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Investing in renewables is the way of the future

They are cheaper and environment-friendly

REFORMS desired in Bangladesh's energy sector have long been trapped in a policy dragnet that encouraged expansion of coal-based power generation while refusing to adopt cheaper, eco-friendly renewable energy on a scale that is necessary. With our fast-depleting gas reserves and the well-documented damaging effects of coal-based plants that far outweigh their benefits, a shift in existing policy is thus urgent. Experts have often noted how the policy continues to favour quick fixes over long-term reforms in line with questions of sustainability, future uncertainty about the availability of coal, its large carbon footprint and the global shift to renewable sources. At a webinar on Monday, speakers from Bangladesh and India also highlighted this issue. They specifically pointed to the Rampal power station in Bangladesh and the Adani-Godda power plant in Jharkhand, India, which they said threaten to destroy the environment as well as people's lives and livelihoods.

While China and India, the largest users of coal, are gradually winding down their dependence on it and shifting to renewable and nuclear energy, their continued mining as well as exporting of coal-related technology to countries like Bangladesh suggest their lack of concern for the wider ramifications of such a position. But the future lies in renewables, and so countries that are still heavily dependent on coal should seriously reconsider their policy. According to a recent report of the Carbon Tracker Initiative, a nonprofit research organisation, it is already cheaper to run new renewables than new coal plants in all major markets including the USA, China, India, etc. By 2030, it will be cheaper to build new renewables than to run existing coal plants everywhere. From an environmental perspective, any shift to renewables will remain incomplete unless everyone participates. Clearly, the enthusiasm for the long-term benefits that investment in renewable energy offers is not yet shared equally by everyone but the global crises of Covid-19 and climate change are proof that we, all of us, need to act fast. The business-as-usual approach is not going to work in this changing world.

It is also important for the energy planners of Bangladesh to consider the uncertainties surrounding imported coal. According to some experts, long-term supply of coal is becoming uncertain not because coal is running out or becoming costly, but because the future of mining coal itself is getting uncertain, thanks to the efforts of environmental activists and the anti-coal lobby targeting the insurers and re-insurers of coal mines and projects. Experts point out to reports of divestment of coal shares by some banks and pension funds as well as withdrawal of insurance, making coal mining and coal-fired power generation businesses unsustainable. Therefore, it is high time the authorities revisit their energy policy, phase out coal-based power plants and embrace renewable energy, which will not only be beneficial for our environment but also create thousands of jobs, especially in the rural sectors.

The more you spend the worse it gets

Undertake integrated plan to solve Dhaka's waterlogging problem

IT may sound facetious, even tendentious, but it will be very close to the truth to suggest that while the rainy season and waterlogging come as a curse for the city dwellers, it appears as a boon for some in the two city corporations. Thousands of crores of Taka are spent every year in projects to improve the drainage of the city and save people living with the misery of waterlogging, but it seems it has all gone down the drain. For example, in the last four years, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has spent over Tk 2,000 crore for so-called development of road infrastructure and drainage, while Dhaka North City Corporation allocated about Tk 1025.86 crore in the last fiscal year for the same purpose. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved, and in fact we see it worsening every year. The claim by the erstwhile mayor of DSCC in 2019, of solving the waterlogging problem in certain areas of his responsibility, has been belied. The result of the work that cost a pretty penny of the taxpayers' money was very visible after the heavy downpour in the city on Monday.

The terse but very true comment of a resident of Shantinagar, as quoted in this paper on Tuesday, identifies the nub of the problem. He says that the budget is made for their own benefits, not for the people or for public interest. We believe the time has come for the LGRD ministry to study seriously why the money being spent is not bearing fruit. Are there follies in the plans? We understand that the projects are approved by the LGRD ministry. It has much to answer for regarding the woes of waterlogging in Dhaka.

We believe that projects are being taken up in an isolated manner, with hardly any coordination between the corporations and the 54 other public service providers. We also believe that town planners and water experts should be taken on board the planning and implementation process. All the service providers should be put under one controlling authority, in this case the two city corporations, at least to stop them working at cross purposes. Finally, continuous oversight and strict accountability should be exercised so that the money does not go down the drain and ultimately into the pockets of unscrupulous individuals.

Caught in the middle of nowhere

Can nations strip terrorists of their citizenship?

A CLOSER LOOK



TASNEEM TAYEB

THE British Court of Appeal has recently ruled that "ISIS bride" Shamima Begum should be allowed to return to the United Kingdom to challenge the revocation of her British citizenship. Earlier in February last year, Sajid Javid, the then British Home Secretary, had stripped Begum of her citizenship, citing her as a threat to UK's national security. This decision was later endorsed by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC), which the BBC terms, "a semi-secret court that deals with cases where the UK government wants to keep someone out of the country on national security grounds."

There, however, is a bit of a complication: international law considers depriving nationals of their citizenship illegal if doing this renders them stateless. But the British Home Office had devised a way of bypassing this—they suggested that since Shamima Begum's parents are of Bangladeshi heritage, she can claim Bangladeshi citizenship, therefore she will not become stateless. A claim Bangladesh refutes on the solid grounds that she was neither born here, nor did she ever apply for a Bangladeshi

citizenship. A suggestion Begum's lawyer Tasnime Akunjee agrees with—"in no way is she Bangladesh's problem", Akunjee said while speaking with the BBC.

The lawyer also added, "What Sajid Javid did in stripping Shamima of her citizenship is human fly tipping—taking our problems and dumping them on other countries". And this attempt by the British Home Office raises certain rightful questions.

For one, the British government's justification for revoking Begum's citizenship on the grounds that, "The

Safety, in a statement said, "Canada is disappointed that the United Kingdom has taken this unilateral action to off-load their responsibilities".

But aside from the superficial problem of "dumping" one's unpleasant responsibilities on other nations, there is a deeper issue that needs to be talked about. By stripping citizenship of their nationals, Britain, along with some other nations, is not only undermining the human rights of the individuals, but also potentially reinforcing their extremist ideologies.

Left alone to fend for themselves in

And this has caused tensions for many governments. While most states scrambled to find ways of washing their hands of these pariahs, the US State Department's deputy spokesperson Robert Palladino went on to suggest that the Trump administration is mulling transferring the IS fighters who are not being taken back by their countries of origin to Guantanamo Bay—a netherworld of human rights abuses.

But for now, with the West and the rest of the world still undecided about the fate of IS fighters and their "brides", they remain a threat to global stability. These individuals are terrorists and criminals, and they should be held to account. But they cannot be left on their own. These people cannot be denied justice, even if they themselves are not on the right side of it.

No government has the mandate to undermine the basic human rights of their citizens and their social contract with the state. There are crimes and then there are laws to punish the criminals. It is time for nations to rise to the occasion and accept their responsibilities. The world needs to hear the stories of these individuals and understand what led to their radicalisation to be able to better address the problem of terrorism.

When Shamima Begum was found last year, she begged to be returned to the UK, especially fearing for the health of her unborn child. According to *The New Yorker* report cited earlier, Begum said, "I'm scared that this baby is going to get sick in this camp... That's why I really want to get back to Britain, because I know it will get taken care of, health-wise at least." Later, Begum's three-week old baby boy died of respiratory diseases.

While the Court of Appeal's verdict to allow Begum to return to the UK to contest the revocation of her citizenship is a welcome move, the negative reaction coming from Priti Patel's office and Downing Street—with a spokesperson for the Home Office even saying, "We will now apply for permission to appeal this judgment, and to stay its effects pending any onward appeal"—are disappointing and myopic.

One country's problem cannot be passed on to another, nor can these individuals be left alone to be lured back into terrorism. Britain must understand this, and the world must understand this, and now.

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

government's top priority remains maintaining our national security and keeping the public safe"—as suggested by the British Home Office—is flawed at its core. A society cannot wash its hands of its citizens because they have committed crimes or become associated with terrorism.

And if Shamima Begum remains a threat to the UK's national security, won't the same be applicable for Bangladesh? More pertinently, is it even possible for a nation to unilaterally make such decisions, and impose them on other countries?

Unfortunately, it seems the British Home Office has a certain way of dealing with people it considers a "threat" to its national security. According to a report by *The New Yorker*, in August last year, the British government also revoked the citizenship of Jack Letts, a jihadi hailing from Oxfordshire who was imprisoned in Syria, on the ground that his father was Canadian. In reaction, the office of Ralph Goodale, Canada's Minister of Public

the inhumane realities of the inhabitable camps in northern and northeastern Kurds-held camps in Syria, many like Shamima are left vulnerable to the lures of the terrorists. With no place to go, these individuals might turn back to IS for support and shelter. And with the Russia-brokered ceasefire between the Turks and Kurds remaining fragile, the threat of these women escaping the camps and going back to the arms of terrorism persists. During the Turkish attacks last year in northeast Syria, the fear of these prisoners fleeing became a real concern for the region.

Overall, the West have fared poorly when it comes to taking responsibility of its citizens who have become associated with the IS. In fact, in the face of the West's inertia regarding this problem, last November, Turkey followed through on its promise of deporting IS fighters and their families to their native countries, sending back men, women and children to the US, Britain, Denmark and Germany, among other countries.

No government has the mandate to undermine the basic human rights of their citizens and their social contract with the state. There are crimes and then there are laws to punish the criminals. It is time for nations to rise to the occasion and accept their responsibilities.

We must listen to the voices from the frontlines of the pandemic

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

ONE of the distinguishing features of the global Covid-19 pandemic has been to expose who the frontline workers around the world are and who the frontline victims of the pandemic are, both from the public health perspective and as a result of the impact of lockdown measures.

In the developed countries, it has been the health workers in hospitals and care homes as well as public transport workers, shopkeepers and delivery people, while in the major cities of the developing countries, it has been the daily labourers living in the informal settlements in major cities like Dhaka, Delhi, Mumbai and Manila in Asia and Nairobi and Lagos in Africa.

However, over the last few months, a number of lessons are emerging from the experiences in many developing countries on how to engage with the frontline communities. These are important lessons as we move forward to tackle climate change, which has not stopped because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, in Bangladesh, we were hit by super cyclone Amphan just two months ago and are currently being hit by major floods around the Brahmaputra river.

The first lesson is that in cities, where the local communities had either grassroots community groups or locally embedded NGOs, they were able to react and adapt to the lockdown measures that were imposed by national governments and these did not require heavy handed policing to be enforced.

They were also able to assist the relevant health and support authorities in providing health checks and quarantining where needed, as well as ensuring food supply for the needy. Settlements and slums where such local grassroots community groups did not exist were the worst sufferers, both from Covid-19 infections as well as lockdown conditions.

A major lesson to take forward into the Covid-19 recovery plans and investments is to build on and strengthen these local

grassroots groups in order to enable them to continue to help the vulnerable communities in these big cities.

Another lesson has been the numbers of migrants that have been living almost unnoticed or uncounted, as they did not have permanent residence and were not voters. In many cases, particularly in India, many of the migrants living in the informal settlements in the big cities were forced to walk back to their places of origin even though they were hundreds of

of these groups, especially those affiliated with Slum Dwellers International as well as NGOs in Bangladesh and elsewhere, to produce and disseminate a weekly series of blogs from different grassroots communities in Bangladesh, India, and other countries across Asia and Africa. This series of Voices from the Frontlines will run every week for the next year and will also include networking of these grassroots groups across towns and countries, as well as enabling them to

implementation and even monitoring of the investments that are being and will be made for the future development of cities and countries. This will be a new and necessary paradigm shift in national and local development planning and implementation that will need to be embraced and adopted by all sensible governments and development partners as they develop their recovery plans.

Future planning and investments need to focus much more on enhancing



Inundated houses in Sunamganj on July 15, 2020.

PHOTO: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/AFP

kilometres away. Whether they will return to the cities once the crisis is over is not certain yet.

In order to give voice to these grassroots community groups and their actions, my colleagues at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development have been talking to many

better engage with local and national governments to allow their voices to feed into decision making in the near future.

It is important that further decision making to tackle vulnerability to climate change should build on supporting the grassroots community groups as well as enhancing their inputs into design,

the resilience and capacities of local communities to withstand not just public health emergencies like Covid-19, but also the much bigger emergency of climate change.

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