

Wired underwater, at last

BTTB almost blew it at Dubai consortium meeting

ABU SAEED KHAN, back from Dubai

Bangladesh averted near exclusion from the 12-country submarine cable by finally agreeing to join the SEA-ME-WE4 consortium that would ensure unlimited bandwidth access.

The Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) confirmed its linkup with the submarine cable at the second meeting of the 12-country SEA-ME-WE4 consortium in Dubai on July 1-3. The BTTB chairman led a four-member delegation to the meeting.

The BTTB confirmation, expected to pave the way for liberalisation of the international voice gateway in Bangladesh, has snubbed the bids by American TyCom and French Alcatel.

TyCom quoted \$117 million and Alcatel \$133 million to connect Bangladesh with Singapore. The latter proposed a link with Singapore via Chennai, India.

Moreover, the BTTB would have had to spend millions on bandwidth beyond Singapore for global connectivity and maintenance and operation of the cable.

The consortium deal will cost the BTTB less than \$65 million. The cost includes installation of a cable landing station in Chittagong and entire branching unit, directly linking the country with Indonesia, Malaysia,

Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, the UAE, Saudi Arab, Egypt, Italy and France.

Besides, the consortium will equally share all maintenance and operational costs with the BTTB.

This cable network would be operational by the first quarter of 2004.

Delegates representing the largest carriers of their countries met in Dubai to finalise the memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the consortium. Pakistan could not participate due to last-minute visa problems.

The parties discussed and analysed the key principles of building and operating the fourth Eurasian undersea cable. Competition in the international voice and data markets figured prominently on the agenda.

It was proposed that anyone, regardless of consortium membership, could purchase any volume of bandwidth at any segment of the SEA-ME-WE 4 cable, and would have unrestricted access to any cable landing station.

The purchaser also reserves the right to choose any domestic or international provider in the country of the cable landing station. Reselling and transferring the ownership of the purchased bandwidth will be also allowed.

Implementation of these provisions is subject to legal, regulatory and

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GAIL, ONGC representatives due July 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Representatives of Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) would visit Dhaka on July 15 to discuss cross border energy cooperation with Petrobangla, sources said.

During the three-day stay, they would hold a seminar with Petrobangla and discuss the possibilities of gas trade and oil and gas exploration in Bangladesh in collaboration with Petrobangla.

Last week in West Bengal, GAIL announced that it would strike an agreement for an 1100 MW gas-fired thermal power plant there, and told BBC that it expected Bangladesh gas supply for the plant.

Quoting GAIL regional chief Dr UD Chhobi, BBC last week reported that West Bengal was setting up the power plant with three units in Haldia. GAIL conceived the project as per technical experts' opinion on import of Bangladesh gas.

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65 more audit & accounts officials transferred

RAFIQ HASAN

Another 65 officials of the Department of Audit and Accounts were transferred on an order by the Office of the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) yesterday.

The initiative came after the government's decision on separating the accounts department from the audit to discipline expenditure.

Of the 33 first-class officials and 32 superintendents, 16 have been transferred to the Chittagong Division, 15 to the Rajshahi Division, ten to the Dhaka Division, six to the Sylhet Division, 12 to the Khulna Division and six to the Barisal Division.

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Teenager beaten to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teenager was beaten to death by a rickshawpuller at southern Mudga in the city last night.

Rubel, 15, son of Abul Kalam, was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after he was pumelled unconscious during an altercation. But the on-duty doctors declared him dead at 8:25pm.

The incident took place in front of the Mugda mosque in the city's Sabujbagh area last night.

Sabujbagh police arrested the rickshawpuller for his alleged involvement in the killing.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
July 9		6-50 pm
July 10	5-18 am	

Prayer Timings		
July 9		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-55	6-59
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Illegal shops around DMCH Police, hospital employees collect lakhs in toll

UNB, Dhaka

Over a hundred unauthorised shops have sprung up around Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), and pro-BNP employees of the hospital and police are allegedly collecting lakhs of taka from the shopkeepers as toll every month.

Barely a month back, police had removed the illegal shops from the DMCH Gate 1 to Chankharpul crossing.

But the evicted shopkeepers reconstructed their shops with support from the DMCH employees and the police of Babupura Police Box.

According to the shopkeepers, hospital employees and police take Tk 40 from each vendor and Tk 100 from each shopkeeper.

Besides, there are more than 100 illegal minibuses at the DMCH, which are owned by class III and class IV employees of the hospital.

In the name of carrying patients and dead bodies, they harass people in many ways. They compete with each other for carrying dead bodies and press relatives of the deceased for extra money.

The employees and police also collect toll from the taxi stand, and rickshaw and van garages at the DMCH.

Behind all these illegal activities is a man by the name of Osman Ali, vice-president of Bangladesh Sarkari Karmachari Samity and an alleged godfather of the DMCH area, sources at the hospital said.

They said Hashem, a close aide of Osman, does the toll collection.

There are also allegations that Osman and some other Samity leaders run liquor shops and sell cannabis (ganja) and phensidiyl at DMCH adjacent to the old PG Hospital quarters using the names of some BNP leaders.

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Sayedee Khokon granted bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday granted bail to Sayeed Khokon, Awami League (AL) leader and son of former mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif.

He was arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Magistrate Nurul Karim Majumder passed the order upon a bond of Tk 500 with two guarantors.

The court mentioned that the Khokon was granted bail in the case under Section 54 of the CrPC as he (Khokon) was later shown arrested in a regular case.

Khokon, who was the AL candidate from Dhaka-7 constituency in the last parliamentary election, was arrested from his residence in the city's Banani area on June 29.

He was arrested on charge of making provocative statements against the government at the AL public meetings.

Khokon was sent to Dhaka Central Jail on a 30-day detention following rejection of his bail petition on June 30.

On July 1, he was shown arrested in a regular case filed with Lalbagh police station in connection with

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PHOTO: STAR

The crumpled passenger buses after the collision at the Kismatpur point on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway yesterday that killed three and injured 14 others.

4 killed near Ctg as buses collide

BSS, Chittagong

Four people were killed and 17 others injured in two separate road accidents on Dhaka-Chittagong highway yesterday.

Police said two passenger buses of S. Alam Paribahan and Royal Paribahan collided at Kismatpur point at 9 am. Three unidentified passengers were killed, 14 injured, three of them seriously.

The injured were admitted to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and local clinics.

In another accident, two trucks coming from opposite direction collided at Bariakia in the morning killing a driver and injuring three others.

In Rajshahi, two teenage girls were killed and eight others injured when a passenger bus overturned and fell into a roadside ditch at Raipara crossing under Durgapur upazila yesterday.

The victims were identified as Suzola Rani, 15, daughter of Shishir Kanta and Bizli, 15, daughter of Bhutta, both from Joykrishnapur village of the same upazila.

After the incident five injured persons were rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH)

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Bhairab bridge opens to traffic September 1

BSS, Dhaka

Bhairab bridge will be open to traffic on September 1, as construction of this nearly one kilometre-long bridge will be completed on August 17, official sources told BSS yesterday.

Direct road links between Brahmanbaria, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, Sylhet and Sunamganj districts with the rest of the country will be established through the bridge which has been constructed at a cost of Tk 681 crores.

The construction work of the bridge started on November 3 of 1999 and at present 85 per cent work has already been completed.

The Bangladesh government provided Tk 397 crores while the Standard Chartered Bank extended Tk 142 crores as loans. Also the Department For International

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Shipman in fact murdered 300 patients!

AFP, London

Former family doctor Harold Shipman, sentenced to life imprisonment for 15 murders, in fact killed nearly 300 of his patients, according to an official inquiry whose results may be published this week, press reports said yesterday.

The inquiry headed by Judge Janet Smith into the crimes of Britain's worst serial killer started off looking into 800 suspect deaths, later reducing the number to 500.

It concluded that Shipman killed around 300 patients in 30 years of practice, the Daily Telegraph said -- precisely 297, according to the tabloid Daily Express.

The 55-year-old former doctor based in Manchester, northwest of England, was jailed for life in

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More Gulf War claim billed

Dhaka seeks \$6m from UNCC

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has recently demanded US\$6 million (around Tk 36 crore) more in compensation for Bangladeshi victims in the 1991 Gulf War.

The demand was placed on June 30 before the Geneva-based UN Compensation Commission (UNCC) as "around 3,800 Bangladeshi war victims were not given compensation in the second phase", said a Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment official.

The commission, formed immediately after the war, sanctioned US\$4,000 for each victim, to be paid in two phases.

Citizens from 36 countries, who had lost jobs and properties and had to return from Kuwait in the wake of the Iraqi invasion, were listed for the compensation. The fund was raised through oil export by Iraq.

Each of the 3,800 Bangladeshi victims received US\$2,500 in the first phase but missed out in the

second phase for procedural errors.

"I think the UNCC would consider the matter and sanction the fresh compensation money immediately," the official said.

The Bangladesh permanent mission in Geneva would pursue the matter with the UNCC, he said.

"It is likely that that the amount would be sanctioned in the next UNCC meeting, scheduled to be held in the middle of this month," the official added.

The issue has already been brought into the UNCC's attention and the UN commission has asked for fresh demands with names and address of the victims.

"But before finalisation of the new amount, it would not be wise to say that the gulf war victims would get the compensation money," the official cautioned.

"We would give advertisement in the national newspapers regarding the compensation money only after getting the green signal from the UNCC," said an official of the

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Compensation claim Petrobangla asked to resolve matter with Unocal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Petrobangla would soon determine its next course of action on the Magurchhara blowout compensation claim following Unocal's refusal to pay, sources said.

The energy ministry yesterday sent a letter to Petrobangla, saying that it has already approved the compensation claim issue and Petrobangla should resolve the matter itself.

A high official, however, observed that since the issue had political and diplomatic implications, involvement of the ministry as well as the highest level of the government was essential.

"We have the Scimitar experience to consider. Petrobangla embarked on an international legal battle with the Canadian company in the early 1990s over violation of agreement. Many people thought that Bangladesh could never win against a Canadian company, but it

did," said the official.

"It did because the country involved a lawyer as good as Dr. Kamal Hossain and it confidently fought the litigation to expose the fraudulent practices of Scimitar."

Similarly, the Magurchhara blowout issue should be dealt with in strong hand. "This is a matter of national interest. We have lost valuable resources and a company is trying to avoid the compensation. To handle this, we need political will," he added.

Last Tuesday, some five years after the explosion, Petrobangla sent Unocal its claim of \$685 million for damaging the gas structure of Magurchhara having a reserve of over 245 billion cubic feet.

Two days later, Unocal flatly refused to pay the compensation saying that there was no scope for discussion on the issue which it claimed has been "resolved" through a supplementary agreement for

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Robbers gun down trader in Gazipur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers shot dead a trader and injured five others, as they opened fire to escape an enraged mob, after looting valuables from the Nagaribazar, in Kaliganj, Gazipur during the early hours of yesterday.

The dead was identified as Subir Chandra Das, 30, son of Sachindra Chandra Das of

Christianpalli at Bhurulia, in Kaliganj, Gazipur while those injured were Mohammad Mokles, 35, Mohammad Hanif, 35, Sunil Das, 40, Gobinda Shaha, 30, and Atul Das, 40.

All the victims were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the attending doctors declared Subir dead on his arrival at the hospital. The doctors also said, conditions of the injured, Mokles, was very critical as he had bullet wounds in his head and chest.

The incident took place when a gang of robbers went to Nagaribazar and started looting valuables from the shops in the late hours of Sunday night. When traders of the shops noticed the robbers, they gathered together and began to run after the gang. Sensing danger, the robbers fired shots to scare the mob away and escape from its clutches. Several people were injured in the attack but six were sent to the DMCH, relatives of the victim said.

3 units of three power plants out of order

BSS, Dhaka

The country is likely to experience loadshedding of 250 to 300 megawatts of power for the next five to six days due to technical faults in three power generation plants in the country.

A Power Development Board (PDB) press release yesterday said three major power generating units Unit No 1 of Raozan, Unit No 4 of Ghorasal and Gas Turbine Unit No 2 at Baghabari went out of order due to various electric and technical glitches recently. The units have the production capacities of 210, 210 and 100 megawatts respectively.

It said all measures were being taken to put the closed units into operation, but experts suggested that five to six more days were needed to fix the faults.

"Concerned engineers and technicians of the power stations are making sincere efforts to mend the units and put them into action," the press release said.

It hoped that the units would go into production within the next five to six days.

Banks to open accounts for AJM workers

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Bank (BB) has advised all scheduled bank branches to open bank accounts for workers and employees of the now liquidated Adamjee Jute Mills (AJM) to facilitate encashments and deposits of account payee cheques.

The BB's advice came following the request by those workers and employees, who do not have any bank accounts, a BB press release said yesterday.

The government has started paying dues and retrenchment

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