

Does he possess the moral ground to lecture the nation?

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

As a decorated war hero, one of America's greatest presidents articulated in his inaugural speech on January 20, 1961: "Ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country."

Imagine if the same declaration was echoed by the draft dodger President George W Bush in his inaugural lecture to the nation, how ludicrous it would sound to his fellow compatriots!

This sort of ludicrousness surfaced after two lectures delivered by President Professor Iajuddin Ahmed, one on August 6, where he lauded the role of the armed forces for "saving the country from an anarchic situation on January 11," and the other on August 12, where he extolled the virtues of democracy and political honesty.

On August 12, in the inaugural speech of a seminar organized by BISS, he emphasized that "proper functioning of democracy required a capable, honest, transparent, and accountable administration, as well as responsible, accountable, and

patriotic political leaders who would lead the country to the right direction. Without strengthening the democratic institutions, the function of democracy and its gradual maturity will remain unaccomplished."

The President went on to remind the nation that "a proper functioning of democratic norms and values and the establishment of rule of law are necessary to narrow the growing political divides and unite a fractured civil society." The contents of his speech are absolutely befitting for a head state and the first citizen of the republic. But the question is; did Prof. Iajuddin, as the president of the republic and head of the erstwhile CTG, practice even an iota of what he is preaching now?

To begin with, his assumption of the presidency was unethical in the first place, albeit not unconstitutional, since he very well knew that his predecessor was deposed only because he endeavoured to become the president of the republic rather than serve the interest of the party that elected him. Since his election to the highest position of the republic, he faithfully served his benefactors, but not so much the

nation, which he was oath-bound to serve.

Since October 28, 2006, all his activities had been shrouded in secrecy, and had been averred to be conspiracies after his assumption of the role of chief adviser (CA) in violation of the constitution, which he was oath-bound to defend. This offence is an impeachable one, as clearly stipulated in article 52 (1) of the Constitution which says, "The president may be impeached on a charge of violating this Constitution" by the parliament.

Nevertheless, this was a historic opportunity for him to prove that a partisan person could rise to the occasion, especially at the fag end of his life and career, and conduct himself to uphold the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

Contrary to expectations, he shrouded himself in secrecy and allegedly conspired to implement the blue print of his mentor bypassing the council of advisers, which compelled four of them to resign. Their action, however, failed to perturb the strongman, who quickly replaced them with a set of cronies.

He destroyed the sanctity of

every organ of the state, including the administration and judiciary, by unprecedented politicization, putting partisan and incompetent people in constitutional positions. Never before in the history of this country had the Election Commission been manned by a group of partisan, incompetent, people with absolute moral bankruptcy.

Instead of improving the situation, he accelerated the downfall and put the last nail in the sanctity of that constitutional body. However, he was not at all disturbed by the adverse reactions, which was very much evident from his statement of January 6 when he told the nation that "the government firmly believes that the January 22 election will be held in a free, fair, impartial manner, and in an atmosphere of fanfare."

The most preposterous part of his assertions was reflected in his statement, "being a teacher, I always discharged my responsibility impartially. I had to ignore other parties in accommodating the demands of the agitating parties during the tenure of the caretaker government.

Despite that, questions about my

impartiality have been raised with a motive." Yet, exactly seven months after his statement of great complacency, Prof. Iajuddin Ahmed acknowledged in his speech on August 6 that the army had saved the nation from an anarchic situation. This observation is indeed a big paradox, since it was his action and inaction as the most powerful individual of the republic, especially after October 28, that had accelerated the nation's journey toward anarchy.

What really happened on January 11? The incompetent and one-eyed government headed by Professor Iajuddin Ahmed was overthrown and a new government was installed. This government has been trying to undo the harm that had been inflicted on the nation, largely by Iajuddin and his benefactors, at the expense of suspension of the fundamental rights of the people of the republic. They have no part, whatsoever, in what he and his benefactors had nefariously planned to get a free ride back to the helm of power, or the eventuality that has befallen the nation.

The least Professor Iajuddin

could have done was to make a solemn apology to the nation for his part in bringing the nation to the brink of disaster, rather than lecturing the nation on transparency, accountability, good governance, and rule of law, and gone into oblivion, as he had for the last six months.

It would be extremely unwise for anyone or any institution to bring him into the lime light once again, and make him utter words which are, albeit, befitting for a head of state, but not at all befitting for a person like Iajuddin Ahmed, who does not possess the moral ground any more to lecture the nation. They would be belittling the highest office of the land, and making a mockery of the indispensable virtues required of a democratic and civilized nation that a preacher must uphold before lecturing others to adhere to.

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AP

The increasing relevance of expatriate lobbying

MASHUQUR RAHMAN AND ASIF YOUSUF

THE right to petition your own government is a fundamental principle in a democratic society. Recently, however, there have been a number of high profile cases of expatriate Bangladeshis petitioning foreign governments to influence government policy within Bangladesh.

The campaign against the detention of MK Alamgir, the campaign against the deportation from the United States of AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed and a letter from a US Congressman to the ACC in support of a business tycoon are three examples of expatriate lobbying.

ing efforts that have appeared on the media's radar.

Baring exceptional reversals in global communications and migration trends, expatriate lobbying is something that we can only expect to see more of in the future. A long term view of this trend is necessary. As such this is not an issue solely for the current government to consider, but for all successive ones as well.

Supporters of such campaigns generally argue that human rights issues are at stake. Sometimes, an issue is framed this way because the supporters believe that, should the campaign succeed, a precedent would be set that would discourage future violations of rights.

These campaigns can thus make the implicit claim of speaking for broader societal interests.

However, while claiming to achieve these broader objectives, these campaigns simultaneously address the narrower interests of a specific constituency, be they the family of the person in question or a group with a specific agenda.

Skeptics of such campaigns tend to focus only on the individual in question, concentrating on his/her innocence or guilt. Further, they feel that such campaigns privilege people well-connected to and capable of using the global communications and/or rights protection networks. However, as mentioned above, there is no

reason why such campaigns cannot be sustained beyond the context of the individual to the broader context of society, ensuring justice for people not connected to the global systems.

Petitioning or lobbying foreign governments by Bangladeshis is not a recent development, nor is it limited to expatriate Bangladeshis. During the Liberation War, representatives of the Mujibnagar government lobbied foreign governments to garner support for the independence movement and to spotlight the atrocities of the Pakistan army.

More recently private Bangladeshi corporations as well as political parties have hired

lobbying firms to lobby the US government. The government of Bangladesh has also hired lobbyists in the past to lobby foreign governments to influence bilateral relations.

Whereas government lobbying efforts aim to further official Bangladesh government policy in foreign capitals, lobbying efforts by expatriates are often at odds with Bangladesh government policy. It is this aspect that makes expatriate lobbying controversial.

Lobbying efforts, whether by political parties or by corporations or individual expatriates, are not inherently good or bad, nor are they monolithic. Though foreign lobbying is generally viewed through the

prism of human rights campaigns, the motivation for expatriate lobbying is varied -- they range from human rights causes to furthering business or economic interests to advancing political goals.

They do however have one thing in common: they all seek to bring foreign pressure to bear on the Bangladesh government instead of solely working through the institutions and mechanisms available within Bangladesh.

One reason why a growing number of expatriate lobbying campaigns are initiated and sustained beyond our shores is the erosion of faith in our judicial system, our law enforcement agencies and any institution that is supposed

to safeguard citizens' rights against abuse. In other words, while greater migration and easier communications have no doubt facilitated such campaigns, this erosion of faith in the efficacy of our institutions is a major driver of expatriate lobbying.

Restoring faith in the consistency, neutrality and accountability of these institutions would lessen the incentive of expatriates to work outside the system and increase incentives to bring change within, at least on matters of human rights.

In this regard, the recent decision to expand voting rights to expatriates is a step in the right direction.

Expatriate lobbying, like governmental and corporate lobbying, is a

development that is likely to grow as global communications develops further and as national and international interests continue to collide. While development of government institutions in Bangladesh will encourage redressing of grievances without recourse to foreign pressure, there will always be foreign lobbying. Nonetheless, as institutions within Bangladesh develop, the government will be better equipped to deal effectively and positively with foreign lobbying efforts.

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A critical review of the coal policy

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THE Department of Energy and Mineral Resources under the Ministry of Electricity, Energy, and Mineral Resources has made the latest version of the proposed coal policy (June 2007) available for review on their website. They also invited opinions and suggestions on the same. This approach, of transparency and accountability, by a government office is laudable.

The latest version of the coal policy is quite different from the earlier versions that were drafted by the Infrastructure Investment Facilities Center. Among many other changes made, the current draft seems to have moved away from its earlier versions in which an export-oriented mining plan by international companies, including the Asia Energy Company (AEC), was emphasized. Unlike the earlier versions, there is no mention of any foreign company as a part of the coal mining action plan in the current draft.

This draft emphasizes the role coal can play in meeting the demands for energy in the country, and in achieving energy security for the next fifty years. The draft under discussion gives preference to the government sector over the private

sector in developing and extracting the recoverable coal reserve.

This draft underscores the need for national capability building through improvement of the existing institutions as well as establishment of new institutions, such as the proposed Coalbangla and the Office of Inspector General of Mining.

The current draft coal policy does not embrace open-pit coal mining method as the only viable option for extracting the coal. The amount of royalty for exporting or selling of coal by private companies has also been raised from 6% to 20%. To ensure public ownership and participation in coal resources, all private coal-mining companies will have to enlist 25% of their resources in the share market.

In spite of the positive changes made in the proposed coal policy, a critical review reveals a great deal of discrepancies, inaccuracies, inconsistencies, redundancies, and misleading information throughout the document. For instance, although it is obvious from the calculations that the recoverable coal reserve is not enough to meet the domestic needs, and to achieve energy security, for the next fifty years, the draft outlines detailed leasing procedures of the coalfields, and what rules would be applied

during the entire period of mining.

On the one hand, the draft emphasizes the need for national capability building, and on the other, it goes to great lengths to show calculations for royalties from coal exports and sales by lessees.

The policy proposes establishing of new public sector organizations, including Coalbangla, yet the role they will play in extracting coal is not clearly outlined. It is not clear from the document whether the coal fields will be leased out to a private domestic company or to an international company, or whether any of the governmental organizations will do the mining, as is done in India by Coal India Limited. A similar role for the proposed Coalbangla would have been a positive change, and a step in the right direction.

However, the roles of the proposed Coalbangla and of the Office of the Inspector General of Mining are very vaguely defined. If they are envisaged only for a regulatory purpose, then they will only duplicate the role of existing organizations, such as the Bureau of Mineral Resources Development and/or the Department of Environment. Coal mining is an environment degrading process.

In order to minimize degradation of water, soil, air, and human health, it

is extremely important to formulate strict rules, regulations, acts, and laws, keeping local socio-economic, geologic, and environmental settings in mind. The draft policy refers to the Equatorial Principles and World Bank Standards as applicable norms for coal mining in Bangladesh. However, these principles and standards are written in generalized terms, and are not enforceable in, or applicable to, a particular country.

The Equatorial Principles are suggested by lenders to borrowing companies as recommended sets of rules, which encourage environmental assessment and corporate social responsibility before a lender can loan out a huge sum of money. These principles also emphasize the need for participation of local stakeholders in projects carried out by private companies that borrow money from a financial institution like ADB.

What Bangladesh needs to do, given the fragility of her environment and dense population, is to formulate a strong legal framework similar to or stronger than those in India or the USA in order to control environmental degradation, monitor compliance, and enforce rules and laws applicable during all phases of coal mining.

The draft policy does not pay

much attention to the scope and necessity for developing and harnessing alternative energy sources, including renewable ones. Yet, coal can only be one ingredient in a country's energy mix.

The coal policy has to be an integral part of an overall comprehensive energy strategy covering all existing and potential renewable and non-renewable energy sources. For example, Bangladesh has rich potential for solar, wind, and tidal energy. Bangladesh may also consider the potential of modern bio-fuels.

Given the importance of agriculture in the economy, it may be possible to find a win-win solution by choosing an appropriate crop mix that also enhances the country's energy security. In addition, there is a pressing need for reducing system loss and improving energy efficiency in buildings, and in the transportation sector.

Thus, alongside formulation of the coal policy, the Bangladesh government should also initiate a public consultation process for formulation of a national energy strategy, so that all the issues can be discussed and resolved in an open, participatory, and transparent manner.

The draft policy suffers from many discrepancies and inaccuracies

with regard to the information concerning reserves, utilization, and impact. To begin with, the recoverable coal reserves mentioned in the draft differ from those in the national energy policy of 2004, and in GSB publications.

For example, the reserve for Phulbari coalfield is shown to be 400 and 572 million tons (MT) in the national energy policy and the draft coal policy, respectively. The coal reserve for Khalasipar is 450, 143, and 400 MT as per the national energy policy, the draft coal policy, and the GSB, respectively. Because of the great depth, the draft coal policy excludes 1053 MT of reserve in Jamalganj coalfield.

However, instead of excluding Jamalganj and other deep coalfields from the master plan, it is important to investigate the feasibility of developing these fields using underground coal gasification.

The draft policy has outlined four scenarios of power demand and distribution of usage of fuels for the period 2005-2025. These scenarios are based on the annual GDP growth rates of 5.2% and 8%, as well as for "sufficient" and "limited" natural gas scenarios beyond 2011. The basis for calculation for these scenarios is not clear. For example, as per the calculation (for GDP

growth rate of 8%), the amount of electricity generated per MT of coal varies between 397 MW and 2560 MW, with an average of 712 MW. The reason for such a great variation (more than six times) is not

clear. Also, the reason for fluctuations in the amount of production of gas-based electricity between 2011 and 2025 is not clear. The projected amount decreases from 10174 MW in 2011 to 8857 MW in 2024, and then increases to 9062 MW in 2025. In addition, 37 MT of coal is considered to be the equivalent of one trillion cubic feet (TCF) of gas.

As per the calculations shown, the amount of electricity generated from one TCF-equivalent coal (i.e. 37 MT) varies between 14712 MW and 94728 MW, as compared to about 22181 MW of electricity generated by one TCF of gas. This discrepancy is important because the draft policy says that private companies will have to produce at least 500 MW at mine-mouth for each 3 MT of coal mined. As per the calculations, only 0.5 MT of coal will be needed to produce 500 MW, allowing them to either sell or export about 2.5 MT out of each 3 MT of coal. As a result, though not explicitly stated, the policy still remains an export-oriented one.

It is shown in the calculation that 4.938 MT of coal will be used to produce 2306 MW in 2012, which implies that coal mining will be in operation at that time. It is not clear, however, who will mine the coal and what method (underground, open-pit, or underground coal gasification) will be applied. The total amount of coal mined by the year 2025 is shown to be about 450 MT, which is much higher than the amount of recoverable coal by underground mining methods, implying that the policy favours open-pit mining.

Although the current policy is an improvement over earlier versions, a close review reveals many shortcomings and discrepancies. It is hoped that the draft will be revised again, and the inconsistencies, inaccuracies, discrepancies and other inadequacies will be removed in order to produce a pro-people and pro-environment coal policy for Bangladesh.

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Q: Everything you are saying here suggests that the only likely positive scenario has at least a 20-year time span. Yet you listen to someone like Al Gore and it sounds like we don't have 20 years.

A: That's why we can't take anything out of the energy equation -- coal, nuclear, gas, energy efficiency and renewables.

I think we have had chronic underinvestment in energy efficiency. We really need to accelerate that. Mitigation of climate change is not going to happen fast enough. That is the reality. We need to think in a broad sense about both adaptation (to climate change) and mitigation (of it). We really have to have what I would call cathedral thinking, where we are looking out and saying we need to address this problem over many decades, in the same way the cathedrals of Europe took many decades to build. It is going to take many decades of both mitigation and adaptation to get to the right place on this planet.

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'Cathedral thinking:' Interview with James E. Rogers

Every day, Americans plug their cell phones, iPods and laptops into the wall, unaware that most of their electricity comes from coal, the dirtiest form of energy production. Duke Energy, which operates 20 coal-fired power plants, is the third largest producer of carbon emissions in the United States. Yet Duke's chairman and CEO, James E. Rogers, is an ardent climate-change lobbyist, advocating for emission reductions, carbon trading and cleaner technologies. In the second installment of our series of conversations about the future of energy, Newsweek's Fareed Zakaria spoke to Rogers about his seemingly awkward balancing act. Excerpts:

Newsweek: Coal is cheap and plentiful, but 40 percent of the CO2 emissions the United States produces come from coal. What should we do?

ROGERS: The difficulty with using coal is that when you burn it, it produces significant emissions like sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, mercury and fine particulate, as well as CO