

New ISD code from today

Call charges down to Tk 7.5 for US, Canada

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board introduces today a new ISD code -- 012 instead of 00 -- bringing down the charge to Tk 7.50 a minute for fixed phone calls to US and Canada.

The same rate will also apply to telephone calls to eight other countries -- UK, France, Italy, Germany, Australia, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore -- in phases.

Initially, the reduced call charge will be applicable only to the users in the capital and then in the entire country.

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Saifur against TU in central bank

Favours disciplined unionism at NCBs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday opposed trade unionism (TU) in the central bank but supported the idea of disciplined trade union activities in nationalised commercial banks (NCBs).

"NCB staff could carry out trade union activities to protect their rights provided those activities are

conducted in a disciplined and just manner, and union leaders cannot call strike in the name of CBA (collective bargaining agent) activities," he told reporters after a meeting with Bangladesh Bank and NCB officials at his Secretariat office in Dhaka.

In this context, he appreciated the disciplinary actions of Bangladesh Bank to check unruly trade union activities at the central

bank, meeting sources said.

NCB reforms, enhancement of investment, interest rate and default loans also came up during the meeting.

The meeting discussed the importance of highlighting the positive aspects of bank reforms to dispel misgivings about it and ways to tackle an ongoing campaign by a section of loan defaulters to create

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Tremor jolts Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mild tremor shook the port city and its adjoining areas in the early hours yesterday.

The 25-second quake, measured at 5.41 on the Richter scale, jolted the south-east part of the country at 12.58 hours and 43 seconds.

Its epicenter was some 236 kilometres off the seismic observatory centre at Ambagan in the city, sources said.

However, no casualty was reported, they added. It was the 18th earthquake hitting Chittagong and its adjacent areas this year.

'Time bomb' found near BNP leader's house

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A 'bomb' fitted with electrical wire, battery and a clock was recovered from just outside the house of Dumki Union Parishad Chairman and union BNP President Md Yunus Howlader in Patuakhali Sunday morning, police and locals said.

A female member of the family first saw the nine-inch-long and six-inch-wide bomb, wrapped in a plastic tape weighing about one and a half kg, at about 10:30 on Saturday night.

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Rejoinder

The Ministry of Commerce has contradicted a report headlined 'Poor business climate drying up FDI flow' commerce minister tells CPD-FBCCI dialogue' published in The Daily Star Monday, and said the report did not reflect the totality of his view.

In a rejoinder yesterday, the ministry said the minister while lamenting the inadequate flow of investment also pointed out that presently investment is taking place and the country has not seen such investment flow earlier. The minister also presented a sector-wise description of investment.

Bishops join in Blair-bashing

Term him 'white vigilante'

REUTERS/ AFP, London

Two church leaders have blasted British Prime Minister Tony Blair for going to war in Iraq, with one bishop saying he and US President George W Bush acted like "a bunch of white vigilantes".

Their criticism -- plus an embarrassing contradiction over

weapons of mass destruction by the US administrator of Iraq Paul Bremer at the weekend -- comes at the end of a miserable year for Blair whose popularity has tumbled over the invasion of Iraq.

The Archbishop of York, David Hope, who is the Church of England's second most senior

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

DANGEROUS MIX: Women workers attend to tannery waste drying in the sun in Hazaribagh tannery district. The waste is ground with chemicals and sold as chicken feed, exposing people to serious health hazards. (Story on page 1)

Critical work on Sangu goes on to up gas supply

STAR REPORT

The offshore Sangu gas field is undergoing a critical development work to meet a higher gas supply demand during the lean season from January to March next, sources said.

With an aim to increase Sangu's gas supply to 200 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) from 140 mmcf, Shell along with Cairn and

Halliburton Brown and Roots began re-perforating the existing four gas wells earlier this month. The oil companies want to reach deeper gas reservoirs through re-perforation expecting to tap more gas, Petrobangla sources said.

The re-perforation of two of the four wells gave positive results instantly but the Sangu-1 well gave negative indications. "We drilled

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Sonadanga OC closed for neglect of duty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The officer-in-charge of Sonadanga Police Station, Farhad Hossain, has been closed to Boyra Police Lines yesterday for neglect of duty and failure to stem rise in crimes including failure to nab outlaws.

Khulna Metropolitan Police has taken serious exception to the murder in broad daylight of Tala upazila shrimp trader Syed Sirajul Islam in the well-known clinic on December 25.

Armed cadres of the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddho) allegedly killed Seraj in a bomb attack in the afternoon. No-one has been arrested.

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Peaking political violence worries leaders

389 activists killed, 5,711 injured in 11 months, says Odhikar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The rising trend of political killings witnessed in recent months has eroded public confidence in the

law and order in the country.

Statistics of Odhikar, a rights organisation, show 389 political activists were killed and 5,711 others

India possesses over 50 nuke devices: US

ANI, Islamabad/Washington

An independent task force co-sponsored by the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society has claimed that India possesses between 50 to 100 nuclear devices and can fire nuclear weapons against targets in Pakistan by French Mirages and Soviet SU-30 fighter-bombers.

The task force headed by former US Ambassador to India Frank G Wisner II, former US Ambassador to Pakistan Nicholas Platt and the President of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Marshall M Bouton, further goes on to say that New Delhi is working on a longer range missile - the Agni plus capable of striking major urban centres in eastern China.

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Biman's Hajj flights start tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines will start its Hajj flights tomorrow, according to a press release.

In the maiden Hajj flight, 274 pilgrims will set out for Jeddah from Zia International Airport (Zia) at 5:00pm to perform Hajj.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharraf Hossain, Shajahan and State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin will inaugurate the flight at Zia.

Prayer Timings		
December 30		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-45	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-27	5-32
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Lower house votes to lessen power of Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's lower house has passed a constitutional amendment weakening President Pervez Musharraf's powers to dismiss the government, after he agreed to water down his authority to end a paralysing political row.

Musharraf also agreed to step down as army chief last week as

part of concessions aimed at ending the dispute which has held parliament in limbo since 2002, with no bills passed except the national budget.

"All amendments contained in the 17th amendment bill have been approved by a two-thirds majority," ruling Pakistan Muslim L e a g u e

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Grim line of death at mass graveyard

Bodies of 25,000 Iran quake victims buried

AGENCIES, Bam, Iran

The graveyard stretches as far as the eye can see. Diggers and bulldozers in the earthquake-devastated city of Bam in south-eastern Iran prepare trenches while gangs of masked workmen cover those that have already been packed with the dead.

In the distance, more machines are preparing long trenches. A dust storm drenches the scene in a surreal yellowish light.

Some 30,000 are believed to have been killed by Friday's quake that registered 6.7 on the Richter scale, according to the latest toll.

The bodies of 25,000 people have already been buried, 19,500 of them by municipal workers in Bam and the other 5,500 by local people in surrounding areas, state radio reported yesterday quoting a local government official.

A grisly production line of death enters the graveyard as vehicles of all descriptions vie to get through the gates and down the dusty track. Bodies wrapped in blankets are piled on the backs of pick-up trucks and jammed in the back seats and boots of private cars.

As soon as graves are prepared, they are filled. A digger is still scooping out one end of a trench while bodies are lain in the other. The smell of decomposing flesh is intense. An adolescent boy drives from the grave on a moped, his face broken with grief.

Volunteers, mainly from the Iranian Red Crescent Society and the Basij Islamic militia, offload bodies as soon as they arrive and carry them to the side of a mass grave. About 20 blanketed figures wait to be processed with purpling bare feet protruding from the ends.

Red Crescent rescuers quickly

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