

Rate for local, NWD, ISD calls likely to be refixed

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications is likely to refix the rates for local, NWD and ISD calls soon.

According to the ministry sources, the revised rates would allow subscribers to make calls by nearly 30 per cent less than what they are at present for calls through Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) network.

It would also reduce call charges for cellular phone users who make calls to the BTTB fixed network, as NWD (Nation Wide Dialling) and ISD (International Subscribers Dialling) calls are trafficked through the BTTB network.

The ISD users would benefit most from the revised call rates, said one source.

The ministry has also proposed making the six-zone system, now applied for calculating NWD calls, into a three-zone one. The ISD call rate would be in line with those of other South Asian countries, the source said.

ISD and NWD call charges are calculated mainly on the basis of distance of the call destination. An NWD call charge is measured at seven to eight times that of a local call charge.

The source said the ministry has also proposed lowering the local call charge. The source also added, "We have proposed applying a time-based rate for local calls through digital metering."

The BTTB subscribers pay only Tk 1.75 per local call at present and enjoy unlimited time. But application of digital metering on local calls would ultimately compel subscribers to pay more because they have to pay accord

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Writ challenging PSA Govt accused of constitutional fraud

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The government committed a constitutional fraud by placing the Public Safety Act as a money bill before the parliament, Barrister Ishaq Ahmed said yesterday.

Resuming his arguments in the High Court yesterday for his client BNP MP M Mursheed Khan who filed a writ petition challenging PSA's validity, Barrister Ishaq said that the act is also ultra vires (beyond the power of) the constitution, curbing fundamental rights guaranteed by it.

Justice MA Aziz and Justice Shamsul Huda are hearing the writ petition since Monday. Over 100 such petitions have been filed since the controversial law denying bail was passed in February last.

In his submission, Barrister Ishaq said that the PSA has curbed inherent rights of the court like the power of revision through violating articles 114, 101 and 7 of the constitution. Quoting article 31 and 33, he said that the act also violates fundamental rights.

Referring to the President's statement giving permission for placing the bill on PSA because that 'involves expenditure of public money', Barrister Ishaq said that the home minister, while tabling the bill, had changed the President's wording to 'money bill'.

Barrister Ishaq further stated that there are also discrepancies between two copies of the bill - one faxed to him by the law ministry and the other brought to him by the law minister. Even the statement and counter-statement regarding the bill given by the Prime Minister and the President show the discrepancies.

The counsel also cited a rejoinder

sent to The Daily Star by the press secretary to the Prime Minister, maintaining that it was a money bill. Also the certificate issued by the Speaker after the bill was passed showed that it was a money bill.

All these amply show that it was a 'constitutional fraud' and 'colourable legislation', he said.

The counsel told the court further that the PSA is ex-facie (apparently) discriminatory as it overlaps the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The state in its affidavit-in-opposition gave no opinion on the matter, which means that the state has accepted the fact.

Citing the FIR of the case against his client, he said that Mursheed Khan had been charged under PSA for overturning a pan of 'halim' and looting Taka 45,000 from a Chittagong sweetmeat shop. "Any

responsible person with a conscience would understand that the FIR lacks the ingredients of serious crimes as stated in section 10 of the PSA, he added.

The counsel citing the affidavit-in-opposition submitted by the state attorneys against the writ petition of Mursheed Khan said that it failed to explain why the sub-inspector of Kulshi police station was suspended for filing one FIR under CrPC and later recording a second FIR under PSA.

He said it shows that the state attorneys are hiding something from the court. Besides, an assistant secretary cannot make any statement other than the SI in his affidavit, he pointed out.

The hearing was adjourned till Monday.

The counsel also cited a rejoinder

Alliance's countrywide demonstration May 23

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led opposition alliance will stage a countrywide demonstration on May 23 to press the demand for immediate resignation of the government.

The programme was taken at a meeting of the Central Liaison Committee at the Baridhara residence of a BNP leader with BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair.

It alleged that lakhs of tonnes of food kept as relief materials, food for works and test relief are being distributed among the ministers and leaders of AL and they are using those for their election purposes.

Referring to allotment of residen-

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Dhaka awaits Delhi's response to border talks offer

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh was awaiting the reply from India about the timing and venue of the forthcoming official level border talks between the two countries, a top foreign ministry official said yesterday.

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Source: Islamic Foundation



Local people try to salvage the crushed tempo hit by a truck in Fatullah yesterday. Two women (inset) were killed in the mishap while six were injured.

Devious payback deal

Bangladeshi workers in Brunei lead subhuman life

REAZ AHMAD

Several hundred Bangladeshi workers in Brunei Darussalam have been leading a subhuman life for months together due to an unfair payback deal imposed on them by a manpower recruiting agent.

According to some recent reports published in the Brunei press, having suffered for several months more than 300 deprived Bangladeshi workers ventilated their anger last month by throwing vases, breaking windows and air conditioning units at Seri Pertamas Manufacturer Sdn Bhd.

Low pay, crammed lodgings and insect-infested food were what drove over 300 Bangladeshi workers to go on rampage on April 12.

Out of a 220 US dollars a month pay-package, each of these poor workers is deprived of 100 US dollars, in other words almost 50 per cent of their monthly wage.

Acknowledging the pay deduction, management of the garment factory said that as per a deal struck with the Bangladeshi recruiting agent concerned, each of the Bangladeshi workers working for Seri

Pertamas are bound to pay the agent a substantial portion of their monthly salary.

Local press in Brunei reported that an inquiry by the Bangladesh High Commission revealed that the deduction was meant to pay the agent in Bangladesh, and that the workers themselves had signed a document accepting such transaction.

But when the Daily Star approached officials at the Ministry of Labour and Employment in Dhaka on Monday, they said that the country's mission in Brunei did not send any communiqué on such a disturbing development.

"We've received any message from our mission in Brunei. But if this had actually happened, I must call it a clear violation of manpower recruitment rules," said Sirajul Islam, secretary of the ministry.

He also asserted that as soon as the identity of the recruiting agent is revealed, the ministry would take drastic actions against it within three days.

Interestingly, if the press reports in Brunei are anything to go by, it seems that the Bangladesh mission

in Brunei has been well aware of the plights of the 300 workers for quite a long time. But no communication was made to the ministry concerned in Dhaka.

Despite frantic efforts to have his comments over telephone, Muhammad Mumtaz Hussain, Bangladesh's High Commissioner to Brunei Darussalam, could not be reached.

The Labour and Employment Ministry officials said they would try to get a report on the issue from the envoy very soon.

Meantime, the envoy was quoted by foreign media as saying that he had received complaints from the garment factory workers. He said the main complaints were about salary, food and living conditions in the factory. He claimed that he had visited the factory to inspect the lodgings and food of the workers there.

The high commissioner agreed that the living conditions and food provided by the factory were dreadful. He reportedly said that he had met the manager of the factory in March, and had expressed his con-

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Four murdered in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people including a housewife were murdered in separate incidents in the city yesterday and the day before.

Dilara Begum, 25, wife of one Yunus Ali was killed in crossfire between two rival groups at Comilla slum at Agargaon.

Dilara was shot in her left eye when she came out of her house to respond to the call of nature. Dilara died on the spot at about 5:00 am yesterday.

Police said two rival armed groups one led by Biplob and another by Hasan Mosharraf locked in a clash over supremacy in the area.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area as both groups were taking position to face each other afresh.

The groups also chased each other yesterday morning and traded several rounds of gunshots.

Police recovered the body and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Biplob was also injured in the gunfight. He was admitted to the DMCH under police custody.

A murder case was filed with Mohammadpur police in this connection.

In another incident, unidentified miscreants slaughtered a businessman at South Jatrabari in Demra yesterday.

The victim was identified as Nurun Nabi Ratan, 25 son of Saleh Ahmed and resident of South Jatrabari in Demra.

Police quoting family members said Ratan came out of his house along with some people at about 10:30 pm on Wednesday. But he did not return home at night.

An unidentified man came to Ratan's house yesterday and told his family members that Ratan was lying in front of the residence of Samsuddin on Electric Office Road.

They rushed to the spot and found Ratan lying in a pool of blood.

Police recovered the body at about 6:40 am and sent it to Mitford hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed with Demra police.

An employee of a video cassette shop was stabbed to death by unidentified terrorists at Mirbagh under Rammathan last night.

Hospital sources identified the dead as Swapon, 25.

A gang of about four stabbed him indiscriminately at about 8:15 pm, hospital sources said quoting local people.

Local people took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared him dead.

Mahbub Rahman Jewel was 'gunned down' by an armed man in front of the National School near Mirpur

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BCI slapped with Tk 4.73cr fine for tax evasion

Plea filed with appellate tribunal against the order

RAFIQ HASAN

The customs authorities fined a chemical factory Tk 4.73 crore in three separate Value Added Tax (VAT) evasion cases last year but the company has appealed to the Customs, Excise and VAT Appellate Tribunal against the order, sources concerned said.

The commissioner of customs, excise and VAT commissionerate, Dhaka (south), issued three separate orders imposing a total of Tk 4.73 crore fine on Bangladesh Chemical Industries at Nandalalpur, Pagla, Narayanganj in July last year.

The fine was imposed in three cases for evading Tk 1.88 crore VAT. The commissioner ordered the factory authorities to pay the government a total of Tk 5.61 crore including the evaded amount.

Officials of customs, excise and VAT, Narayanganj division, however told this correspondent that they

know nothing about the appeal to the tribunal. They have repeatedly reminded the factory authorities in writing to make the payment.

Their latest reminder was given about two weeks back. "We are now thinking about follow up actions to realise the money," said one official. These actions would include freezing of bank account and attaching property of the company, he added.

Manager of the factory Golam Rabbani denied that there was any VAT evasion case against it.

When this correspondent visited the factory and asked the manager about tax evasion, he was requested to contact the head office of Dowel Group of companies which owns the factory.

He also could not say whether customs officials had seized any document regarding payment of VAT.

An official of the factory who deals with customs

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Iranian minister, MPs feared killed as plane goes missing

Civil aviation authorities, IRNA yet to confirm

AFP, Tehran

An Iranian aircraft carrying Transport Minister Rahman Dadman, two deputy ministers and seven members of parliament crashed Thursday, killing all aboard, an interior ministry official told AFP.

Thirty-two people were believed to be aboard the Russian-made Yak-40, which disappeared from radar screens after announcing it would try to make an emergency landing in bad weather in the northern city of Sari.

The ministry official, who asked not to be named, said the wreckage had been found, although the carrier, Farz-e Qeshm airlines, told AFP it could not confirm the report.

State television quoted Golestan province governor Ali Asghar Ahmadi meanwhile as saying search-and-rescue teams were still fully mobilised in searching for the craft in the mountainous Abr area.

Meanwhile, Iran's civilian aviation authority said reports that a Yak-40 aircraft crashed, killing all people on board, were "baseless" and that the fate of the plane was still unknown, the official IRNA news agency reported.

"Up to now the fate of the airliner which went missing early Thursday remains undetermined," the civilian

authorities said, cited by IRNA, calling the reports "baseless."

The pilot of the Yak-40, heading from Tehran to Gorgan in Golestan, lost contact soon after radioing that he would try to land at Sari, 300 kilometres north of the capital, or turn back to Tehran, IRNA said earlier.

An official at Sari in Mazandaran said the plane disappeared off radar screens when it was 10 minutes away from the city.

Civil aviation authorities said the aircraft had left Tehran with 24 passengers and eight crew members.

The passengers included Dadman, who was to inaugurate a new airport at Gorgan, his two deputy ministers Mohammad-Jafar Bahrami and Hassan Dehghan, and seven members of parliament from Golestan.

Dadman, who was only appointed transport minister in a cabinet reshuffle in January, was a former head of Iran railways and an influential reformist politician close to President Mohammad Khatami.

Born in 1956 in the northwestern city of Ardebil, near the Caspian Sea, he was active in student politics before the 1979 Islamic revolution and took part in the take-

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16 killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar, India

Two civilians and 14 militants were killed in separate incidents Thursday in India's troubled Jammu and Kashmir region, defence officials said.

Two civilians were killed and one injured in a bomb explosion at Ganderbal, 35 kilometres north of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, a police spokesman said.

The explosion sparked tension in the area and senior police and civil officials rushed to the spot to placate the agitated villagers who had come out onto the streets.

In another incident, two militants were killed in an encounter with security forces near Shopian, 45 kilometres south of Srinagar.

Another militant, described by security forces as a Pakistani national, was killed in a shootout with the police's Special Operations Group near Nowgam, 10 kilometres

be in a serious condition, the spokesman added.

However, eyewitness accounts contradicted the police, who claimed the blast occurred when personnel of the National Rifles - an elite counter-insurgency unit - patrolling the area asked the three to open the lunchbox.

The explosion sparked tension in the area and senior police and civil officials rushed to the spot to placate the agitated villagers who