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Expats remit
Tk 4.70 crore
in April

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladeshis living abroad sent over Tk 4.70 crore as remittances through post office last month.

The money sent by them has already been delivered to their respective recipients all over the country.

The remitters sent Tk 55.72 crore through post office during the last 10 months of the fiscal till April.

**BJMC owes
Tk 1 crore to
Faridpur jute
growers, traders**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) owes about one crore taka to jute growers and small jute traders of the district. As a result, they have been facing acute financial crisis.

Some jute traders told this correspondent that they had invested their entire capital in purchasing jute and sold it to Ambikapur BIMC Jute Purchasing Centre on credit last year.

They now say that if their outstanding bills are not cleared by June, they will not be able to supply jute to the centre anymore. As a result this will depress the local jute market.

In this context, the district jute traders association held a meeting recently and resolved that they would not supply jute to BJMC centre at Ambikapur unless their dues are cleared of June 2001.

**FBCCI meet with
Omani business
team postponed**

Due to unavoidable circumstances, the Tuesday meeting between the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Omani business delegation at FBCCI has been postponed, says a press release.

The new date of the said meeting will be intimated in due course.

**Deutsche Telekom,
France's Vivendi
struggle for
Polish operator**

AFP, Warsaw

Deutsche Telekom moved Friday to take control of Poland's leading mobile operator and put an end to a pitched battle with France's Vivendi Universal.

The management of the Polish energy and telecommunications conglomerate Elektrownia indicated late Friday it is interested in the 400-million-dollar (451-million-euro) offer from Deutsche Telekom, and will begin negotiations, according to the financial web site Expander.pl.

Elektrownia officials declined to immediately comment, saying they would later issue a statement to the media.

The deal would shift Elektrownia's fixed-line and Internet assets to PTC, the operator of the Era GSM network, according to information released by Elektrownia.

With Elektrownia's agreement as a shareholder, PTC would then issue new shares in itself to give Deutsche Telekom an extra 3.45 per cent stake and take Deutsche Telekom's 49 per cent PTC holding to a majority.

The offer is the latest chapter in a long-running struggle between Deutsche Telekom and France's Vivendi Universal for control of Elektrownia's telecommunications assets, including the PTC company.

Vivendi bought a 49-per cent stake in the Elektrownia subsidiary Elektrownia Telekom for 1.2 billion dollars in 1999. Elektrownia Telekom holds the controlling interest in PTC.

Elektrownia and Vivendi also planned extensive cooperation in fixed-line operations, but Elektrownia's management began talks to sell out to Deutsche Telekom last year.

One expert derided Deutsche Telekom's eleventh-hour scheme as a desperate, last chance effort by Elektrownia's management to save themselves before a shareholders meeting Monday, when Vivendi is hoping to unseat them and restructure the company.

The offer is not binding on Deutsche Telekom until its supervisory board approves it on May 28.

Star BUSINESS

DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 13, 2001



Gonophone mulls over Internet services thru' TV cables

Launching in Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur expected by Dec

SHAHRIAR KARIM

Gonophone Bangladesh Ltd., an Internet service provider (ISP) which started its operations only five months back and shook the country with innovative ideas, now plans to create yet another commotion with new idea to provide Internet connections in major cities via television cables.

Gonophone Bangladesh is planning to provide this unique service at Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur in the city by December this year.

"We already had talks with some of the leading TV cable operators in the city. If everything goes in line with our plan, then we will be able to hook up some 7,000 cable TV subscribers at these two cities to Internet by end of 2001," Delwar H Khan, Managing Director of Gonophone Bangladesh Ltd., told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview on Thursday.

Now a cable TV operator is carrying out a market research in these areas on behalf of Gonophone. "We will launch our project after completion of the research," Khan said adding that Gonophone has to upgrade the TV cable system to make it a unique one.

The ISP is to bring the cable TV subscribers of the country's major cities under Internet network. "We from Gonophone will provide all sorts of infrastructure supports and the project will be run by the cable TV operators," Khan said.

While talking about his vision and future plans, Khan said he wants to see his company as the largest communication infra-



DH Khan, Gonophone MD

structure provider in the country. "We started Gonophone as an ISP, but we won't confine ourselves solely to this for long. Our main objective is to provide all sorts of infrastructure supports to the ISPs."

He also said his company will not merely work as an ISP through which people get hooked up to the Internet world and browse. "We want to furnish our ISP in such a way that will enable people to get almost everything once they hook up, and won't need to go to anywhere else for services."

Elaborating, he said in the future there will be people who would receive online tuition from this network, especially on O and A level.

There are many other things in Khan's mind, which he wants to introduce in the future but wouldn't disclose them for business reasons. Mentioning one of his future plans, he said he is thinking of developing a programme where people will be able to virtually talk while connecting to Gonophone's Internet services.

Khan also said that his company would focus on landline telephony in the days to come. "Gonophone has plans to set up telephone exchange in the future and we have already talked with financial institutions for its funding. But it will take some time."

Khan also wants to expand his work to the education sector with a 'missionary zeal'. "Utilising IT as an enabling force, I want to expand education in the country and bring in quality western basic education at an affordable cost for our talented young people who

can't afford to have it abroad," Khan said.

"Probably my next project will be a distant learning centre, where people will sit down in a virtual classroom and have lessons from professors of reputed western universities and will be able to communicate."

"Once I succeed in putting this company on a solid plane, I will leave this to my other colleagues and wholly concentrate on the education sector," the Gonophone MD said.

Khan spent 23 years from 1975 to 1998, which he terms best part of his career, in the pharmaceutical industry and literally turned a local pharmaceutical firm into a leading one in the country.

A Chemistry graduate from the University of Dhaka, Khan started his career as a salesman at a US-based company in 1967. After liberation, he joined the state-owned Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) and worked there for a few years. Then he joined Hoechst, a multinational company, in 1975 and worked with it till mid-1980. In July 1980, Khan joined Beximco Pharmaceuticals as its marketing manager and became the executive director in 1989. Later in 1994, he was made the managing director of the company. After quitting it in 1998, Khan joined BD Online and worked there for about two years. In December 2000, he started his own company Gonophone.

First phase of Lafarge Cement project ends

The first phase of the Lafarge Surma Cement project has recently been concluded with completion of the site development activities at Chhatak, says a press release.

Manzurul Islam, Chairman of Bengal Development Corporation (BDC), formally handed over the work completion documents to Michel Folliet, Managing Director of Lafarge Surma Cement, at a simple ceremony at a city hotel on Wednesday.

BDC, a sister concern of Islam Group, engaged more than 2000 labourers and conducted 10 million cubic feet of sand-filling at a cost of over Tk 30 crore.

The company applied geotechnics to raise the elevation of the site above the highest flood level.

With completion of the first phase of the project, Lafarge will now go into the second phase of physical construction of the \$240 million project after monsoon.

During the monsoon, the turnkey contractors will mobilise equipment to the site.

Lafarge, the largest building material company of the world, is setting up a 1.2-million-tonne capacity integrated cement plant at Chhatak. This cross-border project will bring raw materials from Lafarge's own quarry in Meghalaya through a 17-km belt conveyor.

South Africa, Thailand sign trade deal

AFP, Pretoria

South Africa and Thailand have signed a trade agreement aimed at giving the two countries a foothold in Southeast Asia and Africa respectively, a South African ministerial spokesman said Friday.

The agreement, signed in Pretoria by the South African and Thai trade ministers Alec Erwin and Adisai Bodharamik, will also see closer co-operation in the auto manufacturing and tourism sectors, Edwin Smith said.

"There are great similarities between the two countries. Thailand sees South Africa as a gateway to the rest of Africa and we see Thailand in the same light in respect of Southeast Asia," he told AFP.

Nickel prices perked up to 7,030 dollars a tonne from 6,640 dollars the previous week, because of thin Russian supply and a lack of stainless steel scrap for mills.

"Falling interest rates and rising short-term lease rates have also combined to make hedging unattractive," Williamson added. "There has been a reasonable physical demand as well."

Base Metals: Cropper Linger

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duration of the global slowdown

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ducers.

"Everyone is expecting slower

global growth, it's just a question

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and how deep we go," said Alan

Williamson at HSBC.

Silver: Silver. Silver prices

moved up gently in gold's wake

before easing back as the weekend

approached.

An ounce of the metal was

fixed at 269.05 dollars on Friday

afternoon, from 266.60 dollars

the previous week, but analysts said the market was dead.

"The funds have basically just

got out of the market," said

HSBC's Williamson.

Palladium and Platinum:

Limo. Platinum group metals

(PGMs) moved lower in thin-trad-

ing, as dealers awaited a respected

annual report from the Johnson

Matthey group on prospects for

platinum and palladium.

By Friday, platinum was selling

for 606 dollars an ounce on the

London Platinum and Palladium

Market (LPPM), from 622 dollars

the previous week.

Palladium stood at 652 dollars

from 673 dollars a week before.

The Johnson Matthey report

was due out on Monday.

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