

# Ten steps to guide Bangladesh out of the energy crisis



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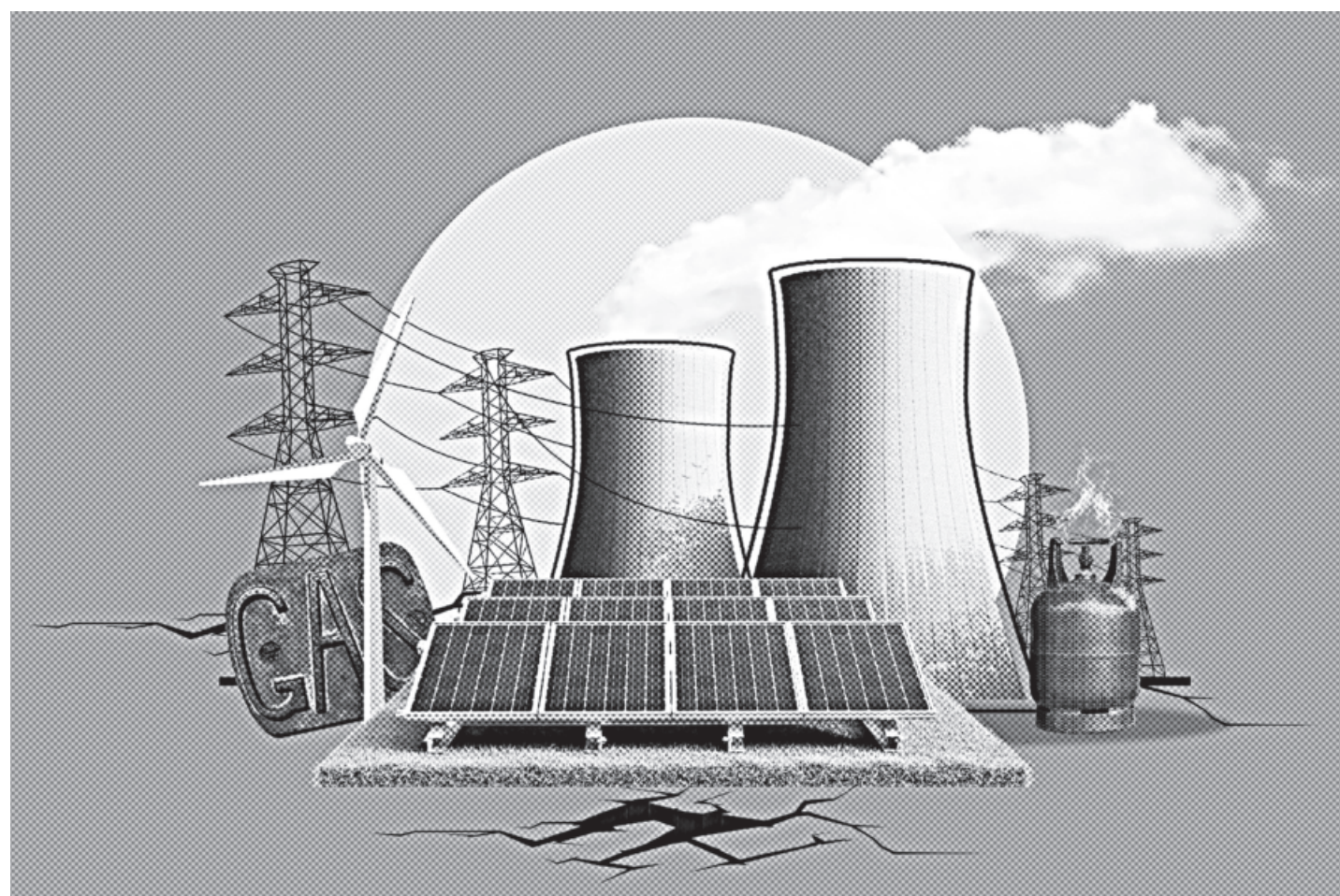
**KHONDAKER GOLAM MOAZZEM**

It's good news that a special parliamentary committee has been formed to address the energy crisis by offering recommendations on the legal, institutional, and operational issues arising from it. The committee is scheduled to hold its first meeting today (May 3). One expects it to recommend not only immediate and urgent solutions but also, more importantly, medium- to long-term solutions for a sustainable transition towards clean and renewable energy development in the country. While this committee's tenure will be for one month, it is expected to recommend follow-up and monitoring by the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources in the coming days.

The special committee should duly acknowledge the challenge of over-dependence on the import-dependent fossil fuel supply chain. The war imposed on Iran has created cracks in the oil-dependent economies of the Middle East, and the unresolved reality of the war has put the world in such a situation that even if the war stops temporarily, the crisis will return repeatedly in the coming decades. This means the global energy system has entered a kind of permanently unstable situation. As a result, the global oil market and related energy markets such as LNG, coal, and LPG will remain unstable. Therefore, it is especially important now to emphasise energy diversification in Bangladesh.

As someone who has worked in the power and energy sector, I would like to recommend the following.

- 1. Gradually reduce subsidies in the power and energy sector**  
Government is under pressure to reduce the subsidy payment for the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), BPC (Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation), Rupantarika Praktirik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL), and Petrobangla. However, subsidies should not be reduced only through the adjustment of tariffs on the consumer's end. Rather, BPC's pricing policy should be revised to make it market-based. Much of the demand for subsidies exists due to the faulty pricing for independent power producers (IPPs) in the power sector. Hence, the government should not go for the renewal of IPPs after the contractual period is over.
- 2. Introduce a real-time monitoring system**  
From fuel import to filling stations, in the five to seven stages of the distribution process, widespread leakages and corruption have been exposed during the recent crisis. Therefore, it is very important to establish a



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

real-time digital monitoring system from import to unloading at the depot, from the depot to the filling station, and from the filling station to consumers. Allocation should be made in the next national budget to establish this system. India and Pakistan have made significant progress using such digital monitoring systems.

- 3. Allocate increased expenditure for energy imports**  
Even if the US-Iran war is over soon, it may take more than one year for global energy prices to stabilise and return to pre-war prices. Therefore, the usual allocation for energy imports by the government will not be sufficient this time. At least 50 percent higher allocation should be made for energy imports in the next fiscal year. However, to obtain this additional funding, low-interest loans from the World Bank and the IMF may be helpful for the government. But the special committee should recommend against taking high-interest loans from the international market.

- 4. Urgently connect discovered gas to the national grid**  
Gas found in Bhola, plus gas available in previously used residual gas wells, and gas obtained through accelerated exploration should be urgently transmitted to the national grid. It is necessary to prioritise gas well drilling, Petrobangla or Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Limited (BAPEX) should declare

as part of a medium- to long-term strategy.

- 6. Eastern Refinery expansion is unnecessary**  
Modernisation of the existing infrastructure of Eastern Refinery is sufficient. The argument for expanding it to increase "strategic reserves" is not acceptable. Such reserves will increase import dependency further in the long run. Therefore, the committee should recommend the modernisation of the existing

sector. If 30 percent of vehicles, especially buses, trucks, and lorries, can be converted to electric vehicles by 2030, the government could reduce diesel use by 8.3 lakh tonnes. Such an amount in foreign currency savings will reduce pressure on the balance of payment and foreign exchange reserve. To achieve this, the committee should advise converting all government vehicles to EVs, as well as reducing duties on all EV vehicles.

- 9. Urgently declare a plan to implement 10,000 MW of renewable energy**  
The current government has announced a plan to generate 10,000 megawatts (MW) of solar electricity by 2030. This would be a positive move. The committee should recommend announcing the government's plan to achieve this target and monitoring it through the parliamentary standing committee. This may include accelerating the implementation of the existing 3,000 MW national rooftop solar programme, completing the tender process for the 5,000 MW large-scale solar projects, and setting timelines for quick implementation by the private sector. In addition, the committee should recommend completing the review of the cancelled letters of intent (LOIs) of the 31 renewable projects as per the recent office order and quickly issue implementation orders. In this case, for newly announced Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), alternative acceptable conditions may be included instead of the "guarantee clause" to attract private sector investment.

- 10. Accelerate foreign investment in the renewable sector**  
Ensure easy one-stop service for foreign investors, introduce online-based payment and exchange of documents and information with different agencies and ensure predictability in receiving specific services on time—both in terms of quality and price. The committee should advise relevant agencies to undertake specific activities to be reported to the parliamentary standing committee. The agencies include Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), BPDB, Sustainable And Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB), Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA), Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA), Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD), Department of Environment (DoE), Registrar of Joint Stock Companies And Firms (RJSC), Petrobangla, Titas, city corporations, etc.

ERL infrastructure, instead of constructing another unit.

- 7. Reduce diesel use and increase solar irrigation in agriculture**  
The 13 lakh diesel-powered irrigation pumps currently in use in the country can easily be converted to solar-powered irrigation pumps. Due to insufficient funding, this sector is progressing slowly. Conversion to solar power will help the government reduce 12-13 percent diesel usage and thereby reduce diesel imports by three lakh tonnes. Such foreign currency savings will reduce pressure on the balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves. The committee should recommend necessary investment by the government, multilateral development banks (MDBs), and international financial institutions (IFIs) funds in this transformative journey.

- 8. Introduce EV-based vehicles instead of diesel**  
About 66 percent of the diesel used in the country is consumed by the transport

this as an emergency. Besides, Tengratila gas well can be drilled now since the Niko case is over. Petrobangla should also retender the exploration of 24 offshore gas blocks after revising the tender documents as necessary, taking into account terms that would attract gas exploration companies.

- 5. Suspend construction of LNG-based infrastructure**  
A major challenge in meeting Bangladesh's current energy costs is expensive LNG imports, leading to permanently high government expenditure. Unfortunately, multinational banking corporations are highly interested in providing bank guarantees and bank loans for LNG imports and related infrastructure development. These expensive infrastructures are creating long-term liabilities and will continue to do so. In contrast, moving towards more accessible and sustainable renewable energy will not create such long-term liabilities. Therefore, the committee should discourage LNG imports and the development of LNG-related infrastructure

## An open letter to Limon and Bristy



**BLOWIN' IN THE WIND**

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**SHAMSAAD MORTUZA**

Limon and Bristy, The attic of my thoughts is peopled by figures whom I never thought would gather to murmur in my head; these are the voices of people who should never have to meet like this.

In the corner, the brother who encouraged you, Bristy, "the lazy one" in your own words, is filled with deep regrets. He is the one who pushed you to apply for the scholarship in the US. And you thought it was in your "riza" to move up to the First World and prove yourself as an engineer. And then, there are Limon's parents. You, Limon, told them not to disturb you in the final hours of your thesis submission. You were just months away from adding the doctorate title before your name. The parents knew of your courtship with Bristy. You really liked that girl: decent and talented. The names, Limon and Bristy, could have been on a wedding card. Now you have become a headline.

Oh, is it the teacher on the other side of my head? He was so proud of your achievements. Coming from a rural part of the country and making it to a well-known US university is no mean feat. How many times have you cited them as role models? How many times have you wished the country had the labs and resources to retain the brain? How many times have you gloated about the success of your students as your own? They almost endorsed your belief that the country has the right talent, and they can prove themselves anywhere in the world only if they are provided

with the proper learning environment. A teacher speaks next, not in grief alone, but in recognition. We push our students not because the world is kind but because we hope merit might negotiate with cruelty. We tell them to read more, think harder, and go further. We imagine them returning as scholars, as mentors, as the proof that effort matters. You did everything that was asked of you—and more. You crossed that fragile threshold from undergraduate uncertainty to doctoral promise. You stood, quite literally, on the steps of success. That is where the world failed you.

Another teacher in Tampa, Florida looks at the empty lab desks and sighs. They were so close to having it all: the wonderful American Dream. Their research, their dedication impressed you. Their zest for life, too. Now they are just obituaries and memories. All eyes are now on the courtroom, with the expectation that justice would be done.

These are the students who hosted Bangladesh nights. You shared meals and late-night addas. Bristy, do they know that you have the rare talent of singing while capping a cup? On Facebook, the videos of your "cup music" are still liked by thousands. Absurd as it may seem, you are not there to thank your fans and followers. Then again, you are way beyond the fallacy of fandom. You showed them how little things can turn big. An empty paper cup filled with music can serve thousands of music connoisseurs. You turned a little country into big news.

You showed them that being "from nowhere" could also mean being from everywhere.

Hisham, Hisham, Hisham—you monster! What are you doing among humans? You are like the selfish giant who could not withstand that the children played in his garden. You are similar to the ancient sailor who killed an innocent bird without a reason. So, what was it? Your roommate complained about your obnoxious behaviour. Is that a crime enough

Limon and Bristy came from a country that boasts the word "poroshrikatorota," a close translation of which can be "schadenfreude." They were running away from the jealousy of mean-minded people. They wanted to embrace the greatness of the country that had been a beacon of freedom for 250 years. Oh Hisham, did you know what King Charles said about America: "This land of opportunities has nourished some of humanity's greatest

Your resentment and envy, a flicker of schadenfreude, surface when you say, "They had everything. They were happy." And you had nothing. And now you will be nothing. If Edgar Allan Poe were to write of you, he would have lingered on your tell-tale heart. If Fyodor Dostoevsky were to respond, he would descend into the moral maze to gauge the collateral damage of evil. Still there would be no closure, no easy consolation.

Your crime is incomprehensible even to the machine that you used to frame. Did you do it deliberately to frame the machine? Surely, you lack a heart in that body that dismembered your own roommate. You wrote prompts to cover up your crime. Language can be used as a veil to conceal intentions, agendas, or prejudices. But no system, human or artificial, can "cover up" violence without first reflecting the world that produces it. The machine is a fast learner. Your toxicity has fed the archive. You have vitiated a system that is outpacing us in our thoughts.

So, what remains? Limon's decomposed body was discovered by a bridge over troubled waters. Bristy, like her name, has dropped and faded. What remains is a reckoning. Two lives lost. Their stories will soon be shelved to make room for the new gossip in town. What remains is a question directed at institutions: universities, states, and communities: What does it mean to invite students into a promise of mobility and not guarantee their safety? What remains is a demand that your story not be reduced to a statistic or a cautionary footnote. What remains is a sticky memory, stubborn enough to not go away. An unprinted thesis. An empty cup devoid of music.

The people in my head ask one simple question. Can we use these tragic deaths as a means to examine not only the violence that ended these lives but also the structures that made such violence possible? A structure that hates happiness in others?



VISUAL: MARZANA TASNIM

to slay a fellow human being and his friend? Your family had a stay order against you. Your violent behaviour was already recorded. How could you be allowed to stay in an off-campus student accommodation? You are a school dropout. Did you watch Limon and Bristy from a shadowy distance? Did their success cause you pain? Were you sad (Schaden) to see them joyful (Freude)? Hisham, the irony is,

minds from the industrial age to the space age." Yes, Limon and Bristy responded to that call.

Yet you had different ideas. You asked ChatGPT how to get away with murder. You could have just watched the ABC series since you were that lonely. You must truly be a sick person to think your unhappiness must be spread to mar other people's happiness.