

# The Daily Star

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## Don't normalise violence against women

### Expand support services, ensure justice for victims, and end child marriage

The outcome of a recently unveiled national survey on violence against women, jointly conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is truly depressing. It's a shameful reflection of the deep-rooted discriminatory mindset of not only policymakers but also society in general. Perhaps the survey's most shocking, if not entirely surprising, finding is that most offenders are those whom victims usually trust: close family members, intimate partners, or husbands. It also paints a grim picture of marital relationships, with three out of every four women saying they have experienced some form of intimate partner violence.

Our policymakers need to take a hard look at the underlying causes of the persistent and appalling trend of physical and psychological abuse of women. One key factor behind its normalisation is the feudal notion of so-called family honour, which restricts or discourages women from speaking out about the violence they face. The survey found that two in every three women never shared their experiences with anyone. Covering 27,476 women aged 15 and above nationwide, the survey shows how violence continues to affect women in every social group, including those living in slums, disaster-prone areas, and women with disabilities.

Another deeply worrying finding is that 62 percent of survivors of such violence are girls aged between 15 and 19—either victims of child marriage or barely above the legal age limit. This fact alone should raise alarm, as it reflects the failure of national initiatives to prevent child marriage. These young women will likely bear the scars of marital violence for years to come, as it inevitably affects their family lives and mental and physical well-being.

The survey—the third national study of its kind, following earlier rounds in 2011 and 2015—exposes the distressing reality that, instead of seeing improvements in women's safety over time, their suffering continues apace. It is also deeply concerning that state support for victims of violence remains so inadequate and ineffective that more than 51 percent of women do not know where to report abuse. Although the authorities have introduced some special programmes, including the telephone helpline (short code 109) and One-Stop Crisis Centres (OCCs), awareness of these support services remains alarmingly low. Less than 16 percent of women apparently know about the helpline, while only 2.2 percent have heard of the OCCs.

This state of affairs is unacceptable. To prevent the widespread violence against women, the government must intensify its campaigns to raise awareness about available state support, expand and strengthen the support services, ensure justice for victims, and redouble efforts to eradicate child marriage. Sociocultural organisations must also step up and build strong social resistance against all forms of violence targeting women and girls.

## CCC must play the role expected of it

### Address the myriad problems facing Chattogram residents

Chattogram city has long been grappling with a host of problems exacerbating the plight of its residents. Despite spending an estimated Tk 10,000 crore to address the waterlogging crisis over the past eight years, the city still goes under water during heavy rainfall. Its drains and canals remain clogged with waste, hampering the drainage system, while frequent flooding during monsoon often turns its open drains and canals deadly. Adding to the city's woes, there has been a sharp rise in mosquito-borne diseases this year. Against this backdrop, it is unfortunate to learn about the Chattogram City Corporation's (CCC) struggle to clean its 1,600-kilometre drainage network and 57 canals apparently due to a lack of modern machinery.

Reportedly, while the government has approved a long-pending CCC project to purchase essential equipment for this purpose, the approval came with a condition that 60 percent of the funding would come as a loan and 40 percent as a grant. Already burdened with debt, the CCC is reluctant to take on additional loans. The mayor argues that the organisation is a service-oriented body, not a commercial entity, and therefore should not be required to operate under commercial loan terms that involve paying interest. However, the government has urged the CCC to become more self-reliant and accept the loan.

While ideally the CCC should be a self-sustaining entity with its own sources of income, this is not the case in reality. It primarily carries out development activities with funds received from various projects, while only a small portion of its income comes from holding taxes and other sources. The CCC's ability to increase revenue or obtain grants is also dependent on the approval of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives. But the project in question being an important one for the city, we think the authorities should find a way to address funding shortages through proper discussion among the parties involved.

At the same time, the CCC must fulfil its responsibilities properly. Its inefficiency or neglect in carrying out basic duties—such as keeping the city clean, addressing the mosquito menace, covering open drains that frequently cause fatal accidents, and regularly cleaning drains and canals under its jurisdiction—is deeply unfortunate. The corporation also has a history of delaying development projects for indefinite periods, a practice that should no longer be tolerated. Experts have repeatedly criticised its failure to properly maintain the city's vital waterways and highlighted serious flaws in project implementation. Going forward, this must change. Moreover, the persistent lack of coordination among various government agencies, which continues to worsen the city's waterlogging problem, must be urgently addressed.

# Why the 2025 Nobel prize in economics matters for us



## MACRO MIRROR

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## FAHMIDA KHATUN

This year's Nobel Prize in economics went to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt for explaining how innovation creates sustained prosperity. It is a prize for a particular way of seeing growth: as a restless, experimental process that constantly replaces old technologies, firms, and even mindsets with better ones. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences honoured the trio "for having explained innovation-driven economic growth," with half the prize awarded to Mokyr "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress," and the other half to Aghion and Howitt "for the theory of sustained growth through creative destruction."

At its core, their combined contribution is putting dynamism at the heart of economics. Joel Mokyr demonstrates how a culture that prized useful knowledge and tolerated disruption transformed scientific insight into practical technologies, while Aghion and Howitt provide the mathematical foundation for this story: a model in which new ideas displace incumbent technologies, thereby increasing productivity over time, even as they unsettle the status quo. The press release and scientific background from the Nobel committee make the complementarity of their work plain: Mokyr explains the historical turning point that made continuous improvement possible; Aghion and Howitt show how, once that engine is running, competition, incentives, and policy shape its speed and direction.

Mokyr, in his seminal books *The Lever of Riches* (1990), *The Gifts of Athena* (2002), and *A Culture of Growth* (2016), argues that Europe's Industrial Revolution did not happen by chance or because of coal or colonial wealth. Rather, it was the result of what he calls an "Industrial Enlightenment"—a period when people began to value practical, useful knowledge. This included both scientific understanding (theory) and hands-on skills (know-how). The two began to reinforce each other: science inspired better tools and machines, while the problems faced by inventors and craftsmen inspired new scientific discoveries. Once this continuous exchange began, innovation became self-sustaining. Mokyr shows that, in earlier times, bursts of creativity faded because societies lacked institutions that encouraged experimentation and accepted failure.

Aghion and Howitt, on the other hand, took Joseph Schumpeter's evocative phrase "creative destruction" and made it operational. Schumpeter was one of the most influential economists of the early 20th century. Aghion and Howitt's 1992 *Econometrica* paper, "A Model of Growth Through Creative Destruction,"

formalises an economy where firms climb a quality ladder by innovating, and every innovation replaces the old one, taking business away from existing firms. Growth, therefore, arises within the economy itself, driven by the motivation to stay ahead and earn profits from new ideas. But this process involves a delicate balance. If policymakers protect established firms too much, they discourage new ideas and competition. On the other hand, if inventors are not protected enough, they lose the incentive to invest in innovation.



Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt won the Nobel Prize in economics this year for explaining how innovation creates sustained prosperity.

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The Nobel Committee's background paper explains the basic idea of their model. Economic growth happens through gradual, step-by-step improvements in technology. Innovators get temporary rewards, such as patents, for their discoveries. The overall economic growth depends on how effectively resources like labour and capital move from old technologies to new ones. Over time, this framework has been expanded to study many modern issues, including competition policy, trade, taxation, and inequality, and to design social protection systems for workers losing jobs to technological change.

Furthermore, the "creative destruction" model helped economists examine growth in the real world. The model shows that innovation and competition are closely linked. When companies compete to produce better ideas or products, productivity and living standards rise. This theory has helped researchers understand how competition, trade, research, and development-friendly policies can boost long-term growth while shaping debates about how much governments should support innovation through tax incentives or subsidies, and how workers,

and automation. The Nobel Committee emphasised a key lesson from the laureates' work: that long-term progress depends on constant renewal. Economics must allow new ideas and firms to emerge, even if that means replacing old ones. However, innovation can be sustainable only if people are protected through fair competition, education, and social safety nets. In other words, growth and inclusion must go hand in hand.

These ideas are highly relevant for Bangladesh. Over the past three decades, garments, remittances, and entrepreneurship have powered the country's growth. However, it now faces the challenges of a middle-income economy while experiencing limited export diversity, energy shortages, urgency to move up the value chain, and pressure to cut carbon emissions. A Schumpeterian view suggests that Bangladesh should focus on dynamism itself, making it easier for new firms to enter, for weaker ones to restructure or exit, and for technologies to spread across all sectors. The key lessons for Bangladesh from this year's Nobel Prize in economics are discussed below.

First, encourage fair competition. The Aghion-Howitt model shows

that competition drives innovation. When a few powerful players dominate the market, new ideas struggle to grow. Bangladesh needs a stronger competition authority, fair public procurement, and transparent regulation so that smaller or newer firms can compete on equal terms.

Second, invest in practical knowledge, in line with Mokyr's emphasis on "useful knowledge," combining scientific ideas with practical skills. Bangladesh should strengthen technical and vocational training, link universities with industries, and support engineering and innovation at the factory level. Without this connection, imported technology will not translate into productivity gains.

Third, support innovation, not protectionism. Industrial policy should encourage experimentation, not preserve outdated industries. Incentives and subsidies should be time-bound and focused on emerging areas like green textiles, pharmaceuticals, IT services, and sustainable manufacturing. Protecting inefficient firms only slows progress.

Fourth, protect people. Workers displaced by technological change should be helped through training, re-employment programmes, and portable benefits. As Aghion argues, social protection makes innovation politically acceptable. For Bangladesh, this means aligning skills programmes with future-oriented sectors like green energy and digital services.

Fifth, stay open to the world. Openness to trade, ideas, and people is essential for innovation. Mokyr's historical research shows that knowledge grows through exchange, not isolation. For Bangladesh, predictable trade policies and openness to global collaboration are vital for upgrading its economy.

Three sectors where Bangladesh can apply these lessons are presented here. First, the garment industry must adopt advanced technologies and design capabilities to move up the value chain. Policies should reward firms that innovate through automation, digital design, and waste reduction, and allow underperforming ones to exit or merge to raise overall productivity.

Second, the financial sector must be disciplined. When poor-performing firms continue to receive easy loans, better ones are starved of capital. Completing banking and bankruptcy reforms will help move money and resources from less productive to more innovative uses. Third, Bangladesh should strengthen research and innovation networks by linking universities, industries, and training centres. As Mokyr argues, the greatest progress happens when science and practice feed each other. Encouraging young engineers and researchers to solve real industrial problems will help create that culture.

At a time when automation and artificial intelligence are transforming economies, the Nobel laureates' work offers both caution and hope. For Bangladesh, the message is to nurture learning, create open space for innovators, and ensure that the gains of growth are shared by all.

# Gen-Z discontent in Asia can affect geopolitical shifts



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## K.M. ARSHAD

South and southeast Asia, in recent years, has become a focal point for large-scale uprisings that have overthrown regimes, exposed deep-seated frustrations, and triggered major political shifts.

Although the protests—Sri Lanka's Aragalaya protests, Bangladesh's 2024 July uprising, Nepal's Gen Z revolution and Indonesia's anti-corruption protests—differ in their immediate causes, they share common roots in economic despair, governance failures, and a generational demand for accountability. In Sri Lanka, decades of poor economic management, such as unsustainable tax cuts and reckless money printing, created a devastating debt trap with foreign reserves falling to mere billions while debt repayments soared. The country's 2022 debt default, its first since independence, triggered unprecedented inflation, shortages

of essentials, and a sharp economic contraction. Likewise, Bangladesh, despite its impressive growth trajectory, experienced widening inequality, with a youth unemployment rate of 13.54 percent and inflation, which eroded purchasing power. In Nepal, youth unemployment exceeding 20 percent, coupled with widespread anger at the extravagant lifestyles of political elites amid public hardship, drove discontent. Indonesia's protests, though initially sparked by police brutality, were underpinned by economic anxieties from rising food inflation and austerity. These crises were both structural and cyclical and rooted in corruption, nepotism, and failures to meet basic needs.

The protests represent a wholesale rejection of entrenched elites and dynastic politics. In Sri Lanka, the Rajapaksa dynasty, once hailed for

ending the civil war, came to symbolise corrupt authoritarianism. The Aragalaya movement, after successfully ousting President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, also revealed the fragility of leaderless protests when establishment figure Ranil Wickremesinghe reasserted institutional power. Bangladesh's July uprising led to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, whose regime was infamous for nepotism and cronyism. Nepal's protests, initially sparked by a social media ban, grew into a sweeping indictment of the entire political class symbolised by the torching of parliament and leaders' residences. Indonesia's protests targeted not only police brutality but also a wider culture of impunity and elite privilege. Furthermore, young people, especially students, have emerged as powerful voices for meritocracy, accountability, and fairness in these protests. Also, social media both mobilised movements and became a target of government repression, as seen in Nepal's platform bans. Yet, such repression often backfired, intensifying public outrage and broadening the base of support for these movements.

These upheavals also carry significant geopolitical ramifications. South Asia has long been a battleground for India-China rivalry, and political unrest is reshaping those

dynamics. India's billions in credit lines have deepened Sri Lanka's dependence and China's reluctance to cooperate on debt restructuring initially did not help. Bangladesh's predicament could compel it to recalibrate relations with Western nations and regional powers, particularly if prolonged unrest affects its garments sector, which accounts for over 80 percent of its exports. Nepal's unrest could invite greater involvement from both India and China, each seeking to influence its political trajectory.

Looking ahead, the future paths of these countries remain uncertain. Sri Lanka's new leadership will have to navigate debt restructuring, governance reform, and the lingering pressures of Aragalaya. Bangladesh must rebuild public trust in its institutions while tackling the economic pressures that have already cost billions. Nepal faces the challenge of reforming governance to address widespread disillusionment, particularly among the youth, and to combat corruption. Indonesia's government, though initially responsive to parts of the protesters' demands, will need to pursue long-term reforms to avert further unrest. Regionally, whether these movements succeed or fail will determine if South Asia advances towards greater accountability and prosperity or regresses into repression and instability.