

Private land-line phone companies eager to work in Dhaka

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

At least 30,000 applications for fixed telephone lines are pending with the north zone of Dhaka alone, according to Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) sources.

The BTTB has failed to meet this demand due to lack of infrastructure. Still, private land telephone operators have not been permitted to start their operation in the capital. The private operators are waiting for the permission from Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to commence their

operation in the central zone at first.

The zone comprises Dhaka city, Zinjira, Savar, Narayanganj and Gazipur district headquarters and Tongi. Officials of private land-line companies said that 70 percent of the telephone subscribers in the country were from Dhaka.

Therefore private operators feel that the authorities are treating them unfairly by not allowing them to venture in this booming market especially when there are no less than five cell phone operators doing business.

Subscribers at present have to pay Tk 10,000 for demand

notes for BTTB phone lines. In addition, they reportedly have to pay a section of the BTTB staff in the region of Tk. 2,500 in bribe to receive the advice note for new connection. Even after that, subscribers often have to wait for months or even years before they get the connection.

According to the International Telecommunications Union, the telecom density in Bangladesh is the lowest in South Asia. Out of every 100 people in the country, only 1.56 has access to telecommunication facility.

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Tk. 30 billion on infrastructure and development for land telephones in the capital and its adjoining areas, said BTRC sources.

"Once given permission, we can develop the necessary infrastructure very quickly and we are capable of serving one lakh subscribers in Dhaka within a very short period," said MA Malik, assistant manager, administration and public relations of Jalalabad Telecom (Bijoy Phone) which is already operating in 16 north-eastern districts.

An official of Ranks Tel, another private operator serving outside Dhaka, said they

were prepared to provide at least 10 lakh connections if permitted to operate in Dhaka.

The private land-line operators received a boost when the Supreme Court on August 23 upheld the verdict of the High Court division that cancelled the exclusive rights of Worldtel to operate in Dhaka for four years. But the companies are still apprehensive about their future in the capital.

The BTRC won the legal battle and can now allow private operation in multi-exchange zones, Dhaka and its adjoining areas.

According to sources, the

companies that have already received licences to operate in Dhaka are Bashundhara Communications and Network Ltd, Ranks Tel, Tele Barta (Jubok Phone), Dhaka Phone and Square Group.

Meanwhile, a high official of BTRC said that there was no decision yet as to when the private operators will be allowed to operate in Dhaka.

When contacted, the vice-chairman of BTRC Reza E Rabbi said he did not have the permission from the chairman to talk to the press while the chairman Omar Farouque refused to talk on the issue.



An eviction drive in progress at Shonir Akhra.

Wasa plans fresh drive to recover canals

SULTANA RAHMAN

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) is going to launch a fresh drive to recover encroached canals soon as part of its canal restoration operation.

"The drive will start sometime in November-December," said a senior WASA official.

Last year, Wasa had recovered 15 canals out of the 26 that can still be rescued from encroachment. Although the capital had 43 natural canals in the past, 17 do not exist anymore and can only be traced in history books. The government has constructed roads on eight of those canals by filling them up. The rest have fallen to government or private land grabbers.

"Due to lack of proper conservation of river channels and waterbodies, localities especially in Dhaka go under flood water and a little downpour creates serious waterlogging. If we can preserve the natural waterbodies, rivers and canal channels, floods would not hit major localities with the same intensity and waterlogging would be reduced," said a Wasa official.

Environmentalists believe that the already filled up natural river shores, canals

and waterbodies could consume huge volumes of floodwater and protect many areas from flooding. Dhaka has 26 water reservoirs, hundreds of small and large ponds and marshy land which naturally store overflowed water. The canals distribute it to different channels.

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nels.

Wasa officials said they would also conduct a follow-up drive to ensure that the recovered canals have not been occupied again. The canals that could be rescued include Kalyanpur Khal,

Segunbagicha Khal, Jirani Khal in Badda, Katashur Khal, Ibrahimpur Khal and Ramchandrapur Khal in Mohammadpur. During the drive, Wasa evicted a number of canal-encroachers who had built houses, shanties and kitchen markets on filled up land.

"Some of these encroachers are trying to come back again. We are planning a fresh survey on the recovered canals," a Wasa official said.

The Local Government Engineering and Rural Development (LGERD) ministry in July this year adopted a national drainage policy to ensure a free flowing drainage system through natural canals. The policy enhanced the implications to protect and recover the rivers, canals, waterbodies and flood flow zones across the country especially in Dhaka.

It has been suggested in the policy that residential constructions will not be allowed between 50 yards of a river and district commissioners will submit reports twice a year after inspecting areas on the riverbanks. Already constructed structures on the riverbanks that block free flow of water will also be removed.

Freestyle movement of vehicles during hartal causes accidents

IMRUL HASAN

Although a small number of vehicles move in the city during the hartal hours, their freestyle movement creates a mess in the traffic.

The bus drivers do not comply with the traffic rules and follow the signals during the shutdowns in the absence of adequate number of traffic police.

Pedestrians also cross the city roads without using the zebra crossing as the policemen remain busy tackling demonstrations by the pro-hartal political activists.

The pedestrians cross the roads even when the green light is on. Tempos, rickshaws and rickshaw-vans also ply violating traffic rules during the hartal hours.

"We do not need to follow

the traffic signal as there are a few vehicles on the road," said Dulal, a pedestrian, when asked at Bangla Motor intersection during a recent hartal.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) sources said almost 50 percent of the usual traffic remains on the city roads during the shutdowns. "This is enough to create a chaotic situation when the drivers do not follow the rules," said a source.

"During hartal we pay more attention to the political programmes on the streets. Managing the traffic is very difficult with small number of traffic policemen," said Alfaz Ahmed, an on-duty police officer at Mouchak intersection.

He said the non-motorised vehicles such as rickshaws

and rickshaw-vans ply the VIP roads recklessly in the absence of sufficient traffic police on the hartal days.

Babu Mia, a rickshaw-puller said: "We can save time by using the VIP roads. We get this opportunity during hartal and the passengers also want to use these roads."

The bus drivers also take the advantage of a thin traffic during hartal and run their vehicles at a high speed. This leads to road accidents, police officers said.

"We drive fast because pickets can set fire to our vehicles or pelt bricks to damage the glasses," said Habibur Islam, a driver at Gulistan intersection.

Asked, high officials of the DMP admitted that they have shortage of traffic policemen. "Despite the shortage of



Motorists and pedestrians alike do not follow any road rules during hartal hours. Rickshaws, that are usually off-limits, are seen plying along the VIP Road from the Sonargaon to the Sheraton intersection.

manpower, we try our best to manage the traffic and maintain the road safety. People should also be conscious

about following the traffic rules," said Mizanur Rahman, the commissioner of DMP.



Residents of Mohammadpur area are victims of the stench in the thick air as wastes are dumped indiscriminately at the Dhaka City Corporation's dumping ground near the Swarighat-Gabtolli road. The situation becomes worse when it rains. Local people have been demanding the relocation of the dumping ground as the environment is hazardous to health, but authorities have remained silent to the demand. Our photographer Anisur Rahman took this photograph yesterday.