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oil-based power plants, storage is to be built for storage of fuel. This needs extra investment.

Presently, about 800 mmcfd of gas is being consumed in the power plants. Of this, 50% is operating on ST mode which means the conversion of ST mode gas-based power plants into oil (furnace oil) will result in releasing of 400 mmcfd of gas to be used for other relatively more important purposes, say in industry. The time frame for this purpose is maximum 10 to 12 months. The investment in comparison to building power plants is insignificant.

Technologically and investment-wise, the conversion is simple and less time consuming. But the major resistance which will come is in the form of increased cost of generation with subsequent higher tariff to the consumers. But we will have to accept this as a reality.

If we want to utilise our sunken investment, and, more importantly, if we want electricity, we do not have any alternative at present other than this. The alternative left is to embrace darkness.

Now we will have to choose whether we want to keep our plants shut for want of gas or whether we will go immediately for liquid fuel to run these power plants to give us power, light, and other requirements of life.

Presently, Bangladesh is importing about 1.5 million metric tons of crude oil and about 3 million MT of diesel and other grades of liquid fuel including furnace oil. In all, about 4.5 million MT of liquid fuel is being imported every year. It is an undeniable fact that in doing so a huge amount of liquid fuel will need to be imported, laying extra burden on foreign exchange reserve. To ease things, the program may be phased in on a yearly basis.

This piece throws some light on the issue of using liquid fuel in place of gas to run the existing power plants, which are already shut for want of gas. It is a reality that there is a paucity of gas in the country, and presently many power plants are shut for want of gas. In future, more will be added to the queue.

Coal and nuclear energy are long-term possible solutions. The government has to draw up plans to use coal or nuclear energy as alternative source fuel in power generation. But even if it is done today, it will take another 7 to 8 years to put these into real operation. Gas production is unlikely to increase in the near future.

The only immediate solution is to switch over to liquid fuel, both for existing and future power plants, which will come online in another 2 to 3 years from now. This will also save the shut down power plants from ruination due to continued idleness of the machinery of the power plants. Many countries of the world do not have gas. But they are running power plants and producing power and supplying to the consumers. If they can -- then why can't we?

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