

## More telecoms tariff cuts okayed

NWD call charges cut to Tk 4.50 a minute

**TELECOM TARIFF CUTS**

**NWD EXISTING CHARGE**

ZONE	AREA	PEAK (Per minute from 8am-8pm)	OFF-PEAK (Per minute, 8pm-8am)
Zone-1	0-50 mile	Tk. 3	Tk. 2.25
Zone-2	51-100 mile	Tk. 6	Tk. 4.50
Zone-3	Over 100 mile	Tk. 10	Tk. 7.50

**NEW NWD CALL CHARGE**

AREA	PEAK (8:00AM-10PM)	OFF-PEAK (10PM-8AM)
Within the district	Tk. 3	Tk. 1.50
0-100 miles	Tk. 3	Tk. 1.50
Over 100 miles	Tk. 4.50	Tk. 3

REIAUL KARIM BYRON

The finance ministry yesterday approved reduced charges for the Nation Wide Dialling (NWD) and International Subscribers Dialling (ISD) calls to compete with the private cellphone operators and curb illegal internet telephony.

The charges for NWD calls have been slashed about 55 percent and ISD 31 percent. Under the new tariff regime, a subscriber can call anywhere in Bangladesh at Tk 4.50 a minute against Tk 10 a minute during peak hours and at Tk 3 against Tk 7.50 during off-peak hours.

A call made within a district will now cost Tk 1.5 instead of Tk 3.0. The ministry of Post and Telecommunications will issue a gazette notification in a few days, sources said.

The ministry also redefined the peak and off-peak hours from 8:00am to 10:00pm and 10:00pm to 8:00am.

It reduced the air distance category from three to two slabs -- from 0 kilometre to 100 kilometres and 101 kilometres and above -- following a proposal forwarded to the ministry by the state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BT&T).

The call tariff for the first slab has been fixed at Tk 3 a minute, which was Tk 3 to Tk 6, during peak hours. The call charge would be flat at Tk 1.50 during off-peak hours.

The call charge for the second slab have been cut to Tk 6 a minute from Tk 10 during peak hours and Tk 3 during off-peak hours.

Subscribers making long-distance calls would primarily benefit from the new tariff regime, which has been approved by Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, according to sources.

The ministry has also introduced four zones for ISD calls in place of three zones.

Neighbouring and middle-eastern countries including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar,

## AL to lay siege to Secretariat PMO, on April 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil said yesterday they will lay siege to the capital including the PMO and the Secretariat after April 21 to overthrow Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's administration by April 30.

"We are still confident about the deadline endorsed by the party. Tens of thousands of AL workers will lay siege to the capital -- to the Prime Minister's Office, Hawa Bhaban, Secretariat, government offices and all entry points to the city," Jalil said.

The AL general secretary was speaking at a programme, 'Face to face with women journalists', organised by Bangladesh Center for Development Journalism and Communication (BCDJC) yesterday in Dhaka.

He said the main programme would be announced after April 21 that include gathering three to four lakh AL activists in the capital.

Jalil said the BNP-led government should not rule the country even for a day, as it has failed to secure people's life and property.

The government came to office promising that it would curb corruption, instead corruption has increased two thousand times compared with our tenure," he said. Killing, violence, rape and

## Politics spins around talks-deadline axis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP yesterday repeated its call for talks with the Awami League (AL) amid the main opposition party's looming threat to dislodge the coalition by April 30.

The offer of dialogue came from a meeting between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and newspaper editors, two days ahead of AL's demonstration to besiege Hawa Bhaban, dubbed as BNP's alternative power-

house, on Wednesday. "We are willing to meet immediately and I'm ready to send invitations right away. The talks can be held anywhere," said BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who was present at the meeting to exchange views.

In reaction, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid questioned the government's sincerity and complained that it did not allow AL leaders to visit the family of

Gulam Rabbani, managing director of Korean Export Processing Zone, who went into a coma after he was injured by assailants.

Talking to women journalists at a city programme yesterday, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil reiterated the April-30 deadline and expressed determination to participate in next elections, which he projected to be held in June or July this year.

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## Govt renews talks offer to AL

PM not perturbed by April 30 deadline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday renewed his offer for dialogue with the opposition on the prevailing political situation.

The offer came during a luncheon Prime Minister Khaleda Zia hosted for editors of press and electronic media at the Prime Minister's Bhaban yesterday.

"We are willing to meet immediately and I am ready to send invitation right away to that effect. The talks could be held anytime and at any place," Bhuiyan said.

The prime minister said her government and her party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, are always willing and open for discussions with the opposition to resolve any conflict or misunderstanding

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## Rising prices push govt into sugar import

STAR REPORT

The government has at last resorted to its own market instruments to control price spiral of essentials, allowing Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) to import sugar, the price of which was forecast to rise by Tk 10 a kg from next month.

After a hiatus of two years, the government has asked the BSFIC, the lone sugar producer in the country, to import 1 lakh metric ton (MT) of sugar to bridge price hike.

But corporation sources feared that the decision to import sugar through the public sector is unlikely to succeed in keeping prices under control due to strict clauses in the Bangladesh Public Procurement Regulations, 2003, prescribed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

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## Tele-tapping to help cut crimes, minister says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The proposed amendment to the telecoms act allowing intelligence agencies to tap phone calls and bust e-mails will help cut rising crime, said Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque yesterday.

"I believe independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh should be of prime concern. We are working to that end, as many countries have already taken different steps following the September 11 attack on the US," the minister told reporters at the Press Information Department, explaining his ministry's move to amend the Bangladesh Telecommunication Act 2001.

The amendment proposal prompted concern from the civil society that it will breach privacy of individuals.

A leading intelligence agency backed by others convinced the post and telecommunications ministry to amend the act, clearing way for them to produce tapped and e-mailed messages before court as evidence.

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## BAIL FIX ALLEGATION PM okays removal of judge Shahidur

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday gave the nod for removal of a High Court judge for misconduct.

The prime minister approved a presidential note on the Supreme Judicial Council's January 26 verdict report with an opinion that the judge in question, Syed Shahidur Rahman, should stand down as additional judge.

The law ministry on Saturday sent the presidential note to the prime minister for her advice, two and a half months into the submission of the verdict report.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office said prime minister's advice was sent to the Bangladesh High Court yesterday and the president would act in accordance with her advice constitutionally. "Now it is just a matter of time before the judge is removed," said a source.

The council was formed on October 29 last year upon a presi-

dential directive following an allegation against Shahidur by Supreme Court Bar Association President Rokonuddin Mahmud. Rokon on October 15 accused Shahidur of taking Tk 50,000 from a client for fixing bail of an accused in a women repression case.

The council in its report said it has not been proved beyond doubt to convict the judge of taking bribes in the bail fix, but "on consideration of facts and materials on record in its entirety, it cannot be said that the allegations are not supported by evidence, nor can it be said the allegations are baseless".

The judge was appointed on April 24 last year in the face of objection by the Bar association and senior Supreme Court lawyers. They alleged when Shahidur was an office bearer of the association, he embezzled the organisation funds.

Shahidur has been on leave since the allegation was raised on October 15 last year.



Traffic moves at a slow pace on a slippery road as light rain came down on the city yesterday bringing a short relief to residents after days of sweltering heat.

PHOTO: STAR

## CASE AGAINST BABY BOY HC issues rule on govt

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court on Saturday issued a suo moto rule on the government asking it to explain by April 24 why the proceeding of the criminal case against 3-year old child Iman Ali should not be quashed.

The court directed the chief metropolitan magistrate, Dhaka to send the record of the case to it by the date. It also directed for putting the case ahead of others on April 24 for hearing and order.

The division bench of Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana and Justice AKM Asaduzzaman issued the rule upon the home secretary, district magistrate and deputy commissioner, Dhaka, chief metropolitan magistrate, Dhaka, and officer-in-charge of the police station concerned.

The Daily Star on April 14 ran a

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## Close down Taiwanese office in Dhaka

Chinese envoy urges govt as he meets FBCCI chief

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

China yesterday requested Bangladesh again to immediately close down the Taiwanese office in Dhaka for the sake of 'long term interest' of the two countries.

At a meeting with Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Abdul Awal Mintoo, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh

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## BTTB CELLPHONE Telecoms minister says no foul play in vendor selection

ABU SAEED KHAN

Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haque yesterday denied the allegations of foul play in the selection of two vendors for the \$76 million cellphone project of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BT&T).

The BTTB has recommended the names of German equipment-maker Siemens and Chinese Huawei to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for the procurement of equipment without updating it in line

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## Good harvest, exports keep economy growing

Says World Bank in quarterly update

STAR REPORT

With a 4.1-percent rise in food grains production, the country very likely will achieve the projected 5.5-percent GDP growth in the current fiscal year, says the World Bank in its quarterly update.

The country's economy has continued to grow in fiscal year (FY) 2003-04, thanks to early grain har-

vests estimated at 25.3 million tonnes in net production, it reports.

A strong growth in exports and imports too is seen to boost the trade service sector. The rebound in Bangladesh's export performance, which started in February 2003, has continued, the bank says, adding export earnings during the first seven months of FY04 has increased by 16.2 percent compared to the

corresponding period of the previous year.

The remittances from expatriate Bangladeshis have rebounded in recent months, increasing by 11.2 percent in the first eight months of the current fiscal year relative to the corresponding period of the previous year," the World Bank (WB) updates.

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## Kidnapper of businessman arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kotwali police on Saturday night arrested a criminal in charge of abduction and attempt to blackmail a businessman on paying Tk 5 lakh.

Earlier in the morning, the criminals acting as a relative called paper trader Abdul Kuddus, 58, at his Patuati house and asked him to appear in front of Maniknagar mosque in the area at 11:00.

On his arrival, a group of youths forcibly took him to a house at a

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PHOTO: STAR

Mathura, an archaeological site in Bagura, loses splendour as local people dig earth out of the location.

## Plunderers destroy Mahasthan Garh

ANWAR ALI and HASIBUR RAHMAN, Bogra

The systematic plunder of the archaeological treasures of Mahasthan Garh, one of the world's ancient habitations that traces the roots of Bangladesh, has left the national heritage to slip to ruin, local residents say.

Influential as well as poor local residents are stripping the over 2,374 year-old ancient city in Bogra, known as Pundranagar in history, off invaluable bricks and throwing up houses encroaching a major chunk of its protected land in parody of a ban.

Many people are also cutting

away mud from Mathura point of the old city that served as the provincial capital of mighty Maurya, Gupta, Pal and other rulers because of the authorities' indifference, they allege.

Influential people sell the ancient bricks at cut prices and workers employed by the buyers

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