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Power price hiked by 5pc

BERC procedure bypassed; new rate to take effect this month

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government yesterday raised the electricity price for consumers, on average, by 5 percent, skirting around procedures of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC).

On January 8, a BERC committee had recommended a 15 percent hike. For now, this may appear the government has struck a middle ground, there are, however, indications that more hikes are on the cards.

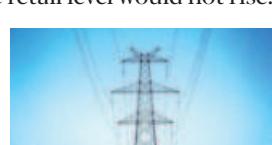
The new rate will be applicable from this month, said a notification from the power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

The weighted average tariff charged by power distribution companies per kilowatt-hour will now be Tk 7.49, up from Tk 7.13.

So, a person who has been paying Tk 1,000 for power will have to pay Tk 1,050 in February.

The move to hike the retail price comes after the bulk price was hiked by 19.92 percent in November last year by BERC, a quasi-judicial organisation that regulates the prices for gas, power, and petroleum products.

While announcing the bulk price hike, Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, and BERC Chairman Abdul Jalil had said the electricity price at the retail level would not rise.



"It seems the government has hiked the power tariff slightly, which may appear to be a good decision, but bypassing BERC is actually giving it a death blow."

However, the same week, six power distributors had submitted proposals to increase the electricity price at retail level by an equal percentage.

BERC on January 8 held a public hearing on those proposals, and there its technical evaluation committee recommended a 15 percent hike at the consumers' end.

The five-member BERC was supposed to sit after January 15 and decide on any price hike by 60 working days from last Sunday.

Yesterday's power price hike announcement was unusual in that it came from the ministry, not BERC.

"From now on, there won't be any hike at one go," Nasrul said yesterday, adding that the electricity price would be adjusted at regular intervals like the LPG price.

The move to increase the prices by the ministry itself did not sit well with experts.

"It seems the government has hiked the power tariff slightly, which may appear to be a good decision, but bypassing BERC is actually giving it a death blow."

The price hike might lessen the government's subsidy burden as prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, he said, adding that the prices might be raised further in the days to come.

M Shamsul Alam, dean of Daffodil University's faculty of engineering, said, "We are going backwards with such decisions -- BERC is an exemplary organisation.

"The government's decision is dangerous and reckless ... they destroyed the BERC brutally ...".

BERC was supposed to announce its decision on the electricity price hike over the next two months, but the ministry went around BERC procedures and came up with the announcement, leveraging a recent amendment to the law.

President Abdul Hamid last month issued an ordinance amending the BERC Act 2003 to include a provision that would allow the government to adjust the prices of gas, electricity, and fuel bypassing BERC.

The government had assured that the provision, which is yet to be approved by parliament, will only be used in the case of emergency.

Asked if any emergency prompted this decision to hike prices, Nasrul Hamid said electricity generation cost has increased 20 times; the price adjustment was necessary considering the global and domestic situation.

The power price hike would have an impact on inflation, which crores of consumers are enduring. Inflation averaged 8.76 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year.

SOCIAL MEDIA Government to launch 'lawful interception'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken initiative to introduce an "Integrated Lawful Interception System (ILIS)" to monitor social media and thwart various anti-state and anti-government activities, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told parliament yesterday.

He was responding to a query from Awami League MP from Dhaka-10 Shafiq Islam, who wanted to know whether the government would increase vigilance to thwart local and foreign conspiracies.

The minister said law enforcement and intelligence agencies were working relentlessly to foil any kind of conspiracies against the country.

"Besides, modern technology like Open Source Intelligence Technology [OSINT] has been included in the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre [NTMC under the home ministry] to prevent anti-state and anti-government activities through monitoring social media ...".

According to sources, the NTMC uses OSINT to track mobile and land line phones to identify and locate suspects.

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Chemicals from plastic factories nearby being discharged into the Buriganga in the capital's Swarighat area, polluting the river and environment. Locals have difficulties breathing as the water emits a strong odour. Though releasing chemicals into rivers is prohibited, the authorities concerned seems to have turned a blind eye to it. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Vehicles caught in a long tailback on the Kuril flyover and Airport Road in the capital yesterday afternoon. Commuters had to suffer delays on this busy road all the day mainly due to the rush of devotees towards the Biswa Ijtema ground. The first phase of the religious congregation begins on the Turag today.

Nightmare on Airport Road

Thousands suffer as traffic goes haywire; many miss flights

SAJJAD HOSSAIN and HELEMUL ALAM

Dhaka dwellers and commuters suffered immensely yesterday as traffic came to a standstill on the Airport Road. Thousands were stuck for hours on end and many missed appointments, meetings and even flights.

The trouble began around Wednesday midnight, when a massive rush of devotees to reach the Biswa Ijtema ground, along the busy Dhaka Mymensingh highway in Tongi, started to peak.

The narrowed-down road in front of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport due to the construction work for the Bus Rapid Transit added to the problem.

Poor traffic management planning ahead of the second largest congregation of the Muslims has been blamed.

The queue of vehicles was 17km long on the south end, up to Mohakhali. Nearby roads came to a standstill due to the cascading effect.

Many commuters spent several hours on the

highway as vehicles were only inching forward during the morning rush. Standstill traffic was seen on the Kuril and Mohakhali flyovers at least until 2:00pm.

Finding no other way, many started to walk.

"My daughter and grandchildren started from our Gulshan-2 home at 7:00am to catch a flight for London that was scheduled to depart at 11:00am. The flight was delayed by an hour, yet they missed the flight as they could not reach the airport by then," said a frustrated father.

He said the airlines told them that around 30 people missed the flight.

Pankaj Talukder, who was to fly with Qatar Airways to New York, said, "My flight was scheduled for 11:15am. I started in a microbus from Farmgate at 8:00am. After getting stuck for an hour in Banani, we took a turn towards Mirpur DOHS and reached the airport via Diabari-Uttara road.

"We arrived at the airport at 11:10am. There were 30 others who arrived late due to the

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GRAFT AT UNIVERSITIES Empower UGC to take legal action The regulatory body asks govt citing inaction by edn ministry

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

University Grants Commission wants power to take actions against irregularities and corruption in universities if probes find evidence to substantiate the allegations.

The commission hopes to have such power since the education ministry on most occasions doesn't take actions even after submission of UGC probe reports that find allegations of irregularities and corruption to be true.

"It is important for the commission to have the power to take legal action against irregularities in the recruitment of university teachers, admission of more students than seats available, financial irregularities, certificate trade, and irregularities in development projects of universities," the UGC said in its annual report for 2021.

A UGC delegation, led by its Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah, submitted the report to President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban last night, UGC member Prof Mohammed Alamgir told The Daily Star.

The report made a set of recommendations.

"Everybody wants effective steps be taken based on the findings of probe reports. What is the benefit of

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Work together for a just, fair economic order PM urges world leaders

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the world leaders to work collectively for a just and fair economic order as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict with sanctions and counter-sanctions have created havoc throughout the world.

"Taking current global economy into account, it is high time to work collectively for a just and fair economic order," she said.

The PM was addressing the inaugural leaders' session of the "Voice of Global South Summit 2023" through a virtual platform.

India is hosting the two-day virtual summit by bringing together the countries of the Global South to share their perspectives and priorities on a common platform. The theme of the event is -- "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose".

Some 120 countries have been invited to participate in this summit. The outcomes of the two day event will be channelled into the Indian's G20 presidency.

Hasina said Bangladesh welcomes India's vision as the G20 president to ensure inclusive development under the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future".

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