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Open-pit mining for Barapukuria planned

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The government plans to develop the northern part of Barapukuria coalmine through open-pit mining method to boost coal output and feed the proposal coal-fired power plants in future, senior officials said Sunday.

The energy ministry officials last week informed the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also in charge of the energy ministry, the detailed plan to take up the Barapukuria coalmine as a pilot project for open pit mining in Bangladesh.

The PM has asked the energy ministry to move forward with the plan to exploit the country's first open pit coalmine at Barapukuria in northern Dinaipur, a senior energy ministry official told the FE.

He said a high-powered government delegation will also visit several open pit coalmines in Germany next week to know about the open pit mining method.

The government would conduct a feasibility study before undertaking Barapukuria open pit mining method instead of current underground mining, said the official.

Officials said the planned northern part of Barapukuria coalmine has 271 hectares of land, where around 5,000 villagers have either dwellings or farm lands.

The government will compensate the affected people in such a way that they will never feel their livelihood has been disturbed by the coalmining, they said.

The government will try to improve the living standard of the affected people through providing necessary compensation.

Each of the affected family might get Tk 2.0 million for each acre, said a senior Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd (BCMCL) official.

Some family might get Tk 10 million as compensation for their crop lands and homesteads, the BCMCL official said.

The Barapukuria has a deposit of around 390 million tonnes of bituminous coal at a depth of 118-509 metres.

It has six coal layers with average 36 metres thick coal seam.

Coal production from Barapukuria is now around 2,000 tonnes a day, down by 1,000 tonnes from the average coal output of 3,000 tonnes.

It has now only 42,000 tonnes of coal stocks.

Present Barapukuria coal production is not sufficient enough to run a 250-megawatt (mw) coal-fired power plant at the mine site, the main consumer of this coal, said the BCMCL officials.

Electricity production from the country's lone coal-fired power plant hampered often due to inadequate coal production.

But the government has planned to generate around 3,000 mw of electricity through coal as part of its drive to diversify fuel sources.

If Barapukuria coalmine is turned into an underground one it would meet significant quantity of coal demands for the planned coal-fired power plants.

Besides, adopting the open pit mining method would help the government avoid compensating locals out of regular land subsidence.

The vicinity of the Barapukuria coalmine area saw the first land subsidence in 2005, when the Chinese consortium led by China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) had just completed development of the coalmine.

Several villages and agricultural lands were damaged due to the land subsidence.

Another land subsidence took place in 2008 affecting croplands, commercial and domestic spaces, houses and many other infrastructures.

The villagers then forced a halt to extraction of coal from the country's lone operational mine.

Coal production, however, resumed after compensating the affected locals, said officials.

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