Volume 11
Issue 6
November 1, 2024

SANEM
Thinking Aloud

Editor's Desk

The theme of the November 2024 issue of Thinking Aloud is "Reform Challenges in Bangladesh". The first-page article, "Crony capitalism in Bangladesh: stifling investment and growth" analyses the economic landscape of Bangladesh over the last decade, which has been defined by deepening crony capitalism. Examining various economic sectors, the article remarks that crony capitalism is deeply ingrained and has hindered the possibility of a truly dynamic and inclusive economy that Bangladesh could have attained. The article concludes that, unless the structural issues creating and sustaining crony capitalism are resolved, a propitious investment climate cannot be achieved and sustainable economic development through broad-based domestic and foreign investment cannot be ensured. The second, third, and fourth pages of this issue present three more articles. The second article titled "The structural issues facing RMG sector in Bangladesh" pointed out the structural issues which endanger the sector's competitiveness in the long run. The article remarks that without significant reforms and a commitment to stability, Bangladesh risks losing its competitive edge in the global apparel market. The third article titled, "Navigating the Global Innovation Index: Strategic directions for firms and industries in Bangladesh" remarks that the GII score of Bangladesh reflects a mixed narrative—steady although constrained progress in certain innovation sectors, and systemic challenges in others. The article reiterates that the GII 2024 provides a roadmap for Bangladesh's transition from small-scale innovation enhancements to becoming a regional innovation leader. The fourth article titled, "Necessity of child protection in Bangladesh" remarks that the cost of not protecting our children from various challenges is often intergenerational. The article contemplates that, the massive loss that is occurred by not protecting them far outweighs the cost of protecting the children. The fourth page showcases the events of October 2024.

Inside this issue

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Crony Capitalism in Bangladesh: Stifling Investment and Growth

Selim Raihan

During the last decade, in the immediate past Awami Leagues' government, the economic landscape of Bangladesh had been defined by deepening crony capitalism - a situation in which business success is not defined by competitive advantage but by political connections and favouritism. Crony capitalism dented the economic landscapes and discouraged the growth of private investments from both domestic and foreign fronts. At the heart of crony capitalism lies the fact that business entities that enjoy intimate company with political elites always turn out to be at an undue advantage. These advantages range from preferential access to government contracts and resources to leniency in regulation and tax exemptions.

The quintessential example is the banking sector, in which a few politically connected conglomerates grabbed a disproportionately large amount of loans by showing little or no collateral. Lack of proper regulatory oversight resulted in increased nonperforming loans, which now stand as one of the major potential risks to the financial sector's stability. Furthermore, there were instances of a high level of contractual agreements within the power and energy sector, with firms having obvious political connections, irrespective of their doubtful feasibility or efficiency, especially regarding IPPs.

Crony capitalism essentially cannot avoid giving more undue privileges to the chosen few in business at the cost of a majority section of private investors. This uneven playing field thus discourages genuine entrepreneurs who do not have any political connections from competing effectively owing to stifling innovation and competitiveness. SMEs, or small and medium enterprises, which are crucially important for employment generation and diversification of the economy, usually cannot scale up because of exclusion from lucrative markets dominated by politically connected firms.

This is not easy for foreign investors either. Foreign investors are avid to invest in those sectors that offer high growth possibilities, but they keep away because the playing field is never really level. A lack of transparency in regulatory matters and the threat of arbitrary policy changes persisted, which prevented the emergence of a favourable business environment for foreign investors. This is one of the reasons why foreign investment didn't register pace in Bangladesh.

The strong sway of crony capitalism kept the general business climate unconducive for most private investors. Inefficiencies in regulatory mechanisms and bureaucracies, along with non-transparency of systems, posed serious problems concerning doing business. For example, essential permits, licenses, and approvals took a long time and involved excessively high costs unless moved by political patronage.

Besides, the legal regime related to the protection of intellectual property rights and the enforcement of contracts remained weak, a fact that is of primary concern for both local and international investors. In a nutshell, without strong legal protection, companies risk losing their investments or intellectual property to powerful competitors who could utilise their political networks for their benefit.

Several policies and practices were tailored to benefit politically connected businesses at the expense of the broader economy. The banking sector saw a lot of new licenses, many of which were given to politically connected businesses, which therefore enjoyed preferential credit access, leading to increased NPLs. Defaults were all over the place on account of less than adequate due diligence, with hardly any consequence for the high-profile large defaulters. And once more, tax evasion was a common feature, with selective enforcement allowing politically linked businesses to escape through waivers and amnesties. In the power sector, independent and quick rental power producers were given privileged treatment on account of political connections, while mega projects of infrastructure construction were usually awarded in a nontransparent manner to politically favoured companies. Real estate dealings had preferential land allocations while strong groups manipulated the stock market. Politically connected industries benefited from export incentives and trade policies, which disadvantaged smaller competitors. This dominance of crony capitalism in Bangladesh was facilitated by a strong "anti-reform coalition" among corrupt political elites, corrupt business elites, and corrupt bureaucrats.

One of the more disquieting features of the form taken by crony capitalism in Bangladesh was the degree to which its politically connected businesses were able to influence the policymaking phenomenon often referred to as "state capture." It allows cronies to shape laws, regulations, and policies in their favour. Examples of state capture include those in industries such as telecommunications, RMG, banking, real estate, and energy, where major policy decisions were doled out to a few select players.

The policy distortions favouring cronies led to an economy that is less diversified and more dependent on a few sectors dominated by a handful of influential players. This concentration of economic power stifled competition by raising barriers for new entrants and inhibited the growth of sectors that could otherwise drive economic diversification and sustainability.

Corruption in Bangladesh had been all-pervasive and acted as a facilitator for the emergence and consolidation of crony capitalism. Paying bribes or kickbacks had been a common practice for receiving contracts, as well as for hastening bureaucratic processes or evading regulatory fines. Such an atmosphere discouraged ethical business practices, besides increasing the cost of doing business for those who do not indulge in corrupt practices.

Corruption didn't stop there. It siphoned off the wealth from the public sector since money that would have been used to build infrastructure, healthcare, or schooling was instead spent on self-serving interests. It misallocated resources that ought to be contributing to inclusive economic development.

The solution to the problem of crony capitalism needs to be multi-faceted. In the first instance, there needs to be a far greater commitment to the rule of law. Anti-corruption measures have to be enforced; regulatory bodies must be given full independence to do their job without any kind of political interference. In that way, enterprises will have equal opportunities to compete with each other, where success will be determined by competence and competitiveness rather than by political relationships.

Secondly, the processes of government procurement and policy formulation should be made more transparent. E-procurement systems reduce personal contact between businesses and officials, thereby reducing avenues for corruption. Besides, the policies should aim at encouraging fair competition, innovation, and investment across all sectors, not just chosen sections.

Third, the institutions involved in monitoring the financial system need more strengthening. Banking regulations have to be tightened, and Bangladesh Bank must have the authority as well as resources to enforce compliance without discrimination. The non-performing loans will require not only financial restructuring but are also underlined for future fresh lending to be based on full transparency and risk-based criteria.

It is equally important to outline a culture of accountability among political leaders and business elites, and they must be made accountable for unethical practices, while at the same time, civil society organizations must be encouraged to raise their voices for greater transparency and reform. A strong legal framework that punishes corrupt practices and protects whistleblowers would go a long way in undermining the structures of crony capitalism.

Crony capitalism is deeply ingrained and has gotten in the way of the possibility of a truly dynamic and inclusive economy that Bangladesh could have attained. Unless the structural issues that create and sustain crony capitalism are resolved, a propitious investment climate cannot be achieved and sustainable economic development through broad-based domestic and foreign investment ensured. Only meaningful reforms could unshackle the economy, which is a prerequisite for the journey of the country to an equitable and prosperous future.

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The structural issues facing RMG sector in Bangladesh

Eshrat Sharmin

The RMG sector has been a significant driver of economic growth since the early nineties in Bangladesh. The sector accounts for more than 80% of Bangladesh's export earnings and employs around four million workers relying on low-cost labor as a competitive advantage in the global market. However, the sector faces some structural issues which endangers its competitiveness in the long run. In this context, the sector requires in-depth examination regarding these issues in the context of competitor countries and the recent socio-political advancements for undertaking key takeaways.

According to various studies, the RMG sector's development has been facilitated by a "political settlement" between government and business elites, aligning economic benefits for owners with political stability through employment generation. This settlement has supported keeping wages low to maintain Bangladesh's competitive advantage. However, this has also cemented a cycle of labour unrest, as workers' demands are persistently sidelined, and minimum wage adjustments rarely match inflation or living costs. International attention on Bangladesh's RMG sector peaks only during tragic incidents, such as the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, but systemic issues persist in daily operations. For starters, the ongoing labor unrest, which has been a chronic issue for the past decades, highlights the fragility of this sector. Workers have protested against low wages, unsafe working conditions, and the suppression of their rights, leading to factory closures and disruptions in production. This unrest is exacerbated by a backdrop of political instability, with an interim government tasked with the gigantic task of maintaining order and addressing the root causes of discontent among workers.

The RMG industry started with small factories as it was easy to set up a small garment factory: one could establish a factory by renting space, buying 50–100 sewing machines, wiring up the factory for electricity, hiring and training the workers, getting a contract for a small order of simple garments, and going to work. However, even after four decades, long working hours, low wages, lack of regular contracts, and systemically hazardous conditions persists in the sector. Absence of contracts helps the owners not to provide proper compensations while laying off workers, or work-related injuries, even deaths. Furthermore, arbitrary cases in times of protests hampers way forward to peaceful collaborative solutions. Trade unions face considerable repression, with union organizers often experiencing intimidation or violence. This suppression hinders workers from securing better wages or improved working conditions, leading to a fragile industrial relations climate. The inability of unions to advocate effectively leaves workers vulnerable and strengthens the employer's position, as reflected in the minimal improvements in wage structures over the years. Furthermore, taking advantage of the lack of strong unions, vested interest groups driven by political motives manipulates the conflicts.

Another major issue facing the industry is the low productivity of workers which the sector mitigates through longer working hours. This low productivity refers to the lower skill level due to lower education level and lower level of automation in the production process. Currently, less than 15% of operations in Bangladesh's RMG sector are mechanized, which is significantly lower than that of competitors like Vietnam. On that note, Bangladesh's investment in research and development (R&D) within the RMG sector is particularly low, with factories allocating only about 2% of their expenditures to research and development activities. Moreover, many mid-to-senior management personnel in this sector lack the necessary skills to uplift efficiency in critical production areas, such as sewing. This skills gap prevents the workforce from achieving optimal productivity levels. On the contrary, Vietnam's workforce is often considered more skilled due to better training and educational systems, which contributes to its ability to produce higher-value garments compared to Bangladesh's focus on basic apparel.

While looking at the competitors further, Cambodia's garment sector faces similar challenges in terms of wages but has made strides with its structured, tripartite minimum wage adjustment system. Regular wage reviews involving government, employers, and unions help in creating a more balanced environment. Although there are still challenges, the presence of structured negotiations has allowed for more stable industrial relations compared to Bangladesh. Vietnam offers relatively higher wages and has better productivity, in part due to a strong focus on efficiency over long working hours. This shift attracts a more stable workforce and minimizes excessive unrest, positioning Vietnam as a key competitor. Indonesia has implemented a wage adjustment formula based on GDP and inflation, which is more predictable and aimed at reducing labor disputes. This method is a potential model for Bangladesh to consider, as it bases wage adjustments on empirical economic data, although it is not without criticism from unions.

Moving forward, first, the sector ought to establish stronger, more autonomous trade unions, which would be essential for creating balance in wage negotiations and peaceful collaborative solutions. This shift might include establishing wage-setting boards with true worker representation to foster more regular wage adjustments in line with living costs. Second, emulating Indonesia's model, where wage adjustments align with GDP and inflation, could make wage changes more transparent and prevent abrupt demands for wage hikes due to inflationary pressures. Third, developing a robust regulatory framework and investing in compliance mechanisms can protect workers and minimize the reputational risks tied to poor labor conditions. This could include strengthening Bangladesh's Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) to enforce safety standards more effectively.

Addressing the underlying causes of unrest and mitigating the structural issues are essential for restoring confidence among international buyers and ensuring the sector's long-term viability. Without significant reforms and a commitment to stability, Bangladesh risks losing its competitive edge in the global apparel market.

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Navigating the Global Innovation Index: Strategic Directions for Firms and Industries in Bangladesh

Afia Mubasshira Tiasha

Innovation elevates productivity by bringing in novel concepts, methods, and technological advancements that contribute to efficacy. That results in higher production from the same or fewer inputs, which is essential economic growth. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) publishes the Global Innovation Index (GII), which ranks countries based on their innovation capabilities and outcomes, taking into account institutions, human resources, and creative outputs. It has seven pillars that offer a comprehensive framework for evaluating global innovation performance, as well as two sub-indices: Innovation Input and Innovation Output.

In the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2024, the score of Bangladesh reflects a mixed narrative—steady although constrained progress in certain innovation sectors, and systemic challenges in others. In addition, out of the 133 economies, Bangladesh stands at 106 positions. Furthermore, Bangladesh ranked 22nd out of 38 lower-middle-income economies. As a result, there is a pressing need to bridge the gap between its desires for economic expansion and the generation of innovative ideas. In this context, it is essential to comprehend the state of innovation in Bangladeshi firms and industries to determine how to get over these challenges and propel forward advancement.

The GII assesses countries using a range of indicators that fall into two primary groups: innovation outputs and inputs. While Bangladesh ranks 112th in innovation inputs, it has performed better in innovation outputs, ranking 90th. This disparity reveals a crucial component of Bangladesh's innovation ecosystem: although the country can produce innovative ideas, it finds it difficult to establish an atmosphere that encourages long-term innovation.

In addition, Bangladesh is ranked considerably lower by the GII in categories like business sophistication (126th) and human capital and research (128th). These areas are directly related to the aptitude of businesses and sectors to conduct research and development, integrate cutting-edge technology, and create environments that are conducive to innovation. Additionally, limited participation in global value chains, the lack of R&D partnerships with universities, and an absence of knowledge network integration are the primary hurdles at the firm level. Expenditure on research, education, and skill development is still low in Bangladesh.

While discussing innovation in contemporary sectors, access to digital infrastructure is essential, but instead, Bangladesh performs poorly in terms of fixed broadband and 5G access. Digital transformation requires better connectivity, especially as Bangladesh aims to boost its low-level, stagnant high-tech exports. To integrate data analytics, increase operational effectiveness, and link with global value chains, firms require a strong digital infrastructure. Accelerated investment in broadband infrastructure is necessary to ensure that businesses and industries outside of urban areas are not left behind, even if the government's "Digital Bangladesh" initiative has made an impact. However, furthering this involvement at the corporate level is now a challenge, particularly in sectors like manufacturing, agribusiness, and textiles which are the foundation of the economy of the country.

A potential solution for tackling the disparity involves expanding funding for advanced industries such as automation, artificial intelligence, and sophisticated procedures for manufacturing. For instance, firms in the garment industry may leverage automation technology and more advanced digital supply chains to reduce inefficiencies and increase their competitiveness. In a similar vein, agribusiness firms may employ precision agricultural technologies to boost crop yields and resilience, potentially promoting economic growth and innovation.

With a business sophistication score of 126th, Bangladesh requires immediate action to improve knowledge absorption, innovate connections, and stimulate the growth of knowledge-intensive jobs. Constraints without immediate remedies may prevent firms engaging in advanced research and development, even for activities that have been regarded as beneficial to innovation, such as R&D collaborations with foreign or academic partners. Creativity in innovation clusters, coupled with collaboration among firms, universities, and governments, are prerequisites to develop sophisticated skills. These clusters help organizations in leveraging their R&D efforts and bringing innovations to market. To optimize knowledge-sharing, these clusters should concentrate on sectors where Bangladesh excels, such as digital finance, clean energy, and textiles.

The expansion of Bangladesh's venture capital market is necessary to allow startups and small-to-medium businesses (SMEs) to undertake risks, invest in new technology, and develop. This might create a source of funding for high-growth companies by offering incentives for private equity investment in emerging industries.

Bangladesh, which ranks 128th globally, is also experiencing a significant human capital crisis. Limited funding for education, particularly in STEM disciplines, and a shortage of skilled labour slow down industry innovation. Better education and vocational training are essential to produce a workforce capable of working in high-value industries, research, and entrepreneurship.

Moreover, the problem of missing or outdated data, especially in the high-tech, education, and research and development sectors, is a key revelation from the GII 2024 report. Nine of the indicators in Bangladesh have out-of-date data, while thirteen indicators have missing data. This dearth of reliable data makes it more difficult to accurately evaluate Bangladesh's capacity for innovation as well as for businesses and governments to identify those areas that need adjustment. A more robust innovation ecosystem can be fostered by making well-informed policy decisions, which will require strengthening the data infrastructure.

In addition, Bangladesh's 108th-ranked institutional quality emphasizes the necessity of changing regulatory frameworks to foster an atmosphere that is more conducive to business. Businesses frequently encounter administrative roadblocks and a lack of well-defined, uniform policies that foster creativity. Innovation potential in businesses could be greatly increased by streamlining the patenting and intellectual property protection processes, cutting red tape, and improving governance.

The GII 2024 provides a road map for Bangladesh's transition from small-scale innovation enhancements to becoming a regional innovation leader. Firms and industries in the country need to work more to encourage innovation, even though they are efficient at transforming innovation inputs into outputs. This will require higher R&D expenditures, more sophisticated business operations, and a workforce skilled to use new technologies. By utilizing sectoral strengths and addressing structural shortcomings, Bangladesh can realize its full innovation potential. Ultimately, this would improve the country's long-term economic growth and competitiveness globally.

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Necessity of child protection in Bangladesh

Sheikh Tausif Ahmed and Md. Tuhin Ahmed

Demographically, Bangladesh is a comparatively young country with an expanding youth population. The 2022 census reported that- 63.76% of the population is aged 34 or under, while 38.64% is aged 19 or under. According to the nationally representative Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, almost 35.6% of the population are children aged 0 to 17. This youthful population gives Bangladesh the golden 'demographic dividend' period, where it can rip the benefits of large young age population to drive its economic growth. The children who are outside of the workforce, will continue this trend of demographic dividend for a significant amount of time in the future. Creating a sustainable future, thus, depends on facilitating proper growth for children. Children require more than just good nutrition. They need nurturing environment & protection from harm when they are vulnerable.

However, in Bangladesh the reality is different. The children face severe neglect, even going as far as being abused. According to the MICS 2019, over 45 million children under the age of 14 endure regular violence at home, and 7% of children aged 5 to 17 are working as child labourers. Hazardous child labour has serious implications, with children being 1.4 times more likely to experience psychosocial problems and 6 times more likely to drop out of school. Additionally, 51% of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18. According to UNICEF, every week, over 20 children die as a consequence of extreme violence and abuse which is intimately linked to child vulnerability. The HIES surveys indicate that poverty and vulnerability are higher among households with children. So, children are disproportionately poverty-affected. According to UNICEF, millions of children are living on the streets and are out of school. Online space isn't safe for children either, about 20% of the children expressed that they were abused online.

The cost of not protecting our children from these conditions is often intergenerational. They may not manifest themselves immediately. Rather, they are expressed through the adults that the children become. If not taken care of during their developmental years, a child may grow up to be a problematic adult. They could also, in turn, impose violence on their children & this cycle continues. One study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) & Child Fund Alliance has shown that the cost of violence against children is almost USD 7 trillion globally. Estimates put the cost of violence between 2-8% of the global GDP. Among these costs, direct costs are incurred through- medical costs, legal fees, shelters etc. Meanwhile, indirect costs are- loss of wage, permanent physical impairment, psychological costs etc.

Bangladesh has various laws & policies for the protection of children. The Children Act of 2013 is the main legislature for child protection in the country. The law prohibits violence against children & ensures child protection through various measures, such as various degrees of punishment for the perpetrators of child violence. There are also other laws & policies, such as the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (2012), National Children Policy (2011), The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2010) and many others. The problem is with the application & implementation of the policies & laws. Lack of justice against the perpetrators of violence against children allows for the cycle to continue. Ensuring punishment for such offences would work as a deterrence from further occurrences. At the same time, if the government abides by its own policies, it is bound to provide adequate protection for the children.

Early Childhood Care & Development Policy (2013) focuses on the early childhood development of children. It is when the children are most vulnerable and face the most rapid growth. Protection during this period is of utmost necessity. The ECCD policy of 2013 is a dynamic and modern policy in this regard. However, it lacks implementation. Again, the lack of a department for children affairs is showing up as a major issue in this regard. Some NGOs are engaged in child-protection activities. However, the lack of a unified national body is also preventing them from properly coordinating these activities amongst themselves.

Lack of representation on the children's behalf is also a major issue. The constitution of Bangladesh & the Children Act (2013) keeps provision for any measure necessary for child protection; this segment of the population has been neglected by the policymakers largely, so far. The lack of representation on behalf of the children means there is no coherent body to hear their side.

Under the Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA), which is responsible for the protection of both children & women, there is a Department of Women Affairs (DWA), which mainly represents the rights of women. However, there is no separate department for voicing & ensuring children's rights & protection. All of our neighbouring countries, for example- India, Nepal, Pakistan & Sri Lanka have separate departments for children affairs. It is a necessity now to create a separate department for children under the entity of MoWCA. This is going to allow for a representative body for children. Moreover, this department can also work as a liaison between other relevant ministries; such Ministry of Labour and Employment, which works to prevent child labour; and the parliament itself.

Implementing current policies, enforcing protective laws, and addressing critical policy gaps will create the essential foundation for safeguarding children, providing a launchpad for further, more sophisticated interventions that improve their education, emotional well-being, and personal development. The point should be made that- the consequences of failing to protect children are profound; studies indicate that violence against children can erode a nation's future GDP by as much as 8%, while protecting them today would require less than 1% of GDP. When we choose to invest in children's safety, education, and development, we not only foster healthier, more prosperous individuals but also lay the groundwork for a more resilient society and economy. Such an investment in children's futures stands as a powerful commitment to generational progress, and it's a call to action we cannot afford to ignore. By acting now, we not only address immediate needs but also set the stage for lasting benefits that will ripple forward, shaping a brighter, more equitable future for all.

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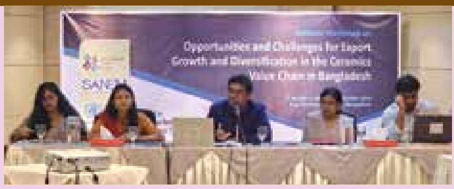
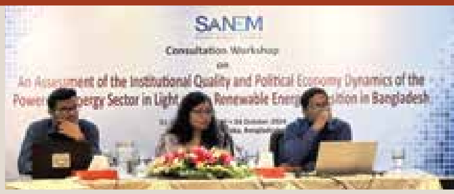
SANEM and ITC hosted three national workshops on export growth and diversification



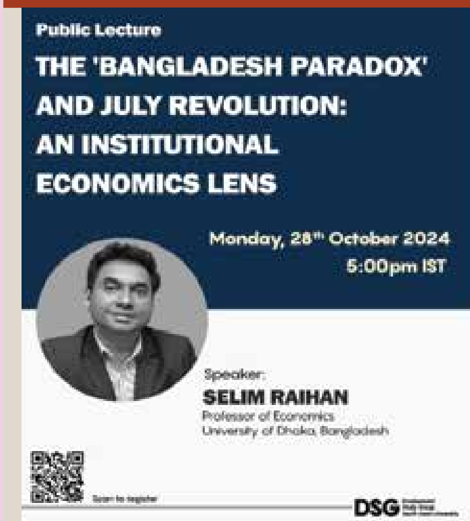
SANEM, in collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC) and UN-OHRLLS, hosted three national workshops on 26 and 27 October, 2024 at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium in Mohakhali, Dhaka. Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics at the University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM, conducted the workshops. On the first day, the workshop titled "Opportunities and Challenges for Export Growth and Diversification in the Apparel & Textiles Value Chain in Bangladesh." explored the critical role of the apparel and textile sector in Bangladesh's economy and key challenges such as LDC graduation, strengthening upstream value chains, and promoting sustainable practices. Participants, including industry leaders and policy experts, engaged in discussions focused on diversifying products, improving input sourcing, and enhancing compliance with international standards. The second workshop titled "Opportunities and Challenges for Export Growth and Diversification in the Processed Food Value Chain in Bangladesh" brought together industry experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss the processed food industry's potential for growth and export diversification. The workshop began with an overview of the processed food sector, followed by engaging roundtable sessions on production challenges, quality compliance, and trade hurdles in the context of LDC graduation. Participants shared valuable insights on key areas such as technology access, regulatory compliance, and sustainable production practices. The discussions provided actionable recommendations to strengthen Bangladesh's processed food sector, focusing on developing a more resilient, diversified, and export-ready industry that can thrive in both local and global markets. The third workshop titled "Opportunities and Challenges for Export Growth and Diversification in the Ceramics Products Value Chain in Bangladesh" gathered industry experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss the ceramics sector's growth potential and its significant export opportunities. Sessions focused on key challenges such as dependency on imports, energy supplies, and the impacts of LDC graduation, alongside strategies to enhance product innovation, sustainability, and compliance with global standards. The discussions generated valuable insights to support the ceramics industry in diversifying products and expanding into new international markets.

SANEM organized two consultation workshops on renewable energy



SANEM in collaboration with the TARA Climate Ltd. organized two consultation workshops on 24 October 2024 at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium in Mohakhali, Dhaka. Mr Md. Tuhin Ahmed, Lecturer of Economics at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University and Senior Research Associate at SANEM conducted the first workshop titled "An assessment of the institutional quality and political economy dynamics of the power and energy sector in light of the renewable energy transition in Bangladesh." Mr Ekramul Hasan, Research Associate at SANEM conducted the second workshop titled "Assessing the investment needs for a transition to renewable energy in the power sector of Bangladesh by 2041." Participants provided valuable insights into funding strategies, emphasized the need for transparency in governance collection, and suggested exploring public-private partnerships.

Dr Selim Raihan delivered a public lecture at South Asian University, New Delhi



Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics at the University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM, delivered a public lecture on "The 'Bangladesh Paradox' and July Revolution: An Institutional Economics Lens" on 28 October 2024. The lecture was hosted by the Development Study Group (DSG), South Asian University, New Delhi, India. The lecture attracted academics, policymakers, and students where Dr Selim Raihan discussed on Bangladesh's economic challenges, institutional constraints, and development path.

Dr Bazlul H. Khondker presented at a national workshop organized by UNICEF Bangladesh and MoWCA

Dr Bazlul Haque Khondker, Professor of Economics at the University of Dhaka and Chairman of SANEM, delivered a presented at a national workshop on the Establishment of the Department of Children Affairs (DCA) under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA). The workshop was held on 9 October 2024 at Bangladesh Shishu Academy, Dhaka. The workshop was chaired by Tania Khan, Director General (Additional Secretary) of Bangladesh Shishu Academy. Ms Nazma Mobarek, Secretary, MoWCA, and Deepika Sharma, OIC Deputy Representative of UNICEF Bangladesh, were present as chief guest and special guest respectively. Key stakeholders exchanged insights & discussed legal frameworks, policies, and operationalization of the DCA.

Dr Selim Raihan was a panelist at the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka

Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics at the University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM, spoke at a panel discussion on 'The Health Sector and Economy of Bangladesh: Prioritizing Strategies to Tackle Key Challenges.' It was organized by the Health Economics Study Alliance (HESA) of the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka at the Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium on 19 October 2024. The panel discussion was moderated by Dr Syed Abdul Hamid, Professor of Institute of Health Economics at the University of Dhaka. Mr Abu Muhammad Zakir Hussain, Chairman, Community Clinic Health Support Trust, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh, Dr Selim Raihan, Dr Sajjad Zohir, Executive Director, Economics Research Group, Dr Rumana Huque, Professor of Economics at the University of Dhaka and Executive Director of ARK Foundation, and Professor Dr Mohammed Shadrul Alam, Pediatric Urologist & Health Economist, Director, Center for Medical Education, Dhaka were present as panelists. Experts delved into innovative solutions and policy approaches to strengthen the nation's health infrastructure and economic resilience.

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SANEM is a non-profit research organization registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms in Bangladesh. Launched in January 2007 in Dhaka, it is a network of economists and policy makers in South Asia with a special emphasis on economic modeling. The organization seeks to produce objective, high quality, country- and South Asian region-specific policy and thematic research. SANEM contributes in governments' policy-making by providing research supports both at individual and organizational capacities. SANEM has maintained strong research collaboration with global, regional and local think-tanks, research and development organizations, universities and individual researchers.

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