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Mobile operators taken for a ride

Telecom ministry abruptly postpones meeting

By Staff correspondent

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MPT) yesterday postponed the meeting between the ministry and representatives of five private telephone operators just a few hours before the scheduled time.

The meeting was convened by MPT to discuss bilateral issues including interconnection facilities and operational obstacles.

The telecom operators were informed of the postponement of the meeting over telephone just a few hours before the time of the meeting.

The MPT had informed the participants about the agenda of the meeting on January 25.

The problem of interconnection is closely related with the call generated by the cellular operators vis-a-vis the fixed network of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), because the fixed network of BTTB is not sufficiently equipped to absorb the additional traffic.

The MPT did not mention anything about the reason behind the postponement of the meeting. It, however, said that a fresh date for the meeting would be announced soon, officials said.

Home, Post and Telecom Minister Mohammad Nasim, directed the ministry officials to postpone the meeting, an official told the Daily Star yesterday.

The meeting, first of its kind between the regulators and operators since private operators started business in the country, was to discuss the common problem of five private operators.

To reduce the problems of congestion at the interconnection points, additional equipment need to be installed on the fixed side and the tariff on calls entering the mobile networks need to be made on a per-minute basis, experts said.

The mobile operators have been facing acute problems and users have been barred from access by Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) due to lack of interconnections.

Earlier, different private operators expressed their apprehension that their local and foreign investment might go in vain, if they are denied necessary decision and use of physical infrastructure of BTTB without delay.

The meeting was also likely to take decisions pertaining to building up an effective network to provide inter-connection, inter-town telecommunication, related facilities, a proposal of Grameen Phone, realisation of penalty from Sheba Telecom (cellular phone).

The agenda of the meeting also included: possibilities of sharing BTTB's physical infrastructure including building of microwave towers.

Decision makers of private operators including Grameen Phone, TMIB, Bangladesh Rural Telecom Authority (BRTA), Sheba Telecom and Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBTL) were ready to discuss many other 'business related sensitive' issue in the meeting.

There are more than 1,16,200 mobile phone users in the country whose number has been increasing day by day.



Hartal rites

Top-notch BNP leaders marshal a torch procession in the city on the eve of the 36-hour country-wide hartal, called by the opposition alliance.

Kibria justifies PSA

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria said Public Safety Bill would help improve the law and order situation that was identified as a major hindrance to economic growth, reports UNB.

"Law and order must be put on a solid base to take our efforts for economic growth to a successful end," he said while briefing newsmen at the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) yesterday.

State Minister for Information Abu Sayeed also spoke at the briefing.

Kibria referred to the concerns expressed by the business community over violence, extortion, tender grabbing and hartals at their recent conference, which was attended by both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition.

He said entrepreneurs were reluctant to invest because of violence and toll collection by terrorists although banks are ready to finance.

Kibria who was critical of anti-terrorism law sponsored by BNP during its rule said the Public Safety Law was different. It provided adequate safeguard against harassment of the innocent and also punishment for filing false cases.

Justifying the necessity of the controversial new law, Kibria pointed to the loopholes of the existing ones under which criminals secured release on bail and evaded punishment due to lengthy process of trial.

The whole process of trial of a criminal case takes a maximum of four months in USA, Germany and Switzerland, Kibria said. "What is normal practice in other countries, we're

trying to ensure it by law. So, the new law can in no way be termed as draconian ... Now it will not take months and years for investigation and trial of a criminal case of such nature."

Kibria accused the opposition parties of trying to create a confrontational situation through hartals, damage to properties and bomb blasts.

The flood-ravaged economy was recovering fast and it was evident in economic indicators. Export marked a 7 per cent rise, industry grew by 6 per cent and inflation rate remained at controlled, 3.4 per cent in November.

"But, we fear whether the trend will continue in the face of constraints like hartal and violence," Kibria said.

Prof Abu Sayeed said it is no surprise that BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami which were born through state terrorism will oppose the new law.

Central body for observing Ekushey formed

By DU Correspondent

A central committee has been formed at Dhaka University for observing the historic Ekushey February in a befitting manner, said a DU press release.

Prof. R I M Amlur Rashid, president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association, was made the coordinator while vice-president and acting general secretary of the Association Prof. Anwar Hossain and M Hasibur Rashid joint coordinators.

The committee was formed at a meeting at the Administrative Building with DU Vice-Chancellor Prof. A K Azad Chowdhury in the chair.

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Traders protest terrorism at B'baria

From Our Correspondent

BRAHMANBARIA, Feb 1: BNP and its allies brought out a torch procession which paraded through the main roads of the town to drum up support for hartal while Jamaat-e-Islami brought out a separate procession in the town in this regard today.

Meanwhile, traders and businessmen of the town brought out a 'lathi procession' to protest terrorism and ransacking of their shops by terrorists today.

Later, they held a rally at TA Road with Alhaj Abdul Hashim in the chair.

The district administration deputed two magistrates and deployed a team of police at the Brahmanbaria Rail Station to keep the situation under control. The ticket counter of Titus commuter train remained closed for a long time to avoid collection of toll by mastaans.

The public prosecutor and the lawyer of the plaintiff strongly opposed the petition of bail and said, the three are guilty of the murder of an innocent housewife who was pregnant.

The court fixed the next date of hearing on February 17.

On October 30, 1999, the housewife Mummy was murdered at her father-in-law's house. The husband of the deceased Ripon confessed earlier to the charge of murder.

Earlier, Ershad Shikder was brought to Khulna this morning from Jessore Central Jail while Noor-e-Alam from Satkhira Jail. Other accused in the case Nazim Sarder, Tunda Haroon, and Liaquat Lashkar were also produced in the special court.

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2 Jubo League activists murdered in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Feb 1: Two Jubo League activists were murdered in two separate incidents in the city today.

They were identified as Akram Hossain, 23, and Shahidul Islam Liton 24.

The first incident took place with the murder of Akram Hossain at about noon at Dakbonglow Square, under Khulna Thana.

He was gunned down by another Jubo League activist Shajahan 30, who escaped from police custody ten minutes after arrest.

Police and witnesses said Shajahan shot Akram point blank in front of Diganta Paribahan office. He died on way to hospital.

In the second incident, Jubo League activist Shahidul Islam Liton was killed in bomb blasts.

He was one of the accused in Raju murder case recorded with Sonadanga thana last year.

According to witnesses, some young men hurled bombs at him outside the court compound at about 3 pm.

He was being taken back to the district jail from the CMM's court. Constable Mirajul Islam was also severely injured in the bomb blast. He was admitted to the general hospital.

Both the murders were sequel to intra-party rivalry, police said.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) will hold its council election 2000 on March 22, said a bourse announcement yesterday, reports BSS.

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Holzman's formula for economic growth

US Ambassador John C Holzman has stressed the need for political stability, uninterrupted port operation and development of infrastructure, including telecommunication, for attracting foreign investment in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

In a meeting with the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) yesterday, he said that Bangladesh should assess the gas potential and identify the best possible use of this non-renewable, precious natural resource.

He also emphasised the need for exploring all possibilities to export the surplus of the natural resource for additional financing.

Echoing American economist Jeffrey Holzman observed that Bangladesh would attain self-reliance through additional foreign investment rather than accelerating investment in agriculture.

He reaffirmed that he would continue his current effort and mission towards enhancing US investment in Bangladesh.

Holzman also said Bangladesh should address all international issues, including labour and environment, for having uninterrupted access to

the US market.

The Ambassador and DCCI leaders also discussed economic cooperation between Bangladesh and US and other related business issues in relation to international trade.

DCCI president Aftab ul Islam said the chamber body has been maintaining a very good relation with US Embassy and the business community of the US.

He mentioned that management of human resources has been identified as number one problem at this juncture of Bangladesh economy.

The DCCI has taken some effective drives and established Human Resources and Entrepreneurship Development Institute (HREDI) to train human resources and bring out skilled managers, he informed.

Since management efficiency is the prime need of Bangladesh, he said USA with all its expertise could come forward to helping the country in terms of technology transfer and foreign direct investment.

The DCCI chief informed the meeting that in the year 1998-99 Bangladesh's export to USA stood at US dollar 1967.54 million, about 45 per cent of total export.

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Poetry Festival begins

From page 1

Barman and Stephen Muldoon of Ireland also attended the function.

Shamsur Rahman urged the countrymen to stand against conspiracy of the religious fanatics who are creating anarchy in the country by destroying the peaceful democratic atmosphere.

The aim of the first poetry festival was to rise against the autocracy and remove the autocratic ruler from power. We've won against the autocracy but against the communal elements and religious radicals victory is yet to be achieved."

President of Jatiya Kabita Parishad Belal Chowdhury termed the festival a "unique" one in the world and urged all to uplift the spirit of Ekushey February through organising various programmes on the occasion of Ekushey February.

The festival began with hoisting of national flag and rendering some specially composed for the occasion.

Later, the poets in a procession marched toward the central Shaheed Minar to place wreaths paying homage to the martyrs of the Language Movement. They also placed wreaths at the mazar of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and artist Quamrul Hasan.

The second round bidding at the last moment as 'special acts' because existing data showed maximum prospects of oil and gas there.

The government is currently negotiating with Shell Oil for blocks 5 and 10, Unocal for Block 7 and with Maersk Olie for deep sea blocks 19 and 20. The negotiations with Maersk have almost reached a 'dead-end' as the company asked for gas export options in the Production Sharing Contract, the sources pointed.

Govt woos US-Irish bid

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proposals in favour of the American companies. The government is now eager to mediate a deal in which both Tullow and American oil companies co-exist," one source said.

The second round bidding negotiations had started amid much enthusiasm of the oil companies in October '97. But the government's 'favouritism' for financially weak Tullow for awarding it the most coveted blocks 9 and 11 led to delays in the negotiation process, the source pointed out. At one point, the government tried to find a financially big partner for Tullow. As a result, the Chevron-Texaco joint venture was invited to strike a partnership with Tullow on Block 9. But the partnership talks failed as Tullow sought a bigger share.

At that time, Enron was offered blocks 3 and 6 and it was continuing negotiations till early '98. The negotiations then came to a virtual halt due to lack of government decision and direction. Afterwards, Enron also avoided negotiations as the company's ownership was changing. Later, when Enron reappeared as a new company, Petrobranga said it must first see if the bid documents given by the original Enron could be considered valid in the new context.

Now, the government is considering the new Enron as a valid bidder and as a result, it invited the company for fresh negotiations recently. It also decided last week to re-invite Tullow and Chevron-Texaco for Block 9 but it is yet to send the invitations.

Block 9 and 11 were originally reserved for exploration and development by local exploration company BAPEX. But these blocks were included in

Heroin worth Tk 1cr seized in city: 4 held

By Staff Correspondent

Detective Branch of Police yesterday arrested four people and seized one kilogram of heroin worth Taka more than one crore from a house at Sabujbagh in the city yesterday.

The arrested were identified as Salauddin Chowdhury, 45, Enamul Huk, 28, Manjurul Islam and Alam Uddin.

"Country's existing laws are not being applied against the ruling party terrorists. Certainly, the motive of the introduction of the new law is to harass the opposition."

Section 16 of the new law is aimed to deprive the people from getting bail from the court during the trial period, she said.

"This law also prohibits granting of bail even to the elderly, women and sick people. Section 13 and 18 of the law are not realistic and these do not ensure proper trial."

Khaleda said section 13, 15, 16 and 18 reflected the government's lack of respect for the judiciary and its intention to curb the independence of the judiciary.

In the new law, she said there was also reflection of the adverse remarks of the prime minister and home minister made about the judiciary earlier.

The BNP chairperson called upon all opposition parties, professional bodies, mass organisations, cultural wings, human rights organisations and the countrymen to build up resistance against the black law and those who formulated it.

She asked the government to immediately withdraw the law and accept the opposition's one-point demand.

Replying to a question, she said the opposition parties refrained from attending parliamentary sessions because the government had violated the atmosphere in the House.

"We have refrained from attending parliament sessions, but not boycotted it permanently. We have already informed the Speaker to accept our demands and create conducive atmosphere in the Sangsad," she added.