

12000-line phone exchange opens at Jatrabari

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday inaugurated the Jatrabari 12000-line digital telephone exchange by talking to President Shahabuddin Ahmed about accomplishments of a great scheme.

"The present government has brought a revolutionary change in telecommunications by taking some epoch-making steps," she said after inaugurating the exchange.

This exchange is under the Greater Dhaka Telephone Project under taken for the installation of 1,38,500 lines in the capital and its adjoining areas.

With the opening of Jatrabari digital exchange, the project works began in 1998 completed. The Prime Minister started the project by inaugurating the Chalkbazar exchange on April 28, 1998.

Expressing satisfaction over the quick implementation of the project, Hasina said Awami League does not believe in lip service, but in

deeds.

Telecommunications and Home Minister Mohammad Nasim, Mayor Mohammad Hanif, State Minister for Telecom Abdur Rouf Chowdhury, Kamal Ahmed Majumdar, Habibur Rahman Mollah, Secretary Nazmul Ahsan Chowdhury and Japanese Ambassador Jiro Kobayashi also spoke at the function.

Hasina said before their coming to power telecommunications sector was neglected, but the present government took practical steps to keep pace with modern communications system.

The government introduced the telecommunications policy as the prime step for the development of the sector and opened up the door for the country to step into the global information super highway.

The Prime Minister said during her rule 39 districts came under digital phone network. Moreover, she said, 92 upazilas are also getting the facilities of modern digital telecom.

7 acid survivors back home after treatment in Spain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The culprit disfigured her face, but could not destroy her courage of leading a normal life, said Kakoli, one of the seven acid survivors who returned home yesterday from Spain after treatment.

In 1999, a worker in the same village in Natore threw acid on Kakoli, as in most other cases. Undaunted, Kakoli sat for the Dakhil examinations, and stood 20th in the merit list in 2000. She was lucky enough to be visited by ASF officials and selected to go abroad.

Acid Survival Foundation (ASF) in co-operation with Corporation Demostatica of Spain arranged the trip to Spain in the second phase.

Earlier, ASF sent six victims to Spain and repaired the skin of their face.

The victims described their experience in Spain to the newsmen at a press conference at BRAC Centre yesterday.

In an emotion-choked voice, Rubina, 26, from Narayanganj said she had to undergo four painful operations to regain a normal look on her face. She was not familiar with the Spanish language and food.

Shamima, hailing from Bogra, was victimised by her husband for dowry in 1992. She was treated first in a local hospital, and then shifted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. She is grateful to ASF for the help.

The head of Rubina, aged 16,

swelled alarmingly, as the doctors injected saline to grow hair on her acid-burnt skull. She burst into tears, when she was recalling her traumatic experience.

The other three survivors Begum, 18, Asma, 17, Shahinur, 16, missed their nearest and dearest when abroad. They appealed to the government and the affluent class in the society to set up a modern burn unit in every hospital so that the victims do not have to go abroad for better treatment.

Dr. Shamonta Lal Sen, who accompanied the victims to Spain, Ivy Rahman, trustee of ASF, and Dr. John Morrison, executive director of ASF, attended the press conference.



PHOTO: STAR

Tareq Zia, son of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia, speaking at a conference of the Bogra Zia Samity at the National Museum auditorium in the city yesterday.

Shahabuddin shocked

FROM PAGE 1

Shahabuddin Ahmed said in his message. He said King Birendra was a visionary leader who led his country towards modernisation and development. "He will remain ever present in the hearts of the Nepalese people for his commitment to them."

The President expressed condolence for the grief-stricken people of Nepal. "We hope that members of the Royal family and the people of Nepal will bear this tragic loss with courage and strength," he said.

He prayed for the eternal peace and salvation of the departed souls. In a message to Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said King Birendra was an ardent lover of democracy which was flourishing in Nepal under his patronage, leading to an era of democracy and development.

She said in his death Nepal has lost a visionary leader and a great statesman and Bangladesh, a true friend.

Sheikh Hasina said King Birendra will always be remembered for his great contribution towards the regional cooperation in South Asia.

Sheikh Hasina hoped that the members of his family and the people of Nepal would be able to bear this tragic loss with courage and strength.

She also prayed for the peace of the departed souls. In a condolence message, Khaleda Zia said King Birendra had made outstanding contribution towards establishing world peace as well as making South Asia a region of peace and development.

The Nepalese King had first announced the commitment to

make Nepal arms-free aiming at disarmament in South Asia, Khaleda said.

The former prime minister said King Birendra was a sincere supporter of late President Ziaur Rahman when the latter initiated establishment of SAARC.

She conveyed sympathy to the brotherly people of Nepal.

Schoolboy robbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A student of Loreto School was robbed of Tk 1500 in the city yesterday afternoon.

Mehran, a student of class ten, was going to his private tutor's house by a rickshaw at about 3 pm when two muggers riding on a motorcycle intercepted him at Dhanmondi Central Road and snatched the money at gunpoint, sources said.

Diplomats said they had worked on meetings between Indian Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer and her Pakistan counterpart Inamul Haq during their stay here in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo.

The Colombo meeting could have also prepared some space for a summit between Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

Vajpayee formally invited

SAARC meet put off

FROM PAGE 1

The third special session of the standing committee of SAARC scheduled to be held on the 8th and 9th as a mark of respect for the late His Majesty the King Birendra," the ministry said.

Asian diplomats had said that both India and Pakistan were making preparations for the two foreign secretaries to meet here signalling a thaw in their relations strained due to escalating border unrest.

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Vajpayee formally invited

Musharraf to New Delhi for summit-level peace talks last week.

Diplomats said they expected the standing committee to set an agenda for a meeting of the "council of ministers" which is tasked with finalising dates for the next summit.

India yesterday said it was "stunned and deeply shocked" at the massacre of Nepal's royal family and announced three days of state mourning.

Earlier on the day, Vajpayee spoke to his Nepalese counterpart Girija Prasad Koirala, a senior official said.

"The prime minister rang up Mr. Koirala," an official of the premier's office said.

"The prime minister also convened a meeting of the cabinet committee on security where Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh briefed them about the developments in Nepal," the official added.

New Delhi is closely watching the developments, he said.

Meanwhile, a section of the border between India and Nepal was reported to be shut yesterday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

A group of Indian journalists trying to reach Kathmandu from West Bengal was stopped at the Kanakavita checkpoint and turned back, PTI reported.

The journalists said no reason was given denying them entry to Nepal.

Indian traders trying to take goods into Nepal were also not permitted to enter, the report added. Indian and Nepalese citizens usually enjoy free travel into each other's country under the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty.

No vehicular traffic could be seen on the Nepal side of the border, PTI said.

Suicide bombing kills 18

FROM PAGE 12

Hundreds of angry people took to the streets in an anti-Arab demonstration in the Tel Aviv suburb of Bat Yam, home to some of the victims, Israeli television reported.

The Israeli army said it had tightened its closure of the Palestinian territories and told all Palestinians inside Israel to leave immediately.

Israeli leaders roundly condemned Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for the bombing, saying he had not taken action against perpetrators of violence.

US President George W. Bush also called on Arafat to take action after the "heinous terrorist attack."

"There is no justification for senseless attacks against innocent civilians. I call upon Chairman Arafat to condemn this act and to call for an immediate ceasefire," Bush said in a statement.

Israeli Minister of Internal Security Uzi Landau said Arafat "is the one who has made it possible for these organisations, over which he has jurisdiction."

Defense Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer accused Arafat of wanting "to provoke chaos in the Middle East."

"The attack perpetrated Friday

night in Tel Aviv is one of the most atrocious we have known. It came as Israel is doing all it can so that a ceasefire can be installed that ends the violence," he said in a statement.

Sharon spokesman Ranaan Gissin for his part warned that "a red line has been crossed."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was "horrified," a statement issued by his spokesman said, adding that he "condemns this indiscriminate terrorist attack in the strongest possible terms."

"This horrible event underlines the urgency of breaking the cycle of violence," it added.

The blast came some 10 days after Sharon declared a unilateral ceasefire with the Palestinians and just before the premier is due to leave on a trip to plead Israel's case to European leaders.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, meeting Friday evening with his German counterpart, Joschka Fischer, said Israel was determined to continue its truce, according to public radio.

But former deputy defence minister Ephraim Sneh said he did not believe Israel "can keep the ceasefire much longer."

The bombing "shows the cruel

and brutal face of Palestinian terrorism. Now we have to take harsh measures. The rules of the game should be changed," Sneh told CNN.

Sharon had ordered Israeli troops last week to fire only in self-defence, following publication of the Mitchell report on the deadly Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The report called for an end to the violence, a freeze on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and tougher Palestinian action against "terrorism."

Arafat has called on Israel to accept the report in its entirety, including the recommendation on settlements, while the Palestinians have rejected the ceasefire as a sham.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and senior ministers and military chiefs were meeting Saturday to consider a response to a suicide bombing outside a Tel Aviv nightclub overnight that left 18 dead and more than 100 injured. The bomber, who was among the dead, blew himself up among a group of young people waiting in line to enter the Pasha discotheque, a popular night spot in this coastal city.

Trim defence budget

FROM PAGE 12

Even after signing of the CHT peace accord, the defence budget increased in the last three years and there was no declaration to reduce it as a dividend of peace, they mentioned.

Terminating most of the defence expenditure non-productive, the authors of the keynote paper urged the government to "freeze defence expenditure in the next budget at this fiscal year's stage in absolute terms and incrementally reduce it in the future" for diverting more resources to education and health sector.

They also said purchase of arms and ammunition necessarily takes place to pay commission to some influential people and does not have any relation what so ever with security of the people.

Raising questions about the procurement of eight Mig-29s involving Tk 1000 crore and a naval frigate costing Tk 550 crore, they said it would cost Tk 2.5 crore just to launch a torpedo from the frigate.

The country started with 9.48 per cent revenue expenditure for defence in 1972-73 and the amount

rose to 11.3 per cent in 1974-75. "In a dramatic turn, defence expenditure rose to 19.06 per cent of the total revenue expenditure in 1975-76 and changed the whole characteristics of the state machinery," the keynote paper said.

Quoting UNDP and South Asian Human Development Report, the authors said defence expenditure in Bangladesh increased by 52 per cent (from US\$ 341 million to 517 million) during 1985-96 period, whereas, even NATO reduced its defence expenditure by 25 per cent in that period.

Mentioning the government's revenue expenditure for administration and internal security as the lowest (23.21 per cent) in fiscal 1974-75, they said the expenditure was generally high on those two heads in the 1980s. "Revenue expenditure on those two heads reached its peak at 41.20 per cent in 1984-85."

However, in the 1990s, there was a downturn of revenue expenditure on those two heads, although slow, and in 1999-2000 it came down to 27.76 per cent.

They suggested bringing down revenue expenditure on those two heads to 20 per cent through proper administrative reform and introducing modern technology like Information Technology (IT).

They also raised questions as to where and for what purpose the allocations on two heads in the budget, general service and miscellaneous, are being spent and suggested diverting the resources for creating a safety net for the poor.

However, terming the discussion a cliché, Dr Atiur Rahman said that any discussion for development of the country should focus on how to develop backward linkage for the highest export earning apparel sector and establish a linkage between banks and NGOs to infuse more resources into rural areas.

The others who spoke on the occasion include former defence secretary Salahuddin Ahmed, Dr Jafrullah Chowdhury of Ganashasthya, former IG of Police Abdul Khaleque, BMP leader Wing Commander (Retd) Hamidullah Khan and Dr Md Masum of Jahangirnagar University.

Journalist murder Litu's wife interrogated

UNB, Khulna

Police yesterday interrogated wife of ward commissioner Asaduzzaman Litu, an accused in journalist Shamsur Rahman Murder Case.

They took Shampa, wife of Litu, who was expelled from Jubo League, into custody at about 12 noon and released her after a few hours.

Police sources said they cordoned off the residence of Litu at the Sher-e-Bangla Road, took Shampa to Kotwali thana and inquired about her absconding husband.

Two professional killers arrested in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested two notorious criminals from the city's Sayedabad area in the early hours of yesterday.

The arrested are Bacchu, 30 and Mohsin, 28.

According to police both are professional killers in the city. Sources said Demra thana police raided the Sayedabad area at about 1:30 am and arrested the two from near Huzurer Bar.

Police said the arrested are accused in a number of cases, including murder and snatching.

Sandwip tragedy

FROM PAGE 12

Navy sources said the search operation would cover 25 nautical miles in and around Sandwip channel in the Bay.

Some naval teams were deployed on the shore at Sitakunda with high-speed boats to conduct search operation near land during high tide.

When contacted at noon yesterday, Navy and police sources said no more bodies were recovered.

PM inaugurates

FROM PAGE 12

Rajarbagh, Malibagh and Sayedabad areas.

The Tk 397.66-million overpass will be constructed jointly by local builder Development Constructors Limited and Uhang General Municipal Construction Limited of China.

Local Government Minister Zillur Rahman, Mayor Mohammad Hanif, State Minister for Shipping Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Deputy Minister for LGRD Saber Hossain Chowdhury were, among others, present at the inauguration at Khilgaon rail intersection.

Dhaka Declaration

FROM PAGE 12

planted bombs and killed many people at the Ramna Batmul on the first day of the Bengali new year, Kabir Chowdhury said.

Demanding trial of war criminals, he said Bangabandhu never forgave war criminals. "We are demanding trial of the war criminals for the sake of justice, not for revenge."

The concluding session was also addressed by Poet Shamsur Rahman, Prof Alia Imam (Pakistan), former Speaker of Nepalese parliament Daman Dhungana, former Speaker of Indian Parliament PA Sangma MP and Chitra Bhattacharya MP (Bangladesh).

The concluding session was rounded up with a musical soiree. Following is the text of the Dhaka Declaration:

Recognising that fundamentalism and communalism are undermining the vitals of our society, eroding democratic values, norms and institutions and the perpetuation of continued acts of violence and terrorism;

recognising that women, children and people belonging to ethnic and religious minority groups are particularly being victimised by fundamentalist and communal forces;

recognising that these forces are geared to gain political control by various means what so ever;

recognising that there is a great urgency in checking and rendering these ineffective without further delay; further recognising that unless concerted efforts are made to achieve these objectives, the entire South Asian region will be engulfed in medieval darkness;

recognising that countries in South Asia are endangered by identical problems, we should move unitedly and resolutely to deal with the problems;

recognising that some political parties and social groups are using fundamentalist and communal ideologies as well as these forces in furthering their ends; affirming the

need to urge upon political parties and social groups in South Asian countries to desist immediately from utilising these forces for political benefit;

affirming the need for de-communalisation and secularism implying an active reconstruction of ethnic and religious identities in a spirit of equality, interdependence and mutual respect, we call upon states, governments, political parties and civil society organisations to uphold inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-faith equality as inalienable democratic principles; recognising that sections of a media are increasingly becoming the means to propagate fundamentalist ideology and sentiments, we call upon media institutions and personnel to uphold principles and ideals of democracy, pluralism and secularism in order to promote values of diversity and tolerance;

Recognising that the process of secular democratisation of South Asian societies could effectively challenge patriarchy and gender subordination, reinforced and sustained by reactionary forces, we call upon states, political parties and civil society organisation to uphold these fundamental principles;

Recognising that the present conference held in Dhaka on June 1-2, 2001 has been a milestone in bringing together members of the civil societies of South Asia and paving a path to fight the communal and fundamentalist forces unitedly by upholding democratic, human and secular values; and pledge To harness our energies for promoting social justice, peace, gender equality and secular democratic values.

To work towards bringing all perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war criminals to justice.

Gyanendra named regent

FROM PAGE 1

"But since His Majesty King Dipendra Shah Dev is physically not able to take care of the affairs of the state and since both Queen Aishwarya and Prince Nirajan have also died, the Raj Parishad (privy council) has decided that Prince Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev shall be appointed regent."

Gyanendra, who is the middle son of the late King Mahendra, has a keen interest in environmental issues but his attention will be on more pressing issues over the coming months.

An international member of the World Wildlife Fund since 1997, chair of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) and also patron of the Britain-Nepal Society, he has also been in news for the wrong reason - unpaid utility bills on one hand and a rowdy son on the other.

Gyanendra was educated at St Joseph's College in Darjeeling,

India, and graduated from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu in 1969.

In May 1970 he married Princess Komal, the sister of the late Queen Aishwarya. He has one son, Prince Paras, and a daughter.

The prince has acted as chair of the Regency Council and Royal Representatives Council, which deals with matters of state during the king's absence and has represented his late father at National Day functions organised by foreign embassies in the capital.

Gyanendra, who has travelled widely, became a member of the state council in 1977. He also writes lyrics under the penname G. Shah.

Gyanendra was king for about two months in 1950-51 when his father Crown Prince Mahendra, grandfather King Tribhuvan and other members of the royal family including then Prince Birendra fled to India to escape political turmoil at home.

The Sundarbans

FROM PAGE 12

Craig Bennett said the concern for conservation of the forest is no longer confined in Bangladesh.

It has become an issue worldwide, Craig said citing last month's demonstration in London. F.O.E.s in UK, Netherlands and other European countries, along with civil society representatives and environmental organisations like FEJB, will launch a campaign against any bid to explore oil and gas at the Sundarbans and its 25 km 'impact zone'.

Craig said that he and Paul had meetings with Shell officials and government functionaries in Dhaka. They assured him that exploration would not take place in the reserve forest at Sundarbans and its 'impact zone' to protect the environment.

He hoped that Shell would live up to its commitment.

The participants also urged the government not to go for any PSC with oil companies for hydrocarbon exploration in the Sundarbans or elsewhere in the country without assessing the environmental impact.

FROM PAGE 1

family." The radio made no mention of the circumstances of the deaths of the 55-year-old Harvard-educated King Birendra and the other members of his family.

There were conflicting reports on the crown prince's condition, with some officials saying he was in a deep coma and had been declared "clinically dead."

Sources close to the royal palace said the stunning massacre was triggered by a bitter family row over the woman the crown prince wanted to marry.

As the argument at the dinner table peaked, the crown prince apparently stormed from the room. He went to his private quarters in the palace, armed himself with two semiautomatic weapons, walked back to the dining room and opened fire, before shooting himself.

The funeral procession of the king and queen, and the three other

royals identified by state radio, began yesterday afternoon, winding through the streets of Kathmandu to the cremation spot at the Golden Temple on the banks of the holy River Bagmati.

Hundreds of thousands of stunned mourners lined the streets of the Nepalese capital yesterday to watch the funeral procession.

The bodies of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, and three other members of the royal family killed in the massacre, were carried shoulder-high on bamboo stretchers towards the cremation site at the city's Golden Temple on the banks of the holy River Bagmati.

The speed of the funeral, in accordance with Hindu traditions, had left the people of Nepal almost no time to digest the shocking news of the royal bloodbath that took place 24 hours before during a regular Friday dinner gathering at the royal palace.

The slow procession began at

the military hospital where the bodies had been taken the day before and was due to pass by the main gate of the royal palace on its way to the temple.

A mounted guard of honour led the way, with police massed bands playing somber music.

The king's body, held aloft by bare-chested brahmin priests, was covered to the neck by a saffron cloth - his face obscured by garlands of flowers and another piece of cloth wrapped around his forehead.

Behind him came the body of the queen - inside an ornate, covered palanquin - followed by those of his younger son, Prince Nirajan, and only daughter Princess Shruti, and one of the king's cousins, Princess Jayanti Shah.

While many of the onlookers seemed too stunned to react, others wept openly, holding sticks of incense or clutching each other for support.

As the procession passed by, women threw flowers and rice coloured with red powder.

"I couldn't believe it when I heard the news," said student Gopendra Gautam. "I had to come here to see for myself, but I still can't really take it in."

"I got the news by phone this morning, but my first reaction was that it was a hoax call," said social worker Shanti Mishra. "At a time when the country most needs a good leader, the king is dead."

Behind the main funeral cortege, walked a line of official mourners, including cabinet ministers, senior palace staff and top military officers.

One elderly mourner watching the procession, Hari Chandra Paudel, said he was still confused as to what had happened in the palace on Friday.

"All we here are wild rumours, and it is time the government gave us a clear picture of what actually took place."

The Home Ministry ordered three days of national mourning and requested all male government officials to shave their heads as a mark of respect.

Thousands of shocked residents, some distra