

White Man’s Media: A Short History



TO be fair, modern media is white men’s invention. Even though the Chinese invented paper and printing, Gutenberg’s type-set printing of papal indulgences and the Bible launched media into the religious, commercial and cultural space, which initiated the Industrial Revolution and imperialism. Western science, driven by religious fervour for capitalism, paved the way for the information revolution that became global.

Nothing succeeds like success. White Man’s Media became successful through both new technology and its business model. The medieval Catholic Church got substantial funding by issuing indulgences (forgiving sins

created political and war news sheets in 1566. By 1609, Germany printed the first newspapers. Such printed media spread information and knowledge from the hands of the royalty, clergy and elites to the masses. This paved the way for the first French and American revolutions with populist cries for equality, freedom and democracy. American media invented advertising, pushing the right of everyone to consume, enter into debt and freely erode our natural resources.

But the power of media cuts both ways. Just as markets need true, fair and timely information to perform effectively, society needs a courageous media to speak truth to power. Sound political decisions cannot be made with bad or corrupted information. Thus, as early as 1695, Britain abolished the licensing of the press, and by 1791, the newly independent United States of America institutionalised the freedoms of speech, press and assembly into the First Amendment to its constitution.

Armed with these freedoms, White Man’s Media played a crucial role in the advancement of science, technology, and colonisation. Media, power and technology formed a formidable toolbox that gave the West the decisive edge of knowledge to dominate the rest of the world. As the Arab Orientalist scholar Edward Said lamented, mental colonisation through religion and ideology was more powerful than physical colonisation, and this was achieved largely through education in Western languages, taught through Christian schools.

Ergo, media is a power that can be used to dominate others, inseparable from war and beliefs. As Kenyan independence fighter Jomo Kenyatta quipped: “When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land, and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes



The first newspapers in recorded history were published in the early 1600s.

CREDIT: DANIEL R BLUME/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible.”

The Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels understood the power of media in politics when he realised that a lie repeated enough becomes the truth. This prompted Winston Churchill to proclaim that “in wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.”

Fast forward to today, the drums of war are again being beaten by White Man’s Media, again attended by a bodyguard of lies. Internet guru Yochai Benkler, in his 2018 book “*Network Propaganda*”, summed up the dangers: “First, having a segment of society that is systematically disengaged from objective journalism and the ability to tell truth from partisan fiction is dangerous to any country. It creates fertile ground for propaganda. Second,

it makes actual governance difficult... Third, the divorce of a party base from the institutions and norms that provide a reality check on our leaders is a political disaster waiting to happen.”

These disasters are unfolding by the day.

Former CIA media analyst Martin Gurri stated succinctly in “*Revolt of the Public*”: “We live in an age of misinformation—an age of spin, marketing and downright lies. Of course, lying is hardly new, but the deliberate propagation of false or misleading information has exploded in the past century, driven by new technologies for disseminating information—radio, television, the internet—and by the increased sophistication of those who would mislead us.”

In short, White Man’s Media is today being challenged by the rise of new

media channels such as Al Jazeera, CGTN, RT and a myriad small social media channels (eg johnmenadue.com) that provide a whole range of information that portray different perspectives and views in different languages. And that is what should be the case, because truth comes not from “my way or no way,” but from a myriad different colours of opinions and perceptions. Global media cannot be controlled by a small minority who has only their interests at heart.

The debacles of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars showed that wars fought on the basis of outright lies end up badly for everyone. What role did the White Man’s Media play in such disasters by not speaking truth to power?

In 1962, American writer James Baldwin wrote about racism in his country: “Whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveal, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves.” Events have shown that White Man’s Media knows far less about the rest of the world than they admit, and that they know themselves even less.

We have a situation where the white man is still dominant in global economics, finance, military, technology and media, but may lose that dominance with rapidly changing circumstances. We have a majority that feels insecure because it realises that soon it may be a global minority, in both population and power. No minorities can feel secure when the majority is insecure.

That is not a good foundation for global peace and stability.

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Courtesy: Asia News Network

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from divorces, abortions and crimes) and granting letters patent, franchises and charters to go out and conquer colonies. As the commercial class rose in power, so did its demand for information. Venetian merchants

How to support the renewable energy drive in Bangladesh

From an apparel exporter's perspective



RECENTLY I wrote about how Bangladesh’s RMG industry needs to move towards renewable energy in order to gain a global competitive advantage in garment production. Here I want to look at some

of the challenges our industry faces in its shift to renewable and cleaner energy, and how to overcome these challenges.

While we, as garment manufacturers, are keen to see a move towards renewable energy, we are—to a large extent—dependent on wider infrastructure issues in Bangladesh around the energy mix and the transition from traditional and renewable energy. That is what this piece will focus on.

At present, for Bangladesh as a whole, the main source of energy is natural gas. But this source is getting depleted quickly, while other fossil fuel resources such as oil and coal have a finite supply.

According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), there are around 10.63 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in Bangladesh, with annual production of 0.961 trillion cubic feet in 2019. Indigenous gas reserves will go dry soon, given the yearly production and growth rate. In short, the clock is ticking.

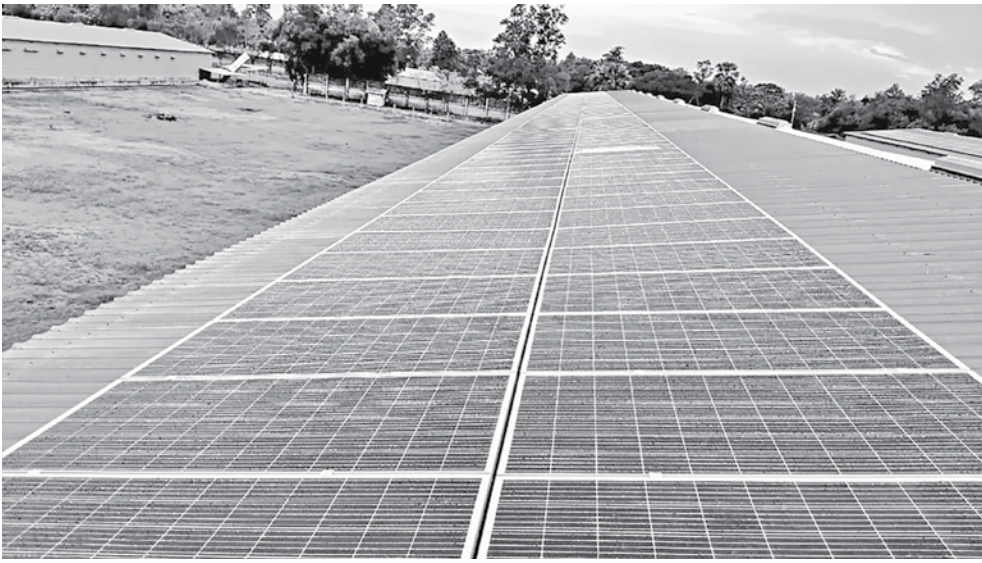
At present, our government is importing liquefied natural gas as an alternative. Bangladesh set out targets for renewable energy generation capacity in its 2016 Power Sector Master Plan: 2,470 MW by 2021 and 3,864 MW by 2041.

Given that only 369.81 MW—including 230 MW of large hydropower—of renewables have been connected to the grid to date, it

is clear that the target for 2021 will not be achieved.

What is holding us back in our shift to renewable energy, and what solutions can we look to moving forward?

Most experts agree that Bangladesh has excellent potential for harnessing renewable energy sources, such as solar, biomass, wind, and mini hydropower—these are all areas where we as a country are blessed with an excellent supply.



File photo of a rooftop solar power project in Ghatail, Tangail.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

The investment costs of renewable energy technologies are generally higher compared to fossil fuel alternatives, with high start-up costs. However, it is widely acknowledged that the return on this investment is large once externalities such as health and environmental hazards are factored in. Long-term operating costs for renewable energy are

also less.

Renewable energy is the obvious long-term option for a developing country like Bangladesh, which will soon graduate from the LDC status. It is a huge investment in our future as an economic player on the global stage.

So what are the key challenges in our shift to renewable energy? In my research, a number of issues became apparent. Firstly, the land availability for renewable projects is

limited in Bangladesh at present as most land here is designated as agricultural, and cannot be used for renewable energy projects—at present in any case.

Secondly, the existing policy tools and incentives may not always be applicable to renewable energy in the same way as they are to natural gas projects.

The third issue is a lack of synchronisation, in the sense that the targets that are being set for renewable energy plants are not in tandem with future plans for power transmission infrastructure, in the same way as they are for conventional power plants.

The fourth issue is a reluctance on the part of banking, finance and investment institutions around renewable energy due to a lack of experience and understanding relating to large-scale renewable energy projects. Added to that is the fact that there is a limited amount of knowledge of renewable energy technologies—in Bangladesh, we lack experts with the know-how and understanding of large-scale renewable energy projects. Such expertise may need to be brought in from other countries leading in this area.

These points are particularly important. It is widely recognised that private sector investment will be needed to plug the investment gap caused by a shortfall of public sector financing capabilities. The government cannot do this alone.

So what needs to happen? The first issue is finance. We all now recognise that investment into the renewable energy sector investment is required—and this money will have to be shifted away from the development of conventional power plants, and to solar, wind and other renewables projects. There needs to be a clear direction shift around national policy.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) could play an important role here, as domestic capital will likely not cover the infrastructure costs associated with the shift to renewable energy.

Secondly, I believe we need to learn from other countries where agricultural land is now simultaneously being used for solar power generation. If we could make use of more agricultural land, this would take the pressure off roof-top space for solar panels, which is a challenge in our cramped cities. To facilitate

this transition, new laws and policies will be needed.

Thirdly, we need to adjust planning regulations so that developers can build projects which have less infrastructure and land risks. This will attract more investment and reduce barriers to entry into the sector.

Fourthly, Bangladesh needs to develop and present a clear and detailed renewable energy plan, which offers a medium and long-term direction for private energy stakeholders. This could be shared widely and also act as a signal to the investment community.

Following on from this, our government now needs to map out the current renewable energy potential of Bangladesh, addressing technical issues and identifying suitable project locations. This could also see the creation, where possible, of special renewable energy development zones. We need a plan and to identify potential blockages.

Which actors need to be involved in this process? There are organisations such as the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA) or Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), which will be responsible for identifying land to site renewable energy projects.

Other relevant organisations include relevant private sector stakeholders—the RMG sector should certainly be consulted—NGOs, academic and research institutions, and energy experts.

Bangladesh’s shift to renewable energy is no small undertaking and will require heavy investment. But for our RMG industry, which aims to lead the world in sustainability and use of renewable energy, the rewards will be plentiful and long-lasting.

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RAGHURAM RAJAN
(born February 3, 1963)
Indian economist

Strong government doesn't mean simply military power or an efficient intelligence apparatus. Instead, it should mean effective, fair administration—in other words, 'good governance.'

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Will names
6 Recipe instruction
10 Follow
11 Speculate
12 Stood up
13 Tennis star
14 Past due
15 Canada's capital
16 Sense of self
17 Scrooge cry
18 Superman foe
19 Delivered the news
22 Sub shop
23 Editor's spot
26 Sent home, in

a way
29 Track act
32 In shape
33 Retina setting
34 Otherworldly
36 Singer k.d.
37 Ford's predecessor
38 Comic's forte
39 Static problem
40 Keen
41 Coop group
42 Melville book

DOWN

1 Physician
2 Furious
3 Uranium-235, for one
4 Trick
5 Spot

6 Petty fight
7 Kind of pool
8 Really impressed
9 Take it easy
11 Precisely
15 Granola bit
17 Press event
20 Outmoded
21 German article
24 Fill with mist
25 Convention highlight
27 Snap
28 College award
29 Judge's place
30 Send away
31 Poison
35 Great weights
36 Sister of Linus
38 Pillbox, e.g.

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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