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**DEVELOPMENT AND FREEDOM IN
BANGLADESH THROUGH THE LENS OF
AMARTYA SEN'S "DEVELOPMENT AS
FREEDOM" PARADIGM**

Md. Nurul Amin*

&

Md. Thowhidul Islam**

Abstract

This study investigates whether Bangladesh has been successful in transferring its social and economic development accomplishments to political development during the Awami League regime (2009–2023). The two main facets of development—economic and social—are, frequently, the only ones taken into account by modern techniques of evaluation. The other part of development, the

* Professor, Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Dhaka. Email: naminhistory@yahoo.com

** Associate Professor, Bangladesh Studies Center for General Education (CGED), International Islamic University Chittagong. Email: tauhidcox@gmail.com

political one, is frequently ignored by evaluation techniques. The majority of Bangladesh's social and economic accomplishments are true, according to this study's analysis of development as freedom, but they have not yet been applied to the country's political arena. By comparing Bangladesh's accomplishments to India's through the lens of Amartya Sen's concept of "Development as Freedom," it is concluded that these successes have given Bangladesh "an uncertain glory." Bangladesh's achievements are primarily flawed by a lack of political freedom, in contrast to India's achievements, which were marred by disparities and a slow pace of social growth.

Keywords: Socio-Economic development, Political development, Bangladesh, Development as freedom.

1. Introduction

Since the independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been striving for freedom, economic growth and development. After the 2000s, it excelled at accomplishing its main objective of economic growth (UNCTAD, 2014: 12). In terms of socio-economic growth, like as life expectancy, education, and child mortality, the country has also made considerable advancements over the years. However, the lack of political stability and uncertainty has continued to be a major problem for the nation (Khatun, 2016: 131). Through a fair election, democracy was established in Bangladesh in 1991, despite being tarnished by the experience of many dictatorships (Riaz, 2013: 11). The Awami League (AL), the country's current ruling party, has held power since 2009, or around fourteen years. In fact, this is the first time a party has held office in Bangladesh for more than five years that was elected democratically.

Development is typically described in economic terms, with a focus on economic growth and the eradication of poverty in particular, which is apparent in Bangladesh's construction of development goal after the independence. Such an interpretation is still common in the governing party's policy. As an illustration, the development of the Dhaka metro-rail project (Kamruzzaman, 2019), the Banghabandhu Satellite, the Rampal power plant (Joshi, 2016), the Banghabandhu Tunnel, the Rooppur nuclear power plant (WNISR, 2017), and the Padma Bridge (Al-Mahmood, 2012) all illustrate the stories of economic progress and infrastructural development. Additionally, the nation is progressing towards higher middle-income status (Dhaka Tribune, 2019).

In addition to economic progress, social indicators have recently grown significantly for assessing a nation's overall development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Human Development Report (UNHDR) served as inspiration for the development concept, that now includes life expectancy, gender empowerment, healthcare, and educational services (Elliott, 2014: 52-57). Surprisingly, political concerns have not been incorporated in the definition or evaluation of development. The Human Development Index (HDI) takes transparency and accountability into account, however it does not analyze political liberties. For instance, Singapore's HDI score in 2022 was 0.939 out of 1.000 (UNDP, 2022). Despite ranking number 12 on the HDI rating, Singapore received a score of 47 out of 100 in the Freedom in the World report from Freedom House and was labelled a "partly free" country (Freedom House, 2022). Lack of regard for political liberties and human rights is a fundamental flaw in defining, interpreting, and assessing a nation's level of development. In

the 2022 HDI report (UNDP, 2022), some countries with scores higher than 0.8 include Saudi Arabia (0.875), Bahrain (0.875), Qatar (0.855), Brunei (0.829), Russia (0.822), Belarus (0.808), Kazakhstan (0.811), and Oman (0.816), but in the Freedom in the World report for the same year (Freedom House, 2022), none of these countries received scores higher than 30 out of 100. Based on their social and economic achievements, it is tempting to argue that each of these countries is highly developed. However, ignoring political freedoms exposes a significant problem in how a state's level of development is assessed. Many development researchers have suggested that political liberties and democracy should be included in the definition of development (e.g. Sen, 2000; Deneulin, 2006; Drèze & Sen, 2013). Rawls (1999: 3) argues that justice should be the foundation of any development model. A materialist focus on economic growth often overlooks the importance of justice and fairness.

With the aforementioned facts in mind, this study has made an effort to assess Bangladesh's development and freedom using the state's growth throughout the course of the last fourteen years under the Awami League government by evaluating the economic, social, and political facets of development. The study used Amartya Sen's analytical framework of 'Development as Freedom' in the evaluation in order to have a thorough grasp of the development and freedom in Bangladesh. Qualitative and quantitative data have been used in this study mostly been dependent on secondary sources. The World Press Freedom Index (PFI), Reporters sans Frontières (RSF), Freedom House, the Heritage Foundation, and other independent international research organizations as well as global institutions, like the UN and the World Bank (WB), have all been significant sources of

information. The websites and reports of several local NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, as well as the websites and reports of various ministries and government bodies in Bangladesh, have also been useful sources for gathering data.

2. Concept of Development & Amartya Sen's 'Development as Freedom'

Development is frequently assessed in terms of economic growth only (Peet & Hartwick, 2009: 2; Thirlwall, 2014: 25-26). Initially, development economists' linked the development with the growth in per capita income. The notion was gradually modified to encompass the fulfillment of basic necessities. Social indicators like life expectancy, access to health care, social protection, and education were integrated into development through UN programs in the 1990s (Elliott, 2014: 52-57). The Human Development Index (HDI) widened the concept of development (Elliott, 2014: 52-57). Thus, development now primarily consists of two aspects: the economic and the social. In order to set universal standards of development, the UN established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It's interesting to note that the idea of development does not include political freedom. The SDGs only have Goal 16, which can be partly linked to politics due to its emphasis on transparency and justice, but the MDGs never had a goal connected to the political aspects. The World Economic Forum (WEF) prepared the Inclusive Development Index (IDI), which solely takes a state's economic success into account (World Economic Forum, 2018a: 2). This is a persistent flaw with the numerous evaluations of development that solely take into account the social and economic components.

The most comprehensive explanation of development was offered by Amartya Sen. Through his ‘Development as Freedom’ paradigm, Sen has made an effort to break the constraint of evaluating development solely in terms of economic and social components. He defines development as the ability of people to live the kinds of lives they “reason to value.” This includes having access to personal and political freedoms. Thus, ‘development’ entails expanding this very capability to exercise one’s economic and political choices, among other things, while ‘poverty’ is viewed as the absence of ability to lead a good life. According to Sen, a state cannot develop without the elimination of significant sources of unfreedom (Sen, 2000: 5). Poverty, tyranny, systematic social deprivation, low economic possibilities, disregard for public amenities, intolerance, or excessive action by oppressive nations are examples of these sources of unfreedom (Sen, 2000: 5). To put it simply, Sen’s thesis is that “freedom is both the primary end and the principal means of development” (Sen, 2000: 11). Based on Sen’s capacity approach, Álvarez(2020: 87) stated that political freedom is essential in assessing a state’s development. Sen (2000) examined how the three facets of development—social, economic, and political—are interconnected and supportive of each other. Sen (2000: 9) asserts that integrating economic, social, and political issues is essential for the appraisal of development. Accordingly, evaluation of development must involve a “simultaneous appreciation of the vital roles of markets, market-related organizations, governments, local authorities, political parties, other civic institutions, educational arrangements, opportunities of open dialogue and debate, media and other means of communication” (Sen, 2000: 9). Berlin’s (1969: 118-172) distinction between negative liberty

and positive liberty remains significant in this reference. Berlin defines Freedom from external interference or constraints imposed by others—especially by the state or other individuals as negative liberty, while positive liberty refers to the freedom to control and direct one's own life-self-mastery or self-realization. Berlin warned that positive liberty, while noble in theory, can be dangerous in practice if used to justify authoritarianism. Sen (2000: 38-41) has defined five unique categories of freedom that require examination for the purpose of evaluation of development—

a) Economic Facilities: This encompasses the population's and the individual's economic rights. GDP, income, wealth, inequality, unemployment rate, production, and wage rates are some of the major factors included in the evaluation.

b) Social Opportunities: This covers both health and education. Life expectancy, avoiding preventable sickness, early mortality, fertility rate, and illiteracy are some important factors.

c) Protective Security: By providing social safety net, this is meant to save the affected populace from sinking into utter misery. Unemployment benefits, famine assistance, elderly benefits, emergency public employment, and bereavement benefits are a few important components.

d) Political Freedoms: It is defined as the possibilities for people to choose who should rule and according to what values, as well as the ability to examine and criticize authorities. A free press, the ability to choose between political parties, political discussion, the right to dissent and criticism, voting rights, and the election of lawmakers and executives through popular vote are some of the essential components.

e) Transparency Guarantees: In order to connect freely with one another, there must be promises of candour and clarity. Corruption, financial irresponsibility, the possibility of justice, and shady dealings are a few important factors.

Economic and social facets of development are included in this paradigm through the first three categories of freedom. The latter two forms of freedom emphasize this uniqueness since they address political issues, which were mostly disregarded in previous research assessing development. Additionally, it is interested in examining the society's gender and environmental elements.

3. Economic Development in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has advanced economically significantly under the Awami regime. As evidenced by its high GDP growth, per capita GDP growth, GNI per capita, large foreign exchange reserves, and efforts to meet power demands, Bangladesh has achieved significant success in these areas. The GDP growth has exceeded 6 in every year since 2011 except for 2020 due to Covid (Table 1.1). All other broad economic measures, such as Gross National Income (GNI) Per Capita, Per Capita GDP (PPP), and Foreign Exchange Reserves, show that Bangladesh's growth has exceeded a two-fold rate. For instance, Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves, which were 5.79 billion USD in 2008 (Table 1.2), had rapidly increased to a staggering 46.17 billion USD by 2022. In spite of its rapid economic expansion, wealth inequality has slightly increased in Bangladesh during the period. In addition, over the past fourteen years, income inequality has essentially not changed (Table 1.3). The percentage of the population that lives below the national poverty line—under 1.90 USD per day and under 3.20 USD—has decreased by 20% or more over the

previous fourteen years (Table 1.4). However, the proportion of population living under 5.50 US\$ has decreased by only 7%.

Table 1.1: Growth Rates of Bangladesh's GDP at Constant Prices (% Per Year)

Year	GDP	Per Capita GDP
2005	6.5	4.9
2006	6.6	5.2
2007	7.0	5.7
2008	6.0	4.8
2009	5.0	3.8
2010	5.5	4.3
2011	6.4	5.2
2012	6.5	5.2
2013	6.0	4.7
2014	6.0	4.8
2015	6.5	5.3
2016	7.1	5.9
2017	7.2	6.1
2018	7.8	6.7
2019	8.1	7.0
2020	3.4	2.3
2021	6.9	5.7

Source: The World Bank (2023a; 2023b)

Table 1.2: Bangladesh in Some Economic Indicators

Year	GDP (constant 2015 US\$, Billion)	GNI Per Capita (Atlas Method, Current US\$)	Per Capita GDP (PPP) (current international US\$)	Foreign Exchange Reserves (Current US\$, Billion, Includes Golds)
2008	890.3	660	2625.4	5.79
2009	927	720	2751.2	10.34
2010	967.6	800	2906.1	11.17
2011	1017.6	890	3119.9	9.17
2012	1070.6	970	3493.9	12.75
2013	1120.7	1030	3734.7	18.09
2014	1173.9	1100	3997.3	22.32
2015	1236	1210	4216.7	27.49
2016	1307.7	1410	4558.6	32.28
2017	1376.6	1650	4830.8	33.43
2018	1460.3	2020	5246.9	32.03
2019	1558	2210	5697.9	32.7
2020	1593.3	2300	5897.6	43.17
2021	1684.4	2570	6493.8	46.17

Source: The World Bank (2023c; 2023d; 2023e; 2023f)

Table 1.3: Income Inequality in Bangladesh

Year	Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality (out of 1)	Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality in Rural Areas (out of 1)	Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality in Urban Areas (out of 1)	Theil Index of Income Inequality (out of ∞ , where $\infty = 1$)	Theil Index of Income Inequality in Rural Areas (out of ∞ , where $\infty = 1$)	Theil Index of Income Inequality in Urban Areas (out of ∞ , where $\infty = 1$)
2000	0.31	0.27	0.37	0.18	0.13	0.26
2005	0.31	0.28	0.35	0.19	0.15	0.22
2010	0.30	0.27	0.33	0.17	0.14	0.21
2016	0.31	0.29	0.32	0.19	0.18	0.19

Source: The World Bank (2018)

Table 1.4: Poverty Headcount Ratio in Bangladesh

	2000	2005	2010	2016	2018	2019
Poverty Headcount Ratio at National Poverty Lines \$1.90 a Day(% of Population)	48.9	40.0	31.5	24.3	21.8	20.5
Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$2.15 a Day(2017 PPP, % of Population)	33.3	24	18.2	13.5	N/A	N/A
Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$3.65 a Day(2017 PPP, % of Population)	72	65	59	52	N/A	N/A
Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$6.85 a Day(2017 PPP, % of Population)	93	91	89	87	N/A	N/A

Source: The World Bank (2023g; 2023h; 2032i; 2023j)

Table 1.5: Bangladesh in the Index of Economic Freedom

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Overall Score	47.5	51.1	53.0	53.2	52.6	54.1	53.9	53.3	55.0	55.1	55.6	56.4	56.5	52.7	54.4
Property Rights	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	34.9	32.4	36.1	41.0	38.0	36.3	36.8
Government Integrity	21.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	27.0	23.3	27.0	25.0	19.1	21.2	24.4	26.6	27.7	22.2	22.5
Judicial Effectiveness	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	26.0	32.6	34.5	36.1	35.4	28.1	28.0
Tax Burden	72.8	72.8	72.7	72.8	72.7	72.5	72.7	72.7	72.8	72.7	72.7	72.7	78.2	77.9	78.2
Government Spending	94.2	93.9	92.4	93.9	92.1	92.3	92.0	93.6	94.0	94.2	94.5	94.3	93.8	93.2	94.7
Fiscal Health	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	78.7	78.9	77.6	76.8	74.2	60.6	63.4
Business Freedom	62.9	59.4	65.0	68.5	68.0	70.8	62.2	52.6	53.4	52.1	50.9	52.3	55.6	55.6	56.7
Labor Freedom	52.3	53.8	54.3	55.9	51.9	51.9	63.7	62.5	68.7	66.4	68.2	68.4	68.8	36.6	46.8
Monetary Freedom	67.3	66.6	68.6	67.5	65.4	65.9	67.7	68.2	68.6	69.0	69.9	70.0	69.9	70.0	70.1
Trade Freedom	40.2	58.0	58.0	54.0	54.0	59.0	59.0	63.6	63.6	61.2	63.6	63.6	63.4	63.8	62.0
Investment Freedom	20.0	45.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	45.0	45.0	50.0	50.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	50.0	50.0
Financial Freedom	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	40.0	40.0

Source: The Heritage Foundation (2023)

Table 1.6: Professions of Parliament Members in the Bangladesh National Parliament (%)

	Businessman	Lawyer	Professionals	Landlords	Politics	Other
1973-1975	23.7	26.5	30.7*	2.8	12.7	3.6
1991-1995	59.4	18.8	15.5	3.9	2.0	0.4
1996-2001	47.8	14.8	8.5	6.9	3.1	18.9
2001-2006	52.1	8.7	8.4	8.4	2.1	20.3
2009-2013	53.5	13.1	6.4	7.5	6.1	13.4
2014-2018	59.0	13.0	–	5.0	–	23.0
2019-2023	61.0	13.0	5.0	4.0	–	17.0

Source: Firoj (2013) and Ahmed (2019)

* Professionals includes farmers (14.8%), services (0.7%), teachers (9.9%) and doctors (5.3%)

The overall ranking of Bangladesh in the Index of Economic Freedom has sharply improved (Table 1.5). Nearly all of the factors taken into account by the index have been improved. Regarding some areas, nevertheless, there are worries. The first is a 6.0-score increase in tax burden over the previous fourteen years. With a lower grade, Fiscal Health has also suffered under the regime. The factor of business freedom decreased from 62.9 in 2009 to 56.7 in 2023. Occasionally, the investment freedom score has also had problems. While the regime improved the score from 20.0 to 45.0 in just one year in 2010, there has been a very steady progress in this element's performance after 2011, which led to a score of 55 in 2023. After being stuck at 20.0 for eight years straight in terms of property rights, the score exploded to 34.9 in 2017 and 36.8 in 2023. Trade freedom has significantly improved, whereas monetary freedom has only

somewhat improved. Trade freedom improved significantly from a score of 40.2 in 2009 to 58.0 the following year. Despite a modest decline over the following two years, the government has been able to keep its score above 60 since 2016.

Overall score of economic freedom stood 54.4 in 2023, making its economy the 123rd freest among 177 countries. It is ranked 26th among 39 countries in the Asia–Pacific region. Its total rating is lower than both the regional and global averages, placing it in the lower part of the “mostly unfree” category (The Heritage Foundation, 2023). The report commented that “the foundations of economic freedom in Bangladesh remain fragile. Corruption and judicial inefficiency undermine the rule of law. Structural problems and weak governance constrain development. The inefficient regulatory regime is often heavily politicized, and policies needed to liberalize or sustain open markets are undercut by government interference in the economy” (The Heritage Foundation, 2023). “The overall rule of law is weak in Bangladesh. The country’s property rights, its judicial effectiveness, and its government integrity scores are below the world average” said the report. It further said that “Enforcement of property rights is uneven. Poor record-keeping systems can complicate land and property transactions. The feeble judiciary is slow and lacks independence.” From a record high of 68.8 in 2021 to record lows of 36.6 in 2022 and 46.8 in 2023, Bangladesh’s score on labour freedom substantially decreased.

In the 2023 ranking, Bangladesh was classified as the second-most economically free country in the region, trailing only Bhutan and outpacing countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldives. Bhutan, which is ranked 90th overall this year, is the only nation from South Asia to do so. The economy of the

nation had the freest market in South Asia with a score of 59.0 (The Heritage Foundation, 2023). India has a score of 52.9, placing it second in the region. Sri Lanka came in second with a score of 52.2. The Maldives, Pakistan, and Nepal all trailed Bangladesh in the world's rating of economic freedom with scores of 46.6, 49.4, and 51.4, respectively (The Heritage Foundation, 2023).

Table 1.7: 2023 Index of Economic Freedom of South Asian Countries

Regional Position	Country	Global Position	Score
1 st	Bhutan	90	59.0
2 nd	Bangladesh	123	54.4
3 rd	India	131	52.9
4 th	Sri Lanka	136	52.2
5 th	Nepal	142	51.4
6 th	Pakistan	152	49.4
7 th	Maldives	160	46.6

However, out of the 300 seats in the parliament, 182 businessmen were elected in the 2018 general election (Prothom Alo, 2019; Table 1.6). Sen (2000: 116-122) noted that in order to ascertain the presence of market freedom, the political influence of interest groups must be investigated. Political influence-using is a highly widespread strategy used to protect one's own economic and business interests (Sen, 2000: 126). This is therefore related to business freedom. The business freedom is anticipated to decline significantly once it becomes a businessmen's parliament. Many times, powerful and influential interest groups attempt to sway political judgments in favor of their own interests. Numerous loan defaults, inadequate debt recovery, and various irregularities in both public and private

banks have been brought on by the businesspeople's structural dominance (Ahmed, 2019). Workers' organizational power has suffered as a result of the structural power (Ahmed, 2019).

3.1 Fast-Track Development Projects in Bangladesh

During the regime, structural development has received a lot of attention. Some fast-track development projects have shaped the core of development policymaking. The Awami government has given these projects great priority on the grounds that they will improve people's quality of life and promote economic growth (Zakaria, 2020). Among the projects are the Padma Bridge, the Dhaka City Metro Rail, the Matarbari Deep Sea Port, the Matarbari Coal Power Plant, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, the Elevated Expressway in Dhaka, the Payra Sea Port, and the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Terminal. The 1000 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and the 1320 MW Rampal Coal Power Plant are also included. While Saif (2021) claimed that the implementation of all fast-track projects is intended to raise Bangladesh's GDP by 2%, BSS (2021) said that the construction of the Padma Bridge is only estimated to increase the country's GDP by 1.5–2%.

Table 1.7: List of Fast-track Projects

Fast-track Projects	Cost
The Padma Bridge	3.8 billion USD
The Dhaka City Metro Rail	6.1 billion USD
The 1000 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant	12.65 billion USD
The 1320 MW Rampal Coal Power Plant	1.5 billion USD
The Matarbari Deep Sea Port	4.6 billion USD
The Matarbari Coal Power Plant	

The Karnaphuli Tunnel	1.1 billion USD
The Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Terminal	4.4 billion USD
The Elevated Expressway in Dhaka	1.2 billion USD
The Payra Sea Port	500 million USD

Since 2009, the regime has made notable advancements in the electrical and power industries. From a 2009 capacity of 5,500 MW, the regime achieved incredible progress to supply over 26,000 MW as of 2023 (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). While it has built new power plants to increase its capacity, the expensive Quick Rental Power Plants (QRPPs) have largely been contracted to fulfill the rising demand for power (Mujeri & Chowdhury, 2013: 15). Although there have been controversies on alternatives to the QRPPs (Mirza, 2020: 128-130). The government has given producers penalties for not using their QRPPs, which has led to criticism of the regime's electricity consumption (Imam, 2021). The regime has decided to shut down the QRPPs by 2024 because the regime has now reached a point where there is extra power available for the government to distribute (Dhaka Tribune, 2021).

The development of the Metro Rail appears to be a timely project given the frequency of severe traffic congestion and the dearth of public transportation options in Dhaka. The Dhaka Metro Rail Project is anticipated to save the Bangladeshi economy 2.4 billion US dollars (200 billion BDT) annually, or roughly 1.5% of GDP and 17% of tax income (Kamruzzaman, 2019). According to Kamruzzaman (2019), traffic congestion costs the country an estimated 4.4 billion US dollars annually, or 11% of the national budget. The Awami regime's other expedited projects are primarily focused on building new infrastructure. The Elevated Expressway in Dhaka, the Payra Sea Port, the

Matarbari Coal Power Plant, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, and other projects have all received significant funding (Saif, 2021). The designation of them as “fast-track” projects over other projects reflects the regime’s preference for economic and infrastructure development over the other two components.

4. Social Opportunities and Protective Security

At the heart of social opportunity lies the question of justice. Rawls (1971: 75-83) argues that a just society is one in which social and economic inequalities are arranged to benefit the least advantaged (the difference principle), and where positions and offices are open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. Nussbaum (2000: 74-75), building on and diverging from Rawls, emphasizes that justice requires ensuring individuals have the real capabilities to function and flourish, particularly for the least advantaged. Drèze & Sen (2013: 51–56) have provided a clear outline of the components that must be considered when evaluating a state’s development. Bangladesh has achieved remarkable advancement in almost all indicators. The issues are illustrated in the tables below.

Table 2.1: Bangladesh in Some Social Indicators

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Life Expectancy At Birth (Years)	69.49	69.88	70.26	70.61	70.93	71.23	71.51	71.79	72.05	72.32	72.59
Growth in Life Expectancy (%)	0.57	0.57	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.39
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years for Female)	70.77	71.26	71.72	72.16	72.57	72.96	73.32	73.66	73.98	74.29	74.60
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years for Male)	68.37	68.69	69.00	69.27	69.53	69.76	69.98	70.19	70.41	70.64	70.88

Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	40.5	38.6	36.8	35.1	33.5	32.1	30.6	29.3	28.0	26.7	25.6
Under-5 Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	51.5	48.7	46.1	43.8	41.6	39.5	37.5	35.7	33.9	32.3	30.8
Total Fertility Rate (Children per woman)	2.38	2.32	2.27	2.23	2.19	2.15	2.12	2.09	2.06	2.04	2.01
Population Using at least Basic Sanitation Services (%)	37.86	39.21	40.54	41.86	43.17	44.46	45.74	47.00	48.23	N/A	N/A
Population Using Safely Managed Drinking Water Services (%)	55.78	55.75	55.71	55.67	55.63	55.59	55.54	55.49	55.44	N/A	N/A
Mean Years of Schooling, age 25+	4.8	5.3	5.7	5.8	5.5	5.2	5.8	5.9	6.1	6.1	6.2
Mean Years of Schooling (Female), age 25+	N/A	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.7	4.4	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.7
Mean Years of Schooling (Male), age 25+	N/A	5.5	6.6	6.7	6.3	5.6	6.5	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.9
Literacy Rate, Age 15-24 (%)	N/A	N/A	77.99	77.83	85.53	85.56	87.89	92.24	92.95	93.80	94.86
Literacy Rate, Age 15-24, Female (%)	N/A	N/A	79.54	79.37	86.93	86.48	89.54	93.54	94.38	94.91	96.09
Literacy Rate, Age 15-24, Male (%)	N/A	N/A	76.40	76.28	84.09	84.63	86.19	90.91	91.54	91.80	93.71
Prevalence of Underweight Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	36.7	N/A	35.1	32.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	21.9	22.6
Prevalence of Underweight Male Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	34.8	N/A	33.4	32.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	21.7	22.4

Prevalence of Underweight Female Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	38.6	N/A	36.9	33.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	22.1	22.9
Prevalence of Stunting (% of Children under 5)	N/A	N/A	41.3	N/A	38.7	36.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	30.9	28.0
Prevalence of Stunting – Male Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	40.6	N/A	39.6	36.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	30.8	28.0
Prevalence of Stunting Female Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	42.0	N/A	37.8	35.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	30.9	27.9
Immunization, DPT (% of 12-23 months children)	97	94	96	94	96	97	98	98	98	98	98
Immunization, Measles (% of 12-23 months children)	93	88	93	88	91	94	97	97	97	97	97

Source: The World Bank (2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; 2021e; 2021f; 2021g; 2021h; 2021i; 2021j; 2021k; 2021l; 2021m; 2021n; 2021o; 2021p; 2021q; 2021r; 2021s, 2021t; 2021u; 2021v; 2021w; 2021x)

In Bangladesh, the increase in birth life expectancy has been striking. Even with a 69.49-year average life expectancy, the growth rate each year stayed at 0.56 for the five years leading up to 2013 (Table 2.1). After 2013, the rate of growth in life expectancy remained constant at 0.38% year. Additionally, Bangladesh's infant and under-5 mortality rates have both dramatically declined. The proportion of people who use at least basic sanitation services has increased. Despite all these societal gains, there has been a minor decline in the population's use of safe drinking water. The average number of years spent in school for adults over 25 has significantly increased. It will take

some time for women to catch up to men in terms of education, despite the fact that the mean years of schooling for both sexes have grown (Table 2.1). The literacy rate has increased for both men and women. The high rate of female literacy in Bangladesh is probably one of the most positive signs of social progress despite the predominance of patriarchal societal norms.

The percentage of underweight kids has significantly decreased during the last fourteen years, especially among girls. Compared to the 40.6% of underweight male children, there were 42.0% more underweight female children in 2011. Compared to the 28.0% of underweight male children in 2018, the rate decreased to 27.9 in 2019 for female. The percentage of children aged 12-23 months who have received the Diphtheria Pertussis Tetanus (DPT) vaccine has been high. In 2019, 97% of 12- to 23-month-old children had received the DPT vaccine, up from 93% in 2009.

Bangladesh has achieved its stellar track record in social indicators. There are variant social protection programs in Bangladesh including the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Allowance for the Disabled, Old Age Allowance, Allowance for the Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute Women, Food for Work, Stipend for Primary Students, Secondary Education Stipend Project, Honorarium for Freedom Fighters, and Test Relief (Hulme, Maitrot, Ragno, & Rahman, 2014: 13; Tariquzzaman & Rana, 2018: 250). The situation of the transgender, tea worker, bedead and the majority of other socially marginalized minorities have also improved under the government. In this regard, Bangladesh's 2013 decision to recognize the transgender community marked a significant breakthrough (Ahmed, 2013: 1; Al Jazeera, 2021).

The government has promised a tax refund for businesses hiring transgender persons, and the transgender community has been recruited by the traffic police (Ahmed, 2013: 7). A significant portion of the success in terms of social advancement is attributable to the integration of these groups and specifically targeted social protection programs towards them.

Table 2.2: Unemployment Rate of Bangladesh

Year	Unemployment Rate (% of total labor force)	Unemployment Rate (% of female labor force)	Unemployment Rate(% of male labor force)	Unemployment youth male (% of male labor force ages 15-24)
2008	4.29	6.78	3.47	7.6
2009	5.00	7.39	4.19	8.5
2010	3.38	4.44	3.01	5.9
2011	3.71	5.41	3.10	7.2
2012	4.06	6.45	3.18	8.4
2013	4.43	7.61	3.23	9.6
2014	4.39	7.51	3.20	9.7
2015	4.38	7.46	3.17	9.7
2016	4.35	7.38	3.13	9.7
2017	4.37	6.75	3.35	10.2
2018	4.29	6.65	3.26	10.3
2019	4.22	6.65	3.20	10.4
2020	5.2	7.5.	N/A	12.1
2021	5.1	7.1	N/A	11.5
2022	4.7	7.1	N/A	10.6

Source: The World Bank (2023k; 2023l; 2023m; 2023n)

An important concern for Bangladesh has been its fluctuating unemployment rate. Even while female unemployment has been

high, the average unemployment rate shows that there is also concern about the state of the labour market as a whole (Table 2.2). Over the course of fourteen years, the rate decreased from 4.29 in 2008 to 4.22 in 2019. After that, it began to rise once more and stood in 2022 at 4.7. Because women make up the majority of the unemployed population, they are severely disadvantaged and face discrimination in the workplace. In 2008, the female unemployment rate was 6.78; in 2022, it was 7.1. Overall, it can be said that there hasn't been much progress made in this area.

Table 2.3: Bangladesh in the Social Indices

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
HDI	0.543	0.557	0.566	0.575	0.579	0.579	0.595	0.599	0.616	0.625	0.632	0.655	0.661	N/A
Global Gender Gap Index	0.65	0.670	0.681	0.668	0.685	0.697	0.704	0.698	0.719	0.721	0.726	0.726	0.719	0.714

Source: UNDP (2009; 2010; 2011;2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022); World Economic Forum (2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018b; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022)

Several social indices, like the HDI and the Global Gender Gap Index, have improved significantly in Bangladesh (Table 2.3). The most recent HDI score of 0.661 in 2021 is a significant improvement from the score of 0.543 in 2009. Bangladesh has also been able to lessen its gender difference, based on its performance in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI). In 2022, it received a score of 0.714 out of 1 as opposed to 0.65 in GGGI in 2009. It is significant to highlight that the Gini Coefficient and the GGGI quantify inequality in distinct ways. In the Gini Coefficient, 0 denotes perfect equality and 1 denotes perfect inequality. However, in the GGGI, 1 denotes the maximum equality and 0 the highest inequality.

Table 2.4: Government Expenditure on Different Sectors of Bangladesh (% of GDP)

Year	Education	Health Services	Social Protection	Military
2009	1.9	2.62	2.25	1.2
2010	N/A	2.74	2.42	1.3
2011	2.1	2.83	2.64	1.4
2012	2	2.82	2.40	1.3
2013	2	2.75	2.23	1.3
2014	2.1	2.73	2.26	1.3
2015	1.9	2.72	2.02	1.4
2016	2.2	2.86	2.08	1.4
2017	2.2	2.78	2.09	1.2
2018	1.9	2.72	2.17	1.3
2019	1	2.62	2.54	1.3
2020	2	2.63	2.93	1.3
2021	2.1	N/A	3.01	1.3

Source: The World Bank (2023o; 2023p; 2023q) and Social Security Policy Support Program (2023)

The government has not significantly increased its spending on healthcare and education while attaining great economic growth (Table 2.4). Every year's budget has tended to decrease amount of government spending on education. Sen (2000: 242) underlined the importance of education in enhancing people's capacity for reasoning. This gives education, along with political freedom, a very particular place in Sen's paradigm. The USAID (2023) has stated that Bangladesh's educational system continues to be of very dubious quality. The poor quality of education has also been discussed by Asaduzzaman & Shams (2019: 42) as

a significant impediment to enhancing human capital. Mahtab (2017) talked about how a generation's 'intellectual crippling' was caused by the subpar education system. The government has increased the military's budget allocation. The amount spent on social security has also significantly improved.

Table 2.5: Food Security and Bangladesh

Year	Global Food Security Index	Food Production Index
2008	N/A	84.5
2009	N/A	85.1
2010	N/A	90.2
2011	N/A	93.3
2012	34.6	94.1
2013	35.3	96.3
2014	36.3	98.7
2015	37.4	100.5
2016	36.8	100.8
2017	39.7	107.8
2018	43.3	107.8
2019	53.2	108.3
2020	50.0	111.5
2021	49.1	116.4
2022	54.0	N/A

Source: The World Bank (2023q) and Economist Impact (2023).

Bangladesh has advanced significantly in terms of total food production, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Food Production Index (FPI) (Table 2.5). The regimes'

recently released five-year plans demonstrate its concentration on food production, where “raising agricultural productivity, fostering diversification, ensuring food and nutritional security, sustainable intensification and desertification of climate resilient agricultural production” have got substantial precedence (Centre for Research and Information, 2019: 4). Bangladesh’s accomplishments in terms of food production include ranking as the 10th-largest producer of tropical fruits and having the fastest rate of fruit production. The FPI only recognizes crops as food if they are edible and contain nutrients, not including coffee and tea. Bangladesh has been able to improve its score, which was 84.7 in 2008, to 116.4 in 2021. The Global Food Security Index (GFSI) by the Economist Impact (Table 2.5) is one of the most significant indicators used to determine food security. With the exception of 2016, Bangladesh’s ranking in the index has consistently increased. The GFSI assigns a score out of 100, with 100 denoting the best score. Bangladesh improved its rating from 34.6 in 2012 to 54.0 in 2022, which is an impressive increase.

5. Political Freedoms and Transparency

While Bangladesh wins praise for its socioeconomic development metrics, its record on political freedom and human rights is cause for concern. To evaluate the development of democracy and political liberties in Bangladesh under the regime, the study examined a wide variety of indices.

Table 3.1: Bangladesh in the Political Indices

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Press Freedom Index (out of 100)	37.33	42.50	N/A	57.00	42.01	42.58	42.95	45.94	48.36	48.62	50.74	N/A	N/A	36.63	35.31
Democracy Freedom Index (out of 10)	N/A	5.87	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.78	5.73	5.73	5.43	5.57	5.88	5.99	5.99	5.99	N/A
Corruption Perceptions Index (out of 100)	24	24	27	26	27	25	25	26	28	26	26	26	26	25	N/A
Fragile States Index (out of 100)	98.1	96.1	94.4	92.2	92.5	92.8	91.8	90.7	89.1	90.3	87.7	85.7	85.0	84.5	85.2

Source: RSF (2023); Economist Intelligence Unit (2023); Transparency International (2022); The Fund for Peace (2021)

Table 3.2: Bangladesh in the Freedom in the World Report

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Overall Score (out of 100)	49	47	45	41	39	39	39	39	40
Political Rights (out of 40)	4*	20	19	17	15	15	15	15	15
Civil Liberties (out of 60)	4*	27	26	24	24	24	24	24	25
Classification of Political Regime	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly free

Source: Freedom House (2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2023)

* A rating system out of 100 was not used for the report before to 2016.

It is clear from Table 3.1 that Bangladesh's press freedom has deteriorated during the past fourteen years. Taking over from the authoritarian military caretaker government with very

poor score 37.33 in the Press Freedom Index (PFI) in 2009, the regime couldn't improve it only 35.31 in 2023. The lowest possible score in the PFI is 100, and the best possible score is 0. It implies that over the past fourteen years, the regime has drastically restricted press freedom. One of Bangladesh's lowest rankings since the index was launched in 2002, at 163rd place, was achieved in 2023. Bangladesh was listed in the report as one of the 31 countries with a "very serious situation." In 2023, Bangladesh ranked last among the nations of South Asia. India was ranked 161st among the neighbouring nations, followed by Pakistan at 150 and Afghanistan at 152. It makes use of five factors, including political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and safety, to help form the Index and give a comprehensive picture of press freedom. According to RSF, the country's editors often self-censor under the current legal system, and the Digital Security Act is among the most arduous legislation in the world for journalists (RSF, 2023).

The Democracy Freedom Index (DFI) (Table 3.1) assigns a maximum score of 10 and a minimum score of 0 for each country. After seeing a continuous decline until 2018, the DFI score improved in 2020 and remained at 5.99 in 2022. It has consistently been categorized as a "Hybrid regime." In regard to Corruption Perception Index, the regime has poorly improved the score of 24.0 in 2009 to 25.0 in 2022. The report claims that the country's progress in reducing corruption and increasing accountability has been inadequate. The regime, however, managed to improve its position on the Fragile States Index. The caretaker government's dangerous score of 98.10 out of 100 may have been influenced by its authoritarian foundation. This suggests that Bangladesh was on the edge of an fragile state at

the time. A noteworthy development is that the regime was able to drastically lower its score to 85.2 in 2023.

Table 3.2 demonstrates how Bangladesh's political freedoms have declined under the rule, as per the Freedom in the World Report. Political rights have been steadily declining since 2016. Additionally, civil liberties have also been curtailed. Political rights and civil liberties were not scored separately in the Freedom in the World Index prior to 2015. However, it has adopted distinct assessments for each of these indicators starting in 2016. Although Bangladesh has maintained its status as a partly free nation, it has significantly decreased its score from 49 out of 100 in 2015 to 40 in 2023. Bangladesh isn't even included in the list of this organization's democracy index. Except for the reduction of fragility, Bangladesh has performed poorly in the vast majority of the measures studied here.

5.1 Different Acts and Public Freedom

The "Power and Energy Fast Supply Enhancement (Special Provision) Act," enacted by the government in 2010, gave it legal impunity to seek and carry out any action for the 'quick launch and implementation of any energy and power project'(Khan, 2020: 294). This bill blatantly violates the rights of the public to participate in policymaking. By 'eliminating the need for arrest warrants' with the ICT Act's 2013 revision, the regime strengthened and made the Act more oppressive. The ability to post bail was eliminated, and its use was declared not subject to bail. The Act gives the state permission to bring legal action against anyone who publishes anything that disparages the state or a member of the ruling regime. On the list of offenses that might result in prosecution include hurting religious beliefs and

disseminating false information. In accordance with this law, the police filed around 1,271 charge sheets between 2013 and 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The implementation of the Digital Security Act in 2018 enhanced the monopolization and power consolidation strategies used by this Act (Amnesty International, 2018). It also features non-bailable prosecution, same as its predecessor. According to the Act, a person who engages in propaganda or a campaign against the 'national anthem' or the 'national flag,' the 'national anthem,' the 'father of the nation - Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,' or the 'spirit of the liberation war' will be sentenced to life in prison (Mahmud, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018). The Act has already demonstrated its repressive nature against the populace because it has been used to file charges against teenagers, university professors and students, writers, journalists, and cartoonists over remarks they made on social media criticizing the activities of the Bangladeshi government (IFEX, 2020; Nazeer, 2020; Sakib, 2021). In addition to these two laws, the government also passed the Broadcast Act 2018 (Quadir & Paul, 2018), which gives the state the power to penalize media outlets if they publish or broadcast anything against the interests of the general public. According to these regulations, journalists are frequently detained and arrested in Bangladesh (CPJ, 2015; Greenslade, 2016; Agence France-Presse, 2019; IFJ, 2021). A human rights organization located in Bangladesh named Odhikar reports that 150 attacks on journalists and 196 extrajudicial executions, including crossfire, torture, and shooting, occurred in 2020 (Odhikar, 2020: 20-22). According to Odhikar (2020: 31-33), 142 journalists, authors, bloggers, opposition leaders and activists, teachers, attorneys, cartoonists, and other people have been detained and imprisoned as a result of this act. Extrajudicial killings and abductions by government

forces became commonplace. Between January 2009 and December 2018, at least 1,920 cases were recorded (Chakravorty and Basu, 2022). General civilians have also died while in police custody, and the police have attempted to deflect blame by blaming the person for being a drug addict or for dying naturally from a stroke or lynching (The Daily Star, 2020; The Business Standard, 2020; UNB, 2021). Violence against political opponents has also been a manifestation of the law enforcement agency's monopoly on violence. Over the past fourteen years, opposition leaders and supporters have frequently been subjected to torture and repression (Quadir, 2014; Hussain, 2016; McPherson, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2017; 2019). The regime routinely executes opposition political leaders and workers through extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. The worst example was set in 2017 when the then-chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha was forced to retire after the government objected to Sinha's choice to abolish the Supreme Court justices' ability to be removed from office by the parliament (PTI, 2017). Sinha's situation took a very nasty turn when he was charged with money laundering and embezzlement after quitting his job and leaving Bangladesh (The Indian Express, 2020; Tipu, 2020). Sinha claims that the military intelligence service of Bangladesh intimidated him on behalf of the government, which is what ultimately led to his resignation. He described Bangladesh as a country ruled by state terrorism and made comparisons between the regime's aggressive policies and practices and the Gestapo and Hitler regimes (Bergman, 2018).

The arrangement of free and fair elections is one of the most crucial components of democratic decision-making, as Sen (2000: 151–155) has noted. Another crucial component is the opposition's positive role in counteracting the complacency

of the prevailing government (Sen, 2000: 155-157). But over the past fourteen years, the government has reduced both of these factors. When the state police exploited their authority to prevent the opposition from beginning political campaigns and participating in a free and fair election, the 2014 general election was marred by violence (Quadir, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2014a; 2014b). Due to the pre-election violence against party officials and workers, the opposition political party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ultimately decided to boycott the election (Hassan & Nazneen, 2017: 205). The BNP was not given the opportunity to continue its political campaign, despite participating in the 2018 general election (AFP 2018; Rahman 2018). Thus, campaign killings, threats against opposition leaders and activists, uneven voting, and terrified voters characterized the 2018 general election (AFP, 2018).

In terms of accountability in governance, the government hasn't put any policies into place to put an end to legal impunity regarding the current Right to Information Act (Aminuzzaman & Khair, 2017). A system like the Right to Information Act is essential in countries with high levels of corruption, like Bangladesh and India (Drèze & Sen, 2013: 96). However, free access to general information is one of the most effective ways to improve accountability and openness. National security-related material can be kept behind closed doors. Bangladesh needs to implement such a framework to increase its governance's transparency and accountability.

5.2 Participation in Policymaking

The analysis of political freedom in the preceding section has aided in illuminating the fact that over the past fourteen years, the

people of Bangladesh have not had the opportunity to influence national policy. The analysis supports the claim that Bangladesh did not have significant political freedoms during the regime. This can be accomplished by utilizing the three ways to influence policymaking: electoral politics and opposition, civil society and media organizations, and citizen politics. These forms of political participation have been mentioned by Sen (2000: 146–160) in his analysis. First, there is no longer a place for peaceful political protests to be organized in Bangladesh. Citizens consequently no longer have an opportunity to effectively address their demands. The police crackdowns during the 2018 Quota Reform Movement, the 2018 Road Safety Protests, and the Protest against the Rampal Power Plant (Shovon & Salekin, 2018) indicate that police crackdowns on non-partisan, non-violent, peaceful citizen activities have grown common in Bangladesh. The Digital Security Act and its predecessor, the ICT Act, have restricted citizens' ability to write and express themselves freely. According to several instances of detention and arrests made as a result of the act, it has turned into a crucial tool for stifling dissenting voices in the state. Second, due to the lack of a free and fair election, residents were not given the opportunity to select the political representatives they chose. It implies that the public has no voice in determining policies and thus, their interests were not represented in the parliament. The greatest means to ensure the voices of the populace are a free press and an active political opposition, according to Sen (2000: 181). The lack of free and fair elections, an effective opposition, and the assurance of voting rights imply that Bangladesh's population had little influence on the country's decisions. Thirdly, a culture of fear has been cultivated among the media and members of civil society as a result of the ongoing torture and detention of

these groups' members. Deaths while in the custody of the police, extrajudicial killings, arrests, and detentions made pursuant to the Digital Security Act have made it necessary for the regime to establish an impenetrable suppression system. The absence of these three options implies that Bangladesh's citizens lack any means of influencing the country's policy.

6. Conclusion

Since 2009, the Awami government has overseen significant economic growth and infrastructural development in Bangladesh. In the past fourteen years, the majority of the components that make up the social part of development have likewise advanced, although there are some concerns. The regime has failed to address inequality-related concerns. The unemployment rate is unchanged, and the regime has done nothing to lower female unemployment. Additionally, the government has not addressed potential environmental and ecological issues. Without giving any consideration to potential environmental hazards, the Rampal Coal Power Plant and the Rooppur Power Plant were built. Despite the government efforts, the quality of education has continued to be a concern. The government has also made an effort to combat violence against women. The regime has taken into account the concerns and interests of the disadvantaged communities. High economic growth, increased food production, improved food security, adequate energy and electricity, high life expectancy (particularly for women), and social protection programs for transgender, bedi, and tea workers have been the regime's primary accomplishments. It appears to have made an effort to accomplish both economic and social development based on its emphasis on fast-track projects and social protection.

But everything else pales in comparison to the regime's abject failure in the political sphere of progress. Political freedoms have taken a hundred steps backwards under the state. Despite implementing a few cutting-edge transparency initiatives, all political facets of progress have reached their lowest point. Indices, numerical depictions, the adoption of new policies, and the areas of policymaking that are given importance all indicate that, over the past fourteen years, the political dimensions of progress have been neglected. The government's fast-track initiatives indicate that economic growth has been given priority, but the regime has also given social development a lot of attention. As a result, it appears that the administration has continued to adhere to a more limited concept of social and economic growth. In order to paint an unusually bleak picture of social development in India, Drèze & Sen (2013) made reference to Bangladesh's social advancement. They contend that the simultaneous economic growth and social decay experienced by India exemplify the idea of "An Uncertain Glory," where the importance of the glory in the economic side has been ambiguous due to the social disparities that have existed. Bangladesh's political deficiencies have rendered the viability of its economic and social splendor uncertain. As a result, Bangladesh has advanced under the regime toward an "uncertain glory". The political aspects must be strengthened in order to achieve meaningful development. The claims of growth would remain uncertain without political liberties.

The 'Development as Freedom' concept encourages simultaneous awareness of all three aspects—economic, social, and political—where a deficiency in one aspect cannot be

made up for or replaced by another. Even when combined with Bangladesh's successes in the social facets of development, the country's economic growth cannot make up for the absence of political freedom. According to "Development as Freedom," the three facets of development should be valued simultaneously. This means that under the regime, political freedoms have experienced an unthinkable decline. Despite making considerable investments and making significant progress in both the economic and social facets of growth, the regime's glory is still in question due to the dismal state of political liberties which constitutes "An Uncertain Glory of Bangladesh." The followings are the recommendations for the stakeholders:

- a) **Strengthen Democratic Institutions:** Promote the independence of the judiciary, election commission, and anti-corruption bodies to ensure fair governance and rule of law. Establish and enforce checks and balances on executive power.
- b) **Ensure Free and Fair Elections:** Create transparent electoral processes monitored by credible domestic and international observers. Reform electoral laws to prevent voter suppression and manipulation.
- c) **Protect Civil Liberties and Political Rights:** Safeguard freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press through legal protections and enforcement. Repeal or amend repressive laws that are used to silence dissent, such as overly broad digital security or sedition laws.
- d) **Encourage Political Pluralism:** Support a multi-party system where opposition voices can participate without fear of persecution. Promote inclusive dialogue between political parties, civil society, and the public.

- e) **Promote Accountability and Transparency:** Require transparency in government spending and decision-making processes. Encourage investigative journalism and whistleblower protections.
- f) **Civic Education and Engagement:** Invest in civic education programs that emphasize the importance of democratic values and citizen participation. Empower civil society organizations to advocate for human rights and democratic reform.

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