

Tackling economic disparities: A journey towards Bangladesh 2.0

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Economic disparity has been a recurring theme in the history of Bangladesh, shaping its past, influencing its present, and challenging its aspirations for the future. From tales of tyranny to the struggle for independence, the narrative of inequality has been a constant companion in the nation's journey. As Bangladesh sets its sights on a new era, dubbed 'Bangladesh 2.0', the call for reducing economic disparity is louder than ever, driven largely by the youth who spearheaded the July Uprising of 2024.

The seeds of economic inequality were sown long before Bangladesh's independence. Stories of exploitative practices during the Mughal and Maratha periods, though now largely anecdotal, are still shared as cautionary tales. The British colonial era institutionalised these disparities, with resources from Bengal diverted to serve imperial interests. This period witnessed devastating famines and systemic impoverishment, cementing a legacy of economic deprivation.

The partition of British India in 1947 did little to address these inequities. Under Pakistan's rule, East Bengal (later East Pakistan) found itself further

marginalised. The economic policies of the central government were heavily skewed in favour of West Pakistan, leading to pronounced regional disparities. Despite constituting the majority of the population, East Pakistan received only a fraction of the resources and investments. This imbalance fuelled discontent, ultimately culminating in the Liberation War of 1971.

When Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation, there was widespread hope that the new state would rectify

with these enduring disparities. The youth, armed with modern technology and inspired by global movements, led the charge for systemic change. Their demands extended beyond political reforms, calling for an economy that is inclusive and equitable. The recently published 'White Paper' added momentum to this movement by exposing the extent of economic discrepancies. The report revealed alarming disparities in income distribution, access to quality education and healthcare, and



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

- » Bangladesh's economic disparities stem from historical exploitation and systemic inequities.
- » The 2024 July Uprising showcased youth-led demands for inclusive economic reforms.
- » 'Bangladesh 2.0' envisions a progressive, equitable, and resilient nation beyond GDP growth.
- » Challenges include institutional resistance, corruption, lack of expertise, and global economic pressures.
- » Achieving equity requires reforms, youth empowerment, and strong public-private partnerships.

these injustices. Yet, despite notable achievements in poverty reduction, literacy, and health, economic inequality has persisted and, in some cases, widened. The gap between the wealthy elite and the majority population remains stark, with rural areas and marginalised communities often left behind.

Fast forward to 2024, when the July Uprising highlighted the simmering frustrations of a generation grappling

employment opportunities. It also pointed to systemic issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.

The concept of 'Bangladesh 2.0' embodies a vision of a nation that is progressive, inclusive, and resilient. Central to this vision is the reduction of economic disparity, a goal that resonates deeply with the youth who played a pivotal

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