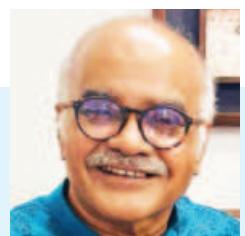




Economic inequality and why it must be addressed

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quintile of the population is 49 per 1,000 live births, while the under-five mortality rate among the top quintile is 25 per 1,000 live births. Similarly, 85 percent of the births among the top 20 percent of the population are attended by trained birth personnel, while the comparable figure for the bottom 20 percent is 32 percent.

Disparities in the educational and health sectors are quite widespread. In education, with the coexistence of public and private education, schools for the wealthy versus poor children, and English versus Bengali medium schools, large scale inequalities have been created. These have been reflected in educational achievements and later, in job opportunities and employment. Similarly, by maintaining a three-tier health system

- » In most cases, inequalities in opportunities determine the inequalities of outcomes.
- » Economic inequalities are linked to power relations in a society.
- » There are moral and ethical reasons as well as economic, political, and social reasons for addressing economic inequalities. Economic inequalities can also be a political time bomb.
- » The policy package to address economic inequalities must embrace macro, meso, and micro policies. No policy in favour of inequalities would be effective, if they bypass the issue of gender disparities.
- » Improved access of poor and marginalised people to quality ICT services can be key in reducing economic inequalities.

In the economic field, the existence of inequalities in income and wealth is well-known. A look at either defaulted bank loans or cross-border money laundering, amounting to thousands of crores or taka, clearly indicates that money and wealth in Bangladesh are concentrated in a few hands. An analysis of overall data shows that while the bottom 40 percent of the population in Bangladesh receives 13 percent of the country's GDP, the top 10 percent of the population enjoys 38 percent of it. Economic inequalities result in unequal human development outcomes as well. For example, in Bangladesh, the under-five mortality rate among the bottom

in Bangladesh, a huge discriminatory wall has been erected in society. Consequently, the public health facilities are inadequate and substandard. Naturally, it is the general public, which avails of the public health system, that does not receive even the minimum acceptable services. On the other



VISUAL: ANWER SOHEL

Fifty percent of urban people use the internet, while only 35 percent of the rural population uses it. In rural areas, only 3 percent of households have computers, and 78 percent of the rural population does not know how to use a computer. All these contribute to economic inequalities.

In Bangladesh, economic inequalities are reflected in gender disparities regarding outcomes as well as opportunities. For example, the labour force participation rate among women is 36 percent, compared to 81 percent among men. The representation of women in senior and middle management in the country is only 12 percent. The gender disparity in the use of mobile phones is 29 percent. About 33 percent and 17 percent of men and women, respectively, use the internet. The economic disempowerment of women stems from these aspects.

Economic inequalities are linked to power relations in society. In fact, economic inequalities and power relations reinforce each other. The disparities in economic endowment give rise to unequal economic, political, and social power

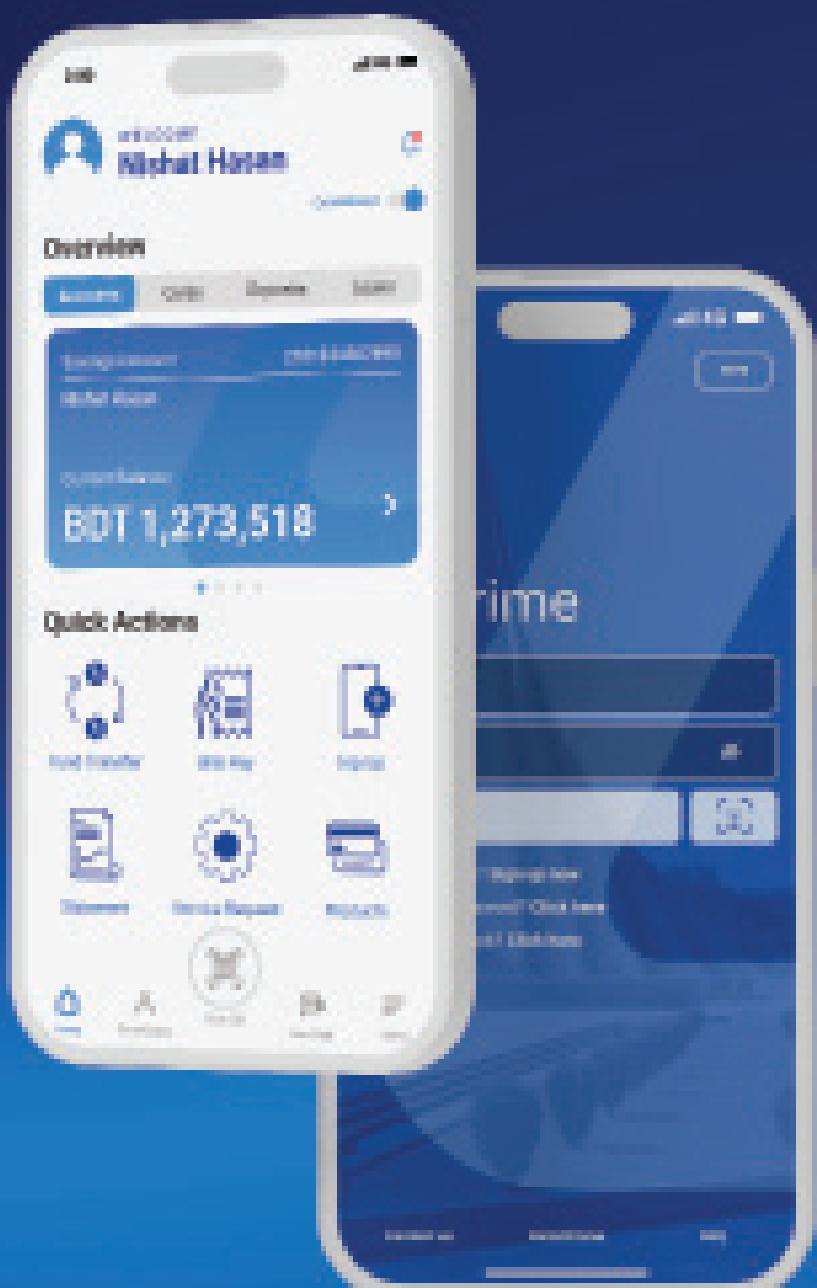
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