

Legal battle holds back private land phones in Dhaka

Verdict on BTRC-WorldTel case likely today

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

A long-drawn legal battle between the telecoms watchdog and UK-based WorldTel deprives thousands of prospective subscribers of receiving private fixed phone connections in the capital.

Watchdog BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission), which has so far allocated licences to 19 private PSTN (public switched telephone network) operators in four zones, cannot provide licences for Dhaka zone, thanks to the case.

WorldTel, which obtained a licence in 2001 to launch 3,00,000 telephones on build-operate-own

basis in the capital, went to court after the BTRC curtailed the company's co-exclusivity with the state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTBB) to allow more private PSTN players.

After it lost the case in the High Court Division, WorldTel appealed to the Appellate Division to retain its co-exclusivity, WorldTel representative Nayeem Chowdhury said.

The Appellate Division may give a verdict today.

The demand for fixed phones in the capital is estimated at 10 lakh while the registered demand with the BTBB is about two lakh, sources said.

The BTBB cannot provide con-

nections due to lack of required infrastructure.

There is a huge pending demand for 30,000 telephone lines only in the north zone of Dhaka. Over 4,000 demand notes have been issued for giving connections under Gulshan telephone exchange but it has no connection left for any new subscriber. Besides, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar exchange has a pending demand for 2,000 phones.

Everyday the BTBB authorities receive hundreds of applications from intending subscribers and issue demand notes although there is an instruction not to issue any, BTBB sources said.

The BTBB will not be able to give

any connection in the next three months, they added.

When contacted, one BTRC official said although the new PSTN companies, which have already launched services in Chittagong and Sylhet regions, are capable of offering connections to subscribers in the capital, the telecoms watchdog cannot allocate licence due to the case.

"We can launch the service in Dhaka through wireless local loop (WLL) technology within a month but we need a licence for that," said Zakaria Swapan, chief operating officer of RanksTel, one of the new PSTN operators.

Dhaka Int'l Trade Fair now begins Dec 12

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF), the country's largest exposition of local and international products, will now kick off on December 12, 2005 instead of previously-announced December 22.

As the previously-announced date may coincide with the Eid-ul-Azha, the DITF steering committee recently at a meeting fixed the new schedule for the month-long fair to be held at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka.

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the commerce ministry as usual will organise the DITF-2005 this year.

EPB sources said around 418 national and international companies will showcase their products at 28 pavilions, 40 mini pavilions and 337 stalls at the fair.

However, the steering committee has decided to allocate 10 premium pavilions, 14 premium mini pavilions and 35 premium stalls to the local entrepreneurs in some significant locations at the fair premises.

At the fair, 90 percent stalls will be allocated to local companies and the rest to the foreign ones, sources added.



Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury and Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman along with others pose for photographs at a seminar in Dhaka yesterday to mark the National Fisheries Fortnight 2005.

Ensure hygiene to reach Tk 100b export target

Altaf urges shrimp producers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury yesterday urged the shrimp producers and exporters to follow the hygienic sanitation rule and good aquaculture practice at every stage of production to attain Tk 100 billion annual export target by 2010.

Besides, standard sanitary operational procedure, EU directives and US regulations in production should also be maintained, he added.

"These will help ensure safe shrimp production and earn more foreign currency," the minister said while addressing a seminar titled "Export Potential of Shrimp and Fish: Vision 2010 and Beyond".

Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFEEA) organised the seminar in Dhaka on the occasion of National Fisheries Fortnight 2005. Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Commerce Ministry Advisor Barkat Ullah Bulu and BFEEA President Maksudur Rahman also spoke at the function.

Presiding over the seminar Noman said Tk 100 billion revenue

income from frozen foods export is possible by 2010 through increasing per hectare shrimp production as well as bringing more lands for shrimp cultivation.

The minister said he will hold an inter-ministerial meeting soon to allocate more new lands to the farmers for shrimp cultivation.

"Besides, the exporters also have to maintain HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) system to achieve the target," he added.

Noman said Bangladesh earned around Tk 2,572 crore by exporting 63,000 tonnes of shrimp in the last financial year. "But the earnings can be more than Tk 3,000 if the HACCP system is maintained properly."

Altaf also said the country's frozen food sector is passing through a hard time as the EU notified a number of Bangladeshi fish processing industries in its 'rapid alert list' following detection of antibiotic and pathogenic infection in shrimps and fish products.

He emphasised detecting the causes behind such infection in fish products. "We've to find out the causes of infection and develop the quality of our fish products if we

want to keep up with the existing upward export trend and achieve Tk 100 billion export target," Altaf added.

Fisheries and Livestock Secretary Abdul Karim said an inspection team from the EU will visit Bangladesh during the end of this year to inspect the local shrimp industry. In the circumstances, he urged the shrimp cultivators and exporters not to allow child labourers in their processing plants.

Mokammel Hossain, principal scientific officer of Department of Fisheries (DOF), and Rafiqul Islam, inspector of DOF, jointly presented a keynote paper on status of HACCP implementation in Bangladesh, while Mahmudul Hasan, former president of BFEEA, and ABM Mohiuddin, advisor to BFEEA, jointly presented another keynote paper on Vision 2010.

Now, US is the single largest importer of Bangladeshi frozen foods with a market share of 40 percent, while the European countries import 48 percent.



ACNielsen's South Asia MD due today

Partha Rakshit, managing director of ACNielsen South Asia, will arrive in Dhaka today.

He will attend the ACNielsen's "Consumer 360 Client Conference" to be held in the capital tomorrow, says a press release.

At the conference, he will share his thoughts and discuss the future of Bangladeshi consumers from a regional perspective.

Rakshit, who is in charge of ACNielsen's business in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, will also meet different business personalities of the country, high officials of government and donor organisations during his visit.

China's economic planning body hits out at central bank

AFP, Beijing

China's key economic planning body, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Monday lashed out at the reform policies of the central bank in a highly unusual display of bureaucratic infighting.

The NDRC, arguably the most important body with responsibility for the economy within the government structure, sharply criticised the People's Bank of China for overstepping its mandate on two major banking and securities reform programs.

"The monetary operations of the central bank should avoid fiscal bailouts and stop grabbing more power from the Ministry of Finance to form another fiscal distribution channel because it is distorting," it said in a statement on its website.

Govt likely to adopt PSC guideline for coalfields

BDNEWS, Dhaka

With a cautious note about leasing out the country's coalfields to foreign companies, the government is likely to adopt production sharing contract (PSC) provision for the coalmines.

Energy Advisor Mahmudur Rahman hinted this after the government's Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC) yesterday presented various options for developing the country's coalfields.

Petrobrangia, the state-run oil, gas and mineral corporation, has the experience of dealing PSCs with the international oil companies, Rahman said after the IIFC presentation at the

energy ministry.

Other options for developing the coalmines, according to IIFC Chief Executive Officer Nazrul Islam, are joint venture, total lease out or engaging the foreign companies only as operators.

IIFC, a government-owned company, provides professional services for line ministries and agencies of the government to develop infrastructure projects for private sector participation.

As the government is going to appoint a consultant for developing a strategy for the country's coalfields, the IIFC did the groundwork. The country has coal reserves equivalent to 70 TCF (trillion cubic feet) of gas.

Mahmudur Rahman asked the IIFC to look into the experiences of India, Indonesia and Australia on whether Bangladesh needs a separate entity for running the coal sector as the authority.

In the IIFC presentation, its CEO Nazrul Islam put some recommendations, including keeping both underground and opencast operation open and turning the dependence on gas-based power plants to coal-based power stations.

He observed leasing out of Khalaspir coalfield was not a right decision. He also warned about Asia Energy Plc, which is now exploring on Phulbari coalfield, meeting sources told the news agency.

CONSIGNMENTS OF 'LOW-QUALITY' GRAINS FROM INDIA

Nilphamari chamber asks importers to be cautious

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

In the face of a series of consignments of 'low-quality' grains from India to Bangladesh, Nilphamari Chamber of Commerce and Industry has asked importers to be cautious about importing food grains from the neighbouring country.

Chamber President Sohel Parvez in a statement on Thursday alleged a section of Indian exporters are violating trade agreement by sending consignments of rotten and inedible grains to Bangladesh.

Expressing deep concern, Parvez said some departments of the Indian government are recommending those low-quality grains as quite fit for human consumption.

Importers at Saidpur said a section of Indian grain exporters buy rotten and odorous wheat or rice in auction at very low prices in different parts of India. Then they send those inedible grains to Bangladesh after getting the Indian government's certificates as cent percent safe.

When the Bangladeshi importers

receive consignments of rotten grains, they refuse to accept those, causing LC bill settlement problems.

Import firms such as M/s Nurul Islam of Saidpur, Nilphamari, M/s Javed Store of Banish Bari of Saidpur, M/s Mecca Poultry Feeds Ltd of Khulna, M/s Shahhan Traders International of Lalmonirhat and Sonia Enterprise of Saidpur reported several incidents of consignments with low-quality grains in recent times.

In most cases, Inquiry Committee, formed to resolve the dispute, found that a significant portion of the consignments was inedible. But the Indian government's documents, which the exporters placed to the Bangladeshi importers, showed the consignments of grains were pure and safe.

Hazi Mostak of Sonia Enterprise said he was surprised to see the documents of the Indian government, which certified the rotten and inedible wheat he imported in September last year. Mostak ordered for 2,220 tonnes of wheat to LMG International, an export firm in Kolkata.

The 'Plant Quarantine and

Fumigation Station' of India certified in favour of the rotten wheat, Mostak said.

Even one Indian ministry provided phyto-sanitary certificate in favour of the rotten wheat, he added.

The department of the atomic energy of India also provided radio activity test certificate in favour of the consignment, Mostak said.

Mostak said the Indian exporters in collaboration with a section of the government officials are engaged in such unfair practice for a long time.

There are about 50 importers in Saidpur who import various grains such as rice, wheat, maize and spices from India. Usually, LCs for imports are opened in the local branches of Islami Bank, Basic Bank, National Bank and Al-Arafah Bank.

Mohammad Kawas Ali of Islami Bank, Saidpur branch, said the Islami Bank head office recently sent a letter to FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo to take action against Indian export firm LMG International, which cheated a number of local import firms.

Japan, India mull telecoms tie-ups

ANN/ THE DAILY YOMIURI

Japan and India are set to reach an agreement on tie-ups in research and development of next-generation telecommunications technologies, involving cellphones and broadband Internet access, according to government sources.

The government plans to strengthen cooperation in the field of information and communications technology among governmental, business and academic entities with India, which is experiencing rapid economic growth.

The government will soon establish a working panel to discuss how to translate proposed cooperation between the two nations into action.

Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Taro Aso will visit India and hold talks with Indian Communications and Information Technology Minister Shri Dayanidhi Maran on Aug 24.

The ministers will issue a joint statement on the issue after their meeting.

The government expects that the cooperation pact will encourage more Japanese firms to enter the Indian market and increase their investment in the country, where Japanese firms lag behind their US and European rivals.

To complement the planned joint statement, the government will dispatch to India a mission comprising about 100 business leaders led by Matsushita Electric Industrial Co chairman Yoichi Morishita.

The mission and heads of major Indian private companies will hold a bilateral forum on information and communication technology titled Japan-India ICT Forum.

The meeting will be the first under the forum, the establishment of which was decided at a Japan-India summit meeting in April.

According to the sources, the joint statement will call on the two countries to establish working panels for each business field -- cellphones, broadband Internet access, electronic government, and e-commerce and security.

GM plans to purchase more auto supplies in Asia

AFP, Michigan,

General Motors Corp. is planning to purchase more material in Asia and trim capacity in North America as it struggles to contain the huge financial losses in its basic automotive business.

The plan includes increasing its purchases from suppliers in India from roughly \$150 million currently to more than \$1 billion by the end of 2008, GM spokesman Tom Wickham said in an interview.

"Remember this is a projection," he cautioned, adding that GM may not be able to find sufficient suppliers to meet that demand.

The need to cut supply costs has been heightened by a sharp rise in steel and oil prices and steady losses in the company's North American business unit.

GM buys roughly \$85 billion of automotive components, steel and other material to feed its automotive operations every year.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

With a view to introducing the latest development in the local furniture industry with customers, a five-day national furniture fair begins today at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association (BFIOA) and CommuniCare Dot Events, an event management company, are jointly organising the fair for the second time.

According to the organisers, Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury is expected to inaugurate the fair, while Commerce Ministry Adviser Barkat Ullah Bulu will also be present.

A total of 56 local furniture companies will display wooden,

cane and plastic furniture, wooden floors, and furniture for children in 110 stalls at the fair.

Md Salim H Rahman, secretary of BFIOA, said the main objective of the fair is to tap the potential of furniture industry and apprise people of the recent progress Bangladesh has made in this sector.

Some seminars will be also organised on the sidelines of the fair and 30 renowned personalities will be declared 'Celebrity in the Fair', the organisers said.

Navana furniture is the event partner of the show, while The Daily Star, ATN Bangla and munshigi.com are the media partners.

The fair will remain open from 10am to 9pm every day and no entry fee will be charged.

Month-long fair begins in Bangkok Aug 31

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Thailand is going to hold a month-long international fair during 31 August and 30 September in Bangkok.

Quality products under nine categories will be showcased in the festival titled "Thailand Export Highlight's Month 2005".

Department of Export Promotion (DEP) of Ministry of Commerce of Royal Thai Government is organising the show.

Officials of the Thai Trade Center of Royal Thai Embassy in Dhaka announced this at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

Manufacturers and exporters form different countries will showcase various items including gem and jewelry, health and beauty products, refrigeration and air conditioning, electric and electronic equipment, auto parts, gifts and decorative items, household

products, food and fruits and fashionable leatherwear in the festival, said Kanyarat Vongsul, director of the Thai Trade Center in Dhaka.

She also urged the Bangladeshi manufacturers to take part in the month long show.

Thailand is the gateway to East. So, Bangladesh can have access to the markets of the Eastern nations through Thai market. If Bangladesh joins the show, it will be one step ahead of achieving the goal, said President of Bangladesh-Thai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BTCCI) R Maksud Khan.

Every year Department of Export Promotion Bureau organises around 15 international exhibitions at Bangkok. The bureau will organise nine international exhibitions in the upcoming months, the conference was told.

Oil retreats below \$67

AFP, Singapore

Oil prices were lower in Asian trading Monday as the market paused for a breather after crude futures shot past a record 67 dollars a barrel last week, dealers said.

At 11:40 am (0340 GMT), New York's main contract, light sweet crude for September delivery was at 66.39 dollars a barrel, down 47 cents from its Friday close of 66.86 dollars and all-time trading high of 67.10 dollars set on Friday.

While crude prices are lower, dealers said the underlying tone remained bullish and expected the market to rebound shortly as global demand for oil was still robust and US refineries were still affected by outages.

"When the market flies so high like that, it is bound to fall a bit and I think the market is due for some profit-taking," said Victor Shum, a Singapore-based analyst with energy consultancy Purvin and Gertz.

"However the correction will likely be a small setback rather than a total reversal of direction.... it's a red hot market," he said.

Over the past week, crude futures have risen by more than four dollars on continued refinery problems in the United States, which is in the midst of summer when demand for gasoline is typically higher, and strong global demand for oil.

Production shutdowns at strained US refineries are also of concern.

On Thursday, problems were experienced at a ConocoPhillips facility in Wood River, Illinois. The 300,000-barrel-per-day facility is in preliminary restart mode, analysts said.

A 180,000 barrel-per-day unit in Memphis, Tennessee, was said to have suffered power failure, which typically takes up to a week to overcome.

BP's accident-prone Texas City refinery, the third largest in the United States, now has four units out of commission including one out of use since March 23, a spokesman said.

New York futures have now rocketed by more than 160 percent since August 2002, when they stood at just 25 dollars a barrel. They have jumped at least 60 percent since August 2004.