

Why gas export is not a viable option for Bangladesh

BADRUL IMAM

In an apparent U turn on the question of gas export, the BNP hierarchy is now trying to make its way clear for the pipeline supply of natural gas to India. Yet it was not so long ago that Khaleda Zia was speaking in the same tone as the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina on gas export. "We cannot become beggars by exporting our gas" she said.

Since her above rhetoric, neither the gas reserve of the country increased, nor the projected future domestic gas demand decreased. So why does she change her mind? Was it a political showpiece or was it a genuine gesture that somehow turned sour? Whatever it is, it looks like finance minister Mr. Saifur Rahman will have tough time in selling the idea of pipeline gas export to the people because a large mass of politicians, academicians, professionals and national experts strongly believe that exporting gas at the present stage will go against the national interest.

How dependent Bangladesh is on natural gas? The dependence is overwhelming and obvious as one can see that about 90 per cent of the electricity generated in the country comes from gas fired power plants. A comparative study shows (Oil and Gas Journal, 16 July, 2001) the share of natural gas among total commercial energy consumed annually in the following Asia Pacific countries: India 8 per cent, South Korea 9 per cent, Japan 13 per cent, Thailand 24 per cent, Indonesia 31 per cent, New Zealand 32 per cent, Pakistan 42 per cent, Malaysia 50 per cent and Bangladesh 70 per cent. Obviously Bangladesh is placed in a unique position, being the most dependent on gas.

Why consider 40 or 50 years gas demand?

At present Bangladesh produces about 1000 million cubic feet of gas per day and about 332 billion cubic feet of gas per year. This is what the country needs and uses mainly for generating electricity, producing fertilizer, feeding industrial, commercial and domestic sectors. In that sense there is no additional demand of gas at present. This is a point emphatically preached by the foreign oil companies working here, as they advocate the case of gas export. The foreign companies try to

down play the fact that Bangladesh has to depend on its gas for a long time in future and there is at present not enough gas to sustain such dependence. Not surprisingly, the foreign companies are here to do business and to make profit and therefore would not bother to consider the future energy scenario of the country. But for Bangladesh, ensuring future supply of gas is of paramount importance. There are basically two reasons for this:

1) Except for natural gas, there is no other significant indigenous commercial energy source in the country. Oil prospect of the country

renewable large scale energy source will not happen before 2060. Also the role of nuclear energy will continue to decrease worldwide because of its environmental negative side. In fact oil and gas together will remain the prime energy source throughout the world until 2040 after which gas will be the single most important fuel. Use of natural gas will peak in 2050 and after that time battle between gas and solar energy will begin for dominance. It is only after 2060 that the battle will swing in favour of solar energy.

Form the above it is logical for a country which has gas as the only

1970 was 0.067 trillion cubic feet (TCF), during 1971-1980 it was 0.279 TCF (more than four times the previous decade), during 1981-1990 it was 1.067 TCF (3.8 times the previous decade) and during 1991-2000 it was 2.49 TCF (2.3 times the previous decade). The present growth rate of use of natural gas is 7 per cent per annum.

A study of the future demand of natural gas in the next 50 years has been carried out by the government. The demand forecast is done on yearly basis from 2001 to 2050 taking care of individual sectors like power, fertilizer, commercial, indus-

trial and domestic. A decade wise future gas demand is shown as follows: 4.4 TCF during 2001-2010, 8.8 TCF during 2011-2020 (twice the previous decade), 13.0 TCF during 2021-2030 (1.6 times the previous decade), 16.9 TCF during 2031-2040 (1.3 times the previous decade) and 19.3 TCF during 1941-1950 (1.2 times the previous decade). From the above 40 years gas demand of the country is 43.1 TCF and 50 years' gas demand is 62.4 TCF.

From gas field to gas reserves: Central to the subject of gas export is the question: do we have enough gas for export? Do we have or will we have 62 TCF gas available to meet 50 years' demand or 43 TCF gas for 40 years' for that matter? The "floating on gas" theory which used to sneak through the media from time to time, has lately been silenced, thanks to the USGS-Petrobranga joint gas assessment report. Before coming back to this gas assessment report, let us point our attention to some of the gas fields in Bangladesh.

Bakhrabad gas field, discovered in 1969, was initially considered one of the largest in the country with a reserve of 2.78 TCF. In 1990 Canadian consultant IKM in a revised study concluded that the reserve of the field is 0.867 TCF, substantially lower than the previ-

ous estimate. Bakhrabad was put under production in 1984 but since 1995 the pressure drop in the field resulted continuous decrease in production rate and production decreased to 105 mmcf/d in 1997 and 45 mmcf/d in 1999. At present it is producing only 35 mmcf/d. Bakhrabad gas field will be exhausted in a few years from now.

Titus gas field, one of the largest in size and the biggest producer in the country, had initial reserve of 2.1 TCF, but more than 1.8 TCF or about 85 per cent of the reserve has already been produced from the field. How long the remaining 15 per cent gas will run is anybody's guess. Chattak gas field had 1.14 TCF gas according to the previous estimate, but recently a revised reserve estimate showed it to be 0.27 TCF. Chattak was put under production in 1960, but production declined led to its suspended in 1987. A reappraisal of the field has been suggested. Kamta and Feni gas fields, put under production in 1984 and 1992 respectively, were suspension from production in 1992 and 1998 due to water production instead of gas.

Out of 22 discovered gas fields, only a handful are large in size (reserve in excess of 1 TCF). There are 14 fields with individual reserve less than 0.5 TCF. These include Begumganj (0.01 TCF), Meghna (0.08 TCF), Semutang (0.098 TCF), Sylhet (0.10 TCF), Narsingdi (0.10 TCF), Saldanadi (0.12 TCF), Beanibazar (0.16 TCF), Kamta (0.17 TCF), Fenchuganj (0.21 TCF), Chattak (0.24 TCF), Shahbazpur (0.33 TCF), Moulvibazar (0.40 TCF), Feni (0.44 TCF), Kutubdia (0.46 TCF). These gas fields will be short lived. The country has a present gas reserve of about 11 TCF.

It is not that large field will no more be discovered in Bangladesh, but the distribution of field size will certainly follow the already proven trends of the present fields. That means there will be more small discoveries than large discoveries.

It therefore brings up several questions. Why can't the government realize that it will make the nation vulnerable to a disastrous future energy crisis if it starts gas export with this modest reserve in hand? Should the government want to judge the viability of an export option, why can't it wait more for the reserve scenario to change substantially, if it does, in favour of Bangladesh? Why can't the government tell the foreign companies that the interest of the nation is more than the interest of the companies? Why can't the government ask the foreign companies to go and find more reserve before they propose an export option? And finally, why is the government in such a hurry to make a point on gas export? Or has it already made the point?

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As sewers take over Dhaka

They reflect failed governance rather than failed drainage

THE Dhaka city faces the fate of either being choked to death by garbage or overrun by sewage. This isn't an apocalyptic metaphor but a possible scenario of the very near future as it tries to do with less than 650 kilometers of sewerage lines when it needs at least 3000 km of it. There is something oddly apt for a city which has grown and prospered like a bandit in a border town.

The problem is that the authorities don't have enough sewerage lines. The city house owners don't construct septic tanks anymore. Instead most link their sewer disposal lines to the main line which is supposed to dispose of rain water and other non-toxic effluents. Of course a large section of local WASA officials benefit from this practice. This water lands up in the lakes and rivers polluting them almost beyond measure.

The city's sewer system is also so ancient that it's threatening to blow up under the pressure of jammed and overflowing feces. But the most terrifying news is that nobody is doing anything about all this at all. One can live in Dhaka only at the mercy of sewers.

One reason why the authorities haven't been able to do anything about the problem is lack of resources. The city is unable to repair itself and there is no one keen to keep it going. This applies to the ever present foreign lender or the city's residents themselves. Most probably one isn't interested in saving Dhaka while the other doesn't consider it worth it.

Dhaka has exploded beyond capacity, planning and expectation. With the pursuit of ill-gotten wealth as the primary target for most, nobody bothered to look after the place where they lived. Since politicians have sprung from the same culture that encourages crony capitalism, they too never invested in the city. Since the caretakers of the city showed no interest in its maintenance, the new breed of home owners didn't bother to either. Thus a cycle of neglect was created that has led to the present crisis situation.

We have reported on this problem several times over the last few years. Nobody is taken it seriously enough to do something about it. The new government is yet to settle into its job, still it needs to move immediately in this particular field. We earnestly hope that some immediate steps will be taken to address the sewerage system of Dhaka.

Ultimately it's a question of urban governance. When that crashes, many other aspects die with it. The state of the sewers is really a statement on the failed governance of a state, society and city. The rest are simply fetid examples of the misery that failures generate.

GD against PM questionable

But what about BNP supporters who ransacked the police station?

THERE has been a considerable snowballing of disquiet centring around the news that Awami League leader advocate Rahmat Ali MP filed a general diary at Sreepur police station naming Prime Minister Begum Zia in his complaint. He stated in his entry something to this effect that the PM be held responsible if anything should happen to Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina and her sister Rehana following withdrawal of lifelong state security for them as a result of striking off the law relating to it.

Such an exceptional, dramatic and presumptive recourse taken to filing a GD against the PM looks patently anachronistic to the image of her high office and certain constitutional immunities that it carries. This may have created an intended stir, but Rahmat Ali with his knowledge as a lawyer and status as an MP should not have done so, however hurt his sensibilities might have been by the annulment of the relevant law. So the move has been questionable on the AL MP's part.

We also think that it has been a case of misjudgment on the part of the officer-in-charge of Sreepur thana to have accepted the GD in the first place, which basically set the ball rolling in an awkward direction. He should have referred the matter to higher authorities instead of acting on his own betraying a lack of grasp of the full implications of what he was doing. Little wonder, the OC has earned a suspension order for entertaining the GD.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman was caustic in his remarks in the parliament the other day saying if OCs started accepting GDs like that it would be a rule of jungle in the country. The sentiments expressed and steps taken are all very understandable reactions from government circles. But what we are hugely intrigued by is the complete lack of action against the band of BNP supporters who ransacked the thana and spawned disturbances through their hartal at Sreepur. People would like to know what action the government is contemplating against those BNP elements who took law into their own hands.

Election-2001: Act-I played

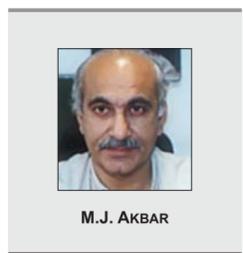
SHAHABUDDIN AHMAD

WITH the swearing in of a 60-member cabinet, the largest ever in Bangladesh, with Begum Khaleda Zia as the Prime Minister, the BNP-led 4-party alliance has been saddled in power. With the assumption of office of the President of Bangladesh, a largely ceremonial office, by AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, without any contest, the constitutional provision has been completed. Between the two ceremonies there has been restructuring of the officers in defence, civil including police, law, universities, medical institution, prison and other organizations. Many more posting and transfers will take place as a matter of routine, a prerogative of the government but prerogatives must be used discreetly. These exercises have taken a few weeks' time of the government and it is hoped that these changes will help in the dis-

pensation of justice equitably for all irrespective of caste, colour, creed and political beliefs. The initial few weeks' time of the new government, however, was marred by the reported oppression on minority community, particularly Hindus, done allegedly by the ruling party activists. The Home Minister and the Foreign Minister have, however, contested these incidents and they have both termed the reports either as baseless or as exaggerated. Whatever be the truth of the matter, there is no scope for the government to remain complacent on the plea that the matter has been exaggerated. Nor any quarter should overplay or magnify the issue with a view to discredit Bangladesh, where communal harmony has been the best excepting occasional rapture, under the given geo-political and economic situation.

The Prime Minister, in her first address to the nation, has assigned some programmes for 100 days to

Take your pick



M.J. AKBAR

BEFORE Mike Denness interfered with history, and my life, I did not much care whether the Indian team won or lost in its latest effort to raise money for the impoverished families of Test match cricketers, needy institutions like television companies, the Board of Control for Cricket in India, its equivalent in South Africa, the International Cricket Committee and the various organisations that control venues where Test cricket is played in South Africa (one or two with remarkable names). My first glimpse of the India-South Africa series was on television. I quickly discovered that if this had been boxing, some honest referee would have stopped the fight.

On the one side was Shaun Pollock with a tough, no-nonsense air about him, in the company of a bowler with a multi-syllable name and genuine pace to go with his mean look. There was nothing unprofessional about that mean look, I hasten to add; he was doing his job, and doing it reasonably well, in the modern spirit. Facing them, on that fateful morning, was Saurav Ganguly. I must have been particularly stupid that day, for there was so much that I did not understand. Why, for instance, had the selectors of the Indian cricket team sent a footballer to play in South Africa? Saurav Ganguly was fending the

rising ball off like an expert goalkeeper deflecting something he cannot hold beyond the goalposts on either side of him. Saurav scratched the air with his bat while his head, without sufficient time to think, sought the mercy of instinct, and not very elegantly at that. I gather, checking the scorebooks, that Saurav Ganguly did not do too badly in terms of runs scored, so there must have been occasions when he batted well, or when those

handout to a veteran who must also get his share, however little it might be in the case of match referees, of the loot that is now synonymous with cricket. Only an excess of money can explain the fact that there are now four umpires for every Test. One can see the point of the third umpire in the age of technology, for the third umpire is really the camera rather than a human being. A human being is hired merely to pass on to the field what

or even unreasonable, doubt that Mike Denness was biased. You cannot ignore Shaun Pollock and find young Virender Sehawg of Haryana, who has played fewer Tests than the number of times Pollock repeated his appeal, guilty and expect any other conclusion. You cannot besmirch six players of a side, punish the captain for being unable to control his players for behaviour that is par for the course and expect any other verdict on

provocation, with every intention of creating a controversy that he thought would affect Indian morale. He gave himself away when he admitted, in London, that at best it was only a technical fault and not a deliberate use of unfair means. You do not have to be match referee and an ex-England captain to appreciate what is obvious. Some commentators have been so provoked that they think Denness was setting up the Indian side before its con-

cluded this important issue in *The Asian Age* and decided that the answer is no. He is not even prepared to call Denness anti-Indian. Why? Because during the England tour of India in 1971-72 he saw Denness reading Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography. That is by far the most interesting reason I have come across.

On the other hand, one could make a good case for the view that reading Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography would be sufficient to convert any normal, liberal, balanced Englishman into a racist. I presume this is the autobiography that Gandhi published in 1928, written during the fallow decade after the collapse of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movement. Few autobiographies are as frank as that. It is a kind of litany of failure and guilt. This is the book where Gandhi narrates for instance that he was having sex with his wife in the next room when a parent died. He not only punished himself with abstinence after that, but, sadiastically, punished all his disciples as well. (Jawaharlal, fortunately for India, left such discipline to others. In this respect, Jinnah was more Gandhi than him!) There is enough material in Gandhi's autobiography to make a psychoanalyst sparkle (as indeed Erik Erikson did).

I can imagine a healthy liberal's reaction to the autobiography: "You mean, we lost the British empire to this man! We lost out to a combination of abstinence and non-violence! This is crazy! This man must have cheated!!! All Indians are cheats!!!"

Our columnist friend adds that Denness also picked up the autobiographies of other Indian leaders. Frankly, if I were made to read the lives of some of our Indian politicians, I would become anti-Indian too.

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BYLINE

One could make a good case for the view that reading Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography would be sufficient to convert any normal, liberal, balanced Englishman into a racist. I presume this is the autobiography that Gandhi published in 1928, written during the fallow decade after the collapse of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movement. Few autobiographies are as frank as that.

mean pacers were too tired to continue their bullying. Being a cricket junkie, I did return sporadically to the set during the series, and was well rewarded once or twice too. When young Virender Sehawg made his century, for instance: good, mature footwork and a bat that knew when to meet the ball and when to leave it alone. I wish Sehawg had become a household name because of his batting.

Like most other fans, I had little idea that Mike Denness was the match referee for the second Test; and if I had known it I would not have cared. Sunil Gavaskar is in the technical committee of the ICC, a fact that I learnt from Geoff Boycott, who narrated it with much relish. What does this committee do? It appoints match referees, among other things. In other words, Sunil Gavaskar did not much care either when Denness was accepted as match referee by both India and South Africa. It was only another

the camera has told him. What is the fourth man's job? Is the Umpire of Umpires, the majestic match referee, there to tell us that the umpires have not done their job? It is, or at least used to be, the job of the two umpires on the ground to inform players whether they were behaving or misbehaving. Umpires on the ground have very real and effective ways of telling a bowler that he has made a nuisance of himself. The umpire should have turned down Shaun Pollock's now famous appeal purely because it was an attempt to hector the umpire into a decision. If we need a match referee at all, it is only to pull up the officiating umpires on the ground for being incapable of doing their job. Mike Denness should have fined that umpire, and he would have entered the history books for a far better reason than he did.

So to the all-important question: is Mike Denness a racist? The bare facts prove beyond any reasonable, your inclinations. Mike Denness was not sending a signal to merely the players. He was passing a remark on the Indian national side and implicitly on India. This is one reason why there was outrage. Indians, Mr Denness, are not chauvinistic about cricket, however much they may love the game. They would not have reacted in the manner they did if they were not convinced that this was acrid and unacceptable injustice. They understand cricket. They even understand what cricket used to be about, as in the phrase, "It's not cricket".

The decision against Sachin Tendulkar is where bias came close to racism. If Sachin was technically at fault, as every press pundit who has never cleaned dirt from the seam has told us, then it was one of those faults, which requires a raised eyebrow and a quiet word, not a screaming headline. Denness did what he did deliberately, without

admit their faults publicly and rectify them, (b) listen to criticism from within the party and take corrective steps, (c) eschew consideration of blood relations in public affairs, (d) elect the party chief and the presidium members democratically, (e) look forward with a vision keeping the ideals of liberation war and the courage of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the guiding spirit and not make an idol of him. The simple people of the country, some of whose votes are traded in the elections on monetary consideration by all political parties have the wisdom to take the right decision at the critical juncture. This has been amply proved in 1954, 1969, 1971 and 1990. They will watch how both the Establishment and the Opposition act in the scenes, the amalgam of which are the acts of a real life drama to be enacted as a result of the election-2001 and completed within the next five years.

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be implemented by her government. A good start as this is an expression of her intention of hard work for the development of the country. Her proponents and opponents will eagerly wait to see what she achieves in her 100-day programme. She has really put her offices and herself to an acid test. But without waiting for 100 days two things should have been expedited. One is the cleanliness of Dhaka City and the other is the city's law and order. It appears that the City Corporation of Dhaka has gone on a long slumber. Dirt, filth, garbage are all

around and clearing these will show visible improvement and will be appreciated by the city dwellers. If the City Father is not functioning, the LGRD Ministry should get the work done through the ward commissioners or by some other outfit. As far as the law and order situation is concerned, the least said is better, as people die in road traffic on city roads in broad daylight. Reshuffle in police administration from IGP to OCs is not proving effective. May be the solution lies elsewhere.

The Finance Minister (he has the longest experience in that position) is waging a war of words and data. He is telling consistently that the AL Government has left the government exchequer completely dry. His former colleague, SAMS Kibria, coming from the same division, has replied to Saifur Rahman's comments and statements through written rejoinders. However, both of them know it jolly well that ordinary people will go by the simple fact of whether living is within everybody's reach and if life is safe. The rest of their claims and counter claims are bunkum. The World Bank and the IMF representatives will, as they

have in the past, advocate for new financial and monetary prescriptions for the country because they are paid to do so. If these pundits of the IMF and World Bank are real experts, then why the US economy was going down even before September 11. Did they prescribe measures? After all USA is their landlord.

The leader of opposition is now more sober and she has been able to get rid of the first shocks of not winning the elections. Losing elections is losing office and power akin to a Kingdom (here democratic though). This is why cried

King Richard: "A horse! A horse! My Kingdom for a horse!"
Cates: Withdraw, my Lord;
"I'll help you to a horse."
--Richard-III by Shakespeare
Volumes have been written and said about election debacle of AL. Even one State Minister of Sheikh Hasina's Cabinet has in an article published in a business associations' publication, identified some reasons for the defeat of AL. His courage, though belated, to write even at this stage should be an eye opener because not many stalwarts of AL want to listen to one listing reasons for their defeat. One very old leader of AL, who worked with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, told this scribe that if AL hierarchy were criticized many would not exist in the party.

AL, in order to remain in the political arena in the country actively and honourably must learn to (a)