

Editor's Desk

The October 2022 issue of *Thinking Aloud* presents articles on labour market challenges, child marriage, FDI, and industrial labour in Bangladesh. The first-page article titled "Policies and strategies to address labour market challenges in Bangladesh" outlines the labour market challenges in Bangladesh. The labour market in Bangladesh faces several challenges, including slow job creation, stagnant female labour force participation rate, high youth NEET rate and youth unemployment rate, and skill mismatches, among others. The article further narrates five sets of policies and strategies to address those challenges. They are undertaking pro-employment policies, long-term investments in job creation, developing market-relevant skills, strengthening labour market institutions, and migration policies. The second and third pages of this issue present three more articles. The article titled "How to preclude the incessant prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh?" contextualises the reasons behind the persistent presence of child marriage, along with its dire consequences, and the way forward for the nation. The article observes the necessity of an institutionalised approach to addressing social norms in addition to direct interventions. The article, titled "Mobilizing FDI for SEZs in Bangladesh", sheds light on the ongoing effort of the government of Bangladesh to attract FDI and construct SEZs as destinations of FDI. The article recommends speedy implementation of SEZs, exploring non-traditional sources of investments, including climate-smart investment, compliance with SDGs, and action-focused, time-bound and targeted investment promotion plan to mobilise FDI. The article, titled "The challenges facing the industrial labour of Bangladesh", discusses the state of the industrial workers in Bangladesh, focusing on minimum wage, occupational hazards, absence of social protection, rising social and economic inequality, and the underlying factors behind these issues. The article stresses the low standard of living experienced by the industrial workers and the inclusion of workers in the policymaking process to mitigate the challenges. The fourth page draws attention to the events that took place in September 2022.

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Policies and strategies to address labour market challenges in Bangladesh

Selim Raihan

The labour market in Bangladesh faces several challenges. The Bangladesh economy has undergone significant structural changes over the last five decades. However, agriculture still holds the largest share of total employment. In the recent decade, despite high economic growth, job creation has slowed down. With increased automation in the manufacturing and services sectors, job creation in these sectors remains a big challenge. The high degree of informal employment in Bangladesh, where the share of informal employment in total employment remains well above 85%, is an immense challenge to ensure decent jobs. The labour force participation (LFP) rate of females, over the past decade, has remained stagnant at around 35%. Also, though the country is passing through the phase of the demographic dividend, the share of youth "not in education, economic activities and training (NEET)" is high, and the youth unemployment rate is excessive. The labour market is characterized by a vicious cycle of low pay, low skill, and low productivity. Quality health and education services are essential for improving labour productivity, but Bangladesh falls behind other countries in providing universal access to these services. Bangladesh has extremely low public spending on health and education relative to GDP, which is a barrier to raising labour productivity. The persistence of poor working conditions, the high rate of rural-urban migration with a significant concentration of migrated labour in the urban informal services sectors, skill mismatches in the labour market, and the outward migration of a sizeable proportion of low-skilled labour are other significant employment challenges. There can be five sets of policies and strategies to address labour market challenges in Bangladesh.

(1) Undertake pro-employment policies: Bangladesh should encourage job creation to promote pro-employment policies that provide adequate jobs for an expanding workforce. The macroeconomic, sectoral and labour policies should work together to achieve four employment objectives: First, 'balanced' employment growth occurs through resolving macroeconomic imbalances, such as excessive imports or high inflation. Second, 'sustainable' employment growth occurs through targeting sectors that can sustain employment in the longrun (structural transformation). Third, 'inclusive' employment growth occurs through targeting sectors that benefit marginalised groups. Fourth, 'decent' employment growth occurs through labour market regulations that simultaneously ensure human capital development and labour conditions that meet the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

(2) Long-term investments in job creation: Long-term investments in job creation should be promoted by creating an environment that supports a robust private sector. To promote a more favourable business environment, governments should enhance legal and financial institutions. Infrastructure improvements and increased interconnectivity will assist cut business costs, while efforts to combat corruption may boost investor confidence. Efforts for the formalization of business enterprises need to be backed up by policies that promote worker's rights, private sector development and social cohesion. Government should engage closely with banks to find ways to offer financial services to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and informal businesses that cannot access financing as they are not registered. As workers are

vulnerable in large informal sectors, which discourages investment, income-generating options should be provided for those who are most vulnerable.

(3) Developing market-relevant skills: Short-term training should be used to assist informal workers in developing market-relevant skills. Entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and managerial skills could all be beneficial; however, realistic economic opportunities for micro-enterprises and self-employment must first be identified. Youth and women's inequalities must be addressed. Unemployment among youth, particularly young women, is high. Youth should be assisted in upgrading their skill sets through gaining access to high-quality technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Self-employment opportunities should be aided through entrepreneurial training and improved credit and savings access. Women's rights in the workplace should be protected by law.

Skills training must satisfy the needs of today's workforce while also preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. Green jobs can be found in the construction of climate-resilient infrastructure as well as the manufacturing of environmentally conscious goods and services. Similarly, the same technology that makes certain low-skill jobs obsolete may also create new jobs that need further training and abilities. The policymakers must anticipate future trends and ensure that the country's education and training systems are aligned with the needs of the future economy.

(4) Strengthening labour market institutions: Strengthening labour market institutions and leveraging data for better job matching will be critical. There is no trade-off between worker protection and economic growth when it comes to labour market reforms. Bangladesh should seek a collectively negotiated level of protection that safeguards workers without sacrificing growth. Reforms should be managed through a strong social dialogue between employers, employees, and the government. Any efforts to loosen labour market restrictions should be complemented by actions to mitigate the negative consequences. Policymakers should be able to increase overall labour law enforcement and extend protections to the country's huge informal businesses.

Reliable and timely labour market data are required for evidence-based policy. The country may want to explore setting up labour market information systems. Comprehensive surveys of formal and informal employment, annual surveys of higher education graduates, and regular industry surveys of business needs would all contribute to this. More efforts are required to assist disadvantaged job seekers in their job search. Both endeavours will necessitate the development of coordinated strategies, resources, and capacity.

(5) Migration policies: Bangladesh should advocate for migration policies that provide possibilities for more skilled workers. Beyond the main destination countries, additional options should be explored for facilitated migration schemes. Improving the quality and accreditation of education will enable migrants to take advantage of their skills while working abroad. A basic legal framework should be defined to broaden the scope of migration programs. This system should make visas, seasonal jobs, and qualification recognition easier. Bangladesh can benefit from migration through remittances, transfers of skills and knowledge, and networks that can lead to entrepreneurship and new markets and which can help reduce informality.

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How to preclude the incessant prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh?

Eshrat Sharmin

Child marriage refers to a marriage in which one or both spouses are under eighteen years old. Despite the strong performance on socio-economic and population fronts, the incidence of child marriage and associated adolescent fertility rate in Bangladesh is among the highest in the world and the highest in Asia. Bangladesh is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), both of which reproves child marriage. The country adopted the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 following the previous act of 1929, which allowed the reporting and filing of cases against the occurrence of any event of child marriage. Moreover, in 2018 the MoWCA undertook the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage (2018-2030). In spite of these efforts, incidence of high child marriages in Bangladesh envisaged that these efforts may not be adequate and hence fresh look into it is needed.

In Bangladesh, the median age of first marriage was 16.3 years in 2018 and more than half of women aged 20-24 years were first married before age 18, whereas 15 percent were married before 15 years of age, according to the MICS 2019 data. The pandemic has exacerbated the scenario. According to MJF reporting, during six months of 2020 more than 13.8 thousand girls were victims of child marriage. Moreover, around half of them were aged 13-15 years. Another UNICEF report said 10 Million more were susceptible due to the pandemic.

Child marriage limits girls' opportunities and harms educational, health and other socioeconomic outcomes. Thereby, the elimination of child, early and forced marriage is one of the key targets of SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) as SDG target 5.3 aims to eliminate it by 2030, but also has substantial direct as well as indirect implications towards other SDGs related to education, health, employment and overall well-being of girl child/women. Meeting the SDG target to end child marriage by 2030, or the national target to end child marriage by 2041, will require political will and stronger actions. According to various calculations provided by UNICEF, the country has to move eight times faster than the rate observed over the past decade to meet the national target. In the case of the SDG target, the country has to move seventeen times faster than the present rate of reduction in child marriage.

Girls with lower education levels, experiencing poverty and having less educated mothers are more likely to be married at a young age than their counterparts. Similarly, lack of birth documentation, enforcement of laws, unawareness of rights, gender inequality, and emergencies such as violence and climate change result in child marriage. Child marriage is mostly concentrated in rural regions and urban slums. Compared to higher than secondary educated girls, the odds of child marriage were several times higher among the girls with a lower level of education. 5.7 percent of women who married after 18 years and 0.6 percent among those who got married before their 18th birthday were found to be engaged in decent occupations. If child marriage can be reduced by 50 percent, we can get 0.45 Million more women employed in high-skilled occupations (professional,

technical or managerial occupations). Nearly one in three child brides have a spouse who is at least a decade older and half of the child brides gave birth before age 18. Married girls are over four times more likely to be drop-outs than their counterparts. Child brides are more likely to say that wife-beating is justified than their peers. Globally, girls who married before the age of 15 were almost 50% more likely to have experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners than those married after 18, disproving the present societal perception of safety from GBV achieved through early marriage. Girls married at young ages are more likely to experience multiple pregnancies, recurrent miscarriage, termination of pregnancy, delivery-related complications, higher rate of child and maternal mortality.

Child marriage is associated with large income and welfare effects as well. According to World Bank analysis from multi-country data, the largest impacts of child marriage in terms of their economic costs tend to be related to fertility and population growth, education and earnings, and the health of the children born to young mothers. For instance, ending child marriage could result in \$4 trillion in additional income globally, through reduced population growth, under-five mortality, and under-five stunting. It will also accompany a 12 percent rise in income and productivity and a 1.7 percent gain in GDP. In Bangladesh, averting single child marriage would benefit from a monetary point of view due to a reduction in maternal mortality, infant mortality, child mortality, hospitalization and inability to work, by \$4328 to \$4336, and total economic benefits in this connection could be \$33.9 billion. According to a 2019 UNFPA-Johns Hopkins study, ending 90 percent of child marriages by 2030 would cost \$35 billion in total, and roughly \$600 to spare each child bride.

According to the literature, various compositions of cash, in-kind, and community-based approaches have been moderately successful in quite a few countries. The research showed the need for complementary interventions to improve the quality of schooling apart from the direct ones. Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks has been cited as one of the several vital strategies that decrease child marriage and increase the age of first marriage. In Bangladesh, despite the presence of law, the persistent occurrences of child marriage indicate the necessity of an institutionalized approach to addressing the social norms in addition to direct interventions. For instance, the integration of community-based approaches in the interventions has illustrated promising outcomes in various African and Asian nations. Moreover, effective implementation of the law can support the interventions further in mitigating the child marriage crisis in the country. Also, the necessity of reliable and updated data on child marriage is crucial to ensure timely interventions and informed policymaking in the right direction.

Informed policies to reduce child marriage will result in social and economic benefits in terms of higher education and earning opportunities for girls, lower pre and post-natal health risks, infant mortality rates and malnutrition, enhanced decision-making authority of women in the household and reduced intimate partner violence which benefit the economy in the long run through lower fertility rates, population growth, poverty and enabling Bangladesh to usher in demographic dividend and equitable growth.

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Mobilizing FDI for SEZs in Bangladesh

Md. Tuhin Ahmed

The importance of attracting higher levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) for Bangladesh is paramount, especially when the country aims to achieve the status of an upper-middle-income country by 2031 and a developed country by 2041. To achieve the targets, attracting FDI in the private sector is crucial as the private sector accounts for more than 75% of all investments in Bangladesh. To streamline the regulatory environment for attracting FDI in the private sector, the Government of Bangladesh initiated a deregulation process that mainly took place between the 1980s and 1990s and continued during the 6FYP and 7FYP but at a slower pace. However, the country's private investment to GDP ratio stagnated at 22-23% over the last decade. Moreover, Bangladesh's FDI to GDP ratio over the last decade was only 1.1%, while comparable nations like Vietnam and Malaysia performed better with 6% and 3.4%, respectively.

Given the stagnant investment scenario in the country, the government has no choice but to explore all potential avenues to attract investment that too on a large scale-both domestic and foreign. It is now evident that export processing zones (EPZs) which came four decades ago are not the best possible route for boosting investment. With a view to enhancing industrialization and employment generation through the process of adequate promotion of trade and investment, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) had been formulated in 1980 and was able to establish only 8 government EPZs and 2 private EPZs so far. However, the EPZ model can not attract enough FDI and export earnings. As estimated by the World Bank (2018), in the two decades until 2017, the EPZs attracted investment of only USD 4.3 billion, contributed to USD 59.4 billion in export earnings and generated employment for 481,000 direct workers. In addition, the focus being on export, the EPZ model was not advantageous to others except manufacturing for exports. Domestic linkages of the EPZ model were also weaker. In order to ensure more domestic participation in the economic zones (EZs), the Government of Bangladesh moved away from the EPZ model and emphasized the establishment of special economic zones (SEZs).

The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) founded in 2010 is regulating the SEZs. BEZA aims to establish economic zones in all potential areas in Bangladesh including backward and underdeveloped regions with a view to encouraging rapid economic development through the increase and diversification of industry, employment, production and export. BEZA's goals are to establish 100 SEZs and generate 10 million job opportunities by 2030. By 2030, it also intends to carry out foster planned (direct and indirect) industrialization by boosting output and exports by USD 40 billion. As per the BEZA brochure of 2021, BEZA confirmed an investment of USD 29 billion (USD 26 billion by BEZA-owned zones and USD 3 billion by private economic zone developers). So far, BEZA approved 97 SEZs, of them 26 industries are in operation and 31 industries are under construction. The SEZs attracted a total of 192 foreign and domestic investors and created 40,000 jobs (BEZA brochure, 2021).

India is a pioneer in developing SEZs in the South Asian region, and it has benefited greatly from the zones' enhanced export growth, higher use of local commodities, and increased job creation. In the

beginning, SEZs in India was governed by the rules of the nation's foreign trade policy, and fiscal incentives were put into force by the rules of pertinent laws and regulations. The idea of making SEZs an engine of economic growth is integrally linked to quality infrastructure complemented by an attractive fiscal package, with the minimum possible regulations. SEZs, with their exclusive legal framework and specialized provisions, can further facilitate investment by providing bypasses to bureaucratic red tape. The static and dynamic effects of the zones, ranging from job creation, export growth and increased revenues to economic diversification, innovation, skill development and technological transfer, can provide new impetus to the economic growth of a country.

Like India, the BEZA is providing multiple incentives to the developers of the SEZs as well as to the manufacturing unit investors. Benefits to the developer of the SEZs include mainly tax exemption. Incentives for unit investors range from the exemption of taxes, and custom/excise duties to non-fiscal incentives such as no FDI ceiling, issuance of work permits and recommendation for residency/citizenship.

To facilitate FDI, the GoB has brought some significant changes in its regulatory space and institutional reforms. In its regulatory space, it is welcoming that Bangladesh has taken several initiatives for the improvement of the business environment such as the introduction of one-stop services for investors, initiate of a national single window, incremental changes in the companies' law etc. With regard to institutional reforms, initiatives undertaken by the GoB includes creating reform action plans, establishing taskforces, coordinating reform initiatives among pertinent government agencies, offering support for reform to line agencies, engaging in discussions with stakeholders in the private sector, and keeping track of reform progress. Standing on this momentum, Bangladesh needs to take some proper steps to mobilize FDI for SEZs.

First, the GoB has so far approved two SEZs under public-private partnership. Expanding PPP opportunities in the country can open the door for FDI, particularly in industries with high risk and protracted returns.

Second, Bangladesh has partnered with the Indian government under government to government economic zone approach of BEZA for three SEZs (Mirshari, Mongla and Kustia). The speedy implementation of these SEZs will increase Bangladesh's exports and improve its trade standards and trade-handling capacity.

Third, Bangladesh should explore non-traditional sources of investments such as new growth sectors that reflect global and future trends, and climate-smart investments which have great promise for the country.

Fourth, in many third-world countries, the liberalized FDI policy has not been able to promote sustained development. Hence, FDIs for SEZs must be compliant with the sustainable development goals of Bangladesh.

Finally, Bangladesh must make every effort to present itself as a top candidate to receive foreign investment. This necessitates developing and putting into action-focused, time-bound, and targeted investment promotion plan.

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The challenges facing the industrial labour of Bangladesh

Omar Raad Chowdhury

The labour force employed in the industrial and manufacturing sector of Bangladesh has been facing a range of issues including low wages, occupational hazards, absence of social protection and rising social and economic inequality across all aspects of life. Since the independence of Bangladesh, industrial labour has been characterized as one of the lowest-wage labour in the world and is often compared to the labourforce of the global manufacturing hub of China. However, it has been the skill level of the industrial workforce that has been mostly in the discussion. Unfortunately enough, there has not been any major policies addressing either the grievances or the efficiency of the workers. Moreover, workers have had to resort to certain demonstrative actions, some of them even violent, to voice their legit concerns and demands.

In this context, it is high time that policymakers and concerned parties took a serious look at the issues affecting the industrial labour and make headways accordingly. As Bangladesh is set to graduate from the LDC status in 2026, the industrial labour will play a key role in the further progress of the country. Without ensuring the agency and voice of the industrial labour, the country will continue to be mired in a sorry state where disincentivised workers will be pushed to the depth of misery.

To begin with, we should take a look at the issue of minimum wage. The minimum monthly wage of Bangladesh has been set at USD 48 per month which is the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region. On a global ranking, among 136 countries, Bangladesh's minimum wage stands at the 5th place from the bottom. It is, however, not only the matter of a dismal performance in the global standard that is concerning. Apart from the Ready-Made Garments sector—which has a different standard of the minimum wage—the minimum wage policy is not practiced in other sectors. So, even though there exists a policy of minimum wage on paper, most workers are deprived of its stated benefits. More importantly, due to the high level of informality in most sectors, there exists hardly any mechanism for workers to bargain their wages with their employers. Hence, it is difficult to discern the real level of wage of industrial workers, especially of those who are employed in the informal sector.

In comparison to other sectors, there exist somewhat more uniform and stronger worker bodies like trade unions that have been engaged in protests demanding a just minimum wage for a long time. For over half a decade, these bodies have been demanding a minimum wage of around USD 230. However, after tri-partite negotiations among the worker bodies, the RMG owners and the government, the minimum monthly wage was fixed at USD 95 for the RMG workers in 2018.

Reflecting on the issue of wages, it suffices to say that industrial workers in general are immensely underpaid. The scale of expropriation is quite unparalleled. The issue of minimum monthly wage gains more prominence if the waves of subsequent inflation are taken into consideration. In a study by the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), it has been found that in recent times, in contrast to the official figures, food prices had risen by more than 12%. While food prices are standard metrics for decoding day-to-day expenditure, there are also long-term human capital development issues at stake here. It is only natural that workers are forced to save less for

the future and spend less on the healthcare and education of household members. It can be even argued that the whole cycle of intergenerational inequality is being sustained by the lack of policy actions in this area.

The COVID-19 pandemic, still looms large over the current socio-economic condition of the workers. Due to subsequent lockdowns and lack of direct policy support, workers' income across the phases of the pandemic took a downward turn. Workers were subjected to increasing health risks as during the later waves of the pandemic, factories were operationalized, although most other establishments were declared closed. In the long term, workers were left more vulnerable in terms of employment, income and health.

The collapse of the Rana Plaza and the subsequent death of more than 1100 workers (according to official figures) have become a permanent symbol of the RMG industry of Bangladesh. While differing in scale, there had been plenty of such tragedies before the accident of Rana Plaza. Factory fires, collapse of buildings and other daily work-related accidents had been a rather common phenomenon. As pressure from activists in the western markets mounted, the buyer brands and the local RMG enterprises entered into agreements like Accord and Alliance which were tasked with monitoring and ensuring the installation and maintenance of adequate safety measures in the RMG factories. However, the degree of success of Accord and Alliance remains a matter of debate as similar accidents have reoccurred in RMG factories. On the other hand, there has been no such arrangement in the other manufacturing sub-sectors—owing to primarily two reasons. First, these sub-sectors have not received the kind of national patronage and attention as RMG. Second, there has not been similar pressure from activists in the destination countries as most of these sub-sectors are not connected with the global value chain.

More importantly, there has not been any state-level pressure on the manufacturing and industrial enterprises to ensure the safety and health of the workers. The incidents of Rana Plaza and other factories indicate the institutional deficiencies which contribute to the culmination of such tragedies. The institutional processes in place do not accommodate workers' representation. As a result, from the very first steps of the establishment of enterprises to the design of crucial rules and regulations related to recruitment, wage, post-employment benefits, etc. are materialized without any participation of the workers and, in the process, without addressing their concerns and demands. On the other hand, there are systemic barriers in place that effectively prevent organizational mobilization of workers. For example, the section 13 (1) of the Labour Act 2006, allows the owner of an enterprise to close any branch or section of a factory or other establishment partially or entirely due to illegal strike. Also, the participant workers of the illegal strike would not get any wage in case of such shutdown of the branch or section.

It goes without saying that the standard of living of the industrial workers is far low and needs immediate attention. Without the inclusion of workers in the policymaking processes of the industrial sectors, there remains little hope of their worries and concerns to be addressed. However, as these aspects have their own complications, each must be approached cautiously and based on broad social consensus.

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Dr Selim Raihan conducted workshop on GTAP modeling in Mumbai



Dr Selim Raihan, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) conducted an in-person training workshop on "Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) Modelling using GTAP for Trade Liberalisation under FTAs/RTAs", during 12-15 September 2022, in the Mumbai Office of India Exim Bank. The workshop was organized by India Exim Bank to facilitate research on international trade and investment. Research officials at the Research and Analysis Group in India Exim Bank participated in the workshop. Participants were sensitized to the theoretical and practical aspects of CGE modelling and GTAP.

SANEM organised virtual session on global food markets

South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) organised a virtual session on "Global Food Markets: Recent Trends and Drivers of Price Developments", as part of the "Bay of Bengal Regional Trade and Connectivity Capacity Building Program", on 13 September 2022 over Zoom. SANEM, in collaboration with the USAID and U.S. Department of State-funded Cross-Border Infrastructure and Connectivity project (CBIC), has been conducting the capacity building program since October 2021. Dr Upali Wickramasinghe, Senior Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Italy, delivered the keynote presentation and Dr Nihal Pitigala, Lead Economist, WBD, moderated the session. Dr Wickramasinghe shared his insights and analysis on the dynamics of the international food market. Despite the recent consecutive declines in global food prices, market stability is yet to be achieved due to various supply-side barriers. On a local level, food prices remain high for several infrastructural challenges which refrain nations, especially those with low income and high importing tendency, from achieving food security. With the aim to facilitate discourses related to country-specific policies, these issues were addressed during the session. Government officials, academics, researchers, officials of business associations, development workers, journalists and professionals joined the session. Later, an open discussion was conducted after the keynote presentation.

SANEM researchers presented papers at CAICE-2022 in Kathmandu



Research Associates of SANEM, Farhin Islam and Omar Raad Chowdhury, attended the Annual International Conference in Economics 2022 organized by the Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University (CEDECONE). The conference was held on 20-22 September 2022, in Kathmandu, Nepal. Farhin Islam, Research Associate, SANEM, presented the paper, "Occupational Health in the Context of High Labour Market Informality in Bangladesh: Evidence from Nationwide Labour Force Survey", authored by Farhin Islam and Afia Mubasshira Tiasha, Research Associate, SANEM. Omar Raad Chowdhury, Research Associate, SANEM, presented the paper, "Factors Affecting 'Business Status' in Bangladesh in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic", authored by Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM, Md Tuhin Ahmed, Senior Research Associate, SANEM and Omar Raad Chowdhury.



Research Associates of SANEM, Farhin Islam and Omar Raad Chowdhury, attended the Annual International Conference in Economics 2022 organized by the Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University (CEDECONE). The conference was held on 20-22 September 2022, in Kathmandu, Nepal. Farhin Islam, Research Associate, SANEM, presented the paper, "Occupational Health in the Context of High Labour Market Informality in Bangladesh: Evidence from Nationwide Labour Force Survey", authored by Farhin Islam and Afia Mubasshira Tiasha, Research Associate, SANEM. Omar Raad Chowdhury, Research Associate, SANEM, presented the paper, "Factors Affecting 'Business Status' in Bangladesh in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic", authored by Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM, Md Tuhin Ahmed, Senior Research Associate, SANEM and Omar Raad Chowdhury.

SANEM organised virtual session on global and regional value chains

A session on "Prospects of global and regional value chains for South Asia and BIMSTEC" under the "Bay of Bengal Regional Trade and Connectivity Capacity Building Program", organised by SANEM in collaboration with the USAID and U.S. Department of State-funded Cross-Border Infrastructure and Connectivity project (CBIC), was held on 22 September 2022 over Zoom. Dr Nihal Pitigala, Lead Economist, WBD and Dr Prabir De, Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, conducted the session. Government officials, academics, researchers, officials of business associations, development workers, journalists and professionals participated in the program.

SANEM remembers Farzeen Ferdous Alam



In loving remembrance of Farzeen Ferdous Alam, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) held an online memorial event on 17 September 2022. A young visionary, Mr Alam was a social entrepreneur and the founder of 'Oggro Ventures', a social business which aimed to transform the agricultural sector of Bangladesh. The event was held over Zoom and streamed live on the Facebook page of SANEM. It was attended by friends, colleagues and well-wishers of Farzeen.

Validation workshop for Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project

Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1, Ministry of Commerce and South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) jointly organized a virtual validation workshop on policy reviews on 28 July 2022. Reviews of "The SME Policy 2019", "The Trademark Act 2009" and "The Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act 2013", were discussed in details in the workshop. The meeting was chaired by Mr Md Mizanur Rahman, Project Director (Joint Secretary), BRCP-1, MOC. Dr Selim Raihan, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, SANEM, delivered the presentation. Also present were Mr Md Munir Chowdhury, National Trade Expert, BRCP-1, MOC; Mr Kongkan Chakma, Deputy Registrar (Trademarks), Department of Patents, Designs and Trademarks; Ms Farzana Khan, General Manager, Women Entrepreneur Development, SME Foundation; Dr Nadia Binte Amin, President of Women Entrepreneurs Network for Development Association (WEND) and Director, FBCCI; and Asaduzzaman Nur, Joint Secretary, Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs, GoB. Later an open discussion was conducted. The government officials and representatives from the private sector shared their views and opinion on the policy reviews conducted by SANEM.

SANEM hosted session on partial equilibrium model

South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) hosted a session on "Partial equilibrium model using WITS SMART model" on 27 September 2022 over Zoom. The session was conducted by Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics at the University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM. Dr Puspa Sharma, Economist, Nepal, moderated the session.