

LET THERE BE NO LOAD-SHEDDING DURING WORLD CUP

The entire nation – not only the football fans – is in an ecstatic mood thanks to the ongoing World Cup competition, the greatest show on earth. Bangladesh is not among the 48 countries that have qualified for the tournament – held after every four years, but the fans here are as enthusiastic as the playing nations. Defending champions Argentina and five-times world champions Brazil have the largest number of fans in Bangladesh. France, England, Portugal have also many followers but their number is far behind the two Latin American heavyweights. In Bangladesh the time is now for wiping out sleep from eyes in order to watch and enjoy the exciting moments with football giants such as Messi, Ronaldo, Neymar, Kylian Mbappe, Vini, Halland and Harry Kane fighting for glory. The problem here has been the timing of the matches: midnight or early morning. Many are defying the odds in the timing.

While fans –millions in number – are

cheering and shouting for their teams the World Cup matches have caused some concern for the electricity authorities. Not alarming though there have recently been incidents of protests, vandalism and violence over load-shedding during the matches. Some areas have seen human chain protests on the streets and stoning of rural electrification offices. According to Prothom Alo such protests have been reported from Tangail, Jhalakathi, Netrokona and Sylhet and Dhaka's Dohar area. Rural electrification authorities in these areas have asked for additional security measures fearing power outage-related protests. As the weather heats up despite monsoon rains the demand for electricity has increased pushed up by increased use of fans and air conditioners. The World Cup has added some extra hardships though. It has broken the normal pattern of electricity consumption in the country – peak hour from the evening till 11 pm. Now the demand goes up from midnight

until early morning as many of the World Cup matches are late night and morning affairs. With power being produced far below the capacity the existing daily load-shedding is hovering close to 3,000MW. The brunt of the shortage is being diverted to the rural areas – the perennial sufferers of a discriminatory policy. For lack of fuel and pending bills many of the power plants are sitting idle while the country can actually generate up to 13,000MW of electricity as against the normal summer demand up to 16,000MW a day.

Here goes the fact. The country has now a generation capacity of around 29,000MW. The actual generation hardly crosses 14,000MW. This means around half the capacity remains idle despite being paid in US dollars as capacity charge. This gap is being tackled by shedding the load with the rural areas – where 57% of the generation goes-being the worst sufferers.

What causes the load-shedding and why the rural areas suffer the most? The answer is: Power Development Board's failure to clear the dues of the power plants and disruption in fuel supply, a long-standing issue that has reached a critical stage due to the war and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine. Both wars have disrupted the supply chain of fuel with import-dependent countries like Bangladesh becoming the worst victims.

What Bangladesh now requires most is to ease the reliance on imported fossil fuel. Let's have a pivotal change in the fuel policy and try to explore more fields for natural gas on-shore and off-shore. Drilling for new gas fields has to be started without delay. The new BNP government has invited international oil companies to participate in its bid for offshore oil search. Conditions have been relaxed making the offer more lucrative to the international companies. It's now time to wait and see the outcome. ■

Reverse Swing



Farid Hossain

