

## FIXED-LINE TELECOM OPERATION

# Bashundhara first to get licence

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) yesterday decided to award Bashundhara Communications Network Limited (BCNL) first licence to run fixed-line phone in the private sector.

BTRC officials said the move was aimed at providing people with more land phones, as, according to the

International Telecommunication Union, Bangladesh has less than one telephone per 100 people.

The figure rises to 2.15 per 100 people if mobile-to-mobile connections are included. There are more than three million phones, including 2.25 million cell phones in the country.

BCNL is a concern of Bashundhara Group, one of the country's biggest conglomerates.

"The BTRC has decided in principle to award the PSTN licence to Bashundhara Communications Network Limited in four zones as it qualifies," BTRC Chairman Syed Maqbul Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday.

The decision was taken at a commission meeting of the telecom watchdog.

The BTRC chairman said the company will have to deposit Tk 8

crore in licence fee in three weeks and follow the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) licensing roll-out plan to launch the private sector land phone service.

The licence will be valid for 15 years and can be renewed. The renewal fee has not been fixed as yet. An operator also has to pay the commission Tk 3 crore every year.

"This will increase tele-reach and

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## 'Free anti-graft' body to get its head in 2 days'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said a chairman would be appointed to the Anti-corruption Commission in a day or two.

The chairman would then select the other members.

"We have made a number of decisions today on administrative reforms. A number of steps have already been taken for economic and banking reforms. But we will have to do more," Saifur told the press at his office.

"We have made many promises to the development partners but could not implement some of them, especially those related to governance reforms," he said.

## CABINET RESHUFFLE

# Portfolios of eight ministers changed

### Four ministries merged into two; top BNP leaders see the change meaningless

REZAUL KARIM

The government last night reallocated the portfolios of six ministers and two state ministers and merged four ministries into two in a cabinet reshuffle ahead of the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting beginning tomorrow.

Highly placed sources said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia made the

changes to infuse further dynamism into the administration, but some key leaders of her ruling BNP said the effort was virtually meaningless.

Khaleda did not downsize the cabinet in the reshuffle despite widespread criticism in and outside the BNP and pressure from the development community.

The ministries of jute and textiles merged into the Ministry of Textiles

and Jute and the Food and Disaster Management and Relief ministries merged to form the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said the mergers were part of a plan to downsize the government.

In the reshuffle, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, elderly leader of the

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## Sweat it out, scorchers ahead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A blistering heat wave baking Bangladesh further intensified yesterday on back of a brewing cyclone in the Arabian Sea, making life in Dhaka and elsewhere miserable.

Many people, especially the old and children, fell sick as the scorcher, coupled with frequent power cuts and inadequate water supply, brought life to a virtual halt.

As most people preferred to stay indoors to avoid exposure to blazing sun, traffic and people on city roads thinned out, listless pedicabs, rickshaws and day-workers lazed out under trees in leafy areas. Parents cautioned their children against playing outside.

The Meteorological Department said temperatures significantly soared in western, northern and central regions, but remained relatively low in southern and eastern regions.

The highest temperature was recorded at 40.9 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga, up from 40 degrees

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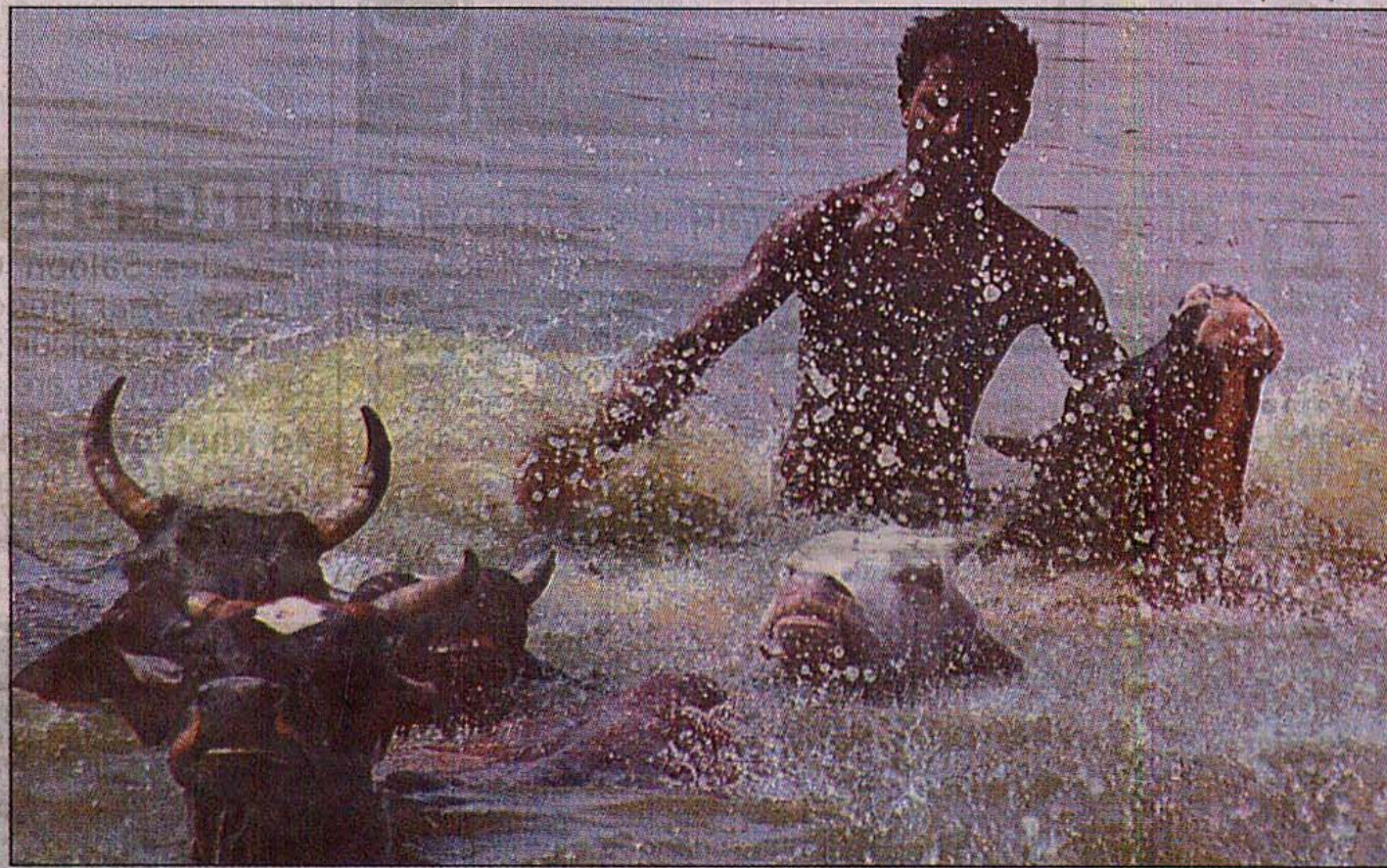


PHOTO: STAR

COOLING DIP Having had enough of heat and dust, the cows and their master take a refreshing dip at Basila river yesterday.

# Empty pledges

### Donors point out that the government made a host of reform commitments without fulfilling them

REZAUL KARIM BYRON

A chunk of the commitments the government made on governance reforms to the donors at the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meetings in 2002 and 2003 remain unfulfilled, according to the discussion notes of the donors prepared for the upcoming meet.

According to a table prepared by the Local Consultative Group (LCG) of donors, the government lacks in fulfilling promises on reforming political process, ensuring transparency and accountability and reforming the judiciary and the public administration.

Meanwhile, donors in their BDF discussion note observed that in May 2002, the ruling BNP committed decentralisation of the government by holding Gram Sarkar, thana/upazilla and zilla parishad

elections. The Gram Sarkar was established two years later. But there is no new development in reforming or democratising the Upazilla Parishad.

In May 2003, the government committed to draft NGO regulations in consultation with the NGOs. But till now there is no such regulation.

Last year, the government committed to scrutinise laws that stand in the way of people's right to information. But it made no progress in this regard so far.

Two years ago, the government told the donors that the process to establish an independent Anti-corruption Commission is underway. While the government enacted a law for the commission, it has not set up the commission or appoint the commissioners yet.

The government also did not fulfil its two-year old promise to

separate auditing and accounting functions and to computerise all accounts in districts.

Two years ago, the government told donors that a Law and Order Monitoring Committee has been formed led by the minister for Local Government to review the situation every week and to take appropriate measures. Similar committees have also been formed at the district, upazilla and UP levels.

In 2003, the donors observed that these committees produced no reports or recommendations.

Last year, the government said it prepared a draft law to establish a permanent public prosecution and legal service to radically change the justice delivery system. But there is no update on this.

The government committed on Alternative Dispute Resolution,

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## Cops urge people to help Bangla Bhai

Another die in hands of gang

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amidst reports of more deaths at the hands of Jagota Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) police administration yesterday urged the northwesterners of the country to aid Bangla Bhai and his men in cleansing the so-called Sarbahara operatives.

On visiting some of the trouble-torn areas in Rajshahi yesterday, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Noor Mohammad claimed that locals had expressed satisfaction at the activities of JMJB at the helm of which is much-talked-about Azizur Rahman alias Bangla Bhai.

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## 5 killed in city

### 2 friends shot dead in Mohammadpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed assailants gunned down two youths at Ring Road in Mohammadpur and three others were killed in separate incidents elsewhere in the city yesterday.

Witnesses said Monir Hossain, 25, and his friends Masud, 24 and Selim Ahmed, 25 perched themselves on a rickshaw-van in front of Ideal Co-operative Society Office on Ring Road at about 11:45am. After a while, Shanto, Ronny and Kawser walked up to them and fired, killing Monir and Masud on the spot and injuring Selim.

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Their bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy. Injured Selim, a driver of Rajdhani Express bus service, was admitted to Orthopaedic (Pongu) Hospital with a bullet wound in his waist.

"I heard 10 to 12 gunshots and came out of my shanty nearby and found that three killers are fleeing through Bijli Mohallah," said a woman seeking anonymity.

The victims' friends told reporters at the DMCH that Monir and Masud were learning driving and waiting at the spot for Monir's

## BY-POLLS BNP meets Tuesday to finalise nominations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP Parliamentary Board will sit on Tuesday to finalise nomination of party candidates for the June 6 parliamentary by-election to Dhaka-10 and Munshiganj-1 seats.

Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will chair the meeting at her office (PMO) at 2pm and interview the nomination seekers.

The parliamentary board comprises members of the National Standing Committee (NSC), the highest decision-making body of the BNP.

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## MUNICIPAL POLLS

# Over 100 held for false voting

### BNP men taking over polling centres alleged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ongoing staggered municipal elections on the second day yesterday were marred by alleged false voting and forcible occupation of polling centres by ruling BNP men, reports received in Dhaka said.

Over 100 people were arrested from different polling centres on charges of casting false votes and involvement in other criminal activities while over 50 were injured in clashes during the polls in 22 municipalities.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed declined to comment on the polls. "I am observing news reports in the dailies on polls,"

he told reporters.

The main opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday lodged complaints with the Election Commission (EC) about massive rigging in the elections. AL lawmaker Rahmat Ali submitted a memorandum to the EC, which said the authorities were backing the ruling alliance-backed candidates in different places to occupy polling centres.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports: The presiding officer postponed polling at Moddhapara Humayun Kabir Primary School centre in the town as over 100 BNP supporters backed by the chairman candidate occupied it. Voters left the

polling centre as BNP and AL activists clashed. Several bombs were blasted and at least 20 people were injured.

Our Bandarban correspondent reports: Many false votes were cast in different polling centres. Police arrested at least 25 people for casting false votes.

Our Bogra correspondent adds: One person was arrested at Dhunat Pilot High School centre with 13 false ballot papers while he was casting false votes for BNP-backed chairman candidate. Returning Officer Al Amin admitted to newsmen that false votes were cast in different polling centres under

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## Bombings kill 3 GIs

AFP, Baghdad

The US-led force in Iraq named a new governor for the holy city of Najaf yesterday in an apparent bid to marginalize the radical Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr, while ten insurgents were killed by coalition forces in four separate operations overnight at Sadr city of Baghdad.

Three US soldiers and six Iraqis meanwhile died in separate bomb attacks in Baghdad, one of which also 23 Iraqi civilians, three policemen and two US soldiers outside the sprawling 'Green Zone' headquarters of the US-led coalition force.

The US overseer for Iraq, Paul Bremer, named Adnan al-Sharifi as the new provincial governor for Najaf and called on Sadr's militia men occupying the city to lay down their arms.

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## Cabinet body for sector-wise PSCs

STAR REPORT

A cabinet committee yesterday decided to ask the prime minister to take steps to set up several public service commissions (PSCs), instead of the one at present, for sector-wise appointment of efficient civil servants.

The Cabinet Committee on Public Service Reforms and Good Governance at a meeting yesterday also adopted a number of recommendations to be placed before the prime minister.

The recommendations include giving contractual appointment, developing a senior service pool, cancelling the system of hiring fourth class employees on a 'no-work-no-pay' basis and dividing all

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## JS should be made more effective

### EU delegation feels

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Bangladesh yesterday said the Jatiya Sangsad should be made more effective as 'the pivotal institution in this democracy', adding confrontational and violent politics was no solution to the problems facing the nation.

"Any opposition can tell anything to the government, nobody should stop voicing their concern, but there are rules and procedures of the game," said Sjef Ijermans, ambassador of the Netherlands.

Ijermans, who also acts as the president of the EU in Dhaka, was speaking at a Meet the Reporters session on 'Bangladesh-EU

Relations' ahead of Europe Day under the auspices of Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) at its office.

"Parliament is the central institution to go to (in a democracy)," Ijermans added, urging politicians to make the Jatiya Sangsad more effective.

"Continuing violent politics is not a solution to the problems in the country," Esko Kentrschynskyj, head of the Delegation of the European Commission, said, adding parliament should be the primary forum for political debates and mediation.

On the state of human rights and recent mass arrests of people, Ijermans said, "We have brought

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## CTG ARMS CACHE Police attach shop of key suspect's father, 2 houses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong police yesterday attached an optical shop owned by the father of a key suspect of the April 2 arms cache at Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited (CUFL) jetty.

Following a court order, police went to confiscate the valuables of Noor Optical, owned by Nurur Rahman, father of suspect Hafizur Rahman, at Laidighi in the port city in the afternoon. They were seizing the goods from the shop till 6:30 in the evening.

Law enforcers also nabbed an alleged robber Syed Noor of Patiya upazila during the drive, police said.

Separate police teams yesterday also raided Hafizur's houses at Patiya upazila in Chittagong and in Khulna city to attach his moveable

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PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka City Corporation rolls bulldozers onto illegal installations at Gabtoli Truck Terminal yesterday in its effort to clear the area of encroachers.

## Dhaka slates Iraq prisoner abuse

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has strongly condemned the sadistic and inhuman abuse of prisoners by some members of the occupying forces in Iraq and described it as a criminal act.

A statement by Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday registered Bangladesh's protest over the recent incidents of abuse of the Iraqi prisoners.

"Bangladesh believes that the tortures on Iraqis in prison constitutes a gross violation of human dignity and human rights and show total disregard for humanity," Morshed Khan said.

Bangladesh hopes that a fair and transparent investigation would be undertaken without delay and persons responsible for this heinous act brought to justice, he added.

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