

ALTERNATE JOB
Microcredit
for tobacco
growers soon

UNB, Dhaka

Health and Family Welfare Minister Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain has said a microcredit project will be launched soon for the tobacco farmers to discourage tobacco production.

The minister said this while addressing a press conference at the Press Information Department (PID) yesterday.

The news conference followed the passage of the Smoking and Tobacco Product Usage (Control) Bill, 2005 in the current session of the parliament, restricting smoking at public places and public transports.

WHO Country Representative Khaled Hasan, UNFPA Representative Sunita Mukharjee and Director General (DG) of Health Abdur Rahman were, among others, present at the press briefing.

Mosharraf said a large portion of land in the country, particularly the

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First pvt land phones
start in Ctg Mar 20

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bay Phones, a joint venture between US firm Westec.com Inc and local Westec Limited, will launch the country's first private fixed phone on March 20.

"We have successfully completed the test run and are now ready to offer phones to subscribers in the country's southeast zone," MA Hashem, chairman and chief executive officer of the Westec Limited told The Daily Star in an interview.

He said Post and Telecommunication Minister Aminul Haq will inaugurate the network at a function in Dhaka, which will be also attended by State minister for Finance Shah Md Abul Hussain and US Ambassador Harry K Thomas as special guest and guest of honour.

"We will hold a separate launching ceremony in Chittagong on March 22," Hashem added.

Bay Phones has recently signed an interconnection agreement with the state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB). "We are in talks with cell phone operators to have interconnectivity with them," he said.

"To have interconnection with private mobile operators may take a month or two," he added.

The company will invest approximately Tk 100 crore in 2005 to roll out its network.

"The current network capacity will be one lakh telephones, mostly based on a wireless local loop (WLL)," said the Bay Phones chief, adding that the company has plans to introduce some wired phones as well.

WLL is a wireless technology that enables phones to operate within a short range.

Subscription fees for WLL con-

nection will be Tk 15,000 and Tk 9,500 for a wired one, he added.

"We shall announce the tariff plan during our launching," he added.

Bay Phones would be the first operator to launch fixed phones under the new licensing criteria of the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

The telecom regulator BTRC has segmented the country into five zones - central zone, southeast zone, northeast zone, southwest zone and northwest zone -- and awarded licenses for four zones except the central zone.

The southeast zone consists of the greater Chittagong division, including Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Hathazari, Fotikchori, Potia, Feni, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Chadpur, Comilla and Brahmanbaria.



PHOTO: STAR

Scavengers occupy the main entrance to Pantha-Kunja, a park at Hotel Sonar Gaon crossing that remains off-limits to people since it received a facelift as part of the recent city beautification.

Rice kicks off
Asia trip with
push for
Indo-Pak
peace

US may signal willingness to sell F-16s to both rivals

AFP, REUTERS, New Delhi

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in the Indian capital yesterday at the start of a six-nation tour of Asia which she said was in the midst of "tremendous change".

"This is going to be an opportunity to exchange views with important countries, important players in the region that is itself in the midst of tremendous change," Rice told reporters on board the aircraft which brought her to New Delhi.

"For instance with India, we clearly have a broader and deeper relationship than we ever had," she added.

Rice was received at the airport

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Lensmen
protest Rab
assault on
colleague

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Photojournalists yesterday kept their cameras shut for 15 minutes demanding punishment of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men responsible for assaulting SM Gorky, chief photojournalist of the daily Jugantor.

Meanwhile, police yesterday misbehaved with two journalists when they sought to enter parliament to cover the House proceedings.

Some 60 photojournalists working in different newspapers took part in the programme to protest Monday's assault on Gorky. Taken up by Bangladesh Photojournalists Association, the programme started at 12:30pm on the National Press Club premises.

On Monday, a team of Rab-3 led by Major Wasir, attacked Gorky while he was taking photographs of Rab men assaulting three youths near Baitul Mukarram area. They kicked and punched him before taking him to Rab office at Tikatuli.

BDNEWS adds: A three-member committee was formed to enquire into the matter, said Lt Col Chowdhury Fazlul Bari, Additional DG of Rab.

"We have taken up the matter and if anyone found guilty, action will be taken against them," he added.

In parliament yesterday two policemen misbehaved with Harun Jamil, senior reporter of The Daily Inqilab, and Nazrul Islam Mithu, senior reporter of The New Age. The two were harassed even after disclosing their identities and showing their parliamentary passes.

Bangladesh Parliament Journalists' Association (BPJA) yesterday condemned the incident. BPJA President Shahjahan Sardar and its General Secretary Ashish Shoiikat in a statement described the incident as unfortunate. They called for the Speaker's intervention to take immediate actions against the policemen responsible for the misconduct

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PHOTO: STAR

Lensmen put down their cameras on the National Press Club premises yesterday protesting Rab assault on daily Jugantor Chief Photojournalist SM Gorky.

Bangladesh most dangerous
country in S Asia for journos

Threats against press freedom 'spiked' in Asia

AFP, Washington

Threats against press freedom in Asia "spiked" last year, as authoritarian regimes in North Korea and Myanmar kept a tight grip on the media while the Philippines remained the deadliest place in the continent for journalists, a US-based media rights group said Monday.

Despite having "one of the freest presses in Asia," the Philippines was the second deadliest country in the world after war-ravaged Iraq, where 23 journalists were killed, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists' annual survey on worldwide press freedom.

At least eight Philippine journalists, mainly rural radio broadcasters, "were gunned down in retaliation for their work," according to CPJ's report titled "Attacks on the

Press in 2004."

"Threats to press freedom spiked throughout Asia in 2004, even as the news media claimed significant accomplishments" with their "key roles" covering elections in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the report said.

A CPJ delegation concluded that Bangladesh was the most dangerous country for journalists in the region, as three were murdered in retaliation for their work. Journalists received scores of threats from extremists and suffered routine harassment and physical attacks.

China continued to hold the most journalists in prison in the world, with at least 42. The report said 122 journalists were imprisoned worldwide last year.

"It was a disappointing year for those who hoped that President Hu Jintao would allow a greater degree

of freedom for China's increasingly market-oriented press," the report said.

In military-ruled Myanmar, conditions for journalists "deteriorated" as hardliners tightened their grip on power and cracked down further on the official media and "the few remaining independent writers and editors," the report said.

"One thing remained certain in 2004" in Stalinist North Korea, the report said, "There is no press freedom in the country, only government outlets that voice the pronouncements of Kim Jong Il's authoritarian regime."

In Indonesia's Aceh province, 80 employees of the Serambi Indonesia newspaper died in the December 26 tsunami disaster, wiping out nearly half its staff, the report said.

Fisherman
fights tiger
for life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A fisherman on Monday fought for about 15 minutes with a man-eating Royal Bengal Tiger and managed to survive the attack in the deep forest in the Sundarbans.

Family sources said critically injured Abdul Hamid, 46, is now undergoing treatment at Shyamnagore hospital. Son of Erfan Ullah of the village Khalishabunia in Shyamnagore upazila, Hamid was seriously injured in the head, chest and hands.

Sources said Hamid and three others were fishing at the Latabaria canal under Kadamtala range in the Sundarbans when a Royal Bengal Tiger suddenly swooped on them. Hamid struggled with the tiger for 15 minutes, but the tiger finally abandoned the fight when Hamid jumped into the canal.

PREMIER, AL-ARAFAH BANKS

BB assigns officials to
monitor activities

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday assigned two senior officials to monitor the activities of the board members of Premier Bank and Al-Arafah Islami Bank.

The central bank took the decision under its 'Early Warning' system of supervision to deal with some serious interference of the board members in operations of these banks and other management problems.

BB General Manager Mir Abdur Rahim has been attached to Premier Bank and GM K M Jamsheduzzaman to Al-Arafah Bank.

In separate letters, the BB told the banks the two observers will be present at their board and executive

committee meetings. The banks must co-operate with them and send them the files and documents related to the meetings three days in advance.

The observers are also authorised to give opinions at the board meetings, the letters said.

The letters also specified the problems the BB found with the banks. The central bank said both the banks on various occasions violated BB circulars and guidelines, and some of their directors have been found to be involved in irregularities.

Besides, conflicts between board members and their interference in the banks' activities are posing threats to the banks' future, the BB said.

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2 senior bank
staff jailed

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced two senior bank officials and three others to seven years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for misappropriating Tk 30 lakh in August 1988. The court also fined them Tk 6 lakh each, in default they have to suffer RI for one year more.

The convicts are then assistant general manager of Sonali Bank, Gulshan Local Branch Sirajuddin Ahmed, principal officer of the same branch Humayun Kabir Chowdhury and three others—managing director

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Flats to get
costlier

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Real estate developers are going to raise the price of flats in the face of increasing cost of construction materials, Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) leaders yesterday said at a press conference.

Due to increase in price of building materials, the cost of under-construction and to be constructed flats will go up by Tk110 to 125 per square foot, said Rehab President Toufiq M Seraj, adding, "Now we have to increase the price of flats by Tk175 to 200 per square foot."

Reading out a written statement at the conference, Rehab Vice-president SM Anwar Hossain said the price of essential building material, mild steel (MS) rod, has increased by 100 percent from

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Health programme to
get \$105m more aid

NAIMUL HAQ

The Ministry of Health will receive a supplementary fund of \$105 million, in addition to \$200 million already committed by the World Bank last week, for the on-going Health, Nutrition, Population Sector Programme (HNPS), official sources told The Daily Star.

The World Bank in the US capital Washington DC last week made the commitment of the additional fund at a negotiation meeting with a delegation of the Ministry of Health led by Health Secretary AFM Sarwar Kamal.

"The World Bank felt that the implementation of the HNPS programme was satisfactory in Bangladesh. The authority specially appreciated the health ministry's

regular allocation of at least 68 per cent of the total healthcare budget for the poor at primary healthcare (PHC) level and scaling up essential service delivery (ESD) focus on the mother and child health," Sarwar Kamal told The Daily Star.

He said, "Since the launching of the HNPS in July 2004, we have adopted special action plans enhancing attention to address issues like emergency obstetric care (EOC), for which we have improved the union health centres and the Mother and Child Welfare Centres (MCWC). Very recently we trained Skilled Birth Attendants (SBAs) across the country to ensure safe delivery at home to increase

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CONTEMPT CASE
Judgement
against
2 dailies
Monday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) will deliver on Monday the judgement in the contempt case filed against two Bangla dailies for running reports on an HC additional judge's alleged tampering with his LLB results.

The HC division bench comprising Justice MA Matin and Justice AFM Abdur Rahman fixed the date yesterday on completion of hearing that began in December last year.

QC Azmalul Hossain, counsel for the petitioner, completed his submission yesterday. Barrister Tanjibul Alam was present for the defendants.

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Dozens of migrants
face jail, caning
in Malaysia

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Dozens of people arrested this month in a crackdown on illegal immigrants in Malaysia are to be jailed and caned, local media reported yesterday.

Two magistrates' courts in the capital Monday sentenced 57 Indonesian illegal immigrants to be jailed for up to three months and 16 of them to be caned once, the Star said.

In northern Perak state, 14 Indonesians, two Indians, a Bangladeshi, a Thai and a Chinese national were sentenced to one stroke of the cane and jail terms

ranging from three to six months, the paper said.

In Klang, in central Selangor state, 10 illegal immigrants -- eight Indonesians and two Indian nationals -- were sentenced to up to 12 months' imprisonment.

One of the Indonesians was ordered to receive two strokes of the cane while the others were to get one stroke each, the Star said.

Malaysia launched a nationwide blitz on March 1 to weed out hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants after the expiry of a four-month amnesty which had been extended twice at Jakarta's request.

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Prayer Timing		
March 16		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-35
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-14	6-18
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		

