

BTV, Betar to be made autonomous soon, JS told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT The government is contemplating autonomy for the state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar (radio).

However, before that it intends to find out why the previous government did not provide the autonomy in the first place, said information Minister Tariqul Islam yesterday in response to an opposition lawmaker's query in the parliament.

When Awami League MP, Atiqur Rahman Atiq, inquired about the fate of the two electronic media, Tariqul wondered why the previous government ignored the laws granting autonomy despite passing of the laws at the parliament and the president assenting those on July 17, 2001.

"We've formed a committee headed by the information secretary to look into the matter. We'll take necessary measures after having the committee report in hand," explained the minister.

He also informed the House that the now defunct ETV would not be given its licence back but the matter might be brought into consideration if it changes its name.

Enam's lawyers yet to get copy of court order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lawyers can not move bail petition for Reuters journalist Enamul Haq Chowdhury before the High Court as they are yet to obtain the certified copy of the lower court order rejecting his bail petition.

Talking to The Daily Star his lawyer Barrister Tanjibul Islam Sunday alleged that the lower court was yet to complete the process to prepare the certified copy. The reason for such a delay was alleged to be official pressure.

Chowdhury is now in Dhaka Central Jail.

Police arrested him on December 13 under Section 54 of CrPc by keeping his wife virtually hostage following filing of a Reuters story on the December 7 bomb blasts at four cinemas in Mymensingh.

Enamul quoted the home minister in the story but the home minister denied having talked to the Reuters journalist on the issue. Later developments showed that Enamul had talked to a different person on phone mistaking him to be the home minister.

Four cases were filed in connection with the blasts at Ruppani, SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Tribals held with bombs remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two tribal men, arrested with explosives and a propellant on Monday evening, were placed on a 5-day remand for interrogations yesterday.

A patrol team of Chandgaon Thana police rounded up Ganga Manik Tripura, 35, and his brother Bamha Tripura, 25, at Bohaddarhat Bus Terminal area on Monday afternoon, minutes after they arrived from Lama upazila of Bandarban district. The patrol team noticed their suspicious movements and took them to the police station. Later, police seized 25 small-sized glass tubes filled with explosives and propellant.

Sources said that the two brothers kept their mouths shut during preliminary interrogations.

Chandgaon thana police filed a case in this connection. A letter was sent to the concerned army officials requesting examination of the seized explosives.

Table with Sun Rises, Sun Sets, Prayer Timings (Feb 19), Azan, Jamaat.



PHOTO: STAR

A police officer tries to talk BNP activists out of a demonstration, brought out in Narayanganj yesterday in protest at the killing of businessman Sabbir Alam Khondokar.

Bid to issue new telecom licences in red tape

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The telecom regulator's proposal, seeking the prime minister's consent to two licences for fixed line phones, two more for mobile operators in the private sector and legalisation of Internet telephony, is now caught in a bureaucratic tangle, sources said.

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) on January 2 submitted a proposal in this regard to the prime minister through the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MoPT). It also proposed that the licences be awarded to the private sector through international competitive bidding.

The government had earlier declared ICT as a 'thrust sector'. It observed that many countries including neighbouring India have allowed Internet telephony in recent times.

"Voice over Internet is a reality now and it is a demand of the day," BTRC said in the proposal.

It said further opening up of the telecom sector would help to increase the country's tele-density, which is now 1 per cent, one of the lowest in the world. Bangladesh plans to increase tele-density to 4

percent by 2010.

Bangladesh currently has 6.5 lakh fixed line phones provided by the BTB and over 10.5 lakh mobile phones provided by four private operators in foreign joint ventures.

The BTRC proposal has irked the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB), as the state-owned agency fears that the move would curtail its monopoly in fixed line operation and reduce revenue earning from international calls.

The BTB has also launched a crusade against the Internet telephony as its proliferation would curtail the monopoly of the BTB on international gateway, leading to a sharp decline in its revenue earning, sources in the industry alleged.

The MoPT explained to the BTRC the losses that the BTB might incur after the proliferation of Internet telephony, it is learnt. The ministry's intervention will further delay the clearance process.

The BTRC has been working for bringing more fixed and cell phone operators into the market to provide people with greater access to telephone and increase tele-density.

The BTRC took almost a year to prepare the proposals after conducting a study on the country's

telephone demand and analysing the frequency allocation system.

The Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPA) in a letter to the BTRC chairman expressed concern over the delay in making the decision on legalisation of Internet telephony.

The ISPA proposed to the BTRC for convening an inter-ministerial meeting to resolve the problem.

According to sources, should the move get the go-ahead it would ensure cheap yet easy access to fixed line phones, cellular phones and international and long distance telephony. It would also help develop the country's information communication technology (ICT).

The telecom watchdog has suggested competitive bidding for awarding all new telecom licences, sources in the BTRC said.

They said the BTRC has blamed unplanned allocation of frequency in the past for the failure to invite new companies to launch mobile service.

The MoPT in the past had allocated the frequencies without considering the future necessity of t h e

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US war plans run into Ankara, Riyadh snags

Blair sees no rush to military action

AFP, Ankara

Washington's preparations for war on Iraq hit new snags yesterday as Turkey warned its backing for the US was not irreversible and regional giant Saudi Arabia hardened its opposition to unilateral US action.

Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Ankara was not "on an irreversible road" in support of the United States, which wants to use the only Muslim member of NATO to stage an invasion into neighbouring Iraq.

For his part, Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia, a key US ally in the Gulf,

warned Washington against attacking Iraq without a green light from the UN Security Council.

Prince Saud told the BBC late Monday that such action "would appear as aggression" as momentum built for a fresh Security Council resolution authorising the use of force -- a call joined by Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer.

Sezer, who has largely ceremonial powers but can influence major security decisions, also said Turkey would not open its territory to US combat troops without a new UN resolution authorising force.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warned Monday that the

legitimacy of any action would be impaired without a united international position, while the focus must remain ridding Iraq of its alleged weapons of mass destruction.

He was speaking at a crisis summit of the European Union that agreed a compromise joint statement pledging to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis, without ruling out the use of force.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Washington's staunchest backer, insisted yesterday that "there's no

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Police hunt for 100 members of 2 Islamic militant groups

ANWAR ALI, Dinajpur

Police in the entire northern region have been frantically looking for some one hundred alleged members of Islamic militant groups-- Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) and Shahadat-e-Al-Hiqma (SAH).

In Dinajpur, police gathered detailed information about the identification of the seven militants who lived in the tin-shed house at Gurgoba area in the town. They also got details of some 80 members of the JMB and raided several places in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Rangpur, Panchagarh, Nilphamari and Joypurhat in the last three days.

Police, however, could not arrest anybody as the militants went into hiding following Dinajpur blasts. Dinajpur police also collected some contact numbers of the militants from the two mobile phones, recovered from the tin-shed house.

The OC of the Kotwali Thana in

Dinajpur said that the bombs and bomb-making chemicals recovered from Gurgoba were similar to those found in Parbatipur upazila in May last.

On May 20, 2002, police arrested eight JMB members Shahabul Islam Sharif, Obaidullah, Lutfar Rahman, Mosharrar Hossain Zulfikar, Anwar Hossain, Umar Faruk, Abu Bakkar Siddique and Mustakim from Zahanabad area in Parbatipur.

About 25 petrol bombs and some firearms and chemicals were also recovered from their possession. Mustakim and Zulfikar, out of the eight, were freed on bail on February 7 last.

The investigation of the

Parbatipur incident was yet to be completed, police said.

In Rajshahi, Shahadat-e-Al-Hiqma (SAH) could not draw police's attention even after its chairman Sayed Kawsar Hussain in an open press conference on February 8 declared the emergence of the militant party.

Police arrested an alleged SAH member on February 16.

Police filed a case in this regard accusing Shamim, another SAH member Mojibor, and SAH chairman Sayed Kawsar Hussain, but did not mention the party's name.

Shamim was taken on a two-day remand yesterday after police sought a 10-day remand at the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

Transport leader killed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four gunmen shot dead a transport workers' leader and injured his companion near the police box at Gulistan in the city last night.

Jahangir Hossain Munna, 35, and Azimuddin, 26, were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared Munna dead.

Sources said that Munna, general secretary of Dhaka-Daudkandi minibus workers' association, and Azimuddin

sat for a negotiation with some others near Sergeant Ahad police box. The assailants went there and on some plea, asked the two to come with them.

But only yards away, the gang pulled out revolvers and shot them. Rivalry among transport workers' leaders led to the incident, the sources said.

Azimuddin was first admitted to the DMCH and then shifted to the orthopaedic hospital.

Announcement

Due to unavoidable reasons, Star Chittagong could not be published today.

The page will come out tomorrow.

PM okays use of airforce planes to fight mosquito

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has endorsed the idea of using Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) planes for aerial spraying to eliminate mosquitoes.

The PM yesterday sat with the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) representatives at her office to talk about aerial spraying in detail and the plan of using airforce planes.

A highly placed source said that the PM was convinced that the DCC should use airforce planes, though at present these planes are not equipped with spraying facilities.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka told The Daily Star yesterday that a decision in this regard might be taken today to formulate a clear-cut strategy for handling the situation.

"We have discussed different

aspects of aerial spraying so that it can be made very effective," Khoka added.

Sources said that to use the airforce planes, it would be necessary to install spraying equipment that will cost at least Tk 70 lakh.

The meeting also discussed the possibility of using helicopters of the plant protection wing of the agriculture ministry. It has three helicopters with spraying facilities, but these are out of order now. The repair cost of each helicopter will be at least Tk 2 crore.

DCC officials said repairing the helicopters or installing spraying equipment in air force planes will be a more viable proposition than hiring helicopters from the USA.

On Monday, local agents of three international companies participated in a DCC tender bidding to get

the work. The bidders said they would procure helicopters from the USA to conduct the spraying on the DCC's 360 square-kilometer area.

The technical committee of the DCC is now examining the environmental aspects of the proposals of the three companies, said the chairman of the committee Kazi Abul Bashar.

The committee, with experts from Bangladesh Air Force, plant protection wing of the agriculture ministry and Dhaka University, is examining the proposals keeping in view the availability of resources and environmental factors, he added.

"We will discuss the matter with the mayor today and exchange views on the planned operation," said Bashar.

Jubo League leader murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

A leader of opposition party Awami League's youth wing was killed by miscreants in the town on Monday night.

Miscreants left the beheaded body of KN Barua, 22, president of Awami Jubo League of Kalaghata ward unit, in a river.

The dead body was recovered from river Shankha yesterday, police said. Motive behind the killing is still unknown.

District unit of Jubo League demonstrated in town yesterday protesting the killing.

We apologise

In yesterday's (February 18) issue a photograph of blossoming Kristnachura was published in the back page. It was a file photo which got published due to computer malfunctioning. We regret the error and apologise to our readers. -- Editor

Police nab 47 for Jhenidah killing

DELWAR KABIR, Jhenidah

Police have so far arrested 47 people for Sunday night's carnage at Ganna union in Jhenidah Sadar upazila.

A gang of 12 opened fire on Union Parishad election campaigners at a Kuthidurgapur teashop, some ten kilometres off the district headquarters, leaving five killed on the spot.

Rivalry between Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) candidate Sarafat Hossain and Awami League contestant Awlad Hossain led to the killing, say local people.

Sarafat and Awlad lead two powerful groups. Since the 1991 murder of Sarafat's elder brother Hakim Khan, ten people have been killed in conflicts between the two groups.

The tension heightened when the outlawed Biplobi Communist Party lined up its support for Sarafat and the Purbo Banglar Communist Party, another banned political outfit, for Awlad.

Sunday night's killing and subsequent arrests have sparked panic among the locals, prompting many male AL activists and followers to flee the area.

Besides, BNP activists attacked and damaged the residences of eight Awami League workers Monday night, leaving at least six people injured.

The local unit of the ruling party also brought out a procession in Jhenidah town yesterday, protesting the killings and blaming it on the AL.

However, the authorities have decided to go ahead with today's

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