

How much more evidence is needed?

Systematic rape of Rohingya women

THE horrific use of rape by Myanmar's armed forces, both sweeping and methodical, as found out by The Associated Press (AP) while interviewing Rohingya women, is appalling. It must, however, be remembered that this is not the first time that such atrocities—that can only be described as war crimes—by the Myanmar armed forces have come to light. There is, in fact, no dearth of similar accounts from Rohingya women and girls even, which simply goes to show that the Myanmar armed forces have indeed, consciously and systematically, been attempting to carry out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingyas at the very least.

Ever since the latest round of Rohingya exodus from Myanmar began, newspapers in Bangladesh and a section of the global media have repeatedly reported how Rohingyas were subjected to brutal and humiliating treatment and torture, and widespread sexual violence, including indiscriminate rapes. Moreover, thousands of Rohingyas have testified to witnessing mass killings by the Myanmar armed forces. After all this, how some countries can deny the severity of the Myanmar army's crimes is perplexing. We understand that all countries have their own geopolitical interests in every matter. However, what is difficult to fathom is how that can supersede the most basic humanitarian aspects that Myanmar has clearly violated.

The overwhelming evidence that has come out till now, including the latest findings of AP, completely nullifies the Myanmar government's ongoing denials of the widespread atrocities that have been committed against the Rohingyas by its armed forces. Most importantly, such atrocities cannot go unpunished.

The crimes committed against the Rohingyas must be addressed through the international criminal justice system, as Myanmar authorities have showed themselves to be completely unfit for that role, through its continuous denials.

Utter disrespect to our martyrs

Neglecting the killing grounds

WE have been covering this issue for some time now in this newspaper. Hence when it comes to light that 13 mass killing grounds of Pakistani occupation army during the war of liberation in 1971 are lying in neglect we take great offence. The government spares no expense while observing Victory Day nationally. Yet, we find that the largest of the 13 killing grounds, situated next to Lalmonirhat Railway station, is being used as a rickshaw stand.

Forty-six years ago, the Pakistani forces with the aid of their collaborator cohorts killed around 600 from nearby villages and buried them here in a mass grave. While this particular massacre may have faded from the collective memory of the nation's people, we find it perplexing that the concerned ministry has not taken any meaningful steps to preserve the site for its historical significance.

It is a tragedy that we have failed to honour our martyrs. That such a site can become a rickshaw stand is a slap in the face of the hundreds who perished as a result of premeditated killing by an occupying army and local collaborators. This, unfortunately, is the situation all over the country. Back in March, we wrote in an editorial the neglect other sites have similarly suffered. What is the point of having a ministry of liberation war affairs if it does not look into preserving the historical sites of the war of independence? Memorials are erected at these sites of mass killing and burial to remind younger generations that the freedom they enjoy came at a heavy price.

The burden of imported energy

It's time for Bangladesh to reduce dependence on imported energy and take offshore gas exploration seriously



BADRUL IMAM

IN Bangladesh today there are visible plans of a changed landscape in the energy and power sectors. In fact, the country stands at a crossroads of major transition from an underdeveloped energy sector to a more developed one—from a mainly local gas-based mono-energy status to multiple sources in the energy mix. This mix will include local gas and imported LNG, coal, oil, nuclear, cross-border power and renewables. The transition in the power sector is supposed to be massive and quicker than anything before it as the power generation capacity is projected to increase from the present 15,000 MW to 21,000 MW in 2020, then to 32,000 MW in 2030 and to 54,000 MW in 2040 (PSPM 2016).

A major challenge presently faced by Bangladesh is ensuring sustainable primary energy supply for mega power projects and fast-growing industrial installations. In the face of a fast depleting gas reserve and a lack of major initiatives to develop local coal, achieving a sustainable local primary energy source becomes difficult. Yet there are scientific arguments to suggest that the slogan of fast depletion of gas reserves has been overly played while the prospect of new gas discoveries remains underemphasised. A consequence of the above is an increase of dependence on imported energy in policy and planning.

According to estimates, Bangladesh will have more than 90 percent dependence on imported energy sources by 2030. With a major coal reserve in north Bengal underutilised and the full potential of gas not unearthed, the wisdom of going for almost total dependence on imported energy has been debated. Both LNG and imported coal will be priced higher than indigenous gas or coal. Limited, short-term LNG import to tackle the immediate gas crisis seems reasonable, but large-scale, long-term LNG import seems questionable. The present trend of slight rise of oil price in the international market pointedly suggests that the age of low oil price and hence that of LNG is going to be short-lived.

It is understood that a distinct government policy decision depends predominantly on imported energy. A major shift from local to import-based primary energy means the country will have to face huge economic pressure to

pay for imported energy. The cumulative cost of large amounts of coal and LNG imports on a long-term basis along with large-scale imported power is likely to raise the cost of power and industrial products.

Is this sustainable? Will it be affordable to the general population? Geoscientists argue that an overwhelming dependence on imported energy is not inevitable and the energy import may be scaled down to a reasonable level by utilising local primary energy sources, mainly natural gas and local coal. An exploration and exploitation programme for local energy sources may change the way

stratigraphic plays are yet to be taken on board, not to mention the various unconventional plays. Recently, Bapex launched a campaign of exploratory onshore drilling whose results will depend on how efficiently the technology is applied in geological evaluation to locate drilling points.

Offshore gas exploration in Bangladesh is a little explored area. Yet the adjacent offshore areas of India to the west (Mahanadi basin) and Myanmar to the east (Rakhine basin) have registered significant new gas discoveries lately. In the 1970s exploration in all these areas had failed to achieve success. The return of

Coal is going to be the prime source for power generation in Bangladesh in the next decade and beyond. The present contribution of two percent power generation by coal is likely to jump to 35 percent by 2030. The six or more large-scale (1,300 MW each) coal-fired power plants being actively pursued at present are to be fed totally by imported coal. Demand of coal-fired power plants is expected to increase from less than one million tonnes of coal per year currently to about 30 million tonnes per year by 2030. While all this will generate electricity, the overwhelming dependence on imported coal will raise power prices significantly.



Limited, short-term LNG import to tackle the immediate gas crisis seems reasonable, but large-scale, long-term LNG import seems questionable.

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh's energy policies are designed.

Bangladesh, the largest delta basin, is a proven gas province in the eastern part but its true potentials are yet to be revealed. This is because it is an underexplored country with an immature exploration status by any standard. The gas prospect in this mega delta has been underplayed while the notion of gas depletion has overly influenced long-term policy decisions. Drilling for new gas wells is few and far between and there have been no serious effort to discover new gas reserves over the decade.

Yet geological evaluation suggests Bangladesh has far more gas potential than is presently known. Exploration drilling till date has been confined to simple conventional structural plays and mostly onshore. More subtle

international oil companies in 2000s in the offshore Rakhine basin and Mahanadi basin with newly interpreted geological and technical models brought a new era with several major gas discoveries, turning offshore Rakhine to one of the most lucrative gas provinces in the region. This has not happened in adjacent Bangladesh's offshore.

There is no natural divide between southeastern offshore Bangladesh and the offshore Rakhine basin; the whole area is a single geological unit which may be referred to as offshore Bengal-Rakhine basin. Therefore, the geological models which led to the discovery of gas in offshore Rakhine should also hold valid in the adjacent offshore in Bangladesh, including deep offshore. But Bangladesh's offshore has disappointingly not seen serious exploration programmes.

Bangladesh has a reasonable amount of shallow mineable coal reserves in the Dinajpur and Rangpur districts. But development of national coal resource has been slow and has taken a backseat in national policy planning. Geological settings of coal fields in Bangladesh are not very favourable for open-pit mining, mainly because of geological and socio-economic reasons. However, that does not preclude underground mines from developing. The option of building mine-mouth coal-based power plants in north Bengal has not received the attention it deserves. This would significantly ease the pressure which would otherwise fall on our economy should a policy of total dependence on imported coal for power generation is implemented.

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Re-thinking development

Given massive social divisions and the disruptions from technology, what is the new development model?



ANDREW SHENG

AS the Commission for Global Economic Transformation, co-chaired by Nobel Laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Michael Spence, formed early last month, gets down to work, we should reflect whether emerging markets are able to formulate such a new development model.

The World Bank is the world's premier development funding agency and its flagship World Development Report (WDR) is an opinion shaper about the future of development. This analytical effort is the largest group think on development issues, overseen by the World Bank chief economist aided by a team of over 100 staff and consultants. It is an annual stock-take of the latest thinking and accumulated experience on development issues and policies.

The Bank is part of the economics establishment, since it hires what it considers the best and brightest of economists from the top universities. But if the economics profession is blind to its own blindness, then the Bank also suffers the same fate. A recent blog review of the last five WDRs, however, suggests that a new Washington Consensus is emerging (Is there a New Washington Consensus?, *Global Policy Journal*). Gone are the idealist and perfectionist models of free markets. Instead, the Bank has embraced complexity, context, learning by doing, politics and ideas—all major reviews of the economic profession since the global financial crisis hit in 2007/8.

Indeed, a review of the last decade of WDRs suggests that the Bank has made significant mental shifts about the whole development process. After a separate review of 30 years of development thinking in 2009, the WDR that year launched an influential report on economic geography, reminding everyone that the world is not flat, and geography shapes destiny.

In 2010, the WDR presciently pointed out that climate change would hurt the emerging markets more, requiring more urgent attention to climate mitigation. The next WDR looked at conflict and security as fragile states continue to fail because weak institutions cannot cope with the combined stresses of conflict, security, corruption, justice and jobs.

In 2012, the Bank addressed the issue of gender in development. Since women generally make up half of the population, it seems common sense that higher proportion of women in the active labour force, with equal pay, would increase growth in incomes. But women face different forms of discrimination that

deter development.

In 2013, the Bank tackled jobs, finding that unemployment and job expectations amongst youth being the most urgent of policy priorities. In the last two years, this has emerged as one of the top political concerns arising from the impact of robotics, 3D printing and artificial intelligence on lower-skilled jobs.

After looking at risk management in 2014, which was clearly overlooked in the run-up to the global financial crisis, the Bank took an unusual step in looking at Mind, Culture and Behaviour. Moving out of the comfort zone of economics into psychology and



ILLUSTRATION: NOAH SCALIN

other social sciences, the WDR team used the three principles of human decision-making: thinking automatically, thinking socially, and thinking with mental models to argue that policymakers can advance development by thinking beyond economics. This report never got the serious attention it deserved, mainly because it was outside the reductionist mental model of mainstream Rational Expectations economics.

In the last three years, the Bank has tackled the issues of Digitisation (2016), Governance and the Law (2017) and most recently Learning (2018). The issue of using technology to accelerate development is not new, and how rapidly innovation and advances in technology are

making old ideas and work processes obsolete is becoming more obvious every day.

On the issue of governance, Bank President Kim Jim Yong asked the right question: Not "what is the right policy?" but "what makes policies work to produce life-improving outcomes?". By moving out of a purely technical analysis of development into the political economy of how to arrive at the right choices and implementing them effectively, the Bank has finally accepted that the world is a complex adaptive system, in which there are no optimal outcomes.

The latest WDR on learning lies at the heart of development. And yet, education and learning is defective in many societies, keep large numbers in poverty and hopelessness. Many countries spend huge fortunes on education, but the results are not always ideal. This WDR, led by Bank Chief Economist Paul Romer (famed for his work on human capital, innovation and knowledge), was marred by the controversy over the Bank's writing style, which led to stripping the chief economist of the research group's leadership.

My quarrel with Bank reports is aligned with Paul's—they are too long, too technical and try to sanitise everything. When an executive summary is itself nearly 50 pages long, the reader is lost and misses the big picture. Practitioners in development know that most governments are lucky to implement three major initiatives in their four- to five-year terms. The need to focus and prioritise is critical to policy formulation and delivery.

Indeed, the elites have lost trust with the populace by promising too much but not delivering enough. The populist revolts basically reflect their sentiment that current thinking perpetuates one percent interests at the expense of the 99 percent. The verbiage in the Bank reports disguises the truism that its member countries are having serious problems delivering for the 99 percent. That requires the Bank to speak truth to power.

But this cannot be done as long as the Bank's resources are running short, since it is also losing money (net loss of USD 237 million in fiscal 2017) without sufficient capital increases from its shareholders. This is problematic at exactly the time when sound analysis and advice is necessary in a confusing development world.

In the past, the Road to Rome was many. Today, you don't have to go to Washington to find development ideas. That itself means that the path of development thinking has changed profoundly.

Andrew Sheng writes on global issues from an Asian perspective. Copyright: Asia News Network

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Take actions against BCL leaders in Rajshahi

The Daily Star reported on December 7 that some Chhatra League (BCL) leaders assaulted five female students of the Institute of Health Technology in Rajshahi in front of police and the principal of the institute. These leaders even repeatedly threatened to rape female students and had locked them in the dorms to prevent them from holding a human chain.

The whole incident is shameful, to say the least. The impudence of some BCL leaders and activists has reached a new level because of indulgence and impunity. If strict action is not taken against them, they will be further emboldened.

Abul Khaer, Tangail

Pay teachers' salaries

Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) is one of the largest safety net projects in the secondary education sector. Under this project, run by the education ministry and funded by the government and World Bank, more than 6,000 graduates from renowned public universities work as additional class teachers.

However, for the last four months, they haven't received their salaries. It was promised that the tenure of the project would be extended and their jobs would be made permanent, but the reality is very different. I urge the authorities to make sure, at the very least, that their due salaries are paid.

Sayek Ahmed Sajib, By email