

12kg LPG cylinder price hiked by Tk 44

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The price of a standard 12kg LPG cylinder has been set at Tk 1,421 for the month of September, up Tk 44 from Tk 1,377 the previous month.

The new price of the essential fuel came into effect at 6:00pm yesterday, as announced by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission.

The price of LPG per kg will now be Tk 118.44, which was Tk 114.79.

Prices of other liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders – from 5.5 kg to 45 kg – will go up proportionately.

As per the BERC decision, the price of “auto gas” (LPG used for motor vehicles) also increased to Tk 65.26 per litre from Tk 63.21 per litre.

The price of LPG, marketed by state-owned LP Gas Company, will remain the same as it is locally produced with a market share of less than 5 percent, reports UNB.



PHOTO: PID

US embassy Chargé d'affaires Helen LaFave meets Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at state guesthouse Jamuna yesterday.

Govt cancels Momen’s contract as foreign secy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government has cancelled the contractual appointment of Masud Bin Momen as the foreign secretary.

The Ministry of Public Administration issued a gazette notification to this effect yesterday.

On Sunday, a farewell reception was accorded to Masud Bin Momen at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was also attended by Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain.

Masud Bin Momen took over the helm of the foreign ministry in 2019, and in November 2022, the Awami League government extended his tenure on a contractual basis for two years until December 6 this year.

Prior to his appointment as the foreign secretary, he served as the Bangladesh Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in New York since 2015.

Before that, he served as Bangladesh’s Ambassador to Japan from 2012 to 2015.

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Correction

The report on BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman’s speech on the front page of yesterday’s issue had an incorrect headline. It should read: “No more than 2 consecutive terms as PM”. We apologise for the inadvertent error.

Shirin steps down as JS speaker

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A gazette issued yesterday said the president accepted Shirin’s resignation and it already came into effect.

Shahabuddin on August 6 dissolved the parliament formed through the January 7 national election.

On August 14, former deputy speaker Shamsul Hoque Tuku was arrested in the murder case of a rickshaw puller who was killed in the capital’s Paltan during the quota reform protest.

Now the questions have come up whether the post of the Speaker has fallen vacant and who will administer the oath of office to the newly elected members of the next parliament.

According to the constitution, even after her resignation, Shirin will continue as Speaker until her successor takes over.

In other words, she will be considered as the Speaker until the next elected Speaker takes over.

Shirin will administer the oath of office to the lawmakers of the new JS.

The Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad is the third highest post of the state.

Article 74 of the constitution states how the posts of the Speaker and deputy speaker will become vacant.

It says that the Speaker’s post will fall vacant due to five reasons.

The constitution stipulates that if the president’s office becomes vacant or if the president is unable to perform his duties due to absence, illness or any other reason, the Speaker shall carry out the duties of the president until a new president is elected or the president resumes his duties, as the case may be.

On the other hand, Article 50 of the constitution says, “The president may resign with a signed letter addressed to the Speaker.”

Article 74 of the constitution deals with the election of the Speaker and the deputy speaker.

According to the constitution, parliament shall elect a Speaker and a deputy speaker from among the MPs during the first sitting of the Jatiya Sangsad after a general election.

Nizam Uddin Ahmed, a former professor of public administration at Chittagong University and also a parliamentary affairs expert, yesterday said despite her resignation, Shirin will remain as the Speaker until the new Speaker is elected in the next parliament.

Shirin became the Speaker for the first time on April 30, 2013. She has been holding the post since then.

She was first elected an MP from Rangpur-6 in the 2014 national election.

After the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, many cases have been filed against AL leaders across the country. On August 27, a case was filed against Shirin over the death of Muslim Uddin, a jeweler, in Rangpur during the quota reform protest.

Muslim Uddin’s wife Dilruba Akter filed the case at Rangpur Metropolitan Magistrate’s Court, accusing 17 people, including the Speaker.

Former commerce minister Tipu Munshi, now behind bars, was shown arrested in the same case.

BTRC’s curious U-turn on Summit Comms

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waived on semantics.

“It is evident that many of the actions and omissions by the BTRC and the telecom ministry were driven by political influences, leaving the regulator often powerless, compelled to follow directives from both visible and obscure sources,” said Abu Nazam M Tanveer Hossain, a telecom expert.

In late March, Summit Communications sought the regulator’s approval to issue new shares valued at Tk 170.5 crore to companies based in Abu Dhabi and Mauritius and its current managing director.

A total of 14.20 crore new shares will be issued for Tk 12 each, according to the application.

A month later, it decided to send a letter to the posts and telecommunications ministry for a pre-approval of the transaction. The government approval came next month.

Then on June 12, the BTRC allowed the company to do the share transfer without any charges.

Before doing so, the telecom regulator sought the legal opinion of the law firm, which said that since

Summit was merely issuing new shares, the 5.5 percent fee on the selling price was not applicable.

Summit also said the fee was not applicable as the company was raising its paid-up capital by issuing new shares.

However, the BTRC’s legal and licensing division wanted to slap the charges from the onset as Summit was transferring and selling shares in the guise of issuing new shares. The Daily Star has learnt from officials involved with the proceedings.

It is because after issuing the shares, Farid’s holdings in the company came down from 95 percent to 25 percent as he transferred the shares to new entities and Summit also submitted the sales agreement with these companies.

Of the new shares, about 9.44 crore shares worth Tk 113.38 crore were issued to the UAE-based company Global Energies – enough to secure 49 percent stakes in Summit Communications.

One of the shareholders of Global Energies is Adeeba Aziz Khan, the middle daughter of Farid’s older brother Muhammad Aziz Khan, also the chairman of Summit Group.

She nominated Farid’s daughter

Fadijah Khan and Sanadina Khan, the daughter of her uncle Jafer Ummeed Khan, as directors of Summit Communications, according to BTRC documents that cited the Global Energies Holdings’ board resolution.

Another 4.04 crore shares worth Tk 48.59 crore were given to Mauritius-based Sequoia Infra Tech – enough to secure 21 percent stakes in Summit Communications. Doorvesh Kumar Jugurnauth, who also serves as a director of Sequoia Infra Tech, will represent it on the board of Summit Communications.

The remaining 71.04 lakh shares were issued to Summit Communications MD Md Arif Al Islam, whose stake remains unchanged at 5 percent.

“So, the charge is justified for Summit – we earlier charged Kirtankhola Tower Bangladesh for the same process,” said a top official of the commission on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly on the issue.

But, BTRC’s immediate past president Md Mohiuddin Ahmed pursued to get legal opinion in this regard, according to the BTRC officials involved in the process.

Mohiuddin, who resigned as BTRC president on August 14, could not be reached for a comment despite repeated attempts.

After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5, the BTRC wrote back to the law firm and said its legal opinion is only advisory and not binding.

On August 14, the BTRC sent a letter to Summit Communications directing it to pay 5.5 percent of the selling price of the share.

In its response to The Daily Star, Summit Communications said it has already furnished Tk 10.24 crore to the regulator after the BTRC letter.

“On the surface, you would see Summit has become a giant providing quality services and operating under law and rules. It’s true,” said a top official of a company that operates in the telecommunication industry.

But the government has provided all kinds of facilities enabling Summit to grow, issue directives and set policies directly in its favour, he said.

“In this context, we commend the recent decision to impose a revenue share on share transfers retrospectively, as it reflects a newfound autonomy,” said telecom expert Abu Nazam M Tanveer

Hossain.

However, this move suggests that similar instances may have occurred in the past.

To address these potential gaps, an independent investigation should be launched to enable the regulator to recover any lost revenue on behalf of the state, he added.

Summit Communications maintains it has done nothing wrong.

The company along with its partners are deploying a private submarine cable by the first quarter of 2026, it said.

“And the investment needed to establish this project is approximately \$40 million per member. Over the past five years, Bangladesh has faced economic challenges, including a shortage of dollars and a critical need for such funds.”

The partnership with Global Energies and Sequoia Infra Tech was “strategically developed to boost the company’s paid-up capital and infuse foreign currency – resources that local banks were unable to provide.”

“This collaboration is essential for completing the submarine cable project, which is of significant national importance and necessity,” it added.

BB’s strange bid to save Orion plant

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regulator, are responsible for deciding whether a client will get loans upon assessment of the company’s credit risk.

Mezbaul said the central bank only checks the legal issues, and the regulator issued NOCs to those banks because there is a scope in the law.

“Coal-based power companies were exempted from the single borrower exposure limit to speed up electricity generation,” said the BB spokesman.

Before joining the central bank as its governor following the Awami League’s ouster and Rouf’s resignation, economist Ahsan H Mansur had told The Daily Star that the exemption from the single borrower exposure limit for these types of power plants was avoidable. “We do not need coal-based power plants, we need renewable energy.”

Approving such projects on political grounds is “not good news” for governance in the banking sector, he had said. “The state-run banks have no accountability and governance. That is why they [coal-based power producers] took large amounts of loans from these lenders.”

A senior Bangladesh Bank official who monitors the state-run banks told The Daily Star that the three lenders approved the loans at a time when a major portion of their credit was already concentrated with some large borrowers, which is “very risky”.

A lender’s risk increases when a single customer gets a large portion of loans, sometimes even more than the client’s capital, he added.

For instance, seven large borrowers, including AnonTex, Crescent, Ratanpur, and S Alam groups, account for 57 percent of the total defaulted loans at Janata Bank.

Even after this, scam-hit Janata Bank approved a Tk 5,078 crore loan for Orion Power, which is 219 percent of the lender’s Tk 2,314 crore paid-up capital – far exceeding the 25 percent ceiling relaxed by BB. Orion Group was already one of the top borrowers of Janata, with Tk 2,875.85 crore loans taken until June this year.

Janata had the highest Tk 48,000 crore defaulted loans as of June this year, up from Tk 5,818 crore in 2017. It faced a Tk 2,750 crore capital shortfall until December last year, having been put in deep trouble by Anontex, Beximco and S Alam Group.

Md Abdul Jabbar, who was appointed as the bank’s managing director and CEO in April last year, told this newspaper recently that the loan for the power project had been approved before he took charge.

Janata Bank has yet to disburse the loans, said Jabbar. “I’m trying to run this bank smoothly. I want to protect the bank from further deterioration of its health.”

Agrani Bank approved a Tk 2,856 crore loan for OPDL-2, which is 138 percent higher than the lender’s Tk 2,072 crore paid-up capital. The state-run bank approved the new loan to the company despite Orion Group subsidiaries having a Tk 2,250.63 crore liabilities with the lender.

Rupali Bank last year approved Tk 2,645 crore for the company and the amount is 569 percent of the bank’s paid-up capital of Tk 464.70 crore. Orion Group subsidiaries’ outstanding loans at Rupali Bank stood at Tk 1,117.48 crore until June this year.

Agrani Bank was the lead arranger for the loans, but Janata Bank approved the highest amount followed by Rupali Bank despite their worsening financial health, caused by high defaulted loans and capital shortfalls, showed the lenders’ meeting minutes.

Defaulted loans at Agrani stood at Tk 20,864 crore or 28 percent of disbursed loans as of March this year, up from Tk 14,806 crore during the same period last year, BB data show. The bank also faced Tk 4,450 crore capital shortfall as of December last year.

Contacted, Md Murshedul Kabir, managing director and CEO of Agrani Bank, declined to comment.

Zaid Bakht, who recently resigned from the post of chairman of the bank, told this newspaper that the loan had been approved long ago by “maintaining due diligence” with the central bank’s permission.

A senior official of the bank, seeking anonymity, said Agrani Bank approved the loans because the government had cleared Orion’s plant and signed an agreement to purchase power from it.

Rupali Bank’s defaulted loans stood at Tk 10,357 crore as of March this year, which is 21 percent of its disbursed loans, BB data show. It faced a Tk 2,193 crore capital shortfall last year.

The bank’s Managing Director and CEO Mohammad Jahangir could not be reached for comment.

Salman Obaidul Karim, managing director of Orion Group, told The Daily Star on Thursday that they secured approval for a syndicated loan from Agrani, Janata, and Rupali Bank “based on the coal project’s financial credibility without any undue influence”.

He explained that significant investments were made for the coal project from Orion’s equity, including for land procurement, land development, and basic and detailed engineering, in collaboration with “internationally reputed” engineering consultants.

However, recognising the long-term benefits for Bangladesh’s economy and energy sustainability, the conglomerate decided to pivot to a solar project, he said, adding that this decision, made during the previous government’s tenure, reflects the firm’s “commitment to the country’s well-being over short-term profitability”.

The Orion Group managing director said they requested the banks to cancel the loans approved for the coal project and to approve a new loan for the solar project. Rupali Bank cancelled its portion of the loan in April, effectively cancelling the entire syndicated credit, he said.

If disbursed, the tenure of the project loans would be 15 years, including a one-year grace period, while the project was expected to be completed in three years, industry insiders said.

Orion had initially planned to implement a 635 MW coal power plant at Gozaria in Munshiganj but it later moved the project to Moheshkhali in Cox’s Bazar with hopes to supply electricity for 25 years from 2026.

The funds initially allocated for land development in the coal project have been reallocated to the solar project on the land given by the government, ensuring a smooth and responsible transition, Salman said.

The company has also applied for a new loan for developing a renewable power plant on the Munshiganj land where it had initially planned the coal project, he said.

“The cancellation during the previous government’s tenure demonstrates that no special favours were sought or received.”

Series sweep beckons Tigers

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name in Rawalpindi’s honours board after his flier in the first innings and this time it was Hasan Mahmud’s turn with figures of five for 43 as Pakistan were bowled out for 172.

Mahmud said the remarkable turnaround was possible because they believed that teammates can hold their own in difficult situations such as the one presented to Liton-Mehedi.

“After losing quick wickets, things were getting bad and we wanted to progress with new plans. Everyone had faith in their own abilities and had faith on teammates. We knew that if Liton Das and Mehedi Miraz can get set, momentum can be changes and that’s what had happened,” Mahmud said at the press conference yesterday.

He argued that Bangladesh revelled in the experience of their veteran stars.

“When you have players of such experience in your side, they will always share that experience on the field. Even off the field too. I feel that for a new cricketer in international stage, that is a very important thing,” Mahmud, who is playing just his third Test match, said.

Bangladesh’s pace supremacy, too, found new meaning with Mahmud

and Nahid Rana’s competitiveness while Taskin Ahmed, the veteran pacer in the rank, created the early inroads to Pakistan’s batting with the wicket of opener Saim Ayub.

“Whenever a pacer was handed the ball, the plan was to bowl wicket-taking deliveries. The more [wicket-taking] deliveries you bowl, the more successful you are. Taskin bhai gave us the start with the first wicket of the day and then Rana was terrific. Maybe the momentum shifted and then I followed my process to get wickets,” he said, before relaying that his teammates’ hard work was behind every delivery which helped him attain a splendid feat.

“We won a match here and there is an opportunity to win another. We are very happy,” Mahmud added.

The Bangladesh openers were positive in picking up 42 runs in seven overs but there are chances of rain spoiling the party.

“I don’t think they [openers] were thinking of the rain when they batted. If it had not rained, we would have tried to finish by today or at least finish it in the first session tomorrow,” Mahmud said as the Tigers look to complete the job hoping the rain keeps away.

21 dists now without DC

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transfers while officials, who believe they were sidelined during the Awami League rule, started lobbying to become DCs.

The government then transferred 25 of them, a day after giving the DCs the additional charge of zilla parishad and municipality administrator.

The government had also dissolved the governing bodies for secondary and higher secondary educational institutions, district and divisional sports councils.

As a result, the responsibility of overseeing them and forming new committees landed on the table of the DCs.

“Now that there are no lawmakers and local government representatives, we have to deal with all these while receiving threats from various quarters over the phone. It’s a lot on our plates,” said a DC who did not want to be named in fear of reprisal.

“Besides, there is a constant fear of transfer. We don’t know when our turn will come,” the official said.

Several DCs said they could not make certain decisions during “a time of transfers” as it could complicate

matters for the person who would replace them. And this was harming operations of some institutions, they said.

A DC, who left their station recently, told this paper that they intentionally made a decision not to create a school governing body.

“If I had made a committee, it would have created a fresh controversy because I was dubbed loyal to the previous government,” the official said.

A DC said, “The large-scale transfer of the DCs panicked field-level officials. The fear of transfer is hindering routine work. In fact, those who were transferred are now better off.”

An official from the Dhaka Divisional Commissioner’s office said they get enquiries every day about formation of committees for educational institutions and sports organisations. However, due to the “uncertainty over transfers”, no new decisions are being made, the official said.

Asked about appointments of new DCs, Mokhlesur Rahman, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, said, “New DCs will be appointed quickly.”