

Flared natural gas latest prize in bitcoin miners' energy quest

AFP, Washington

As the value of bitcoin soars and concerns rise about the energy-intensive process needed to obtain it, cryptocurrency entrepreneurs in the United States believe they have found a solution in flared natural gas.

Profitably creating, or mining, bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies requires masses of computers dedicated to solving deliberately complicated equations -- an endeavor that globally consumes more electricity than entire nations, but for which these start-ups say the jets of flaming gas placed next to oil wells are perfect power sources.

"I think the market is enormous," said Sergii Gerasymovych, CEO of EZ Blockchain, which has six different data centers powered off natural gas in the US states of Utah and New Mexico, as well as in Canada.

Across the country, companies like EZ Blockchain are setting up shipping containers where racks containing hundreds of computers mine cryptocurrency, fueled by natural gas from oil wells that otherwise would be burned in the open. Interest in their work has grown over the past year.

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies



A handout photo from Giga Energy Solutions shows a natural gas generator powering a bitcoin mining centre in north Texas in May.

like ethereum and dogecoin have seen meteoric price spikes since the Covid-19 pandemic turned the global economy on its head and mainstream companies began to embrace the technology.

But a backlash has formed against the digital assets' energy usage, fueled by concerns it relies on carbon-emitting power sources that contribute to climate change.

This week, Tesla boss Elon

Musk criticized bitcoin's power consumption, particularly of energy produced from coal, and said he would no longer accept the cryptocurrency as payment for his electric cars.

While entrepreneurs in the fledgling industry say using natural gas that is otherwise wasted represents a solution to these concerns, its ability to actually cut emissions remains to be seen, said

Tony Scott, managing director of analysis at oil and gas research firm BTU Analytics.

"In the grand scheme of things and relative to other load, yes, it's small," Scott said. "They are creating economic value (but) they're not necessarily significantly changing the emissions profiles.

Huge numbers of processors worldwide are dedicated to the task of mining bitcoin. The activity uses 149.6 terawatt-hours per year, according to the Cambridge Bitcoin Energy Consumption Index (CBECI). That is slightly less than all the electricity consumed by Egypt.

As the most popular cryptocurrency, bitcoin is undoubtedly valuable, trading at around \$50,000 in mid-May from less than \$10,000 a year ago, giving miners incentive to find the cheapest source of power to increase their margins. Enter flared natural gas. Oil producers flare natural gas if they can't find a way to process it, which, with prices low and pipelines complicated to build, can be the case worldwide.

"Miners tend to be based around areas where there tends to be surplus power. What is new... is this whole concept of taking gas flaring," said Jason Deane, bitcoin analyst at Quantum Economics.

Banking stocks suffer despite higher dividends

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A moratorium on bank loan payments was offered in March last year after the economy started suffering from the effects of the pandemic.

The support was initially expected to last until the end of June. But, later, it was extended up to December as the crisis showed no signs of abating.

In 2020, banks were able to provide much higher dividends. But many banks retained some of their profits as safekeeping for the coming years, Chowdhury said, adding that the banks were apprehensive of what was to come in the coming months.

According to the banker, it was not normal for banking stocks to trade at lower prices because the central bank strictly monitored banks. As a result, they fared comparatively better than many other companies.

The price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio of the banking sector is the lowest among all the sectors, giving some explanation as to why the prices of the stocks in the sector were the lowest despite the generation of higher profits.

The P/E ratio of the banking sector is 6.9, whereas, for fuel and power, it is 11.8, pharmaceuticals 18 and textile 18.8, according to data of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

Apart from this, the stock price of 21 banks was less than Tk 20, and for some, it is hovering around the face value of Tk 10.

"Stock prices are not reliant on dividends; rather, future profitability is the main influencer," said Arif Khan, vice-chairman of Shanta Asset Management.

Investors have a common perception that most banks failed to get back what they had loaned out in the past year, so there would be an impact on the balance sheet in the coming years.

"Investors fear that the bad loan portfolio of banks will be larger in the coming years, thus their provisioning requirements will increase," said Khan, also a former commissioner of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission.

The second wave of infections might also have an impact on the banking sector in the coming months, he added.

Non-performing loans stood at Tk 88,734 crore last year, which was 7.66 per cent of the outstanding loans of Tk 11,58,775 crore as of December, showed data from the Bangladesh Bank.

The higher profits of banks were not expected due to the lower interest rate regime and the pandemic plaguing the economy, said stock investor Abdur Rahim.

From April 1 of last year, the lending rate was capped at 9 per cent, for which the interest income of banks dropped.

The stocks of banks are not preferable for investment because the asset quality is not good, while they also have a huge amount of non-performing loans, the investor added.

Boro output to decline

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The output is also expected to go up by 3.5 per cent to 3.58 crore tonnes, it said, on the assumption of favourable weather conditions, sufficient supply of seed and fertilizers, proper irrigation, and continued support from the agriculture ministry and the DAE.

The USDA raised its projection on the production of pre-monsoon crop Aus, and rain-fed Aman rice.

The government continued to encourage farmers to produce hybrid and some high-yield rice varieties such as BRRI Dhan-50, BRRI Dhan-54, and BRRI Dhan-84 and distributed hybrid seeds and fertilizers to boost domestic production of the grain to contain prices.

"The Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown measures have led to consumers stocking personal allocations

of rice, thereby driving up domestic prices. Speculation in the market is also driving up prices," said the USDA.

High prices have led to greater returns for farmers, but the farmers are faced with rising labour costs, so the profit increases are minimal this year, it said.

"Weather conditions over the next month will be important to monitor. Farmers were late to plant this year's Boro rice crop, so the upcoming monsoon season could dramatically impact this year's harvest."

The USDA said approximately 50 per cent of Boro rice would be harvested by the second week of May when the monsoon season was expected to start.

It forecast a decline in rice import to 500,000 tonnes in anticipation of a strong harvest and increased rice production in the upcoming Aus and Aman seasons.

US retail sales flat, inflation fears on the rise

AFP, Washington

The US economic recovery showed signs of hitting some turbulence as shoppers curbed their spending last month and manufacturing slowed due to supply bottlenecks.

After a rush of shopping in March, US retail sales were flat in April, and while auto sales rose, vehicle production fell amid a global semiconductor supply crunch, according to government data released Friday.

Meanwhile, a private survey showed consumer confidence fell due to concerns about rising prices as the reopening of the world's largest economy drives speculation of a sustained rise in inflation.

Officials in President Joe Biden's administration have tried to downplay the fears of a slowing recovery, but acknowledged there could be some bumpy months ahead.

"This was an unprecedented economic downturn... where we completely powered down the economy," said Cecilia Rouse, chair of Biden's Council of Economic Advisers.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার. বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ. ট্যুরিস্ট পুলিশ (হেডকোয়ার্টার্স). বাড়ি নং-৩২, রোড নং-১, ব্লক-এ. বনশী, রামপুরা, ঢাকা. তারিখ: ১৬/০৫/২০২১খ্রিঃ. স্মারক নং-৪৪.০১.২৬৬৭.৯৭৬.০২.০৫০.২১-২৫২৫. উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি. নিম্নলিখিত শর্ত সাপেক্ষে ২০২১-২০২২ অর্থ বছরে ট্যুরিস্ট পুলিশ, ঢাকায় নিম্নোক্ত মালামাল/সেবা সরবরাহের লক্ষ্যে সীলমোহরকৃত খামে যোগ্যতাসম্পন্ন দরদাতাদের নিকট হতে পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন, ২০০৬ ও পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা/২০০৮ ও তৎসহ সংশোধনী মোতাবেক দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

Merkel rejects bringing forward Germany's exit from coal. German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Saturday rejected demands to bring forward an exit date for ending coal generation in Germany, currently set at 2038. "Those affected need some reliability on the path to climate neutrality," Merkel said. "I don't want to unravel this again after one year." Banks can't appoint former MDs. Against the backdrop, the BB asked three banks in January to remove independent directors from their boards. In its circular, the central bank also instructed banks not to appoint their MDs, deputy and additional managing directors as advisers and consultants within five years since their retirement. Before the issuance of the circular, banks were permitted to appoint former MDs and top executives as consultants or advisers one year after the retirement of the officials. A number of banks earlier suffered from a conflict of interests while taking important decisions due to such appointments, a BB official said. "We have given an explanation of the law so that banks comply properly and avoid violation of the rules," he said. Banking hour 10am to 2pm until May 23. The government has enforced lockdown-like restrictions since April 5 after the Covid-19 infections rate and death tolls began rising alarmingly. As the situation worsened, it went for a strict countrywide lockdown from April 14.

The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd. Gazipur-1700. Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) for Appointment of Consulting Firm. Tender No. 75/2021. Date: 17/05/2021. 01. Name of procuring entity: The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd. 02. Procuring entity district: Gazipur. 03. Expression of Interest (EOI): Selection of Consulting Firm (National). 04. EOI Ref. No.: 53.18.3300.019.07.02.2021-196, Date: 17/05/2021. 05. Date: 17/05/2021. 06. Procurement sub-method: Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS). 07. Budget and source of funds: SPCBL's own fund. 08. Project/program name: Extension of Bank Note and others Security Production Area. 09. EOI publication date: 17/05/2021. 10. Tender closing date and time: 14/06/2021 (11:00am). 11. Tender opening date and time: 14/06/2021 (11:05am). 12. Brief description of the assignment: Planning, design, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of the construction of the infrastructures to be implemented in the project "Extension of Bank Note and others Security Production Area". The consultancy services include the following tasks: i) Preparation of GIS and digital survey map of full corporation (66 acre) area. Layout plan, Architectural, 3D perspective views for the project including plans, 3D perspective views, elevation, sections and architectural details as per design criterion outlined, Sub-soil investigation at proposed construction area. Structural, Electrical, Sanitary & Plumbing design drawing of proposal approx. 30,000sqft plinth area of Bank Note production area. 5-storied 30,000sqft plinth area of others Security Production area and Extension of existing EME building. Replacement of HT cable, road, security fence, drain and other utility services discussion with SPCLB authority, ii) Assessment and modification plan of existing HVAC system and preparation of design drawing with detailed calculation of new HVAC system at proposed area from existing plant, iii) Assessment and modification plan of existing systems and preparation of design drawing of compressed air system, security control system, fire alarm detection system, firefighting system and power generation & distribution system of the factory establishment, iv) Assessment and modification plan of existing chemical doses plant and preparation of design drawing of new water treatment and chemical doses plan for proposed extension area, v) All engineering design & Drawings & Estimated cost must be vetted by BRTC (Bureau of Research, Testing & Consultation), BUET in consultation with SPCLB authority, vi) Preparation of detail BoQ, Technical specification, Tender schedule and floating e-Tender at SPCBL/BB website, vii) Project Management Consultancy during the design and Construction phase including supervision. 13. Expected qualification of consulting firm: i) The Consulting firm must have a minimum of 5 (five) years' experience in building design and supervision; ii) The firm should have experience in designing similar nature (manufacturing industry building) of projects. 14. Experience, resource and delivery capacity required for responsiveness: Interested Consulting firms must provide information in details that they are qualified to perform the same. Brochures, description of similar assignment & experience certificate(s) have to be submitted. The documents will also include: i) valid trade licence (up-to-date), TIN and BIN certificate, up-to-date income tax clearance certificate, bank solvency certificate etc. to be submitted by the consulting firm. The EOI will be reviewed on the basis of the following: i) Registration of firm, ii) Availability of key professionals, iii) Qualifications and experience of the team leader and leader of individual discipline; iv) Availability of resources, v) Average annual turnover of the consulting firm for the last 03 (three) years, vi) Experience of the firm in similar consulting services for the last 05 (five) years with respective certificate from employer, vii) Experience of the firm(s) in other works, viii) If the applicant is a JV national/international partner(s) then please indicate the responsibilities of each Party and an MOU between/among the parties should be submitted. Members of a JV/Consortium shall be jointly & severally liable for the entire performance of the assignment. ix) History of litigation in courts or any arbitration proceedings (if any). 15. Special instructions: i) Consultant will be selected in accordance with the SPCBL own procurement policy, ii) Interested Consultancy may obtain as for further information at the address below during the office period, iii) The prospective Consultant shall submit all supporting documents as "ORIGINAL" and "COPY" in separate sealed envelopes marked with the "Extension of Bank Note and Others Security Production Area" to the signatory addressed, iv) Due to any unavoidable reasons, if the tender cannot be opened in due time, then it will be opened in the next office day at the same time, v) The Request for Proposal (RFP) will be issued to the short listed firms only. The client will not be responsible for any costs or expenses incurred by the firm(s) in connection with the preparation or submission of the EOI. 16. Name of official inviting EOI: Maruf Ahamed. 17. Designation of official inviting: Executive Engineer (Civil). 18. Address of official inviting EOI: The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd., Gazipur. 19. Contact details of official inviting EOI: Ph: 88-02-9205110-15, Ext.-266. 20. The procuring entity reserves all right to accept or reject any or all EOIs without assigning any reason whatsoever. No claim will be entertained in this regard. Maruf Ahamed, Executive Engineer (Civil), The Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Ltd., Gazipur-1703.