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Power tariff may rise by 15pc

Per unit cost for consumers likely to be Tk 8.23 from Tk 7.13; BERC to decide within 60 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Less than a month after the government said that it was withdrawing energy subsidies, an electricity tariff hike of over 15 percent was placed on the table yesterday.

The technical evaluation committee of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) recommended raising consumer-level power prices by 15.43 percent.

It presented the proposal to the members of the commission during a public hearing at the Biam Auditorium in the capital.

The weighted average tariff charged per kilowatt hour by different power distribution companies is Tk 7.13. It is being proposed that this should rise to Tk 8.23.

Over the last 15 years, power prices for consumers more than doubled and business association leaders and a consumer rights group said further rise in power tariff would put people and industries in more trouble than they are already in due to inflation, and global economic downturn.

On December 18 last year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced that consumers must be prepared to pay the real cost of electricity.

The subsidies are reflected in the bulk power price level, at which electricity distribution companies buy energy from generators, as opposed to the consumer level.

On November 21, the bulk power tariff was hiked by 20 percent to Tk 6.20 per kilowatt hour. The new bulk price was decided after adjusting for the withdrawal of subsidies.

Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) said it would have a shortfall of over Tk 2,000 crore, which can only be covered by hiking consumer-level tariff by 27 percent to Tk 9.03 per kilowatt hour.

Yesterday, the power distribution companies cited the hike in bulk power tariff as the reason for which the price at the consumer level must be increased. They said over the last 15 years, the bulk electricity tariff increased by three and a half times while the price for consumers only doubled.

Almost all power distribution companies proposed tariff hikes of over 20 percent to the BERC. The companies include PDB, Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB), Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd (DPDC), Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd (Desco), Northern Electricity Supply Company PLS (NESCO), and West Zone Power Distribution Company Ltd (WZPDCL).

Desco said it was costing them Tk 9.76 to deliver every kilowatt hour when the consumers are paying Tk 7.13 per kilowatt hour.

DPDC proposed that private educational institutions and hospitals be charged at commercial rates, instead of being charged the same as public schools and hospitals. It recommended that electric vehicle charging stations be levied inflated rates.

It also proposed that clusters of homes in slums be charged a subsidised flat tariff.

Meanwhile, Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd proposed that the wheeling charge (transmission charge) be hiked by as much as 120 percent with effect from February.

In addition, the metro rail authorities (Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd) and the high-tech park authorities asked for a subsidised electricity rate of Tk 5 per kilowatt hour.

The five-member BERC, led by its Chairman Abdul Jalil, would make the decision within the next 60 days.

The Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) opposed the proposed tariff hike and called it unjustified.

CAB Vice-President ASM Shamsul Alam said those who increased the bulk price of electricity took into consideration that power production

"If they [the PDB] do not want to increase sufferings, they should rather reduce prices by increasing their efficiency. Profit does not come by hiking prices, rather by improving efficiency. We have reasonable doubt about their competitiveness."

PRESIDENT ANWAR-UL ALAM CHOWDHURY of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries



One-year-old Jisan reaches for his mother, having been confined to a high-pressure oxygen chamber for four days at the pneumonia unit in the capital's Shishu Hospital. As his father is a rickshaw puller, the family still does not know how to manage the medical expenses. All they want now is for their child to be okay.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

No legal bar to releasing Fakhrul, Abbas

SC upholds HC bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There is now no legal bar to releasing BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas.

The development came as the Supreme Court yesterday upheld the January 3 High Court order that granted the two opposition leaders ad-interim bail in a case filed over Nayapaltan clashes.

The Appellate Division of the SC also withdrew the chamber judge's order, which, on January 4, asked the counsels for Fakhrul and Abbas not to furnish bail bonds before the lower court concerned till yesterday.

Besides, the apex court asked the HC to dispose

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OTT REGULATION

Revised draft bans a whole lot of content

Info ministry submits it to HC

ASHUTOSH SARKAR and MAHMUDUL HASAN

The information ministry yesterday submitted to the High Court a revised draft law on regulating the content of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms.

The draft contains a broad list of the type of content that would be prohibited for reasons that include hurting religious sentiments and disrupting communal harmony.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil will pass an order on the draft of Over-The-Top Content Based Service Providing and Conduct Regulation-2022 tomorrow.

The draft bans content that go against the spirit of the Liberation War, the country's culture and social values, can damage communal harmony, threaten the state's unity, and contradict the laws, regulations and the constitution.

The information ministry submitted the first draft to the court on June 12

last year.

The HC bench then asked the ministry and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to update it.

However, an OTT platform executive said representatives of the industry met the ministry officials before the latest draft was produced, but their recommendations were not taken into account.

"Hurting sentiments is an undefined matter. Any content can hurt anyone's sentiment. These provisions will seriously limit creativity of content creators in our business," said the executive, wishing anonymity.

Contacted, Supreme Court lawyer Rashna Imam, who has been working on the issue, said, "The draft contains an extensive list of 'prohibited content', which, being broadly framed and vague, are susceptible to misuse, thereby violating the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, and muzzling creativity."

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FARDIN'S DEATH

Bushra gets bail, finally

To be released after court order reaches jail authorities

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Amatullah Bushra, an accused in a case filed over the death of Buet student Fardin Noor Parash, got bail yesterday — two months after she was arrested in the capital's Banasree area.

However, she could not walk out of jail as of filing of this report at 10:30pm yesterday, as her bail order did not reach the authorities of Kashimpur Women's Central Jail, where she has been languishing.

Judge Tahsin Iftikhar of Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court-7 yesterday heard her bail petition for the second consecutive day and issued the bail order, said defence lawyer AKM Habibur Rahman Chunnun.

The bail will remain valid till submission of the probe report before the court, said court sources.

During yesterday's hearing, Fardin's father Kazi Nooruddin Rana opposed the bail plea, saying that Bushra was with his son till 10:15pm on November 6, so she might know about his son's "murder".

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Washington to carry on working with Dhaka

Says Biden

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US President Joe Biden has said Bangladesh and US will continue to work on democratic governance, climate change, refugees, and maritime security.

"We are invested in your success and support the ability of all Bangladeshis to freely participate in and contribute to their country's development," he said, while accepting the credentials of the newly-appointed Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA Muhammad Imran at the White House recently.

Biden said his country acknowledges their

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Farmers gather seedlings on a lush green seedbed in the Byshalita area of Sylhet. They will use the seedlings in their farms and sell the surplus. Many farmers in the region counted losses last year because of floods that damaged even paddy stored in villagers' homes.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

POLICE WEEK-2023

Give DB, CTTC authority to probe money laundering

Officials make flurry of demands at meet with ministers

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Police high-ups yesterday placed a host of demands, including the authority for the DB and counter-terror unit of the DMP to investigate money laundering cases and the appointment of lawyers in the force to deal with such cases.

Currently, only the Criminal Investigation Department of police has the authority to investigate money laundering.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Khandker Golam Faruq placed the demand for the authority to probe money laundering cases, while a special superintendent of the CID demanded the appointment of lawyers.

Asked, the DMP chief told The Daily Star last night that the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit and the cyber crime wing of the Detective Branch of police often find evidence of money laundering while investigating cases.

"We then have to write to the CID or Bangladesh Bank for further investigation, as we have no authority over it. It makes the procedure complicated."

If the DMP commissioner is entrusted with the responsibility to that end, then he can allow the units to investigate whenever required, he added.

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