Why is Bangladesh neglecting the extraction of mineral resources?

Md Hasanur Rahman Tanzir – Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates gained independence at almost the same time. At that time, the fragile situation of the two countries was almost the same. But Bangladesh is not even close to the way the United Arab Emirates has achieved economic independence in the last 50 years. One of the reasons for the rapid rise of the United Arab Emirates was to ensure the proper use of mineral resources. Although valuable natural mineral resources have been found in Bangladesh, the responsible parties in the sector have shown extreme negligence in extracting them. However, no one can give a correct answer as to why mineral resources are neglected in Bangladesh.

There are endless reserves of mineral resources hidden under the ground in the northern and western parts of Bangladesh. Coal and rock (hard rock) extraction has started. However, it has not spread. Oil, gas, limestone, and iron ore have been found in geological surveys and test drilling. No initiative has been taken to extract them.
Geologists say that diamonds are found deep in the ground where coal is found. Even today, it has not been explored. Routine exploration of all natural resources, including oil and gas, is carried out. Promising results are also found. Only initiatives are not taken to extract them. Sometimes, even after taking initiatives, they are stopped. It remains a mystery. The role of the institutions established in Joypurhat with the aim of exploring all natural resources, including minerals, and taking measures to extract them is also not satisfactory. Therefore, the least importance has been given to the northern and western regions in extracting oil, gas and mineral resources.

The oil reserves on the west bank of the Jamuna in Bogra were reported by surveying at the beginning of the last century. Then the excavation site was suddenly closed. On December 12, 1982, when the golden door of oil was discovered in Haripur, Sylhet, an initiative was taken to conduct a seismic survey using the technology of that time to determine the area of oil reserves. Then Petrobangla and Shell Bangladesh BD Limited started a joint survey in Bogra, Rangpur, and Panchagarh. At that time, it was said that there were very large reserves of oil under the soil of Bogra.

There is oil in Shalbahan, Tentulia, Panchagarh. Then all surveys were suddenly stopped. In 1987, the Bogra survey team said that if oil is found on the west bank of the Jamuna, it is possible to meet a lot of the country's energy needs. It was mentioned that oil extraction has started in Haripur. In terms of gas, the isolation between the northwestern region and the eastern region will no longer exist in the case of oil in Bogra Panchagarh. Because where oil deposits are found, there are various minerals including gas, coal, hard rock, limestone, iron ore and other minerals underground.

In the northwestern part of the country, less importance has always been given to the exploration and extraction of mineral resources. As a result, mineral extraction in this region has not been possible. In the meantime, coal from the coal mine in Barapukuria of Dinajpur and hard rock extraction in Madhyapara began in the late nineties. Currently, 250 megawatts of electricity is being generated in steam turbines with the coal extracted from the coal mine in Barapukuria and added to the national grid. The sale of hard rock from Madhyapara has started. Apart from this, there is no other mineral extraction in the northern region.

According to geologists, the possibility of obtaining oil and gas in the northern region is high. Because the soil in this region is very old. Bangladesh covers a large part of the Bengal Basin, one of the largest deltas in the world. In the

north and northwest of this country, the Sikkim Kanchenjunga valley is in the south, from Khasia Jayantika to the Bay of Bengal. The sea, forested plateaus and plains are formed by river-borne sediments in a straight line touching the pass. The absence of oil and gas in this Bengal delta is a surprise to geologists. For a long time, geologists have expressed the possibility of finding oil in this country. The discovery of oil in Haripur and the discovery of oil deposits in the underground survey of Bogra and the discovery of oil in the Shalbahan of Panchagarh have become a reality.

Oil exploration began in this country since 1910. First started by a foreign company. In the late fifties, the British Standard Vacuum Oil Company dug wells on the west bank of the Yamuna in Bogra and in Kuchma and Kalakopa. Then it was closed. Then, even after the earthquake survey was started in 1987, it was closed. However, geologists repeatedly say that the country is floating on a huge amount of minerals and oil. The United States has understood this very well.

Judith Tranzo, a staff writer for the Washington File of the United States Information Service, said in an article that Bangladesh has at least 11 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves. While the United States is calculating Bangladesh’s oil and gas reserves, the country’s geologists are not coming forward to extract oil and gas in the northwest. Occasionally, the government agency Bapex Gas returns to old oil fields after routine surveys. A source said that a preliminary survey conducted in an area of □□about 70 kilometers between Bogra and Pabna showed that the gas and oil are in the same condition as they should be in the ground. There are several rules for the formation of hydrocarbons in the ground and their storage. There are numerous folds in the ground. There, organic material in the source rock is transformed into oil and gas under heat and pressure.

Oil has been found underground in Bangladesh again after 37 years. On December 8, 2023, oil was found in a gas field in

Sylhet. Two days later, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid Bipu announced the news at a press conference. The State Minister also confirmed that gas has been found in four layers. However, this too was stopped after extracting oil for a day.

The Geological Survey of Bangladesh (GSB) has estimated the market value of the country's naturally-reserved mineral resources. According to their calculations, the total value of the country's natural reserves of mineral resources is more than 226,000 crores (2.26 trillion). In Bangladeshi currency, its amount is 241.97 trillion (2 crore 41 lakh 97 thousand 300 crores) taka. However, the value of the natural gas reserves in the country has not been taken into account in the GSB calculation. Those concerned said that if the price of natural gas is taken into account along with the GSB calculation, the estimated value of the mineral resources in the country will increase by several trillions of dollars.

According to sources from the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, the GSB has estimated the financial market value of eight types of mineral resources discovered in the country at 226,140 crores. Of this, coal is more than 7.25 billion tons. If the market price is calculated at $175 per ton, the price of this amount of coal stands at $126,890 million. In addition, there are potential reserves of peat coal of about 600 million tons. At $60 per ton, its value stands at about $35,900 million (35.9 billion).

In addition, there are 25.27 billion tons of limestone. At $30 per ton, this amount stands at $758.1 billion. There are 201 million tons of hard rock, with a monetary value of $5.42 billion. 230 million tons of plain soil are worth $29.9 billion. There are 5.117 billion tons of glass sand, with a value of $6.14 billion. 220 million tons of gravel are worth $3.3 billion. And 625 million tons of iron are worth $6.88 billion.

According to the information on mineral resource reserves published on the GSB website, the country has 1053 million tons of coal reserves in Jamalganj of Joypurhat, 102 million tons in Barapukuria of Dinajpur, 143 million tons in Khalaspir of Rangpur, and 402 million tons in Dighipara of Dinajpur. Besides, there are 282 million tons of peat coal reserves in Hakaluki Haor in Moulvibazar, 150 million tons in Baghia-Chanda Beel in Gopalganj, 75 million tons in Dirai in Sunamganj, 52 million tons in Shalla, 32 million tons in Bijoynagar in Brahmanbaria and 80 khal tons in Kalamouja in Khulna.

Regarding limestone reserves, GSB says that the largest limestone reserves in the country are in Naogaon district in the north. Tajpur, Badalgachhi and Bhagwanpur in the district have more than 250 million tons of limestone reserves. Besides, there are 10 million tons in Joypurhat Sadar, 59 million tons in Panchbibi Upazila in Joypurhat district and 17 million tons in Baghalibazar in Sunamganj, 129 million tons in Tekerghat and 129 million tons in Lalghat.

As a mineral resource, there are 125 million tons of valuable plain soil in Madhupur of Tangail, 68 million tons in Madhabpur of Habiganj, and 25 million tons in Bijoypur of Netrokona. In addition, although plain soil reserves have been identified in several other districts of the country, GSB could not provide any information about its quantity.

The organization has reported huge reserves of gravel in six districts of the country. The total reserves of gravel in these districts are 2.2 billion tons. There are 650 million tons of iron ore reserves in Hakimpur of Dinajpur. In addition, there are more than 3,200 million tons of glass sand reserves.

The government’s relevant agencies have an estimated value of the country’s natural mineral resources. If they can extract them, Bangladesh may one day become a wealthy country like the

United Arab Emirates. Foreign reserves may be heavy. It may turn the country’s economic wheels. Despite such numerous possibilities, the country is clearly showing slowness, reluctance and negligence in extracting mineral resources for invisible reasons.

Badrul Imam, professor and energy expert at the Department of Geology at Dhaka University, told that no one is found responsible for ensuring the proper use of the country’s mineral resources. The government also does not have an adequate budget for extracting mineral resources. As a result, it is not possible to extract potential natural mineral resources. We are also losing trillions of dollars worth of resources.