

Dream of an ordinary citizen



The dream of an ordinary citizen can come true only in an environment of peace and harmony, where the citizens make relentless efforts to improve their living conditions and their leaders act with responsibility and selflessly, while governments change periodically on the basis of free and fair elections. Let us hope the dialogue the government and the opposition have embarked on after confrontational politics of a decade and a half would lead us to such an era of peace, harmony, and prosperity.

GHULAM RAHMAN

I have a dream. The dream is that of an ordinary citizen. The dream is to have the right to the basic necessities of life -- food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, etc. The dream is to have the right to work with provisions for reasonable rest, recreation, and leisure. The dream is about a decent living for all of us. The constitution has provisions to guarantee them. My dream is to see them realized in my lifetime.

Bangladesh has a per capita income of \$500. Its economy is growing at over 6 per cent rate per annum. If the growth momentum could be pushed by 1 per cent annually, by the year 2010 the economy would grow at 10 per cent. If this could be maintained for the next 15 years, by the year 2015 the country would be out of the club of 49 Least Developed Countries (LDC), and by 2025 would become a mid-level developing country, with per capita income of about \$3,000.

The country would reach the threshold of a developed nation with per capita income of over \$12,000 by 2040 if the same growth rate can be maintained for the next 15 years. That can happen only if almighty Allah is very gracious. The underlying assumption, however, is that the population will remain stable. In reality, the population is likely to grow for a few years and then would stabilize for sometime before it starts declining. The actual per capita income, therefore, could be somewhat different than stipulated.

I am not daydreaming. Some nations, including China, the most populous country in the world, have shown that double-digit growth is attainable. Such a high growth rate seems to be within the reach of neighbouring India, which has already attained almost 9 per cent growth. What is needed is a vision for the future and single-minded relentless efforts of the leadership and the populace to reach those goals. It could be much easier for us than others to reach these targets as we have a homogeneous and young population. Once we commit ourselves to these goals, various strategies could be chalked out to attain them. I have one, which I would like to designate as 9E strategy.

For the country to prosper, the first and foremost requirement is accountability and transparency in governance. This can be achieved through periodic credible elections to select the stewards to lead the country and the communities at the national and local levels. Thus **election** is the first element of 9E. Only a democratic polity can provide good governance and create lasting environment of freedom and innovation for uninterrupted progress and prosperity.

The second prerequisite is empowerment of the downtrodden and disadvantaged groups. A society marches ahead in an environment of fair competition with equal opportunity for all. Every citizen should be on a level playing field. Therefore, **empowerment** is the second element of 9E.

For attaining excellence and

glory in the community of nations we must educate citizens about worldly subjects to develop their skills to engage in productive occupations, to excel in science and technology and other arena of scholarly pursuit of arts, ethics, history, religion, etc.

Education is the third element of 9E.

The wheels of production rotate with energy. Energy makes life comfortable, easy, and hassle-free. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to ensure adequate supply of energy -- gas, oil, and electricity for every-day comfort as well as for long-term improvements in citizens' living conditions.

However, the situation is precarious now. We are using our limited gas reserves to produce electricity, possibly not the best possible use for this scarce resource. Already few precious lives were lost in brutal governmental action during mass agitations triggered by the government's failure to ensure adequate supply of energy to its people.

However, the region we are in is rich in hydroelectric potentials as well as oil and gas reserves. Energy cooperation among Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, and Nepal is likely to give a boost to the development of the entire region. All these countries, particularly Bangladesh, can reap huge benefits from affordable hydroelectricity from Nepal, Bhutan, and India, coal from India, and gas from Myanmar, and at the same time can share its own energy resources with the neighbors to put them in best possible use. In 9E strategy, **energy** is the sixth element.

Welfare, income, and employment have close correlations. Employment gives income and income promotes welfare. A modern state exists for the welfare of its people. In this scenario, **employment** is the most important of the nine elements. All the policies and

programs of the government should be geared to generate and facilitate employment. Broadly speaking, of the country's total workforce, about 50 per cent should be engaged in manufacturing, construction, and mining sectors; 25 per cent in agriculture, fisheries and animal husbandries, and the remaining 25 per cent in services and other sectors.

For orderly expansion of the economy, a few corridors of development, say, one from Teknaf to Dhaka, another from Mongla to Bangladesh, and still another from Dhaka to Tamabil, etc. and about one hundred or so hubs of manufacturing and service activities, with population ranging from a few hundred thousand to several million, may be created with the right facilities. The development in these hubs should be more vertical than horizontal. The picturesque rural character of the rest of the country should remain undisturbed.

Since the Second World War, several East and South-East Asian countries achieved unprecedented social transformation and economic growth, initially based on export expansion and then with concurrent increase in domestic demand. Production of goods and services depend on "effective demand." A nation is poor because its people lack purchasing power which oils the wheels of production. In the present LDC status, it would not be possible to break the "vicious circle of poverty" without opening of and a breakthrough in markets abroad for products and service produced in Bangladesh.

This is why the current Doha Round of WTO negotiations is so important for the country. Despite all pervasive corruption and widespread governmental failure in almost every sector, Bangladesh economy is showing good prospects due to expansion of garment industry and manpower export. The economy is benefiting in multiple ways from these two sectors. In 9E strategy, **economic integration** is the eighth element of 9E strategy.

The country should generate not only enough employment for the new entrants in the job market but also for the absorption of 30 million or so unemployed labour force in the next couple of years and attain full employment by 2015.

Simultaneously, the efforts to raise labour productivity through skill development and adoption of improved modern technology should continue unabated to give the country an edge in global competitiveness.

In this age of globalization, no country can progress in isolation.

Economic integration, particularly with the neighbouring countries, is pivotal for ensuring uninterrupted long-term progress. European Union, Nafta, and Asean are some



of the examples which show how living standards of people can be made better by opening each other's markets and harnessing and sharing each other's resources.

We must work together with India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan, and even with China, to develop water and energy resources and to develop infrastructure -- road, railway, and river communication network.

By developing Chittagong port and making it an efficient regional hub, the country's GDP could be raised by at least 1 per cent and create a million new jobs. **Economic integration**, is, therefore, the eighth element in 9E strategy.

Everyone in society should have access to good education, healthcare, decent living environment, public transportation, and security of life and property. Everybody should enjoy equal rights and freedom of thought, action, and religious belief, and none should impede others' rights. All would be equal in the eyes of law

mid-level developing country by 2025 and raise it to the status of a developed country in about 40 years.

The dream of an ordinary citizen can come true only in an environment of peace and harmony, where the citizens make relentless efforts to improve their living conditions and their leaders act with responsibility and selflessly, while governments change periodically on the basis of free and fair elections. Let us hope the dialogue the government and the opposition have embarked on after confrontational politics of a decade and a half would lead us to such an era of peace, harmony, and prosperity.

The process of economic and social transformation is a complex phenomenon. There is no precise explanation as to why some countries are rich while others are poor. Many African countries with abundant natural resources are poor and on the other hand resource-poor Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are rich.

Human endeavour and ingenuity perhaps play a decisive role. With right policies and leadership, a country could make great strides in a short period, as the countries of South-East Asia exemplify. The 9E strategy, if pursued vigorously, I believe, would create conditions which would make Bangladesh a

Gulam Rahman is a former Secretary to the government.

Power crisis

SALEQUE SUFI

BANGLADESH is reeling under severe power load shedding -- the worst in its history. People of all walks of life are agitated. Even the major cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, and Khulna are having 10-12 hours brown-outs regularly.

People have started coming out in the streets and taking the law into their own hands. This is an ominous sign for everyone, let alone the government of the day, caretaker government, or the incoming government.

The power generation and supply system appears to have completely collapsed. The national grid cannot meet even 50% of the average demand. Against a coincident peak demand of about 4,900 MW the generation has come down to a little over 3000 MW.

It is a shame, it is a disgrace. It has not happened over a day or a month. Non-professional attitude and massive corruption has culminated in this misfortune. There has been practically no addition to power generation over the entire term of the 4-party alliance government.

The lone so-called peaking plant at Tongi has become a liability. The coal operated plant at Barakpuria is already sick, like the coal mine. Many of the ageing plants at Ashuganj and Ghorashal are long overdue for overhauling. Some of these have outlived their economic life and should have been replaced by now.

No major new plants were set up and very little maintenance was carried out. So instead of increasing power generation has gone down. On the other hand, demand has increased in geometric progression. The country's power sector will

remain in trouble for a long time into the future. Consequently trade, commerce, and even civic life are in total chaos and jeopardy. So what are the remedies?

As conscious citizens, no self-respecting Bangladeshi should keep their fingers crossed and wait for divine blessing. The civil society must diagnose the failures and come up with possible remedies to alleviate the ongoing sufferings.

I remember that I had an opportunity to help prepare the minutes of a high level meeting at the PMO sometime in 2005 while working as director (operations) of the national gas grid. My friend, Aminur Rahman, director (operations) of TGTCL, and myself had some ideas for load management which could have been effective during that period. But I believe that the situation is much worse now.

Staggering the peak load over different slots may not work now. In many countries, super-markets are open only during the day on weekdays. They do not have power generation crisis, but they still do that, but in our power-starved country we keep our super malls open till midnight. Is this not a luxury?

We have developed this culture and cannot easily come out of it. But civil society must create public opinion about shopping culture during the day and on week-ends. All shops and markets, excepting food and medicines shops, must close by 6 pm on weekdays. This will save a significant amount of power during peak time.

There should be a massive drive for disconnecting unauthorised and illegal connections during caretaker government's tenure. A sufficient amount of diesel must be kept reserved for the upcoming irrigation season for relieving the national power grid from a significant load,

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. The author is aware of this initiative. It can be guaranteed that Bangladesh will never receive a cheaper option than this again. The new government must not make the mistake of scrapping fair contracts for narrow political gains.

All the dubious and non-transparent power deals must be scrapped, and fresh tenders must be invited in a transparent manner within the first 100 days of the new government. The list should include Meghnaghat Units 2 & 3, Sirajgonj 450 MW, Fenchuganj, and Chandpur.

The complete overhauling and replacement of existing plants at Ashuganj and Ghorashal must receive priority. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority attention. The bio-diesel alternative must be given serious attention. Plants can be made to run on bio-diesel.

A regional power grid can be a viable option. Last year, in New Delhi, the author had the opportunity to meet senior executives of the ONGC and the Mittal group. India is planning to set up large power plants at Tripura, a stone's throw from the Khasia border. If this happens, Bangladesh may exchange power with India. We need power during peak hours, and can sell during off-peak hours when all our effective generation is available.

The Sirajgonj power plant would have been up and running by now if the Summit-PDB joint venture had got the final approval. Any addition to power generation at Meghnaghat will require a new gas pipeline from Bakhrabad to Demra. This should proceed simultaneously, keeping a provision for extending this line across the Padma river

over the future Padma bridge.

Coal mining options must be given serious thought, and every coal mine must have mine-mouth power plants. Power from municipal waste can be an option for Dhaka and Chittagong. The solar power option must get priority