

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Flowery rhetoric on CSA cannot redeem it High Court judge's comments a wake-up call for CSA proponents

The government, ever since the Cyber Security Act (CSA) was passed in September replacing the Digital Security Act (DSA), has mostly sought to sugarcoat its way out of any critical focus on the new law by citing reduced penalties, especially in case of defamation. While the shift from jail term to fine in some sections and expanding bail options mark a welcome change, we cannot deny that the law is still far from what we had expected. Beyond those sentencing changes, it retains all but one offence from its infamous predecessor, and thus has the same exploitative potential. Against this backdrop, we find the recent observations of a High Court judge quite illustrative.

Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif was categorical when he said at a workshop that five sections of the CSA—22, 23, 25, 27, and 28—will “always remain a threat to independent journalism.” He noted the lack of clarity in them. For example, Section 22 deals with digital or electronic forgery, but does not say what constitutes forgery. Similarly, Section 23 deals with fraud through digital or electronic means, while Section 25 is about the transmission or publication of offensive, false, or threatening information. Sections 27 and 28 address cyber terrorism and religious sentiments, respectively. Such overly broad terms leave room for interpretations and potential misuse. If abused, these sections, as well as others underscored by the Editors’ Council, would not only put journalists—who were among the biggest victims of DSA—in trouble, but ordinary people, too.

The retention of these controversial sections invalidates the uplifting assessment by the state minister for information that there is “a huge difference” between CSA and DSA. There is not. Moreover, reduced penalties are a poor substitute for the debilitating experience that one has to go through if implicated in a case. What safeguards are there against politically motivated cases or arbitrary arrests by police? Even if a defendant doesn’t land in jail, few cases are properly disposed of in our court system, so one has to carry the stigma or burden of a case indefinitely. So, the question is really not if DSA 2.0, as an editorial by this paper rightly called the CSA, is as draconian, but if it will be abused with the same zeal.

One can ill-afford to be hopeful under the present climate, despite the apparent lull in CSA activities. We, therefore, urge the government to stop hiding behind flowery rhetoric about this potent instrument of intimidation and repeal or properly amend it. Five years of rampant DSA abuse demand nothing less.

If a dam must be built, it must be built right Bagerhat dredging/dam project shows why foresight is key

There are certain conditions facing our rivers for which one can only blame nature, such as river erosion and flooding, even though these can also be attributed to human-induced climate change now. But our rivers and canals—and the communities surrounding them—also face issues that derive purely from lack of foresight. One such issue is the ill-planned construction of dams. As per a report by this daily, the Water Development Board recently dredged a 23km stretch of the Bishkhal River in Bagerhat’s Kachua upazila. For this, the contractor also built several dams, thereby stopping the flow of water to different canals connecting 18 villages in Badhal union. So now, while the project originally aimed to benefit farmers by enhancing the flow of freshwater in the river, it is doing exactly the opposite as multiple Boro paddy fields, canals, irrigation channels, and fish enclosures have dried up.

We have seen the failure of numerous such dams and dikes over the years. For example, just the other day, we wrote of how the construction of a three-vent regulator on the Korotoa River in 1996 causes it to remain dry for most of the year, obstructing fish migration and causing pollution and water stagnation. What the river authorities fail to grasp is that solutions such as embankments, if not properly planned, can cause more problems than benefits. This is partly because they do not engage with the local communities before implementing a project. As such, while the problem they are initially targeting may be eliminated, the nuanced side effects of a project remain unknown to them until after completion. This explains why embankments meant to reduce flow of saline water to canals, such as on Daratana River, are also posing a new problem by restricting overall waterflow.

It is crucial for public project managers, especially those working with natural resources on which people’s livelihoods are dependent, to be careful and farsighted in their planning. They must engage with local communities and experts to work out effective plans before undertaking a project.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Make Dhaka accessible

We already know how dangerous it is to move around Dhaka city, especially if you use public transport. However, we often overlook how much more difficult it is for people with special needs. From footpaths and local buses not having ramps for better accessibility, to not even a single road sign having braille or other tactile or auditory signals—Dhaka is not built to be inclusive. It is even more disheartening that many of the new developments aren’t accessible either. I urge the authorities to take inclusivity seriously and make the city accessible for every citizen.

Aanon Sarker
Pragati Sarani, Dhaka

How can we enhance our energy security?



Dr Ijaz Hossain is former dean of the Faculty of Engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

IJAZ HOSSAIN

Bangladesh hasn’t recovered from the economic shocks caused by the Covid pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, as it is still experiencing a slow but continuous draining of its foreign exchange reserves and is unable to stop the devaluation of taka. The power and energy sectors have been badly impacted in this situation because of their overdependence on imported fuels. Policymakers understood that the foreign currency requirement for this increasing dependency on fuel imports would soon become unsustainable. Experts then pointed out that this situation was mainly the result of neglecting two areas: gas exploration and renewable energy. The stark realisation that the country may not be able to pay for its fuel imports led the authorities and policymakers to declare enhanced gas exploration and incentivise rooftop solar panels and solar parks.

Over the last 20 years, natural gas production in Bangladesh tripled without the addition of any substantial reserves. Exploration was grossly neglected with the belief that no major discoveries were possible, and the shortfall in supply can be easily met through the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG). The unusually low LNG prices during the last decade emboldened those who propagated the idea that it was cheaper to import LNG than to invest in gas exploration. The strong proponents of LNG import cited Japan and Korea as examples.

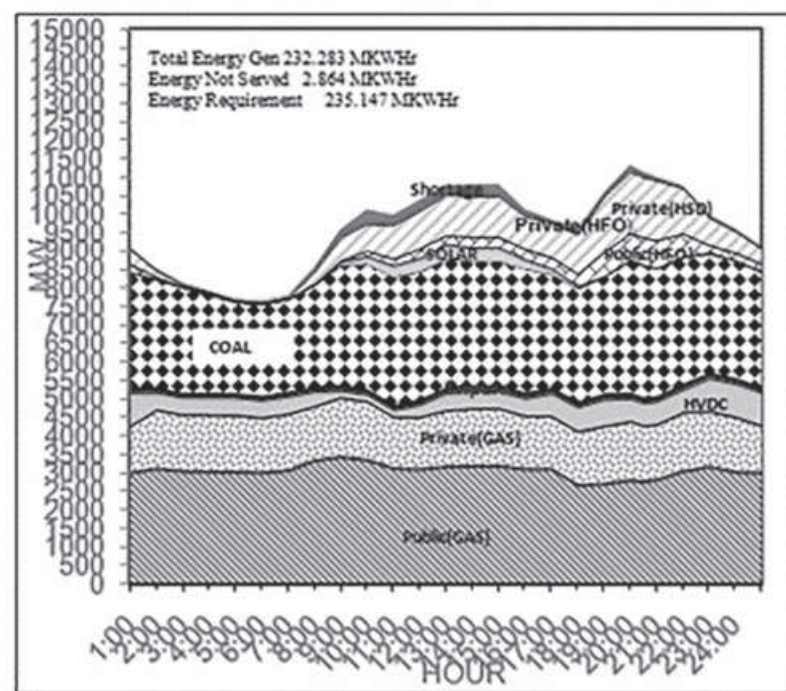
Domestic natural gas production reached its highest level of 2,663 mmcf/d in 2017. But it started to fall the following year, reaching around 2,250 mmcf/d. Thus, there has been a production decline of approximately 400 mmcf/d in the last six years. At this rate, by 2030 the production will reach a dangerously low level, and to meet the daily national demand, the LNG import burden will severely stress both the dollar reserves and exchange rate. More than two years have gone

by since the alarm was raised, and all the previously promised activities are yet to bear fruit. Very recently, however, some commitments with respect to gas exploration have been made. Petrobangla has announced an ambitious plan of drilling 46 wells by 2026 and a total of 100 wells by 2028. The plan is backed up by a promise

panels. Four solar technologies are directly or indirectly contributing to the total grid electricity. Solar parks are continuously providing electricity to the grid when there is sunlight. The other on-grid technologies are directly contributing when they are sending electricity to the grid. At other times, like the off-grid technologies, they are indirectly contributing by lowering the load on the consumer. The net effect is the same.

The achievement on this front over the last 15 years—since the passing of Renewable Energy Policy, 2008—is dismal. Only 677 MW power generated by solar energy is being contributed to the grid. The implication of this failure can be understood by analysing the daily energy curve.

Daily Energy Curve
18-02-2024



SOURCE: BPDB WEBSITE

of adequate funding and removal of bottlenecks. Moreover, focus has been renewed on the long neglected Bhola gas field, while offshore blocks are also being tendered. Now we wait and see how seriously and sincerely the drilling plan is executed.

The other long neglected area is renewable energy, especially grid-tied solar power plants and rooftop solar

The contribution of solar PV electricity can be seen from the Daily Energy Curve figure, which shows how the demand for electricity was met on February 18; the turquoise band from early morning to early evening is the contribution to the grid. To meet demand during these hours, the grid operator dispatched oil-fired (mainly HFO but also some diesel)

power plants. What is amazing here is that the full demand could not be met due to a lack of fuel despite having more than enough power plants, and we had to resort to load-shedding. It is inconceivable that when the sun is shining, there is load-shedding. The electricity supplied by HFO and diesel power plants, including load-shedding, could have been supplied by solar PV. If the grid had enough solar PV capacity, they could have saved the fuel used by oil-fired power plants as well as prevented the load-shedding. In the last 15 years, we managed to build fossil fuelled power plants with the collective generation capacity of more than 20,000 MW, but solar PV power plants with the capacity of less than 500 MW.

If Bangladesh had grid-connected solar power plants with the collective generation capacity of 2,000 MW more, which could have been accommodated in the grid without instability issues, a lot of foreign currency could have been saved and the country would have had greater energy security. However, to accommodate another 2,000 MW of daytime solar, there must be sufficient power plants to manage intermittency (to cover for cloudy days). There are gas-fired power plants (gas turbines) with less than 1,500 MW capacity that can perform this task. Of course, there are plenty of oil-fired power plants, but the unit cost of electricity from these power plants is very high. It is ironic that we need more gas-fired power plants despite the fact that nearly 50 percent of the existing plants (with more than 5,000 MW generation capacity) are sitting idle. To keep tariffs low and add more solar PV electricity to the grid, the gas-fired power plants should be simple (single) cycle, not combined cycle, of which we have plenty and which is the principal cause of overcapacity.

The realisation that energy security cannot be ensured by importing fuels and that domestic resources are the only means of strengthening energy security have hopefully dawned upon policymakers in Bangladesh. Continuous gas exploration and exploitation of renewable energy should be the two pillars of energy security in the country. The neglected reserves of high quality coal should also be considered. A developing country cannot import fuels to sustain a growing economy beyond a certain limit.

COP28: Progress for women, but Bangladesh deserves more



SM Mashrur Arafin Ayon works at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University. His research interest lies with the intersections of gender, technology, and feminist theory.

SM MASHRUR ARAFIN AYON

In the coastal village of Shyamnagar in Satkhira, a woman named Rina (pseudonym) faces a relentless battle. Rising salinity from encroaching seawater ruins her family’s rice fields, forcing her to walk far every day to collect fresh water. Her story is all too common in Bangladesh, the seventh most climate-vulnerable nation in the world, according to Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index 2021. For women like Rina, the outcomes of climate conferences like COP28 matter—and yet, promises often outpace progress.

The proceedings of the global climate summit’s latest edition brought renewed focus on gender, with discussions of just transitions and gender-responsive climate policy, adding momentum to an issue sidelined for too long. The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund offers Bangladesh a ray of hope—a concrete way to fund recovery after the inevitable effects of a changing climate, like devastating cyclones and insidious erosion, upend vulnerable communities. But with limited details yet provided, it remains unclear how swiftly this lifeline will reach those most in need.

COP28 placed gender squarely on the agenda. The Gender-Responsive Just Transitions and Climate Action Partnership demonstrates a shift, acknowledging women’s vital role

in adaptation and recognising the need to incorporate their experiences and knowledge into the worldwide green transition. The conference underscored how climate change has gendered effects, from water scarcity to heightened vulnerability during disasters. Women are burdened in ways still far too often overlooked by policymakers.

There also remains an uncomfortable gap between acknowledgment and action. Increased rhetoric is necessary but fails to address the urgent need for real-world solutions. To make a difference, gender-responsive approaches must underpin every aspect of climate finance, directing resources to female-led projects and building women’s capacity throughout society. Likewise, collecting gender-disaggregated data is essential to fully understand and target these inequalities.

COP28 offered progress, albeit slow; but time is a luxury that nations like Bangladesh cannot afford. We need clear commitments, bold funding allocations, and an unwavering focus on equality at future climate talks. For COP gatherings to have a transformative impact, good intentions must solidify into actions bound by measurable targets. This means quantified mandates for female representation at all levels of climate governance, designated financing

for women-led initiatives, and the explicit inclusion of gender analysis in adaptation plans. Without them, promises to build more equitable climate solutions ring hollow.

It’s essential to address climate change effects’ intersection with other vulnerabilities in Bangladesh’s context. Poverty, ethnicity, and social marginalisation interact with climate risks, compounding existing inequality. An understanding of this web is vital to create effective policies.

Bangladesh and the broader climate justice movement must take on the root causes of gender disparity. This translates to tackling discriminatory policies, providing women with climate-specific knowledge, investing unequivocally in girls’ education, and challenging societal norms that limit female potential.

COP28 should have been a strong advocate for funding women-led innovation. Bangladeshi women are a wellspring of adaptive solutions, from local-level resilience initiatives to sustainable farming practices. Yet, they face systemic barriers to accessing the resources and support required to implement these solutions at scale. Accountability is another crucial piece of the puzzle. Pledges made require robust frameworks to monitor whether financial aid targets female-led projects and reaches communities directly.

COP28 missed an opportunity to showcase Bangladeshi successes in tackling climate impacts. From community-level cyclone preparedness to female-led adaptation strategies, the nation must be a leader. Platforms for amplifying these initiatives and facilitating South-South knowledge exchange and cooperation with similarly vulnerable nations would strengthen outcomes.

Bangladesh deserves global advocacy on issues like climate-driven

female migration, which demands international frameworks and protections. We need investment in girls’ education to redress inequitable climate impacts in the long term and a clear focus on ensuring that climate financing supports, rather than undermines, women’s economic opportunities. Bangladesh is crying out for data-driven action. Without gender-disaggregated statistics, the unique effects of climate change remain nebulous and hard to address. Funding that enables data collection and trains female advocates to harness information is a pivotal component of effective policymaking.

Bangladesh faces internal realities that add additional urgency to addressing gender gaps in climate resilience. Global platforms like COP can catalyse progress—and there’s a responsibility to use the spotlight wisely. Bangladesh must demand transparency and accountability in loss and damage funding, advocate alongside climate-vulnerable nations, and play a central role in knowledge-sharing to ensure it is seen as a driver of solutions, not simply a victim.

The world sees its own future mirrored in Bangladesh—Rina’s story echoes beyond her village. Within her narrative lie potent truths: resourcefulness in the face of adversity, the quiet but relentless force of marginalised women fighting for survival, and the harsh reality that ignoring intertwined issues of climate and gender will come at a profound cost for society as a whole. The clock is ticking for COP29, world leaders, and wealthy nations. They must invest in the women of Bangladesh, support their innovations, and give them a seat at decision-making tables. Their leadership, strengthened by the world leaders’ action, offers us the best hope for a future where justice and survival go hand in hand.