# Rights groups oppose power tariff raise

Urge for other revenue options

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Consumers' rights groups and left-leaning political parties yesterday strongly opposed the government's plan to increase the bulk power tariff and urged the government to look for other revenue sources.

Consumers were already cornered due to the rise in electricity bills in recent times and hiking the prices further would put them under huge pressure, they said.

The observations came at a public hearing at Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (Berc) in the capital on Power Development Board's (PDB) last month's proposal to raise bulk power tariff by 50 percent on average.

State-run distribution entities Dhaka Power Distribution Company, Dhaka Electric Supply Company, Rural Electrification Board and West Zone Power Distribution Company are PDB's bulk buyers. PDB itself is a distributor.

PDB had suggested Berc to increase the bulk rate to Tk 6.03 a unit (a kilowatt-hour) from the current Tk 4.02 to minimise its reliance on subsidies to buy power from oilfired rental plants.

The state-run power distribution companies had also suggested Berc to increase retail electricity tariffs by at least 50 percent.

Consumers' Association of Bangladesh Energy Adviser Prof Dr M Shamsul Alam, at the discussion, said the recent 7.5 percent rise in bulk rates caused retail rates to rise sharply.

Power tariff for bulk buyers was last increased in March by 7.49 percent, from Tk 3.74 a unit to Tk 4.02, and for retail users by 6.25 percent, from Tk 5.02 a unit to Tk 5.32.

"An increase of Tk 0.28 per unit for bulk buyers increased electricity bills of consumers by Tk 1,000 to Tk 3,000. We are scared to think of what will happen if the bulk rates go

up by Tk 2.01 per unit," he said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh central committee member Ruhin Hossain Prince said the proposed hike would fuel inflation further and increase prices of products manufactured with the use of electricity.

He urged the government to look for alternatives to help the country come out of the electricity crisis. He said PDB and many government

officials favour increasing electricity prices, saying that tariffs in Bangladesh were one of the lowest in the region. "But they do not say that our per capita

income is also one of the lowest in the region," he said. Workers' Party of Bangladesh central

committee member Ragib Ahsan Munna said the government should take into consideration the purchasing capacity of consumers before increasing electricity tariffs. Shah Moshfiqur Rahman, a college

lecturer of Gaibandha representing a consumers' rights group, warned that there would be public outrage if the electricity prices again went up. A Berc technical committee yesterday also

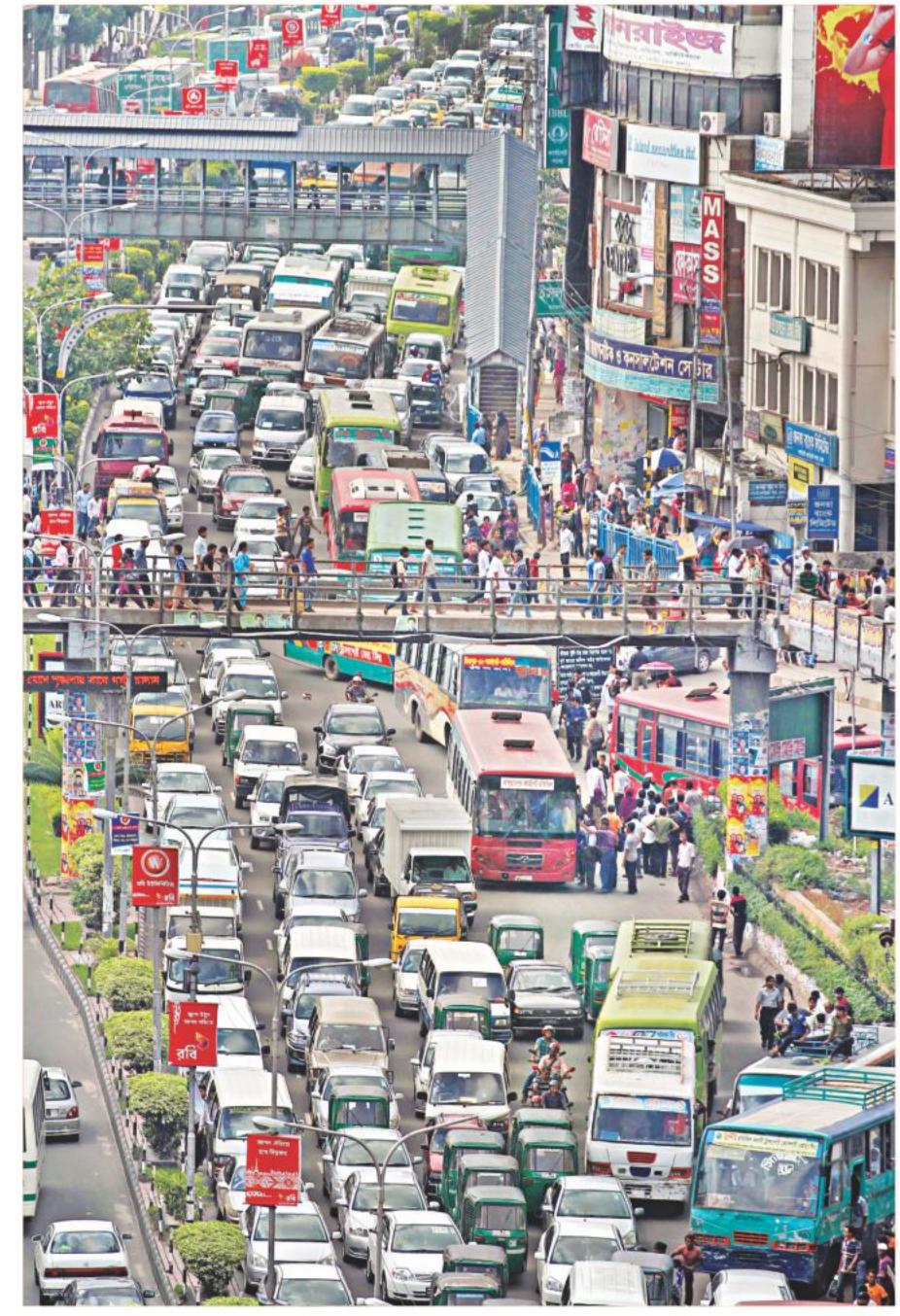
Salim Mahmud said it is not mandatory for the commission to oblige. PDB Systems and Planning Director Mizanur Rahman said not raising the power tariff would cause a Tk 12,500 crore deficit in

recommended raising the bulk tariff by 21.89

percent or Tk 0.88 per unit. But Berc member

the current fiscal year. Even with the raise, the deficit would still stand at Tk 3,700 crore, he said.

Berc would soon hold another public hearing on proposals to raise retail prices. It plans to raise tariffs for both bulk buyers and consumers by this month, said an official



Traffic jams like this has become a common phenomenon for Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in the capital during afternoon rush hours. The photo was taken yesterday around 4:00pm.

#### PADMA BRIDGE FUNDING 10 MPs to visit Japan to meet Jica high-ups

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ten ruling Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance lawmakers, who are members of Bangladesh-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group, will visit Japan soon to persuade top officials of Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) not to cancel its funding for the Padma bridge project.

The group, at a meeting yesterday, also decided to host a dinner 'very soon' in honour of Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Shiro Sadoshima and Jica officials in the capital in connection with Japan's funding in the mega project.

"We have asked the foreign ministry officials to work on the Japan visit soon," AL lawmaker Md Zillul Hakim, also chief of the group, told The Daily Star after the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

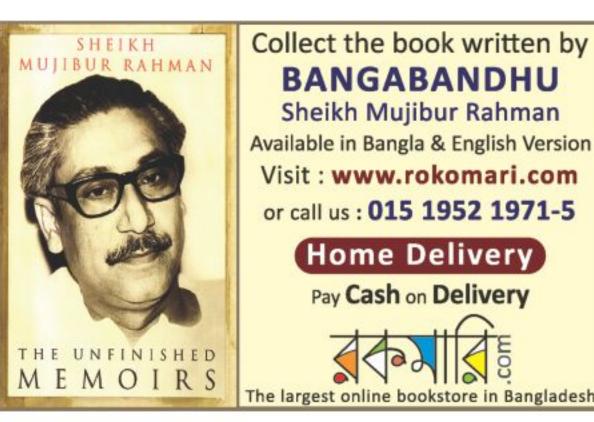
"We have planned to meet with the Jica top officials. We will convince them so that they do not stop funding the Padma bridge project following the corruption allegation raised by the World Bank," he said.

Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, the lone opposition lawmaker in the group, however, told The Daily Star that he is yet to decide on the Japan visit issue.

The group was formed last year to enhance relations between Bangladesh and Japan.

On July 11, a senior Jica official in Dhaka said the agency's funding for the Padma bridge project would depend on the government's constructive steps against the corruption allegation, which led to the cancellation of funding commitment for the project by World Bank and Asian Development

Jica is one of the co-financiers of the project with a



# Mirpur safe home not so safe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The only state-run safe home in the capital lacks separate accommodation for autistic children, access to emergency medical services and specialised manpower for tending to its residents, said speakers at a workshop yesterday.

The workshop titled "Ensure effective quality and sustainable services of existing safe home project" was organised by Voluntary Association for Family Welfare and Social Development (VAFWSD) and facilitated by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF).

A recent visit to the safe home building in Mirpur found the roof on its second floor to be damaged and toilets unhygienic and unhealthy, said Dr Abdul Quaiyum Laskar, chief executive of VAFWSD.

"I found children aged 6-14 years roaming about there without any clothes on them," he

For the development and rehabilitation of vagrants, safe custodian women, adolescents, destitute and helpless, Laskar called on all to work together to improve the overall situation of the safe homes in the country.

Razia Sultana, manager of the safe home in Mirpur, said they do not have enough man power and resources to carry out the everyday activities of the safe home, including formalities involving court.

Nasima Begum, director general o Department of Social Services, said, a memorandum of understanding with VAFWSD and MJF will enable all the seven government-run safe homes in the country to provide better services in counseling, legal aid, health treatment, skill development, rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims and destitute of the society.

The participants of the workshop were mainly the nurses, teachers, trainers and administrators of the Mirpur safe home.



Adulterated food items of Gulzar Food Products in Bakalia area of Chittagong city being identified by officials of a mobile court comprising representatives of Chittagong City Corporation and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution yesterday. The company was later fined.

PHOTO: STAR

### Rapist gets 60 years imprisonment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chittagong court yesterday sentenced a rapist named Ahmad Hossain to 60 years' rigorous imprisonment under two sections in a case filed on March 25, 2007 for raping a girl after kidnapping her.

Later, the girl committed suicide. The court of women and children repres-

sion prevention tribunal-1 judge Rezaul Karim also fined the convict Tk 1 lakh, said the court sources.

Public Prosecutor (PP) of the tribunal Advocate Chandan Talukdar told The Daily Star, "As Ahmad Hossian was proved guilty beyond doubt, the court sentenced him to 60 years' rigorous imprisonment and fined him one lakh taka under two separate

sections of women and children repression

Ahmad along with his accomplices kidnapped a class seven student of a madrasa on March 22 and wanted to marry her forcibly. After failing to marry her, he raped her five times keeping her captive for three days.

The girl managed to flee away from the captivity on March 24 and went to her village

On March 25, the victim's mother lodged a case with Chandanaish Police Station against Ahmad Hossain, Ismail, Joynal Abedin and Anwar Hossain.

The victim committed suicide by hanging

herself at her residence on July 24 in 2007. Police submitted the charge-sheet against only Ahmad before the court under articles 7 and 9 (1) of women and children

#### 'Police torture' on journo condemned

UNB, Dhaka

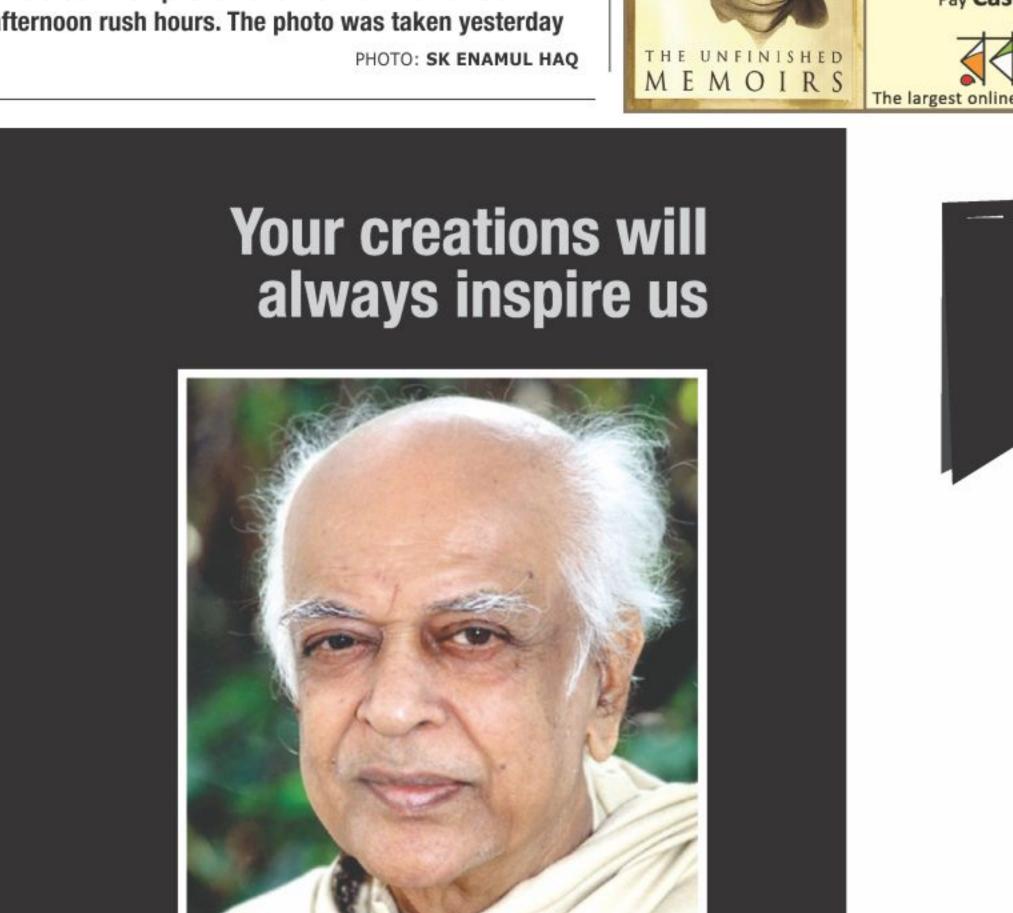
Journalist leaders yesterday condemned the torture on Mostafizur Rahman Sumon, a crime reporter of online news agency Justnewsbd.com, after detaining him for more than two days in custody of DB police as well as implicating him in a false stealing case.

In a statement, Kamal Uddin Sabuj and Syed Abdal Ahmad, president and general secretary of the Jatiya Press Club, said torture on any person after detaining secretly is a violation of human rights.

They demanded immediate release of Sumon as well exemplary punishment to the perpetrators.

Family sources said DB police picked up Sumon for his active involvement in various protest programmes of journalists on Sagar-Runi murder and Bibhas Chandra Saha's death.

A team of Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police picked up journalist Sumon from in front of Eastern Plaza on Friday afternoon, kept him at a secret place and allegedly beat him up indiscriminately.



**Architect Mazharul Islam** December 25, 1923 - July 15, 2012

May Allah rest you in peace



