

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Those who promise a new dawn



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

NEVER was so much owed by so many to so few" -- those famous words of Winston Churchill's tribute to the air defenders of Great Britain in the Battle of London reverberate through vast distances on to our home-front.

That was in the backdrop of Hitler's invasion of Europe when Britain took the last stand under the oratorical flourish of the 65-year old Churchill. Spiritedly, he would remind the House of Commons in his maiden speech as the British PM that he had officially reached pension age, but there he was leading the war effort with the power of his words. This was supremely aided by the superiority of British air power over Germany. In a masterly tactical stroke, Britain acquired the edge over Germany through a providential lull in Hitler's saturated bombings that had weakened his air power and forced him into a pause.

Now, in the context of Bangladesh, Churchill's words should find resonance with the economic battle waged by so few in our country to benefit so many, that too in spite of all the negative politics.

The three pillars for sustenance of the economy and enrichment of our growth potential are well-known but not plumbed deeply enough: Remittances from overseas workers, the garment export earning and the farmers' unflinching productivity placing food security on the table or the mat as the case may be.

Picture Bangladeshi women living and working in Middle East, suddenly air dropped into the sweltering and hostile clime earning valuable foreign exchange for the country. Huddled in a small room after a day's work, they nurture a small dream of sending money home keeping a bare minimum for themselves. A head-turner statistic: Women working overseas send 72% of the incomes to their families in Bangladesh

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compared with 40% for men.

The tremendous sacrifice they are making for their families and the country is all the more moving when you think of countless others, mostly men, who have not had their status legalised. We hear of heart-wrenching stories of their fugitive uncertainty as they constantly look over the shoulders for any scowling eyes lest they are caught and handed to the police.

In deserts, on impounded boats, along remote frontiers, they surface almost anywhere. They would be found in jails or encamped in remote locations as their fate hangs in a precarious balance, that also incommunicado.

There is no knowing how much of the money is remitted to Bangladesh by workers with legal immigration status and how much indeed from "illegal" immigrants.

All the same, they send in a huge sum of money -- give and take, \$12 billion plus per year (perhaps exceeding the total foreign currency reserve).

Remittance is net earning whilst earning from RMG export which grosses around \$16 to \$18 billion has an



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element of value addition-related deduction in terms of dependence on import. Apparels export, woven and knitting taken together, accounts for 35% in real income to Bangladesh. In other words, it works out to approximately \$6 billion in net earning.

This does not, however, reflect the true potential of apparel export. A huge untapped potentiality ranges before the eye when you think of Bangladesh shaping as the next garment export destination after China. In effect, we are looking at the prospect of our competitors thinking of relocating their industries to Bangladesh with all the investment and buy-back possibilities in the horizon. We could also expect the right proportion of backward and forward linkages to chalk up increased domestic value addition to overall export.

A recent spate of Western media publicity seems focused on Bangladesh as one of the second wave of countries -- some Asian, some Latin American, some African -- coming up fast from behind. "The West in gloom and the Bric starting to plateau, attention is turning towards these countries, many of which not

long ago were dismissed as basket cases."

The Guardian report is emphatic: "When growth rates for 2013 are chalked up, these are the countries that will dominate the top 20."

What makes you sit up and take notice is this: Lack of physical infrastructure is bypassed to boost productivity quickly through mobile telephony in some African countries. Bangladesh is already going through a mobile revolution as new hopes spring from the submarine cable connectivity and the next genre of mobiles.

Our highlighting the apparel exports and remittance earnings is directed towards egging the government and its agencies to organise the two sectors, which in a way admittedly, remain somewhat disorganised, to put in mildly. When you think about "centrality of women in development" which The Economist's intelligence unit has highlighted about Bangladesh, you at once direct your attention to the dire need for upgrading the status of workers with remunerative real wages and workplace safety guaranteed to them.

There is also a good deal of work to be done in the area of remittance earnings which keep fluctuating in terms of volume of manpower export with some conventional markets a bit on the shuttering down mode.

The way Bangladeshi workers on arrival at our international airport are being treated leaves ample room for improvement. We must go beyond a single immigration desk. Perhaps they should be entitled to a collective elevation of their status as commercially important figures. They would be only pleased if they feel cared for and welcome in the land of their birth for which they sacrifice so much at the expense of personal comfort.

Finally, attend to the concerns of a young and growing population which is potential demographic dividend waiting to be reaped.

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How long will gas last in Bangladesh ?

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How long will the estimated gas reserve run" is a question frequently asked. Estimates published in the media show that the gas reserve of the country will be exhausted by 2015, 2017 or 2020. A more realistic assumption may be made by looking into the available data.

Bangladesh produced and consumed about 0.7 Tcf gas in 2011, and the annual gas consumption is likely to increase to about 1 Tcf within three to four years. Assuming an average production and supply rate of about 1 Tcf gas per year, the 16 Tcf of remaining reserve (as of Dec 2011) should run for about 16 years. In other words, Bangladesh is likely to exhaust its gas reserve by about 2025. Is this assumption realistic or overly simplistic?

There are a few points that need to be considered in this regard: i) gas production and supply rate will not remain static over the years, ii) gas production and supply are expected to grow in future, but the growth will not continue, iii) it is expected that the gas production and supply will grow till certain time and then start to decline and the line representing the decline will have a longer tail, and finally, iv) estimated gas reserves may change with time due to reserve addition from reserve growths and new discoveries.

First of all let us discuss what is meant by reserve growth and whether reserve growth in any significance has taken place in any gas field in Bangladesh. Reserve growth refers to the addition to already known reserve in a gas field in the course of field development, i.e. if the boundaries of proven gas areas are extended and/or if new pay zones are found through drilling. Reserve does not grow automatically, but it is the new data acquired through the field development process that led to the increased estimation of the reserve.

Let us take the case of Titas gas field, the largest gas field in Bangladesh, to see if reserve grew over a period of time. In 1991, the initial gas reserve of Titas was estimated by IKM (a Canadian consultant) to be 2.10 Tcf. In 2001, after several more development wells were drilled, the initial reserve of the field was re-estimated by Hydrocarbon Unit of Bangladesh and Norwegian Petroleum Directorate (HCU-NPD) to be 5.13 Tcf, a significant increase from previous estimates. In 2010, with some more development drilling done, the initial gas reserve of Titas field was again estimated by international consultant RPS Energy to be 6.36 Tcf (Petrobala 2012). Therefore Titas gas field is an example where significant reserve growth was documented as the development of the field proceeded over the years.

Now the question is, do all gas fields in Bangladesh registers reserve growth with time like Titas? The answer is certainly not. There are some

gas fields which register significant reserve growth while there are some others which do not, and there is a third group which registers negative reserve growth. A negative reserve growth means that the reserve of the field is found to be less than previously estimated.

And finally, how does the total gas reserve of the country play out over the years? In simplistic terms, the reserve of a country gradually declines as gas is produced and consumed. However, this may be compensated by the amount of reserve growth, if any. Even more important is the fact that the reserve may still increase by another factor, i.e. if new reserves are added by new gas field discoveries.

From Petrobangla published data, we may look into how the estimated total gas reserves of the country has changed over the last 20



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years taking into account the new gas filed discoveries and reserve growths in the old ones. In 1993, there were 17 gas fields in the country with an estimated total initial gas reserve of 12.43 Tcf and remaining reserves of 10.55 Tcf (Petrobangla 1993). In 2003, the number of gas fields was 22 and the total initial gas reserve was estimated at 20.51 Tcf and a remaining reserve of 15.4 Tcf (Petrobangla 2004). In 2011, the number of gas fields grew to 23 with an estimated initial gas reserve of 26.84 Tcf and a remaining reserve of 16.74 Tcf (Petrobangla

2012). Interestingly, the estimated remaining reserve of the country over the years has not decreased but has increased from 10.55 Tcf in 1993, to 15.4 Tcf in 2003 and to 16.74 Tcf in 2011. This is in spite of the fact that both demand and production of gas have increased over the years.

And now let us consider the main theme of the article, i.e. will Bangladesh exhaust its gas by 2020? Future projections into gas production and supply suggest that gas production will continue to increase for some years now and then it will start to decline. Thereafter, as the above projection shows, the gap between gas demand and supply will continue to widen and will never close. Yet, gas production will continue for considerable amount of time. Let us be more specific on this point.

In 2006, Bangladesh Gas Sector Master Plan was prepared by Petrobangla/World Bank (consultant: Wood Mackenzie) with forecasts of future demand and supply scenarios. In a forecast of gas supply scene from the existing gas fields the production is expected to increase and reach a peak in 2016, and then it will decline. As the demand for gas continues to grow, the gap between demand and supply will continue to widen as the production begins to decline after 2016. Gas production from the existing reserves is expected to continue to 2025 and beyond, although in short supply.

In 2011, Power Sector Master Plan prepared by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), forecast long-term production forecast and set three scenarios -- a high case, a base case and a low case. In each case, in addition to production from existing fields, production from identified new prospects (expected to be added as new fields) are considered. In all three cases, gas production is expected to reach a peak in 2017 and then decline. Taking the base case scenario as reference, production is expected to peak at 3320 mmcf per day in 2017 and then start to decline (JICA 2011). As the production continues to decline, the gap between demand and supply will continue to widen. However, gas production is expected to continue to 2030 and perhaps beyond, although lesser and lesser in volume over time. According to this projection, gas as a fuel will contribute to 25% of the total electricity generation in 2030 (compared to 88% in 2010) while coal's contribution at that time would be 50% (compared to 4% in 2010).

The above implies that under realistic projection, gas will not be exhausted in Bangladesh by 2020, but is likely to flow till 2030 and perhaps beyond that point.

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(References: *Energy Resources of Bangladesh, 2nd edition- December 2012*, by Badrul Imam published by Bangladesh University Grants Commission, 2012)

Salute to daughter of India

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WOMEN and gender issues have increasingly become very important in Asia in recognition of the fact that improvement of the condition of the people of the country must necessarily include development strategies related to women, who make up almost half of the population.

In most of the South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, women are still in the grip of socio-economic, cultural, political and religious profiling, and could not play an assertive role in activities beginning from family to state. Women are still treated as weaker segment of population and have been made subject to various social, domestic repressive measures.

A 23 year old physiotherapy student went to watch a film with her male friend at a mall in south Delhi on December 16, 2012, around 9 pm. They took an auto- rikshaw to Munirka, a few kilometers away, and waited for a bus to Mahavir Enclave at Palam where the girl lives. At about 9.15 pm, the couple boarded a bus with tinted glasses and heavy curtains. There were six other people inside, all visibly drunk. Within minutes they started misbehaving with the girl and passing lewd remarks. When her companion objected they pounced on him and beat him up. They hit him with iron rods and punched him several times.

Meanwhile, four men pinned down the woman and took turns to rape her. They repeatedly hit her in her abdomen and made her unconscious. It was around 10 pm that the couple was thrown off the bus. They lay on the road for a few minutes, after which the boy mustered the courage to seek help. A passerby spotted them and called the police. The victims were rushed to hospital in a critical condition. While her companion was out of danger, the girl's life hung on a slender thread. She later succumbed to her injuries. The government had flown her to Singapore Mount Elizabeth Hospital for an organ transplant because her intestines were severely damaged.

Within forty-eight hours people were out in the streets holding the strategic India Gate to ransom and damning the police and government in particular.

As per the Indian government's own data a woman is raped every 20 minutes. This year, 650 rape cases happened in Delhi. The rate of rape cases is higher in Delhi than any other city in India. The government has recently introduced "Help Line" 181 for Indian women. It will be operated from the chief minister's office.

The people want long-term solutions and are using this case to ensure that the government put in place a mechanism to prevent crimes against women. They are looking for workable laws, speedy justice and greater accountability. There are enough and adequate laws in place. The problem lies in their implementation and the fact that there is tardy progress in the judicial process. The net result is that criminals go scot-free and are often out on bail. Rapists should be hanged.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the "Daughter of India." Her sacrifice must not go in vain. We should remember December 29 as a day of resistance against repression of women, or "Damini Dibash."

In our country numerous women have died from male perversity and violence, such as Mahima, Shimi, Fahima, Runi, Trishna and many others. Their families have not received justice. Today, the whole of India stands by the rape victim's family.

The Indian government and parliament are contemplating to enact a law to give rapists exemplary punishment. They are thinking of capital punishment, and even castration of the perpetrator. There are lessons for us.

Mahmuda Imam is a women's rights activist.