Coal shortage: Power generation may halt at another unit of Payra

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Online Desk: Operation of another unit of 1,320 MW coal-fired Payra Power Plant is going to be suspended soon due to coal shortage, according to Bangladesh-China Power Company (Pvt) Limited (BCPCL) officials. The plant has two units each having 660 MW and the first unit of the two has already been shut following the coal crisis. "Now the remaining unit may run until June 2," said Shah Abdul Moula, plant manager of the BCPCL.

BCPCL, a joint venture of the Chinese firm China National Machinery Import & Export Corporation (CMC) and Bangladeshi state-owned North-West Power Generation Company Bangladesh Limited (NWPGCL), is the owner and operator of the Payra Power Plant. The plant manager said that the plant is currently operating one unit having 660 MW while another 660 MW unit was closed last week.

Moula said that the overdue payment against the coal import actually created this critical situation. The overdue amount now stands at more than $400 million. "But recently we received a permission from Bangladesh Bank to pay $50 million to the coal supplier against the overdue", he said adding that this will help arrange to resume coal import. But still it will take about a month to receive the coal supply and we hope we may not get before June 28, said another official of the BCPCL.

According to official sources, the Payra power plant needs to import 3 lakh metric tonnes of coal every month to operate the plant in full swing. They said the BCPCL normally opens LC through state-owned Sonali Bank to import the coal. But recently Sonali Bank regretted opening the LC due to the dollar crisis. Admitting about the problems, the BCPCL officials said the authority has already communicated the issue to the Power Division to take necessary measures.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 21 last year inaugurated the 1320 MW ultra-supercritical coal-fired power plant at Patuakhali's Payra on a day when she also declared the country's 100 percent electricity coverage. This milestone achievement puts Bangladesh ahead of India and Pakistan among the South Asian nations to light up every house with electricity.

BCPCL set up the plant using Ultra Supercritical Technology at over $2 billion as part of a development partnership on 982.77 acres of land. The Export-Import Bank of China lent $1.96 billion for the project. The company started operation in 2016. This kind of coal-fired power plant using Ultra Supercritical Technology is the thirteenth in the world and seventh in South Asia. The Ultra Supercritical Technology used for this plant aims at protecting the environment in line with the government's policy, officials said.

After undergoing test runs for about five months, the first unit of the Payra power plant started commercial operation in May, 2020. In October, 2020, the second unit of the 660 MW plant, a joint venture of Bangladesh and China, started its commercial operation.

The Payra and another 1320 MW Rampal power plants have been implemented targeting the power evacuation from both the two plants and transmit power to Dhaka city and adjoining areas to meet growing power demand. The Payra power plant is burning some 13,000 tonnes of coal a day. It has a 76.30 acre dumping zone where 25 years' worth of by-product can be kept.

The plant is currently importing coal from Indonesia. It has its own jetty whose conveyor belts can unload 3,200 tonnes of coal every hour from four vessels at the same time. Bangladesh's power generation capacity reached 25,514 MW from just 3200MW in 2009, according to the data.