

NATIONAL CITIZEN PARTY

The new kids on the political block



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The new kids on the political block have a name: the National Citizen Party (NCP). After some test runs under the banners of Students Against Discrimination and Jatiya Nagorik Committee, the NCP represents "July's People" who ousted an authoritarian regime through a people's uprising. Thus, Generation Z's youthful exuberance translates into political power. However, history tells us that uprisings and revolutions are only the easy part; governing is the real challenge. The interim government includes three (minus one) student leaders who, I am sure, will attest to this truism.

NCP's emergence as a political entity promises change. If guided properly, the party can bring in a reformed democracy, ending years of political stagnation. For a country yet to properly earn the guiding principles of the Liberation War—equality, social justice, and human dignity—even after nearly 54 years of its independence, there is an overwhelming disillusionment with traditional political forces. The societal and cultural fault lines are responsible for occasional tremors. The eruption of July 2024 is symptomatic of a deep-rooted molten anxiety. Reconciliation and national unity are crucial, requiring negotiation of the contested narratives of identity, history, and ideology. Whether the NCP will look for national healing is not clear at this point.

Sarjis Alam, one of the chief organisers of NCP, asserts that their party aims to emphasise "citizenship" that transcends the limitations of being a Bangalee or Bangladeshi. This stated centric position, which they call pro-Bangladeshi, is vague and warrants further elaboration. The party grew out of the rejection of the established culture that conceptualises political loyalty as an allegiance to one of the dynasties that has a male heroic figure at its pivot. The "Bangalee" and "Bangladeshi" discourses are credited to two iconic male figures. Despite being ruled by female leaders, the country has never been able to transcend the legacies of its patriarchs. More than three decades of premiership held by female figures

as symbolic heirs have not presented women as transformative figures. Even the head of the interim government, known for his efforts in women's empowerment through microfinancing programmes, has struggled to create a substantial space for women in Bangladesh 2.0.

The composition of NCP is no different. The euphoria of July's achievements has started to wane as the harsh realities of politics have surfaced. The unity of the students is fractured by ideological rifts, political rivalries, and allegations of corruption. The new party has strategically detached itself from its rightist members, but not without suspicion. The common perception is that in the forthcoming national election, they might complement one another.

NCP and its allies came together through their opposition to a common adversary: the fallen regime of Awami League. The absence or shadowy presence of the deposed leadership has made ideological rifts within the orbit of the party both visible and pronounced. Different factions with varied political philosophies are now fighting for influence. For some, radical reforms are the logical consequence of an uprising. Others push for a rather moderate and incremental approach. All eyes will be on the NCP to see if our young ones have the ability to maintain solidarity and navigate the country's complex political landscape as well as the international spheres of influence.

Another challenge for the NCP is its perceived association with the interim government. The established political parties, who have been running the oppositional marathon race for decades, find the NCP as the last runner to finish the race with their baton. The glory for NCP thus overshadows their long-anticipated political comeback. The atmosphere is a breeding ground for suspicion and resentment as former allies are turning into political adversaries.

Some have accused student leaders of monopolising the revolutionary narrative, highlighting their role while slighting the contributions of their peers. This perception

is both politically damaging and historically contentious. The apparent, initial exclusion of private university students from the central committee of the recently formed student organisation Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsads (BGCS) strengthened this perception, leading to scuffles between these students and BGCS supporters at the DU campus on Wednesday. Although later developments somewhat cleared the air, with the disclosure

people's mandate.

I don't want to discourage our young revolutionaries. They need time to strike roots and sprout shoots before they bloom and yield fruits. But if the maturity of their fruits is rushed chemically and artificially, their party is unlikely to be acceptable and sustainable in the long run. The party's high moral ground has already been tainted by some allegations of corruption and violence.

grew up with fast internet, instant food, instant messaging, and instant access to the information galaxy. They demand quick results and are notoriously unforgiving. They need to learn to deal with others with mutual respect.

To stay relevant, the party's manifesto must prioritise the country's expected demographic dividend. This involves the transformation of youthful energy into economic productivity.



The emergence of Jatiya Nagorik Party (National Citizen Party) as a political entity promises change.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

of the full 205-member committee including private university representation, the damage was already done. One hopes that, with time, these young leaders will have the maturity to adopt an inclusive narrative that recognises the contributions of all factions.

The new party will also have to respond to the grapevines that whisper conspiracy. The party will have to come clean about its funding source, especially after allegations about the paid agency of overseas actors or covert operatives of rightist political parties. We need a proper distance from the event to understand whether the revolutionary zeal of NCP was organically homegrown or strategically manufactured. The challenge for NCP is to prove that they are not a beneficiary of political crises or even conspiracies, but a transformative force advocating for the

Some of the accusations are likely political smears, while others seem genuine enough to raise concerns. For credibility's sake, the party must come clean, championing transparency and due diligence, and restore public trust.

Let's not forget: the NCP holds huge potential. Like the student-led movements of 1952, 1966, 1969, 1990, and 2018, the NCP's youthful leadership promises to offer an alternative to the entrenched political dynasties that have controlled our politics for decades. Their idea of anti-discrimination resonates with a generation that is logged onto social media and globalised interfaces. Then again, whether the Gen Z will be patient enough to work closely with other generations is a point to ponder. We already see the impatience and arrogance that have alienated some of the leaders. This is a generation that

We need education reform, vocational training, and digital literacy not only to fulfil their promise of equality and opportunity but also to solidify their support base among the youth.

To become a credible political force, the new party must learn from historical precedents and strategically address ideological rifts, corruption allegations, and political hostilities. Ultimately, the legacy of the new party will be determined by the nation it purports or helps to build, not by the regime it has overthrown. The country awaits a leadership that has integrity, vision, and inclusivity to change the course of Bangladeshi politics. Even if they don't succeed, at least they will have some exciting stories to share with their grandchildren about the time they nearly changed Bangladesh.

Maximising energy efficiency is key to our industrial growth



Afia Mubashira Tiasha
is senior research associate at the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). She can be reached at tiashaafia@gmail.com.

AFIA MUBASHIRI TIASHA

increasingly important for cooperation and trade.

Although energy efficiency has many advantages, several obstacles hinder its widespread use in the industrial sector of Bangladesh. Many industrial operators are unaware of the financial and environmental advantages of energy efficiency, and there is a lack of qualified workers to handle and deploy these technologies. Another major obstacle

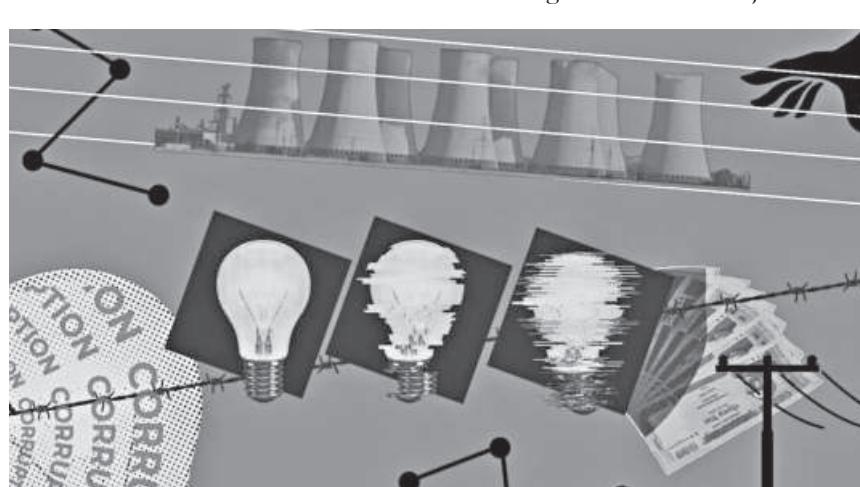
with new laws or mandated guidelines meant to increase energy efficiency. In addition, a lack of knowledge about the advantages and opportunities accessible to organisations is a widespread obstacle to energy efficiency. A major gap still exists in the application of standardised frameworks for energy efficiency.

Governments worldwide understand the critical significance of energy-efficient technologies in combating climate change and decreasing industrial energy usage. Tax incentive schemes can encourage businesses to invest in energy-efficient equipment. Grants can fund projects that improve energy efficiency, encourage renewable energy integration, and develop novel technology with environmental benefits. Providing funding channels, incentives, and support systems helps reduce the initial investment burden. Mandatory energy efficiency targets encourage businesses to invest in technological upgrades, operational improvements, and environmentally friendly practices. International collaborations enable the exchange of knowledge and experiences, allowing countries to learn from one another's successes and failures in boosting energy efficiency.

Moreover, collaborative projects bring together experts from several countries, encouraging innovation and the development of cutting edge technology that improves energy efficiency and promotes waste reduction to help develop a more sustainable and environmentally conscious industrial landscape. Governments should foster a conducive environment for joint ventures, research collaborations, and knowledge-sharing. Also, increasing investment in research and development can address new technical problems and gaps, encourage innovation in energy-efficient technology, enhance existing solutions, and develop new techniques.

One of the key obstacles industries face is the high upfront costs associated with implementing energy-efficient technology. The swift development of energy-efficient technologies creates a knowledge gap since some industries do not have the expertise needed for successful deployment.

Existing infrastructures and legacy systems in industries may not readily integrate with newer, more energy-efficient technologies. Moreover, industries may be reluctant to comply



Although energy efficiency has many advantages, several obstacles hinder its widespread use in the industrial sector of Bangladesh. FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

The need to tackle climate change necessitates an increase in energy efficiency. Global energy intensity has been declining annually since 2015, with significant implications for businesses, governments, consumers, and the environment. Energy security, climate change, and economic stability are more pressing than ever, and both developed and developing countries must take action to address these issues amid rising concerns over energy price volatility and the worldwide focus on reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions.

In developing countries, where energy consumption and the search for clean energy sources continue to grow, energy efficiency is becoming an increasingly important tool for both financial stability and energy security. Furthermore, in developing countries like Bangladesh, energy efficiency has emerged as a crucial component, owing to its commercial and industrial competitiveness and energy security advantages. In addition, the environmental benefits, such as lowering CO2 emissions, make it increasingly valuable.

In FY23, over 10.35 percent of Bangladesh's GDP was derived from its ready-made garment (RMG) industry. This sector employs millions of people and is the main driver of economic growth. Also, in terms of satisfying the increasing demand for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards for international clients, energy efficiency is essential for Bangladesh's industries. For example, Bangladeshi garment manufacturers need to meet foreign consumers' requirements to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

However, the pattern of energy use in Bangladesh indicates a significant reliance on non-renewable resources. Recent data shows that the industrial sector alone is responsible for a large amount of the overall energy consumption, with textiles, clothing, and chemicals being the main

contributors. Collectively, the garment (15.4 percent), textile (12.4 percent), and chemical fertiliser (12.2 percent) sub-sectors account for over 40 percent of the total energy consumption of the industrial sector.

Given this high level of consumption, energy-saving strategies could significantly lower costs and improve these businesses' competitiveness globally. Limiting energy use in the industrial sector lowers operational costs, boosts economic efficiency, and frees up capital for growth and innovation. Reducing CO2 emissions and other pollutants also encourages environmental responsibility and helps the country meet its environmental commitments under international agreements. By lowering dependency on foreign fuels and increasing energy efficiency, national energy security and stability can be improved. Effective energy use also boosts Bangladeshi products' competitiveness in the global market, where sustainability is

is the high upfront cost of energy-efficient technologies and the absence of financial incentives. Furthermore, energy performance requirements and incentive gaps persist, while enforcement of some laws to foster energy efficiency remains weak. Another barrier is the challenge for businesses to shift to modern energy-efficient systems without major investment and technical know-how, as many still cling to outdated equipment and manufacturing practices.

One of the key obstacles industries face is the high upfront costs associated with implementing energy-efficient technology. The swift development of energy-efficient technologies creates a knowledge gap since some industries do not have the expertise needed for successful deployment.

Existing infrastructures and legacy systems in industries may not readily integrate with newer, more energy-efficient technologies. Moreover, industries may be reluctant to comply

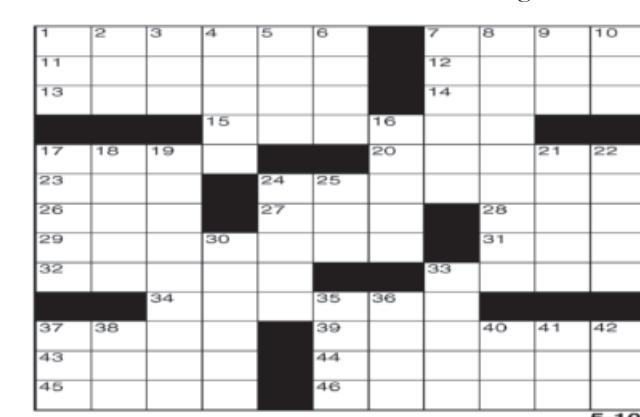
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Predicament
- 2 Pindar poems
- 3 Piled up
- 4 Latvia's capital
- 5 Pooh's pal
- 6 Pop of music
- 7 Seek, as office
- 8 Power unit
- 9 Vigilant
- 10 2001 Will Smith film
- 11 Predict
- 12 Beagle or boxer
- 13 Objective
- 14 Kinsey topic
- 15 Spreads, as a sleeping bag
- 16 Green of "Casino Royale"
- 17 Small sounds
- 18 Calls on
- 19 Ignores the limit
- 20 Too
- 21 Big billed bird
- 22 Foot features
- 23 Painter Monet
- 24 Artist's inspiration
- 25 Lent a hand

DOWN

- 1 That ship
- 2 Semicircular shape
- 3 Beam of light
- 4 Left on a liner
- 5 Llama's land
- 6 Adam's home
- 7 Baltimore player
- 8 Goes off on a tangent
- 9 Easter quest
- 10 Put into words
- 11 Rural businesses
- 12 Crumple
- 13 Detached
- 14 Fierce females
- 15 "Superman" star
- 16 Michener book
- 17 Unfaithful
- 18 Pipeline flow
- 19 Go against
- 20 Routine
- 21 Engrave
- 22 Portion (out)
- 23 Money machine
- 24 Singer Reed
- 25 Trophy
- 26 Sports drink suffix
- 27 Homer's neighbor



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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