

ARE THE STUDENTS COLLATERAL DAMAGE?

After page 3 nobody could give us an answer,” Fuad says. “Besides, we didn’t initiate the human chain with only one demand [fixing dates]. We have seven specific demands, including development of a proper curriculum and website.” The principals of Dhaka College, Eden College and Titumir College also admit that they didn’t issue notices to the students, adding, however, that they informed the students if they came to their offices to enquire about the matter—that is, on an ad-hoc basis. “It was so uncertain that we didn’t even know what to study for the exam, as we were told that our syllabus will change. As such, we were waiting for a new one,” says Sathi Akter, a third-year student of Eden College. “Now, we have

all the data of these seven government colleges from its website, right after they got affiliated with DU. The Office of the Controller of Examinations apparently repeatedly requested the NU authorities to provide the relevant data as soon as possible, but to no avail. “The website is a national resource and it’s not their property. How they can erase everything from the website is beyond me,” says Chowdhury. “I requested them several times to send me the tabulation sheet that contains the marks of the written exams of final year honours students, but they haven’t sent it yet. Without these marks, how can we calculate a final result? We are done with the viva and waiting for the tabulation sheets,” explains Chowdhury. The NU VC Prof. Harun-or-Rashid could not be reached by *Star Weekend* for a comment, despite frequent attempts. However, the NU authorities, through a

of education. Even after that, if we need to wait an added five months to get the results, where will we go then? Who is to take our responsibility?” asks Sumona Akter, a final year student of Begum Badrunnesa Govt. Women College. Police brutality Although the students took to the streets to put pressure on the authorities to resolve the issue, the government, rather than quell the concerns of the student body, decided to retaliate with violence—firing tear gas shells and charging batons. Ironically, although Siddikur was allegedly injured by tear gas shells, the police filed a case against 1,200 unidentified students of these seven colleges on charges of attempting to kill policemen, rioting with lethal weapons and damaging property. “Look at the video clips that are

students are not illegal; they are not in any way responsible for the irresponsibility of the authorities. They don’t even have an effective complaint mechanism, so what options do they have instead of coming out to the streets?” opines Alam. Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer, argues that there are very specific circumstances under which the police can use physical force to normalise a movement. “Physical force can be used depending on the nature and character of the assembly. If it is not an unlawful assembly, the police don’t have the right to interfere. However, if it seems that the protestors are very violent and are about to cause serious injury or damage to government property or any person or government official, the police can use ‘necessary’ force.” However, Barua highlights that what constitutes ‘necessary’ cannot be

EDUCATION

OPINION

Since early 1980s, successive regimes in Bangladesh have been undertaking pro-corporate, neo-liberal economic reforms guided by the World Bank, IMF and ADB. Along with education and healthcare, the environment, energy and power sectors have been direct victims of these ‘reforms’. As a result, the capabilities of national institutions were undermined, people and environment ignored, and several bad deals signed on natural gas, coal and electricity generation. Net result for the country: unstable system, severe corruption, rising prices of gas and power, high social and environmental costs, and increasing financial burden. The government’s present master plan for power generation is a cumulative outcome of the pro-corporate agenda. This was prepared by a team from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and was supported by business groups, such as Tokyo Electric Power Services Company Limited and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. The plan leaves Bangladesh dependent on huge loans, foreign companies, imported coal and liquid natural gas (LNG), coal-fired power plants mostly in the coastal region, and nuclear power, up to 2041. If it goes as planned, the largest mangrove forest of the world, the Sundarbans, will be ruined, the danger from climate change will increase manifold, the country will incur huge financial burden, and people will be forced to purchase electricity at a much higher and irrational price. The National Committee to protect oil, gas, mineral resources, power and port is proposing the “Peoples’ Master Plan for Power and Energy (2017-2041)” as an alternative to the government’s master plan. It aims to ensure a continuous, safe and cheap power supply for every citizen and for the economy; to identify sources of power that do not cause environmental damage and financial burden; to find an economically feasible and affordable energy mix for the country; and to develop an appropriate policy framework and institutional setup for capturing new knowledge, innovation and developing technology.



PEOPLES’ MASTER PLAN FOR A LIVABLE FUTURE

ANU MUHAMMAD

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO APPROACHES

SUBJECT	GOVERNMENT’S PLAN	OUR PROPOSAL
Energy supply target up to 2041	245 Twh	245 Twh
Main features	Import-dependent, costly, environmentally disastrous	Environment friendly, cheap and safe
Main source of power generation	Coal, LNG and nuclear	Natural gas and renewable resources
Main actors	Foreign companies, consultants and financiers	National institutions and people’s initiative
Investment	Minimum USD 129 billion	Maximum USD 110 billion
Power tariff in 2041	BDT 12.79 (in constant price)	BDT 5.10 (in constant price)

In the alternative master plan, the Committee challenges undertaking projects of mass destruction in the name of development. In order to understand the current situation, it studied the global scenario, the comparative development of technology, and the comparative movement of cost, and reached the conclusion that power generation from fossil fuel and nuclear energy is suffering from technological stagnation, resulting in huge environmental and social costs. On the other hand, renewable energy is undergoing innovations that make it much cheaper and more environment-friendly. The Committee also studied Bangladesh’s potential and challenges. For solar power, we examined the problem of land, and found that only about 0.55 percent of land will be needed to reach our target by 2041 with the latest technology. Wind and waste energy were also studied. Experts from the University of California, Berkley, the Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis and International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) all were optimistic about Bangladesh’s potential to carry out pro-people transformation. We considered only 25 of the average potential in our projection to make it more feasible.

In the short term (2017-21), the Committee’s plan does not deviate far from the government regarding our energy mix, but it proposes a fundamental shift in the policy framework. This includes scrapping Rampal coal and Ruppur nuclear power plants and replacing those with solar, wind and gas-based power plants in appropriate places; cancelling gas export deals; developing and engaging PetroBangla and Bapex in further gas exploration on-shore and off-shore; and building institutional setups to mainstream renewable energy. With the right policy and institutions, in the mid-term (2021-31), it will be possible to develop our renewable energy sector while keeping natural gas-based power plants in the lead (natural gas: 49 percent, renewable: 39 percent, and other: 12 percent). In the long-term (upto 2041), we will embrace a qualitative shift in the energy mix (renewable: 55 percent, natural gas: 37 percent, other: eight percent). The government’s reliance on coal, LNG and nuclear will result in continuous increase of power tariff in coming years. The Committee’s proposal ensures a power tariff only 40 percent of that of the government’s. After studying all facts and potentials we are

With the right policy and institutions, in the mid-term (2021-31), it will be possible to develop our renewable energy sector considerably while keeping natural gas-based power plants in the lead (natural gas: 49 percent, renewable: 39 percent, and other: 12 percent). In the long-term (upto 2041), we will embrace a qualitative shift in the energy mix (renewable: 55 percent, natural gas: 37 percent, other: eight percent).

convinced that renewable energy is the future of the earth. China and India along with many other countries have realised this and have been taking massive strides to transition to renewable energy. But these same countries are transferring their plants to Bangladesh to destroy the Sundarbans and the coastal belt. Projects of mass destruction are not acceptable in the name of development. The people of Bangladesh deserve a far better future, and it is possible. The Committee’s master plan emerged from a people’s movement; it took shape from the work of many. Some people will call it audacious. But yes, we need to be audacious to embrace a people and environment friendly vision, and to make our country livable, safe and prosperous. Anu Muhammad is member secretary of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, and Professor of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University



Siddikur Rahman



Demonstration in front of Eden College on July 21.

been informed that, considering our convenience, our syllabus will remain unchanged. I don’t see any reason why they took five months to declare that!” exclaims a frustrated Akter. The students were preparing for a united demonstration for the past one month, and their principals were well aware of their increasing discontent with the status quo. Granted, they held a meeting hurriedly on the 18th of this month to fix the problems, but if they really had solved the problems as they are claiming, why didn’t they let the students know that their concerns had been addressed? Why was the police involved to “resolve” a matter that was supposedly already solved? The long delay Md. Bahalul Haque Chowdhury, controller of Examinations, University of Dhaka claims that the NU is to blame for the prolonged delay in conducting exams and publishing results—it erased

press statement, declares that they sent over the required data—registration data, college table, course data, old syllabus and other information—as soon as they received DU’s request. They are also in the process of sending the tabulation sheets which was requested by DU on July 4, said the press release, as they need time to gather the answer scripts from the chief examiners throughout the country. However, Chowdhury argues that NU didn’t provide the integrated data, and labels the authorities as ‘vicious’. “It’s a conspiracy. They are delaying the results of the final year so students cannot sit for the 38th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination and get disappointed with the activities of DU,” he claims. With authorities caught up in this blame game, it’s the students who keep suffering. They are, instead, being made into scapegoats. “Most of the students, especially the female students, of NU, fight hard to pursue such a long period

available on social media. We didn’t throw any brick chips or take any sticks, let alone any arms. We didn’t go there with the intention to create any chaos or conflict. We formed a human chain and took a position demanding a solution to a protracted problem,” says protester GK Sanjid, a third-year student of Titumir College. “We have almost two lakh students in these seven colleges, and if 20 percent of them attend the protest, it is natural that regular movement will be hampered,” adds Sanjid. Advocate and policy analyst, Syed Mahbubul Alam, who is also the secretary of Centre for Laws and Policy Affairs, argues that it is unfortunate that the universities don’t have any political counsellors. “In situations where students are dissatisfied and take to the streets, the police should try to solve the issue mutually and inform the respective authorities, so that a fruitful decision can be taken upon discussion,” says Alam. “Here, the demands of

determined by any rank below the police inspector and, even then, the inspector has to take permission from the highest-ranking official. “In Bangladesh, though, the police don’t feel the need to take permission beforehand. They attack as they wish, remaining outside the purview of the law,” argues Barua. There should be an investigation as to why the police took such an extreme step, and whether it was legal. The students of these seven government colleges were initially hopeful that their status and educational experience would change once they became a part of Dhaka University. Little did Siddikur and his classmates imagine the fate that awaited them. The Prime Minister and Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid has given assurance that they would look into the matter, but it remains to be seen for how long students continue to pay for the inefficiencies of its educational institutions. ■