

## PM likely to open Jatrabari telephone exchange today

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The commissioning of 12,000-line digital exchange in the city's Jatrabari area will not cater to new telephone connection seekers.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the exchange tomorrow, which has been commissioned under Greater Dhaka Telecommunications Network Improvement Projects, Phase II.

"It is now unlikely that the connection seekers of greater Demra area will receive phones. And this is due to shortage of cables," said one source preferring anonymity.

The telephone seekers of Dhania, Jhilmili Residential Area, and Shanirakhra will also not get lines, he added.

He said the secondary cables of some areas would not be laid due to fund constraint of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB).

The source said the BTTB was expected to lay the primary cables in the areas well ahead of the inauguration.

Yet the new exchange would not be able to utilise its full capacity for long due to lack of primary cables, another source added.

Asked whether the full capacity of the exchange would remain unutilised for long, an official of the BTTB said the problem is as to vastness of the area. Moreover, the infrastructure related to civic amenities is yet to develop in the area.

The official said the BTTB has a plan to complete the cable-laying work by the end of June this year.

There are more than 40,000 connection seekers in the areas, while the registered ones are more than 15,000, sources said.

The sources said about 200 analogue telephones of Jatrabari-Sayedabad area now under Gulistan Central Exchange would go digital.

According to a plan by the BTTB, 2,000 analogue telephones in total will be made digital after the commissioning of the exchange.

Ericsson of Sweden has installed the exchange, while Mitsubishi Corporation of Japan has supplied the switching equipment.

The project was supposed to be completed last year, even now the exchange is being inaugurated without adequate cable facilities.

There are about 9.5 lakh telephone subscribers in the country, of which BTTB provided 6.37 lakh and the rest by four private mobile phone operators.



Blangladesh Chhatra Federation (BCF) paraded the city streets yesterday demanding government action against three Beximco firms involved in the textbook scam.

## Shell, Unocal want overdue gas bills

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Other Petrobangla defaulters include the Japan-dominated multinational joint venture fertiliser factory Kafco. Though Kafco gets heavily subsidised gas, its outstanding dues with Petrobangla once soared to over Tk 80 crores, before coming down to Tk 30 crores at present.

"In real value of gas, we should now get at least Tk 50 crores," said a source. Kafco sells its fertiliser to the international market at global rate and it never gives Bangladesh any discount or subsidy when it sells fertiliser to the government.

In recent years, purchase of Kafco fertiliser by Bangladesh has increased. Gas is the main raw material for the fertiliser production.

Other gas bill defaulters include Fenchuganj Fertiliser factory, with arrears of Tk 15 crores, and a handful of industrial consumers. In many cases, these industries, which illegally consume more gas with the

connivance of a section of unscrupulous employees of Titas, Bakhrabad and other Petrobangla affiliates than they pay for, have obtained court injunction against disconnecting their gas lines.

Meanwhile, a government official said representatives of Unocal and Shell have been repeatedly asking Petrobangla and the Energy Ministry to clear their dues within a couple of months.

An industry insider said that both these companies fear that a change of government might worsen the bill payment scenario. Besides, soon after US President Bill Clinton visited Bangladesh in March last year, the government verbally committed to the oil companies that all gas purchase backlogs would be cleared by March of this year. Yet the government failed to settle the issue to the oil companies' satisfaction.

While Petrobangla continuously pays Unocal and Shell bills for

purchase of Jalalabad and Sangu gas respectively, the bill payment is at least three months behind the schedule.

Currently, Petrobangla is purchasing gas of about 200 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) from Shell's offshore Sangu gas field and about 100 mmcf of gas from Unocal's Jalalabad gas field. The government has been buying Sangu gas for 35 months and Jalalabad gas for 28 months. Shell's monthly bill now comes at around US 8 to 9 million dollars and Unocal's about 3.75 million dollars.

"We have been paying them continuously, we are not defaulters," said a government official. "We have told Shell-Unocal that no matter which government comes after the next election our contracts with them remain the same and we are bound by our commitment to pay all their dues."

## When death means freedom

NAIMUL HAQ

After nearly six years of confinement, 28-year old Awang Maung, a Myanmar national, died from AIDS at Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) in the city last week.

Maung was suffering from acute diarrhoea.

Maung, from Netyun under Yangon police station, was arrested on charge of illegal fishing off the coast of Mongla Port and fined Tk 2000 or to suffer 15 days in jail in default. The authorities handed down the punishment on October 9, 1995.

Due to his failure to pay, Maung was sent to Khulna Jail on October 11, 1995 and later, to Comilla Central Jail on 25th of the same month.

The Daily Star ran a report on Maung titled 'In Hell and Home' on January 21, 2000.

The ministry tried to send Maung to his homeland through Cox's Bazar border, but to no avail.

On October 14, 1996, Maung fell seriously sick. And on November 11 the same year, he was shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for treatment. Blood samples were sent to Dhaka for diagnosis after doctors failed to identify the cause of his sickness. He was diagnosed as HIV positive.

Later, Maung was sent to the IDH. He had since been condemned to a solitary life in a shabby room on the sixth floor of the hospital where he witnessed death of six other AIDS patients. Another AIDS patient, aged 23, from the same country, was his inmate.

Soon after his confinement, Myanmar officials in Dhaka visited Maung at IDH. They said he was not a Myanmar national. The officials' denial made him stateless.

Four police personnel of Dhaka Central Jail used to keep vigilance on them round the clock to make sure that none of them escaped or attempted suicide. Maung tried to commit suicide at least twice.

He had a six-year old daughter and a beautiful wife who fled to Thailand. In an interview, Maung said, "When I left my house for fishing I told my wife that I would be back with enough money, but I guess I would never see her."

Says Dilruba Karim, senior programme officer of Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh: "Let Maung's roommate not die the same way and we must find a way out to free him from confinement. Above all, he is a human being and there are many HIV-positive people who are living happily."

She also said, "Had the government wished, we could have ensured his freedom. Let's not make the same mistake as we did for Maung."

According to the AIDS policies in Bangladesh, the patients are allowed freedom. But the government refuses to put the policies into action.

## AL leaders tight-lipped

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1979, allows heirs of a President to enjoy certain facilities if he dies while in office.

Under this provision, the widow and the two sons of late President Ziaur Rahman were provided with two residences and some other benefits, they said.

A delegation of some senior AL leaders met President Shahabuddin Ahmed on Wednesday and discussed with him the security of Sheikh Hasina during the tenure of the caretaker government.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, AL Presidium member Sajeda Chowdhury had said that the Ganabhaban was built to accommodate the Father of the Nation but he did not stay there. "Had he stayed there (Ganabhaban), he would not have been killed so easily," Sajeda said.

What prompted the government to go for a fresh law remains a question in public mind as influential Cabinet members declined to

divulge anything about it despite being contacted repeatedly.

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria told newsmen on Wednesday that a new law was being considered on two points: Sheikh Hasina is going to leave the office of prime minister and she is the daughter of the Father of the Nation.

Talking to the Daily Star recently, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khasru said, it would be premature to say whether the new law would also cover security of all former heads of government as "the law is still in the womb of mother."

"Nothing has been finalised yet. We're at a preliminary stage of drafting now."

Explaining the reason for a new law, the minister had said that some recent reports by national and international security intelligence agencies gave clear hints of a "potential threat" on the life of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

## Emergence of adolescent

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400," said a source who claimed that he had once bought such a weapon.

"In India these firearms are manufactured by lathe machine experts along the bordering towns for markets in their own country and in Bangladesh," said another source. Indian lathe experts use more sophisticated machines to manufacture arms than those in Bangladesh, he added.

From across the Indian border, modern pistols also find their way into the country, especially into Dhaka. But pistols cost up to five times more than revolvers and are in high demand among political activ-

ists or upmarket terrorists involved in toll collection at different construction sites.

"Police, gun shops and the rifles clubs are the main sources for all sorts of ammunitions because you hardly find ammunition being smuggled into the country," said a source in the police.

A top police official said that unless there was a political decision, smuggling of illegal arms into the country would not stop.

"Today's street criminal becomes tomorrow's student leader only because he has blessings from one political leader or the other," said the official requesting anonymity.

## 168 killed in first 5 months

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Lalbagh, Gulshan, Tejgaon, Uttara and Dhanmondi thanas and one each in Cantonment, Kafur, Kamrangirchar, Kotwali and Pallabi thanas.

No report of homicide last month was received from only two thanas out of the 21 in the capital—Sabujbagh thana and the recently established Hazaribagh thana.

Three double murders took place in the city -- two in Shyampur thana and one in Demra thana last month.

The most sensational was the double murder in Demra area in which a mother and daughter were strangled allegedly by sub-tenants.

Other sensational murders were those of businessman Rafiqul Islam in his office at Motijheel, Julekha Akther, doctor's wife and herself a nurse, at Bangladesh Medical College Hospital in Dhanmondi area and Dhaka University student Zayed Akber Chowdhury.

Zayed was gunned down by a gang of miscreants in front of his wife at their residence at Shewrapara.

The victims included nine businessmen, top political activists and a newborn baby.

Twelve miscreants including two 'police informers' and four muggers were also killed last month.

Two of the muggers shot dead

while two were beaten to death by mob.

A private security man was killed by a colleague and a garment employee was stabbed to death inside a factory by a colleague.

Besides the mother and daughter, two other housewives were killed in the month one in crossfire at Agargaon slum and another by muggers as she refused to hand over her valuables.

Two Awami League activists were shot dead by their rivals.

A newborn baby was strangled to death in Mirpur area. Besides, two minor girls and a boy were strangled allegedly by their parents in separate incidents.

An airline employee was shot dead in the old part of the city.

Two traders and a VDO shop employee were shot dead when miscreants hit him with a concrete slab on his head.

A cook at hotel in Motijheel area died as a colleague poured hot water on his body. A drug peddler died as he fell into a ditch in Agargaon slum.

Identity of 11 of those killed last month could not be known. Of them, two were minor boys, six were teenage boys and three were teenage girls.

## Tribals rally against eco-park

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(the hills), many tribal people told this correspondent that they have been asked to leave their ancestral homes.

Jendro Lamin, a leader at a punji in Mahdab hills, showed land lease documents. "Since 1974, we paid land tax worth Tk 20 lakh but our existence is uncertain now. These are our ancestral homes. Why should we feel unsafe?"

Residents voiced the same sentiment in neighbouring Awlacharra, Julicharri, Baraicharra, Dikcharra, Belkuma and Ugachari areas. "The Eco-Park has been planned to displace us from our ancestral lands," said another punji leader. The government claims that the

project is part of a plan to develop the area economically and preserve the environment.

The project of the Ministry of Environment and Forest will be completed by 2004. The Cabinet approved the project in July last year.

When contacted, Deputy Commissioner of Moulvibazar district Debashish Ray said, "I have been instructed by the Prime Minister not to disturb the tribal families. "We are now preparing a map for the project so that no tribal family is affected."

He also said the Prime Minister has instructed him to provide all Khasia and Garo families with land registration documents.

## BNP delegation meets CEC

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ment as decided earlier was also protested.

It alleged that such operations, as in the past, would be applied to harass and detain opposition activists while shielding the real criminals under the protection of ruling party godfathers, thus further thinning out the opposition workforce ahead of elections.

Meeting sources said leaders also protested distribution of plots at Uttara without acquiring land ahead of the government's departure as contrary to the election code of conduct.

Sources said BNP leaders also alleged that some NGOs are working against the BNP and engaged in campaigning in favour of the Awami

League violating their rules and provisions. They sought EC's interference to halt such 'unholy' activities.

They laid utmost importance on correction of voters' list alleging that the government enlisted thousands of fake voters. In this context, they cited the lists at Bhola and Sirajganj as having a huge number of fake voters included in them.

BNP leaders also drew CEC's attention about the Prime Minister's electioneering across the country by using government vehicles, money, media and all other sorts of facilities.

They also alleged that a section of government officials are working like party activists in different parts of the country and requested the

CEC not to appoint those people for poll duty.

Leaders said election would not be free and fair without the release of thousands of BNP leaders and activists who were arrested under false cases.

Election Commissioners Mohammad Ali and Munser Ali and other senior officials of the EC were present on the occasion.

Meeting sources said the CEC appreciated the demands and problems raised by the BNP leaders and assured his best efforts to resolve those.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told newsmen that BNP still has objections about one of two EC officials, but is happy about its overall activities.



Kabori Sawar, chairperson of Bangladesh International Film Festival handing over a cheque for Tk one lakh for the Gujarat Earthquake Relief Fund to ML Tripathi, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh

## BNP working on a '91-style deal

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influential BNP leader said it would spare party chief Khaleda Zia the embarrassment of publicly seeking votes for Jamaat or Jatiya Party.

Amidst mounting pressure from the partners, BNP recently deferred the so long fruitless negotiation on finalising a list of opposition candidates for the next polls.

To avoid fresh controversy in the party and alliance as well, BNP now prefers to settle the long-standing dispute over sharing of seats during the caretaker government.

"We find it proper to go slow with the process of seat sharing because any decision at this moment may trigger fresh crisis in the party and its partners," an influential BNP leader said, preferring anonymity.

Elaborating, he said the announcement of a final list of candidates might anger many top

leaders and demoralise their followers at the grassroots level, bringing about yet another pre-election debacle for the party.

Another leader in the party's standing committee defended the decision. He said the announcement of a final list at this moment might prompt many to quit BNP or other opposition parties in the combine and join the Awami League.

"Such action may also trigger revolts against the opposition leadership and encourage many local activists to side with the rebels," he noted.

Leaders of Jamaat and IOJ recently met Khaleda and asked her to resolve the issue of seat sharing shortly. Khaleda reportedly assured them that a meeting among the top alliance leaders would be held to discuss the matter. But, the latest developments on the opposition

front do not indicate that the proposed meeting would be held in near future.

Khaleda has meantime asked the secretaries-general of the four opposition parties to discuss the issue first and then refer it to the top alliance leaders. This has frustrated the smaller parties, who have started choosing their nominees apparently to keep up the pressure on BNP.

Recently, Jamaat announced its candidates in Bogra and Jhenaidah as part of its tactic to mount pressure on BNP, which is also learned to have instructed its enlisted nominees to start preparing for the polls. BNP has already confirmed unofficially the nomination of its 230 candidates, party sources said.

The smallest partner in the combine, IOJ, also published in the press its list of 26 candidates. Sources in the smaller parties

## PSA

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judgement concerning PSA would restore the judiciary's rights.

He also hoped that when the Attorney General would argue on behalf of the state, he would uphold the Constitution and call for repeal of the PSA as his (AG) post is a constitutional one.

Advocate Khandaker Mahbuddin argued that the PSA is against fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. He pointed out that the provision of summary trial in penal code is for jail terms of one, two or three years. But that in PSA is for even capital punishment and life term and this goes against fundamental rights and the Constitution.

The hearing will continue.

## Global Forum

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the civil society, the private sector and the media in developing and implementing effective national and international anti-corruption strategies.

The conference ended with an impressive closing ceremony. Earlier in the morning, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands was present during the formal speeches.

## SQ Chowdhury

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knives, a wireless set and two walkie-talkies were seized in a four-and-half-an-hour raid on Chowdhury's Goods Hill residence at Rahmatganj in the port city shortly after JCD leader Nitol was shot dead Tuesday.

Police prepared a seizure list of the recovered items and took signature on it from SQ Chowdhury's brother, Saifuddin Quader Chowdhury, as the MP was taken into custody. He was released on bail on Wednesday.

Kotwali thana OC Mohammad Ali filed a General Diary (GD) after the incident.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner AT Ahmedul Huq told UNB that Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury's family was asked to furnish valid documents against the arms and ammunition within 24 hours of the raid.

"But they could not produce papers as to whether these were imported or kept in custody," he said.

With the latest, police said, nine cases, including two murders, have been filed against SQ Chowdhury in last 10 years.

## S Asian meet

FROM PAGE 12

Suresh Acharya. The Sri Lankan delegation is led by former ombudsman Prof BESJ Bastiampillai. Filmmaker Tissa Abeysekera, poet SG PUNCHIHewa and former diplomat Javed Yusuf are among the members of the delegation.

Prof Kabir Chowdhury is the chairman of the conference organising committee.

The conference will conclude adopting the "Dhaka Declaration."

## Govt urged to collect Bangla manuscripts from foreign libraries

BSS, Dhaka

Eminent folklore experts yesterday urged the government to collect old but rare handwritten Bangla manuscripts from different libraries across the globe to explore the hidden treasures of the age-old Bangla literature and culture.

The Portugal government proposed us to donate some rare Bangla manuscripts being preserved at its National Library in Lisbon, but unfortunately the past BNP government didn't take any initiative to bring those back," Dr Muhammad Shahjahan Mian, Professor of Bangla Department of Dhaka University, told at a seminar yesterday.

He said the Portugal authorities took those manuscripts to their country by ship from Bhawal's Nagri in the 18th century.

"Many more such manuscripts are being preserved in different libraries and museums including the British Museum and the National Museum of the

## BCS family planning cadre nominees face uncertainty

BSS, Dhaka

Fifty-six successful candidates of 20th BCS in family planning cadre yesterday staged a demonstration in front of the National Press Club after they found their names missing in the official gazette.

"We went to the Establishment Ministry in the morning to ask why our names are not in the gazette like our fellow BCS qualifiers. But the Establishment Ministry officials said you cannot join as officers due to temporary court injunction," they said.

The protestors said they have submitted a memorandum to President Shahabuddin Ahmed as well as the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The authorities should resolve the issue at the earliest as they qualified in the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) examinations, they added.

Netherlands, which can be collected by government initiatives," he added.

Dr Shahjahan said these while presenting his keynote paper at the seminar on Abdul Karim Shahitya Bisharad, who played a pioneering role in collecting old manuscripts, specially hidden treasures of the Middle Age of Bangla Literature.

Centre for Advanced Research in Humanities of the university organised the seminar, presided over by its president Prof Muhammad Moiruz zamam.

Dr Abdul Momin Chowdhury, Professor of History department and Dr Mansur Musa, Professor of Modern Language Institute and Director of the Centre Prof Ahmed Kabir also took part in the discussion.

## Commemorative stamps released

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh post office yesterday released a commemorative postage stamps of Taka 10 denomination with a first day cover valued Taka 6 in observance of the "World Tobacco Free Day."

State Minister for Post and Telecommunications Abdur Rouf Chowdhury released the commemorative stamps in the committee room of the Dak Bhaban in the city.

The state minister also released a set of four commemorative postage stamps on four distinguished artists each valued Taka 6 and a first day cover worth Taka 6. Ustad Gul Mohammad Khan, Ustad Khadem Hossain Khan, Gouhar Jamil and Abdul Alim's portraits are on these stamps.

## Body recovered in Gazipur

UNB, Gazipur

Police recovered the body of an unidentified youth aged about 20 from Santapur in Sadar upazila on Tuesday.

Police said, they recovered body, tied with rope, from near the railway track in the area and sent to the morgue for autopsy.

## Tobacco hazards

FROM PAGE 12

Laboratories and Foundation, Kingshuk, Poverty and Hunger Alleviation Society (PHASE) and LIFE got awards for their role in anti-smoking campaign.

Dilruba Anguri received the certificate and crest on behalf of her husband Prof Sayeed while managing director of Hamdard Foundation Mohammad Yusuf Harun, S A Mahmudi of Kingshuk, executive director of PHASE Mohammad Amjad Hossain and Chairman of LIFE Kamrul Islam Sony received the award on behalf of their respective organisations.

ADHUNIK advisor and National Professor Dr Nurul Islam suggested increase of excise and duties on cigarettes by 200 per cent. High price will discourage smoking and increase government's revenue, he said.

He assured that as one of the oldest anti-smoking campaigners, ADHUNIK will always extend support to any government measure against smoking.

CAT President Amanullah Khan noted that four million people die every year around the world due to smoking-related diseases. He warned that the figure is going to reach 10 million by 2020 making tobacco the number one single cause of death.

ADHUNIK secretary general Enayatulhik Khan regretted that the laws to control tobacco advertisements in the country were not very adequate.

He also lamented that the gov-

ernment's move to finalise the "