

Can increased gas prices fix anything?



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Within a week of the electricity price hike, the government raised the retail price of gas for industries, power plants, and commercial establishments – which account for 78 percent of gas use in Bangladesh. Although the average price increase is 82 percent, the rate of price increase in power and industrial sectors is 150 to 179 percent. Only in June 2022, gas prices were increased by an average of 23 percent. This time, although the price of gas has not been increased for residents, transport, and fertiliser production, the tripling of the price of gas in industrial sectors means there will be a massive increase in the price of daily necessities.

More than 50 percent of the country's electricity generation comes from gas-based power plants. Now, raising the per unit price of gas from Tk 5.20 to Tk 14 for public and private power plants will increase the generation cost of gas-based electricity, as a result of which the deficit of Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) will increase due to buying electricity from these power plants, thus creating more pressure to further increase the price of electricity.

Due to lack of proper initiative from the government to explore gas from the country's onshore and offshore blocks, a significant part of the gas required for power, industry, commercial, and residential sectors has to be imported from abroad in the form of LNG, spending huge amounts of foreign currency. According to Petrobangla's report from January 5, 2022, the cost of gas produced by state-owned companies from domestic gas fields is Tk 1.27 per cubic metre. Although 80 percent of the demand is met from gas produced

in the country, the remaining 20 percent is met by importing LNG from abroad. And due to the high price of imported LNG, the average cost of gas per cubic metre stands about Tk 20. For this reason, as the import of LNG and the price of LNG in the international market increases, the pressure to raise the price of gas in Bangladesh also increases.

At present, Petrobangla is supplying about 2,700 million cubic feet per day (MMcf/d) of gas, including 500 MMcf/d of imported LNG, against a demand of 3,800 MMcf/d. To meet the demand of the industrial and power sector, if the government wants to import 350 MMcf/d from the spot market, then an additional USD 3.3 billion will be

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required, considering the current LNG price of USD 22 per million British thermal units (MMBtu). If LNG price increases further, foreign currency requirement to import LNG will also increase.

At a time when opening LCs for daily necessities has to be curtailed, imported edible oil and sugar could not be unloaded from ships due to



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non-payment in dollar terms, and when the Rampal power plant was shut down for not being able to import necessary coal due to the forex reserve crisis, there are doubts as to whether an additional USD 3.3 billion could be made available for LNG imports. Earlier, gas prices were hiked twice (in 2019 and 2022) with a promise to increase supply by importing LNG. But due to the dollar crisis, LNG imports were instead reduced.

If the gas crisis could be solved by merely increasing gas prices, why has no impact been visible after previous gas price hikes? During the 13 years, the government has increased retail gas prices six times. According to *Samakal*, the average gas price increase was 11.22 percent in July 2009 and 22.78 percent in June 2022. In the name of solving the gas crisis, the price of gas has been increased from Tk 4.34 per cubic

metre in 2009 to Tk 21.67.

The solution to the gas crisis lies not in increasing the price of gas, but increasing gas production within the country.

Independent experts have been advising the government for many years to prioritise gas exploration onshore and offshore. But, to serve the interests of the LNG lobby, the government focused on importing LNG. Although the two privately owned LNG terminals in the country have a total regasification capacity of 1000 MMcf/d, currently only 550 MMcf/d gas is being processed. But because of the Speedy Supply of Power and Energy (Special Provision) Act 2010, the government is making capacity payments worth around USD 202,500 daily even without regasification. On top of this, the government is considering signing similar kinds of contracts with the private operators to build two more

LNG import terminals.

If we compare the investment and achievements of state-owned gas exploration company Bapex with those of the LNG import regime, the opportunity cost of not exploring local gas becomes more evident.

After the gas crisis intensified in 2022, Bapex discovered 723 BCF (billion cubic feet) of gas reserves through an investment of Tk 812 crore, as per a report by *Bonik Barta*. To import this much in LNG, foreign currency equivalent to Tk 96,000 crore would have been spent on a long-term contract and, to buy it from the spot market, Tk 1,70,000 crore would have been needed! However, as the government has been emphasising on importing LNG from abroad without increasing the capacity of Bapex, it spent Tk 85,000 crore on importing LNG from abroad between 2018-19 and 2021-22.

If an investment of Tk 812 crore in

domestic gas exploration can save us billions of dollars, how much could have been saved if just a tenth of the amount spent on LNG imports was invested for the exploration of gas in onshore and offshore areas of the country?

Energy security cannot be achieved if we continue to depend on importing energy from abroad. The price of LNG, coal, or oil in the international market is always unstable. That is why, during the planning of the power and energy sector of a country like Bangladesh (which has a huge trade deficit), emphasis should be placed on locally-sourced and relatively less environmentally damaging energy (gas, in our case) and renewable energy sources.

The sooner the country's power and energy plans shift from foreign dependency to local capacity development, the sooner we will be rid of the gas crisis.

On the book that got Adarsha banned from Boi Mela



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ANUPAM DEBASHIS ROY

The recent fiasco surrounding three books published by Adarsha has caught the public eye after the publisher was refused a stall at the Ekushey Boi Mela of this year. One of the books, *"Bangaleer Mediocrity'r Shondhane"* (2022) by Faham Abdus Salam, has received special attention as Bangla Academy has flagged it as vulgar. The book itself is essentially a collection of philosophical polemics, which sometimes take the form of politically charged rhetoric. I object to the book, too, but on entirely different grounds than Bangla Academy.

There is no reason that this book should be restricted, but I have serious concerns about some key points made in the book and their underlying philosophy.

Salam says that Bangalis – though I assume he really means Bangladeshis – became a state before they could become a polity. Their place in that state has become that of subjects and not citizens.

But is that a failure of the people? Or were they denied the opportunity to become citizens by the colonial power structures that remain undisturbed even today? When supreme sacrifices have been made repeatedly, how can one deny that the people of this land have fought to become citizens?

It is a matter of great misfortune that we have been forced into being subjects of the ruling class for centuries. Once the foreigners left, it was local politicians who took up that mantle. But that doesn't mean we want to be subjects or that this life satisfies us. Our fight against it is still going on. Fulbari, Chunarughat,

Rampal, the quota protests, the road safety movement – they all point towards that fight.

The author has pointed out other flaws in Bangalis, but his explanations suffer from a lack of depth. According to him, Bangalis don't understand that the legal code has a purpose beyond punishments. But what is the reason behind that? They are driven towards a punitive understanding of the legal system by the socio-political realities surrounding them.

When they see that the justice system in their country is against them, when they see governments using the police and administration against the common people, they are forced to become vindictive. The system is a ghost of our colonial past, not the fruit of our own democratic process.

Another problem apparent in Salam's writing is his love for the West. In his book, he has put the liberal thoughts of the West on a pedestal. His discussions convey the idea that there is nothing better than Western liberalism, and that we should copy that liberalism ourselves.

Our collective coordination, our culture, our history – they all help us as tools in our fights. This minimal coordination has been what has allowed us to revolt time and again. We can stand with each other in times of trouble, we can fight for each other because we are communitarian.

Regarding the distance between society and the state, the author has tried to say that the collective unity of Bangalis runs into obstacles in society, not at the level of the state.

He has also said that Bangalis gained a state before they could grasp the idea of collective ownership. These claims have historical flaws.

Collective ownership was definitely a familiar concept to the farmers of Bengal. If that weren't the case, they wouldn't have fought for land rights or against indigo farming. The fact that they could do it proves that they were conscientious not only about their individual benefit, but also about collective and societal benefits. In any case, society must be stronger than the state, so that it has the ability to pull the reins of the state. The state is only an instrument meant to serve society. It is natural that society will mean more to an individual than the state. In fact, it's natural for a state to contain more than one society.

The author's most problematic statement is perhaps: "He can't live without freedom, but he doesn't deserve a state." A state isn't something so great that a person needs to earn it. If colonisation had not happened, then we would have come upon a liberal state by ourselves. The state is only an institution that is supposed to safeguard the interests of society.

Some of Salam's discussions in the book definitely deserve praise. He has successfully captured the importance of revolution. Freeing society from a particular party isn't revolution; it is the natural course of change, he points out. Revolution can only take place when a dictatorial journey towards becoming a dictatorship is stopped collectively.

His discussion captures a love for the West, but at the same time, it has surprisingly postcolonial sentiments. He tells us we need to be more like the West, but also gives us the indication that we need a proper revolution of our own. I would have agreed with him if he hadn't put the blame of this reality on Bangalis, inadvertently absolving the structures of state and power.

Translated by Azmin Azran.

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নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ ওয়াক্ফ প্রশাসনের স্বার্থ সংরক্ষণ এবং ওয়াক্ফ এস্টেটের পক্ষে ও বিপক্ষে মামলাসমূহ পরিচালনার জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় সংখ্যক দক্ষ ও অভিজ্ঞ আইনজীবী নিয়ে ০১ (এক)টি আইনজীবী প্যানেল গঠন এবং ওয়াক্ফ এস্টেট এর বিভিন্ন বিষয়ে মতামত প্রদানের জন্য ০১ (এক) জন আইন উপদেষ্টা নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে নিম্নোক্ত শর্তে দরখাস্ত আহবান করা যাচ্ছে:

- ১। আইন উপদেষ্টা বা প্যানেল আইনজীবী কোন পদেয় জন্য আবেদন করা হচ্ছে তা উল্লেখপূর্বক আবেদন করতে হবে। প্যানেল আইনজীবীদের বিভাগভিত্তিক নিয়োগ দেয়া হবে। আবেদনকারী কোন বিভাগের জন্য প্যানেলভুক্ত হতে আগ্রহী তা উল্লেখপূর্বক আবেদন করতে হবে;
- ২। আবেদনপত্রে আবেদনকারীর নাম, পিতা/স্বামীর নাম, স্থায়ী ঠিকানা, বর্তমান ঠিকানা, বয়স ও অভিজ্ঞতা ইত্যাদি উল্লেখপূর্বক জীবনবৃত্তান্ত দিতে হবে;
- ৩। আইন উপদেষ্টা এবং ঢাকা বিভাগের জন্য আবেদনকারীদের ঢাকায় নিয়মিতভাবে বসবাসরত হতে হবে এবং অন্যান্য বিভাগের ক্ষেত্রে যে বিভাগের জন্য আবেদন করা হবে সেই বিভাগে নিয়মিতভাবে বসবাস করতে হবে;
- ৪। আবেদনের সঙ্গে সদ্য তোলা ০২ (দুই) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের সত্যায়িত ছবি সংযুক্ত করে দিতে হবে।
- ৫। আবেদনকারীর বয়স ২৮/০২/২০২৩ তারিখে ৫৫ বছরের মধ্যে হতে হবে।
- ৬। আবেদনের সঙ্গে জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র, বার কাউন্সিলের সনদপত্র, শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতার সকল সনদপত্র এবং হাইকোর্ট বিভাগ ও আপিল বিভাগের তালিকাভুক্তির সনদপত্রসহ সকল সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি সংযুক্ত করতে হবে;
- ৭। আইন উপদেষ্টা এবং ঢাকা বিভাগের প্যানেল আইনজীবীর ক্ষেত্রে আবেদনকারীর বাংলাদেশ হাইকোর্ট বিভাগ ও আপিল বিভাগে আইনজীবী হিসেবে মামলা পরিচালনায় কমপক্ষে ১০ (দশ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে। বিভাগীয় পর্যায়ে ঢাকা বিভাগ ব্যতীত অন্য বিভাগের জন্য আবেদনকারীর ক্ষেত্রে জজ কোর্টে মামলা পরিচালনায় কমপক্ষে ১০ (দশ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে;
- ৮। ওয়াক্ফ প্রশাসকের পক্ষে মামলায় স্বাধীনভাবে প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা, মামলার আরজি তৈরি, মামলার জবাব তৈরি এবং নথিতে আইনপত্র মতামত প্রদানের দক্ষতা ও অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
- ৯। আবেদনকারী অন্য কোন সরকারি/বেসরকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের আইনজীবী হিসেবে নিয়োজিত থাকলে তা উল্লেখ করতে হবে;
- ১০। নিযুক্ত আইনজীবীদের সিডিউল অনুসারে ফি প্রদান করা হবে;
- ১১। সম্পূর্ণ অস্থায়ী ভিত্তিতে উক্ত নিয়োগের মেয়াদ হবে ০১ (এক) বছর।
- ১২। আবেদনপত্র আগামী ১২/০২/২০২৩ তারিখ বিকাল ৪.০০ টার মধ্যে ওয়াক্ফ প্রশাসক, বাংলাদেশ, বাংলাদেশ ওয়াক্ফ প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, ৪ নিউ ইন্সটান রোড, ঢাকা বরাবরে পৌঁছাতে হবে;
- ১৩। কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করেন এবং
- ১৪। আইনজীবী নিয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।

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