

Bangladesh's development model is failing its people



Abu Afsarul Haider
is an entrepreneur. He can be reached at afsarulhaider@gmail.com.

ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

On June 2, 2025, the Finance Division, in its Medium-Term Macroeconomic Policy Statement, forecast that Bangladesh's economy would surpass the \$500 billion mark in FY2026-27. This optimistic outlook from the government comes at a time when several international development partners, including the World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank, have made far more cautious projections. The World Bank expects Bangladesh's economy to grow by 3.3 percent this year, the Asian Development Bank forecasts 3.9 percent, and the IMF predicts 3.76 percent GDP growth.

In economic discussions, growth and development are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. Economic growth refers to the rise in a country's GDP, reflecting how much production has increased compared to the previous year. It is purely a quantitative measure. In contrast, economic development is a qualitative process involving structural changes in the economy and society that lead to improved living standards. It focuses on broader socio-economic progress, not just production figures.

It is widely believed that economic growth creates jobs and reduces unemployment. Yet in Bangladesh, growth has not produced enough decent work to meet the needs of our youthful and expanding population. Between 2013 and 2017, average annual GDP growth was 6.6 percent, but job growth stood at just 0.9 percent a year. At present, around 65 percent of the population is of working age, yet finding a decent job remains a major challenge. Nearly 85 percent of the workforce is engaged in the informal sector, where wages are low, jobs are insecure, and there is

no social protection. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reports that unemployment rose from 4.07 percent in mid-2023 to 4.49 percent in mid-2024, leaving over 26 lakh people without work. This points to what economists call "jobless growth"—an economy that expands but leaves many behind.

The benefits of growth have also been distributed unevenly. While average household income rose more than fifteenfold—from Tk 1,917 in 1983-84 to Tk 32,422 in 2022—much of this wealth has gone to a privileged few. Data shows that the top 5 percent of households control 30.04 percent of total income, while the top 10 percent hold 40.92 percent. In contrast, the income share of the bottom 50 percent has fallen from 20.23 percent in 2016 to just 19.05 percent in 2022. This widening gap between rich and poor is alarming for any society hoping to build fairness and stability.

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Food inflation, which exceeded 14 percent in late 2024, has pushed many working families closer to poverty. The national poverty rate is projected to rise from 18.7 percent in 2022 to 22.9 percent in 2025. The share of people living in extreme poverty—those earning less than \$2.15 a day—could almost double to 9.3 percent, adding around 30 lakh more to this group. The Gini index, a key measure of income inequality, is

during the monsoon, leading to damage and displacement. Air pollution from unfit vehicles, factories, brick kilns, and unregulated construction has made Dhaka's air dangerously toxic. According to the 2025 Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Global Livability Index, Dhaka ranks as the world's third least liveable city.

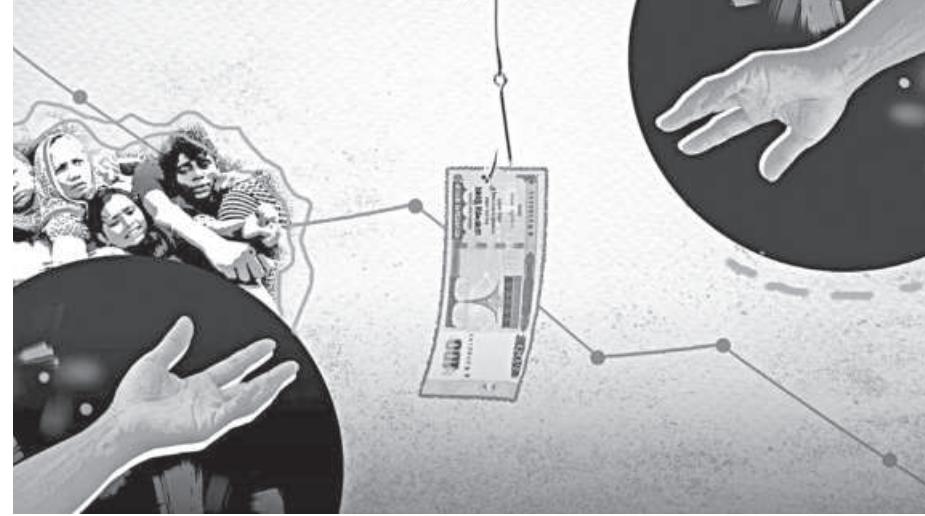
Meanwhile, our healthcare system remains among the weakest in the region. There are

with the needs of human development or the job market. There is a lack of adequate communication and collaboration between the government, academia, and industry. Each year, over 6.5 lakh university graduates enter the job market, yet many end up in low-paying jobs that do not match their skills. This fuels growing frustration among young people, which can destabilise both society and the economy.

Despite promises by the interim government to improve health and education, the FY2026 budget has slashed development spending in both sectors. This raises serious doubts about the government's ability to improve essential services, reduce poverty, and build human capital.

We need to understand that the frequent student protests, workers' strikes, and road blockades we witness are not isolated acts of violence or mere political stunts. They are warning signs of a society under immense pressure, where hopes are shattered, dignity is denied, and opportunities remain elusive for many. When young people set buses ablaze or workers block roads, it is often an expression of deep frustration from those who feel abandoned by a system that promises prosperity but delivers suffering. Their anger is rooted in genuine grievances: lack of decent jobs, poor healthcare and education, rising inequality, and the belief that economic benefits favour only a privileged few.

Bangladesh stands at a decisive crossroads. Continuing to chase GDP numbers while neglecting fairness, human development, and environmental sustainability will only deepen inequality and social divides. True progress is not measured by GDP alone, but by how fairly growth benefits are shared, how well the vulnerable are protected, and how responsibly we safeguard the nation's future for the next generation. It is time for our leaders, policymakers, and society as a whole to move beyond empty slogans and take meaningful action—investing in health, education, and good governance to build a people-centred economy where every citizen, rich or poor, rural or urban, can live with dignity, hope, and security.



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

expected to rise from 33.4 in 2022 to 36.1 in 2025, showing that wealth is becoming more concentrated among the rich.

GDP figures also fail to capture the harsh realities of unplanned urbanisation, environmental degradation, and weak public services. Bangladesh's industrial growth has come at a heavy environmental cost. Rivers such as the Buriganga, Turag, and Shitalakhy are now severely polluted due to unregulated industrial establishments and unplanned urbanisation. Factories routinely dump untreated waste into these rivers, contaminating the water with toxic chemicals and heavy metals. Dhaka, in particular, suffers from poor urban management and inadequate water and sanitation services. Clogged drains and canals worsen flooding

too few medical facilities, overstretched staff, and shortages of essential medicines and equipment. Soaring out-of-pocket healthcare expenses pushed around 61 lakh people into poverty in 2022. Many reduce spending on food or education just to cover medical costs. The World Food Programme's 2023 report revealed that 36 percent of Bangladeshis face food insecurity. Poor nutrition weakens labour productivity, which stands at just 10.4 percent for Bangladesh—far behind South Asia's average of 16.3 percent and the 27.8 percent average for other Asian countries, according to the Asian Productivity Organization.

Education, which should empower people and open opportunities, is also failing to deliver. Our education system does not align

Challenging the Fifteenth Amendment through legal doctrine



Asma Bint Shafiq
is professor at the Department of Law in the University of Chittagong.

ASMA BINT SHAFIQ

The book, titled *Revolutionary Constitutionalism and Why it was Essential to Declare the Fifteenth Amendment Unconstitutional*, by Dr Sharif Bhuiyan, a senior advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, is inspired by the July Revolution. It highlights some of the most pressing constitutional questions of the time—namely, the constitutionality, legitimacy, and tenure of the current interim government led by Professor Muhammad Yunus. Drawing on the author's oral and written arguments in *Badiul Alam Majumder v Bangladesh, the Fifteenth Amendment* case (Writ Petition No 9935 of 2024), the book presents, in its fourth chapter, a compelling case for declaring the Fifteenth Amendment of the Bangladesh Constitution illegal.

Since its formation in August 2024, the constitutionality, legitimacy, and tenure of the present government have been subject to persistent scrutiny. Various political parties and civil society actors have demanded that the government step down in favour of an elected one as soon as possible. The first three chapters of the book counter this claim, arguing that the government is both constitutional and legitimate and should remain in office for a reasonable period to implement necessary reforms, including constitutional reform. Bhuiyan supports this stance through a detailed analysis of constitutional provisions, established doctrines, and the theory of revolutionary constitutionalism, set against the backdrop of the political crisis that followed the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024.

The book outlines how the government's formation through revolution, its replacement of an authoritarian regime, its "performance" in managing the disorder that followed the Hasina administration's collapse, and the popular demand for change all lend legitimacy to its rule. On the question of constitutionality, Bhuiyan argues that the "constitutional vacuum and crisis" caused by Hasina's flight created a robust legal foundation for recognising the new government as constitutional beyond question. He invokes the "doctrine of necessity"—a principle established in Bangladeshi jurisprudence despite its absence from the text of the constitution, along with Article 7 of the constitution, which affirms that "all powers in the Republic belong

to the people." These, he contends, offer a legal rationale for recognising the Yunus-led government as constitutional. Chapter 3 further demonstrates how this doctrine and Article 7 could have been used to address potential vacancies, such as those that would have occurred had the president and speaker resigned after the revolution.

As with questions of constitutionality and legitimacy, the tenure of the current government has sparked ongoing debate, which the book addresses in Chapter 2. By applying constitutional principles and the

in the Eighth Amendment case—as well as broader social, political, and historical factors, Bhuiyan argues that the Fifteenth Amendment should be declared unconstitutional. He highlights how the Thirteenth Amendment introduced the NPCG to safeguard democracy and how the Fifteenth Amendment's abolition of this provision has led to "evil consequences," thereby justifying a judicial reversal.

The book also engages with the basic structure doctrine and its origins in Bangladeshi judicial decisions. It examines both substantive and procedural conditions necessary for a valid constitutional amendment. Building on this, Bhuiyan contends that the Fifteenth Amendment amounted to a wholesale rewriting of the constitution, thereby dismantling its core features—including democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights. He presents the argument he made in the Fifteenth Amendment case: that the amendment not only undermined these constitutional pillars but also fundamentally altered the democratic

the present government differs from the NPCG. Despite this shortcoming, the book stands out as a pioneering intellectual work on the critical

constitutional questions surrounding the formation, nature, and function of the current government, as well as on the legality of past constitutional amendments.

It offers essential insights for students, academics, and researchers working in the fields of constitutional law, democracy, and legal reform in Bangladesh.



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

idea of constitutionalism, Bhuiyan argues that a three-year term would be a reasonable timeframe to allow the government to implement its revolutionary mandate. He also clarifies that the constitutional provision concerning the tenure of the non-party caretaker government (NPCG) is inapplicable to the current government, as the two differ fundamentally in terms of their political context, formation, purpose, operations, and other critical aspects.

Beyond its analysis of the government's constitutional status and tenure, the book offers discussion on constitutional developments following the July uprising. Emphasising the interpretive principles used by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh—notably

and republican character of the state. He concludes that the Supreme Court must declare the amendment unconstitutional to restore democracy, uphold the rule of law, protect people's rights, and prevent further encroachments on the constitution.

While the book serves as a valuable guide to understanding the legal status of the current government, it would have benefited from the inclusion of a few additional topics. For example, it does not delve into the ongoing debate between the concepts of an interim government and a revolutionary government—a tension that frequently emerges in the current administration. However, towards the end of Chapter 4, the book does provide a clear explanation of how

বাংলাদেশ কৃষি উন্নয়ন কর্পোরেশন

কৃষি ভবন

৪১-৫১, মিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০।

(বীজ উৎপাদন খামার বিভাগ)

পুনর্বিন্দু বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং- ০১/২০২৫-২৬

বাংলাদেশ কৃষি উন্নয়ন কর্পোরেশনের স্বীকৃত উৎপাদন খামার বিভাগের ২০২৫-২৬ উৎপাদন বিভাগের আমন ধানবীজ ফসলে ব্যবহারের জন্য মাইক্রোবিজ্ঞপ্তি জোরাবলী করা যাচ্ছে।

জোরাবলী নং: বামারের নাম ও পত্র

১। মুকুট বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, চাইজেল।

২। তামাক বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, ফিলিসুর।

৩। গুম্বুজ বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, গুম্বুজ।

৪। কালোজাত বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, মুকুটজাত।

৫। সেরামেজ বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, সেরামেজ।

৬। বিশালজাত বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, কৃষজাত।

৭। পুরুষজাত বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, পুরুষ।

৮। মুকুট বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, মুকুট।

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১০। পানিপুর বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, পানিপুর।

১১। কালোজাত বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, মুকুটপুর।

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১৩। সার্বজনিক বীজ উৎপাদন খামার, বিভিত্তি, সার্বজনিক।

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