

# An alternative energy future for Bangladesh



**OFF** the coast of Bangladesh sits the small island of Manpura. Shaped like a banana when viewed from above, this will be the country's first "green island" powered by only renewable energy.

Dreamt up by the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority, as part of a larger initiative to provide renewable energy to 250 other hard-to-reach places, Manpura will be powered by a mix of solar, wind and biogas.

"We want to make it a green island," explained Siddique Zobair from the energy authority. "This is part of the plan to ensure electricity to all by 2021."

While it is great that the country is investing in renewable energy, if you look at the overall picture, the nation's main energy source in a few years will be coal.

And that is a problem. Because burning coal means greenhouse gases, and that means climate change. And as everyone knows, Bangladesh is at risk of climate change.

Now renewable energy is still part of the government's plan, but it's a little unclear to



**If Bangladesh is serious about combating climate change, off-grid renewable energy, such as solar home systems, needs to play a more central role in the country's energy infrastructure.**

what extent.

The renewable energy policy from 2008 sets the goal at ten percent renewable energy by 2020, whereas the power master plan from 2016 has the goal at three percent for 2021. Not to mention, last year, Bangladesh along with other climate vulnerable countries at the UN climate talks committed to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050.

Within the current paradigm of development, which believes every citizen's access to grid electricity is fundamental to the country's ability to develop and grow its economy, an overhaul to renewable energy is unlikely any time soon.

But there might be another way for the country to have a clean energy revolution—it would just require some rethinking of our chosen development pathway.

**Coal, coal**

Currently, we rely on natural gas for most of our country's energy needs. Yet as the supply of easily accessible natural gas runs out, we have decided to turn to coal.

Over the next few years, the government is planning to build at least a dozen new coal plants to light up the country. While

Bangladesh does have its own natural reserve of coal, it is buried fairly deep and so the current proposal is to import coal from India and other nearby countries.

While this may meet the country's growing energy demands—and provide electricity to the millions of households that currently have no access—it will inevitably raise the country's greenhouse gas emissions.

Based on what the government reported to the UN climate body, the country expects to increase emissions almost threefold by 2030. Like many developing nations, Bangladesh argues it has a right to burn fossil fuels in order to develop. After all, the country has historically emitted very little—less than half a percent of total global emissions.

But it is hard to fully support this argument, knowing full well that Bangladesh is also in great danger of climate change. With a population of 160 million, living in a relatively small area of land, the country faces major challenges in food security and other areas because of such changes in the atmosphere.

Now the government has told the UN climate body it will reduce its projected

emissions by five percent, and with international support by 15 percent.

We could be more ambitious, of course, we would just need to imagine an alternative energy future—one that relies far more on off-grid renewable energy.

**On becoming a solar nation**

Over four million solar home systems have been distributed in Bangladesh over the last five years. That amounts to about 150 megawatts of electricity servicing close to 20 million people.

But this year, the distribution of solar home systems dropped. The underlying reason (in my opinion, at least): across the country, grid electricity is valued over off-grid renewables.

Somehow solar panels are associated with being backwards in rural Bangladesh, with being poor. In people's mind, only when you are connected to the energy grid do you have any status and are "developed" like the rest of the country.

Making things worse are the lone electric poles that stand tall in villages, built by politicians who have promised access to the grid in a few short years. Why would villagers

invest in solar when they are expecting grid access in a few short years?

Another reason why the solar home system market has been saturated is because of a government "food for work" programme, where solar home systems were given out for free, further decreasing their value in people's eyes—nobody wants to buy something others are receiving for free.

Ironically, the customers most likely to purchase solar home systems at the moment are those already on the grid. They are the ones who realise grid power is not always as reliable as they were led to believe.

**A brighter future**

Perhaps another way forward for Bangladesh is to have a serious discussion about energy futures—both in terms of consumption and production. Most of the work in reducing greenhouse gases has been in reducing CO2 emissions; but on the flip side of that is reducing consumption. Does everybody really need to consume the energy that they do?

There are off-the-grid energy alternatives in Bangladesh that would potentially support rural livelihoods better than the grid—especially with the development of mini-grids spreading, whereby villagers can stock and trade solar energy with their neighbours for a small fee.

And a major benefit of solar home systems is that they are a kind of lo-fi technology, meaning they can be repurposed. This is why many fishermen now light up their boats at night with solar panels.

A decentralised energy infrastructure would also be more resilient to shocks. When the grid breaks down, whole regions are left without power. In a decentralised energy system, even if one solar village lost power all the other villages would remain fine.

Bangladesh was fairly realistic in its pledge to the UN climate body to unconditionally reduce five percent of its projected emissions by 2030. But the country could become even more ambitious in combating climate change if it were to consider off-grid renewable energy as a more central part of its energy infrastructure.

Manpura, and other hard-to-reach sites, would no longer have to be the exception, but the path to a different type of development. They could act as examples of what a decentralised off-grid renewable energy system in Bangladesh could look like.

Meraz Mostafa is a writer who works at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development.

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## For a desirable prosecution service



**STRAIGHT LINE**  
MUSLIM

**MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA**  
has very rightly commented that the government's decision to start a permanent prosecution service by employing professional lawyers is a welcome move. In every criminal prosecution, the State is the complainant on behalf of the aggrieved people and it is thus only proper that public interests do not go by default on account of extraneous factors.

It needs to be brought home that not merely is the office of Public Prosecutor a public office, but one of considerable significance for the integrity and efficiency of criminal justice. Anyone appointed to this office must, in the interest of the public, have a high degree of efficiency, and knowledge of the law of crimes and the criminal procedure; he must have the character and integrity that are irreproachable and above suspicion; he must have a sense of duty to the public and to the Code as overriding considerations. As can be immediately realised, if these requisites are lacking, the incumbent to such an office can gravely injure

the administration of criminal justice.

The ideal Public Prosecutor is not merely concerned with securing convictions, or with satisfying the government with which he has to be in contact. He must consider himself as an agent of justice, his discretion to apply to the court for its consent to withdraw from any prosecution, is a vital one. It is in the interests of the State and the public that any selection to such an office must be based on the most pertinent considerations, without prejudice or favour, and that only the best candidates should be appointed.

The Public Prosecutor being an officer holding public office is responsible to conduct the case. He acts as machinery to assist the court in deciding the guilt or innocence of the person. No other person can be allowed to interfere with the case in disregard to the position and functions assigned to the Public Prosecutor.

The Public Prosecutor, though an executive officer as stated by the Privy Council is, in a larger sense, also an officer of the court and he is bound to assist the court with his fairly considered view and the court is entitled to have the benefit of the fair exercise of his function. It also needs to be appreciated that in our country the scheme of the administration of criminal justice is such that the primary responsibility of prosecuting



ILLUSTRATION: MATT BANDSUCH

serious offences (classified as cognizable offences) is on the Executive authorities.

For the Public Prosecutor to apply an independent mind and exercise his discretion. In doing so, he acts as a limb of the judicative process and not as an extension of the executive. The court has to be satisfied that the

Public Prosecutor did not yield to the directive of the executive but made an independent study of informing himself of the materials placed before the court. In instances where this happens, the apex court would hopefully agree with the submissions of the Public Prosecutor.

The Public Prosecutor is not

expected to do what the State directs because he owes allegiance to a higher cause. Despite his undoubted duty to his client, the State, he may disregard his client's most specific instruction if they conflict with his duty to the court to be fair, independent and unbiased in his views.

It is certainly refreshing to hear that there is intent to meet the long-standing demand for staffing the prosecution system with professional lawyers. We will have to wait to see that loyalty to the party in the power does not remain the main criterion for appointment as Public Prosecutors.

The purpose of a criminal trial is not to support a theory but to investigate the offense and to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused; and the duty of a Public Prosecutor is to represent not the police but the State, and his duty should be discharged fairly and fearlessly. The Public Prosecutor has to aid the court in discovering the truth and also in the discharge of its duty to do justice as between the State and the accused.

Keeping in mind the issue of ensuring desirable prosecution service, the importance of establishing an apolitical prosecution service or cadre can no longer be brushed aside. Criminal prosecution cannot be regime centric. We may

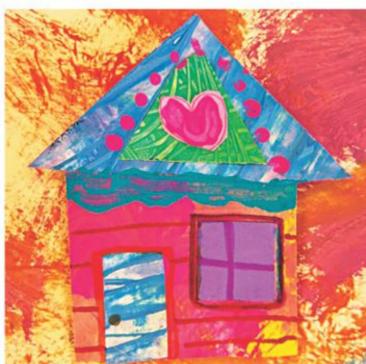
follow the Crown Prosecution Service modality as in England or adopt the District Attorney system as practiced in United States. The priority, however, is on delinking the prosecution from political executive's control.

The honour and dignity of the office of Public Prosecutor as statutorily stipulated have to be ensured by means of substantial injection of resources along with professionalism of highest order. Political partisanship shall have no place in it as favours to party faithful would inevitably mean the prejudicing of the integrity and efficiency of criminal prosecution.

Along with the above, the deficits of proper investigation have to be removed. The investigators have to understand the true import of legally proper and tenable investigation. In specific terms, they cannot be disposed towards submitting charge-sheets without correctly ascertaining the facts and circumstances of the incident under examination. Investigators must be subject to proper supervision. Adequate investigative skill development training is a must along with influence-free recruitment of investigating personnel.

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**A WORD A DAY**

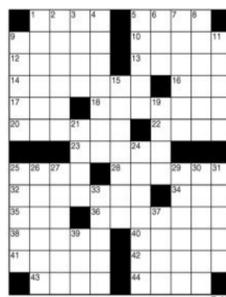


**MELIORISM**  
noun

*The belief that the world can be made better by human effort.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>             | 32 Direction              | 7" — lizards!"       |
| 1 Exec's note             | 34 Writer Anais           | 8 Fuel gas           |
| 5 Fit                     | 35 Start of the MGM motto | 9 Doesn't raise      |
| 9 Billiards shot          | 36 Pennsylvania city      | 11 Ditties           |
| 10 Convenes               | 38 — Dame                 | 15 Triton orbits it  |
| 12 Soap Box Derby setting | 40 Evenings, in ads       | 19 Bomb shell        |
| 13 Sun Valley's state     | 41 Attach, in a way       | Diana                |
| 14 In front               | 42 Static                 | 21 Croquet setting   |
| 16 Frying need            | 43 Canadian native        | 24 Like some produce |
| 17 Tipsy                  | 44 Atlantic catches       | 25 Monk's music      |
| 18 Furniture trim         | <b>DOWN</b>               | 26 Gallant           |
| 20 Avoid bed              | 1 Succeed                 | 27 Lent ender        |
| 22 Addition column        | 2 Book boo-boos           | 29 In agreement      |
| 23 Famed furrycoon        | 3 General feeling         | 30 Cruise ships      |
| 25 "Moon-struck" star     | 4 Volume of reprints      | 31 Uneasy feeling    |
| 28 Address of "Dr. No"    | 5 Friendly seniorita      | 33 Worth of acting   |
|                           | 6 Flower plot             | 37 Bedrock pet       |
|                           |                           | 39 Lobster eggs      |



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**



**BEETLE BAILEY**

**BY MORT WALKER**



**BABY BLUES**

**BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**

