

Calling from land phone to mobile to cost Tk 1.50 a minute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Making calls to mobile phones from Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) land phones is getting costlier as the state-owned operator will charge Tk 1.50 per minute from April 19.

Presently, Tk 1.50 is charged for five minutes talk on both fixed and mobile phones.

Under the new tariff rate, an inter-district caller will not have to pay additional charges as the entire country would be treated as a single zone and there will be no peak and off-peak rates.

However, charge for land phone-to-land phone call will remain unchanged.

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BENAPOLE, TEKNAF LAND PORTS

Tk 142cr bribes exacted in 2yrs

Tk 17,203 charged at Benapole, Tk 4,927 at Teknaf per consignment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Businessmen have to pay bribes at fixed rates at 30 different points at Benapole land port and seven points at Teknaf land port to release consignments.

The illicit practice is delaying the business process, increasing prices of goods and depriving the government of revenue, a Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)

report revealed.

The report on 'Benapole and Teknaf land port: A diagnostic study' also revealed that customs officials and port officials of the two land ports received no less than Tk 142.08 crore in bribe in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 financial years.

Government officials have been depriving the government of taxes from consignments for years by false declarations, the report said.

The government have lost nearly Tk 100 crore of tax in the last four years, the report said quoting a customs official.

The report stated that businessmen on an average have to pay bribes of Tk 17,203 at Benapole and Tk 4,927 at Teknaf land port to release a consignment.

The publication ceremony of the report was held in the VIP

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PM returns home

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia returned home early yesterday ending her four-day visit to Turkey.

Minister, chiefs of the three armed forces, diplomats and senior civil and military officials greeted the PM as she arrived at Zia International Airport at 1:54am.

Earlier, she was given a hearty send off when she left Istanbul for Dhaka Saturday evening. Turkish Minister for Cultural Affairs Ninet Chubukchu and Governor of Istanbul Maaumner Gul waved goodbye to the PM at the Kamal Ataturk International Airport.

Khaleda left for Ankara on Wednesday on a four-day visit at the invitation of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. She was the first prime minister of Bangladesh to visit Turkey.

Khaleda led the Bangladesh side at the official talks with Turkey on Thursday where the two countries

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PHOTO: STAR

Members of the Christian community celebrating Easter Sunday pray on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises yesterday.

Mobile court comes under attack

Nabisco staff assault court members, lensmen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers and employees of Nabisco Biscuit Factory, a concern of Bhaiya Group, assaulted the members of a mobile court and two photojournalists when the court went there to conduct a drive yesterday.

As the mobile court led by Magistrate Tapan Kumar entered the factory in Tejgaon industrial area in the capital, the workers and employees started throwing different things at the team members, witnesses said, adding that the latter ran towards an office room of the factory and locked the door.

The workers beat up and injured Prothom Alo photographer Munir Hossain and Amar Desh photographer Md Ibrahim.

"They [factory men] broke my camera and snatched away a purse and cell phone," said Md Ibrahim who got treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"After we managed to call Tejgaon Police Station, the law

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PHOTO: STAR

Workers of Nabisco biscuit factory in the capital throw plastic baskets at the mobile court members during a drive yesterday.

SAFTA MEET ON APRIL 20

Dhaka to ask for cuts in barriers

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

Dhaka will ask the first South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) Ministerial Council meeting here on April 20 to reduce non-tariff and para-tariff barriers among the member countries.

Commerce and trade ministers from the seven member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- will attend the meeting.

Bangladesh will request the Safta member countries to reduce registration, licence and marking fees they charge from exporters, mainly of drug and cement, to give a boost to intra-Saarc trade that still falls far short of achieving its vast potential.

The country's potential for exporting items like cement and pharmaceuticals to the Safta

countries cannot be utilised due to high fees for registration, licence and the like in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh will request the member-countries to have a Safta Mutual Recognition Arrangement on the standards of the products so that the countries can avert complexities involved in having standard certification from other countries.

It will also request India to improve infrastructure in-between Banglabandha and Kakravita on priority basis and reduce high LC margins imposed by the Indian banks in the northeastern states.

The Safta agreement, signed during the 12th Saarc Summit held in Islamabad on January 6, 2004, came into force from January this year.

As agreed by the member states, tariff concessions under it will be effective from July.

The Safta Ministerial Council (SMC) and the Safta Committees of Experts (CoE) were established under the agreement.

The first Safta CoE meeting on April 18-19 will precede the first SMC meeting.

The SMC, comprising commerce/trade ministers of the member states is the highest decision making body and responsible for implementation of the agreement. It will meet once a year or more often as and when considered necessary.

The CoE, comprising a senior economic official from each member state, will support the SMC and monitor, review and facilitate implementation of the agreement. The CoE is to meet at least once in every six months.

Navy kills 3 'pirates' in Ctg, locals call them innocent

Boatmen go on indefinite strike in protest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three persons were killed and another injured at Char Patharghata on the bank of the river Karnaphuli in Chittagong city as the navy personnel opened fire on them during an anti-smuggling drive on Saturday night.

The slain were identified as Yusuf Ali, 35, son of Keramat Ali, Kader, 17, son of Fakir Ali, and Mansuf Ali, 30, a

jetty worker of the Chittagong port also son of Akkel Ali. They all hailed from Charpatharghata under Karnaphuli Police Station in the city.

Navy and police sources said the slain and the injured were pirates carrying looted fuel oil who fired at the law enforcers in pursuit.

Several drums of fuel oil worth about Tk 1 lakh were seized from the spot, they said.

On the other hand, local people

identified the slain and the injured as innocent boatmen and blamed the navy men for firing indiscriminately at them causing casualties.

Local boatmen enforced an indefinite strike in protest at the incident suspending ferry services between Charpatharghata and Bridgeghat in the city demanding a fair investigation of the incident and exemplary punishment for the responsible.

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Food, fuel shortages hit Kathmandu hard

Anti-king protests drag on

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's capital was at a near-standstill yesterday with food and fuel in short supply and prices rising as protests continued for the 11th straight day against King Gyanendra's absolute rule.

Around a dozen hotel and restaurant workers were arrested after more than 1,000 protesters took to the streets in the tourist area of Thamel, an AFP reporter said.

Other small rallies were staged in the capital and on the main ring road as police shied away from enforcing a ban on all gatherings. Opposition parties who have called an indefinite general strike said the demonstra-

tions were growing.

"Our movement will continue until we achieve our goals. People across the country have shown their support to our ongoing movement," said Yogesh Bhattarai, a spokesman for the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist), one of seven major parties leading the action.

The parties ousted when Gyanendra sacked the government and took direct control 14 months ago called a strike on April 6 in a move backed by Maoist rebels.

The protests have since snowballed into daily clashes even though riot police have used tear

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DEFAMATION SUIT

Editor, publisher of Prothom Alo get bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to the editor of the Prothom Alo, its publisher, a senior reporter, and a columnist in a defamation suit filed by Chief Whip Khondaker Delwar Hossain.

The daily's Editor Matiur Rahman, Publisher Mahfuz Anam, Senior Reporter Ashish Saikat and its Columnist Hafizuddin Khan along with their lawyers appeared before the chief metropolitan magistrate's (CMM's) court at 12:15pm and prayed for bail.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mujibul Hag granted them bail upon a bond of Tk 5,000 with two guarantors.

Moving the bail petition, the

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US analysts detail war plans against Iran

AFP, Washington

The United States began planning a full-scale military campaign against Iran that involves missile strikes, a land invasion and a naval operation to establish control over the Strait of Hormuz even before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, a former US intelligence analyst disclosed yesterday.

William Arkin, who served as the US Army's top intelligence mind on West Berlin in the 1970s and accurately predicted US military operations against Iraq, said the plan is known in military circles as TIRANNT, an acronym for "Theater Iran Near Term."

It includes a scenario for a land invasion led by the US Marine Corps, a detailed analysis of the Iranian missile force and a global strike plan against any Iranian

weapons of mass destruction, Arkin wrote in The Washington Post.

US and British planners have already conducted a Caspian Sea war game as part of these preparations, the scholar said.

"According to military sources close to the planning process, this task was given to Army General John Abizaid, now commander of CENTCOM, in 2002," Arkin wrote, referring to the Florida-based US Central Command.

But preparations under TIRANNT began in earnest in May 2003 and never stopped, he said. The plan has since been updated using information collected in Iraq.

Air Force planners have modelled attacks against Iranian air defences, while Navy planners have evaluated coastal targets and

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PHULBARI COAL PROJECT \$21b economic benefits over 30 years claimed

Venture to add 1pc to GDP a year, reckons Asia Energy study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Phulbari Coal Project will generate economic benefits worth over \$21 billion for the country over its 30-year life, besides adding one per cent to the GDP a year, claims a study commissioned by the project proposer, Asia Energy Corporation.

"The direct effect on [the] GDP is

expected to be US\$7.8 billion over the life of the project," projects the study conducted by an international professional services company named GHD. "The indirect or multiplier effects are expected to be US\$13.7 billion. This gives a total GDP increase of US\$21.4 billion," it estimates.

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PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka University students paint a symbolic picture on a strip of cloth at the TSC intersection yesterday to protest against the killings in Kansat by the police.

Charges framed against top JMB leaders

UNB, Chandpur

As a special tribunal in the district town yesterday framed charges in explosives and murder cases against JMB top brass Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai and Ataur Rahman Sunny, and their 12 sidekicks, the three militant leaders proudly admitted conducting bomb attacks.

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Prayer Timing		
April 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-35	5-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-24	6-28
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation