

WorldTel cleared to set up city phones

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The telecoms regulator has cleared the way for UK-based WorldTel to launch 300,000 fixed-line telephones in the capital by next January under a licence it had obtained back in 2001 but could not utilise so far due to bureaucratic tangles.

"The BTRC has asked us to launch the service and hopefully we will introduce it by early next year," a WorldTel official told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

The British telecoms firm was awarded with the licence to run three lakh fixed-line phones in Dhaka on build, own and operate (BOO) basis in July 2001, before Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) came into being.

But, to date, WorldTel could not commence the service as it did not get the necessary infrastructure, including inter-connectivity facility, from the state telecoms monopoly,

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB). The company, which plans to invest \$300 million in the project, will provide data and high-speed Internet and other value-added services apart from voice, WorldTel officials said.

It will use both wired and wireless service to roll out Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), more commonly known as fixed-line phone.

WorldTel's commencing operation will make way for more private operators in the Central Zone under the new PSTN licensing regime, industry sources said.

The Central Zone, comprising Dhaka City, Jinjira, Savar, Narayanganj district headquarters, Gazipur district and Tongi, is now out of the bounds for the new PSTN licensing process because of WorldTel's co-exclusivity with the BTTB.

The BTRC, which has divided the country into five zones namely

Central, South-East, North-East, South-West and North-West, was compelled to keep the capital off-limits to private operators due to a dispute with WorldTel.

WorldTel Bangladesh Ltd had served a legal notice on the BTRC, seeking its co-exclusivity with the BTTB in the Central Zone.

In a bid to meet huge untapped demand for the fixed-line phones, the telecoms regulator is contemplating bringing the capital under the PSTN licensing regime.

"We are making efforts to open the Central Zone under the PSTN licensing regime because of huge unmet demand," BTRC Chairman Syed Marghub Murshed earlier said. "We would seek proposals for PSTN licence as soon as we resolve the issue with WorldTel."

WorldTel Bangladesh officials said they would hold an internal

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The Samajik Proirodh Committee (social resistance body) forms a human chain at the Dainik Bangla circle yesterday in support of its demand for direct elections to the reserved seats for women in parliament.

PM assures e-governance

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said the government has taken initiative to introduce e-governance at each tier of the administration in a bid to ensure sustainable development and good governance.

In a message on the eve of World Telecommunications Day, the premier wished all the success of the day.

She hoped that the initiative will help strengthen and expand the country's overall development and progress.

Information and communication technology (ICT) could be an effective weapon in the fight against poverty and hunger, she said. "We

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Three killed in N'ganj road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Three people including two college girls were killed and 40 others injured in a road accident at Arahazar in Narayanganj yesterday.

A speeding Manohardi-bound minibus collided head-on with Dhaka-bound Swapna Bilash bus near Panchrakhi bus stand at around 1:30pm, killing college student Lucky, 18, on the spot and injuring 42 others, sources said.

Of the injured, college girl Sumi, 18, and Aminul Islam, former member of

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Bangladesh scores lowest in S Asia teledensity

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bangladesh's teledensity is still the lowest in South Asia, so say statistics of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), released before the World Telecommunications Day today.

Only 1.56 of 100 people access telecoms facility -- the 2003 data of the UN telecoms watchdog say -- way down from the Maldives with 25.11, Sri Lanka with 9.57 and India with 7.10 among the South Asian ITU member states.

The figure for Bhutan is 4.69, Pakistan 4.42 and Nepal 1.78. Bangladesh nudged past only Myanmar in the Asian region.

Cell phones outnumber fixed line telephones in Bangladesh, which has 0.55 fixed line telephone per 100 inhabitants. The number of mobile phones per 100 people stands at 1.01.

Currently, it has around

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Rumsfeld 'backed prisoner abuse'

Pentagon denies the new revelation; Powell apologises

AFP, Washington

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld approved a secret program that encouraged interrogation methods used at Abu Ghraib prison, where Iraqi prisoners were abused, The New Yorker magazine reported Saturday.

Rumsfeld had approved "a highly secret operation" last year, which "encouraged physical coercion and the sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners in an effort to generate more intelligence about the growing insurgency in Iraq," New Yorker investigative reporter Seymour Hersh wrote, citing current and former intelligence officials.

Excerpts of Hersh's report have been released ahead of publication this week.

The Pentagon said Hersh's report was "outlandish, conspiratorial, and filled with error and anonymous conjecture."

"No responsible official of the Department of Defence approved any program that could conceivably have been intended to result in such abuses as witnessed in the recent photos and videos," Pentagon spokesman Lawrence Di Rita said in a statement.

The New Yorker reported that the clandestine Defence Department operation was known as a Special-

Access Program (SAP). Its rules were: "Grab whom you must. Do what you want," according to one former intelligence official cited by Hersh.

Rumsfeld's decision to import such techniques into Iraq, after their use in Afghanistan, was opposed by members of US intelligence organisations, the report said.

"They said, 'No way. We signed up for the core program in Afghanistan, preapproved for operations against high-value terrorist targets, and now you want to use it for cabdrivers, brothers-in-law,

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PHOTO: STAR

Wasa sets up 10 powerful pumps on the footpath of Biswa Road to suck out waters from the low-lying areas of Kamalapur, Maniknagar and Mugda to prepare the poor-drainage in the capital to survive during the imminent rainy season.

Charge framed against MK Alamgir

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against former state minister for planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir and seven others in Janatar Mancha sedition case.

Judge (in charge) Monjurul Baser of the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed June 20 for trial of the case.

Earlier, the same court on April 26 rejected the discharge petitions of Alamgir and seven others in the case.

The seven others who were also charged with sedition are former home secretary and incumbent Election Commissioner Shafiur Rahman, former students relationship officer of education ministry Abu Alam Shahid Khan, former joint secretary in the women's affairs ministry Sirajuddin Ahmed, former assistant secretary of establishment

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Girl killed after gang-rape in Fatikchhari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Criminals on Saturday gang-raped and then killed a teenage girl in Fatikchhari reportedly for threatening to denounce them to police if they did not leave her father's house they had been using as a hideout.

Police retrieved the body of Rozi Akhter, 18, daughter of Mohammad Yunus of Shahnagar village of Lelung union, hanging from a tree yesterday morning.

The gang commanded by Islami Chhatra Shibir leader Babul kidnaped Rozi in the night, raped and hanged from a tree, sources alleged.

The gangsters had been staying at Yunus' house by force for the past few weeks, villagers said.

Local police made a raid on the area yesterday afternoon in search of the rapists but could not catch any of them.

Petrobangla okays block 9 share sell-out

UNB, Dhaka

State-run Petrobangla has finally approved the transfer of Chevron-Texaco shares in the gas exploration block 9 to Canadian firm Niko Resources Ltd.

Officials said Petrobangla in a recent meeting approved the stake sell-out after reviewing clarifications it received from Chevron-Texaco.

The US energy giant announced the sell-out of its interests in Bangladesh on September 17 last year to the Canadian minnow.

The Chevron-Texaco had a 60 percent stake in the 6,880 square-kilometer onshore block. Financial

details of the sales were "never disclosed", officials said.

The Petrobangla approval has been sent to Energy and Mineral Resources Division for its consideration. The all-clear seal would be given by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who is in charge of the ministry.

The Petrobangla approval followed acceptance of Niko by Irish company Tullow Oil plc, the block's operator having 30 percent share.

Tullow had opposed the sale, but recently accepted Niko as its partner. Tullow also received the share of investment money from Niko for gas exploration in the block.

AHSANULLAH MURDER Police want to verify statements before arresting Jubo Dal leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police prefer to wait before moving to arrest Nurul Islam Sarkar, until the statements given by the three FIR-named accused linking the Jubo Dal leader to the killing of Ahsanullah Master are verified, said a CID official.

Earlier on Friday the three First Information Report-named accused in their statements said Jubo Dal leader Nurul Islam Sarkar, who allegedly leads a drugs ring, masterminded the killing, revealed a source in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

Referring to the delay in capturing Nurul Islam Sarkar, a CID official said, "We want to gather adequate information first."

Assistant Superintendent of

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Bridge on Padma opens tomorrow

RAFIQ HASAN

The country's second longest bridge named after Baul saint Lalon Shah opens to traffic tomorrow, connecting Kushtia and Pabna districts across the Padma River at Paksey.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the 1.8-kilometre bridge constructed at a cost of Tk 1,065 crore, with Tk 820 crore provided by Japan Bank of International Co-operation (JBIC).

According to communications ministry sources, all is set for the commissioning, which will have Japanese Ambassador Matsushiro Horiguchi present as the special guest.

JBIC Deputy Director General Ryotaro Koga has already flown in from Japan to attend the function, where he will read out a message

from JBIC Governor Kwasuke Shinozawa.

The name of Lalon Shah, perhaps the most popular Baul of the country who lived and sang in Kushtia in the 19th century, lends a sort of halo of sanctity to the structure. It also has two more distinctions -- the deepest bridge foundation and the longest continuous concrete structure in the world.

Chinese contractor Major Bridge Engineering Bureau had started the construction works in August 2000. A large team of 300 Chinese and 1,400 locals worked round the clock at the site, some 300 metres down from Harding Railway Bridge.

Lalon Shah Bridge is the last but one installation required for estab

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Ten shops robbed in Bhola

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Robbers looted 10 shops, including three jewellers, and took away valuables and cash reportedly worth about Tk 10 lakh in Daulat Khan in Bhola in the early hours of yesterday.

Around 25 robbers in shorts,

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Prayer Timing		
May 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-10	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-36	6-40
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Tk 3.5 crore in foreign currency seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials at Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday recovered Tk 3.5 crore in foreign banknotes from a bag abandoned by a smuggler in face of intense watch.

Acting on a tip-off, customs Sub-inspector Mofazzal Hossain kept a sharp eye on a passenger waiting in the departure lounge to board an Emirates flight bound for Dubai.

Scared by the customs leaving his

bag on a trolley.

Opening the bag in the airport's Customs Hall, officials found euro 200,385, US\$ 34,500, Kuwaiti Dinar 1,835, Saudi Rial 897,000, UAE Dirham 570, Qatar Rial 22,700 and Oman Rial 720.

Customs officials said the security seal on the abandoned luggage suggested involvement of airport security personnel in the currency smuggling.

Mofazzal also played a leading role in a recent bust of Tk 2 crore in foreign banknotes at the ZIA.

Heatwave to continue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The heatwave sweeping the country for the last few weeks will continue for some more days especially in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions, the met office said yesterday.

Meanwhile, four elderly people died of heatstroke in Gaibandha on Friday and Saturday. People are falling ill or getting reluctant to come out of their houses due to the heat-wave across the country.

The met office told The Daily Star last night that the capital today may experience a rise in the temperature. A decreasing trend in heat is seen everywhere but in Khulna and Rajshahi, the office added.

The temperature in most of the places came down yesterday. In the capital, the temperature was 35.5

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