

# We need better education infrastructure to prevent primary dropouts



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In Bangladesh, physical infrastructure is still a major challenge in ensuring a safe and child-friendly learning environment, as well as quality primary education in the country. Educational infrastructure includes school buildings, classrooms, teachers' rooms, furniture, water and sanitation facilities, playgrounds and boundary walls. According to the Annual Primary School Statistics (APSS) 2024, there were a total of 118,607 schools under which 65,567 (55.3 percent) were government primary schools, and the rest were kindergartens, NGO-run schools and religious schools, providing primary education in Bangladesh. There were 383,624 teachers in government primary schools in 2024, of whom 252,704 were female. Primary education in Bangladesh consists of six classes—pre-primary to grade 5—with a total enrolment of about two crore students in 2024 across Bangladesh.

According to the APSS 2024, 13,519 (20.4 percent) government primary schools in Bangladesh operate on a single-shift basis. This means that four out of every five schools (79.6 percent) continue to operate on a double-shift basis. Over the years, the student-teacher ratio has improved in government primary schools; it was 1:28 in 2023. However, classroom congestion (student classroom ratio among the division ranged from 28 to over 37), along with the high prevalence of double-shift schools, affects the academic performance, resulting in a high proportion of children dropping out.

The government is committed to converting all double-shift primary schools to single-shift schools. The objective is to improve quality, inclusivity and equity in primary education by increasing contact hours. In double-shift schools, learning time is short, creating inequality in the delivery of education. To address the weakness posed by the current double-shift system, the number of classrooms needs to be increased, as there is a huge shortage of classrooms. At the same time, the number of teachers in government primary schools must be increased.

In Bangladesh, between 30 and 32 lakh children are born every year. The net enrolment rate was 94.55 percent in 2024. The country is yet to achieve the 100 percent enrolment target. A total of 52,048 government primary schools are currently operating on a double-shift basis, and the number of classrooms must be increased to convert the remaining double-shift schools to single-shift schools, as per the standards set out in the Infrastructure Planning Guidelines adopted by the Directorate of Primary Education in 2018. The guidelines aim for a reasonable student-classroom ratio to prevent overcrowding.

Through the fourth Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP4), the government planned to build 50,500 classrooms, teachers' rooms and head teacher rooms, many of which are still under construction. The number of single-shift schools increased from 9,112 in 2017 to 13,519

in 2024. This is considered slow progress towards the targeted achievement of 100 percent single-shift schools in the country.

Over the past decade, Bangladesh has significantly reduced dropout rates in primary education, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The dropout rate is a crucial indicator of success in primary education. Although the dropout rate decreased significantly between 2010

percent in 2024—may have been caused by early entry into the labour market. In that case, child labour in the country is likely to rise. Compared to boys, girls' dropout rate rose marginally from 12.32 percent to 13.36 percent between 2023 and 2024. For both genders, classroom congestion and the prevalence of a high percentage of double-shift schools can also be contributing factors to the increased dropout. These factors

infrastructure, including the construction of new classrooms, as well as the reconstruction, repair and maintenance of existing schools. This will impact the achievement of the desired academic outcome. The education sector budget received around 1.72 percent of GDP in 2025-26, which is much lower than 4-6 percent, recommended by the Education 2030 Framework for Action. It is a global document, adopted by UNESCO Member States in 2015, providing guidelines for the implementation of SDG 4. To achieve SDG 4 by 2030, the government must take all required measures to regain the progress made towards universal basic education, including raising the amount of educational stipend, involving students and parents in school planning and management, investing in all aspects of school infrastructure, prompt recruitment of teachers, and undertaking educational campaigns.

Particular attention must be given to primary school teachers' training to improve educational quality. The 67 primary training institutes (PTIs) and 505 upazila resource centres in the country play a vital role in enhancing primary school teachers' capacity, ensuring that new teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively teach at the primary level. The PTIs are also involved in curriculum development, monitoring the quality of primary education, identifying areas for improvement and promoting the expansion of primary education access. However, many PTIs do not have enough training rooms and hostels. Some are housed in very old buildings that require reconstruction. The situation of upazila resource centres is similar, with many requiring additional training rooms and offices to run smoothly. Therefore, along with the primary schools, primary teachers' training centres and primary school education offices need proper infrastructure to work smoothly for the upliftment of primary education in Bangladesh.



Classroom congestion, a contributing factor for increased dropout, can significantly limit quality contact hours, leading to low academic performance. PHOTO: COURTESY

and 2024 from 39.8 percent to 16.25 percent, compared to last year (13.15 percent) the rate increased slightly. Boys have a higher dropout rate than girls across all grades. The increase in the dropout rate is alarming, meaning a significant portion of children are not completing the full primary education cycle. One reason for the high dropout rate cited in the APSS 2024 is rising living costs due to inflationary pressures, which leads to families prioritising short-term economic survival over continued schooling for their children. The sharp increase in the dropout rate among boys—from 14.12 percent in 2023 to 19.02

significantly limit quality contact hours, leading to low academic performance.

The high proportion of double-shift schools reflects challenges that should be overcome by increasing the primary education budget to convert all double-shift schools to single-shift schools, ensuring sufficient classrooms, and recruitment of more teachers. In the current fiscal year's national budget (2025-2026), planned education sector outlays constitute 12.1 percent of the total budget (Tk 95,644 crore), of which primary education has been allocated Tk 35,403 crore. This is not adequate for building sufficient educational

# Strategic autonomy has become a survival necessity for us



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For Bangladesh, the phrase "strategic autonomy" is no longer an abstract policy slogan—it is becoming a survival necessity. The country's economic structure, geographic realities, and political constraints form a tight web of dependencies that limit its ability to make fully independent choices. A closer look at the numbers shows the risks are not theoretical. They are real, measurable, and growing.

From a strategic standpoint, Bangladesh's position is shaped by the intersecting interests of major powers. The United States views the Bay of Bengal as a strategic node in its Indo-Pacific agenda, seeking closer defence and maritime cooperation. India, as the immediate neighbour with 4,096 kilometres of shared border, holds both leverage and overlapping security concerns, while China's deepening economic and infrastructure footprint, particularly through ports and energy projects, adds another layer of complexity. Russia, though less directly present, engages through defence sales and political alignment, while the EU's concern lies mainly in trade security and maritime stability, given its heavy import dependence on Bangladeshi goods. Other regional actors, including Japan and Australia, are also increasing engagement, recognising Bangladesh's strategic maritime location. This convergence of competing interests creates opportunities but also vulnerabilities, making autonomy increasingly urgent.

Bangladesh's economic base is alarmingly narrow. On the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, it scores 0.88—almost 10 times the developing country average of 0.09. The RMG industry accounts for 80 percent of exports, when experts suggest no single sector should exceed 20 to 30 percent. With knitwear and woven garments included, textiles alone bring in over 85 percent of earnings. Buyers are equally concentrated: the EU, US, and UK take 70 percent of exports, well above the safe threshold of 50 percent designated for any one market or region. Such heavy reliance means that a downturn or policy change in these regions could shake

the economy far more than it should. Imports also deepen dependency. In 2024, China supplied 28.57 percent of imports—almost double the 15 percent safety limit economists recommend. In 2023, the trade deficit reached \$20.42 billion, or 4.6 percent of GDP—four times the 1 percent sustainability benchmark. With India, the imbalance is stark, amounting to a \$9.22 billion annual deficit that carries political weight.

Financially, the weak spots are evident. Bangladesh attracts only about \$3 billion in FDI a year—0.4 percent of GDP, well below the 2.5 percent benchmark and just a fraction of Vietnam's \$39 billion. Remittances contribute \$33 billion,

**The cost of dependence is already high for Bangladesh. The trade deficit drains reserves, while heavy export concentration increases volatility during global downturns, especially given reliance on garments. Political leverage tilts away from Dhaka as water disputes undermine agriculture and energy imports limit industrial flexibility.**

or 6.03 percent of GDP—twice the safe 3 percent limit—making the economy exposed to shifts in host nations' policies. Geographically, Bangladesh shares 76 percent of its borders with India and depends on the sea for 93 percent of trade, leaving it vulnerable to regional naval influence.

Water disputes with India add another dimension of risk. The two countries share 54 rivers, but between 1997 and 2016, Bangladesh received less than its treaty-mandated share in 65 percent of critical dry periods. In March-May alone, India fell short in 39 of 60 cases. Under the Ganges Water Treaty, dry seasons in 2010 and 2016 saw 44 to 49 percent less water than agreed. These shortages have tangible effects, reducing 20 percent of fisheries income and undermining about 5 percent of GDP linked to sea-

based activities.

Maritime security is equally weak. With nearly all trade conducted by sea, the vulnerability is stark. Over a recent five-year period, 411 fishermen were killed and 1,000 were injured by maritime criminals. Defence spending is just 1.4 percent of GDP, well below the regional average of 2.5 percent, leaving significant gaps in deterrence and rapid response.

Looking across the indicators, Bangladesh scores only 2 out of 10 in economic diversification, when at least 7 is needed. Its top 20 products make up 80 percent of exports, compared to 37 to 59 percent for countries such as China, India, and Vietnam. Energy dependency is another glaring weakness—80 percent of energy is imported, with security metrics rating the country at 2 out of 10. Diplomatic flexibility stands at 5 out of 10, against a target of 8, while institutional capacity for independent decision-making is just 3 out of 10, where 7 is desired. Trade diversification scores 4 out of 10, but should be at 7. On average, Bangladesh records a strategic autonomy gap of only 3.7 out of 10.

The cost of dependence is already high. The trade deficit drains reserves, while heavy export concentration increases volatility during global downturns, especially given reliance on garments. Political leverage tilts away from Dhaka as water disputes undermine agriculture and energy imports limit industrial flexibility. The imbalance with India also serves as a potential bargaining tool in bilateral negotiations. Security risks are equally acute: maritime reliance makes almost all trade vulnerable, and porous land borders combined with underfunded defence capacity create layered challenges that affect stability.

Credible analyses underline these risks. UNCTAD and the Harvard Growth Lab point to economic concentration, SIPRI highlights dependence on foreign defence supplies, the IEA and IEEFA stress imported energy reliance, while UN Comtrade and OEC reveal limited trade breadth. Studies from Springer and the Atlantic Council describe cautious multi-vector diplomacy that restricts policy manoeuvrability.

Regional examples show that alternatives exist. Vietnam once faced a similar over-reliance but broke out by diversifying exports and drawing in large volumes of FDI. Singapore, despite its small size and lack of resources, secured autonomy through trade diversification and strong diplomatic networks. South Korea transformed from an aid recipient into an industrial power

with independent decision-making capacity.

The broader picture for Bangladesh is troubling: notable economic fragility, significant geopolitical pressures, and a clear shortfall in strategic independence—hardly the profile of a nation fully steering its own course. Strategic autonomy, in this context, is not a lofty ideal but a necessity. It is about avoiding situations where

external forces—whether markets, neighbouring governments, or supply chain disruptions—can dictate national outcomes. It means loosening the chokehold of export and import concentration, strengthening institutions to make independent decisions, and ensuring defence and energy security.

The urgency lies in the compound nature of the risks. An economic shock

could coincide with a water dispute, or a maritime security crisis could erupt alongside an export downturn. For Bangladesh, the question is not whether to pursue strategic autonomy but how quickly it can achieve it. The data, in all its unforgiving precision, points to the same conclusion: dependence already comes at a high price, and the cost will only rise if the country delays transformation.

বাংলাদেশ পর্যটন করপোরেশন	
ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন	
পর্যটন ভবন, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা-১২০৭। <a href="http://www.parjatan.gov.bd">www.parjatan.gov.bd</a>	
নথি নং-৩০.৩২.০০০০.০৮২.০৭.০২৯.২০১৮/ তারিখ: ০৩/০৯/২০২৫ খ্রি.	
সিএন্ডএফ প্রতিষ্ঠান মনোনয়নের লক্ষ্যে দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি	
২০২৫-২০২৬, ২০২৬-২০২৭ ও ২০২৭-২০২৮ অর্থবছরের জন্য ০২টি সিএন্ডএফ প্রতিষ্ঠান মনোনয়নের লক্ষ্যে দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি	
১ মন্ত্রণালয়	বেসামরিক বিমান পরিবহন ও পর্যটন মন্ত্রণালয়
২ সংস্থা	বাংলাদেশ পর্যটন করপোরেশন
৩ আহ্বানকারী ইউনিটের নাম	ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন্স
৪ তহবিলের ও ব্যয়ের উৎস	বাংলাদেশ পর্যটন করপোরেশন এর নিজস্ব তহবিল
৫ আহ্বানকারী ইউনিটের জেলা	ঢাকা
৬ যে কাজের জন্য দরপত্র আহ্বান করা হলো	বাংলাদেশ পর্যটন করপোরেশন এর আমদানিভাবে বন্ডেড পণ্যসামগ্রী চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর, চট্টগ্রাম এবং হযরত শাহজালাল আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দর, ঢাকা হতে ছাড়করণ।
৭ ক্রয় পদ্ধতি	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি
৮ দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	২১/০৯/২০২৫ খ্রি. (অফিস চলাকালীন)
০৯ দরপত্র জমাদানের তারিখ ও সময়	২২/০৯/২০২৫ খ্রি. বেলা ২:০০ টা। যদি দরপত্র গ্রহণের দিন কোনরূপ সরকারি ছুটি ঘোষিত হয়, সে ক্ষেত্রে পরবর্তী কার্যদিবসে বর্ণিত সময়ে দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে। অসম্পূর্ণ বা ত্রুটিপূর্ণ দরপত্র সরাসরি বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে।
১০ দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	২২/০৯/২০২৫ খ্রি. বেলা ০৪:০০ টা। মহাব্যবস্থাপক, ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন্স, পর্যটন ভবন, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা-১২০৭ এর অফিস কক্ষে দরপত্র দাতাদের সম্মুখে (যদি কেউ উপস্থিত থাকেন) খোলা হবে
১১ দরপত্র বিক্রয়কারী কর্মকর্তার নাম ও ঠিকানা	ক. ব্যবস্থাপক, হিসাব (ভারপ্রাপ্ত), ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন্স, বাপক, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা-১২০৭ খ. উপব্যবস্থাপক (হিসাব), হোটেল অবকাশ, ৮-৩-৮৮, মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১৩
১২ দরপত্র গ্রহণকারী কর্মকর্তার পদবি ও ঠিকানা	ক. মহাব্যবস্থাপক, ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন্স, পর্যটন ভবন, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা-১২০৭ এর অফিসে সংরক্ষিত দরপত্র বাগ্ন এবং খ. ব্যবস্থাপক, হোটেল অবকাশ, ৮-৩-৮৮, মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১৩ এর অফিসে সংরক্ষিত দরপত্র বাগ্ন
১৩ দরদাতার যোগ্যতা	১. দরপত্রের সাথে নিম্নবর্ণিত দলিলাদি দাখিল করতে হবে: ক. হালনাগাদ ড্রেড লাইসেন্স; খ. হালনাগাদ সিএন্ডএফ লাইসেন্স; গ. হালনাগাদ ব্যাংক স্বচ্ছতার সার্টিফিকেট; ঘ. হালনাগাদ ভ্যাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন সার্টিফিকেট; ঙ. হালনাগাদ আয়কর রিটার্নের সার্টিফিকেট; চ. প্রতিষ্ঠানের ঠিকানার সমর্থনে দলিলাদি/চুক্তিপত্র; ছ. বন্ডেড ওয়ারহাউজ এর মাশামাল ক্লয়ারেন্স কাজের ০৫ (পাঁচ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতার সনদ; জ. ঢাকা ও চট্টগ্রাম সিএন্ডএফ এজেন্ট এসোসিয়েশনের দর ও কমিশন প্রতিপালনে অঙ্গীকারনামা; ঝ. বিগত ০৩ (তিন) অর্থবছরে ০৩ (তিন) কোটি টাকার টার্নওভারের ব্যাংক প্রত্যয়নপত্র। ২. কাস্টমস, সিএন্ডএফ এজেন্ট এসোসিয়েশন অথবা অন্য কোনো প্রতিষ্ঠানের কাগজে তালিকাভুক্ত প্রতিষ্ঠান দরপত্রে অংশগ্রহণ করতে পারবে না।
১৪ দরপত্রের মূল্য	৫,০০০.০০ (পাঁচ হাজার) টাকা মাত্র (অফেরতযোগ্য)
১৫ দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার পদবি ও ঠিকানা	মহাব্যবস্থাপক, ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন্স, পর্যটন ভবন, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা-১২০৭
১৬ অন্যান্য তথ্যাদি জানার জন্য যোগাযোগকারী কর্মকর্তার পদবি ও ঠিকানা	ব্যবস্থাপক (সংগ্রহ), ডিউটি ফ্রি অপারেশন্স, পর্যটন ভবন, আগারগাঁও, ঢাকা-১২০৭
১৭ পার্শ্বিক প্রাক্‌উরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮ অনুযায়ী এই সিএন্ডএফ এজেন্ট মনোনয়ন কার্যক্রম পরিচালিত হবে এবং বাংলাদেশ পর্যটন করপোরেশন কোনো কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে এই কার্যক্রম সংশোধন ও বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করে।	
মুহাম্মদ আতাউর রহমান সিস্করী উপসচিব মহাব্যবস্থাপক, ডিএফও ফোন: ০২- ৪১০২৪২২৮ (অফিস)	
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