

BEN Webinar on  
*Renewable Energy Transition* a book by Prof. Sajed  
Kamal  
Chairman's Remarks

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# Welcome

- Introduction: I am Ahmed Badruzzaman- I chair BEN's Energy Panel and I Co-teach a signature course, *Energy and civilization*, at University of California, Berkeley. In the course we discuss, the challenges of energy transition we humans face in the context of the developed and developing worlds. You heard today many of the same points our students wrestle with.
- August 26: Phulbari Day- My deepest respects for the martyrs. We are delighted to have Prof. Anu Muhammad one of the key leaders on that movement with us today.
- Today's conversation: Prof. Kamal's book is a focal point – But the conversation was a bit larger- namely meeting Bangladesh's increasing energy needs, benefitting the people.
- Sequence:
  - ❖ Prof Kamal mainly shared key points from his book, but also added a few important points.
  - ❖ Four eminent discussants: Dr. Kamal Chowdhury, Dr. Mahmud Farooque, Dr. Dipal Barua, and Professor Anu Muhammad shared their thoughts as closely as they can relating to the book but they also generously added their perspectives on Bangladesh's energy transition trajectory.
  - ❖ We then had a lively Q&A session
  - ❖ I quickly summarize the discussions trying to connect the thoughts of the keynote speaker and discussants. I briefly share a couple of my own thoughts.
- Our facilitator, Dr. Mohammad Irfan, deftly handled the session and kept us moving along. Thanks, Dr. Irfan.

# Summary of Chairman's Observations at Session End

- We had a very a rich discussion
- What I heard in the presentations-A Summary: The recording contain details and additional remarks made by the keynote speaker and the discussants, and the Q&A.
- **Professor Kamal**, in his keynote talk, suggested that Bangladesh can transition to renewables fully. He showed a number of slides of his involvement with solar projects around the world. He raised issues with so-called 'clean' coal, Rampal, nuclear power in a densely populated country- Points I myself have made several times in the last few years. I shudder to think to think what might happen in case of a Fukushima-like accident at Rooppur. Prof. Kamal expressed his disappointment that COP26 did not phase out coal-based power generation, opted for a phase-down instead. He was also disappointed by a lack of discussion of over-consumption in the developed world. He hopes for a much faster transition to renewable energies than the current pace. This is possible, he felt, because much is happening in technology advances such as batteries for storage and economic/financing of renewable projects.
- **Dr. Chowdhury** shared his research on energy transition issues in Southern Africa and put them in the context for Prof. Kamal's book. He emphasized the need for policy and long-term planning, which appears to be lacking in Bangladesh energy discussion. He also noted the feasibility of subregional energy trade. We in BEN have made the same point over the years.
- **Dr. Farooque** noted that he comes from an intersection of science and society and found many things to agree with Prof. Kamal's book. He picked up on the example of a citizen-expert engagement in science in South Korea that Dr. Kamal had in his book, & shared his own experiences and lessons learned on a similar a project he did on nuclear in 2014 in Bangladesh. The key takeaway to him was government/citizen partnership essential in making sound energy policies.

# Summary of Chairman's Observations at Session End

- **Dr. Dipal Barua**, who previously headed Grameen Shakti that played a big role in implementing solar power in rural Bangladesh expanded on the theme of renewables in Prof. Kamal's book. He shared a number of ideas that he is pursuing with Bangladesh authorities and other potential partners on the topic. He noted the need for net-metering to optimize use of solar. He made a strong case for a Ministry of Renewable Energy, independent of the Power Ministry, to attain the visibility, resources, and policy-making ability needed to make a speedy transition possible. We need to help change the mind-set of policy and decision makers, he remarked.
- **Prof Anu Muhammed** congratulated Prof. Kamal on the book and hoped to see a Bangla version of it soon. Prof. Muhammed who was instrumental in mobilizing against the Phulbari open-pit mining project reminded us that policy change did not happen over several governments, but a just end was achieved by involving the masses. Experts are not the only ones who know it all. People are permanent and paramount, he noted, and must be a part of discussion and decision-making. He cautioned us against vested interests. Prof. Muhammad's points very much fit with the message in Prof. Sajed Kamal's book.

# My thoughts

- My own perspective and the vision of the book overlap broadly: We must arrive at a **sustainable, 'clean', and just energy system**, otherwise we will be in big trouble.
- I agree with many of the suggestions made in the discussions. I add/reiterate three points
  - In assessing energy options, one **must** look at both the upsides (i.e., positives) **and** downsides (negatives) of one's choice- All energy source options have some negatives- none is all 'clean.' The question one needs to ask. can we address the downsides?
  - Developing countries like Bangladesh need to actively engage their local experts working on the ground there. Relying 100% on foreign entities/experts for developing their energy strategy and tactics will not lead to a good outcome as we have seen in the past and even recently. Of course, we can learn from foreign experts –use them as resources but they should NOT be designing a country's energy plans. BEN/BAPA has made this points repeatedly.
  - As was noted by several speakers, watch out for vested interests. Here I believe education and citizen engagement are critically important.

**My hope:** We will use the vision in Dr. Kamal's book and ask our ourselves what can we do to arrive at a sustainable, benign, and just energy future for our native land. Let today's discussion be a start for additional dialog. The road ahead will be tough, but we must persevere.