

Generating power without government

To develop energy, the planners repeatedly advise mobilisation of resources, which means high taxes and a burden on the people. They also instruct the government to borrow capital on easy terms from foreign governments and institutions. This conventional method has not only failed to develop either our energy or the economy, but has also brought about an ugly culture of corruption.

NIZAM AHMAD

"If all conditions for development other than capital are present, capital will soon be generated locally or will be available from abroad"-- Lord Peter T. Bauer, a celebrated critic of foreign aid to Third World, taught Development Economics at the L.S.E. from 1960-83.

THE Bangladesh government struggles to meet the energy needs of the population, although this government, a popular version of a caretaker, is trying to take the bull by its horn. However, while it tries to make matters right by tackling corruption, depoliticising the energy sector, or breaking the unholy monopoly of a few private

vendors, the government needs to rework radically its energy policy. The best way would be for the government to stand back and allow the market to generate a momentum in the management and production of energy. A sweeping shift in power generation, from a "public-private partnership" to a wholly private entity in competition with the existing power generation by the government, can overcome the present energy crisis in the country. Bangladesh's leaking gas fields and disruptions in supply prove that the contractors chosen by the government were either incapable, or were cheating the government, or were simply awarded contracts carelessly. However, under stiff government

control, the Bangladesh gas fields are not only ill-managed but also do not benefit from advanced technologies that can revive, in many cases, old fields for more fossil fuels. Within the government, and SOEs, there is a strong component of deeply embedded selfish interest, for keeping infrastructure investments and management of energy within their control. Furthermore, the demand of our development economists that the government should play a large role in energy matters reinforces the vile interests of such vested groups. To develop energy, the planners repeatedly advise mobilisation of resources, which means high taxes and a burden on the people. They also instruct the government to

borrow capital on easy terms from foreign governments and institutions. This conventional method has not only failed to develop either our energy or the economy, but has also brought about an ugly culture of corruption. It is only logical that a drastic cut in the government's economic involvement can drastically diminish corruption. Our coal fields could be a good source for power, but remain unutilised due to faulty contracts and protests from environmentalists who prefer darkness and poverty to having foreign investors develop our natural resources. Ecological concerns and a repeat of the East India Company syndrome run wild in the minds of our development intelligentsia. They hold no faith in the laws of the country for punishing corporate frauds, or in modern technology for clearing industrial pollution. The government had always approved industrialisation without any concern for clean environment. The consequence has been acute pollution of rivers, ponds, cultivable lands, including populated areas

like Hazaribagh in Dhaka. Bangladesh has no waste cleaning technology, or management, due to this regulatory negligence. Our energy specialists often reveal a magic number of 50 years of reserve gas, or coal, before any export can take place. The Bangladesh economy, if steered by private entrepreneurship, will naturally seek, as the world does, alternate sources of energy including nuclear energy, but if export at all takes place, prices will climb to an abnormal high when reserves are low. The high prices will deter exports, keeping the reserves intact and untouched. Contrarily, the government signs long-term fixed price agreements that do not, and cannot, reflect true reserves or discoveries. It is time to let the private sector, foreign or local, to invest in Bangladesh's energy sector to fulfil market demands for gas and electricity. Undeniably, private enterprises would be more efficient, with their expertise and resources, in supplying uninterrupted gas or coal for our power. Gas reserves could

be higher, and utilisation more efficient, if private producers were discovering, conserving, and supplying gas to our kitchens, and to fertiliser or power plants. In a free market in energy, prospective private investors in Bangladesh, after signing up with the local administration, would be free to negotiate with people on whose land they want to drill or excavate. For a successful outcome, as in any business, there will be negotiations with people in relevant areas for corporate shares, jobs, or a premium price for the use or purchase of their lands. Presently, government owned or authorised operators simply evict people, and often coercively. The inhabitants of the area do not benefit from the wealth underneath their lands, which is unjust, exploitative, and a denial of their economic rights. A government policy, however, can guide private investment in exploring and exploiting fossil fuels or green energy, but it should restrict its authority to formulating rules that relate to health, safety, forgery, and,

indeed, the environment. It will provide the conditions for economic development, like property rights, security of life, low taxes, the freedom to trade and invest, and minimum government meddling in the affairs of private enterprises. There will be hordes of energy watchdogs, like the media, green activists, local people, lawyers, politicians, and NGOs, to keep an eye on private enterprises in Bangladesh's energy sector. The world had briefly, but partially, experienced free market in energy during Ronald Reagan's time [1981-89] when he, in his first executive order as US president, deregulated the price of oil which had been controlled since 1972. This led to massive exploration of oil, therefore, low prices. The US energy business, since then, has been highly regulated by the government, and under severe green pressure, causing qualms worldwide. The opposition, from green environmentalist, to energy in the free sector on grounds of pollution is, in reality, to prevent the advance

of global capitalism in Bangladesh. Green environmentalists in the West, in connivance with governments ideologically bent to strong market interventions, promote the idea of sacrificing current use of resources to save for the future. By this doctrine, resources will remain unutilised for ever, as our future generation will reserve it for their future. Many, however, reason that a coterie in the industrial West does not want the world's natural resources to be depleted, but kept in reserve for their industries only. To meet the energy needs of 150 million people, Bangladesh must boldly chalk out a program that welcomes private entrepreneurs, the unfailing engines of development, with their right to produce power without government intervention.

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PSC reform

Corruption in the PSC is giving birth to thousands of corrupt officers, because those who get jobs for money later become mad to make a profit on their investment. If the present government dreams of an enlightened Bangladesh, it cannot but take firm steps to reform the PSC as soon as possible.

MD SAZZAD REZA BASUNIA

THE Public Service Commission (PSC) is a very important constitutional institution of Bangladesh, because it recruits and screens all cadre and non-cadre service officers who, later, will be responsible for running the administration. So it is expected that the chairman, members and staff of the PSC will be honest, competent and eligible. But in the last five years, the picture of the PSC was different. It had been working as an agent to politicize the administration on behalf of the four-party alliance. A dead man walking After assuming office as chairman of PSC, Z N Tahmid Begum, "white panel" leader of Dhaka University, and its members had accommodated 16,418 candidates in cadre and non-cadre positions, and 12,576 candidates out of them were in first class position, mostly on political consideration, bribe and favouritism. This record breaking activity has also given birth to an interesting equation, that is the numbers of candidates who were appointed through the PSC over 25 years is equal to the number appointed during ZN Tahmid's term. Z N Tahmid has done five times the work in only a single tenure, obviously a great job! Though Z N Tahmid had shown her expertise in breaking the record of appointments, ironically, she and her members were not able to save the PSC from silly question paper leakages. Why? I think the answer is blowing in the wind. However, the chairman and the members have made the PSC a part of the unfair and unhealthy scheme of politicizing the administration. Problems that the PSC faces The problems that the PSC faces can be categorized in two ways. First is its structural problem and

second, its recruiting system. Now it is clear that the chairman, members and other officials of the PSC are appointed on the basis of their political identity. It would not be an exaggeration to say that every man jack of the PSC is more or less engaged in bribery and corruption. There are accusations against them for changing answer sheets, leaking question papers, tampering with tabulation sheets and giving higher marks in viva, in exchange for money. Many officers and subordinates are only SSC passed, but are getting promotion to some important positions like, director or controller of examinations. If this is the situation in the PSC's own administration, how can we expect that they will select eligible and competent manpower for our national administration? Some proposals for structural reformation

- An extra body should be formed with the eminent justices, army personnel, teachers, bureaucrats to select, monitor and advise the chairman and members of the PSC.
- Steps should be taken to develop a policy so that eligible and competent persons get appointment for important positions. Moreover, the PSC's recruiting system should be changed, because it is extensive, time consuming and inundated with loopholes. We talk about the selection of competent and eligible candidates but, on the other side, we have set up obstacles by adopting a quota system.
- But our constitution, through article 29, provides for equality of opportunity in public employment, which is defined as:
- Equal employment opportunity for all citizens employed in the service of the state.
- Non-discrimination in employment for all citizens in the service of the state.
- Special provisions for adequate representation of the population within state-sponsored employ-

ment. Are not we playing a double game very consciously? • Some proposals for recruiting system reformation are

- The quota system should be revoked because it is really a hindrance for the really competent candidates to gain entry into our administration. It is really deplorable that 55% of the posts is filled by the quota system.
- Recruitment tests of professional cadre and general cadre should be taken separately. The tests for the general cadre must put emphasis on English language & communication, general knowledge (Bengali, history & current affairs), analytical ability, critical reasoning, general mathematics, basic management, basic human resource management, Bangladesh affairs, its administration & international relation and information & communication technology.
- These topics can be divided into six modules like, Module 1- English Language & Communication (full marks 150, MCQ 60% & descriptive type 40%), Module 2- General Knowledge (full marks 150, MCQ 80% & short type 40%), Module 3- Analytical Ability, Critical Reasoning and General Mathematics (full marks 150, MCQ 100%), Module 4- Basic Management and Basic Human Resource Management (full marks 150, MCQ 60% & descriptive type 40%), Module 5- Bangladesh affairs, its administration & international relations (full marks 150, MCQ 40% & descriptive-short type 60%) and Module 6- information & communication technology (full marks 150, MCQ 40% & descriptive-short type 60%).
- As for the professional cadre, the tests should emphasize the respective subjects mostly. A test should also be taken on english language & communication, general knowledge and basic management, and basic human

resource management on MCQ question pattern.

- In the existing system there is a preliminary test, which seems unnecessary.
- A provision for answer sheets re-evaluation should be adopted to bring transparency in the PSC.
- The PSC should disclose the lowest marks during the result publication, so as to broaden the opportunity for answer sheet re-evaluation on the basis of candidates' complaints.

About the 27th BCS

The 27th BCS is the latest victim of corruption in the PSC. Various reports on recruitment irregularities have been published in most national dailies. There are allegations of question papers leakages, changing of answer sheets, tampering with marks of written test, and giving comparatively high marks in the viva in exchange for money. So, it is necessary to carry out an urgent investigation, and punish the culprits to set an example. To save the students from confusion and disappointment, and to select the really eligible candidates, a fresh test for the applicants of 27th BCS would be held under IBA (Institute of Business Administration) through several slots, as soon as possible. If it is not brought about, then great corruption will get legal clout. It is high time to reform the PSC. We all expect a dynamic administration to have transparency, crucial for imparting real service to the people, which is possible only by removing all kinds of loose ends from the PSC. Corruption in the PSC is giving birth to thousands of corrupt officers, because those who get jobs for money later become mad to make a profit on their investment. If the present government dreams of an enlightened Bangladesh, it cannot but take firm steps to reform the PSC as soon as possible.

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HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

IN the summer of 1987 I gave a talk at the University of Tokyo on the women's question. Using my knowledge of Singapore and Bangladesh, I discussed the slow but inexorable progress of women in Asia. In Singapore, the Women's Charter of 1961 gave women a great deal of fundamental rights. It created an enabling situation for women to participate in almost equal footing alongside men. Many of my gurus from Singapore and Bangladesh were women activists and I used their careers as examples. I was not naive and knew too well that paths of progress were not strewn with flowers. A large number of women in Singapore worked very hard at low-end jobs at electronic factories and there were tens of thousands of foreign domestics workers whose low-waged labor underwrote whatever freedom Singapore women enjoyed; in Bangladesh the condition of vast majority of women was dismal yet there were signs of change brought about by a combination of factors in which NGOs played an important role. Many women were beginning to join garments factories. In the audience there was a young woman who asked me some penetrating questions. It turned out quickly that she knew a great deal about women's issues in both Singapore and Bangladesh. She was forceful in her various points but not insulting. Her comments made huge contributions in understanding the "now you win, now you lose" seesaw like trajectory of women's development. I realized that she had an understanding of these societies in question from bottom up. After the talk, we chatted some more and I found out that her name was Ms. Yayori Matsui who had spent time in Bangladesh and Singapore as a correspondent of Aishai Shimbun and ran a women's network in Japan. Later on I found out that she was a leading feminist activist in Japan. She authored a book titled: *Women's Asia*. She was a leading force on the side of comfort women issues and fought tirelessly for the compensation of the victims which some Japanese politicians including the present Prime Minister Abe denies. However, in one of her remarks made during my talk, she referred to housewives as house slaves. Yes,



she spoke English. It was not a case of lost in translation. On my way back my host, Mrs Kodera, a housewife, kept asking: "why did Matsui use the term 'house slave'?" I was a houseguest of Mrs. Kodera whose husband was an architect and their only daughter was studying in Paris. Mrs. Kodera chose to be a housewife. She was an educated woman who read history and philosophy for leisure. At that time she was learning French and reading Michel Foucault. I could understand her feelings of hurt. I also found the usage of the term rude yet I did not dare to cross-swords with Ms. Matsui. Over the years, as I thought more about that encounter, I have come to sympathize more with Mrs. Kodera yet have not been able to refute Ms. Matsui's position completely. I have come to realize that there are many more issues with regard to the women's question. It is not simply a matter of emancipation versus bondage. Some women may find freedom in what seems to be bondage; others may find "freedom" enslaving. It is a question of culture, class, and individual choice. The last part is itself a product of the first two. It is

also a matter of the moment of social and cultural transformation. Lila Abu-Lughod has asked penetratingly: "Do Muslim women really need saving?" This was in reference to the world (mostly, western) attention on women in Afghanistan. What did emancipation mean for them? In the post-Taliban Afghanistan, more and more middle class women are coming out, going back to school, joining work force but many of them continue to wear their burqas (veils). During the Taliban rule, which banned Afghan women's participation in education and employment outside the domestic sphere, women would get public beating for not veiling. With Taliban's gone many Afghan women continue to wear veils, as some other women enjoy the freedom of going to beauty saloons, facilities that went underground during the Taliban rule. In Turkey, which was the first modern Muslim nation, in 1999 Merve Kavacki, a woman parliamentarian fought for her right to cover her head, a practice that was banned in Turkey in the zeal of imposing secularism from above. Ms. Kavacki, an US educated computer professional, put Turkish democracy to a test.

At the heart of the women's question is the tension between freedom and equality. Freedom is in the final analysis an individual choice. Social institutions can create certain enabling conditions for the realization of individual freedom. Freedom also entails freedom to be different. Yet freedom cannot be thought in isolation from the social rules that draw limit to freedom. Most civilized societies seek to curtail the freedom of an oppressor to protect the freedom of the oppressed. Freedom of the exploiter is denounced to safeguard the freedom of the consumers. Debates rage on the issue of freedom of the market forces and to what extent must those "freedoms" be controlled. Here we come head to head with market freedom versus the freedom of an individual worker to enjoy life. Imposition of equality by decree like forcing emancipation may meet the same fate with regard to gender relations as it met with regard to social systems. In the end the real issue is justice. Is the present system of gender relations in society X just? What is justice is to be resolved not just by the Talibans or the self-declared guardians of society or by George Bush but has to be understood as an outcome of a group's own cultural and historical experience. The issue of gender equality must be seen not just as a goal in itself but also as a means for enabling women to achieve emancipation and social justice. Some women may take the route of Mrs. Kodera or my mother who chose to be a housewife and achieved fulfillment in that role; other women took the route of Ms. Matsui and lived a meaningful life. Ms. Matsui passed away in December 2002. The world we live in is large enough to accommodate her ideals as well as the choices of Mrs. Kodera. We need freedom and difference for freedom is difference.

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UN Convention against Corruption: What we need to achieve

FARHEEN KHAN

THE UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) came into force in December 2005 with these weighty preambular words -- "Corruption poses a threat to the stability and security of societies, undermines the institutions of democracy, ethical values and justice, and jeopardizes sustainable development and the rule of law. There are links between corruption and other forms of crime particularly organized crime and economic crime -- such as money laundering -- and thus this problem is no longer a local matter, but a transnational phenomenon that affects all societies and economies." This convention is weighty because it contains two things -- an elaborate set of guidelines and recommendations for anti-corruption programmes, and secondly it places the onus on signatories to execute that structural overhaul. There is no supranational police - governments must implement anti-corruption framework by creating or improving institutions, implementing tactical and strategic programmes, replacing outdated laws of business and procurement, and managing a regulation mecha-

nism at par with international standards. This multilateral treaty is 8 chapters and 71 articles long, covers substantive topics such as public and private sector corruption, including domestic and foreign bribery, embezzlement, trading in influence, money laundering and other offences. It also addresses procedural measures including preventive action, guidelines for criminal related issues and, most importantly, a framework for international cooperation. If a party wants to implement the convention, the technical guidelines are already there; if the country is suffering from a lack of capacity, then international assistance may be sought under its rubric. One of the primary motivations for creating an instrument solely for anti-corruption was to simplify international transactions, where criminal behaviour falls through the cracks of international loopholes and trans-boundary policing barriers so that vested parties take advantage of restrictions set by national borders, while victim countries and people suffer from it. This treaty is meant to be the cornerstone for ensuring transparency and accountability when trans-

boundary resources for economic and social development are mobilized. In the case of Bangladesh, this would mean that the use of foreign capital and aid would be closely regulated, investment in our stock exchanges could be given enhanced accountability, and smuggling and other trans-boundary criminal activity would be comprehensively criminalized. For a country like Bangladesh that is dependent on FDI, the UNCAC would be a catalysing driver. But, having secured the worst ranking in Transparency International's (TI) corruption index from 2001 till 2005, losing large sums of development aid to corrupt elite and sacrificing public wealth to build empires for our MPs, we did not show any interest in this ground-breaking document. Ninety-seven countries took part in the first negotiation session of the UNCAC in 2001, and the number subsequently increased, but Bangladesh was not enticed. Even when the UNCAC was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2003, we showed no inclination towards it. This instrument has strengthened anti-corruption advocacy mechanisms, and organizations worldwide have had achievements like creating anti-corruption bodies



for many countries, operational agreements for sharing information between law enforcement and financial institutions, implementing stronger oversight mechanisms for international aid -- almost everything that countries would need to fight corruption, but I guess that in Bangladesh we were quite content with our sinking boat. It is distressing to recognize that our institutions are so dilapidated, and the leaders were so vested in the personal enrichment that we could not even make the first step towards

a global instrument that would have at least set us in the right direction towards accountability. One of the many obstacles to this instrument was the massive development projects of the World Bank and DFID which local companies bid for, and won illegitimately through the use of bribes. These illegitimate contracts increase our international loan burden while producing substandard outputs that deprive the poor that rely on the public service that that project was meant to bring.

The USAID calls it grand corruption because actors at the highest levels "skim" while funds are in transit. Another global dimension of corruption is the siphoning-off of national funds to offshore accounts by the highest office-holders in our country. To tackle these problems that extend beyond our borders, the UNCAC has a clause under which money expatriated illegally could be repatriated. While the UNCAC may sound like a panacea for our problems, the complete picture is not that rosy. It is true that by being a signatory we can enjoy the benefits of anti-corruption technical assistance and international cooperation from more advanced countries, but it cannot achieve results for us. Outcomes are dependent upon the resolve of our leaders, and the efficacy of our institutions. All the institutions that are going to support the UNCAC need to be revitalized: they begin with the law enforcement agencies, public service commissions, central bank, judiciary and government procurement, and go all the way to diplomatic efforts for international cooperation, parliamentary transparency and the ACC. As a compromise to the states that negotiated this instrument, the document contains measures that

are mostly discretionary, and not mandatory. The UNCAC can tell us how we can punish bribery and embezzlement, but it cannot force our government to do it -- that is the task of our lawmakers; it gives us a framework for improving the conduct of public officials and cleaning up the recruitment process, but it cannot enforce it -- that is the task of our PSC; it can give recourse to monitoring corruption by foreign nationals on our territory, but it cannot stop them -- that remains in the hands of our law enforcement. The instrument can bring in a wealth of technical expertise, but it cannot create institutions. While the UNCAC is a necessary step in our anti-corruption efforts, it is not sufficient on its own. Ratification of the UNCAC must go hand in hand with strengthening of public institutions that will implement it, creating a responsive environment for drafting anti-corruption laws, giving the ACC depoliticised functions, strengthening rule of law so that the corrupt may be served justice, and engendering accountability at every level of private and public institutions so that corruption may be detected early. The UNCAC creates a weighty responsibility for our civil society as much as it does for law-

makers and bureaucrats. As an LDC, we are positioned to acquire maximum benefit from becoming a signatory. As Bono said -- corruption is a disease for the poorest societies. It is refreshing that the CTG is approaching anti-corruption with more than cheap talk. The extent of grand corruption and petty corruption existing in Bangladesh guarantees that we will have a steep learning curve. As a new signatory to the UNCAC, let us utilize its clauses to the utmost, and, hopefully, one day the billions of dollars that have been siphoned out of Bangladesh can be repatriated. At the very least, let us create some accountability so that we do not return to the complacency of settling in to the top of TI's corruption list again!

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