, or smart TV, viewers can stream content over the internet, bypassing traditional cable and satellite channels. This is especially relevant in Bangladesh, where the OTT market is set to reach \$238.90 million in 2024, with an annual growth rate of 10.80 percent expected through 2029. The growth underscores the increasing

reliance on OTT platforms for news, entertainment, and educational content.

Unrestricted access to internet TV on mobile devices plays a key role in creating a knowledge-based society. To fully capitalise on this shift, we need supportive policies and regulations that enable the potential of internet TV to drive a more informed and empowered society. A significant trend has emerged as many viewers, particularly younger demographics, are "cutting the cord" and moving away from traditional TV towards mobile viewing options.

As the industry adapts to these changes, the future of entertainment needs to be diligent, inclusive, and tailored to individual tastes. International OTT platforms like Netflix, Prime Video, and Hulu entered Bangladesh long before. Today, local platforms like Toffee are changing how people consume entertainment, allowing them to watch their favourite content on the go or at home.

However, at a time when the world has embraced TV on mobile phones, Bangladesh decided to delink TV from OTT platforms, proving to be counterproductive for the viewers. The lack of legal framework and regulations in the country has led to the suspension of this service, depriving viewers of their right to access information and entertainment through their preferred medium. The unethical action by vested groups to stop linear TV channels on OTT platforms forces consumers back to outdated and more expensive methods of accessing television.

Fundamental rights, economic implications, and global market dynamics – are all compelling reasons to reconsider the decision to discontinue linear TV on OTT. People must have the freedom to choose how they consume media and access information. To ensure unbiased viewing, it is crucial for the interim government to reform the legal landscape and regulate linear TV on OTT platforms. As streaming services and online platforms have taken centre stage, we must build trust, foster collaboration, and empower citizens to make informed decisions that shape their communities and the world around them.

The writer is the CEO of Banglalink

India to add record renewables this year

REUTERS, Gandhinagar

India will connect a record 35 gigawatts (GW) of solar and wind energy capacity to its grid during the year ending March 2025, a top bureaucrat told Reuters, as it scrambles to achieve its 2030 clean energy target after falling short of a much publicised 2022 renewables goal.

The world's fastest growing major economy has prioritised coal to address a surge in power demand in recent years, with growth in coal-fired power output expected to outpace renewable energy generation this year.

Commissioning of large solar farms has slowed in recent years and resulted in solar power generation growing at the slowest pace in six years during the first half of 2024.

However India, the world's third largest solar power producer, expects that to change starting this fiscal year, when it sees fresh additions of 30 GW of solar capacity, Bhupinder Singh Bhalla, the top bureaucrat at India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy told Reuters.

The country will also add about 5 GW of new wind capacity, he said.

India added a total of 10 GW of renewable capacity in April-August, the first five months of this fiscal year, taking its total to about 153 GW, government data showed.

"We cannot provide an exact number for next year (2025-26), but we will definitely overtake this year's capacity (addition)," Bhalla said on the sidelines of RE-Invest, India's biggest renewable energy conference.

Bhalla also said there was a "lot of market demand for battery-linked storage projects," adding that more tenders for such projects can be expected going forward.

Easy, convenient, cheap: how single-use plastic rules the world

AFP, Bangkok

Each year the world produces around 400 million tonnes of plastic waste, much of it discarded after just a few minutes of use.

Negotiators hope to reach the world's first treaty on plastic pollution this year, but across five very different countries, AFP found single-use plastic remains hugely popular as a cheap and convenient choice, illustrating the challenges ahead:

Bangkok

On a Bangkok street lined with food vendors, customers line up for Maliwan's famed traditional sweets.

Steamed layer cakes – green with pandan leaf or blue with butterfly pea – sit in clear plastic bags alongside rows of taro pudding in plastic boxes.

Each day, the 40-year-old business uses at least two kilos of single-use plastic.

"Plastic is easy, convenient and cheap," said 44-year-old owner Watchararas Tamrongpattarakit.

Banana leaves used to be standard, but they are increasingly expensive and hard to source.

They are also onerous to use because each one must be cleaned and checked for tears.

It "isn't practical for our pace of sales",

said Watchararas.

Thailand started limiting single-use plastic before the pandemic, asking major retailers to stop handing out bags for free.

But the policy has largely fallen by the wayside, with little uptake among the

country's street food vendors.

Thailand produces two million tons of plastic waste a year, according to the country's Pollution Control Department.

The World Bank estimates 11 percent goes uncollected, and is burned, disposed



A customer buys vegetables wrapped in plastic bags at a street market in Bangkok, Thailand. Two million tonnes of plastic waste are produced every year, according to the country's Pollution Control Department.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

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