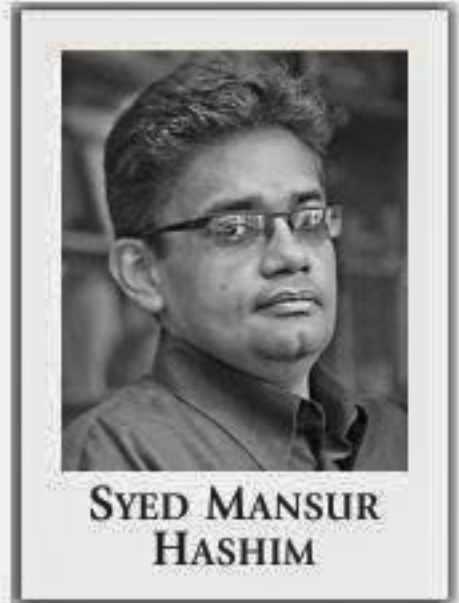


Rise of the renewable



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

ONE would have thought that the flattening out of global oil prices would have spelt doom for the renewable energy industry. On the contrary, we find that there has been a 4 percent increase in clean energy technology spending in 2014 and the price of photovoltaics and wind turbines are coming down drastically.

While the oil industry has frozen up to US\$380 billion investments in new energy, new investments in renewable has topped \$329.3 billion.

China remains the market leader for renewable energy with spending up by about 17 percent, or in dollar terms, some \$110 billion, roughly double what the United States has spent. We find that across the board, advanced economies are pouring money into renewable energy. According to the Bloomberg New Energy Finance research, "Wind and solar power are now being adopted in many developing countries as a natural and substantial part of the generation mix. They can be produced more cheaply than often high wholesale power prices. They reduce a country's exposure to expected fossil fuel prices. And above all, they can be built very quickly to meet unfulfilled demand for electricity."

The worldwide interest in clean energy technology



PHOTO: IDCOL

Access to electricity translates into bolstering income and reducing expenditures; uninterrupted education for children and access to cell phone technology; and of course employment generation with a budding solar industry – which has generated some 70,000 jobs. The solar revolution in remote areas of Bangladesh has transformed lives for the better.

has been spurred primarily by the collective realisation that we need to do something for climate change. The December 2015 agreement to cut emission in an effort to contain global warming has prompted action across the field on various renewable technologies. 2015 saw

more countries putting more money in solar, wind, geothermal and other sources of renewable energy and this trend is expected to continue in the current fiscal.

According to World Bank data, countries far and wide have undertaken "green" programmes. In the Middle East, Morocco has taken the lead to become a "solar powerhouse". It is building the world's largest concentrated solar power plants in the Saharan desert. The Noor-Quarzazate power complex when it goes into operation will give power to one million of its citizens and reduce Morocco's dependence by 2.5 million tons of oil annually. Mexico has undertaken a nationwide programme to make households energy efficient by distributing more than 20 million energy efficient bulbs free of cost. That means some 5.5 million Mexicans will save about 18 percent of their energy bills. China, the undisputed leader in renewable technology is turning 800 schools into "sunshine schools" through rooftop solar connections generating 100 megawatts (MW) of power that will power classrooms. And in Europe, Turkey has put into place 16,000MW of hydro, geothermal, wind and other renewable power.

As we draw closer to home, Bangladesh is forging ahead with solar-powered homes. Indeed, our country has been dubbed the "world's fastest expansion" in solar energy. As of January 2016, some 3.5 million homes get their power from solar energy, i.e. 18 million residents have electricity generated from off-grid "green" power. Access to electricity translates into bolstering income and reducing expenditures; uninterrupted education for children and access to cell phone

technology; and of course employment generation with a budding solar industry – which has generated some 70,000 jobs. The solar revolution in remote areas of Bangladesh has transformed lives for the better.

A 20-watt system costs approximately \$150, which users pay over three years. The system produces enough energy to power two lights and one mobile charger. The deletion of kerosene lanterns is a safety boon where it could easily ignite mosquito nets used in rural households. The benefits of power in rural Bangladesh is most important as access to electricity enables mobile phones to be charged – which in turn allows for mobile banking to complete financial transfers. The process becomes much easier as this can be done at home.

To put all this in perspective, the introduction of solar technology at household level has improved lives of entire communities, as it provides a cheaper and safer form of electricity that power up all sorts of electrical appliances – TVs, radio, cell phones, etc. Poorer communities can check on a weather forecast which is a major boon for a country that suffers from extreme and unpredictable weather conditions. On the health front, the replacing of kerosene lamps with electrical bulbs mean no more toxic fumes that contribute to indoor pollution and lastly, the rapid growth of the solar panel industry means substantial new employment generation, for both men and women.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

The marginalised of the marginalised

Ensure the rights of ethnic minority women

THE just concluded 'National Indigenous Women Conference 2016' has brought to the fore the extent to which women from ethnic minority communities are deprived of their rights. While women in general have to contend with all kinds of discrimination and violence, those from ethnic minority groups are even more marginalised. It is not only the state that neglects the need to ensure their rights as equal citizens; even within their own communities, patriarchal customs and traditions allow for discrimination and violence against women.

These important observations point to the urgency of formulating a policy to reduce the vulnerabilities these women face. The recommendations of the two day seminar that gave a voice to women from at least 17 ethnic minorities have been targeted to improve their status within their own communities as well as in society at large. They include: having reserved seats in parliament for these women, implementation of the CHT peace accord, a land commission for plain land ethnic communities, amendments to laws for an effective land commission for the CHT and a representative of the ethnic minorities in the National Human Rights Commission.

In addition to these steps it is crucial for the government to ensure access to justice for women from these communities who often become victims of sexual violence within and outside the communities. This means that perpetrators of sexual violence, no matter what their identities are, have to be brought to book.

Save the DND project area

Go after the canal encroachers

THE objectives for which the Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra dam project was taken up in the 1960s have been, to a large extent, nullified by the indiscriminate urbanisation of the project area and fish farming by damming the canals. The picture carried in this newspaper yesterday, depicting how a part of the canal has been dammed for the purpose of fishing, says all about the management of the project. The canal network is the lifeline of the people living inside the DND area.

This paper has been constantly highlighting the plight of water bodies in the country and particularly the rivers that serve the major cities of the country, but the authorities seem to be quite unconcerned over the issue. DND project is a case in point where lack of a long term plan to address the problems has put the nearly two million residents of the area in constant hardship, particularly in the rainy season when the situation is compounded by hindered runoff of rainwater due to blocked canals. Reportedly Matuail, Dakkhinpara, Muslimnagar, Mogolpara and Medical Road are areas in particular, where several hundred fishing farms have mushroomed. Also canals have been filled up to set up gas and petrol filling stations in the area. This is all the more galling since the government conducts anti-encroachment drives from time to time, only for the canal to be refilled and reoccupied.

We reiterate the call of the experts to immediately form a task force to take a coordinated effort to resolve what has become a deep rooted problem. Apart from the technical issue there ought to be arrangements for constant supervision of the area to prevent encroachment.

COMMENTS

"Did Taskin get justice from ICC?"
(March 21, 2016)

Nahid Hasan Sourab

We cannot expect justice from an organisation like ICC. They intentionally did this so that Bangladesh cricket cannot march forward.

"Govt forming a company for country's first satellite" (March 20, 2016)

Arian

According to news reports, the satellite can save at least \$14 million a year, which the local television channels pay to different foreign satellite companies as transmission fees. Hope it will be a good project for the country.

MARIA MAY and RAKIB AVI

THE future has always been uncertain. Particularly for the 300 million extreme poor in South Asia, one constant fear is an unexpected shock—a natural disaster, an illness, political unrest among others. While we cannot prevent all shocks, we can prepare and work to eliminate vulnerabilities. Building resilience means that as households, communities, and societies, we are better able to face what may lie ahead.

Let's talk about a few instances where almost the same magnitude of shocks resulted in different scenarios. In 2015, Nepal and Chile both experienced earthquakes of over 7.0 on the Richter scale. Over 8,500 people died in Nepal whereas in Chile the number was 11. Japan, experiencing a 6.6 earthquake, had few deaths during the quake itself, but the tsunami that followed led to one of the worst nuclear disasters in history, killing over 1,200. The trajectory to full economic, social and political recovery looks remarkably different across these three countries. That's why the recent shift in thinking in the development world has gone beyond post-disaster, post-shock support to building resilience of a person or a community or even a whole country.

Several aggravating factors that increase the frequency, complexity and severity of disasters are climate change, unplanned urbanisation, and poverty. In South Asia, where urban growth is rapid and unplanned, there is ample cause for alarm. For example, a recent study in Bangladesh concluded that over half of Dhaka and its outskirts are highly vulnerable to multi-dimensional disasters – both natural and human-induced incidents including flood, and

waterlogging—courtesy of unabated, unplanned urbanisation over the past years.

While getting a comprehensive estimate of the economic consequences of disasters is difficult, the Insurance Information Institute reported that in 2014, 189 natural catastrophes caused USD 28 billion in insured losses, and 147 man-made disasters cost an additional USD 7 billion, equal to almost twice of Nepal's GDP.

So how are some countries or communities bouncing back and not others? This is where the concept of resilience -- a related concept drawn from psychology and other fields -- comes in. Defined in a number of ways, resilience looks at how individuals, communities, and systems cope with trauma and shocks. At a minimum, in the development context resilience means the capacity to anticipate, prepare for, cope with, and recover from shocks and bounce back to where one was before the shocks occurred. Equally important, increased resilience could also improve livelihoods and support economic growth and transformation while mitigating vulnerability to future shocks.

A guaranteed way to ensure that people are resilient is to reduce vulnerabilities. As there is a clear link between poverty and vulnerability, one of the first measures to building resilience is to alleviate poverty and the causes that contribute to it. Others have looked at the linkage between social cohesion and community and death tolls from events like heat waves, finding that strong social networks are an important form of protection. More recently, the increasing household ownership of mobile phones has greatly enhanced the flow of information that

enables communities to both prepare earlier for disasters, and mobilise more resources in the aftermath.

Agriculture is another particularly important area of focus for a couple of reasons. First, there is the challenge of feeding more people as arable land shrinks. Second, fluctuations of food prices can be a significant shock for

several large and rapidly growing economies, India and other South Asian nations need to ensure that they are developing in a way that won't exacerbate the problems.

One promising area where several governments are experimenting is in the use of technology. An obvious application is to create alerts for approaching hazards, especially fast moving cyclones when minutes count.

When looking at solutions for resilience that will be feasible to scale up to the millions or even billions, cost is a key factor to keep in mind. In recent years, the term frugal innovation has grown in popularity as a way to describe what comes naturally to many operating in resource-constrained settings: creatively improvising with what's available to solve a pressing need. South Asia is known for frugal solutions.

This year, BRAC, world's largest development organisation, is hosting its fourth Frugal Innovation Forum, exploring questions in development and resilience. Starting from innovative approaches to the best practices, lessons learned from previous experiences, to the role of technology, society and organisations in scaling resilience in our communities. This event provides a platform for practitioners to explore effective innovations and create opportunities for dialogue among leaders in the global south.

These approaches and the frugal innovation mindset are what are needed to build resilience, particularly in thinking about how to ensure opportunities for the poor to thrive.

Maria May is a senior programme manager at BRAC's social innovation lab and microfinance programme. Rakib Avi is a communications and partnership manager at BRAC.

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families. Women's consumption often drops first in the household in times of a price hike. But if prices remain high, families may cope by cutting the intake of nutritious food, selling assets, taking children out of school, and avoiding health expenditures.

To date, much of the action in South Asia has been reactive; there has been little strategic planning on issues of addressing urbanisation, the consequences of climate change, or disaster preparedness. However, with

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Cyber attack on Bangladesh Bank

The recent cyber attack on Bangladesh Bank is the worst of its kind in the banking history of Bangladesh. It is also a huge blow to our economy. It shows that the IT system of Bangladesh Bank is not secure. They authorities should do everything to keep our money safe.

Kowsar Rahman Sadit
Uttara, Dhaka



Keeping quiet

This refers to the article "Knowing when to shut up," (TDS, March 17). If one wants to save himself from any trouble, it is better not to speak: See no evil, hear no evil. There are many laws waiting to pounce on you if you speak-be it through your mouth, social media, an interview or writing. If you want to save your marriage, this is the secret mantra: Keep mum and be a yes man!

Recently, a court in Cairo has sentenced a prominent Facebook user to three years' imprisonment for saying in a television interview that a large number of Egyptian women cheat on their non-resident husbands. And here in this country, sedition cases may be filed against you if you speak against the government. Freedom of expression is not for ordinary people. "Pen is mightier than sword" is no longer true.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

Marginalised school teachers

School teachers of our country are very poorly paid. How can the nation expect them to be the "builders of future" when they have a hard time just getting by? The government should consider increasing their salaries and other benefits.

Golam Kibria
Companiganj, Noakhali