

# How Bangladesh's economy is cannibalising its own future



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Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina frequently claimed that Bangladesh was a "market economy." But is it? A market economy is, by definition, a capitalist economy guided by prices, competition, and supply-and-demand dynamics. Yet, Bangladesh has never operated as a genuine market economy or functional capitalist system. Nor is it a hybrid of the two. It belongs to a different category: corrupting capitalism. Understanding this distinction is essential because labelling the system incorrectly blinds policymakers and citizens to the true sources of stagnation and inequality.

Ideally, roughly 60 percent of national income should flow to labour through wages, benefits, and social contributions, while about 40 percent should flow to capital for profits, depreciation, reinvestment, and innovation. This equilibrium can sustain worker purchasing power and provide businesses with the resources needed to modernise and remain competitive. When this 60/40 balance holds, even a capitalist can be deemed as efficient and even compassionate. When it collapses, both labour welfare and long-term growth will deteriorate.

In market capitalism, productive resources are privately owned, and decisions about production, pricing, and allocation are guided primarily by supply and demand. Capital and labour flow naturally toward high-return activities because incentives reward efficiency, innovation, and risk-taking. The invisible hand functions only when institutions ensure transparency, enforce contracts, and punish illicit behaviour. None of these factors operate reliably in Bangladesh.

Although private enterprises operate on the surface, the core levers of opportunity are controlled not by competition but by political access, administrative discretion, and entrenched rent-seeking. Licensing, procurement, customs clearance, taxation, port operations, land registration, and credit allocation—every essential interface between citizens and the economy is mediated by bureaucratic power and political patronage. Prices may be set in the marketplace, but entry, survival, and profitability depend on informal payments, political networks, and navigating layers of extraction.

Within such a system, the 60/40 architecture collapses instantly. Labour never receives anything close to its rightful 60 percent; wages are suppressed because corruption in every step of production inflates nonproductive costs. Capital fails to retain the 40 percent needed for reinvestment because profits are siphoned off through bribes, political tolls, extortion, overpriced contracts, syndicate fees, and hidden commissions. The result is neither capitalism nor socialism but a predatory fusion—corrupting capitalism—where corruption is not leakage but a dominant production input.

In Bangladesh, corruption is systemic and foundational. It structures incentives, allocates resources, determines winners, and sustains political arrangements. Market forces become secondary; informal power becomes primary. Efficiency does not determine outcomes; connections do. Taxes do not reliably fund public goods; inside deals fund political loyalty. Growth may occur, but it remains fragile and uneven because it is

built on extraction rather than productivity.

No sector exposes Bangladesh's corrupting capitalism more starkly than the denim industry. Producing a single denim item requires nearly 3,000 litres of groundwater. In a functional capitalist system, such extraction would require environmental permits, monitoring, and compliance. In Bangladesh, many factories drill illegal deep wells and extract groundwater at zero cost

hidden pipelines.

The consequences are devastating. Untreated effluent—thick, blue, acidic, and toxic—is discharged directly into the Buriganga, Turag, Dhaleshwari, Bangshi, and Shitalakshya rivers. Once-vibrant ecosystems have turned into chemically scorched wastelands. Oxygen levels collapse; fish populations disappear; riverbeds accumulate toxic sludge.

This is not a market failure; it is environmental plunder masquerading as industry. The world enjoys inexpensive denim because Bangladesh pays with poisoned rivers, depleted aquifers, degraded soil, and damaged human lives. Denim becomes a metaphor for corrupting capitalism: the country's natural and human resources are the silent subsidies that sustain production. The recent discovery that marine fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal have collapsed by nearly 80 percent in just seven years further illustrates how corrupting capitalism devours natural resources when regulation becomes negotiable.

The denim case reveals the deeper moral collapse of Bangladesh's economic system. In compassionate capitalism, the 60/40 structure supports social trust, innovation, and reinvestment. In Bangladesh, corruption pulverises all these pillars.

Labour's share collapses because wages are suppressed by informal payments embedded throughout production. Capital's share collapses because profits are diverted into political rents rather than reinvestment. Environmental protection collapses because enforcement is negotiable. Innovation collapses because extraction rewards compliance with power, not creativity or efficiency. Institutional trust collapses because every rule, permit, and inspection can be bought. This produces a self-reinforcing cycle: corruption breeds inefficiency, which then demands more corruption to remain profitable, locking the economy in a low-trust equilibrium.

Finally, the future collapses because the nation somehow—in broad daylight and in the dark of night—cannibalises nearly all its productive resources: its rivers, ocean, groundwater, and even its people. Bangladesh is therefore neither a market economy nor a compassionate capitalist system, and not even a hybrid of the two. It is an economy in which natural and human resources are trapped in a downward spiral created by the system, yet struggling to sustain and seeking rescue.



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

because every clearance—environmental, hydrological, laboratory, or operational—can be bought through bribery.

Water used in denim processing becomes a chemical mixture containing heavy metals, synthetic dyes, caustic soda, chlorine bleaching agents, microplastics, and carcinogenic compounds. By law, this wastewater must be treated in Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs). In practice, operating an ETP is expensive, while bribing inspectors is cheap. As a result, many ETPs operate only during staged audits; otherwise, they remain idle or are bypassed through

The damage spreads far beyond the water. Farmers irrigate fields with polluted river water, contaminating soil and crops. Fish, livestock, and vegetables absorb heavy metals and persistent toxins. Communities face rising rates of kidney disease, neurological disorders, skin ailments, reproductive harm, respiratory illness, digestive complications, and cancers linked to industrial pollutants. This silent public health emergency is the hidden cost behind the country's export earnings in the denim industry, paid by the poor who have no voice in regulatory enforcement.

# What the killing of eight puppies reveals about us



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They say human beings are the finest creation, gifted with intellect, conscience, and that elusive thing called morality. It is a comforting thought, repeated in sermons, textbooks, and political speeches. But the comfort evaporates the moment one looks at what this supposedly superior species does to the voiceless lives that share the world with them. A civilisation is most truthfully measured not by its GDP nor by its highways and flyovers, but by how it treats its weakest dependents. If that is the scale, we may soon need to stop calling ourselves superior and start applying for probationary status in the moral universe.

The story began with several cats in Dhamondi whose eyes were gouged out, a scene so disturbing that even strangers online felt their hearts clench. Before the outrage could settle, another cat's throat was slit open for allegedly eating fish in Bogura. The cruelty required no motive beyond the perpetrator's ability to act without consequences. A fishing cat, an endangered species, was brutally killed by a fishing spear by a man in Chaudanga. There have been incidents of burning living, breathing cats inside cages, migratory birds trapped and shot, and countless unnamed animals disappearing without a record.

What makes these events unbearable is not only their brutality but also the uncanny normalisation that follows. The perpetrators roam freely, sometimes even justifying their actions with impeccable shamelessness. A society that once took pride in its warmth and generosity now produces spectacles that would disturb even the sternest stoic. One wonders whether compassion is becoming an endangered species, trailing closely behind the animals we keep erasing from the map.

None of these incidents, however, prepared the nation for the story of two mothers, one of human children

and another of eight newborn puppies. The dog carried out her maternal duties, nursing and guarding her puppies in a corner of the upazila nirbahi officer's residence in Ishwardi. However, the actions of Nishi Rahman, who is the parent of two kids, made her title of "mother" tremble under its own weight. She killed the eight puppies by stuffing them into a sack and throwing them into the water.

Nishi reportedly claimed she was protecting her own children.

The logic, if taken seriously, would imply that violence is justified as long as the victim does not belong to one's own species.

Yet even basic knowledge of animal behaviour suggests that dogs raised in the same neighbourhood become protectors rather than threats. Fear is not the real explanation here. Indifference is. The kind of indifference that grows slowly in societies where moral education is weak, legal enforcement is weaker, and empathy is treated like an optional trait instead of a necessity.

Across literature and history, animals have often shown more loyalty than humans who claim to be superior. The stories of Fido in Italy and Hachiko in Japan stand as monuments to devotion. Fido waited fourteen years for a master who never returned. Hachiko kept returning to Shibuya Station long after his master had died. Their loyalty became a lesson for nations. Statues were erected. Stories were preserved. Children were taught to honour companionship.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, stray dogs are chased, beaten, poisoned, and treated as disposable obstacles. The contrast is embarrassing. It suggests that the failure is not in the animals but in us. Many are born human, but not all remain humane as they grow.

Perhaps the real question is not whether animals deserve our compassion. The real question is whether we deserve the title of superiority when we fail the simplest

test of moral maturity. A society that treats animals with cruelty eventually turns that cruelty inwards. Violence never stays confined to one species. History is full of examples.

If human beings wish to retain

their cherished title, they must earn it. Not with words or slogans, but with the simple act of choosing kindness where cruelty is easy, of protecting the vulnerable where indifference is convenient, of seeing value in every

life, even the lives that do not speak our language. Only then can we claim to be more than just another species with superior tools. Only then can we begin to resemble the humans we so proudly insist we already are.

## গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমর্থিত  
সেবা জোরাবরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম

মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রালয়

৩/৩, ইক্সটন গার্ডেন রোড, মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর ভবন, ঢাকা-১০০০

তারিখঃ ২৩ অগ্রহ্যান ১৪৩২

০৮ ডিসেম্বর ২০২৫

## মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়ার দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রালয়ের আওতাধীন মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিকার কর্তৃক বাস্তবায়নীয় "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমর্থিত সেবা জোরাবরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্পে "মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়ার জন্য আওতাধীন মাসিক প্রতিশ্রুতি তৈরি কর্তৃত আইনোন্নীত বাস্তবায়ন কর্মসূচীর অন্তর্ভুক্ত আছে।

১. মহিলাগামী/বিভাগের নাম	মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রালয়
২. বাস্তবায়নকারী সংস্থার নাম	মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রালয়
৩. সংগ্রাহক সংস্থার নাম	প্রকল্প পরিচালক, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমর্থিত সেবা জোরাবরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প
৪. সংগ্রাহকের জেলা	ঢাকা
৫. কাজের নাম	প্রকল্পের কর্মক্ষণের মাধ্যমে এবং দার্তকারিক অন্যান্য দায়িত্ব পালনে ব্যবহারের জন্য ১টি মাইক্রোবাস মাসিকভাবে প্রতিশ্রুতি তৈরি
৬. গাড়ীর সংস্কৃতি বিবরণ	২০১৯ বা তদুর্ধৰ মডেলের ১টি এসি Original Dual AC Supper GL (Toyota HAICE) মাইক্রোবাস ভাড়া (উত্তরপাশে কমপক্ষে ৪টি দরজা এবং ১১ আসন বিশিষ্ট)।
৭. দরপত্র পদ্ধতি	উন্নত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি
৮. দরপত্র আহারের সূত্র ও তারিখ	মহিলা/মরিবি/মরিবি/শাশ্বিতসেজেকুরেটিকা/১৫/২০২৫-৬২; তারিখ: ০৮/১২/২০২৫
৯. দরপত্র প্রকাশের তারিখ	০৯/১২/২০২৫
১০. তহবিলের উৎস	(জিওবি)
১১. দরপত্র সিডিউল মূল্য	প্রতিটি সিডিউলের মূল্য ১০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা মাত্র (অক্ষেত্রে যোগাযোগ কর্তৃত আছে)।
১২. টেক্সার সিডিউলিটি	যে কোন তফসিলগত ব্যাক হতে ১,৫০,০০০/- (এক শত পঞ্চাশ হাজার) টাকা মূল্যামানের ব্যাকে ট্রাকটেল/পে-অর্ডার
১৩. দরপত্র সিডিউল বিভাগের সময়সীমা	১৪/১২/২০২৫ হতে ২৩/১২/২০২৫ তারিখ বিকাল ০৫ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত
১৪. দরপত্র সিডিউল বিভাগের স্থান	প্রকল্প পরিচালকের দ্বারা, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমর্থিত সেবা জোরাবরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, ৩/৩, ইক্সটন গার্ডেন রোড (৪৪ তলা), মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর ভবন, ঢাকা- ১০০০
১৫. ক) দরপত্র সাধিকারের তারিখ ও সময়সীমা খ) দরপত্র বাস্তু বক্সের তারিখ ও সময়সীমা	২৪/১২/২০২৫ তারিখ বিকাল ১০:০০টা পর্যন্ত
১৬. দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	২৪/১২/২০২৫ তারিখ বিকাল ১২টা, প্রকল্প পরিচালকের দ্বারা, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমর্থিত সেবা জোরাবরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, ৩/৩, ইক্সটন গার্ডেন রোড (৪৪ তলা), মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর ভবন, ঢাকা- ১০০০
১৭. দরপত্রাত্তর যোগ্যতা, শর্তবদী এবং প্রয়োজনীয় কাগজগুলি	দরপত্র সিডিউলে উল্লেখ রয়েছে।

অনিবার্য কারণবশত: দরপত্র সাধিকারের দিন/খোলার দিনে অফিস বন্ধ থাকিলে পর্যবেক্ষণ কার্যদর্শনে একই স্থানে ও একই সময়ে দরপত্র গ্রহণ ও খোলা হবে।