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100pc population comes under electricity coverage

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh has achieved yet another milestone as the government is set to announce that it has brought 100 per cent of the population under electricity coverage.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will announce it formally at a programme on March 21," Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, told reporters at a programme at the Bidyut Bhaban in Dhaka yesterday.

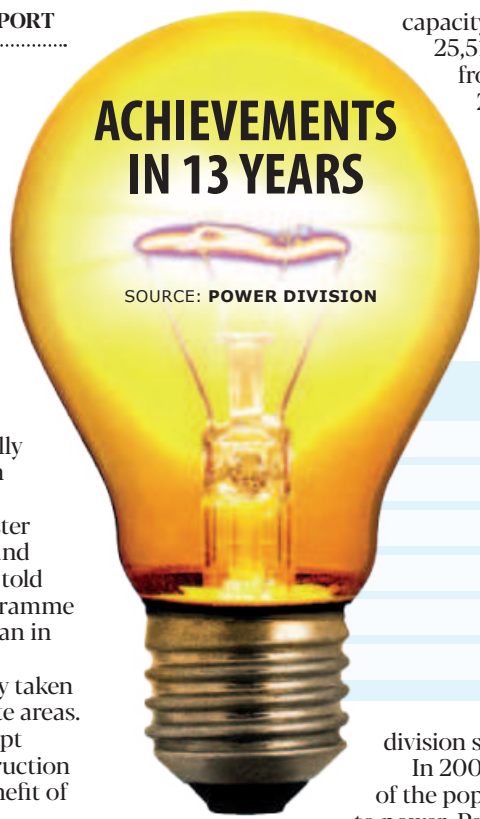
"We have already taken electricity to remote areas. All the homes except those under construction are reaping the benefit of electricity."

"We have taken electricity lines to the remote areas like Rangabali in Patuakhali and Hatia and Nijhum Dip in Noakhali," said Md Habibur Rahman, power secretary.

The achievement will put Bangladesh ahead of India and Pakistan, among the countries in South Asia, that have brought 98 per cent and 74 per cent of their population under electricity network, data from the World Bank showed.

Bangladesh has made impressive strides in the power sector in the last decade.

Installed power generation



capacity rocketed to 25,514 megawatts from 4,942MW in 2009, while the maximum power production rose to 13,792 MW, up four-fold from 3,268MW 13 years ago, data from the power

	2009	2022
Power plants	27	150
Generation capacity (in MW)	4,942	25,514
Highest generation (in MW)	3,268	13,792
Total transmission lines (in km)	8,000	13,213
Population with access to power (in %)	47	100
Per capita generation (in kilowatt-hour)	220	560

division showed. In 2009, only 47 per cent of the population had access to power. Per capita power generation more than doubled to 560 kilo-watt-hour from 220 kWh during the period, making a frequent power outage a thing of the past.

Experts hailed the achievement. While speaking to The Daily Star, M Tamim, an energy expert and a professor of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, described 100 per cent coverage as a major milestone for the country. "People have come under electricity coverage. This is a good achievement." Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said: "It is a major

achievement of the government." "The government has set a target to bring the entire population under electricity coverage. It has worked in the last one decade to attain the goal." The success in the power sector has also helped the government take the economy to a new height.



"The economic success is not only seen in cities - it is also visible in rural areas," said Moazzem.

Both Prof Tamim and Moazzem remind the challenges that lie ahead for the government.

"Now, we will have to ensure an uninterrupted power supply. Electricity will also have to be affordable," Prof Tamim said.

"Electricity has been taken to the people in the remote areas. If they can't afford it, then having the power network will not make any difference," he said.

Moazzem said the government has been able to take electricity connections to the people, but the country is lagging when it comes to the availability of power.

"Availability of power is still low given the capacity," he said, referring to more than 40 per cent excess power generation capacity.

He urged the government to bring down excess expenses that are being incurred in the form of capacity payments, for the operations of inefficient power plants and for the use of expensive fuels.

In the coming decade, the government will have to attempt to move to renewable energy, cutting reliance on fossil fuel based power generation in phases.

"We will have to make improvements in the areas of transmission and distribution systems as well," said Moazzem.

The economist urged the government to reform the power sector policy, moving away from the emergency power supply laws to a competitive power system.

Referring to a study of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Prof M Shamsul Alam, energy

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EU assessing rights progress for GSP

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

A visiting European Union (EU) delegation yesterday wanted to know the causes for delays in the implementation of a few action plans for retaining the GSP to the EU markets under the trade bloc's Everything but Arms (EBA) initiative.

Of the nine national action plans, the EU delegation was satisfied in six areas and in the remaining three wanted to know the reasons for delays in implementation of the action plan, said Md Abdur Rahim Khan, who led the Bangladesh side in the technical committee meeting in Dhaka.

Khan said Bangladesh was supposed to implement International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 138, which was related to age limits of workers in the industry, in December last year.

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STOCKS	
DSEX	CSCX
0.02%	0.13%
6,763.93	11,863.78

COMMODITIES	
Gold	Oil
\$1,962.20	\$104.09
(per ounce)	(per barrel)

CURRENCIES				
	\$ USD	€ EUR	£ GBP	¥ CNY
BUY TK	85.05	92.63	110.18	13.13
SELL TK	86.05	95.43	113.98	13.80

ASIAN MARKETS				
	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
	▲ 1.68%	▲ 0.58%	▼ 0.54%	▼ 2.60%
	56,486.02	25,307.85	3,232.03	3,223.53

Tk 719cr unspent as foreign trips shelved

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and MD ASADUZZAMAN

Around Tk 719 crore in taxpayer money was unused in the last fiscal year because of the cancellation of foreign trips of government officials and the delay in tender processes, both owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

Of the unspent fund, Tk 67 crore was related to foreign aid-funded projects and Tk 652 crore was linked to government-run schemes, according to a report of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED).

The report, based on the implementation of the 2020-21 budget, was placed at a meeting of the National Economic Council on February 2.

Every year, officials from ministries and divisions make trips overseas, costing a large amount of taxpayers' money from both revenue and development budgets.

The government allocated nearly Tk 5,000 crore to meet the expenses of foreign trips of government officials for the fiscal years of 2019-20 and 2020-21, according to the finance ministry.

In some cases, project implementing agencies put in place provisions for foreign tours and include government officials even when they have nothing to do with the projects.

For example, three government officials went to the US and the UK using funds from a project of the Bangladesh Water Development Board in Cox's Bazar in February, although none of them was directly involved with the scheme.

The budgetary allocation aimed at facilitating foreign trips has risen every year due to the growing enthusiasm among the officials to travel abroad. But there has been criticism over their frequent tours as such trips yield no results on many occasions.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself has spoken against such trips on a number of occasions.

But it was the coronavirus pandemic that led to a significant drop in spending on foreign trips over the last two years as international travels came to a halt amid global travel bans and lockdowns across the world.

Many training programmes, workshops, study programmes, and seminars abroad have been postponed because of the global health crisis.

As a result, the Economic Relations Division could not spend Tk 7 crore from the foreign fund portion because of the cancellation of several academic programmes in Japan.

Similarly, nearly Tk 24 crore remained unused at the Statistics and Information Division in FY21, as it was unable to host seminars and training programmes, at home and abroad, due to the pandemic.

The unutilised amount for the Planning Division was Tk 7 crore, Tk 11 crore for the Finance Division and Tk 18 crore for the Social Welfare Division. IMED data showed

Tk 652 crore could not be spent from the government portion of the budget due to the cancellation of foreign trips and the delays in the tender process.

The Election Commission Secretariat could not use Tk 190 crore in FY21 as one of its projects aimed at foreign training came to a halt.

Similarly, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry had Tk 137 crore unutilised, while the legislative and parliamentary affairs division could not spend the entire amount of Tk 1.63 crore.

In order to cut foreign trips amid lower revenue collection, the finance ministry, in FY21, suspended 50 per cent of this fiscal year's allocation for the foreign trips of public servants and ordered to abandon all routine tours.

The money can only be spent for emergency purposes and unavoidable circumstances, it said in a notice.

When contacted, Prof Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, said, "It has been better that foreign trips cost less. It's a good sign. It should be carried on."

He thinks foreign trips are not always productive.

"To rein in expenditures, the authorities are scrutinising proposals carefully. If deemed unnecessary, we cancel proposals."

Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, recommended the authorities show restraint in approving such proposals.

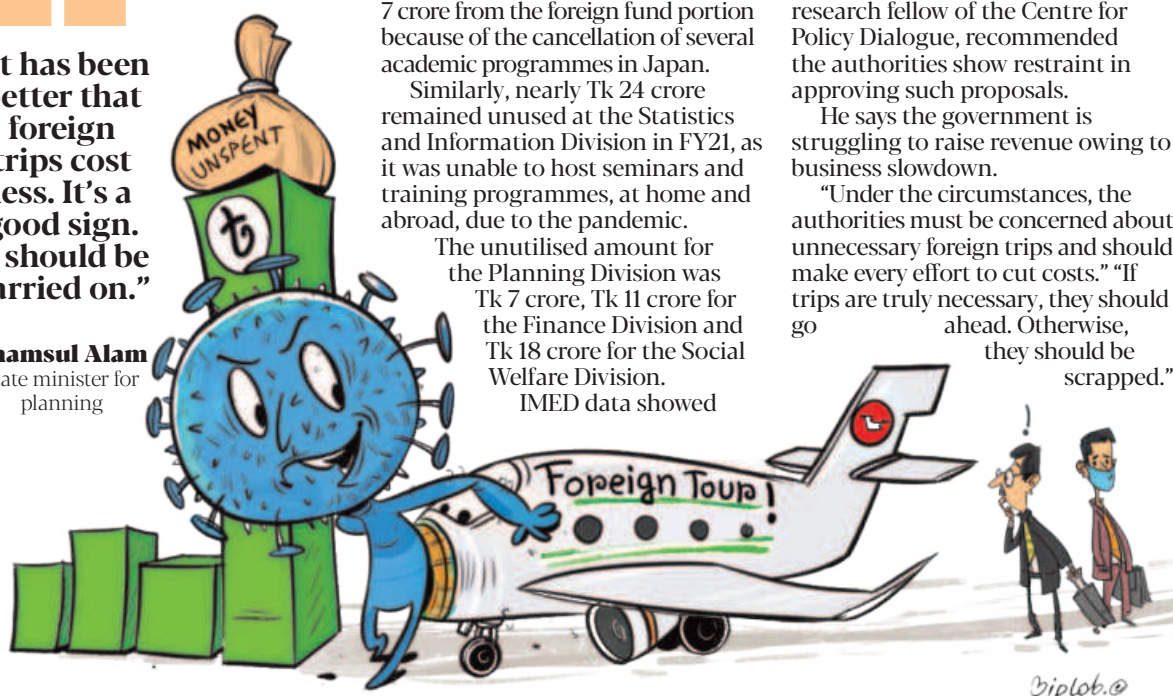
He says the government is struggling to raise revenue owing to business slowdown.

"Under the circumstances, the authorities must be concerned about unnecessary foreign trips and should make every effort to cut costs." "If trips are truly necessary, they should go ahead. Otherwise, they should be scrapped."

“

It has been better that foreign trips cost less. It's a good sign. It should be carried on.”

Shamsul Alam state minister for planning



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