

Saifur to consider duty on cellphone equipment

Tk 75cr syndicated loan for Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd. settled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said he would consider the duty structure for import of cellphone equipment in the interest of faster growth of the industry.

"Telecoms is rapidly expanding. Ten years ago, people did not even think of the present growth of cellphone, which provides unlimited business opportunities. After studying the regional duty structure on cellphone equipment, we will certainly look into the matter," the minister said.

Saifur was speaking as chief guest at a ceremony at Sonargaon Hotel, marking the settlement of the first syndicated loan in the telecoms sector of Bangladesh.

Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) arranged the syndicated term loan facility of Tk 75 crore for the Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBTL), the service provider of CityCell.

The minister said syndicated loan facility in case of big loans is a successful one and no investment is necessary for this system.

Managing Director of the PBTL Faisal Moshred Khan said in spite of the economic recession, CityCell's customer base grew by 200 per cent over the last one year. CityCell shareholders intend to invest over \$100 million over the next 18 to 24 months

to expand its network by more than 300 per cent in 2004, he added.

"We should be in a position to provide the best customer service by bringing in new innovative technologies like soft-switch and other latest technologies as a part of the expansion of services," he said.

"These will help us provide more value added services like local inter-operator and international short messaging service and multimedia messaging service facilities allowing picture transfer, TV viewing and data transfer at a speed of up to 144 kbps," he said.

CityCell has already expanded its services to more than 50 districts, he mentioned.

Acting Chairman of the PBTL Asghar Karim said the company is planning a major expansion in the next couple of years.

PBTL Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Christopher William Maloy said the company's expansion programme will help increase the customer base as well as improve service.

Acting CEO of the SCB SAA Masrur said the bank arranged three syndications for the PBTL. "Seven banks including the SCB participated in the first syndicated facility, which enabled the PBTL to introduce CDMA technology in Bangladesh and Dhaka-Chittagong microwave link project," he said.

Vajpayee eyes

FROM PAGE 12

enriching partnerships. Apart from Bangladesh's promising gas reserves, he said, Nepal and Bhutan have an estimated potential of 100,000MW of environmentally clean hydropower.

"Once," Vajpayee said, "We reach that stage, we would not be far from mutual security cooperation, open borders and even a single currency."

The Indian leader also advocated for regional trade. "By most estimates trade within regions accounts for nearly three-fourths of global trade. Yet, in spite of our geographical proximity, shared economic characteristics and similar development infrastructure, intra-South Asia trade is under 5 percent of our total foreign trade," he regretted.

He said the most important common war at present was against poverty, disease, hunger and underdevelopment. All must share experiences and promote intra-regional linkages for economic and social development.

A small, but significant, beginning has been made by our Saarc experts group on poverty alleviation. The group, drawn from all Saarc countries, has extensively documented best practices in poverty alleviation programmes across the region," he added.

The Indian prime minister said, "As we develop greater economic stakes in each other, we can put aside mistrust and dispel unwaranted suspicions. We will also develop mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns and promote more of our common interests."

He said providing legitimate avenues of free commercial interaction, black market and underground trade could be eradicated.

The envoy conveyed Russian President Vladimir Putin's greetings to the PM. Khaleda invited the president to visit Bangladesh.

PIA

FROM PAGE 1

Saturdays and Mondays, Nazir Ahmed, PIA's country manager in Bangladesh, said.

With the resumption of flights, travelling the route of the two Saarc (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) nations will be much easier and convenient, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Resumption of the PIA services will increase trade and strengthen friendly relations between the two countries," he added.

The PIA has recently appointed Bengal ABN Travels Limited (BATL) as its general sales agent, said Reazur Rahman, managing director of the BATL.

Resumption of the PIA services will provide travelling alternatives to passengers and reduce travel cost, he added.

Currently, Biman Bangladesh Airlines operates three weekly flights on Dhaka-Karachi route. In 2001, the PIA carried 40,739 passengers to and from Bangladesh.

Earlier this month, India and Pakistan agreed on restoring flights between them from January 1 and lift restrictions on aircraft crossing into each other's territory.

Following an attack on its parliament in December 2001, India severed all transport links with Pakistan accusing the nuclear rival of its involvement in the attack.

The PIA will also re-establish its flights to Nepal from January 4, 2004.

Train knocks boy to death

BSS, Ctg

A shuttle train knocked a schoolboy to death and injured two others near Sholoshahar railway station in the port city yesterday.

A Chittagong University-bound shuttle train smashed a rickshaw at around 9:45am at gate No 2 of the rail station, injuring Azadur Rahman Azad, 11, a schoolboy, Ali Akbar, 40, the rickshawpuller, and an unidentified person, witnesses said.

Locals admitted them to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH), where doctors declared Azad dead, railway police sources said.

The injured were being treated at the CMCH, sources added.

Arms, combat dress recovered at Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The armed forces recovered six sawn-off rifles and six military uniforms from an abandoned house at Alekkhong union under Roangchhari upazila Monday.

Acting on a tip off, a team of the armed forces raided Gurukhong area and recovered the arms from an abandoned Jum Ghar, Police said.

The arms and uniforms were handed over to police.

Biman pilots

FROM PAGE 1

yesterday to meet gradually a four-point charter of demands of pilots.

"The minister gave assurance to meet our demands by phases. So we withdrew the 'fly by book' movement," said Bapa President Captain SM Nasimul Haque.

Earlier at a special general meeting on December 16, Bapa raised the four-point demand with the December 21 deadline: increased salaries for the crew, commissioning of an alternative institution or aviation medicine experts for medical check-up, employment of cockpit crew's children in Biman and relaxing of rules to help Bapa get registered as a collective bargaining agent.

As the deadline expired, pilots stopped operating extra flights on a 'limited' strike from Monday disrupting international and domestic flights and sparking worries among thousands of Hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Biman is to ferry 25,000 Bangladeshis intended to perform Hajj pilgrimage in 81 special flights from December 31.

Biman flies to 26 international and seven domestic destinations with 17 aircraft under a schedule of 12 to 15 domestic and eight international flights a day.

Egyptian FM

FROM PAGE 12

him in the hospital.

The confrontation Monday afternoon at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest city, came after Maher heard a strong indication from the Israelis that while they would not sign a truce with Palestinian militants, they would abide by a ceasefire.

The Indian leader also advocated for regional trade. "By most estimates trade within regions accounts for nearly three-fourths of global trade. Yet, in spite of our geographical proximity, shared economic characteristics and similar development infrastructure, intra-South Asia trade is under 5 percent of our total foreign trade," he regretted.

He said the most important common war at present was against poverty, disease, hunger and underdevelopment. All must share experiences and promote intra-regional linkages for economic and social development.

A small, but significant, beginning has been made by our Saarc experts group on poverty alleviation.

The confrontation Monday afternoon at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest city, came after Maher heard a strong indication from the Israelis that while they would not sign a truce with Palestinian militants, they would abide by a ceasefire.

Two Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams of Rab will deal with criminals possessing sophisticated firearms. Its divers and paratroopers will carry out special operations.

PM seeks

FROM PAGE 12

Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Khaleda stressed improved cooperation in educational and cultural areas and asked for more scholarships for Bangladeshi students at various Russian universities.

The envoy conveyed Russian President Vladimir Putin's greetings to the PM. Khaleda invited the president to visit Bangladesh.

With the resumption of flights, travelling the route of the two Saarc (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) nations will be much easier and convenient, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Resumption of the PIA services will increase trade and strengthen friendly relations between the two countries," he added.

The PIA has recently appointed Bengal ABN Travels Limited (BATL) as its general sales agent, said Reazur Rahman, managing director of the BATL.

Resumption of the PIA services will provide travelling alternatives to passengers and reduce travel cost, he added.

Currently, Biman Bangladesh Airlines operates three weekly flights on Dhaka-Karachi route. In 2001, the PIA carried 40,739 passengers to and from Bangladesh.

Earlier this month, India and Pakistan agreed on restoring flights between them from January 1 and lift restrictions on aircraft crossing into each other's territory.

Following an attack on its parliament in December 2001, India severed all transport links with Pakistan accusing the nuclear rival of its involvement in the attack.

The PIA will also re-establish its flights to Nepal from January 4, 2004.

20 abducted

FROM PAGE 1

Chakma, Pratimoy Chakma, Chirojoti Chakma, Gopal Krishna Chakma, Babul Chakma and Shankar Chakma.

Shangamitra Dewan, 60, father of Ilira Dewan, who is general secretary of the UPDF-backed Hill Women's Federation, and village 'Karbari' (headman) Bhabatosh Dewan are among the abductees.

The anti-peace accord UPDF blamed the pro-accord PCJSS for the incident. The peace accord was signed in 1997, bringing an end to two decades of bush war in the hill tracts.

Gargaichari is known as a UPDF stronghold and the abduction is the first such incident in the area allegedly involving the PCJSS.

The entire area is now tense and police and army are on the vigil.

The law enforcers and troops are checking all vehicles passing through the main roads of the district town.

In separate press statements, the district unit of the UPDF and Hill Women's Federation condemned the incident and demanded immediate and unconditional release of the abductees.

The UPDF statement was signed by Sushil Chakma and the other was signed by Antarkar Chakma, office secretary of the central committee of the federation.

The PIA services will provide travelling alternatives to passengers and reduce travel cost, he added.

"Blood for blood and killing," chanted thousands of Palestinians at funerals for the 25 Palestinians died in violence over the same period.

An army spokesman said the Rafah raid was "part of a continuous fight" to destroy tunnels to smuggle arms from Egypt. The army said one tunnel was found in a house. A similar operation in October took a week and left 15 Palestinians dead.

"Blood for blood and killing," chanted thousands of Palestinians at funerals for the 25 Palestinians died in violence over the same period.

The PIA will also re-establish its flights to Nepal from January 4, 2004.

In the other incident, Siddique Mandol, 35, of Subdia village in sadar upazila was killed in his cropland.

Family sources said Siddique went there to irrigate but did not return home.

He was found dead with his throat slit yesterday morning.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to hospital for autopsy.

The chief executive of a private bank said "our (private banks') pace of writing off is slow because this demands all-out scrutiny. But we hope to write off a major chunk of our default loans within this month."

The Jewish state has demanded a Palestinian crackdown on militant groups as a commitment to the so-called "road map" and warned of unilateral steps if it failed that would cost the Palestinians some of the land they want for a state.

The PIA will also re-establish its flights to Nepal from January 4, 2004.

2 drivers killed

FROM PAGE 12

Patrol police recovered his bullet-riddled body from the slum at 11:00pm.

Police found a telephone index in Al-Amin's wallet and made phone call to one of his neighbours at mid-night.

On being informed of the phone call the victim's brother Mohammad Sohel and wife Mukta went to identify the body.

The body received two bullets in the forehead, two in the shoulder, one each in the back and the stomach.

Police are yet to identify the killers or unearth the reason behind the murder.

Al-Amin left behind a four-year-old daughter Lamia, wife, two brothers and as many sisters.

Meanwhile, in another incident a rent-a-car driver was strangled at Mirpur on Monday night.

Mirpur police recovered the body of the driver, Shafiqul Islam, 32, from a market at 11:00pm. The inquest said that there were marks of injuries in the head and he might have been strangulated to death.

Shafiqul was employed as a taxi driver with SA rent-a-car, a car rental service, for ten years and was murdered while on a trip carrying passengers.

One Sabuj, aged about 28, rented the microbus for the trip in which Shafiqul was killed.

Sabuj came to the car rental service at College Road at 3:00pm, rented a microbus and paid Tk 500 as advance of the rent of Tk 1100, said Mohammed Hasan, manager of the car rental service.

"He hired the vehicle to attend a marriage ceremony at Amtaali, Savar and asked to pick up passengers from 4/A Conference Tower lane, Katashur, in the evening," Hasan added.

Hasan gave Shafiqul, a trusted driver of the company, a grey

microbus (Dhaka Metro Cha-512360) at around 6:30pm.

Police recovered the body of Shafiqul from the old cattle market at Mirpur Mazar Road. The victim's neck bore marks nylon rope. His hands were tied at the back and marks of injuries were also found in the head.

Police mounted a search in Katashur but could not find anyone by the name of Sabuj, they said.

Separate cases have been filed with the police.

Both the prime minister and president earlier approved the information ministry's proposal to initiate the process, official sources said.

Their approval is needed to launch a probe against an official with the rank and status of joint secretary and above. The DG of DFP is a joint secretary-level official.

Both the prime minister and president earlier approved the information ministry's proposal to initiate the process, official sources said.

Their approval is needed to launch a probe against an official with the rank and status of joint secretary and above. The DG of DFP is a joint secretary-level official.

Their approval is needed to launch a probe against an official with the rank and status of joint secretary and above. The DG of DFP is a joint secretary-level official.

Their approval is needed to launch a probe against an official with the rank and status of joint secretary and above. The DG of DFP is a joint secretary-level official.

Their approval is needed to launch a