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GAS, POWER TARIFF

## Reasons for hike not clear

BPC, Titas making huge profit; power generation cost dips

SHARIEF KHAN

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (Berc) has increased power and gas price at a time when the public gas companies are making large profits and per unit power generation cost has gone down to a certain degree.

In the meantime, due to falling price of petroleum in the international market—the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) is set to make a staggering profit exceeding around Tk 16 thousand crore (US \$2 billion) this year.

The government is not reducing the price of petroleum product to help the BPC recover its accumulated loss of Tk 5000 crore over the last few years.

Experts say that while the only justification of price hike was adjusting inflation rates, the Berc did not take into consideration the whole profit and loss situation in the energy sector.

The power sector losses are rising because it is buying petroleum from BPC at almost double the rate of the private power generating companies.

But a look at overall energy sector shows that the government is staying profitable in this area.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd (TGTDC) has made close to Tk 1000 crore profit in the last fiscal year said a top official of the company.

Titas provides a major portion of the gas to domestic, commercial, and

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

A spinning mill on a flood plain, built in violation of environment conservation laws, has choked quite a long stretch of river Turag near Dhour Bridge in Tongi. The photo was taken last month. Rajuk has turned a blind eye on the whole matter except for a perfunctory drive in March last year when the mill's construction was underway, inset.



## Guidelines for billboard soon

DCCs plan to get rid of haphazardly put up, risky hoardings in a month

HELEMI ALAM

The two Dhaka city corporations are going to formulate new guidelines to streamline the use of billboards to restore beauty in the capital.

Both Dhaka North and South city corporations have already formed separate committees that are working to that end, according to officials of the two city corporations.

BM Enamul Haque, chief executive officer of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), said a committee comprising eminent citizens and experts was working on it.

Once the guidelines were drawn up, measures would be taken to put things in order to make the DNCC areas more beautiful and greener, said Enamul, the head of the committee.

DNCC Mayor Annisul Huq too told reporters yesterday that the guidelines would be formulated by next month. He made the comment after inaugurating a special clean-up drive near Parbat Cinema Hall at Gabtoli.

Ansar Ali Khan, chief executive officer of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), said they had engaged a team of experts in preparing the guidelines to beautify the city, and it would submit the recommendations by next month.

He said once they got the guidelines, they would take steps accordingly. Ansar said they would continue their drives to knock down illegal billboards in the DSCC areas.

In the absence of monitoring by city authorities, several thousand illegal

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MIGRANT BOATS SINK OFF LIBYA

## Eight Bangladeshis among 82 dead

200 others still missing in the Mediterranean

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

At least eight Bangladeshis, including two minor children, died after two boats carrying up to 500 migrants sank off the coast of Libya, said a Bangladeshi diplomat from the North African country.

The first boat, which capsized early Thursday, had nearly 100 people on board. The second, which sank later, was carrying about 400 passengers.

Rescuers have pulled 82 bodies from the water and saved 198 people, according to Red Crescent official Ibrahim al-Attouhi.

About 200 people are reported to be still missing. The vessels sank after leaving Zuwara, a major launchpad for smugglers shipping migrants to Italy by exploiting a security vacuum in Libya where rival governments are fighting for control four years after the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi.

ASM Ashraf Islam, counsellor (Labour) of



Bangladesh embassy in Libya, told The Daily Star in a text message at 7:28pm yesterday, "46 rescued alive from the Mediterranean out of 54 Bangladeshis. Rest are dead." He reconfirmed it in another text message at 8:42pm.

A Bangladesh embassy team led by the labour counsellor is coordinating the medical and humanitarian support for the rescued Bangladeshis.

Earlier, Mozammel Haque, chargé d'affaires of Bangladesh embassy said there were 31 Bangladesh nationals in the two boats and six of them had died.

A foreign ministry statement said the rescued Bangladeshis include four families with children. They were hospitalised and released after first aid.

BBC Bangla quoted Mozammel saying the Bangladesh nationals of four families were reportedly trying to go to Italy.

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Turag choked, authorities remain silent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A spinning mill now stands on a flood plain earmarked as conservable in the capital's master plan with the authorities playing the role of onlookers.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk), the official custodian of the master plan, did little to stop the construction of the mill on the flood plain of the Turag river near Dhour Bridge in Tongi.

On March 10 last year, the Rajuk in a "token" eviction drive with 10 labourers knocked down only 100-square feet of a brick wall of the 9292-square metre spinning mill being built there.

Led by Executive Magistrate AKM Maruf Hasan, the Rajuk team comprising Deputy Town Planner Kamrul Hasan Sohag and Authorised Officer Parvez Khadem conducted the drive on the grounds that the spinning

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## Power, gas price hike draws flak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A number of ruling Awami League and BNP leaders yesterday urged the government to reconsider its decision of hiking gas and power tariff as they believe it would badly affect the limited-income group.

Of them, Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta termed the decision "unjustified".

"The price of gas and electricity may increase. But the matter of concern is when the fuel price decreases everywhere in the world, you do not reduce it. But when it rises, you hike it here in the name of price adjustment. That is not right," he observed.

The senior AL leader made the observation at a discussion meeting held at the Institute of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital.

Suranjit further said the price of fuel and the cost of electricity production in

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Autumn is when ponds and lakes in Bangladesh are sprinkled with white and red blossoms of water lilies. It has been no different this year. Two kids, all smiles, are revelling in collecting red water lilies along with their edible stems from a lake in Kaliganj of Gazipur yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## 10 killed as India, Pakistan trade fire on border

AFP, Islamabad

At least 10 civilians were killed yesterday as India and Pakistan traded fire across their disputed border, officials said, less than a week after high-level talks were aborted amid a row over Kashmir.

Six died near the city of Sialkot in Pakistan's Punjab province and at least four villagers were killed in Indian-administered Kashmir. Officials said more than 50 were wounded.

A meeting between the Indian and Pakistani national security advisors in New Delhi on Sunday was called off at the last minute amid a dispute about whether the agenda should include Kashmir, the Himalayan territory both sides control in part but claim in full.

In a statement issued to the media, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Pakistan summoned the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad to lodge protest against ceasefire violations.

"The Government of Pakistan strongly protested over the latest ceasefire violations by India in Harpal and Chaprar sectors at the Working Boundary resulting in shahadat (martyrdom) of 6 civilians, including a woman and a child," the statement said.

The two sides regularly fire shells and mortars across the disputed border both in Kashmir and to the south in Punjab, killing civilians.

A senior Pakistani security official told AFP that Indian forces began firing around 3:00 am yesterday and continued intermittently during the morning.

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