

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 are 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 (PBTIL), the service provider of CityCell.

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

Managing Director of the PBTIL Faisal Morshed 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

Vajpayee eyes

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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.

On water issue, the Indian PM said: "The optimum management of our regional water resources for irrigation, navigation and flood control can have a multiple effect on infrastructure, development and growth in our entire region.

"This requires not only financial investments, but also maturity of policy. We should recognise that an enduring partnership can only be built on the basis of each country wisely exercising the rights of a lower riparian and responsibly fulfilling the obligations of an upper riparian."

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 unwarranted 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.

8 Palestinians

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Palestinian was shot in the stomach and died in hospital.

One militant was brought dead to the hospital still clutching a bomb, witnesses said. Another died of shrapnel wounds. A Palestinian policeman was shot near the border post and an onlooker was killed as he watched tanks at his window.

The army said Tuesday's raid was not in response to the ambush in central Gaza late on Monday in which two officers died -- the first Israelis killed in a month. At least 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 for killing," chanted thousands of Palestinians at funerals for the dead in yesterday's raid.

The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, which lost two dead in the raid and was one of two militant groups behind Monday's ambush, vowed to strike back inside Israel. The group is linked to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

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.

Train knocks boy to death

BSS, Ctg

A shuttle train knocked a school-boy 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 Alekhhong union under Roangchhari upazila Monday.

Acting on a tip off, a team of the armed forces raided Gurukkhang area and recovered the arms from an abandoned *Gum Jar*, Police said.

The arms and uniforms were handed over to police.

Biman pilots

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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 NS Samikul 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.

Rab fails

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Rab will have a gang crime unit and a narcotics crime unit to deal with organised cartels. There will also be a specialised investigation unit to probe money laundering, fraud, homicide and such crimes.

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

20 abducted

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

Shanghamitra 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 abducted.

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.

Gargaicharri 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 abducted people.

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

Outlaws slaughter

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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.

2 drivers killed

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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 midnight.

On being informed of the phone call the victim's brother Mohammad Soheli 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 Lima, 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 strangled to death.

Shafiqul was employed as a taxi driver with SA rent-a-car, a car rental company, 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 Aamtali, Savar and asked to pick up passengers from 4/A Confidence Tower lane, Katashur, in the evening," Hasan added.

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

Rampage at DU

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microbus knocked him down at Nilkhet crossroads in the city.

As the news of his death reached the varsity campus yesterday noon, hundreds of students came out on the streets making frenzied demonstrations. They barricaded the Nilkhet entrance to the university, damaged at least six vehicles and set fire to the minibuses of the police force on duty in front of Sir AF Rahman Hall.

At one stage, police in riot gear swooped on the students and fired two tear gas shells that left at least six injured, three of them seriously. A police constable was also wounded during the half-hour clash with the mob.

The three seriously injured were rushed to the DMCH and the wounded police constable, Mehedi Hasan, was sent to the Police Hospital at Rajbari.

Additional police forces were deployed and the university authorities made the campus off limit to all vehicles in order to avoid any further untoward incidents.

After the namaz-e-janaza was held at the university mosque, Mushfiq's body was sent to his village home in Kishoregonj.

microbus (Dhaka Metro Cha-51-2360) 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 Kataras but could not find anyone by the name of Sabuj, they said.

Separate cases have been filed with the police stations.

3 die in road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three persons were killed and one injured yesterday in road accidents in the city.

Monti Mukta, a seven-year-old girl, was killed when a microbus hit her on Mazar Road at Mirpur at 10:00am. She was at the time playing on the road in front of her house.

In another incident, Jahanara Begum, 32, a student of the Northern University of Bangladesh, was hit by a speeding bus in front of the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar at 3:45pm. Jahanara was rushed to the DMCH at around 4:30pm and the attending doctor declared her dead.

An unidentified man was killed crushed by an unknown vehicle at Teigaon at around 12:15pm. The vehicle ran over him when he was crossing the road beside the Teigaon Truck Stand. Police took him to the DMCH at 1:00pm where he was declared dead.

In another incident at Uttara at 1:45pm, a bus driver was injured on the Airport Road when his bus (Dhaka Metro-Cha-8324) belonging to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority collided with another bus. The bus driver was admitted to the DMCH.

Joint forces

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led a raid on a house in the village where the extremists were holding a secret meeting.

Police named the dead Shawkat Ali, 35, and linked him to the PBCP, blamed for a series of high-profile killings in the district over the years. The body was taken into the custody of joint forces.

Among the injured, Lieutenant Faruque was admitted to Jessore Combined Military Hospital with bullet wounds.

Four others, wounded in the half-an-hour armed confrontation with 50 rounds, are Officer-in-Charge of Phultala Police Station Ashraful Islam and constables Abdul Mannan, Manzurul Islam and Nazmul.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Abdul Aziz Sarkar said the four policemen were admitted to Phultala Health Complex with bullet wounds.

Amin, 30, Momin, 28, and Mashiur, 32, were kept under tight security in Phultala Police Station after they were arrested with guns, the DIG added.

The joint forces launched combining operations in Abhoynagar, Phultala and Dumuria -- the upazilas believed to be strong bases of underground operatives.

Probe process against DFP DG begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities have started the process of departmental action for alleged corruption against Director General (DG) of the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) Syed Mahbubur Rahman.

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 the DFP is a joint secretary-level official.

The information ministry on Monday served a show cause notice on the DG saying, "You have been accused of misconduct and corruption under articles (B) and 3 (D) of the Public Servant (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 1985 and why you should not be removed from the service"

He will have to reply to it within 10 working days and also state whether he wants a personal hearing or place evidences in self-defence in the departmental proceedings.

Officials said the DG faces charges of misconduct and corruption under articles (71) (A), 3 (B) and (D) of the 1985 rules.

An inquiry committee report earlier said he misappropriated about Tk 36 lakh through massive irregularities.

On December 3, the information ministry sent its proposal to the prime minister and with her approval it was sent to the president, who approved and sent it back to the information ministry.

The Daily Star ran a report on corruption in the DFP on December 21.

Lalmonirhat murder Hartal observed in district, 19 BNP men accused

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A daylong hartal was observed in the district yesterday to protest the murder of local Awami League (AL) leader Shamsul Alam Suruj who was hacked to death allegedly by ruling BNP men at Charitabari in Aditmari upazila Monday.

The victim's brother filed a case with Aditmari Police Station accusing 19 local leaders and activists of BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) of murdering the AL leader, who was also chairman of Kamlabari Union Parishad under Aditmari upazila.

Reports from different parts of the district said all businesses remained closed and road and rail communications with the district headquarters remained suspended during the peaceful hartal.

Local AL and its front organisations brought out protest processions and organised rallies during the hartal hours demanding arrest and punishment of the killers.

No-one was arrested till yesterday, police said.

JU deadlock on

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university senate to be held on February 19 to nominate a three-member panel of vice-chancellor (VC) candidates, a longstanding demand of JU Teachers' Association (Juta).

But the move fell flat with the teachers unmoved by the gesture as well as hunger strikers vowing to continue their fast until classes resume and examinations are held.

Professor Amin Mohammad Ali, president of Juta, called the move a farce and criticised the VC for 'dilly-dallying' with announcing the election schedule. Juta spearheaded the class boycott programme and has been demanding the vice-chancellor's resignation among other demands.

At around 10:00am yesterday, over 2,000 students brought out processions from all 10 university dormitories and gathered in front of Amar Ekushey, a sculpture in front of the Social Science Faculty.

The agitating students later blockaded the Administrative Building and locked its entrances with pro-VCs Enamul Haq Khan and M Imamuddin, Treasurer ABM Enayet Hossain, Proctor Moshir Rahman as well as officers and employees inside the building.

They also locked up the on-campus branch of Agrani Bank, the Examination Office and Transport Office after driving out officials and

employees.

Students also snapped telephone connections to the buildings at noon.

Pro-VC M Imamuddin met student representatives at around 11:00am and agreed to announce within 24 hours the date of resuming classes. The students threatened to blockade the VC's office and teachers' quarters, if things go otherwise.

Sources said VC Prof Jasim Uddin Ahmed did not go to office since student agitation began Monday, while officials close to the VC said he was busy holding meetings with government high-ups in a bid to solve the academic deadlock.

Earlier, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists locked the gates of men's dormitories at 6:00am and asked students to join a JCD procession at 11:00am instead of the general students' procession. Later, the JCD men opened the gates following protests by residents.

On Monday night, JCD activists beat up two leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League for participating in Monday's general students' agitation.

Meanwhile, Juta has threatened to continue the class boycott programme unless the JCD activists who allegedly manhandled teachers on August 10 are punished. "The probe body formed to investigate the incident has not submitted its report yet," the Juta president said.

Tk 7,600 crore pillage

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Continuous systems loss of power and fake metre reading also infuriated the committee members.

"I can not believe that in Lalbagh and Fatulla, theft is so rampant that the level of systems loss is over 60 percent," comments Shahidul Islam, chairman of the committee.

The committee formed a sub-committee yesterday to probe this corruption.

Corruption in the Rural Electrification Board (REB) also raised eyebrows as they found serious irregularities in a tender bidding for power distribution extension involving about half a million dollars. Another sub-committee was formed to investigate this irregularity, said Committee Chairman Shahidul

Islam.

Apprehending more irregularities, the standing committee also sought papers on the Westmont 130 MW power plant in Sirajganj. Westmont signed an agreement in 1998 to set up a large-mount power plant within 10 months. After a lot of delay, it set up a 90 MW plant. And although it has been given repeated schedules to upgrade the plant to a 130 MW one, it failed to do so. The company is now saying that it will upgrade the plant by March next.

In such a context, Westmont is lobbying for another 130 MW power plant by promising a lot of benefits to Bangladesh. "When they could not fulfil their obligations in five years, how can we trust them again?" Shahidul Islam pointed out.

Sources said Westmont was interested about the second plant as it had an unused 10-year-old power unit in its inventory.

The report on the PDB said 14,812 general objections involving Tk 4,409 crore and 5,477 advance objections involving Tk 3,190 crore remain unresolved since 1971 up to November 2003.

Besides, 355 audit objections since FY 1988-1989 to FY 2000-2001 involving Tk 285 crore lie unsettled.

The PDB however informed the committee that the extent of load shedding was coming down. Where there were 1,042 hours of load shedding in FY 2000-2001 and 900 hours in FY 2001-2002, it has come down to 767 hours in FY 2002-2003.

Committee Chairman Shahidul Islam presided over the meeting, with other members and officials concerned attending.