

Symposium on
White Paper and Thereafter
Economic Management, Reforms and National Budget
Saturday, 18 January 2025, Carnival Hall, BICC, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Agargaon

Organised by *White Paper Committee 2024*
In collaboration with *Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh*

Concept Note

The present Interim Government of Bangladesh took the responsibility of running the country at a time when the economy was faced with significant structural challenges and experienced formidable macroeconomic strains. Recognising the gravity of the situation, the Government issued a gazette notification on 29 August 2024 establishing a committee to be headed by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), with the responsibility to prepare a White Paper on the state of the Bangladesh economy. The twelve-member White Paper Committee prepared its report within the stipulated three-month period and submitted the report to the Chief Advisor on 1 December 2024. The report presented an objective assessment of the state of the Bangladesh economy in key areas, articulating the challenges that were inherited by the Interim Government and offered a number of policy recommendations.

The publication of the "White Paper on State of the Bangladesh Economy: Dissection of a Development Narrative" has sparked a lively discussion about the challenges highlighted in the document and the recommendations it has come up with. Indeed, the leading global media outlets also covered the White Paper initiative and the report's contents. However, the authors of the White Paper are often confronted with questions regarding how the findings and recommendations will be acted upon. The questions are pertinent given that the current economic situation remains afflicted with a number of challenges, the promised reform agenda is quite unsettled, and the projected medium-term outlook seems pretty hazy.

In this backdrop, the White Paper Committee members seek to engage in a dialogue involving key stakeholders and policymakers in the context of the approaching national budget for 2025-26 and to generate shared perspectives and, if possible, an action agenda/plan in this regard.

Structure of the Symposium

The symposium will be a one-day event with five sessions. The dialogue will be conducted through an open discourse, fostering a participatory environment for exchanging diverse perspectives and recommendations.

The opening session will set the stage for the symposium, with the Chair presenting the context and objectives of the White Paper initiative. Three substantive sessions will follow, with in-depth discussions and inclusive consultations around key issues of economic governance and institutional reforms. Each session will commence with opening remarks by the moderator. This will be followed by presentations by the authors of the relevant sections of the White Paper, taking into cognisance the themes of the sessions. All sessions will have relevant policy experts and policy actors as dedicated commentators and speakers.

The session on *Issues Concerning Economic Management and Budget* will focus on the strategies for restoring macroeconomic stability by addressing challenges originating from high inflation, low investment, and low employment opportunities. The recommendations received during this session will be valuable for formulating the national budget for FY 2025-26 and establishing a strong foundation for a comprehensive medium-term agenda for public finance management.

The session on *Economic Reforms and Institutions* will focus on the priority domains for economic and institutional reforms outlined in the White Paper, which are crucial to addressing the embedded challenges facing the economy towards sustainable economic development. As is known, the Interim Government has launched a number of reforms and has set up several committees seeking recommendations in key reform areas. The session will provide an opportunity to strengthen this process through meaningful discussions and exchange of views.

The session on *Medium-term Outlook and Plan* will focus on gathering actionable recommendations for developing a flexible and adaptable two-year mid-term plan. This will ensure policy predictability, effective macroeconomic management, and alignment of domestic priorities with international assistance, fostering sustainable development and long-term partnerships.

The *Wrap-Up Session: Critical Reflections* will mark the end of the symposium, consolidating the discussions from the previous sessions. This session will feature two eminent speakers who will address the house, offering their insights as regards strategies to be pursued by the country to stand its ground in the face of the challenges and policy dilemmas confronting the Interim Government.

Participants of the Symposium

The symposium is designed to provide an interactive platform for stakeholders to engage in discussions and debates concerning macroeconomic challenges and structural bottlenecks. Beyond the standard policy actors, the proposed symposium seeks to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including policy analysts, academics, private sector leaders, civil society representatives, and international development partners. It is expected that participants of the symposium will contribute by offering insights and important practical solutions to foster macroeconomic stability, undertake institutional reforms, and formulate a sound medium-term plan. The symposium will be open to the media and will be broadcast live via social media platforms.

Outcome of the Symposium

The symposium will result in comprehensive documentation of discussions held in the various sessions, distillation of key policy recommendations, and their dissemination to government officials for informed consideration and possible actions.