

# How poor are the poor? A dive beyond the line



Namira Shameem is senior research associate at Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC). She can be reached at namira.sl610@gmail.com.

NAMIRA SHAMEEM

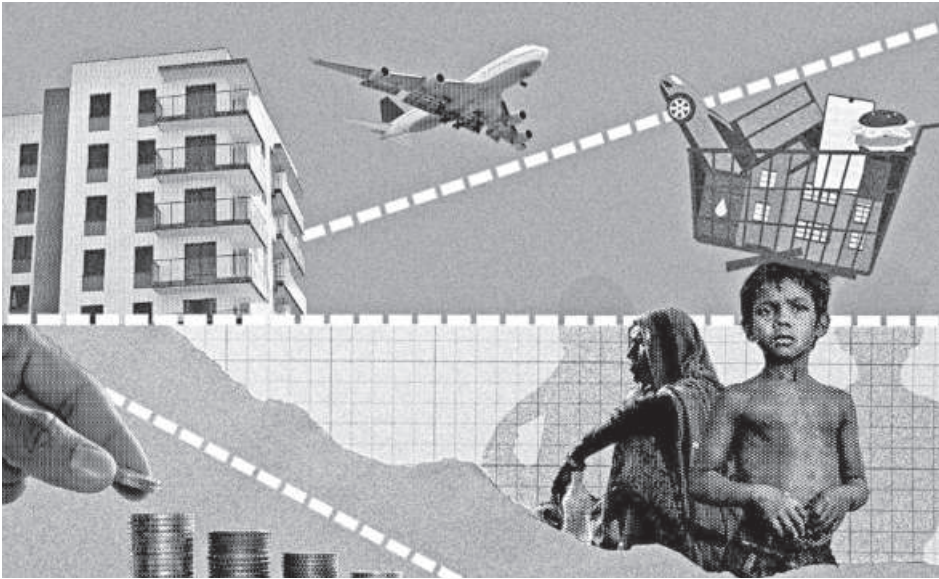
In Bangladesh today, the narrative on poverty has grown louder yet narrower, focusing almost entirely on the headcount ratio. According to a recent State of the Real Economy study by Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), 27.9 percent of people now live below the upper poverty line—a near 10 percentage point rise from the 18.7 percent recorded in the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022. This is not merely a statistic; it signals a reversal of hard-fought gains.

Yet, this alarming headline misses a deeper truth. Poverty is not just about how many fall below the line, but how far below. The poverty gap index (PGI) addresses the deeper question: how poor are the poor? The PPRC analysis places the PGI at 1.76 percent, nearly double the 0.93 percent recorded in HIES 2022. While the absolute figure may seem modest, its sharp rise is far from reassuring. This suggests that most of those now classified as poor hover just under the threshold rather than being deeply below it. In other words, poverty is now shallower but more widespread, signalling a condition of fragility.

But what about those just above this line? Here lies the crux: nearly 18 percent of the total 8,067 households in our study fall into the “vulnerable non-poor” category, which

we have defined as those whose per-capita expenditure lies between the upper poverty line and the median monthly income. This fragile, precarious group is often ignored in mainstream discourse but lives one shock away from poverty. Evidence from the PPRC-BIGD COVID-19 studies offers strong support: nearly 77 percent of this group slipped into poverty and became newly poor during the pandemic. While the latest PPRC survey cannot track such transitions directly, it is

**Poverty reduction cannot simply be about lifting those already below the line, but also about preventing those teetering at the edge from falling in. Policies overlooking this ‘fragile middle’ will be reactive rather than pre-emptive, allowing reversals to outpace progress.**



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

plausible that similar vulnerability dynamics persist—many of today’s poor were, in fact, yesterday’s vulnerable non-poor.

If this is true, poverty reduction cannot simply be about lifting those already below the line, but also about preventing those teetering at the edge from falling in. Policies overlooking this “fragile middle” will be reactive rather than pre-emptive, allowing reversals to outpace progress.

The vulnerabilities that were found extend well beyond income. Around 15.5 percent of school-aged children in the sample are not in school. The results show that the most frequently mentioned barrier was marriage (43.7 percent of cases), followed by financial problems (26.6 percent), the need to work (26.2 percent) and lack of interest in education (16.7 percent), highlighting the structural and

motivational barriers in place.

More than half of the households, around 51 percent, report at least one chronically ill household member—a burden that translates into recurring health-related costs and heightened fragility. Debt compounds the stress on households: the bottom 40 percent of households owe at least twice as much as they have in savings, with debts growing by a net seven percent over the previous six months. Food insecurity is another fault line, with 12 percent of households skipping at least one meal in the past week, while nearly nine percent of the poorest decile endured an entire day without food in the past month. Basic development goals also remain stalled, with over a third of households still reliant on non-sanitary latrines.

In addition, among the 15 percent of female-

headed households, around 23.8 percent are in the poorest decile. Imagine the everyday negotiations of such a family, choosing between food and medicines, whether to pull a child from school to save on costs or put them to work to support rising burdens. This is the fragile middle point, where households are not officially considered poor today but would be pushed into poverty over the years by illness or indebtedness.

Adopting a “people’s lens in economic planning,” as the study recommends, means not just seeing poverty as a statistic to be reduced. It means reversing poverty sustainably, accounting for the multidimensionality of vulnerabilities experienced by the fragile middle. It means safety nets that account for current realities. In this particular context, the PPRC recommends a social safety net for households burdened with chronic illness expenses, in line with its findings. It also means nurturing resilience so that the succession of crises our country has witnessed over the past five years—ranging from the pandemic to global inflationary pressures and national political change—does not undo decades of progress. Special emphasis should be placed on those households which are women-headed and youth-heavy, both disproportionately at risk and central to future transformation.

To sum up, it may feel reassuring that poverty depth remains “low.” But in Bangladesh today, that is not a comfort; it is a warning. While the poor are not deeply poor, the vulnerable non-poor, nearly one-fifth of households, stand on the tipping point. To truly reverse poverty requires seeing, valuing and safeguarding the fragile middle, while tackling the broader vulnerabilities that erode resilience. Ignoring them is not just policy oversight; it is a risk we can no longer afford.

# Let them in: Opening Gaza to the foreign press corps



Dr Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is a senior lecturer at RMIT University, Australia. He can be reached at bkampmark@gmail.com.

BINOY KAMPMARK

The Fourth Estate may not be in a good way, corrupted and compromised as it is, but in some instances, it remains the only light cast over the predations and ghastliness of power. For that precise reason, the state of Israel has been most cautious, to the point of folly, of shutting out foreign journalists from covering the Gaza conflict. A job most dirty needs to be done—levelling, disabling, dispossessing and crushing of a strip with over two million Palestinians—and it shall only be witnessed, controlled and invigilated with utmost care.

Only the friendliest of the friendly need apply for access to Gaza, and the call by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier in August that the military bring in more foreign journalists is heavily contingent on control.

The Gaza campaign is proving frustratingly long for the Netanyahu government. During this time, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have become routine killers of journalists. Given the international press ban, the number of those slain by the IDF are overwhelmingly Palestinian. Since the start of the Gaza War, 189 have been killed. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) puts the death toll for all

journalists and media workers between October 2023 and August 2025 at 197. Data from Reporters Without Borders puts the figure of journalists killed in Gaza at over 210, claiming that 56 of them were intentionally targeted by the

ran to aid the wounded and were subsequently butchered.

The list of the dead also includes Associated Press freelance photographer Mariam Abu Dagga; Al Jazeera cameraman Mohammed Salama; freelance photographer Moaz Abu Taha; and Middle East Eye and Quds News Network correspondent Ahmed Abu Aziz.

The justifications for such slaughter by the IDF have become something to behold. A weary formula is at work: first, assume the strike was on a Hamas or militant site, leaving those in the vicinity silly for being there. The official line is the IDF does not target civilians,

National Congress. “That didn’t make them terrorists, nor legitimate targets.”

With these killings and the continuing starvation and deprivation taking place in the strip, many of Israel’s allies are now giving some unwanted advice. On August 21, member-states of the Media Freedom Coalition released a statement declaring, “In light of the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, the undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition urge Israel to allow immediate independent foreign media access and afford protection for journalists operating in Gaza.” Of the

28 signatories, the bulk are European, including France, Germany and the UK. With usual conspicuousness, the US remains absent.

The signatories went on to “condemn all violence directed against journalists and media workers, especially the extremely high number of fatalities, arrests and detentions.” It was made clear that civilian journalists were protected in times of armed conflict. “We call for all attacks against media workers to be investigated and for those responsible to be prosecuted in compliance with national and international law.”

While the protection of journalists

in such situations could hardly be fully sealed and assured, Israel will find killing members of the foreign press corps in numbers a more trying prospect. Should the journalists be allowed to scribble and record the vast, engineered crime taking place in Gaza and in real time, silencing them will become a most formidable, exacting task. Certainly, casual accusations of Hamas membership or sympathy will be harder, more absurd, to make.

*This article first appeared on Countercurrents.org and Scoop Independent News on August 31, 2025.*



Between October 2023 and August 2025, as many as 197 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

**While the protection of journalists in such situations could hardly be fully sealed and assured, Israel will find killing members of the foreign press corps in numbers a more trying prospect. Should the journalists be allowed to scribble and record the vast, engineered crime taking place in Gaza and in real time, silencing them will become a most formidable, exacting task.**

IDF, while UN Secretary General António Guterres offers 242 as the more accurate figure. Between 2020 and 2022, as many as 165 journalists were killed across the globe, a statistic bound to move even the coldest of analysts.

Add aid workers and medical staff, and you have such cases as the attack on Khan Younis’s Nasser Hospital during the morning of August 25. Initially, it was assumed that two strikes hit southern Gaza’s sole functioning major hospital. At least 20 people died, including five journalists. A closer examination of footage of the strikes by BBC Verify shows the initial assessment to have been conservative. At least four strikes took place. Two staircases were hit in the first wave, and what was initially thought to be a single attack turns out to have been two separate strikes hitting the same location within a fraction of a second. The first, registered at 10:08 local time, killed journalist Hussam Al-Masri, who was in the process of running a live TV feed for Reuters. First responders and journalists

despite killing a vast number in such strikes. Second, belittle those who died in exhaustive fashion, accusing them of being militants, militant sympathisers, or “combat propagandists.” It follows on from the first point: if they were there, they were obviously tarnished one way or the other.

Jodie Ginsberg, chief executive of CPJ, provides a terse, accurate summary on what international humanitarian law says on this subject, “The only individuals who can be considered legitimate targets in war are those directly involved in active combat. Expressing sympathy for proscribed organisations, or even engaging in propaganda, does not make someone a legitimate target.”

One’s political inclination—insofar as protection from military targeting is concerned—is irrelevant to the role of gathering and disseminating news. As Ginsberg goes on to observe, journalists have had leanings and sympathies for such previously proscribed organisations as the Irish Republican Army or the African

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Office of the District Primary Education Officer  
Manikganj

**e-GP Tender Notice (OTM)**

e-Tenders are invited through the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following goods:

Tender ID and Package No.	Brief description of the tender	Tender security (Tk)	Publishing date, closing date & time
1142024, NBIDGPS-1/G1.0544	Goods,  Furniture Supply for 47 Nos. Class Room and 07 Nos. of Teachers Room of Selected 12 Nos. of Govt. Primary School at different location of Manikgonj District.	160,000	01 Sep, 2025 14:00:00;  16 Sep, 2025 14:00:00
1142025, NBIDGPS-1/G1.0545	Goods,  Furniture Supply for 41 Nos. Class Room and 08 Nos. of Teachers Room of Selected 10 Nos. of Govt. Primary School at different location of Manikgonj District.	150,000	01 Sep, 2025 14:00:00;  16 Sep, 2025 14:00:00

These are online tenders where only e-Tender will be accepted and no offline/hard copies will be entertained. The interested bidders may visit the e-GP Portal website (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for further details. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all tender(s) without assigning any reason whatsoever.

**Gokul Chanda Debnath**  
District Primary Education Officer  
Manikganj  
[dpeornanik@gmail.com](mailto:dpeornanik@gmail.com)

GD-1905