

Ban GCM for claiming ownership of our coal



KAMAL AHMED

A controversial energy company, forced to wind down most of its operations and exposure in Bangladesh following a popular opposition from the local population, is now claiming Phulbari’s coal deposits as their resources. On October 15, the company, GCM Resources PLC, announced that it signed a framework agreement with China Nonferrous Metal Industry’s Foreign Engineering and Construction Co., Ltd (otherwise known as NFC) and Power Construction Corporation of China, Ltd (PowerChina) in relation to its world-class 572 million tonnes (JORC 2004 compliant) of high-grade coal resources at the Phulbari Coal and Power Project in northwest Bangladesh. GCM in the past used to say it had “identified a high-quality coal resource of 572 million tonnes at the Phulbari Coal and Power Project in Bangladesh”.

The JORC Code provides minimum standards for public reporting to ensure that investors have all the information they would reasonably require for forming a reliable opinion on the results and estimates being reported. As GCM Resources PLC is an AIM-quoted mining and energy company, these announcements are regulatory requirements. AIM is the Alternative Investment Market of London Stock

Exchange (LSE) where listings of companies give them opportunities to raise funds. In the two weeks since the announcement, there has been increased trading activities involving GCM shares and at least thrice they had to announce Price Monitoring Extension to extend the auction call period. Auction call extensions give electronic order book users a further opportunity to review the prices and sizes of orders before the execution occurs.

Surprisingly, the latest GCM announcement and claim of Bangladeshi coal as their resource comes despite recent deputations to the LSE and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) by Bangladeshi activists in the UK calling for investigations into alleged fraud by the company. Representatives of the UK branch of the National Committee to Protect Natural Resources of Bangladesh (NCPNB) have pointed out that the Bangladesh government had refused to renew the company’s licence in 2010 and therefore it is wholly inappropriate and “illegal” to trade in shares relating to that project.

The LSE, in its response, said that it takes allegations relating to companies listed on their markets—which could impact “the integrity and reputation” of those markets—“very seriously”. It can, therefore, be reasonably assumed that some sort of investigation is underway or may be nearing conclusion. Although, under the strict privacy law, confidentiality of any such investigation is quite natural, thereby prolonging our wait to know about the



File photo of Bangladeshi activists in the UK protesting against GCM Resources PLC’s operations in Phulbari, Bangladesh.

fate of those complaints.

Companies inflating their worth and potentials are nothing new, and there are innumerable examples of such exaggerations crossing the thresholds of deception. And regulators are there to curb such deceptions. But claiming ownership of a nation’s asset by a foreign company is a rarest-of-rare kind of fraud. GCM has committed exactly that. My query to the Bangladesh High Commission in London about this fraudulent claim, however, remains unanswered for over a week.

Since the refusal of the government to renew its licence for its exploration work, GCM has been maintaining low-level exposure within Bangladesh, thereby avoiding media scrutiny.

Instead, the current management of the company is seeking intervention of the Chinese government. To obtain official Chinese backing, it has entered into several partnership agreements with state-owned entities of China. Among those, the most crucial is a joint venture with PowerChina, owned by the central government of the People’s Republic of China. PowerChina is one of the most influential foreign companies in Bangladesh as it completed 10 infrastructure projects including five power plants totalling USD 750 million, and has 12 current projects amounting to USD 4.6 billion including two coal-fired power plants of 1,670MW. Their joint venture is proposing a 2,000MW coal-fired power plant at Phulbari with

an approximate investment of USD 4 billion.

The latest deal with the China Nonferrous Metal Industry’s Foreign Engineering and Construction Co., Ltd—which triggered the unusual trading activities on AIM—says they will focus on works “including, but not limited to, the definitive feasibility study and financing”. However, chattering on the stock traders’ online networks suggests the company is in a dire financial situation, and the majority shareholder, Polo Resources, is thought to be considering selling it off to the Chinese partners. Speculations are rife that if the Chinese partners buy them out, then they might get as high as ten to twelve times the current share price. Otherwise, those stocks are worthless.

When GCM first roped in Chinese interests in the project in January 2019 in Dhaka, it happily announced that their bid to seek necessary approvals from the government would be “greatly assisted by having appropriate consultants and lobbyists in both China and Bangladesh”. Whether these rumours have any substance or not, one thing is clear: GCM has resorted to a daring fraud involving Bangladesh’s mineral resources which demands serious attention from our government and civil society. The government should immediately blacklist GCM, stop all its operations in the country, and take legal actions at the appropriate forum for its attempted sale of our coal resources.

.....

Kamal Ahmed is a freelance journalist based in London.

The other side of the coin: Unanswered questions of men’s sexuality



FARZANA MISHA

THE Covid-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, particularly during the period of the lockdown, has seen a significant increase in the reported cases of sexual assault, harassment and abuse of women and girls. These appalling acts have been more brazen over time and consistently made headlines in various dailies. Just between January and August this year, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers’ Association (BNWLA) recorded 892 cases of rape—tantamount to nearly four cases a day. The reader at this juncture must keep in mind that this is but a fraction of what actually may be happening, as the majority of cases stay unreported. At the same time, we have had a marked growth in all areas of women’s empowerment. For instance, we have had two female premiers in power continuously over the past three decades, while our largest foreign currency earner (RMGs) has been a driver of female labour market engagement. We have an active young population, who have taken to the streets repeatedly to protest against the harrowing violence against women. In response, the government has introduced the capital punishment for rape, though not without criticism.

Now the question is, although our general response seems to be fine on paper, why is it not working? What is the missing part of the puzzle? We should ask ourselves: Are men, particularly the youth, missing from our equation of the solution? The answer, unfortunately, is a resounding yes!

To answer our first question, we should ask: how much do we really know about the sexual aspects of male youth in Bangladesh—particularly, in

the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)? Not much. At this juncture, our understanding of male sexuality, thoughts and perceptions, source of information, or healthcare seeking behaviour is limited at best. But why does this matter? It does because they represent the missing part of our “solutions” equation. Where these men and youth get their information, how these warp their perceptions, and how they deal with their frustrations directly affect how they treat women.

on men’s sexual and reproductive behaviours, contraceptive needs and use as well as fertility preferences.

Taking all these factors into consideration, the Brac James P Grant School of Public Health recently conducted a national survey on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of male youth in Bangladesh. The survey, funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is the first of its kind in Bangladesh and is expected to generate nationally

ethnographic approach, where the researchers literally spent months in the selected localities to collect information from the selected respondents, to generate a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the current condition of SRHR of male youth from both supply- and demand-side perspectives.

This study generated data on an array of indicators. This includes demographic, socio-economic conditions, knowledge, perception and practice regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights, health seeking behaviour regarding SRH, exposure of technology, pornography, daily activities, religious beliefs, gender-based violence, stress and conflict related to gender roles, masculinity, risk taking behaviour and aspiration of male youth.

In this article, we won’t go into the details of the findings as the analysis is still ongoing, but some initial findings suggest that peer networks are one of the first sources of information for men regarding sexual and reproductive health. This increases the likelihood of warped perceptions, practices and being misinformed as the peer groups are themselves in the dark. As a result, most of the information are derived from questionable sources including pornography, word of mouth and informal sources of providers (i.e. street sellers of medicines, *kabirajis*, untrained homeopaths). Shyness and taboo around the topics were identified as among the leading barriers to seeking healthcare, despite many suffering from severe health problems such as erectile dysfunction, urethral discharge and testicular swelling. The survey further explores the role of education and age when it comes to adhering to gender equitable perceptions and respect for women. In addition, it investigates how risk-taking behaviours (drug abuse, having multiple sexual partners, etc.) are correlated with performing idealised and perceived masculinity behaviours.

The nationwide research attempts to understand the gaps and challenges of male-inclusive sexual and reproductive health interventions and services. Challenges such as community resistance, lack of sensitivity among parents, teachers and health care providers at the field level have emerged from the initial findings. The study further reviewed how much this issue has been addressed in the existing policies, laws and acts in Bangladesh and tried to identify gaps in these areas that require immediate attention. The findings along with recommendations will be disseminated at the national level later this year.

The significance of scientifically derived evidence in addressing core social issues is immense and, in this case, the generated data will give us a clear picture of the ground realities. This will further facilitate adopting new and revising existing policies to address their shortcomings. As a society, our broader objective should be to create an environment where men can become advocates for sexual and reproductive rights, not only for themselves but also for their gender counterparts as well. Unless they are not aware of their own health and rights, they will not be able to comprehend and respect the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the opposite sex. There continues to be an urgent need to hold males accountable. To accomplish this, there needs to be widespread inclusion of men in discussions on gender equity and respect in the media and mass campaigns, providing good role models who can denounce and shame toxic masculinity traits and promote them in taking on more gender equitable roles.

.....

Farzana Misha is research coordinator for the project “Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for Male Youth in Bangladesh”, James P Grant School of Public Health, Brac University. The writer is grateful for the support of Professor Sabina Rashid, principle investigator of the project, and the research team for the production of this article.



Although our general response to sexual crimes seems to be fine on paper, why is it not working?

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

This absence of knowledge on these topics is mostly driven by an absence of international attention to the subject. For example, despite the issue of all-inclusive SRHR being reflected across some of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the focus on the male aspects of SRHR is largely absent. The global literature on men’s SRH behaviours and practices is limited. A study by Darroch et al (2016) finds that globally, only a quarter of the countries systematically collect information

representative evidence on SRHR knowledge, practices, behaviours and needs of male youth within the age group of 15-24 years. This quantitative part followed a two-stage random sampling: it was conducted in all eight administrative divisions of Bangladesh and included both city corporations, rural and urban areas of all sixty-four districts, interviewing a nationally representative sample. At the same time, qualitative information has been collected by utilising a focused

THOMAS CARLYLE
(1795-1881)
British historian.

The block of granite which was an obstacle in the pathway of the weak becomes a stepping-stone in the pathway of the strong.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Algiers section
7 October birthstone
11 Twin of Artemis
12 Ship of 1492
13 Conical abodes
14 River of Hades
15 Like vistas
17 Atlas pages
20 One of the Kennedys
23 Boxing great
24 Cajole
26 Got together
27 Concealed
28 Trickery
29 Bailing needs
31 Hold up
32 Different
33 Scottish isle
34 Ineffectual

DOWN

1 Manx, for one
2 Gorilla, for one
3 Soak up
4 Sanctify
5 Baldwin of “Beetle-juice”
6 Garden aid
7 Like some training
8 Lacking any light
9 One or more
10 Unmindful

37 Serengeti sight
39 Cheap booze
43 Rank above viscount
44 Scaly pet
45 Black
46 Head honcho

16 Must have
17 Cuban dance
18 Alaska native
19 Devil’s prop
21 Judy Jetson’s brother
22 Not bother
24 Question of place
25 Wallop
30 With vigor
33 Arrange
35 Londoner, e.g.
36 Company symbol
37 Floral garland
38 Holm of “The Hobbit”
40 – about (wander)
41 First numero
42 Luggage ID

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

10-28

YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

D	O	G	M	A	S	C	A	R	E
E	G	R	E	T	P	A	L	E	D
F	R	I	G	H	T	E	N	I	N
T	E	N	S	M	E	L	L	T	O
S	H	A	K	E	S	E	T	U	P
P	E	R	U	S	E	V	I	N	E
A	P	T	L	Y	D	E	M	O	N
A	T	M	C	A	P	M	I	A	
B	R	I	G	H	T	E	N	I	N
C	O	M	E	T	N	O	N	C	E
S	T	E	M	S	D	R	E	A	D

BETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT