

# The Daily Star

COMMITTED TO  
People's Right to Know

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XI No. 38

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2002

www.dailystarnews.com

16 PAGES PRICE: Tk 7.00

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## 25 awarded Ekushey Padak

UNB, Dhaka

Twenty-five personalities and one institution have been awarded Ekushey Padak, 2001 and 2002 for outstanding contributions in their respective fields.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia distributed the awards among the recipients or their relatives at the Ekushey Padak distribution ceremony and a seminar on the completion of 50 years of the Language Movement at Osmany Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday.

Addressing the ceremony, the prime minister urged all to forge a national unity and show respect to the memory of martyrs by contributing to the progress of the nation and welfare of the masses.

"We should not forget that without tangible and visible progress, all

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## BTTB gives no damn to regulators

ABU SAEED KHAN

Imposition of the new local telephone call rate by Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) is a violation of the telecom act, as it has not been approved by the newly formed Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), sources said.

Effective from February 25, telephone call charge will be Tk 1.50 for every five minutes during peak hours and for every eight minutes during off-peak hours. The BTTB is mandated to submit the new tariff plan to the BTRC prior to its implementation.

Instead of getting the regulator's approval first, the BTTB enforced its inflated tariff under a ministerial directive. Such an act undermines the regulator's authority and it prompted the BTRC to hold an emergency meeting yesterday to review the legitimacy of the BTTB's tariff increase. It will meet again at 10 am today, the sources mentioned.

But BTTB Chairman SATM Badrul Haque told The Daily Star, "The tariff has been increased in compliance with the telecom act. We have duly informed the com-

mission."

The BTRC sources, however, denied receipt of any such information.

As per the act, it is mandatory to submit any tariff plan 60 days prior to its implementation. "Since the act became effective on January 30, how could BTTB obtain the commission's consent?" asked a BTRC source, requesting anonymity.

Justifying the tariff increase, the BTTB chairman said, "It would reduce the long holding-time pressure on the telephone exchanges and more subscribers would be able to make phone calls." But he admitted that BTTB's network has inherent technical faults, which greatly decreases the quality of service.

Meanwhile, concern is mounting among the BTTB telephone users over the metred local tariff. Subscribers usually lock their telephones to prevent NWD and ISD call piracy by BTTB's linemen and other staff. Now they would be forced to lock the telephones to prevent local call piracy.

The Internet and cellular mobile users also got pan

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## Action against officials under '79 ordn: Govt asked to explain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday issued a *Rule Nisi* asking the government to show cause why the Government Servant (Special Provisions) Ordinance, 1979 would not be declared void and ultravires.

A division bench of the HC comprising Justice Hamidul Huq and Justice Najmun Ara Sultana made the rule returnable within four weeks.

The same bench of the court issued another order asking the government to explain why the termination of 12 deputy assistant directors of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) would not be

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## Call money rate eases

STAR REPORT

The call money rates eased yesterday after a week of sizzling ride.

Most of the deals yesterday were sealed at between 17 per cent and 22 per cent. However, one deal was done at 24 per cent between a joint-venture leasing company and a local private bank.

Usually, the call money rates soar to 12 per cent to 14 per cent before the Eid on huge withdrawal demand.

Despite heavy rush at banks, the call money rates eased as the Bangladesh Bank (BB) pumped more money into the market through its rediscount window,

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## ETV clarifies

Barrister M Moniruzzaman Khan, Counsel for Ekushey Television Limited, has issued a clarification on a BSS news item published on page 11 of The Daily Star yesterday.

The clarification said: "Our notice has been drawn to the news item published on 19.02.2002 in various newspapers regarding the statement made by the learned Attorney General in the

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## Drinking death in groundwater

NAMUL HAQ

Random surveys in 61 districts of the country have revealed presence of various chemicals in groundwater at alarming levels, which could cause severe health hazards in long-term consumption.

Damage of liver, kidney, intestines and high blood pressure or male sterility are some of the impacts that these inorganic chemicals could cause.

Two joint studies by the British Geological Survey (BGS) and the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) during 1998-1999 have found high concentration of naturally occurring chemicals like uranium, manganese, boron, sulphur, fluoride and phosphorus in groundwater in several places.

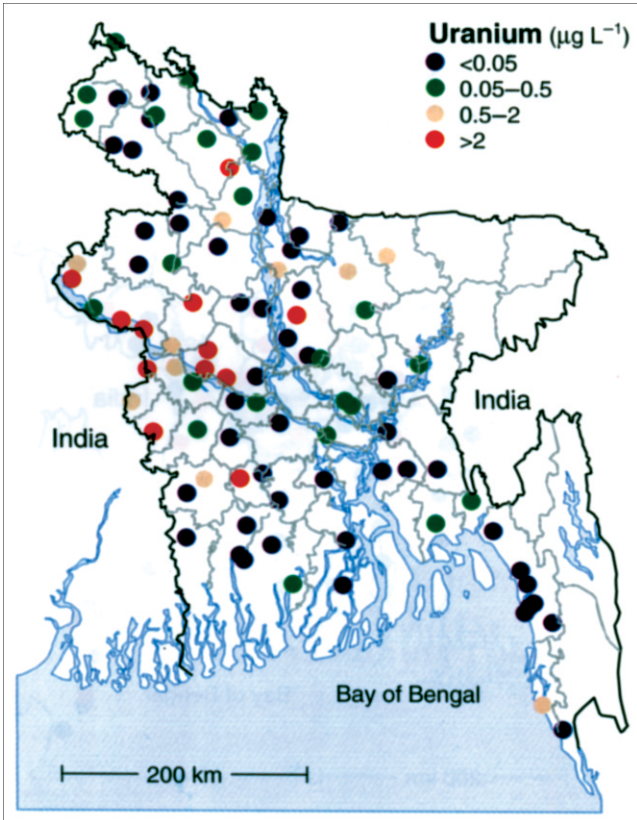
The UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded the study--DPHE/BGS National Hydro-Chemical Survey-- that analysed 3,534 water samples from hand-pumps in 61 districts.

Following the findings, the government has now asked the DPHE to check all these elements in water in its routine monitoring.

The samples were analysed at a UK laboratory using highly reliable water quality testing method.

The study concluded that 35 per cent

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Levels of uranium concentration found in groundwaters across Bangladesh