

GP regrets delay in activating new subscriptions

Star Business Report

GrameenPhone has regretted delayed activation of new subscriptions under the on-going sales campaign.

A GP press release said its activation unit is working round-the-clock. The normal time taken by the computer to process a new subscriber is about 24 hours. In view of the heavy demand of subscribers, the queue is now longer, and the process now takes 72 hours.

Furthermore, due to the on-going upgradation work of its network, GP is sometimes facing small technical delays.

"GrameenPhone is fully aware of the situation, and we are committed to shorten the activation process," the release said.

"We would like to reiterate that GrameenPhone has not sold beyond their capacity. We have recently expanded our capacity, allowing us to take more subscribers," it further said.

All subscriptions sold till November 23 have been activated, and requested any subscriber who has not yet been activated to contact Points of Sale from where the subscription was purchased along with the subscription copy and GP will attend to specific problem.

Henceforth, the usual time for activation will be three working days from the date of purchase of the subscription. It said.

Tax lawyers for raising number of tax-payers

Bangladesh Tax Lawyers Association (BTALA) yesterday urged the authorities to find ways to raise government revenue by increasing the number of tax-payers, reports BSS.

BTALA also called upon the government to make effective measures to check attempts to evade tax. The counteringing by tax lawyers on tax returns should be made mandatory to contain tax evasion, a meeting of the executive committee of BTALA resolved.

Chaired by Advocate MA Sahani Talukder, President of BTALA, the meeting was attended by leaders of Tax Lawyers Association from 65 districts, a press release said.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by SN Chowdhury Azad and Mahbub Alam from Dhaka, Mohsin Khan (Rajshahi), Kazi Fazlur Rahman and Manzil Alam Chowdhury (Khulna), A Matin Khan (Bari-sal), Shah Alam Mullick (Patuakhali), Robin Datta (Feni) and A Latif (Mymensingh).

SMC's annual sales confce held

The Annual Sales Conference of Social Marketing Company (SMC) was held recently at a city hotel, says a press release.

The conference was attended by all the sales officers, sales promotion officers, zone executives, area managers, members of the senior management and other staff.

National sales manager, Shahid Ahmed, presented the report on FY 2000 sales performance, according to his report, SMC distributed 22.15 million cycles of oral contraceptive pills (Femicon, Nordette 28 and Minicon) and 142.54 million pieces of condoms (Raja, Panther and Sensation) during the period.

SMC's national CYP (couple years of protection) achievement in FY 2000 was 2.6 million. In addition 74 million sachets of packaged oral rehydration salt (ORSaline) was sold during the period.

Ashfaq Rahman, Acting Managing Director of SMC appreciated the contribution of the sales force to the success of the company in terms of providing quality health and family planning products to the less-privileged people at a very affordable price.

Colombo considers closing down casinos

COLOMBO, Nov 25: Sri Lanka was considering closing down casinos amid protests that the gambling operations had led to international prostitution rackets and money laundering here, the state-run Daily News said today, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Anura Kumara Dissanayake told parliament Friday a government decision to licence casinos in 1996 had never been officially implemented.

Despite this, casinos have continued to operate in the country, some even within high-security zones of the capital, Colombo.

The Daily News quoted the prime minister as saying the government was now considering closing them down.

Starwood joins in setting up 5-star pvt sector hotel in city

Star Business Report

With the increase in demand for high-quality hotel accommodation in the capital city, Starwood Hotel and Resorts Worldwide Inc of USA has joined hands with local investors to set up a five-star hotel named 'The Westin Dhaka'.

The hotel now under construction in the city's Gulshan area will have 242 rooms, said Al Chowdhury, advisor to the Unique Group which is expected to provide 56 per cent of the total equity. Starwood will give 10 per cent equity and the rest will be financed by other investors.

"IPDC, Shadran Bina and ICB have also committed equity participation in the project," Al Chowdhury said.

The total cost of the project has been estimated at US \$ 32 million with equal debt equity ratio.

Chowdhury said Janata Bank has agreed to act as the lead bank for coordinating financing from different foreign and nationalised commercial banks.

He said the foreign investors would prefer the new hotel because of its proximity to the

airport.

The Starwood Hotel & Resorts Worldwide Inc of USA has six different categories of hotels including Westin and Sheraton.

The Starwood will run the management of the proposed hotel and Hirsch Bedner Associates (HBA), a US company based in Singapore, will design the interior of the hotel.

Creative Kitchen Planners Ltd of Malaysia is designing the kitchen facilities while the lighting works will be done by Project Lighting Design Ltd of Singapore.

The Borak Real Estate (Pvt)

Ltd, a concern of the Unique Group, is constructing the hotel building.

Dennis Herft, Vice-President, Technical Services, Asia-Pacific, Starwood Hotels, said the hotel will maintain Westin standard.

He said that the Starwood has 733 hotels in 80 countries of which 150 are of Westin brand.

Speaking on the occasion IPDC Managing Director CM Alam said that his company board has already agreed to invest in the hotel because of bright prospects.

'Allowing more cos will leave cement sector in disarray'

Meghna Cement gets ISO 2000

Star Business Report

Bangladesh has no possibility of becoming a cement exporting country in near future and allowing more cement companies would add to the list of defaulters, cautioned a leading entrepreneur of the country.

"Most of the local cement factories are producing cement by importing clinker from different countries. The country is going to be self-sufficient soon and allowing more companies may create a dangerous situation in the cement sector," said Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, Chairman of Bashundhara group, at the ISO-9002 certificate awarding ceremony of Meghna Cement Mills Ltd at Sonargaon Hotel in the city Friday.

Attending the function as chief guest, Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed mentioned that

after meeting the local demand, the cement companies would start exporting to the neighbouring countries in near future.

The country presently produces around 43 lakh metric tons of cement against a 60 lakh metric tons demand. Of the total 17 cement factories, five are going for expansion which will raise the total capacity to around 53 lakh tons. World cement majors like Holderbank, Lafarge, Cemex and Scancem have already entered the country.

French Ambassador in Bangladesh Michel Lumaux attended the function as special guest while Trevor Nash, representative of NQA, a British audit firm, Habibur Rahman, Chief Executive Officer of Meghna Cement Mills Ltd,

Savem Sobhan and Sadat Sobhan, vice chairman of Bashundhara group, also spoke on the occasion.

Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, who is also the president of the Bangladesh Cement Manufacturers Association (BCMA), said the local producers are facing uneven competition with foreign companies because of high interest rates in the range of 16 to 17 per cent.

Meghna Cement Mills is the largest cement grinding plant in the country, Sobhan said.

French Ambassador Michel Lumaux mentioned that ISO certification is important not only for the corporate houses, but also for a country's image.

He said that he would try his best to attract more French investment in Bangladesh.



Chuck C.F. Lai, Managing Director of Chargeurs Interlining, Asia, and Bashir A Khan, Executive Director of Osman Textiles Ltd, have signed a memorandum of understanding to set up a joint venture DHJ Interlining factory in the city.

Commodity: Weekly Roundup

Oil surges above \$33 on ME tension, Iraqi squeeze threat

LONDON, Nov 25: Oil prices climbed above \$33 dollars a barrel this week on forecasts of a fall in temperatures in the United States, renewed tensions in the Middle East, and fresh Iraqi threats to hold back oil, reports AFP.

Benchmark Brent North Sea crude oil for January delivery was selling for 33.30 dollars a barrel in London by Friday afternoon, compared with 32.34 dollars a week earlier.

In New York, January light sweet crude was quoted at 35.40 dollars a barrel, against 32.34 dollars the previous week.

Prices rose in response to a "combination of continued cold weather in the United States and the increased tension in the Middle East," Dreasner Kleinwort Benson analyst Paul Spedding said.

Temperatures are forecast to fall in the next six to 10 days in parts of the United States, notably in the northeast, by the US National Weather Service, which market players fear could drain fragile stocks.

Prices were also supported by the increased, but slim, prospect that oil producing nations might use oil as a political tool in support of the Palestinians in the Middle East conflict.

Rubber: Stretched. Rubber bounced back this week in response to bad weather in Asia

that could affect supplies, analysts said.

The London rubber index for October delivery rose to 53.25 pence per kilo from 51.50 pence the previous week.

In Kuala Lumpur, the RSS1 index climbed to 2.545 ringgit from 2.47 ringgit per kilo last week.

Prices rose despite more sales from the International Rubber Organisation that have been "continually absorbed by the market because of the bad weather in south Thailand... and in north Malaysia," Singapore trader Martin Hampson said.

Coffee: Ground coffee prices plunged to levels not seen in more than 30 years amid expectations of a bumper harvest in Vietnam, a leading producer of Robusta quality coffee.

The market remains depressed because producer nations have yet to put in place a plan to rein in supply worldwide.

On LIFFE, Robusta quality for January delivery was selling for 649 dollars per tonne from 666 dollars a week earlier.

In New York, the price of Arabica for March delivery slumped to 72.75 cents a pound, from 74.10 cents last week.

Sugar: Coated. Sugar prices advanced to their highest in four weeks in New York on expectations of an increase in

demand from Russia.

On the London market, May contracts rose to 242.9 dollars a tonne from 240 dollars last week.

In New York, a pound of white sugar (for May delivery) climbed to 9.35 cents from 9.06 cents the previous week.

Prices rose ahead of the Russian auction of import licences for up to 3.65 million tonnes of unrefined sugar on Monday.

Cotton: Strong. Cotton prices ended the week flat, despite ticking up in the middle of the week thanks to a poor weather forecast for number one US producer region Texas.

On the NYCE in New York the March contract rose as high as 68.80 cents to from 68.45 cents last week, before closing on Thursday at 68.08 cents. Cotton prices have now advanced some 11 per cent in little more than a month.

The Cotton Outlook index of physical cotton prices, the average of the lowest world prices, pushed up to 65.25 cents from 63.80 cents a pound.

Wool: Soft. Australian wool prices, which set the tone for the market, fell slightly this week, but the effect was neutralised, for international buyers at least, by a stronger Australian dollar.

The Eastern index ended the week at 715 cents per kilo from 721 cents per kilo last week.

Emirates to be key sponsor of Dubai Shopping Festival 2001

Emirates, the international airline of the UAE, is once again supporting as a key sponsor, the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF), a month-long festival of shopping and entertainment taking place in March 2001 which will be themed One World, One Family, One Festival, says a press release.

Ghaith Al Ghaith, the airline's Commercial Operations Director, said: "The Dubai Shopping Festival is now established as a major event, not only on Dubai's calendar but also internationally. We have been a major supporter of the DSF from the beginning, and we will play our part once again to ensure that the Shopping Festival in 2001 is better than ever."

At a press conference to announce the 14 key sponsors for next year's event, Hussain Ali Loothi, Chief Executive Officer of DSF 2001, said that this year's event had attracted 2.5 million visitors, an increase over the previous year of four per cent overall and 28 per cent from Europe. He added that total sales during DSF 2000 reached US\$1.1 billion (Dh 4.31 billion).

In addition to the provision to the organisers of tickets to the value of Dh 1 million, Emirates will promote the event through Emirates offices across the network with promotional material and advertising. Its Destination and Leisure Management Division will offer special packages, details of which will be announced shortly. Competitions for passengers to win major prizes are also planned.

In one of the most visible worldwide promotions of the event, Emirates will feature decals of the DSF logo on every aircraft. The colourful decal will be placed near the rear of the aircraft fuselage so that it can be clearly seen by passengers boarding by air bridges and steps. In addition, DSF will feature in a special video on the airline's in flight entertainment system.



Jatindra Lal Tripura, Chairman of Khagrachhari Hill District Council, inaugurates a showroom of Sony-Rangs at Khagrachhari recently. - Sony-Rangs photo

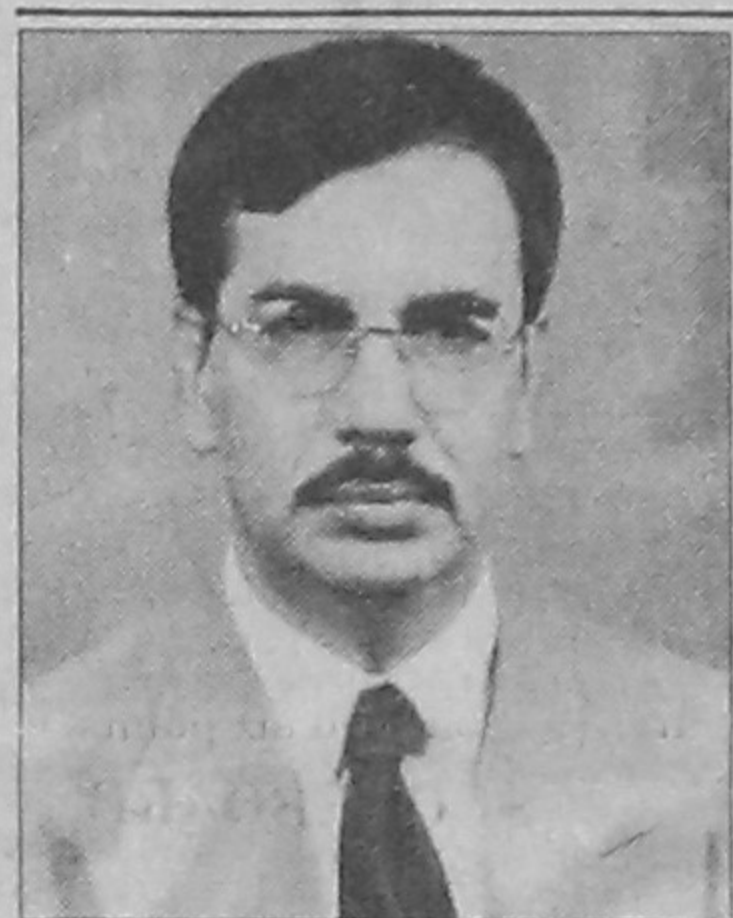
BIFT gives students certificates, jobs

Star Business Report

The BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology (BIFT) set a unique example when it awarded certificates to its first batch of students along with appointment letters.

Minister for Science and Technology Mohammad Noor Uddin Khan handed over the certificates and appointment letters to the students at the inaugural ceremony of the BIFT at its auditorium in Uttara in the city.

Chairman of the University



President

New office-bearers

of Hide & Skin Merchants Assoc

S M Azizur Rahman has been elected President of Bangladesh Hide and Skin Merchants Association, says a press release.

The Election for the period of 2001-2002 was held recently.

The other newly elected office-bearers are Mohammed Aftab - Vice President, Faiyaz Rahman - Vice President, Md Delwar Hossain - General Secretary, Md Saber - Joint General Secretary and Mahabubur Rahman - Treasurer.

Besides, Amunur Rahman, Aven Uddin, Abu Taber, Md Samsul Badir, Ahmmed Hossain, Abdul Matin, MA Rahman Taniun, Md Mala, Shamim Al Masud (Motaleb) were elected executive members.

Sony-Rangs opens showroom at Khagrachhari

Rangs Electronics Limited, a leading manufacturer of electronic products in the country and the sole distributor of world famous Sony Colour TV and other Sony products, opened a showroom at Khagrachhari recently, says a press release.

The showroom was inaugurated by Jatindra Lal Tripura, Chairman of Khagrachhari Hill District Council as the chief guest. Md Ashrafur Maqbul, Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachhari Hill District, was present as the special guest.

Upendra Lal Chakma, a senior politician, Pourasava Chairman M Chowdhury, District Council Members M Zahirul Alam and Binode Bihari Chakma, educationist Nabin Kumar Tripura, engineer Md Shahjahan, local journalists and many other elites of Khagrachhari and senior officers and members of staff of Rangs Electronics were also present.

In his inaugural speech, Jatindra Lal Tripura said as a result of the Peace Accord a congenial atmosphere for the growth of trade and industry is prevailing in the entire district. He expressed hope that following the example of Sony-Rangs, other companies would also come forward and open their shops at Khagrachhari and make their contribution to the development of the Khagrachhari Hill District.

Sunday Business Solutions

Do you have business problems? Write to us at:

Sunday Business Solutions
The Daily Star, 19, Kawan Bazar, Dhaka, Bangladesh, email: dstar@bangla.net

Sarwar Ahmed, MBA (sarwar@asia.com) hosts this column. He heads a business sector of a multinational company in Bangladesh.

The Daily Star has introduced a new business solution column which appears on Sundays. While running your business, you come across problems and wish someone would help. This column will provide you with insights to solve your problems.

PRODUCT FLOP
Q: We have introduced a new product in the market. After about six months of sales, the product doesn't seem to be selling well anymore. What can be the problem? Perplexed

A: There can be several answers to this perplexing problem. First of all, do you know who your customers are? How does your product fit in their lives? At the end of the day, customers - the real buyers, not the retailers - decide if you will survive in the market.

A product launch can be very deceptive. The first couple of months, a new product fills the distribution pipeline and people are clapping with joy with the great sales. Then the product begins to falter - just like your situation. What has happened? Real demand with the customer is not forthcoming. All we have been doing is filling up the pipeline - the product is not really moving to the customers.

What you need to immediately check is your product in the distribution channel - is it stuck there? If it is, your product is not positioned in the mind of your customer. They are not buying.

Next is your marketing mix - the famous 4 Ps - Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Any marketing textbook is based on these 4 Ps. And quite obviously this column cannot replace a textbook!

You need to ask some basic questions. What market segment is your product fulfilling a need? A simple segmentation is based on income. Which income bracket is your product targeted at? The rich, middle class or the lower income strata? Each segment needs to be addressed in a different way.

A product is just not the physical product per se. The services you provide with the product are perceived by the customer as part of it. Even a simple thing like product presentation - packaging, label design and contents build the product image.

Your product's price has to be consistent with the product image. If you are first in the market with a new product, you will certainly have a big advantage of fixing your price. However, if you are coming in with a product that is similar to ones in the market, you will need to be competitive.

The purpose of promotion is to create a positive product image in the mind of the customer. How, where and when you advertise, if you will use sales people, are some areas you need to look into.

Place is your outlets. Questions relate to the distribution channels, their tiers, commission, terms of sales. Within the purview, how do you source your product? If you manufacture, what about raw materials, production?

There has to be a consistency in the all the 4 Ps. Imagine selling a Rolex watch by a 'ferry-wallah' for Tk.200. Sounds absurd, doesn't it? A quality, high end Rolex (product) is meant for the higher income group (segment). Your price expectation will not be less than Tk.2000 - at least (price)! And you will not expect this to be advertised in a cheap non-descript magazine or paper (promotion). Where do you expect the watch to be sold? One of the up end shops (place) in an reputed shopping area. Do you see the total picture? How does your product fit in the big picture? I've given you some leads - make your product a success!

Weekly ReadyCash Prize Winners

The latest draw of the fortunate prize winners was held Thursday at Wonder Optics centre, New Elephant Road. Managing Director of Wonder Optics, M Akram Hossain, announced names of the lucky prize winners.

Prizes for new card holders

Prizes	Winners	Card No
Lunch/Dinner for two at Park Town Cuisine	Dr Nazim Ahmed	6157
Hertz Rent-a-Car	SM Wahidul Islam	6179
Lunch/Dinner for two at GREATWALL Restaurant	RI Siddiqui	6204
Lunch for Two at Meal in the Box fast food centre	Sk Ataur Rahman	6173

New ReadyCash cardholders will become eligible for prizes as soon as they make their first transaction. The winners are requested to collect their prizes from the Public Relations Manager of ReadyCash within 30 days of publishing the winners list by producing their ReadyCash card transaction vouchers. For details, one may contact at 8125294-7. ReadyCash encourages its cardholders to read The Daily Star every Sunday for new listings of prize winners.



Picture shows (from left) Nuruzzaman Khan, General Manager, Admin & Logistics, Shahadat Ahmed, Director, Finance and IT, Ashfaq Rahman, Acting Managing Director, and Shahid Ahmed, National Sales Manager of Social Marketing Company at the Annual Sales Conference of the company held at a city hotel recently. - SMC photo