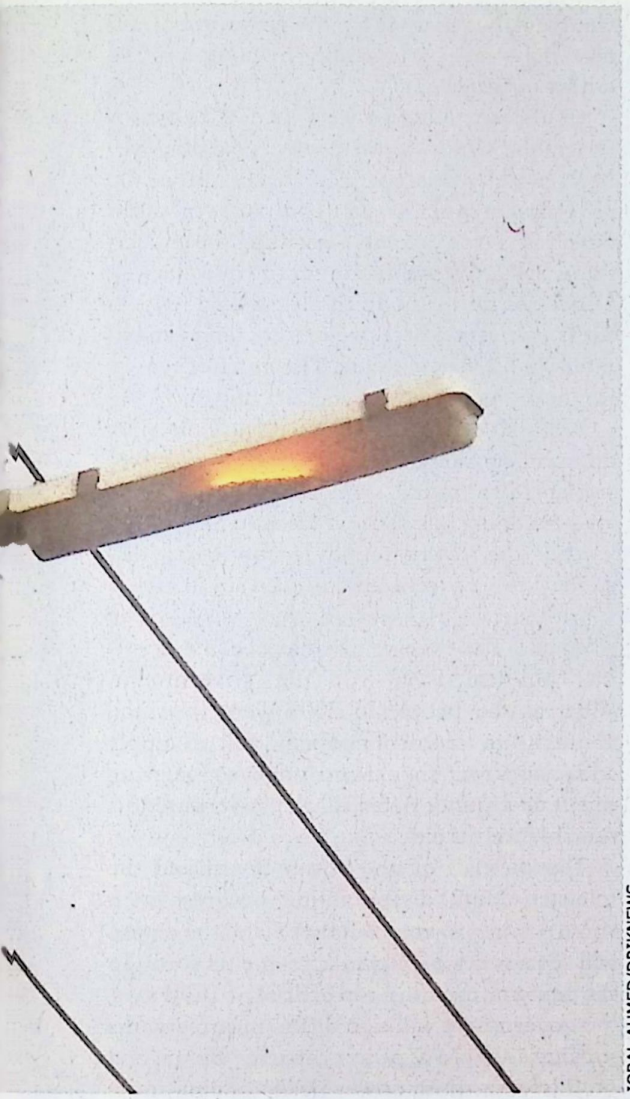


IQBAL AHMED/DRIKNEWS

THE Awami League came to power making a raft of specific promises. But, of them, the party's promises on power and energy appeared to be well calculated. Some had called these plans over-ambitious, while others felt that the country really needed big dreams to go to the next level of development.

Upon assuming power, the first year saw further elaboration of the Awami League's promises on energy -- thus raising the nation's hopes and expectations. The government laid out a plan to install roughly 9,000 megawatts of power -- a good part of it would be coal-fired, a part of it nuclear powered, some gas-fired, and some by both gas and petroleum products. These initiatives demand more than $12 billion of investment.

This is the first time the government laid out a plan for building power plants which are not entirely based on natural gas -- which had so far fuelled more than 90 per cent of the power plants of the country. Due to the lack of development in the gas sector in the last decade, the country is now facing an acute gas crisis. This crisis is not going to be resolved soon, as finding and developing new gas fields is dependent on costly exploration activities, luck, and other time-consuming efforts.

This is why the government has eyed several large-scale coal-based power plants totaling more than 3,500 MW. At the same time it has planned for two 1,000 MW nuclear power plants. These are in addition to the implementation of some gas-based and dual fuel-based power projects. The government has even thought of installing a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in Chittagong at a cost of $1 billion to facilitate import of bottled gas so that the existing gas-fired power and industrial units could continue to operate without hindrance in the future.

At the same time, the government has also taken initiatives to connect Bangladesh's power grid to the Indian grid with the aim of having energy security in the long-term through regional co-operation. Once Bangladesh establishes such connectivity, implementing large-scale hydro-power projects in eastern India would become more viable.

While these large plants are installed, the government had even planned for some short-term rental power projects to minimise the interim power crisis. To help ensure investment, most of the large power projects would be implemented under public-private partnership.

Plus the government has also focused on popularising solar power and conservation of power and has taken up a number of successful and unsuccessful measures to conserve energy. All of it shows that the government has been thinking a lot about how to improve the country's energy security.

The government is now 14 months old and 14 months is not long enough to produce enough electricity to eliminate the 2,000 MW load-shedding of this summer.

Nevertheless, 14 months was long enough to demonstrate the government's powers of implementation. Unfortunately, as it has turned out, the government's implementation skills have proven to be pathetic. The prime minister herself at a meeting in early April