

## 'GP Service Month' launched

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

GrameenPhone Ltd, the country's leading cellphone operator, yesterday launched 'GP Service Month' to widen its after-sales services to customers.

Under the services, all GP customers can query about their problems or seek any other information only by calling 121 as a single hotline.

GP Deputy Managing Director Frank Fodstad formally announced the programme at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

The 'GP Service Month' will start with the introduction of '121' as a single hotline number for all GP customers from today, making it easier for them to access the GP Call Centre.

In an effort to provide after-sales services, more than 600 GP service desks have been opened across the country.

In addition, all the eight GP customer centres located in the divisional cities now remain open from 8am to 8pm every day including holidays, officials said.

GP will also implement a new more customer-friendly credit policy for its post-paid service users and will also introduce 'number portability' for migration from one GP post-paid product to another.

For the first time, GP is also offering to provide 'itemised bills' for all its pre-paid subscribers, giving them the option to receive call details for the month.

An initiative titled 'Grahak Katha' has already been started under which GP officials visit different districts across the country and invite customers to meetings where they can provide valuable feedback and get any of their service-related questions answered.

Syed Yamin Bakht, general manager (Information Department), and Bidyut Kumar Basu, head of Customer Service of GP, also spoke at the function.

## Rehab housing fair begins in Dubai March 9

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Developers is going to organise a three-day housing fair in Dubai, the UAE beginning March 9 to attract expatriate Bangladeshis in the country's real estate and housing market.

Some 43 developers from Bangladesh will take part in the housing fair at Ramada Continental Hotel, Deira, Dubai, to be organised by Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab), organisers told a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday.

Tanveerul Haque Probal, convener of Rehab fair committee, said the main objective of the fair is to promote the products and services of Rehab members to Bangladeshis in the UAE.

He also said Rehab is going to hold a housing fair for the 4th time in a foreign land.

Toufiq M Seraj, president of Rehab, said the fair will give the Bangladeshis in the UAE an opportunity to buy apartments and plots in their home land.

Earlier, Rehab held fairs in New York in 2004 and again in New York and London in 2005.

Capitaland Development Limited, Concord Real Estate & Building Products Ltd and Sagufta N M Housing Ltd are the co-sponsors of the event.

## Fareast Finance okays 20pc dividend

Fareast Finance and Investment Limited, a leasing and financing company, has declared a 20 percent dividend in the form of bonus share for the year 2005, says a press release.

The dividend was declared at fifth annual general meeting (AGM) of the company held recently in Dhaka.

Chaired by MA Khaleque, chairman of the company, presided over the AGM.

## SETTING DHAKA'S STRATEGIES

# Govt bodies on WTO issues fail to file reports as deadline ends

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

All the three government committees on WTO issues failed to submit their reports to commerce ministry as the February 28 deadline ended yesterday.

The committee chiefs sought more time to submit their reports as they failed to set strategies on their respective issues during the month-long deadline, a high official of the ministry said.

The reports were supposed to be placed in a national co-ordination committee comprising all stakeholders in March to finalise Bangladesh's strategies on market access, product diversification and services sector.

The Ministry of Commerce on February 1 formed three committees - Committee on Market Access headed by vice chairman of Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), Committee on Export Diversification headed by director general (Textile Cell) of EPB and Committee on Services Sector headed by secretary of Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment.

The market access committee sought more time through a letter yesterday, saying that it will be able to submit the report by mid March.

The head of Market Access Committee and EPB Vice Chairman Mir Sahabuddin Mohammad said the work of identifying all the products under HS code is not so easy and simple.

The committee is identifying products in an effort to keep those on the duty-free list of 97 percent tariff lines as decided in the last WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong.

A priority list of products will also be developed to exclude them from the 3 percent sensitive list of a few countries, including the US.

The negotiation on the issues in the WTO headquarters in Geneva is supposed to be completed by April 30 this year.

The Services Sector Committee will submit an interim report to the ministry as it collected rules and

regulations of different countries to export manpower.

To finalize a strategy it needs more time, a member of the committee said.

He said improved bilateral relation is needed to send workers to other countries under Mode-4.

Trade body leaders, academics, trade experts, economists and officials are working jointly to set working programmes on the issues.

Mustafizur Rahman, research director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said setting strategies to negotiate in the WTO talks is a continuing process and a country should be prepared itself before any negotiation.

The upcoming months are obviously important for Bangladesh, as some crucial meetings of WTO will be held.

However, small investors still remained panicked over the market situation.

They said the capital market will take more time to come out the recent bearish trend.

Earlier on Monday, a group of small investors took to the street for the second time in a month staging demonstration in front of DSE building as the premier bourse's General Index lost 30.83 points. On February 13, they also demonstrated in front of the DSE building when the price indices experienced a huge fall at one stage on the day.



A M Faruque (3rd-R), managing director of Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd, hands over a souvenir to Gamine S Munasinghe (2nd-L), Sri Lankan high commissioner in Dhaka, at a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday.

# Eskayef exports drugs to Sri Lanka this month

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd, the country's leading pharmaceutical company, is going to export medicines to Sri Lanka this month.

As part of the company's massive business initiatives to expand pharmaceuticals products to international market, Eskayef Bangladesh will initially export 12 products to Sri Lankan market.

The products that Eskayef is going to launch in the Lankan market include Esoral tablet, Losecil capsule, Zithrox tablet, Zithrox suspension, Folex capsule, Dialon tablet, Dilator tablet, Facid Cream

and Facid ointment.

"As Sri Lankan market has huge demand for drugs, we want to be among the top three pharmaceutical ventures in Sri Lanka by 2010. The company has already applied for registration of 44 more products in Sri Lanka," said A M Faruque, managing director of Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd, at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

Gamine S Munasinghe, Sri Lankan high commissioner to Bangladesh, also spoke at the press briefing.

The high commissioner said Bangladesh has huge potential to export drugs to Lanka.

He said as Eskayef is a renowned company, its market operations in Sri Lanka will help strengthen relations between the two countries.

Faruque said, "Eskayef uses most advanced technologies for Sri Lanka," said A M Faruque, managing director of Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd, at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

Eskayef, the fifth largest pharmaceutical company in Bangladesh in terms of turnover, is also planning to export products to Myanmar, Hong Kong and Bulgaria, Faruque added.

## DSE, CSE close higher

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) and Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) closed higher yesterday with gainers outnumbering losers.

The DSE General Index increased by 13.09 points to close at 1531.43 points from 1518.34 points on Monday.

The DSE All Share Price Index also rose by 9.89 points to close at 1172.24 points from previous trading day's 1162.35 points.

A total of 1,925,372 shares of 186 issues worth Tk 19.09 crore changed hands on the DSE against previous day's 2,430,970 shares of 188 issues worth Tk 18.27 crore. Of the issues traded, 125 closed in gains, 40 suffered losses and 21 remained unchanged.

The CSE All Share Price Index increased by 9.29 points to close at 3201.52 points from 3192.23 points on Monday.

The CSE-30 Index, however, decreased by 0.44 points to close at 3027.91 points from previous day's 3028.35 points.

A total of 91 issues were traded of which 52 gained, 31 declined and six remained unchanged. Some 777,801 shares worth Tk 2.78 crore changed hands against 874,775 shares valued at Tk 3.78 crore on the previous trading day.

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## 15-day furniture festival begins today at Mirpur

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A 15-day furniture festival begins today at Mirpur in Dhaka to introduce local products to customers.

In the festival, some 110 furniture shops on Rokeya Sarani will showcase all popular brands of furniture.

Bangladesh Furniture Industry Owners' Association (BFIOW) is organising the festival in association with SME support provider Katalyst.

Scheduled to end on March 15, the show will showcase different types of furniture made of wood, processed wood, laminated board, iron and plastic. There is no entry fee at the furniture festival.

Customers will get maximum 15 percent discount and one year after sales service if they buy furniture from the festival, KM Akhtaruzzaman, president of BFIOW, told a press conference yesterday.

The buyers of the capital will enjoy a free delivery service on the occasion of the fair, he mentioned. On the other the buyers also have the chance of winning car, motor cycle, ornaments, colour television with many other attractive prizes through raffle draw if they purchase furniture from the fair.

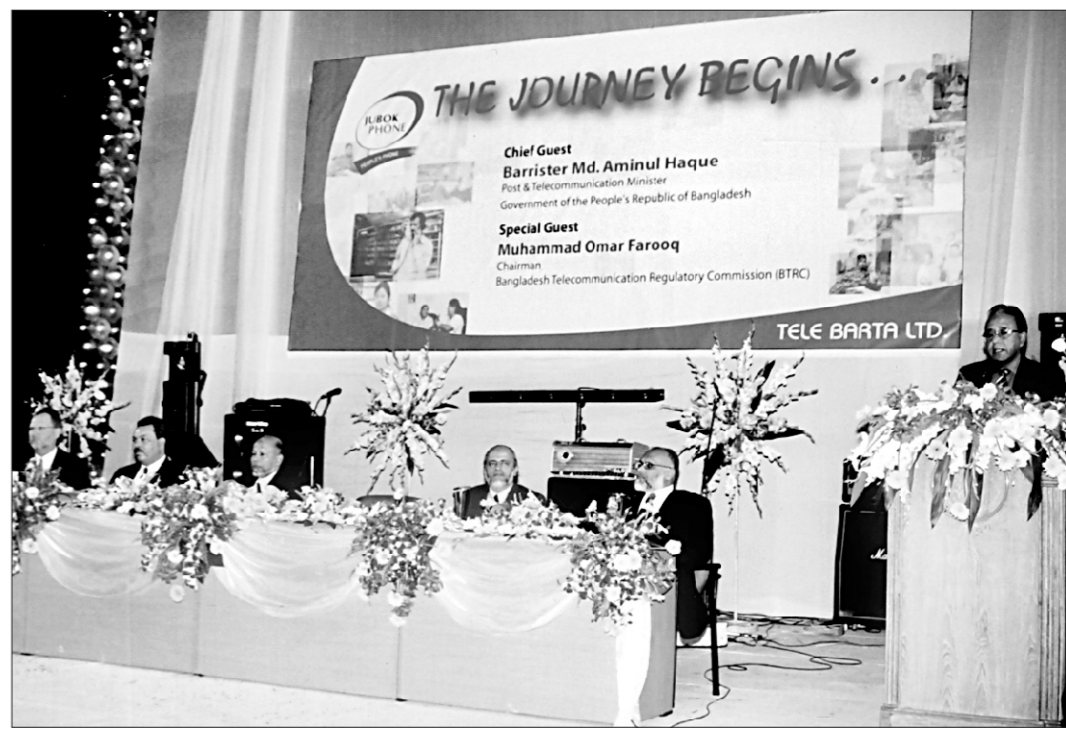
The BFIOW leaders also sought policy support from the government for the growth of furniture industry.

## Bank Asia disburses micro credit among rural women

Bank Asia Limited has launched a small credit disbursement programme under 'Poverty Alleviation Scheme', says a press release.

Syed Anisul Huq, president and managing director of Bank Asia, inaugurated the credit disbursement programme, which was attended by executive director of BURO, an NGO. Other senior executives of both the organisations were also present.

Huq said Bank Asia has been disbursing micro credit among the poor since its inception to fulfill its social commitment. This credit is disbursed through the bank's rural branches.



Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque speaks at the commercial launching ceremony of Jubok Phone held in Dhaka yesterday.

# Tele-density to hit 20pc by year-end

## BTRC chief hopes as Jubok Phone starts journey

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Tele-density of Bangladesh will reach around 20 percent by the end of this year, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) chairman hoped yesterday.

"We are going to grow one million per month and the total subscriber base is expected to reach around 20 million by the end of 2006. The figure is close to the neighbouring countries in the region," said Muhammad Omar Farooq, speaking at a launching ceremony Jubok Phone as a special guest.

Around 30 million mobile sets are sold every month across the world and one million of these figures is sold in Bangladesh alone, the BTRC chairman said noting telecom is the

engine of growth not only in India and Pakistan but also in Bangladesh.

Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque spoke as the chief guest at the launching ceremony at China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The minister mentioned tele-density of a country is considered as an indicator of the economic condition. Like most other developing countries, he explained, Bangladesh was lagging far behind the developed world in terms of penetration in telecoms.

Just in the beginning of the new millennium, tele-density in Bangladesh was around two percent, one of the lowest in the world, he said.

Five mobile phone companies have more than 12 million mobile phone clients. As a result of it, per capita tele-density of Bangladesh is now around 10 percent, he said.

Chairman of Tele Barta Ltd, the owning company of Jubok Phone, Hosain Al Masum said the company has a target to reach around three lakh land phone subscribers in four zones of the country by the end of 2006.

Bradley Holmes of GPC Asia Pacific, J Anderson, Motorola vice-president in Asia Pacific and other top executives of Tele Barta Ltd also spoke at the launching ceremony.

# Provide hardcore poor with credit facilities

## Wahiduddin Mahmud urges micro credit institutions

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

It is high time for micro credit institutions to provide the hardcore poor with credit facilities, economist Wahiduddin Mahmud said yesterday.

He also called for creating employment opportunities with better wages for the poor to minimise the rich-poor gap.

Since the emergence of micro credit the ultra poor have been deprived of credit for their inability to repay loans, he said.

He was speaking at a national conference of International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions (Inafi) Bangladesh titled 'Policies, frontiers and performance of micro finance industry in Bangladesh: Looking for alternatives' in Dhaka.

So far, a large part of the 10 percent of the poorest are out of the micro credit facilities, he said, adding that the graduates in micro credit programmes need to go for enterprises employing the poorest part of the society.

"As the micro credit system expands, there is a need for a regulatory framework not to constrain, but to support further progress of the sector," the economist said.

Over the period the system has become much self reliant with less dependence on the subsidised funds from the government or foreign donors, he said, adding, "It can become entirely self reliant even at the current interest rates if the micro finance institutions can collect funds even from the non-members."

"The commercialisation of these organisations however must not be at the cost of deviation from its main focus -- poverty alleviation," Mahmud warned.

Atiqun Nabi, executive director of Inafi Asia and Bangladesh, said to reduce the vulnerability of the borrowers at any disaster, micro finance insurance can also be introduced in collaboration with the private insurance companies.

Quoting an Inafi survey, he said about 90 micro finance organisations are trying to provide the borrowers with security through health insurance or a lump sum amount during emergency or after the death of the members.

"In this context, the micro finance insurance, if brought under a disciplined system, can help the ultra poor in a big way," Nabi observed.

Responding to a question of Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), said he has no idea if there is any legal provision in introducing micro finance insurance, but added, "There was also not any legal provision while micro credit was introduced in the country, but it is established now."

Professor Syed Mainul Ahsan of Concordia University, Canada, Ifat Sharif of North South University, Imran Matin of Brac, Sajjad Zohir, research fellow of BIDS, and Rashed Al Hasan of Inafi Bangladesh, made presentations in the conference.



GrameenPhone Deputy Managing Director Frank Fodstad (centre) speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday to announce the formal launch of 'GP Service Month'. Syed Yamin Bakht (left), general manager (Information Department), and Bidyut Kumar Basu (right), head of Customer Service of GP, are also seen.