

Ruling and Opposition Political Parties should be Proactive both in the Parliament and Outside for Ensuring Energy Transition

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[31.12.2023, Dhaka]. There is a common understanding among the political party representatives regarding the urgency and importance of energy transition while ensuring energy security in Bangladesh. However, there are differences in terms of the political ideology and commitments to reflect upon the understanding and attain the energy transition goals. These findings have been shared by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in a report titled '*Energy Transition for Addressing Energy Crisis in Bangladesh: Perception of Political Parties*'. CPD explores the perception of the major political parties including Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party (JP), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) on Bangladesh's energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable or clean energy. Political parties through their pro-active role both in the Parliament and outside can best contribute in shaping the long-term energy and power policies and plans targeting energy transition in Bangladesh. Achieving the commitment of 40 per cent renewable energy by 2041 requires coherent policies, initiatives and actions. However, most of the existing and upcoming energy and power-related policies are not in line with that commitment. Hence, voice of the political parties is crucial within and outside the government, as well as within the Parliament and outside the Parliament in order to make coherent policies and plans for achieving just energy transition in the country highlighting major reforms in the areas of energy-mix, renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy pricing and energy security etc. Hence, the study suggests three sets of recommendations for ruling party leaders, representatives in parliament both from ruling and opposition parties, as well as other opposition parties outside parliament to actively use their bargaining power in transiting the national energy related policies and plans.

Perception on shifting from the existing energy-mix: The ruling party, Bangladesh Awami League while in power for 15 years has recognised the challenges of overwhelming dependence on fossil fuel-based energy sources long ago. Yet the party stands far behind in reducing its dependency on fossil fuels. The ruling party still finds it difficult to reduce its dependency on fossil fuels and so continues to keep the newly built coal-based power plants for the next decade. Opposition parties such as BNP, CPB and representatives from the left-wing parties think that renewable energy and natural gas should be prioritised as the main sources of energy because both are environmentally friendly, safer and can reduce generation costs.

Pledges on renewable energy and smart grid in the election manifesto: Perception on Despite the prevailing understanding, there is an overwhelming presence of fossil fuel in all the political party election manifestos with the expansion of power generation capacity. Unfortunately, commitments and pledges on renewable or clean energy and the strengthening and upgradation of the transmission and distribution system towards that direction have been found insignificant in the manifestos of all political parties.

Perception on strengthening transmission and distribution system: Bangladesh Awami League accepts its weakness in modernising the transmission and distribution system and expresses its willingness to establish the smart grid system immediately. BNP's Vision 2030 mentions some steps to modernise inefficient power plants to ensure efficient energy and quality

electricity at a reasonable cost. Other political parties agree that the power distribution and transmission facilities must be improved in line with the power generation, but they also lack in proper planning necessary to achieve the objective.

Perception on subsidy management: The ruling party, Bangladesh Awami League has expressed the inability to subsidise the power and energy sector with such a lion's share, any further. As a result, electricity tariffs have gone up and are expected to rise further. The ruling party argues that the country's power tariffs are lower than those in many other developed countries, and subsidies are still provided to keep electricity more affordable. However, opposition party representatives do not welcome the initiative to hike electricity prices and stated that the IMF mechanism to rationalise subsidies is faulty. According to them, the reason behind the high subsidy allocation is the capacity payment provided to the rental and quick rentals. Under the Indemnity Act titled 'Quick Enhancement of Energy and Power Supply Act 2009', the ruling government has paid 82 Independent Power Plants (IPPs), and 32 rental power plants a sum of Tk 104,000 crore in capacity payment in the last 12 years. The AL thinks it was necessary for that challenging time during 2009, and up until recently. All the other political parties have vehemently opposed this initiative of extending the act for the third time.

Weaknesses of political process in energy-related policy making: A number of challenges are hindering the energy transition in Bangladesh. They include the prominence of fossil fuel in the public discourse about energy, unclear trajectory towards energy transition, unwillingness to involve peoples' representatives and national experts in the policy-making process, not fully functional National Parliament and a lack of political coalition and consensus on energy narratives. Identifying and addressing these risks requires careful planning, stakeholder engagement, effective regulation, and adaptive management. It is important to have a comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation strategy to ensure a successful transition to a more sustainable and low-carbon energy system.

Recommendations on energy transition: The report laid out three sets of recommendations for ruling party leaders, representatives in parliament both from ruling and opposition parties, as well as other opposition parties outside parliament. These include- (a) The elected government should create a fully functional parliament where the policy, plan, and acts can be presented and passed and discontinue discriminatory, non-competitive policies and set up a committee with specialists and climate-responsive people to prepare a roadmap for attaining the 40 per cent renewable energy target by 2041; (b) The appointed members of opposition in the national parliament should utilise the opportunity to put pressure on the government by creating consensus among fellow parliamentarians, promoting parliamentary debates and discussions for renewable energy roadmap to achieve the target, and making sure that the sectoral policies, rules and acts of this sector are presented and passed as bills in parliament; and (c) Political parties with a spirit of activism can mobilise the peoples' movement through knowledge sharing and create a public mood in favour of renewable energy and just energy transition.