

What are the current realities of Bangladesh’s economy?



Selim Jahan is former director of the Human Development Report Office under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and lead author of the Human Development Report.

SELIM JAHAN

As we come close to the end of 2025, one question that surfaces quite often is what the current realities of Bangladesh's economy are. It has become even more important in the aftermath of the people's uprising last year, which changed the political, economic, social and cultural landscapes of the country. Over the past few years, the economy has been facing tough challenges. Thus, the question regarding its current state is logical.

The first aspect to consider is the progress the country has made in improving its social indicators and expanding physical infrastructures. The life expectancy in Bangladesh is 74 years (2023), as compared to 72 years in India and 68 years in Pakistan. Child mortality in Bangladesh is 31 per 1,000 live births (2023) compared to 59 in Pakistan and 28 in India. Over the years, Bangladesh has been able to reduce the incidence of both national and extreme poverty, even though they have taken an upward trend in recent years.

Inequality and discrimination are a critical reality of our economy. The benefits of human development, as indicated earlier, were not equitably distributed across the country, between rural and urban areas, or among various socioeconomic groups. There are differences in deprivation as well. For example, while the adult literacy rate (15 years and above) in Barisal division is 73.42 percent, it is only 66.53 percent in Sylhet division, according to the 2022 census. Child mortality among the highest income quintile in Bangladesh is 20 per 1,000 live births, while for the bottom quintile it is 50 per 1,000 live births. The incidence of multidimensional poverty in rural areas is nearly 27 percent, more than twice the rate of 13.48 percent in the urban areas.

Inequalities and discrimination are not only economic; they feature prominently in social, political and cultural arenas as well. Moreover, discriminations occur not only in outcomes; they are built into opportunities too. The poor and marginalised groups are deprived of health facilities and educational opportunities.



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

They have marginal access to resources, credit facilities and digital services. As a result, these groups also encounter deprivation in employment and income. Marginalised people who live on ecologically fragile lands also face different forms of deprivation. Various marginalised groups are deprived on political fronts and their voices, particularly those of the indigenous groups, are not adequately represented at the national level. On many occasions, the issue of discrimination and lack of security faced by religious minorities has been raised in several forums. These go against the fact that all citizens of the country, irrespective of their religion, caste and creed, have equal rights.

Women still face discrimination in

opportunities, which result in unequal outcomes for them. Both within and outside the home, women are subjected to various forms of harassment and violence. Such violence may be physical or mental, they may be domestic and sometimes they result in sexual violence.

Another aspect of the country's economy at present is the worsening quality of outcomes. Often, we hear that impressive progress has been made in the education and health

Agricultural and manufacturing production has not reached its desired level as yet. The adverse impacts of high inflation will continue to negatively impact people's lives.

Currently, the production, savings and investment levels are going through a sluggish phase. With many of its enterprises remaining non-operational at the moment, the RMG sector is in a bind. The foreign direct investments are not coming forth as expected,

If this trend continues, malnourishment is likely to rise among this group, particularly affecting children.

Power and energy problems are expected to continue as a challenge as well. On the one hand, high electricity generation cost is a concern, while on the other, huge power and energy subsidies are also an issue. Adopting power generation treaties without competitive bidding and excess dependency on imported inputs for power generation increase the energy cost. Absence of timely coordination and depreciation of the taka have contributed to the increased cost too. The huge subsidies provided to the power and the energy sector are enjoyed by the rich and powerful section of society. About 54 percent of the power and energy subsidies go to the top 40 percent income group.

Some existing fundamental structural impediments will pose a hindrance to the economy's future progress. For example, even if some improvements are observed in the financial sector, a lot more still needs to be done to ensure economic disciplines and norms in the sector. A culture of transparency and accountability has yet to take root in the economy. There have also been some improvements in the banking sector, but problems still exist in terms of bad loans, inadequacy of credit, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, weak management, etc. A lack of policy and implementation coordination among different sectors of the economy is still prominent. In coming days, sluggish revenue generation may appear as a challenge for Bangladesh as well.

The global economy is projected to suffer from sluggish growth for a while, the effect of which will be felt in Bangladesh too. First, in the absence of countermeasures, the US tariff hikes are likely to slow down exports from Bangladesh to the developed world. Second, if the LDC graduation takes place as scheduled (November 2026), the country will lose some of the trade benefits it has enjoyed as an LDC. It will have to be prepared to tackle these new challenges. Third, the ongoing wars and political tensions in various parts of the world will have their impacts on our economy too.

These are some of the realities facing Bangladesh's economy at present. Though formidable, these are not impossible to overcome. With commitment, proper priority setting, national preparedness, focused policies and strategies, the economy can be steered towards its desired goals.

The Great British blame game of flags and fury



MIND THE GAP

Barrister Noshin Nawal is a columnist for The Daily Star. She can be reached at nawalnoshin@gmail.com.

NOSHIN NAWAL

London, September 2025. Word of an assault by a migrant in Essex gets out, and the nation convulses into protest. Union jacks wave like warning signs, crowds chant about “British culture,” and Premier Inns become warzones in a theatre of patriotic rage. It looks like satire but feels far too tragic: Nigel Farage, who is reportedly on course to become prime minister, makes another curtain call; right-wing groups choreograph indignation; and Bangladeshis, long part of Britain's story, serve late-night kebabs to the very people calling them invaders.

The incident sparked a protest that was fuelled by a potent mix of neoliberal failure and right-wing populism. The result? A country caught in the grip of a fear that is largely manufactured. Dinghies in the English Channel are recast as Viking longships, and teenagers in asylum limbo are treated as threats to civilisation. Colonial Britain once governed

Bengal; today's Britain trembles at a Sudanese teen asking for Wi-Fi. What is truly remarkable is not the outrage, but the ideological bullet that feeds it. Right-wing populism provides the fury and flags. Neoliberalism—the system that dismantles social services and turns homes into investment assets—sets the stage. And migrants? They are the scapegoats for a nation in decline. The National Health Service (NHS) collapses under decades of underfunding, but the Bangladeshi porter is blamed. Wages stagnate due to deregulation, but the immigrant Uber driver is accused.

Enter, stage right, the panto villain who never leaves: Nigel Farage. Whether dressed in UKIP, Brexit Party or Reform UK regalia, his message never changes: Britain is under siege, and only Nigel sees the threat. Less a politician than a political franchise, Farage recycles his script endlessly: pint in hand, sneer at the ready, blaming the outsider for every crack

in the national pavement. Operation Raise the Colours, the latest outburst of nationalist performance art, saw a hundred thousand march through London. Flags flew from mobility scooters and council flats alike. It felt more like a clearance sale at Poundland than a defence of heritage. Polyester bunting, after all, will not fix train delays, housing shortages or the NHS.

Even Keir Starmer, typically allergic to theatrics, declared the protests “the fight of our times.” That is either a terrifying misdiagnosis or an honest admission that political leadership in Britain now revolves around distraction. Because if asylum seekers are causing a national crisis, then the country is not in decline; rather, it is in delusion. Here lies the deeper tragedy: neoliberalism caused the crisis, and populism sold the lie. Austerity gutted communities. Deregulation outsourced livelihoods. Privatisation turned schools, transport, and healthcare into profit machines. But the public, frustrated by real suffering, is handed convenient villains: migrants who neither designed the system nor benefit from it.

The Bangladeshi diaspora is well-acquainted with this dance. From Brick Lane to Leicester's factories, they have fed, clothed and transported Britain. Once treated with suspicion, now taken for granted, their integration is undeniable. Chicken tikka masala is hailed as the national dish, but its originators are still framed as intruders. Today's kebab seller is tomorrow's

cultural icon—just don't tell the protesters. Globally, it is the same story. Giorgia Meloni in Italy defends “Christian Europe.” Trump's wall still lingers in American fantasy. Sweden and Germany resurrect their far right every election. Across the West, neoliberalism fails to deliver security, and migrants become scapegoats in a pantomime designed to distract from policy disaster.

The hypocrisy is glaring. Protesters scream “Britain is full” while riding in Uber cars driven by immigrants. They lament “drains on the NHS” as Nigerian nurses and Indian doctors carry the night shift. They wave flags outside Bangladeshi-owned shops before popping in for crisps. It is not an invasion; it is integration. But facts rarely survive in a rage march. This theatre has no intermission. The script is old: cut public services, sow resentment, blame the outsider. Politicians chant “secure our borders,” ignoring that housing is unaffordable not due to asylum seekers but because council homes have been sold off. The NHS is buckling under neglect, not migration, and wages are stagnant because the system was built that way.

The irony is delicious, if bleak. Colonial Britain exported its values at gunpoint. Now, Little Britain imports its labour while decrying foreign influence. Protesters rage outside Travelodge, seemingly unaware that without the diaspora, Britain would fall apart.

There is a reason this pattern feels familiar. The Irish, the Windrush generation, the South

Asians—all were once blamed, then relied on, then retroactively embraced. Britain has a tradition of vilifying the newcomer, then quietly depending on them. Today's refugee is tomorrow's key worker. And that is the final punchline: the protests are not about security or culture, they are about illusion. The illusion that Britain's decline can be blamed on outsiders. The illusion that patriotism lies in bunting, not policy. The illusion that Farage-style populism offers solutions when it only recycles enemies.

While right-wing rhetoric boils over, Bangladeshi communities quietly run food banks, work night shifts, and fill the gaps left by decades of austerity. They know Britain better than the protesters do, because they have lived through suspicion, survived the cycles of blame, and still show up to keep the country running. The real emergency is the political cowardice and the refusal to admit that Britain's decline was homegrown, certainly not imported.

So, Britain marches, flags in hand, chanting at shadows. Farage reappears on cue. The diaspora rolls its eyes and gets on with it. And the country limps forward, stitched together not by nationalism, but by the invisible hands it keeps trying to swat away. Immigrants did not break Britain. Neoliberalism did. Instead of fixing it, populism just handed out pitchforks, and no amount of polyester bunting will ever stitch the nation back together.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

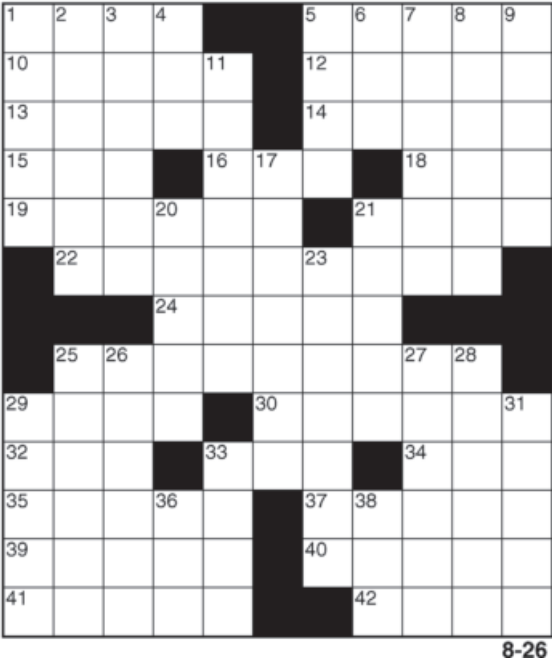
- 1 In _____ (lined up)
- 5 Friendly seniorita
- 10 Fence supplier
- 12 Copier need
- 13 Floor worker
- 14 44th president
- 15 They hold power
- 16 German article
- 18 Vault part
- 19 Close relative
- 21 Phoenix team
- 22 Half of a trattoria dinner
- 24 Accra's nation
- 25 Half of a trattoria dinner
- 29 Old German capital
- 30 White Rabbit's cry

- 32 Goof
- 33 Chowd down
- 34 Price add-on
- 35 Rough guesses
- 37 River through Nantes
- 39 Touch base
- 40 Boom type
- 41 Winter gliders
- 42 Stadium group

DOWN

- 1 Top story
- 2 Horned beasts
- 3 Prepares for a bodybuilding competition
- 4 Tiny
- 5 Heaps
- 6 Angry group

- 7 Bored by routine
- 8 Zodiac twins
- 9 Swift horses
- 11 Hauler's haul
- 17 Occupy
- 20 “Cosmos” writer
- 21 Barn section
- 23 Tooth layers
- 25 Human
- 26 Incense
- 27 Bilingual woman, maybe
- 28 Be the lead of
- 29 Outdoes
- 31 Suits
- 33 Nile reptiles
- 36 Vase item
- 38 Punch-in-the-gut response



THURSDAY’S ANSWERS

S	A	B	L	E		B	A	B	A	R
C	R	A	I	G		E	R	A	S	E
R	A	S	P	Y		J	E	S	S	E
A	B	E		P	R	E	S	S	E	S
P	I	C		T	O	W		A	T	E
S	C	O	T		T	E	R	M	S	
		M	I	A		L	A	P		
	S	M	A	R	T		G	L	O	B
S	E	A		T	E	A		I	R	A
L	A	N	S	I	N	G		F	A	R
A	N	D	E	S		A	L	I	C	E
S	C	E	N	T		P	E	E	L	S
H	E	R	D	S		E	G	R	E	T