



## Why women must be empowered

FROM PAGE 10

Another alarming trend in Bangladesh is the unchecked growth of unregulated e-commerce and social commerce platforms, where many businesses, including women-led enterprises, operate beyond the reach of government oversight. These businesses often evade tax and VAT obligations, creating an uneven playing field that undermines the sustainability of legally compliant enterprises. This lack of regulation not only facilitates the sale of smuggled goods and unethical procurement practices but also exposes significant gaps in the policy and governance of the e-commerce sector. Additionally, legitimate entrepreneurs face considerable challenges due to the disparity in access to competitively priced imported goods, as they are overburdened by an outdated tariff structure that continues to treat imports as if Bangladesh were a nascent economy.

Despite the country's emergence as an economic powerhouse, excessive duties on

VISUAL:  
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e-commerce and social media. Addressing these critical issues requires a holistic approach that includes modernising tax policies, strengthening regulatory frameworks for online businesses, and introducing fair rent controls to foster a more equitable and sustainable business environment.

Women in Bangladesh also face significant cultural and societal barriers that restrict their mobility and independence, deeply rooted in longstanding norms shaped by inadequate security and protection measures. These challenges are particularly pronounced for women in rural areas, where access to reliable and safe transportation is severely limited. In urban centres, overcrowded streets dominated by men have become increasingly hostile environments for women, forcing them to navigate daily challenges ranging from harassment to a lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure. Whether traveling for work, attending meetings, or managing business activities, women are often confronted with safety concerns, societal judgments, and logistical hurdles. The lack of robust law enforcement and government support to mitigate these issues also does not help,

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SHAIKH SULTANA  
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perpetuating a cycle of restriction and vulnerability. Addressing these barriers requires systemic reforms, including better public transportation tailored to women's needs, stricter enforcement of laws to ensure safety, and broader cultural shifts to create an environment where women can move freely and participate fully in economic and social life.

At present, we are also facing immense economic challenges due to global conflicts, political instability, and rising inflation, which have significantly impacted consumer purchasing power. In such times, stimulating the economy becomes more critical than ever. The Bangladesh government must take proactive measures to address these pressing issues and implement well-thought-out policies to support local women-owned businesses while empowering consumers. Strategic programmes, stimulus packages, and incentives can be designed to encourage consumers to buy from local businesses. These can include tax breaks, subsidies, or cashback initiatives for purchasing locally produced goods and services. Additionally, promoting awareness of the benefits of supporting local industries—such as

job creation, economic resilience, and sustainability—can help foster a culture of local consumption. By bridging the gap between struggling businesses and cautious consumers, these policies can help revitalise the economy, increase buying power, and ensure that local enterprises, especially women-led businesses, continue to thrive despite the challenges. This dual approach benefits both the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the general public, creating a more robust and inclusive economic framework for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh today stands at a crucial juncture, with half of its population under the age of 25, presenting a tremendous opportunity for growth. To capitalise on this youthful demographic, our country must focus on addressing skill gaps by incorporating entrepreneurial education throughout the schooling system, from primary schools to universities. Establishing business and social business clubs and research centres will provide students with hands-on experience, preparing them to meet the evolving demands of the economy. In addition, the government should introduce well-structured grant programmes to support business students and startups, enabling them to develop their ideas and build valuable partnerships. Tailored vocational training programmes aligned with industry-specific needs, along with the creation of research centres at universities focusing on key sectors like e-commerce, green businesses, and the creative industries, will equip the workforce with the skills necessary to drive innovation and growth.

I believe Bangladesh now needs to deliver on its promise of empowerment and inclusivity by creating an environment where women can thrive. This means fostering robust support systems, ensuring access to resources, modernising policies, and addressing the inequalities that hold them back. In the vision of Bangladesh 2.0, young women entrepreneurs are not just participants in economic growth but leaders and changemakers, driving the nation towards sustainable development and global recognition. The future of Bangladesh depends on empowering these women to dream bigger, break barriers, and build a legacy for generations to come.



essential materials and resources remain a barrier to growth, stifling the ability of businesses to scale in a competitive local or global market. Furthermore, establishing traditional brick-and-mortar stores has become increasingly difficult due to unregulated and exorbitant rent tariffs, forcing many entrepreneurs, particularly women, to opt for selling through

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