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Illegal VoIP operators make fortune as govt stalls licensing

SHARIF KHAN

While powerful illegal internet telephony operators keep on draining out hundreds of crores taka each year, the government is delaying the process of awarding licence for VoIP operation on various pretexts ignoring a fresh recommendation of Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Authority (BTRC).

The government now says the licence for Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) will be given after setting up a common platform in four areas of the country under Bangladesh Telegraph and

Telephone Board (BTB) through which internet phone calls will be channelised. The four areas are Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Bogra.

Such a common platform, to be connected to the submarine cable, will not start operation before June next, even if the authorities try their best. The submarine cable project is yet to be completed.

A seven-member BTRC committee a couple of weeks ago recommended that VoIP licence may be given to applicants, under certain terms and conditions as an interim measure, before this common platform comes into opera-

tion. The BTRC believes it will be at least a year before this platform is ready.

The BTRC suggested that interested applicants will be provided with a particular set of information about the permanent arrangement of routing VoIP or Internet traffic through four Transmission Platforms of the BTB and the interim arrangement to be made until the common platform is in operation.

But the BTB, which is a direct victim of the seven-year-old illegal Internet telephony, last week recommended to the telecoms

Primary teachers to lay siege to PM's office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Non-government primary school teachers yesterday took up a fresh programme to realise their demand for nationalisation of their schools.

They plan to lay a siege to the prime minister's office if their demand is not met by 10:00am today. If it does not work, they will go for a fast unto death at the Central Shaheed Minar from 5:00pm.

The programme was announced at a rally of the teachers at the Shaheed Minar amid signs of an apparent split in Bangladesh Non-government Primary School Teachers' Association that organised the rally.

Secretary General of the association Akkas Ali Sheikh and some other leaders addressed the rally but its President Mafikul Islam Tripti

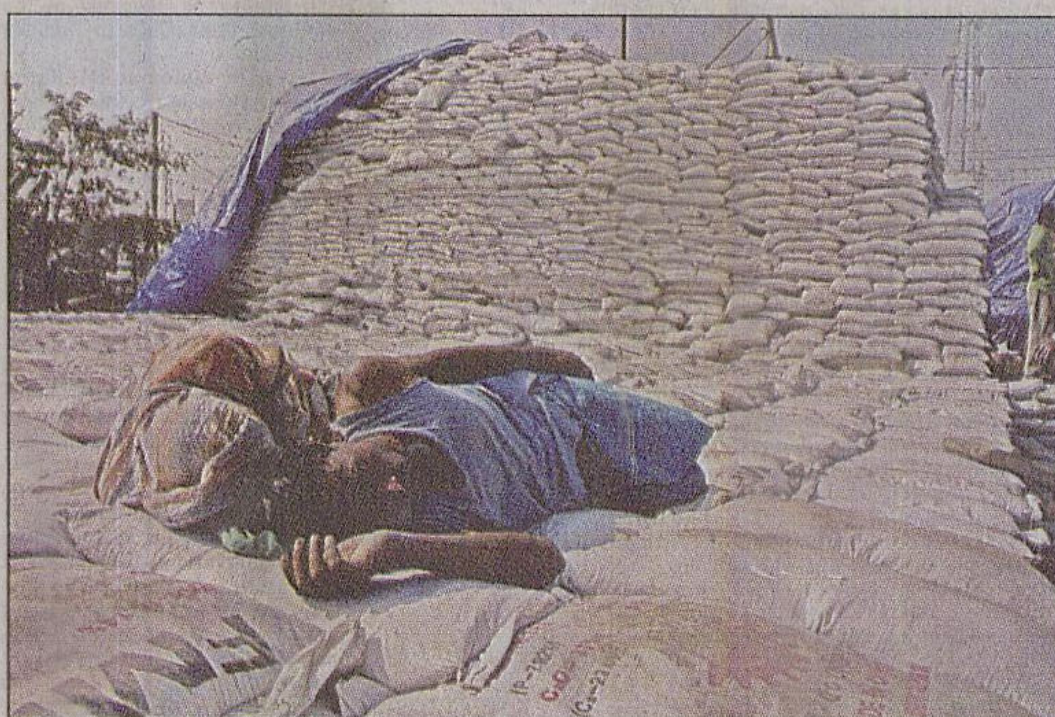


PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

NOTHING ELSE TO DO: Labourers nap on the piled up fertiliser bags at a Narayanganj jetty as the traders' strike entered its eighth day yesterday, stalling distribution across the country.

Cabinet ratifies Safta accord

REZAUL KARIM

The cabinet at a meeting yesterday ratified the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) agreement, which comes into effect from January 1, 2006.

This ratification will pave the way for enforcement of the first-ever regional trade agreement that provides for free trade in goods among the Saarc countries -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The cabinet meeting held with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair viewed that Safta agreement, signed during the 12th Saarc Summit in Islamabad in January 2004, is a historic milestone in the economic profile of the seven-nation bloc.

All members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) are to ratify the Safta agreement by the end of the year.

JMB's Rajshahi top leader captured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police yesterday arrested chief counsellor of Rajshahi zone Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) Lutfar Rahman in Bagmara upazila.

The arrest was made, following up the leads obtained from Aatur Rahman Sunny, the detained military commander of JMB.

A teacher of management at Mollah Azad Memorial Degree College in Atrai upazila of Naogaon, Lutfar had been evading arrest since Bangla Bhai went into hiding last year. He reportedly used his influence as a leader of the ruling coalition partner in averting for long the capture.

A team of Bagmara police arrested him at Sikdari Market yesterday afternoon while he was returning home from the college.

Superintendent of Police in Rajshahi Abdullah Al Mahmood confirmed the news and said Lutfar will be implicated in the Mukul murder case.

As news of the arrest spread, local BNP and Jamaat leaders rushed to the Bagmara Police Station. They have been lobbying

hard for his release, said witnesses.

Lutfar had often claimed to have secured the 'green signal from the government' so as to be not arrested, locals told journalists on a number of occasions.

SUNNY'S STATEMENT

JMB Majlis-e Sura member and military chief Aatur Rahman Sunny had told the investigators in Dhaka that Lutfar was involved in the murder of Golam Rabbani Mukul during the heyday of Bangla Bhai's Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMB). He had adjudged Mukul as guilty in an arbitrary trial.

A leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League and a part-time journalist of Taherpur, Mukul was kidnapped from his house and tortured to death in public in Bagmara on April 11 last year.

JAMAAT LINK Although Lutfar was known as a Jamaat leader in his locality and was seen taking part in different programmes of Jamaat, local chapter of the party has denied his affiliation with it.

Locals said he had also worked as a source for Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in its drives against

Militant 'patrons' should quit govt JP (Manju) tells PM at terror talks

JP (Manju) tells PM at terror talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) at a meeting with the prime minister yesterday said those who are accused of harbouring the militants should resign from the government and the administration for the sake of fair probe.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia assured the JP delegation that no one will be spared if the allegation against him of having links to the militancy is proved, JP leaders told reporters after the meeting held at the prime minister's office (PMO).

The 12-member delegation led by JP Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju also suggested the prime minister take measures to resolve the current political stand-off between the government and the opposition parties and hold talks on the opposition demand for reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems.

Referring to the Awami League led 14-party opposition alliance boycotting the national dialogue on militancy, the prime minister

said, "I had invited all, but they did not come. Still I am ready to sit down with them."

"How can we hold discussion if someone doesn't even receive the invitation letter?" a JP leader quoted her as saying.

In reply, the JP leaders requested her to continue the efforts to have the opposition at the negotiating table to discuss ways to hold the next election in a free and fair manner. Otherwise, they said, the elections will be meaningless.

At the meeting that went for about two hours, they also suggested the government take even tougher line on militants.

"The government should take a deep look into the issue to find out whether the religious extremism is being carried to Bangladesh from other places," JP Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju said at the dialogue.

Talking to reporters, Manju said he told the premier that she should take the initiative to have the opposition parties at the discussion table.

Remittance growth defies manpower export decline

RAFIQ HASAN

Despite a sharp decline in manpower export, the country's remittance earning increased by 27 per cent this year with the total remittance crossing \$4 billion mark for the first time, sources in the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment said.

In 2004, the earning was \$3.5 billion while 2.50 lakh Bangladeshis went abroad for job purposes this year against 2.71 lakh last year,

posting around nine per cent decline, the source added.

The source observed that the main cause of decline in manpower export was job nationalisation policy in Saudi Arabia -- the main destination of Bangladeshi workers. Manpower export to Saudi Arabia declined by around 30 per cent this year compared to last year's export figure.

"We have nothing to do because Saudi Arabia has been recruiting

TRADERS' STRIKE ENTERS DAY 8 Saifur denies any fertiliser crisis

REAZ AHMAD

While the continuous fertiliser strike entered 8th day yesterday, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman denied any fertiliser crisis in the country.

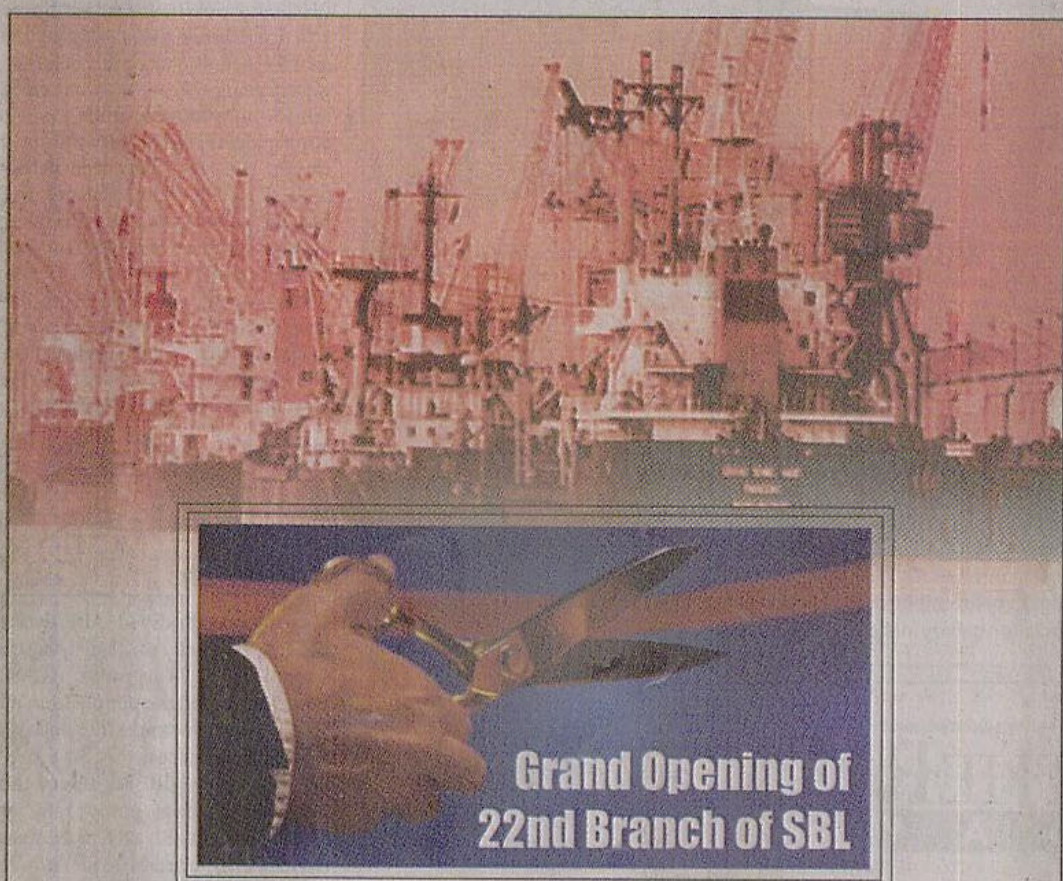
Some people are trying to get the fund (for fertiliser subsidy) released quickly, the finance minister said, adding, "We have to check first whether the farmers are getting the benefits of fertiliser subsidy."

The finance minister made the

comment to the reporters a day after Agriculture Minister MK Anwar expressed surprise at the finance ministry's questioning about the genuineness of the outstanding subsidy bills.

Asked for comments on the situation, the agriculture minister, however, declined to say anything to the newsmen yesterday.

Earlier on Sunday, MK Anwar expressed his utter surprise in raising question over the genuineness of subsidy bills, pointing out



Grand Opening of
22nd Branch of SBL

5th Branch at Chittagong

CDA Avenue Branch

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27 December 2005

To be Inaugurated by:

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed
Chairman, Standard Bank Ltd.

SC Bar asks president to cancel Faizee's appointment

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) yesterday sent a letter to the president reiterating its demand to rescind the order by which Justice Faisal Mahmud Faizee was appointed an additional judge of the High Court.

In the letter, SCBA General Secretary M Enayetur Rahim said Justice Faizee did not have original LLB pass certificate when he took oath as a High Court judge and he received the enrolment certificate from the Bangladesh Bar Council, the statutory body of the lawyers, by providing 'false information about his age'.

Mentioning Faizee's reception

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Tata investment talks to resume on Jan 7

Gas pricing, incentives key issues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With key issues like investment incentive, gas price, coal exploring licence, and process of land allocation still unresolved, the government and Indian Tata Group will sit for the fourth round negotiation from January 7 to finalise the issues concerning the latter's US\$ 2.5 billion investment proposal.

After the expiry of November 30 deadline for signing the proposed investment contract, the Indian industrial conglomerate agreed to review their deadline but the government delayed the fourth round negotiation for over a month due to lack of necessary preparations for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

REMEMBRANCE Aaron H Chowdhury (Danny)



Three years back on this day you left us alone and you were gone before we knew it. Only God knows why so early in life He took you away from us. Our hearts ache in sadness and secret tears flow. Time has not healed the pain and agony in our hearts. Your sweet and pleasant memories are forever enshrined in our hearts and thoughts. Danny, we dearly love you and miss you every moment. You will always be with us.

Dada & Dadi Bhai (Anita & Samson Chowdhury), Parents (Baba & Tapan Chowdhury) & All the Family Members

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Head Office: "Chamber Building" (3rd Floor), 122-124 Motiheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, PABX: 7175698, 9558375, 7169134
Fax: 7176367, 7169078, E-mail: sbliho@bangla.net, SWIFT: SDBLBDDH, Web: www.standardbankbd.com