



THE BAY OF BENGAL BARGAIN: RETHINKING TRADE AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

by *Selim Raihan*

The world economy is no longer passing through a temporary storm. The storm has become the weather. For BIMSTEC, this is the hard truth. The old development bargain, export to rich markets, import energy when needed, depend on remittances in bad years, and trust global trade rules to discipline the powerful, is weakening fast. Reciprocal tariffs, industrial subsidies, the declining authority of the WTO, conflict in the Red Sea and Middle East, energy shocks, and climate disasters are no longer separate pressures. Together, they form a development trap, especially for countries around the Bay of Bengal and its hinterlands today.

The region cannot treat these shocks as distant events. BIMSTEC brings together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, linking South Asia with Southeast Asia and connecting the Himalayas, the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the wider Indo-Pacific. Yet geography has not been turned into enough economic strength. The region has young workers, resources, manufacturing capacity, energy complementarities, and maritime access. Still, these assets remain underused because cooperation is slow, fragmented, and too cautious. In a harsher world, that caution is no longer prudence. It is a costly delay across the Bay of Bengal itself now.

The first change is conceptual. BIMSTEC countries must stop confusing national resilience with national self-reliance. No member, not India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, or Myanmar, can insulate itself alone from oil price spikes, shipping disruption, climate disasters, food volatility, or sudden tariff walls. Yet the region often behaves as if cooperation were a diplomatic luxury. It is not. It is a survival strategy. Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal should therefore move from summit language to operating systems, from speeches to shared reserves, shared data, shared standards, and fast support when markets freeze or borders clog suddenly.

A Regional Economic Security Compact would be a good start. It should focus on energy, food, logistics, and emergency finance. A regional fuel and essential commodity reserve may sound ambitious, but it is less costly than repeated panic imports. Members could pool information on grain stocks, fertilizer needs, freight costs, energy procurement, exchange pressure, and climate risk. They do not need to build a grand economic union overnight. They need a crisis dashboard, early warnings, and rules for helping one another. This is exactly where practical Bay of Bengal cooperation can prove its worth before the next shock arrives again.

Energy is the most urgent test. The Middle East crisis and maritime disruption have exposed the region's dependence on distant chokepoints. A shock in oil and gas markets quickly

becomes inflation in Dhaka, Colombo, Kathmandu, Thimphu, Bangkok, New Delhi, and Yangon. BIMSTEC should diversify suppliers, but that is only half the answer. It should build a regional clean energy supply chain. Solar panels, batteries, grid equipment, electric two-wheelers, green hydrogen components, and efficiency technologies could become public goods. India has scale. Bangladesh has manufacturing capacity. Thailand has industrial depth. Nepal and Bhutan have hydropower. Sri Lanka has renewable potential.

Trade strategy must also change. BIMSTEC still discusses connectivity as if roads, ports, and customs reforms alone will solve the problem. They will not. Tariffs, subsidies, carbon measures, security screening, and new standards are reshaping global commerce. The answer cannot be passive complaint. BIMSTEC needs a Trade Defence and Negotiation Platform to monitor barriers, share legal and sectoral expertise, and develop common positions on rules of origin, carbon standards, digital trade, labour compliance, and sustainability. Smaller economies should not build separate weak capacities. They should pool knowledge with India and Thailand, then bargain with greater confidence in global forums together.

Regional trade is not a soft issue. It is hard economics. Intraregional trade around the Bay of Bengal remains far below potential because politics, weak infrastructure, regulatory mistrust, and border friction repeatedly overrule geography. That is expensive. When shipping routes are disrupted, nearby markets matter more. When Western markets grow protectionist, regional demand becomes a buffer. When supply chains shift, proximity becomes an advantage. BIMSTEC should create production corridors in textiles, pharmaceuticals, agro processing, light engineering, digital services, tourism, fisheries, logistics, and renewable equipment, backed by faster customs, port modernisation, mutual recognition of standards, coastal shipping, and cross-border zones.

The region should also stop waiting for unanimity. A coalition of the willing can move first. If Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Bhutan are ready to deepen power trade and logistics, they should proceed. If Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, and Bangladesh can build maritime and services links across the Bay of Bengal, let them. If Thailand, India, and Bangladesh can develop supply chains in autos, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and processed food, begin. Slow consensus often becomes paralysis. Flexible cooperation would make regionalism more credible because citizens would see results, not just communiqués issued after carefully staged summits and familiar official promises again.

The region's old habit has been to blame geopolitics, then retreat into national policy silos. That habit is now dangerous. The future will not be kind to countries that face global disorder alone. For BIMSTEC, the real question is no longer whether cooperation is desirable. The question is whether the Bay of Bengal region can afford one more decade of pretending it is optional.

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS: THE COSTS OF DENIAL: HOW ECONOMIC GROWTH UNDERMINES GOVERNANCE REFORM



The first day of the 9th SAEC 2026 featured the keynote session, which took place on April 17, 2026, via the Zoom platform. The keynote address was delivered by Dr Shantayanan Devarajan, Professor of the Practice and Chair, International Development Concentration, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, USA. The session was moderated by Dr Selim Raihan, with distinguished discussants Dr Kunal Sen, Director, UNU-WIDER, Helsinki, Finland; and Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD.

Dr Devarajan argued that periods of strong economic growth often generate a “denial” of underlying governance weaknesses — corruption, cronyism, and elite capture reflecting strategic political choices to preserve closed governance systems. Drawing on experiences from the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, he showed how high-growth episodes between 2000 and 2015 masked structural governance problems that later contributed to crisis. He pointed to the Arab Spring, Sri Lanka’s 2022 economic collapse, and Bangladesh’s governance-growth paradox as illustrations of how frustrated expectations and institutional deficits accumulate beneath the surface of apparent prosperity.

Dr Sen presented the “deals and development” framework, explaining how growth often emerges through closed-order deals that enable coordination but become unsustainable without a transition toward open, rule-based arrangements. He argued that elite incentives frequently reinforce closed systems, making governance endogenous to the growth process itself. Professor Sobhan argued that earlier policy frameworks delivered growth but inadvertently reinforced crony capitalism and political control, requiring the suppression of dissent to sustain economic performance a dynamic that deepens systemic fragility over time.

The session concluded with a shared consensus that economic growth and governance reform must be analysed together. The panel agreed that governance denial during growth episodes reflects political incentives, and that failure to address institutional weaknesses risks repeated cycles of boom, stagnation, and crisis.

PLENARY SESSION: UPHEAVAL TO UNCERTAINTY: STABILITY, ORDER, AND GROWTH IN BANGLADESH'S EMERGING POLITICAL SETTLEMENT



This plenary session took place on the second day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 18, 2026 at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The session was chaired by Professor Rounaq Jahan, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, Bangladesh, with a presentation by Dr Kazi Maruful Islam, Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka. Distinguished panelists included Dr Mirza M. Hassan, Senior Research Fellow, BIGD; and Barrister Sara Hossain, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

Professor Rounaq Jahan opened the session by emphasising the importance of developing analytical frameworks to understand Bangladesh’s evolving political institutions and reform processes in the context of the country’s current political transition. Dr Kazi Maruful Islam presented a “stability-order-growth” framework to analyse Bangladesh’s political trajectory following the 2024 mass uprising, the interim government period, and subsequent electoral developments. He described the present moment as a critical juncture shaped by overlapping electoral, institutional, and generational mandates alongside significant economic and institutional challenges. The framework proposed that political actors are likely to prioritise stability in the short term, followed by institutional order, and subsequently growth, though these processes may overlap and are shaped by structural constraints including economic vulnerabilities and unresolved transitional justice issues.

Dr Mirza M. Hassan reflected on the framework, cautioning that assumptions of rational political decision-making may not always hold in practice, and stressed that stability, institutional reform, and economic performance often require simultaneous rather than sequential attention. Barrister Sara Hossain discussed rule of law, judicial independence, and transitional justice, emphasising that meaningful governance progress requires both legal reforms and broader changes in political and social practices.

The session concluded with an engaging discussion among participants, reflecting diverse perspectives on political reform, institutional development, and economic governance in Bangladesh. The discussion reaffirmed the importance of evidence-based analysis and inclusive policy dialogue in navigating the country’s evolving political and economic landscape.

PLENARY SESSION: DECARBONIZING DEVELOPMENT: MODELLING THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF BANGLADESH AND NEPAL



This plenary session took place on the second day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 18, 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn, Auditorium, Dhaka. The session was chaired by Dr A K Enamul Haque, Director General, BIDS. The project background and methodology were presented by Dr Barun Deb Pal, Research Coordinator, Foresight and Policy Modelling Unit, IFPRI. The Bangladesh country presentation was delivered by Dr Selim Raihan. The Nepal country presentation was delivered by

Mr Nanda Kumar Maharjan, Program Officer (Agriculture) and Mr Zaky Khan, Program Specialist, Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal.

Dr Barun Deb Pal explained that the study is rooted in the UAE Declaration at COP28 and assesses the development implications of climate commitments under NDC 3.0 for Bangladesh and Nepal. Using an economy-wide dynamic modelling framework supported by a Social Accounting Matrix and micro-simulation techniques, the study evaluates the economic, employment, and poverty implications of climate policies across energy, transport, and agriculture sectors up to 2035.

The Bangladesh presentation demonstrated that full NDC 3.0 implementation could meaningfully accelerate growth, generate millions of additional jobs, and lift significant numbers out of poverty, with lower-income households standing to gain proportionally more. Renewable energy expansion and solar irrigation were identified as key drivers of inclusive structural transformation. The Nepal presentation highlighted the country’s acute climate vulnerability despite negligible global emissions, finding that agricultural transformation, electric vehicle adoption, and hydropower expansion could generate strong growth and poverty reduction effects, though financing gaps, institutional constraints, and policy inconsistencies remain key implementation challenges.

The session concluded with a shared view that NDC 3.0 should be treated not only as a climate obligation but as a comprehensive development strategy, requiring strong political commitment, adequate financing, and coordinated policy action across sectors.

PLENARY SESSION: TRADE AND MACROECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN SOUTH ASIA



This plenary session took place on the second day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 18, 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The session was chaired by Dr Zaidi Sattar, Chairman, PRI. The keynote address was delivered by Dr Franziska Ohnsorge, Chief Economist, South Asia Region, The World Bank. Distinguished panelists included Dr Sirimal Abeyratne, Emeritus Professor of Economics, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka; Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow, CPD; Dr Anirudh Shingal, Professor and Department Chair, Economics and Policy, S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research (SPJIMR), Mumbai; and Dr Rajan Krishna Panta, Director, Nepal Rastra Bank.

Dr Franziska Ohnsorge presented findings from the World Bank’s latest South Asia Economic Update, highlighting that South Asia’s trade openness remains among the lowest of all emerging markets and developing economies. She argued that South Asia’s low trade openness reflects deliberate policy choices rather than geography, and that while import-restricting policies have worked, export-promoting ones have largely failed, partly because high tariffs on intermediate inputs undermine manufacturing competitiveness.

Dr Anirudh Shingal found that business climate improvements yield the largest manufacturing export gains outperforming tariff cuts or new trade. Professor Mustafizur Rahman cautioned that unilateral reform cannot be assessed in isolation from partner country policies, flagging the US reciprocal tariff on Bangladesh as a fundamental challenge. Dr Rajan Krishna Panta argued that South Asia’s macroeconomic vulnerabilities and trade underperformance stem from the same structural constraints, calling for deeper regional integration and climate-resilient planning. Dr Sirimal Abeyratne stressed the urgency of structural reform, drawing on Sri Lanka’s five decades of liberalisation with persistently weak export outcomes.

The session concluded with a consensus that for countries like Bangladesh the question is no longer whether to reform, but how to sequence, pace, and embed reform within broader strategies for structural transformation.

PLENARY SESSION: ROMANCING THE REFORM: THE BANGLADESH STORY



This plenary session took place on the third day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 19, 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD, was the Special Guest. The keynote presentation was delivered by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, CPD. Mr Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury, Former Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh, joined as Distinguished Panelist. The session was moderated by Dr Selim Raihan.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya argued that Bangladesh does not need another round of reform identification, the major issues are already known. What is urgently needed is a reform delivery mechanism supported by political commitment, transparency, and measurable outcomes. He stressed the importance of fiscal consolidation, stronger revenue mobilisation, and quality public expenditure, warning that without domestic reform momentum, external institutions may increasingly dictate the reform agenda.

Mr Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury focused on practical governance reforms in the financial sector, civil service, and public budgeting. He recommended restructuring state-owned banks, strengthening central bank autonomy, and integrating development and revenue budgets to improve expenditure planning. He stressed that the reforms are already well known and what is now required is strong political will to execute them.

Professor Rehman Sobhan emphasised that legislation alone does not constitute reform unless it produces visible change on the ground. He argued that successful reforms require constituencies of support among citizens, political actors, and institutions, and that accountability, administrative capability, and sustained public pressure are essential to transform reform promises into lasting institutional outcomes.

The session concluded with a consensus that reform credibility, institutional trust, and delivery capacity will be central to Bangladesh’s future progress. Discussions covered topics such as banking governance, capital market reform, civil service politicization, sequencing of reforms, local government strengthening, and the relationship between elections and reform credibility.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON COUNTRY DIAGNOSTICS STUDY: TACKLING DIVERSIFICATION AND RESILIENCE DEFICITS



This roundtable discussion was held on 19 April 2026, the third day of the 9th SAEC 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn, Dhaka. The session reviewed and validated the Asian Development Bank’s Country Diagnostics Study (CDS) for Bangladesh, titled Tackling Diversification and Resilience Deficits, which forms the analytical backbone of ADB’s forthcoming five-year Country Partnership Strategy. Dr Monzur Hossain, Member (Secretary), General Economics Division joined the session as the Chief Guest. The session was moderated by Dr Selim Raihan, Executive Director, SANEM and hosted a presentation by Dr Chandan Sapkota, Country Economist, ADB Bangladesh.

Mr Hoe Yun Jeong, Country Director, ADB Bangladesh, opened by welcoming the guests and highlighting that structural transformation and resilience must advance together, noting that Bangladesh’s historically successful growth model is now showing clear signs of strain. Dr Sapkota’s presentation revealed that Bangladesh’s long-standing growth model is showing clear signs of structural constraint, with extreme export concentration, fiscal fragility, financial sector stress, and growing climate vulnerability collectively limiting the country’s capacity to diversify and build resilience, precisely as LDC graduation intensifies external pressures.

The private sector representatives stressed the need for productivity investment, green manufacturing incentives, financial sector reform, and a strategic diversification of labour migration markets. Academics and policy experts warned that years of reform recommendations have failed to produce structural change in the absence of genuine improvement in governance and political will. Development partners raised concerns over the weak investment climate, declining female labour force participation, and the urgent need to prioritise renewable energy and social inclusion. Dr Monzur Hossain highlighted the importance of aligning external partnerships with nationally determined development priorities and ensuring that reform efforts are grounded in long-term institutional thinking.

The guests agreed that piecemeal reform is insufficient. Sustainable transformation requires coordinated action across diversification, fiscal reform, human capital, governance, and climate resilience underpinned by lasting political commitment.

PANEL SESSION: THE GLOBAL ENERGY CRUNCH DRIVEN BY MIDDLE EASTERN CON- FLICTS: SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVE



This panel session took place on the third day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 19, 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The session was moderated by Ms Israt Hossain, Director, SANEM. Distinguished panelists included Mr Shafiqul Alam, Lead Energy Analyst, IEEFA; Dr Prabir De, Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), India; Mr Naveen Adhikari, Assistant Professor, Tribhuvan University, Nepal; Mr Udaya Namalgama, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; Dr Syeda Sultana Razia, Member (Petroleum), BEREC; and Dr Rafiqul Islam, Additional Secretary and Member, BEPRC.

Mr Shafiqul Alam outlined Bangladesh's deepening energy vulnerabilities, growing import dependency, rapidly depleting domestic gas reserves, and heavy reliance on spot LNG markets that expose the country to extreme price volatility. He argued that the crisis, while severe, is also an opportunity to accelerate structural reforms including renewable energy expansion, efficiency improvements, and electric mobility adoption. Dr Prabir De highlighted India's resilience through strong refining capacity and import diversification, and emphasised the potential of regional energy cooperation through BBIN, BIMSTEC, and SAARC. Mr Naveen Adhikari drew on Nepal's 2015 fuel crisis, which catalysed a major shift toward electric vehicles, illustrating how energy shocks can drive structural transformation when supported by coherent domestic policy.

Mr Udaya Namalgama discussed Sri Lanka's acute vulnerability as an import-dependent island economy, drawing parallels with the 2022 crisis where fuel shortages caused widespread social and economic disruption. Dr Syeda Sultana Razia emphasized the need for real-time data on fuel and freight prices to enable effective tariff adjustments and improve market responsiveness. Dr. Rafiqul Islam stressed the urgency of reducing Bangladesh's energy import dependency and accelerating domestic resource exploration, particularly in natural gas and coal.

The session concluded that Bangladesh must move beyond short-term crisis management toward a long-term strategy focused on diversification, regional integration, and sustainable energy transition.

PANEL SESSION: TRADE AND ECONOMIC SECURITY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL REGION



This panel session took place on the third day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 19, 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The session was moderated by Dr Selim Raihan. Distinguished panelists included Dr Prabir De; Dr Ganeshan Wignaraja, Visiting Senior Fellow, ODI Global, UK; Mr Naveen Adhikari; and Dr Edgar Rodriguez, Lead (Myanmar), IDRC, Canada.

Dr Prabir De highlighted milestones from the 2025 Bangkok Summit including the BIMSTEC Charter and a Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement and identified four near-term integration priorities: linking national digital payment systems, creating a Regional Customs Single Window, harmonising land port regulations, and converting port management systems into a regional platform. Dr Ganeshan Wignaraja argued that BIMSTEC's institutional capacity must urgently be upgraded, calling for a technically capable secretariat with expertise in artificial intelligence and digital trade, and warning that the region risks being left behind without deliberate investment in digital preparedness.

Mr Naveen Adhikari offered a candid assessment of Nepal's structural constraints low growth, consumption-driven economy, and heavy import dependency arguing that deepening BIMSTEC cooperation and building regional value chains offer one of Nepal's more viable pathways toward structural transformation ahead of its LDC graduation. Dr Edgar Rodriguez called for a shared regional vision built around moving up the value chain, leveraging digital transformation, and embedding climate resilience in cooperation frameworks, cautioning that emerging technology benefits will not be evenly distributed without deliberate investment in digital preparedness across member states.

The session concluded with a recognition that Bangladesh, as the current BIMSTEC chair, has a critical role in driving regional integration forward through evidence-based research and inclusive policy dialogue. Dr Selim Raihan expressed the hope that the discussions would catalyse deeper collaborative research on regional value chains, digital trade facilitation, and the complementarity of trade and macroeconomic policy across the Bay of Bengal region.

PANEL SESSION: STRENGTHENING ESG PRACTICES IN BANGLADESH



This panel session took place on the third day of the 9th SAEC 2026, held on April 19, 2026, at BRAC Centre Inn conference room, Dhaka. The session was presented and moderated by Mr Zubayer Hossen, Programme Director, SANEM. Distinguished panelists included Mr Gunjan Dallakoti, Head of Programme and SME Development Specialist, ILO, Bangladesh; Mr Debashis Roy, Director, Advisory and Partnership, Impact Investment Exchange (IIX); and Mr Tawhidul Islam, Senior Manager (Programme), PROGRESS, Swisscontact Bangladesh.

Mr Zubayer Hossen opened by framing why ESG conversations matter at this moment, pointing to evolving corporate sustainability reporting requirements, ESG-conditioned capital flows, rising supply chain accountability demands from global buyers, and Bangladesh's acute climate vulnerability. He noted that while Bangladesh has built genuine strengths — including the world's largest concentration of LEED-certified green factories and a green taxonomy since 2020 — critical structural gaps remain, including the absence of mandatory ESG disclosure, near-total exclusion of SMEs, and weak domestic data infrastructure.

Mr Gunjan Dallakoti stressed that ESG in Bangladesh remains externally driven rather than institutionally embedded, shaped by brand compliance rather than internalised corporate values, with the risk of tick-boxing and greenwashing remaining high. Mr Debashis Roy highlighted opportunities in impact investment and innovative financing, arguing that gender must be treated as a risk management tool and calling on regulators to embed gender metrics into credit assessment frameworks. Mr Tawhidul Islam raised the critical issue of MSME exclusion, urging ESG to be reframed as a capacity-building exercise and global buyers to share the cost of compliance.

The session concluded that ESG is not a reporting exercise but the language through which Bangladesh will negotiate its place in the global economy, requiring a nationally anchored framework, inclusive financing, and shared accountability across the value chain. The adoption of these principles will be critical in ensuring sustainable economic growth and long-term resilience.

BREAKOUT SESSION 1 MACROECONOMIC ISSUES I	BREAKOUT SESSION 2 LABOUR MARKET ISSUES I	BREAKOUT SESSION 3 EDUCATION
<p>The session was chaired by Dr Md. Ezazul Islam, Director General, BIBM and Former Executive Director, Bangladesh Bank. Dr Md. Deen Islam, Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka and Research Director, RAPID was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Dr Bazlul Haque Khondker, Chairman, SANEM; Mr Ibrahim Hassan, University of Rajshahi; Ms Israt Hossain, Director, SANEM; Ms Aayushma Manandhar, Predoctoral Researcher, Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford, UK. The session highlighted macroeconomic concerns in Bangladesh, focusing on population dividends, exchange rates, and the impacts of remittances on economic growth, particularly in developing economies.</p>	<p>The session was chaired by Mr Max Tuñón, Country Director, ILO, Bangladesh. Mr Mahtab Uddin, Research Director, SANEM and Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Dr Nazmus Sadat Khan, Senior Economist, The World Bank, Bangladesh; Mr Rohit Duwadi, Research Fellow, Plaksha University, India; Ms Dipa Das, Research Associate, SANEM; Mr Tidiane Guindo, Master's Student, Andalas University, Indonesia. The session discussed labor market shifts, including the effects of technological changes on labor demand, wage distribution, and employment generation. It also examined gendered impacts and labor productivity in the manufacturing sectors of South Asia.</p>	<p>The session was chaired by Dr Shafiun Nahin Shimul, Professor, Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka. Dr Rubaiya Murshed, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Ms Sumaeya Akhter, Adjunct Lecturer, Southeast University; Ms Mosaddika Mounin, Researcher, Asian University for Women; Ms Nawrin Sultana, Experimental School Teacher, Primary Teachers Training Institute, Lalmonirhat. This session focused on the political economy of education in Bangladesh, evaluating public spending, resource allocation, and reform pathways. Key topics included the challenges of improving educational quality in rural areas and the educational outcomes of refugee populations.</p>
<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 4 AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOOD I</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Barun Deb Pal, Research Coordinator, Foresight and Policy Modelling Unit, IFPRI. Mr Al-Hasan, Deputy Director, SANEM was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Bipin Khadka, Researcher, Nepal; Mr Khaled Hasan Bappy, Research Assistant, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh; Mr Md. Liton Hossain, Master's Student, Department of Economics, Begum Rokeya University. The session explored the intersection of agricultural practices, food security, and migration. Key findings highlighted the impact of agricultural innovation on food security and the role of migration in enhancing livelihood opportunities in rural areas, especially in Nepal and Bangladesh's coastal regions.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 5 ENERGY SECURITY, GREEN GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT I</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Mohammad Emran Hasan, Head of Climate Justice and Natural Resource Rights, Oxfam Bangladesh. Mr Farhan Khan, Senior Research Associate, SANEM was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Naveen Adhikari, Assistant Professor, Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University, Nepal; Ms Fahima, Master's Student, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University; Mr Md Razib, Research Associate, SANEM; Mr Myne Uddin, PhD Student, School of Economics, Beijing Institute of Technology, China. The papers focused on environmental governance, energy access, and climate finance mechanisms.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 6 MACROECONOMIC ISSUES II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Zahid Hussain, Former Lead Economist, The World Bank. Mr Md. Abdullah Shihab, Joint Director (Bangladesh Bank), BIDA, Prime Minister's Office, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Chop Kanta Subedi, Deputy Director, Nepal Rastra Bank; Mr Ahmed Mehedi Nizam, Joint Director, Bangladesh Bank; Ms Khaleda Nasrin, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh; Mr Md. Julker Naim, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Bank. This session covered key fiscal and monetary challenges in Bangladesh, including exchange rate management, fiscal policy's effects on economic growth, and central bank communications in shaping inflation expectations.</p>
<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 7 THE CHALLENGES OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND CLIMATE TRANSITION IN GARMENT MANUFACTURING IN BANGLADESH AND INDIA</p> <p>The session featured Professor Alakh N. Sharma, Professor and Director, IHD, New Delhi, India as Special Guest. The session was moderated by Dr Selim Raihan. The Bangladesh country presentation was delivered by Dr Selim Raihan and Mr Mahtab Uddin. The India country presentation was delivered by Dr Balwant Singh Mehta, Professor of Economics, IHD, New Delhi, India. The distinguished discussants were Dr Saif Uddin Ahammad, Chief Executive Officer, BFTI, and Mr Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), President, BCI. This session presented findings from an ongoing research project funded by IDRC through LIRNEasia, focusing on the challenges of technological change and climate transition in the garment manufacturing sectors of Bangladesh and India. The session covered the dual impacts of automation and climate adaptation on employment, with a particular focus on gender dynamics. While automation increases productivity, it also leads to job restructuring and displacement, especially for low-skilled female workers concentrated in routine roles. The discussants highlighted the urgency of Bangladesh's LDC graduation, the importance of circular economy policies, and the need to move toward skill-based and technology-driven production.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 8 RISING RESEARCHERS' SESSION I</p> <p>The session was chaired by Mr Zubayer Hossen, Programme Director, SANEM. Ms Fariha Khan and Shafa Tasneem, Research Associates, SANEM were the discussants. The papers were presented by: Mr Amzad Hossain, Student, University of Dhaka; Mr Sushant Rijal, Graduate, Kathmandu University, Nepal; Mr Md. Shahria Ahmed Arzu, Student, Department of Economics, University of Rajshahi; Mr Syed Suheb S, Student, St. Joseph's University, Bangalore, India. The session provided a platform for emerging researchers to present their work on environmental sustainability, gendered impacts of labor market changes, and the future of agricultural transformation.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 9 GENDER ECONOMICS I</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha, Pro-vice Chancellor and Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka. Dr Ishrat Jahan Khan, Associate Professor, Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Dhaka was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Ms Nabila Hasan, PhD Candidate, University of Manchester, UK and Deputy Director (Research), Bangladesh Bank; Dr Adnan M. S. Fakir, Associate Professor, University of Sussex, UK; Ms Soumi Bose, PhD Student, Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani, India; Ms Mahjabin Mahub, Master's Student, University of Dhaka.</p>
<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 10 IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE I</p> <p>The session was chaired by Professor Sharmind Neelormi, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University. Mr Md. Tuhin Ahmed, Honorary Deputy Director, SANEM and Lecturer, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Md Shohidul Islam, Master's Student, Department of Economics, Pabna University of Science and Technology; Ms Abina V P, PhD Student, PhD Student, Centre for Economic Studies and Policy, Institute for Social and Economic Change, India; Ms Sadia Islam Munmun, Master's Student, Economics Discipline, Khulna University; Mr Md. Hasinur Rahman, Research Assistant, Center for Research Innovation and Development (CRID).</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 11 GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL ECONOMY</p> <p>The session was chaired by Mr Neil Gandhi, Senior Governance Advisor, FCDO. Mr Shadlee Rahman, Country Economist, IGC, was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Ms Zinat Khan Moddhoma, Researcher, BIGD, BRAC University; Mr Asif Erfan, Master's Student, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University; Dr Md Zulquar Nain, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Aligarh Muslim University, India; Mr Jeet Saha, Senior Research Fellow, University of North Bengal, India. The session explored governance challenges and political economy dynamics, with a focus on democratic transitions, infrastructure development, and the geopolitical impact of political stability.</p>	

<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 12 TRADE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION</p> <p>The session was chaired by Mr Rabiul Islam Rabi, Country Economist, ADB, Bangladesh. Mr Jillur Rahman, Lecturer of Development Studies, University of Dhaka and Deputy Director, RAPID was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Sadril Shajahan, Coordinator, Research & Communication, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development (CED), BRAC University, Bangladesh; Mr Udaya Namalgama, PhD Student, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; Mr Supriyo Mondal, PhD Student, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. This session discussed trade liberalization, regional integration efforts, and their implications for Bangladesh's apparel industry, particularly in light of changing global value chains, and tariff and non-tariff barriers.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 13 MIGRATION AND REMITTANCE</p> <p>The session was chaired by Ms Rahnuma Salam Khan, National Programme Manager, ILO, Bangladesh. Dr Syed Mortuza Asif Ehsan, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, North South University was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Dr Azreen Karim, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS); Dr Ripon Roy, Additional Director, Bangladesh Bank; Mr Mahtab Uddin, Research Director, SANEM; Dr Abdul Ahmad Bahir, Researcher, South Asian University, India. The session focused on the socio-economic impacts of remittances, the role of migration in poverty alleviation, and the effects of climate-induced migration on labor markets, particularly in Bangladesh.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 14 AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOOD II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr M. Nahid Sattar, Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Bangladesh Agricultural University. Mr Md Jahid Ebn Jalal, Deputy Director, RAPID was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Rakibul Hasan, Research Assistant, Bangladesh Agricultural University; Mr Mostafizur Rahman, Research Officer, North South University; Ms Mst. Farzana Akter Mim, Master's Student, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh; Mr Jatinder Singh, Doctoral Fellow, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India. This session examined strategies to improve agricultural livelihoods, food security, and the resilience of farming communities, with a particular focus on climate-smart practices and community-based adaptation strategies in South Asia.</p>
<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 15 HEALTH ECONOMICS</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Rumana Huque, Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, ARK Foundation. Mr S. M Abdullah, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Padam Raj Paneru, Lecturer, Golden Gate International College, Nepal; Ms Selima Sara Kabir, Senior Research Associate, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health; Ms Syeda Tasnime Kabir, Measurement, Quantitative Methods & Learning Science, University of Houston; Dr Milind Kumar Yadav, Assistant Professor, Christ University, India.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 16 ENERGY SECURITY, GREEN GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Sakib Bin Amin, Professor, Department of Economics, North South University, Bangladesh. Ms Israt Hossain was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Raktimava Bose, National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India; Mr Mohammad Iftekharul Islam, Research Associate, SANEM; Ms Apeksha Lal, Research Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India; Ms Farhana Hoque Urmay, PhD Student, Xi'an Jiaotong University, China. This session analyzed energy access, clean energy transitions, and the potential for green growth in the context of South Asia's energy security challenges.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 17 SOCIAL PROTECTION</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Bazlul Haque Khondker, Chairman, SANEM. Ms Shrayana Bhattacharya, Senior Social Protection Specialist, The World Bank was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Anzal Ahmad, Senior Research Fellow, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India; Mr Sayed Arafat Zubayer, Research Assistant, BIDS; Ms Mayeesha Tasnim Aronee, Master's Student, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Bangladesh; Dr Saima Nawaz, Associate Professor, COMSATS University Islamabad, Pakistan. This session focused on the design and implementation of social protection programs in South Asia, analyzing their impact on poverty reduction, child marriage, and healthcare access for vulnerable populations.</p>
<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 18 GENDER ECONOMICS II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Ms Sharmin Islam, Gender Team Leader, UNDP Bangladesh. Ms Eshrat Sharmin, Deputy Director, SANEM was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Md. Sadiur Rahman, Lecturer, Department of Development Studies, Islamic University, Bangladesh; Mr Atif Anwar, Research Associate, J-PAL South Asia; Mr Md. Ishtiaque Yunus, Master's Student, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Bangladesh; Ms Pushpi Chaya de Alwis Dissanayake, Research Officer, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka. The session discussed gender disparities in the workplace, with a focus on the impacts of COVID-19 on female garment workers and the evolving role of women in South Asian economies.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 19 LABOUR MARKET ISSUES II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Atonu Rabbani, Research Director, General Economics Division, BIDS and Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka. Dr Md Nazmus Sadekin, Professor, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Bangladesh was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Dr Hashibul Hassan, Professor, Department of Finance, Jagannath University, Bangladesh; Mr Md. Rafsan Al Abu Huraira, Research Assistant, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development; BRAC University; Mr Amit Mitra, Research Associate, National Council of Applied Economic Research, India; Ms Dinithi Sethmini Kumari Athulathmudali, Research Assistant, Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 20 IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Dr Moogdho Mahzab, Research Fellow, IFPRI. Ms Nabila Hasan, PhD Candidate, University of Manchester, UK and Deputy Director (Research), Bangladesh Bank was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Dr Sofie R Walzl, Assistant Professor, University of Cambridge, UK; Mr Jamil Akhtar, Master's Student, Department of Economics, University of Rajshahi; Ms Tanima Akter, Master's Student, University of Dhaka. This session explored the intersection of climate change impacts on rural livelihoods, school performance, and agriculture, with a focus on Bangladesh's adaptive capacity in the face of climate-induced disruptions.</p>
<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 21 INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>The session was chaired by Mr Owais Parry, Country Economic Advisor, UNDP, Bangladesh. Mr Md Rabiul Islam Rabi, Economist, ADB was the discussant. The papers were presented by: Mr Raisul Millat Saffat, Consultant, Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific; Ms Najeeba Mohammed Altaf, Senior Research Associate, CPD; Ms Syeda Maliha Tasnim, Master's Student, Department of Development Studies, Bangladesh University of Professionals; Ms Farah Naz, Lecturer, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad. The session highlighted strategies for fostering inclusive development and sustainable resource management, with a focus on community-based enterprises and natural resource management in Bangladesh.</p>	<p>BREAKOUT SESSION 22 RIISING RESEARCHERS' SESSION II</p> <p>The session was chaired by Mr Mahtab Uddin, Research Director, SANEM and Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka. Ms Dipa Das and Mr Sudepto Roy, Research Associates, SANEM were the discussants. The papers were presented by: Mr Ibrahim Habib, Student, North South University; Ms Kazi Silia Bashar, Student, University of Dhaka; Mr Shakil Khan, Student, Dhaka School of Economics. This session provided a platform for young researchers to present their findings on labor market challenges, climate resilience, and economic transitions. The session emphasized the importance of nurturing future scholars and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to address pressing global issues.</p>	<p>Scan the QR code for the conference proceedings of the 9th SAEC 2026</p>  <p>or Go to the link: https://sanemnet.org/saec-2026/</p>

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