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Old energy structure should go: experts

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The new government should modify the energy structure to keep plunderers at bay and maintain the country's energy security, said experts at a seminar on Saturday in the capital.

Blaming the ousted Awami League regime for building the costly structure to benefit corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and businesses, they said that the annual bill on energy, largely dependent on imports, stood at some \$20 billion in recent years following many controversial power deals, including the contract with the Adani Power Limited of India, said Ijaz Hossain, a

former dean of chemical engineering at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Given the country's export income at around \$48 billion and the remittance inflow at \$30 billion in the financial year 2024-25 -- the two main sources of foreign currency, the government would not be able to sustain the costly structure because of the payments of the growing obligations of capacity charges to idle power plants within the installed generation capacity of around 30,000 megawatts, which is almost double the demand in the summer and one-third during the off-summer, experts also said.

Moreover, the survival is particularly more difficult when the government is dependent on inefficient bureaucrats, also said Ijaz Hossain.

He made the observations while commenting on the key note speech, delivered earlier by M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Bangladesh Consumer Association of Bangladesh, at the seminar titled 'Reasons for Energy Crises, Impacts and Solution' organised by the Centre for Inclusive Policy and Governance.

Describing how the AL government created oligarchs in the sector and turned energy into a commodity from a service, he viewed that the new elected government should ensure energy justice — a concept that means ensuring an equitable, affordable, and sustainable production and consumption of energy.

He praised the current government's decision to constitute a parliamentary body with members from both treasury and opposition benches, but feared that the activities of the body would remain in paperwork unless the hostile factors in the sector were removed.

He identified the administrative power exercised in the past month to hike fuel oil prices despite elevated inflation and failure of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission to fix the energy prices by checking extra costs, corruption and high profits as main hostile factors in the sector.

Criticising the opposition for not raising the issues in the Jatiya Sangsad, Shamsul said that alternative energy sources like renewable ones should be explored for lowering dependency on traditional fossil fuels.

Highlighting the potential of the solar power as a source of renewable energy, Ijaz Hossain calculated that 50,000 megawatts of power could be generated on only 1 per cent of the country's arable land significantly cutting the energy import bills.

Among others, former secretary K M Kabirul Islam, Supreme Court lawyer Belayet Hossain, Noakhali Science and Technology University vice-chancellor Mohammad Ismail, dean of the School of Business AKM Waresul Karim at North South University spoke on the occasion.

CIPG chairman Md Mozammel Haq, chairman of the microbiology department of Dhaka University, gave the welcome speech and CIPG executive director Khurshid Alam moderated the seminar.

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