

Involve private operators to meet demand for fixed phones: Experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a workshop yesterday stressed the need for involving private operators in fixed phone operation immediately to meet the huge demand pending with Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTBB).

The workshop on 'PSTN (public switching telephone network) Licensing in the private sector' was organised jointly by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC) at a city hotel.

The workshop was organised as a follow-up of BTRC's move to seek views on licensing new fixed line telecom operators from subscribers, stakeholders, experts, potential investors, development partners, interested research and dialogue institutions and the press.

Total registered demand for fixed line phones till July 2002 was over 255,000 while BTBB added 162,000, said Ray Yam, a consultant of Canada-Bangladesh Infrastructure Consultants (CBIC).

The estimated unmet demands in 2002 were in the range of one million, he added.

Other experts stressed the need for keeping the PSTN licensing fee as low as possible so that customers could be benefited.

SM Iqbal of Integrated Services Limited (ISL) said both entry fee

and annual fee should be as minimum as possible.

MH Chowdhury of Anannya said as people's purchasing power is low, license fee should not be a source of revenue of the government.

Siddique Ali Mia of Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited said tariff should be determined by market forces as there are different technologies in the market.

Prof Abdul Awal of North South University said license fee should not be a source of revenue and mobile call charges should be controlled by authorities concerned.

He also spoke in favour of restructuring of BTBB as 100 per cent government ownership has turned the service oriented organisation non-functional like PDB and DESA.

M M Yahea of Grameen Phone said there should not be any sharing of revenue as the government is not investing.

Badir Rahman, secretary of the planning ministry and member secretary of ICT Taskforce, expressed his optimism that the presence of private operators will ease the demand for fixed line phone.

SD Khan, senior CBIC consultant, said the IIFC should try its best to submit a 'positive recommendation' to the BTRC for approval.

BTRC Chairman Syed Marghub Murshed said he is optimistic that the telecom market watchdog would be able to bring private operators by October.

Moderated by IIFC Executive Director Nazrul Islam, the workshop was also attended by Director of Telecom Malaysia International Bangladesh (TMIB) Fazlur Rahman.

Alam murder

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Rashid, assistant superintendent of police, CID, submitted the charge sheet before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, in the afternoon.

Of the accused, Matin, Babu Jamal and 13 others are now in custody while Babul, Al Amin, Dulal and Alauddin are absconding.

The IO sought a court order for warrant of arrest against the absconders and attachment of their moveable property.

The 17-page charge sheet was prepared under sections 120 (kha) (conspiracy), 302 (murder), 380 (burglary), 411 (recovery), 201 (destruction of evidences), 114 (abetment) and 34 (criminal liability) of the Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC).

In the chargesheet, 122 people were shown as prosecution witnesses.

The IO seized 187 items of evidences (alamats) in connection with the killing during the investigation.

Alam, 64, and his three maids - Rahima, Sakhina and Kamala - were murdered at his New Jurain residence in the city's Shyamapur area on the night of January 2, 2002.

Matin, Alam's son-in-law, filed a murder case with the Shyamapur Police Station the following day.

But the probe into the killing took a new twist and the CID submitted a final report on July 18 last year as the case was filed on the basis of murder but the maids were murdered to steal all valuables from Alam's residence.

The CID also filed a burglary and murder case accusing Matin, Babu Jamal and 24 others the same day.

The arrestees on charge of the murder were also shown arrested in the burglary and murder case on July 20 last year.

Rumi hecklers still at large

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The two brothers who harried Nazirhat college student Umme Habiba Rumi to suicide are at large eight days after the incident. Mohammad Azam and Mohammad Nazim of Roshangiri in Fatikchhari are leant to be planning to leave the country, alleged a relative of Rumi yesterday.

"Police action so far is utterly sluggish and lacks sincerity," he said.

"Some policemen are helping the brothers to escape arrest," he further alleged.

The officer-in-charge (OC) of the Hathazari Police Station brushed aside lack of sincerity on the part of police adding that they could not pay enough attention to the case as most cops of the police station were engaged in the joint drive to rescue businessman Jamal Uddin Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, students of Nazirhat college yesterday boycotted classes protesting police failure to nab the criminals.

Rumi, daughter of Abul Kalam, took her life at her house by hanging from the ceiling on August 1 following continued teasing.

Body of beheaded man found in Mohammadpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Decapitated body of a young garment worker was recovered from Babor Road in Mohammadpur Friday.

The victim, Abul Kalam, 18, an employee of AKM Garments, Kalyanpur, was missing since he came out from his workplace Wednesday night.

Police recovered the body with his head missing and hands tied up in the back from Balur Math at Babor Road at 6:30pm. Kamal's name was inscribed in his hands and his identity card was found in his pocket.

Later, his elder brother Shah Alam identified him at Mohammadpur Police Station.

Kamal, son of one Ashraf Ali of 51, North Adabar in Shyamoli, might have been murdered due to an altercation with Parvez, another employee of the garment house, Shah Alam said.

He filed a case with Mohammadpur Police Station yesterday, but police could not arrest anyone till last evening.

Indigenous people

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known as Santu Larma.

He asked Prime Minister Khaleida Zia and the leader of opposition Sheikh Hasina to facilitate the situation to meet their demands.

Dr Sadeqa Halim inaugurated the programme while the Sanjeeb Drong conducted it. Besides, Professor Mesbah Uddin Khan, Pankaj Bhattachairya, Promod Mankin, Rashed Khan Menon, Chitali Tripura, Pandit Rabi, Bubi Tripura, Ramendu Majumdar, Mamunur Rashid, Abul Maksud also addressed the rally.

Following the discussion, traditional musical instruments were played, Garo, Oraon and Khasi dances were performed and a colourful display of people in traditional dresses was organised.

An afternoon seminar was also arranged at the TSC auditorium. Attorney General Hasan Arif attended as a chief guest. Deputy Minister of Chittagong Hill Tract ministry Mani Swapan Dewan, Jorgen Lissner, resident coordinator of UNDP, Tom Hansen, Charge d' Affairs, Danish Embassy, Advocate Sigma Huda, Sultana Kamal and Anan Minj addressed the seminar.

The seminar was followed by a cultural show.

DAP projects

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late that any contract signed by a government must be honoured by the subsequent ones.

"We will negotiate with the lenders to ease the terms," he said. "We need DAP in future."

In approving the projects, the cabinet committee yesterday said DAP is suitable for the country's soil and about 1.09 lakh tonnes of the fertiliser are imported a year. The two projects are expected to produce 5.28 lakh tonnes.

But the production cost of each tonne of fertiliser would be Tk 12,374 at DAP-1. For DAP-2, the cost would be Tk 12,228 while the import price of the same is Tk 10,440 per tonne.

When the government decided to cancel the project last year, Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Jiro Kobayashi wrote to Saifur that it would constrain business relations between the two countries.

"The Government of Japan is concerned that the cancellation of the project will affect adversely to business relations between Japan and Bangladesh," the Japanese envoy wrote.

In the first week of January 2002, the industries ministry proposed cancellation of the project. But a certain quarter actively lobbied to reinstate the costly projects, sources said.

Earlier, Saifur said the government has not approved the two DAP fertiliser projects as "we thought it might create a situation like KAFCO's and create a huge burden on the country".

Money testers

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nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) and 1,308 branches of five specialised banks have any fake note detectors while a selection of the 1412 branches of 30 private commercial banks (PCBs) are using such equipment.

On the other hand, almost all of the 31 branches of 10 foreign commercial banks (FCBs) have detectors to identify counterfeiters.

High-tech money testers costing around Tk 2 lakh apiece are available in the market but smaller and less sophisticated units are also available for Tk 800 only, a central bank official said.

"But most banks do not have such machines although the central bank had instructed them to procure the equipment long time ago," Md Abdul Matin, general manager of the Bangladesh Bank, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The central bank has purchased portable fake money detectors and

supplied them to its vault, currency checking points and balance collection booths.

Matin Uddin Ahmed, managing director of the Shahjalal Bank Limited, said use of money testers should be made mandatory for all banks to combat the threat from counterfeiters that are flooding the money market.

He said all 10 branches of his bank use such machines and have identified several cases of forgery. "The fake notes thus detected were punched to prevent their further use," he added.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Bank has reportedly tightened its security measures after a bundle of 100 forged notes of Tk 500 denomination was discovered from its own vault on Wednesday.

Guards of the vault have been transferred and officials and employees were frisked, sources said.

Police-politics link

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"A bad political culture has developed in our country whereby political rivals of the party in power are handled by the police by implicating them in criminal cases. It was done during the previous government and so is also the trend today.

"...a number of bomb blasts took place in public and private places but in each and every case the police have miserably failed to bring the culprit to book. ...

The credibility of the police is at an all-time low. Integrity, honesty and efficiency of the police are under fire and even men in authority doubts the action of the police....

"Very often the fundamental rights of the citizens are denied and razed to the ground by the police and in doing so the police get the blessings of the executive.

"It is not possible by the inefficient police force. The executive authorities must find out some devise to save the citizens from misuse and police torture.

"If the executive turns a blind eye to the misdeeds of the police, this court cannot be a silent spectator and must come forward to safeguard the liberty of the citizens".

About 30 per cent of the 17-page judgement were expunged upon a petition filed by an additional attorney general.

The attorney submitted that the judgement containing comments and views were unwarranted, betraying personal emotions not befitting the court.

The five-member Appellate Bench headed by Chief Justice K M Hasan granted the government petition.

Question leakage

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fate of the previous test, we took utmost security measures to prevent any possibility of leakage of questions this time."

Ruling out any possibility of leak out of questions from the Bangladesh Government (BG) Press, he said questions were printed at BG Press in presence of magistrates and close circuit cameras monitored activities of the employees involved in the printing process.

He also said that after printing over one lakh copies of questions, the plates of the press were burnt. Packets of questions were sealed off and those were opened just before the test.

"I don't believe questions were leaked out," said another member of the PSC, Prof. Hasanuzzaman Chowdhury, who was in charge of Chittagong centre for the test.

"I talked to Professor Mohabbat Khan, who was in charge of Khulna centre, and Mahfuzur Rahman, who was in charge of Rajshahi centre. Both of them told me there were no reports of question paper leakage before or during the test," Hasanuzzaman said.

He claimed vested quarters might spread the rumour of question leakage for 'commercial or political gains'.

About 50 BCS examinees brought out a procession and held a rally on Dhaka University campus yesterday to protest the alleged leak out of questions.

They decided to demonstrate on the campus today to press their demand for cancellation of the test.

BCS examinees from Rajshahi University also brought out a procession and held a rally on the

campus to press similar demand. A total of 1,20,640 candidates sat for the test on Friday.

Earlier, the PSC had cancelled the preliminary test as it found allegations of question leakage to be true. It had also formed an inquiry committee, which is yet to complete its probe.

BSS adds: Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) General Secretary Azizul Bari Helal demanded resignation of those responsible for leakage of questions for the second time.

Verdict in arms case against Hazari today

BSS, Feni

The Special Tribunal-1, Feni, will pronounce the verdict in arms case against former Awami League lawmaker Joyanal Hazari today.

A joint team of police and BDR recovered arms and ammunition from Hazari's 'Sholia Kutir' residence at Mastar Para in Feni town on August 16, 2001.

Judge Mohammad Firoj Alam will give the verdict at noon.

The tribunal has already recorded statements of 10 prosecution witnesses in the case.

The then officer-in-charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station, Abdul Gaffar, filed a case under the Arms Act against Hazari on August 17, 2001.

After investigation, police submitted the charge sheet against Joyanal Hazari and his employee Faruk Hossain Midha on October 11 the same year.

Gas sale move

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export was certainly necessary for the country on economic grounds, but it will be a political disaster if the government did not seek a consensus on the issue.

"The Awami League and the left-leaning parties will not spare the government if it took such a decision," the policymaker was quoted as telling the premier.

Intelligence reports also clearly state that the political consequence will be disastrous for the government as there is an overwhelming opposition against the export.

"The Awami League itself initiated the process to export gas. It signed six production sharing contracts (PSCs) and its fifth-five year plan included export," State Minister Mosharraf told the press yesterday.

"Now the Awami League is using the issue to build up an anti-government movement. There will be opposition to any good work. But the country will realise what it has missed out on after 20 years if it did not export gas," he added.

According to sources at the Petrobangla, the organisation will make a presentation on the gas sector before the prime minister and other cabinet members on August 17.

The Petrobangla chairman will inform them of gas sector development programmes, achievements in the last two years, gas demand and growth till 2020, investment and other issues.

Another group of experts from the Hydrocarbon Cell of the energy ministry will make a presentation on the gas reserve and resources situation.

26 hurt as JCD men swoop on PSTU students

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least 26 students were injured as Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (CD) cadres allegedly swooped on them during the home minister's visit to Patuakhali Science and Technology University (PSTU) on Friday.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury came to visit the PSTU to attend a meeting with the teachers.

First-year students of the university formed a human chain demanding end to their problems.

The minister gave an assurance that he would talk to them after his meeting with the teachers. At around 4:00pm, the minister attempted to leave the campus ignoring students' appeal.

The agitating students tried to bring out a procession to protest the minister's attitude. At this JCD cadres reportedly attacked them several times leaving 26 including eight female students injured.

Maniuzzaman Hiron, Mahibur Rahman Biplob, Rohena Hossain, Munna, Rumki, Ripon, Arzun, Alamgir and others were injured in the assault.

Students called indefinite strike demanding resignation of Vice Chancellor (VC) Dr Hannan Bhuiyan.

However, the VC was not available for his comment.

JCD cadres and police cordoned the campus and a tense situation was prevailing.

901 more Gram Sarkar units formed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Formation of Gram Sarkar (GS) gained pace as 901 units were formed in 37 districts yesterday, the highest number in a day since the process started August 2.

The GS units formed yesterday are 258 in Dhaka, 543 in Chittagong, 41 in Rajshahi, 17 in Khulna, 22 in Barisal and 20 in Sylhet.

With yesterday's formation, the total of GS units stands at 2,290.

Officials are hopeful to constitute all the 40,392 units in as many wards under 4,488 union parishad within the 45-day time limit.

2 killed in Ctg mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two persons were killed in separate incidents here in the city yesterday.

Police and witnesses said a dock labourer, identified as Abul Hossain, son of Maqsd Ali, was fatally hurt while working inside the Sadarghat Jetty under Kotwali Police Station in the morning. Later, he succumbed to his injury at Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

In the other incident, Jobaerul Islam, 16, a student of Bandartila Katakahli School, was killed in a road mishap in front of Bandartila City Corporation Market. A container mover ran over the victim at around 11.30am.

The driver of the container mover was captured. A case was filed with Bandar Police Station.

Netrokona polls

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The CEC presided over the meeting held at the Election Commission conference room. Election Commissioner Safur Rahman, M Munsef Ali, A K Mohammad Ali and senior officials of home ministry, armed forces division, police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) were present at the meeting.

BJP plans

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session.

"The rule is obviously not being followed and MPs who should have been under automatic suspension for the rest of the session continue to draw the daily allowance (Rs 500) for attending Parliament," he said.

"Two constitutional amendments were passed within an hour, without any discussion at all. It's a shame."

The no work, no pay rule is usually resorted to as stringent action against those who strike work in industrial units. Accusing the opposition MPs of stalling proceedings without provocation day after day, the BJP feels the rule is apt to be enforced in Parliament and has even suggested it to the speaker.

The party has reportedly sought a meeting of all parties with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to discuss the nagging problem and ways of solving it.

Each hour of Parliament costs Rs 800,000.

If repeated adjournments were not enough, MPs across party lines united to get the speaker to call off proceedings for next Monday, the only working day between Sunday and Tuesday, when it is a holiday for the Raksha Bandhan festival symbolising the brother-sister bond.

After that, only Wednesday and Thursday will be working days before the August 15 Independence Day, which comes ahead of a weekend.

Hostage at home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The indigenous people are living in daily fear of losing their heritage as well as wealth.

These people, estimated to be 2.5 million, face an increasing aggression towards their land and culture.

The indigenous people belonged to the subcontinent long before the Aryans invaded more than 3,000 years ago.

They now live primarily in the rugged east of Bangladesh, bordering Myanmar and India. Some have also settled in the northern and southern coastal areas.

The economic conditions of the indigenous people in most areas have deteriorated to the extent that most of them are finding it hard to make ends meet.

The Khasi people in Sylhet region, Garo and Koach in Madhupur forest, Rakhain in the coastal region, Santal and Oraon in northern districts, Tripura in Khagrachhari and 13 other tribes of

the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region live in fear of land encroachments.

"The government development policies always go against indigenous people of all regions. People are taking away our lands. As many as 40 Khasi Punji have vanished from Sylhet within the past 40 years," said Andrew Sholomar, president of the Khasi Welfare Association.

Jyotirindra Bodhipriyo Larma, head of the Bangladesh Adibashi Forum, called for a discussion meeting yesterday seeking to end the land encroachment problem.

"People are illegally taking away our lands in the name of development and this must stop," Larma told the rally.

Besides, indigenous women are also becoming prime targets of the Bangladeshes.

According to an AFP report, 68 tribal women were raped between 1991 and 1995 in the southern CHT when troops fought tribal people in the area.

Outages to go on

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work and we don't have the expertise to handle the problem," the official said.

There might be delay in fixing the line if the experts failed to arrive on schedule, sources said.

Meanwhile, the power distribution problem coupled with generation shortfall plunged many parts of the city including Paribagh, Kanwan Bazar, Ramna and Kakrail into brownouts yesterday.

Desa, however, made alternative arrangements to supply power to Jigatala, Lalmatia, Moghbazar and the Bangabhaban.

Earlier a press release of Desa on Friday night said it detected cable problem at Malibagh level crossing on the Rampura Road.

On Wednesday, both 132 kV power supply sub-stations at Ulan tripped abruptly. One of them was restored within an hour and the other after three hours. But power problems persisted due to the cable problem.

"This particular cable was torn by another utility service provider two years ago," said a Desa superintendent engineer, adding: "If unharmed, these cables last up to 70 years without performance degradation."

But irresponsible and inefficient

operation by Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board, Titas Gas Ltd., Dhaka City Corporation and Roads and Highways Department, real estate developers and even Desa downgrade the performance of the cables and other underground infrastructures, sources alleged.

"There are thousands of kilometres of underground power lines in Dhaka. Many of them were installed during the Pakistan rule. If careless digging did not damage the lines, we would have needed not to worry about their longevity," the engineer said.

Asked to comment on the issue, the chief engineer of Wasa suggested to The Daily Star to contact the managing director, who was busy with family commitments.

DU reopens

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The DU authority cancelled almost 40 examinations of various departments.

Meanwhile, the DU authority rehabilitated most of the BCL leaders and activists who were ousted on July 31 night by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal.

US base attacked

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Infantry Division operating in the area.

Two soldiers were wounded in the explosion and were in stable condition, McDonald said. The troops returned fire, he said.

Also yesterday, soldiers west of Kirkuk opened fire on a car that ran a military checkpoint, wounding two Iraqis, McDonald said. The victims were evacuated to a Kirkuk hospital in stable condition, he said.

In south-central Baghdad, two soldiers were wounded in a roadside bomb attack on their armored Humvee vehicle, said Maj. Todd Mercer of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Thursday's bombing of the Jordanian Embassy, which killed 19 people and injured at least 50 raised fears that al-Qaeda-led terrorists were at work in Iraq. The bombing was the first large-scale terrorist attack since Baghdad fell to US forces April 9.

Authorities are looking at Ansar al-Islam, which US officials claim is linked to al-Qaeda, as a potential suspect, according to Lt. Gen. Norton Schwartz, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In Basra, assailants hurled a grenade yesterday at a British military truck in the southern port city, setting the vehicle ablaze as soldiers ran from the smoking vehicle, witnesses said.

"A British truck passed by at 9:15 am local time in front of a gas station where a man hurled a grenade and the vehicle was set on fire. The soldiers rushed out and fled in a taxi," said Ali Hussein, a taxi driver who had been filling up his car with fuel at the time of the attack.

Four British armoured vehicles and three jeeps came to seal off the area, while a crowd lobbed rocks at them. The soldiers fired shots in the air to ward them off. (See also page 10)

BNP serious

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will be held 'as soon as possible' and will not be run by administrators.

Elections to 15 municipalities could not be held due to legal complexities and court injunctions and steps have been taken to lift the legal bar, sources said.

The BNP has assessed that its candidates were defeated in recent municipal polls due to inner conflict and wrong selection of candidates.

"But now steps have been taken to revamp party activities and remove intra-party troubles, select eligible candidates and ensure victory of the BNP candidates in majority of the municipal polls," a BNP leader said.

"If we can win in a large number of municipalities, it would help in the next general elections," he said.

Desa loss triples

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The operational cost of Desa has increased from Tk 956.42 crore to Tk 1758.79 crore in the last six years, outpacing the rise in revenue earnings, which grew only from Tk 875.31 crore to Tk 1,434.48 crore.

Desa of late has an average systems loss of over 20 per cent, of which 15 to 17 per cent is technical and the rest