

## An inevitable verdict

It may provide some closure for the victims

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 has sentenced deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death for crimes against humanity committed during the mass uprising last year. The tribunal has also sentenced former police chief Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Manan, who is a state witness and has pleaded guilty, to five years' imprisonment. The case concerns the brutal killing of what the UN estimates to be around 1,400 protesters during the July-August uprising.

Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death on two charges. She received the death penalty for Charge 4, concerning the shooting and killing of six unarmed protesters in Dhaka's Chankharpul on August 5 last year. Charge 5 relates to the shooting of six student protesters in Ashulia on the same day—five of whom were later burned after death, while the sixth was allegedly set on fire while still alive.

Hasina was also sentenced to imprisonment until natural death for making inflammatory remarks and ordering the use of deadly weapons against protesting students. Under Charge 2, she was found guilty of ordering the killing of student protesters through the use of helicopters, drones, and lethal weapons. According to the tribunal, Asaduzzaman was sentenced to death on two charges. Prosecutors filed five charges against the accused, including failure to prevent murder, amounting to crimes against humanity under Bangladeshi law. They also asked the tribunal to confiscate the assets of all three defendants, if convicted, and distribute them among the victims' families.

The court's conclusion regarding Sheikh Hasina's superior command responsibility in the execution of the atrocities by subordinates, including the police forces, has been well established. The UN Human Rights Commission's report also corroborates this. Videos, verified by international organisations and media, of law enforcers and security forces shooting down unarmed protesters have evidenced the brutal and deliberate use of excessive force. The deaths of small children who happened to be in the line of fire when security forces shot from helicopters have been widely reported by the media, including our own paper. Audios of telephone conversations provide further reinforcement of the allegation that the former PM, along with her aides, was complicit in planning the crackdown and instructing subordinates to carry it out in the cruelest way. As the tribunal has found, none of the accused took any steps to prevent the atrocities committed by law enforcers, nor did they take any measures against them after the fact. Given such compelling facts, the verdict was inevitable.

For the families of the martyrs, as well as the thousands of protesters who have been permanently disabled by the horrific shootings during the uprising, the verdict against the former prime minister and former home minister may provide some measure of closure. We hope that, as the cases under the ICT continue, all legal steps are taken for the sake of transparency and fairness.

## Rise in fertility rate concerning

Govt needs to revise its policies for population control

The rise in the country's fertility rate, as revealed in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025, should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers. After decades of remarkable progress, bringing the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) down from 6.3 in 1975 to 2.3 by 2012, the rate has now increased to 2.4. This reversing trend is worrying. Experts warn that without effective family planning and population policies, it could negatively impact the country's economy, education, health, and overall development.

The survey shows that contraceptive use among married women has fallen from 62.7 percent in 2019 to 58.2 percent, while access to modern methods has also declined, with 73.5 percent of women's needs met, compared to 77.4 percent in 2019. Moreover, the rise in fertility occurs alongside some other worrying social indicators. For instance, child marriage, though reduced to some degree over time, still remains alarmingly high. Reportedly, the rate of child marriage among girls under 18 in Bangladesh is still 56 percent, which is unacceptable. Moreover, the number of adolescent girls aged 15-19 who have already had children has risen sharply, from 83 percent in 2019 to 92 percent. Teenage childbearing is clearly one of the major contributors to the rising fertility rate.

The survey also highlights some meaningful progress in health and nutrition. For example, institutional deliveries have risen to 71 percent, and skilled birth attendance has reached 77 percent, marking significant improvements in maternal health. The under-five mortality rate has fallen from 40 to 33 per 1,000 live births, while infant mortality has improved from 34 to 29 per 1,000. These gains show that well-designed interventions can deliver results, giving hope that renewed efforts in family planning can reverse the current trend as well.

We, therefore, urge the government to revise its family planning programmes and policies and take coordinated action across ministries. It must immediately strengthen its family planning services, including ensuring an uninterrupted contraceptive supply, rebuilding outreach networks, and restoring strong community-level engagement. Preventing child marriage must also be prioritised, with necessary support systems and incentives to keep adolescent girls in school. Awareness campaigns targeting young couples, especially in poverty-affected areas, are equally essential. Without such urgent interventions, the decades of progress made in population control and management risk being undone.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Push-button telephones come to market



On this day in 1963, the first push-button (Touch-Tone) telephones debuted in the United States, eventually replacing most rotary-dial models.

# EDITORIAL

## It is time Bangladesh pursued inclusive growth



### MACRO MIRROR

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article are the author's own.

#### FAHMIDA KATUN

Emerging from the ruins of the war of independence in 1971 with a devastated economy, Bangladesh has gradually transformed into a vibrant lower-middle-income country, which is poised to graduate from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status in November 2026. Over the years, factors such as remittances, exports, agriculture, small enterprises, microfinance, and the increasing participation of women in the labour force have played crucial roles in poverty alleviation and improving several human development indicators of the country.

Yet, behind the success lies an emerging set of concerns. Income inequality has increased, urban poverty is becoming more complex, and a series of external shocks, including the pandemic, the Ukraine war, global price volatility, climate impacts, and persistent inflation, have revealed deep-rooted structural vulnerabilities. For Bangladesh, the issue is not about the rate of growth, but whether growth can be inclusive.

Bangladesh's fight against poverty has indeed been one of its notable achievements. Rural households gained from expanded irrigation, the adoption of high-yielding crop varieties, better connectivity, and the growth of non-farm enterprises. Women's employment, particularly in the ready-made garment sector, provided millions with stable incomes and greatly increased their independence. Microfinance institutions helped poor households smooth their income, invest in livestock or small shops, and send their children to school. Remittances from migrant workers offered financial stability to rural families.

However, poverty reduction faces specific limitations. Nationwide, 85 percent of workers are employed in the informal sector, characterised by limited job security and a lack of social protection, which makes households very vulnerable to shocks. High inflation, particularly food inflation, has decreased real incomes, causing many families that had escaped poverty to fall back below the poverty line or remain just above it.

Inequality, meanwhile, continues to grow in noticeable ways. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022, the national income Gini coefficient increased from 0.482 in 2016 to 0.499 in 2022, indicating that

income distribution is becoming more unequal. The HIES 2022 shows that the richest of the rich—the top five percent of households—possess 30.04 percent of the total national income, while the poorest of the poor—the bottom five percent—hold just 0.37 percent. In 2016, the top five percent's income share was 27.82 percent, whereas that of the bottom five percent was only 0.23 percent of the total national income.

Besides, urban-rural disparities remain significant. Cities are expanding through higher-

unpredictable rainfall, and flash floods. In recent years, while severe and prolonged flooding in rural areas has led to local food shortages and price hikes, low-income households in urban areas also struggled with high food prices, reducing their food intake or meal quality. The paradox today is that Bangladesh often has enough food supplies nationwide, but poor households cannot always afford enough food due to inflation, low incomes, and weak market governance.

Although Bangladesh has a social protection system with around 120 programmes, including old-age allowances, widow benefits, food assistance, and employment support, the effectiveness of this system remains limited. Spending on the social safety net (SSN) accounts for less than two percent of Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, the SSN allocation accounts for only 1.87 percent of the national budget for the fiscal year (FY) 2026. However,

suggests that inequality tends to rise during early development as economies shift from agriculture to industry, and then decline as more people gain access to education and modern employment opportunities. However, recent evidence indicates that inequality does not necessarily fall automatically. Since the 1980s, inequality has increased in many countries due to skill-biased technological change, financialisation, declining labour bargaining power, globalisation without adequate compensation, and the concentration of wealth among elites. Markets alone cannot address inequality. Policy decisions such as taxation, social protection, labour laws, education, and regulatory measures impact distributional outcomes.

Besides, the "capability approach" introduced by Nobel Laureate economist Professor Amartya Sen in the 1980s shifted the concept of poverty from simple income deprivation to a broader understanding encompassing health, education, empowerment, and agency. The multidimensional poverty framework, now widely adopted globally, emphasises that poverty involves multiple disadvantages, such as poor schooling, unsafe housing, malnutrition, lack of access to clean energy, and social exclusion. Factors like gender, ethnicity, geography, and social class all influence who remains in poverty.

Viewed from these perspectives, Bangladesh's dual reality becomes evident. The country has made considerable progress, but the foundations of inclusive development remain uneven. Bangladesh must now emphasise not only the pace of growth but also its quality, inclusiveness, and resilience.

That means investing heavily in education and skills so that young people from all backgrounds can access more productive work. It involves promoting meaningful jobs in manufacturing and services across all cities and lagging regions beyond Dhaka. It also entails adopting a more progressive tax system where the wealthy pay a fairer share to fund public services. Additionally, it includes modernising food markets and employing digital tools to improve transparency in procurement, stocking, and distribution. Finally, it means incentivising private investment in climate-resilient agriculture through salt-tolerant seeds, flood-tolerant rice, efficient irrigation, storage, and insurance.

And most importantly, it involves recognising that poverty and inequality reduction, and food security cannot be tackled in isolation. These issues are interconnected and must be addressed through a coherent strategy rooted in equity, good governance, and strong institutions.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

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Meanwhile, food security shows a mix of progress and new risks. Bangladesh has more than doubled its food grain output in the past 30 years, thanks to advances in agricultural research, irrigation, and policy incentives. However, food security depends as much on access as on availability. Climate change now poses the greatest threat to that access. Agricultural land is endangered by rising salinity, coastal inundation,

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