

What's the point of a new egg price cap?

Govt must address underlying reasons for price surges

We are worried about the persistent failure of government interventions in controlling the prices of eggs, vegetables, and other staples. The escalating prices of eggs have drawn particular concern of late, with many wholesalers in Dhaka and Chattogram halting sales early in the week to avoid fines for exceeding government-fixed prices. Despite past failures of such price-cap regulations, however, the government again set new prices for eggs on Tuesday following discussions with producers and suppliers.

Under the new pricing structure, which takes effect Wednesday, each egg is priced at Tk 10.91 at the producer level, Tk 11.01 at the wholesale level, and Tk 11.87 at retail. That means consumers should, in theory, be able to buy a dozen eggs for Tk 142.44. However, this is nearly the same price structure fixed by the Department of Agricultural Marketing on September 15. We all know how that directive fared, with eggs selling at Tk 180-190 per dozen as recently as Monday. Whether the new regulation will fare any better is anybody's guess.

The government seems desperate to make an impact amid criticism of its failure in price control. However, as experts have often warned, regulating prices without addressing supply-chain bottlenecks and dismantling market syndicates cannot solve the problem. Rather, we've seen how mobile raids to enforce price caps have backfired, creating panic among wholesalers, exacerbating supply shortages, and pushing prices even higher. In addition to wholesalers' refusal to comply with official prices, there have been other factors responsible for the crisis, including recent floods, extreme heat, and frequent load-shedding, all of which disrupted egg production. Furthermore, rising prices of poultry feed, hatchlings, and other inputs have driven up production costs and eventually market prices.

Can we lower egg prices without addressing the rising costs of production or increasing supply through other means? The commerce adviser has acknowledged that daily egg production has fallen from 4.5-5 crore eggs to around 3-3.5 crore. Against this backdrop, increasing egg imports could offer some relief, and the government recently granted permission to import over 4.5 crore eggs, but bureaucratic delays in issuing duty exemptions have stalled the process. To stabilise the market, there is no alternative to resolving these challenges and cost disparities in the supply chain.

The question is, how long will the government keep relying on ineffective methods like price caps before addressing the underlying causes of price surges? It is high time the government prioritised structural reforms aimed at lowering production costs and increasing competition within the poultry sector. Reducing tariffs on imported poultry feed and other essential inputs would help lower costs, while fostering competition in the domestic market would prevent price manipulation by major companies. Enhancing local production efficiency is crucial for ensuring long-term stability in the egg market.

An irresponsible act by a govt agency

WDB officials must answer for destruction of trees

We are alarmed by the reckless actions of the Water Development Board (WDB) in felling thousands of trees to collect soil for building an embankment in Khulna's Koyra upazila. Reportedly, around 50,000 trees have been cut down over the past eight months along the banks of the Kopotakkho, Shakbariya, and Koyra rivers. These trees have long served as a crucial natural barrier, protecting local communities from natural calamities. Their destruction now leaves the entire area vulnerable to heightened risks. The question is, was the WDB unaware of this, or did they choose to ignore the consequences?

Over the years, we have witnessed such large-scale destructions of trees and forests in the name of development. This is despite a nationally set target to increase forest cover by 20 percent by 2030, which was often neglected under the previous government. We have seen how government institutions themselves have been granted forest land for development projects, further eroding our green cover. Our coastal regions, in particular, have borne the brunt of excesses by forest grabbers. One may recall, for example, how Jhau forests in Cox's Bazar were cut down by officials and unscrupulous businessmen. Now, the WDB is following suit in Khulna's Koyra upazila, felling naturally grown trees for their project. This blatant disregard for environmental protection is simply unacceptable.

The WDB, in its defence, is trying to shift blame to the local population, but locals insist that WDB officials directed them to cut the trees. They say that the required soil could have been sourced from nearby areas without touching the trees, suggesting a nefarious motive behind the WDB action. According to an official, an agreement worth Tk 2 crore has been signed with the forest department for reforestation after the embankment's completion, but this does not justify such indiscriminate destruction in the first place.

We must say that, having witnessed such anti-environment practices under the previous regime, we expect a significant policy shift under the interim government. With seasoned environmentalist Syeda Rizwana Hasan serving as the adviser to the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, there is hope for meaningful change. The adviser has pledged to take decisive action against those who destroy our environment. It is time to put these promises into action. The government must halt the onslaught, including by its own people, on our fast-depleting natural resources.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

The Black Power salute

On this day in 1968, during the awards ceremony for the 200 metre race at the Mexico City Olympics, American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos gave a Black-power salute, for which they were later ordered to leave the Games.

WORLD FOOD DAY

Food security is not just about food production



Dr Selim Raihan is professor at the Department of Economics in the University of Dhaka and executive director of South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). He can be reached at selim.raihan@econdu.ac.bd.

SELIM RAIHAN

World Food Day raises global awareness and prompts action for those suffering from hunger. Around this time, discussions often focus on the state of food security in Bangladesh. Food is not only a basic necessity but also a fundamental human right. Access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food forms the foundation for building a healthier society, promoting social justice, and ensuring a more prosperous future for the people of Bangladesh.

The right to food is mentioned in various international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It refers to the right to access adequate food or the means to achieve it, either through physical or economic access. This right is presented as the responsibility of states to take proactive steps towards eradicating hunger and malnutrition. Food security means having a reliable source of food or calories, but also access to nutritious and diversified foods in appropriate quantities for human health and development.

Food security, in Bangladesh, is an added right, as agriculture is one of the bases for both economy and culture. However, ensuring food security for all is still one of the challenging tasks the country faces. Despite improvement in various fields, such as agricultural production, millions of Bangladeshis are still faced with the grim realities of hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity.

Bangladesh has made significant strides towards food production over the last five decades. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, agricultural production in Bangladesh has been moving upward steeply owing to technological advances, coupled with better farming methodology and governmental initiatives. The country has almost attained self-sufficiency in rice—the staple for the general masses of Bangladesh. But food production alone can never guarantee food security.

The country is still beset with daunting challenges in accessing and affording nutritious food. According to the Global Hunger Index 2023, Bangladesh stands in 81st position amongst 125 countries, reflecting that the level of hunger remains serious.

Malnutrition, especially in children, is still a common problem in the country. According to a UNICEF report, some 28 percent of children under five years of age suffer from stunting while 10 percent suffer from wasting; both conditions are indicative of chronic malnutrition, possibly with lifelong effects on physical and cognitive development.

Added to this are socioeconomic



The country has almost attained self-sufficiency in rice, but food production alone can never guarantee food security.

FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

inequalities, climate change, and a lack of social safety nets. There may be food, but it has become unaffordable for many, and large sections of the population are living in poverty. It is the rural populations, women, and children who, above all else, bear this burden of food insecurity. This makes the right to food not just about availability but also about access and equity.

The right to food cannot be delinked from the broader socioeconomic disparities. The economic growth of Bangladesh over the past decade has been strong, but it hasn't trickled down equitably. The poorest sections of society still struggle with food inadequacy, driven by low wages, unemployment, and food price increases. It is even profound in rural settings where agriculture is the main economic activity and yet farmers often live on the margins because of fluctuating crop yields, lack of market access, and generally inadequate

support from the government.

Another crucial factor in food security is gender disparity. Women, who tend to play crucial nurturing and food-providing roles for individual households, continue to experience several obstacles including low wages, limited access to land, and poor participation and representation in decision-making processes regarding food and agriculture. This inequity between genders impacts not only women's ability to feed themselves but even extends to the health and well-being of their children. Food security can be enhanced by empowering women through education and ensuring access to resources, and economic opportunities that place them on a level playing field with men.

Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. Rising sea levels, floods,

security through different policies and programmes. The National Food Policy and the subsequent Country Investment Plan are examples of governmental initiatives to ensure access to food for all citizens. Social safety nets, such as the Vulnerable Group Development programme and the Public Food Distribution System, are designed to provide basic support to marginalised populations.

However, these programmes face several challenges amongst which targeting, efficiency, and resource allocation are worth mentioning. Most food distribution systems are prone to corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies; hence population coverage is minimal. The government should, therefore, enhance such programmes, increase their transparency, and optimally manage the allocation of resources to realise this right to food for all.

Most importantly, agricultural production and diets have to be diversified. While rice may be a staple ingredient in our diet, it cannot meet all our nutritional requirements. Therefore, more cultivation and consumption of fruits, vegetables, pulses, and protein-rich foods like fish and poultry to reduce malnutrition is a must.

While national government action is paramount, complementing the advancement of the right to food in Bangladesh needs to be taken forward by civil society and international organisations. Food rights have to be at the heart of national development strategies if a better future is to be ensured in Bangladesh. This will not only mean an increase in food production but also addressing the root causes of food insecurity: poverty, inequality, and climate vulnerability. This means that the government engages in collaboration with civil society, the private sector, and international organisations in pursuit of food systems that are inclusive, sustainable, and resilient to such factors.

Empowerment of small-scale farmers, particularly women, in terms of access to resources, education, and technology, shall go a long way in improving the level of food security. In addition, it is necessary to enhance social safety nets, equal access to food, and diverse diets of nutritional value that will help in reducing malnutrition for a healthier society.

As we observe World Food Day, let us remember that the right to food is not just about addressing hunger in the short term but about building a future where everyone has the opportunity to live a dignified, healthy, and productive life. By prioritising the right to food, Bangladesh can pave the way for a more just, prosperous, and food-secure nation.

Youth leading the way to good governance in Bangladesh



Stefan Liller is the resident representative at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangladesh.

STEFAN LILLER

Youth have been at the forefront of many global movements, fighting injustice and calling for democratic reforms. We are seeing something similar in Bangladesh. Young people have been at the centre of a major political transition. What started as a protest movement against public sector job quotas evolved into a mass public movement. After weeks of unrest that sadly saw hundreds of deaths and thousands injured, there is now a growing sense of optimism that Bangladesh has an opportunity to address systemic and structural issues of governance, rule of law, and human rights.

The changes that the youth of Bangladesh are shaping are complex, and the task ahead is not easy. This includes building a discrimination-free Bangladesh, where everyone benefits and enjoys the fruits of socio-economic prosperity. The role of youth in civic and political life has never been more critical. Bangladesh's youth are agents of change. Their engagement is essential to uphold democratic values

and ensuring that future development is underpinned by equity, non-discrimination, and social justice. Now is the time to harness the energy and creativity of Generation Z and ensure that Bangladesh fulfils its enormous potential.

But how do we harness the energy and creativity that youth brings?

First and foremost, the interface between policymakers and youth must be strengthened. Inclusive and meaningful dialogue mechanisms at all levels of policymaking are needed so the voices of young people can be considered. This must be institutionalised so that engagement with youth is not an afterthought or done for optics. While many governments globally desire to engage with young people, good intentions have often just led to occasional dialogues with selected youth groups.

Second, the interface must be broadened to engage young people who remain underrepresented, such as youth from remote rural areas, young women, persons with disabilities,

religious minorities, gender and sexual minorities, and those from ethnic minority communities. Without a conscious effort to bring unheard voices to influence change, the status quo will continue.

Third, building the capabilities of youth is important so they can better articulate and influence policies. Civic and voter education, as well as promoting active citizenship, are critical for nurturing these capabilities.

While it will take time, starting now is crucial to build the foundations of inclusive and people-centred governance in which young people have a greater stake in Bangladesh's development. Responsible citizenship also demands a commitment to peace, tolerance, and dialogue. By advancing a culture of accountable and informed civic engagement, youth can drive transformative change.

Lastly, Bangladesh must find a lasting solution to create decent employment. There is a collective sense among many Bangladeshis that the country has recorded impressive economic growth, while this growth has not fully benefited everyone. Although the national unemployment rate remains relatively low, it conceals joblessness among young people. At more than 11 percent, youth unemployment is high, but millions of young people are also outside the labour force and not studying or receiving training. Widespread informality, accounting for nearly 85

percent of jobs, makes it even harder to earn a decent living and discourages people from seeking employment.

Unlike many low-middle economies, Bangladesh has carved a place in the global manufacturing supply chains. Unfortunately, manufacturing has remained concentrated in the readymade garments sector, not producing enough positive spillovers for other economic sectors. Part of the challenge is that Bangladesh has struggled to attract sufficient private investment. There are also weak backward and forward linkages with small enterprises, stunting their growth and ability to create jobs.

Bangladesh now has an opportunity to invest in building the skills and competencies that young people need for a dynamic labour market. In a globalised world, where rapid technological changes are threatening jobs that entail routine tasks, the future lies in knowledge and green jobs, as well as jobs requiring critical thinking and advanced skills. Limited diversification and low levels of human capital have been at the crux of jobless growth in Bangladesh.

There are no quick fixes for the challenges outlined above, but they are not impossible to tackle when there is political will and a broad consensus for change. This is the moment for Bangladesh to write a new social contract between the state and its people, where youth are architects of building the future they want to see.