

BTTB mobile phones in 10 months likely

BSS, Dhaka

The introduction of mobile phones by Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) may take ten more months, the period required to complete the formalities and setting up of necessary infrastructure.

The government has already rescheduled the tender opening date to March 15 from February 28, one official of BTTB said. The decision to delay in opening tender documents was decided at a pre-bidding meeting last month.

The bidders might offer more facilities to the BTTB if they were given more time, he said.

The officials said the price of the mobile connection could not be ascertained unless the bids are finalised to know the real structural and other costs involved in introducing mobile connection.

The government is planning to introduce a four-lakh mobile phones service for the capital and other parts of the country simultaneously, BTTB officials said yesterday.

"The government wants to introduce mobile phones as fast as possible but it would take some more time which cannot be avoided," the officials said.

He said the board has floated international tender for selecting the company which will supply, install, test and commission the required equipment and accessories to introduce the mobile phone service.

The official said so far seven international and local companies bought the tender papers from BTTB.

With the introduction of the BTTB's mobile phone, 6,85,000 people will come under mobile communications network. The present number of users is 285,000. There will be no formal dealers for the distribution of the mobile phones. The people will have to apply in the same process as for the landline of BTTB.

The service will be the country's fourth GSMC (Global Standard for Mobile Communication) operation.



With just a day more to go for Eid-ul-Azha, commonly called the Qurbani Eid, people have not forgotten to buy wooden chopping boards to sort the meat. These boards, seen in the picture, are being sold at prices ranging between Tk 30 to 140 each, at a market in Mohammadpur.

Eid-ul-Azha tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1 ing for village homes to celebrate the Eid with their near and dear ones.

To catch up with the rush of homebound people, Bangladesh Railway and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) have pressed special trains and launches into service.

But still all transports leaving the city are seen overloaded. Buses and launches are charging much higher than normal fares.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have given separate messages greeting the people on the occasion.

In his message, the President said the unique example of sacrifice set by Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim (RA) will always inspire Muslims to sacrifice one's interest for the sake of others.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the people to share the joy of Eid-ul-Azha with each other. The Eid teaches us the spirit of sacrifice, which should help us build the nation with tolerance and self-control, she said.

The trouble-torn world will become an abode of peace for all if a portion of the wealth of the rich is spent for the poor and achievements are shared, she said.

The Prime Minister also called upon the people to be more careful to protect the environment by removing pollutants during the Eid.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia also greeted the people on the occasion of the Eid.

BSS adds: The main jamaat of Eid-ul-Azha will be held at the National Eidgah Maidan in the city. Separate arrangement has been made for the women to say Eid prayers.

Four Eid jamaats will be held at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at 7 am, 8 am, 9 am and 9.45 am. Other main Eid jamaats will be held at Dhaka University Mosque at 8 am and 9 am. The Eid Jamaat at the BUET mosque will take place at 8.15 am.

In the city, Eid jamaat will also be held at Gulshan Central Mosque and Eidgah at 7.30 am, at Abujar Gilfere College field at 8 am, SOS Shishu Palli Jama Mosque at 7.45 am and at Fakirbari Jama Mosque at 8.30 am.

The main Eid jamaat in Chittagong will be held at AM Aziz Stadium at 7.45 am. In case of inclement weather, the main Eid jamaat will be held at the Anderkuil Shahi Jama Masjid.

The places for Eid jamaat at 8 am in the port city include Parade Maidan, Port Stadium, Polo Ground, Shah Amanat (RA) Mosque, Dampara Police Line Mosque, Nasirabad Housing Society Maidan, Sugandha Jummah Masjid, Chaitakhalai Eidgah Maidan, Shershah Colony Maidan, Haji Saleh High School Maidan, Chittagong University Mosque, Dewanbazar C and B Colony Mosque, Baitush Sharf Jummah Mosque, Gousul Azam Jilani (RA) Mosque Maidan and Mehediabag (CDA) Colony Jummah Mosque.

Ershad's bail

FROM PAGE 1 The Dhaka Central Jail and chanted slogans to welcome their leader. Some JP leaders took the High Court bail order to the District Magistrate at 1:30pm to process Ershad's release. Before the release process could be completed, the Supreme Court issued the stay order.

Jail sources said, as frustrated JP workers started leaving the area at 3:00pm, Ershad asked jail employees why there was no more slogans outside. They informed Ershad that he was not being released and that was why his supporters were leaving.

Ershad was sentenced to five years in jail along with a fine of Tk 5.5 crore, or six months more in prison on failing to pay. Since he has completed three months in jail from November 23, he attempted to get released by paying half of the fine.

On March 1, after the JP had paid a fine of Tk 2.75 crore for Ershad's release, the District Magistrate issued a one-month detention on Ershad. It followed a move by Ershad's lawyers to obtain a bail.

Norway's special envoy, Erik Solheim, held talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga in a bid to push Sri Lanka's fragile peace process, bogged down over a ceasefire, diplomatic sources said Monday.

Solheim who arrived in Colombo on Sunday met with Kumaratunga overnight and held talks with the island's main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe Monday. He would return to Norway on Tuesday, the sources said.

"He is trying to bridge the differences between the two sides to clear the way for an early meeting," a diplomatic source here said amid reports that separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were insisting on a truce before talks.

The Colombo government had said that a ceasefire could be discussed at talks but there was no question of a truce or a de-escalation of the military conflict before that.

Solheim's latest mission to Colombo, follows Britain's recent ban on the LTTE.

The Tigers had earlier warned they would pull out of talks if Britain proscribed them under new anti-terrorism laws that went into effect from February 19.

The LTTE in a statement following the ban said that although there were now constraints imposed on them they were committed to remaining in the peace process and were supportive of Norway's efforts.

Nevertheless, Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran had reportedly told his supporters that they should spare no expense to have the ban lifted in Britain where they maintain their "international secretariat."

Kumaratunga late last month raised hopes of early negotiations between her government and the LTTE saying there could be talks within about two months.

Indian press takes up Mahmud Ali's issue

BSS, Kolkata

Leading Indian newspapers and current affairs websites have joined their counterparts in Bangladesh in exposing B3C's Bengali Service chief Syed Mahmud Ali's role in the 1975 coup.

The most detailed exposure appeared in India Today's online site. This is the site that had first scooped the detailed findings of the Haqoodur Rehman Commission of Pakistan. They also followed up their initial expose by taking on board the BBC World Service's reaction, but described the reaction as "weak and feeble."

The online paper detailed Ali's career as a military officer and beaped up its report by interviewing some BBC Bengali staffers in London.

The reports in this website, the most popular news website in India, saw "enough justification" behind Bangladesh government's demand to the BBC to remove Ali so that he could face investigations in view of his confessions during an interview published in the "Janakantha."

Both Kolkata's Ananda Bazar Patrika, India's largest single-edition newspaper and the multi-edition Times of India ran detailed stories on Ali. They quoted Bangladesh Foreign Ministry sources as saying the government was dead serious about pursuing the demand to have Ali sacked and referred extensively to the interview published in the Janakantha.

5 get 15 yrs RI for snatching in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Five young men were sentenced to 14 years rigorous imprisonment and fined Tk one lakh each, in default to suffer one year more under Public Safety Act on Sunday.

They were sentenced for snatching money and gold ornaments worth Tk 1.75 lakh at gun point from fish trader Shaikh Habibur Rahman on Khulna-Saikhira road on the early morning of the July 24 last year.

The convicts are Khalid, Ripon, Hasan, Nasir and Ashik. They are professional muggers.

The Tribunal Judge Anisur Rahman Khan delivered judgement.

Norwegian envoy urges Chandrika to continue peace process

AFP, Colombo

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8 West Bengal Cong MPs defect to Trinamool

KOLKATA, Reuters

Eight state legislators from Congress party have defected to a regional ally of the federal government in West Bengal, adding to a string of national and local problems for the party.

The eight switched from India's largest opposition group on Sunday to the Trinamool Congress of Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, an ally of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Political analysts say this and other problems boded ill for Congress in forthcoming elections in West Bengal.

Trinamool Congress is the main challenger to the 24-year-old communist regime in West Bengal, where crucial legislative assembly elections are due in April.

"We are happy. Those who have left the Congress are the true anti-Left forces," said a spokesman of the Trinamool Congress, which itself broke away from Italian-born Sonia Gandhi's Congress party four years ago.

The latest blow to Congress comes after an opposition bid to oppose the government's sale of a state-owned aluminium company was roundly defeated in parliament last week, and the party's poor performance in state by-elections last month.

Congress has also been stumbling in its attempts to work out an electoral alliance in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, where legislative assembly elections are also due next month.

Media reports say the powerful regional party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), has offered just five of Tamil Nadu's 234 state electoral seats to Congress.

A meeting was being held in Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu, on Monday to sort out the seat-sharing issue.

The ruling party in Tamil Nadu, the regional Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, is allied with the BJP in the federal government.

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Trawler loot in Shitalakha: One arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Nginj

Police arrested a person on Sunday night in connection with the death of 16 sacrificial animals in the river Shitalakha.

The animals drowned in the river near Bandar thana in Narayanganj when armed miscreants sank a trawler carrying the cattle and some traders from the town's Jimkhana cattle market in the early hours of Saturday.

The arrested person is Khalid Hasan, son of Manjur Hasan of the town's Paikpara area.

Meanwhile, police shut down the Jimkhana cattle market as it was declared illegal by the Narayanganj Pourashava.

Briton threatens hunger strike in Kolkata jail

AFP, Kolkata

Peter Bleach, a Briton serving a life sentence in India for gun-running, has threatened to go on hunger strike if Britain fails to secure his release within two weeks.

In a written statement seen here Monday, Bleach said he had been forced into taking such a drastic step by the failure of the British authorities to get him freed -- despite appeals from British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

"If the British authorities fail to secure my release on remission in accordance with Cook's request within two weeks, I shall observe an indefinite hunger strike," he said.

Bleach is at present in jail in the West Bengal capital, Kolkata, and does not become eligible for release for at least 14 years.

He was arrested in December 1995 with four Russian pilots and a Latvian pilot over an illegal arms drop in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. They all received life sentences.

The Russians and the Latvian were released in July after authorities in Moscow lobbied the Indian government on their behalf.

While the Russians had been freed, Bleach said he had remained in prison "for no reason other than the fact that I am a British citizen."

Cook had written to his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh in December, asking that Bleach be accorded the same treatment as the others convicted with him.

Over 3000 cases

FROM PAGE 12 Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) gathered the information through the registrar of the Supreme Court aiming at fighting on the defence side of the distressed.

She said of around 3,500 cases 1,348, including some 228 cases of 1993, 199 of 1994, 189 of 1995 and 132 of 1996, are awaiting hearing.

BSEHR also requested the government to appoint lawyers for the defence so that the people can get justice and will not be languishing in jail year after year.

According to the report, 116,671 cases were under trial at the High Court as of October 31, 2000.

Of them, criminal cases are 48,965, writ cases 17,739, civil 48,908 and ancient civil cases 1,059.

Moreover, 4,609 cases were pending with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court for appeal hearings, including 580 criminal cases.

"There is no lawyer for all these appeal cases against the jailed accused," the report said.

Sky will clear

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Sylhet and Khulna divisions and one or two places in Chittagong and Barisal divisions.

Rain/thundershower may increase during the 48 hours beginning at 6 p.m. today, the forecast said.

Truck drivers'

FROM PAGE 1

involved in it. As Mizan and some of his supporters went to Begunbari area to catch Momy and Masum, he was taken to an isolated place on a plea.

Several supporters of Mizan later went to the Tejgaon police station at about 10 pm on Sunday to file a case. Police filed a case three hours later, Mizan's supporters said.

Some local people saw Mizan's body lying near the Begunbari lake at about 7:30 am yesterday. Police recovered the body at about 9:30 am yesterday.

Mizan left behind his two wives, two daughters Shumi and Rumi and one son Babu.

A case was filed with Tejgaon police station but police could not arrest any one in connection with the killing.

AL move

FROM PAGE 12

day as the anniversary of the fall of Khaleda government in 1996. On the following day, the prime minister will address another meeting at the historic Osmani Udyan while inaugurating a monument being built at the site where the Pakistani occupation army had surrendered to an Indo-Bangladesh joint command on December 16, 1971.

Use of force

FROM PAGE 1

of the three foreigners were jeopardised due to 'newspaper reports' about payment of ransom. The abductors are now demanding 'a ransom of Tk one crore because they believed I received the ransom.'

The hostages are Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hulgard of Denmark and Tim Selby of Britain.

Kalparanjan Chakma had earlier said that the abductors had agreed to free the hostages if they were exempted from legal action in this regard.

Sources said that in view of the changed situation, the authorities are now drawing a new strategy. Late night strategy meetings chaired by the minister were held at Rangamati Circuit House yesterday and the day before.

"All avenues were explored to renew contact with the abductors," one source pointed out.

Karwan Bazaar

FROM PAGE 12

other cattle markets in the city as well. As a result, the roads near or through the cattle markets of Naya Bazaar, Hazaribagh, Azimpur, Banani and other places were similarly covered with faeces and hay.

The lack of civic amenities for cattle traders, most of whom are small traders or farmers from villages, was also felt. The vendors have made sleeping arrangements in the adjacent places on their own, as the lessees did not arrange anything for them.

The DCC officially leased out only the northeastern part of WASA Bhaban for the cattle market at Karwan Bazaar. There is, however, no open space other than roads used by trucks and other vehicles for transporting essential goods for the biggest kitchen market in the country.

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War of words to shroud hidden agenda?

FROM PAGE 12

can bring about an end to the deadlock by accepting the other's offer, they say.

The opposition leader could easily spell out the time of her choice for the elections and thus demand for the government's resignation within that period. It is true that a consensus on early election should follow the resignation of the government since it's the prerogative of the party in power to announce an early election.

Conversely, the PM could also say that she was ready to resign and thus force the opposition to join an early election. Or, the PM could also offer a dialogue to decide on early polls.

But why are the two sides not narrowing down the gap while they are speaking for the same? What prompted Hasina to come up with the offer for early election? And, what made Khaleda side step the issue? These are the crucial questions pricking the public mind.

According to AL sources, Hasina believes that Khaleda is not ready for an early election or an election volunteered by the ruling party through peaceful hand-over of power. By rejecting the PM's offer, the opposition leader has once again proved that she prefers an election only after winning her battle to topple the government, the sources argued.

Likewise, many in the BNP are learnt to be of the opinion that success in the anti-government agitation would help the party win the election and that's why, it is stressing more on a forced resignation of the Hasina government in the face of a mass movement.

Besides, AL leaders claim to be better prepared for the next general election than the BNP and its partners are. The BNP-led opposition alliance is yet to settle the dispute over sharing of seats in the election. By offering an early election, the AL is trying to take this advantage.

With the combined opposition planning to give an ultimatum to the government to stand down and the ruling party preparing to frustrate the opposition scheme, the politics over election is set to witness a significant development later this month. Both parties are expected to come up with major disclosures as regards the election, of course, in line with their respective hidden agendas when they will hold big public rallies in the capital -- BNP on March 21 and AL on March 30.

Stampede kills 35 at Mina

FROM PAGE 1

of the Muslim faithful occurred at around 8:00 am local time. A blaze at a Mina tent camp for pilgrims in 1997 cost 343 lives.

Muslims from 160 countries, to cries of "Allah Akhbar" hurled stones at the pillars yesterday as Saudi authorities announced a revised figure of 1.8 million pilgrims for this year's Hajj.

King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah, in a message carried by the official Saudi news agency SPA before news of the tragedy emerged, congratulated the pilgrims and wished travellers from abroad a safe return to their countries.

As part of measures to avoid a crush, elderly pilgrims had ahead Sunday night on the stoning ritual. Yesterday each group of 200,000 was allowed one hour to pass through the area.

The site at Mina in present-day western Saudi Arabia is where Ibrahim, his wife and their son Ismail are said to have thrown seven stones each at the devil when he appeared before them.

After Sunday's climax to the pilgrimage at Mount Arafat, where 1.8 billion Muslims prayed for forgiveness at the site of Mohammad's last sermon 14 centuries ago, the pilgrims moved to Muzdalifah to gather stones unloaded there by trucks.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina apart, as many as nine other ministers are now in Saudi Arabia on account of the annual pilgrimage. They all would join the designated groups for the countryside tour programme.

When contacted, leaders of Bangladesh Launch Malik Samity denied that the vessels were plying overloaded.

One of them, G M Sarwar, claimed, "There is no record that any launch accident occurred due to overloading. In fact, the more passengers a vessel carries, the more it is balanced."

His colleague Monir Chowdhury said, "The authorities do not go for any supervision. Rather, we are interested in preventing overloading in each vessel costs about Tk one crore. So we do not want to take risk by not following safety rules."

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