

## MUSHROOMING VOIP TRADE

# Foreign mobile operators involved in racket

SHARIEF KHAN

A few foreign mobile phone operators, which take out profits of hundreds of millions of dollars from Bangladesh each year, have been largely supporting the phenomenally growing illegal VoIP business in the country.

Quoting a confidential study of a top international phone company, an industry insider said the mobile operators' billing patterns indicate that there is a market of 2.5 billion paid minutes in only mobile termination per year.

With 90 percent VoIP (voice over internet protocol) traffic terminating on mobile networks, the mobile companies make at least 66 paise

per minute from each call. The remaining calls are terminated through the landlines of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board with the help of some dishonest employees.

It is estimated that the illegal VoIP business, which allegedly had blessings of Hawa Bhaban and other influential quarters, annually generates more than Tk 1,200 crore and the amount remains outside the tax net and official monetary transaction channels. Bangladesh was world's one of the top VoIP growth zones until the recent crackdown on the illegal business started.

Sensing that some influential quarters involved in this business

do not want to legalise VoIP, mobile phone operators also became involved in it, industry insiders said.

One aggressive operator that entered the Bangladesh market a couple of years ago has consciously tapped this call termination business by selling special package for illegal VoIP operators, the insiders said.

However, one of the oldest mobile phone companies of the country had already got involved in the racket by the time this new company joined the show, they added.

The drive carried out by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) against the VoIP operation shut-

tered the whole illegal network and recovered huge equipment and special SIM cards of these mobile phone operators.

As of Wednesday, the Rab busted 19 such establishments.

But the law enforcers are not yet ready to accuse the mobile phone companies of being a party to this illegal business.

"We have recovered equipment and SIM cards of all companies, but mostly of two of them," said a Rab official involved in the drive.

"We cannot say for sure if the mobile companies have deliberately sold these SIM cards and equipment to the VoIP operators because most of these are sold

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## Drive against graft keeps BNP men on the run

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Like some influential leaders of the party, most of the top brass of the BNP's front organisations have gone into hiding.

They got rich overnight allegedly through corruption in the last five years. Many of them are alleged to have led organised crime at that time, said a party insider.

A group of incumbent and former leaders of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) who were once officially connected to the Hawa Bhaban have not been coming to the office since launch of the drive against corrupt politicians, added the source.

Most of the leaders of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal,

Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, Jatiyatabadi Swachhsebak Dal, Krishak Dal and Mohila Dal are holed up now. They once were very close to Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of the BNP, as he was in charge of overseeing the activities of the front organisations.

Azzul Bari Helal, president of JCD, considered the most important wing of the BNP, used to have a lot of clout during the last five years. His name was much discussed for his controversial and aggressive speeches against Awami League President Sheikh Hasina. Still, blessings of the Hawa Bhaban since the joint forces swung into action against corruption. Allegations of corruption

Many other Chhatra Dal leaders

who were allegedly involved in crimes on and around the Dhaka University campus are in flight, fearing the forces might catch them.

A central leader of the JCD seeking anonymity told The Daily Star that they would be active in politics again once the BNP high-ups decide to that end. "The party high command has asked us to observe the situation, which is why we are steering clear of the organisation," he added.

Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal President Barkat Ullah Bulu has not visited the party office or the Hawa Bhaban since the joint forces swung into action against corruption. Allegations of corruption

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## BB asks Bogra banks to show accounts of 22

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Bangladesh Bank (BB) sent letters to a number of government and non-government banks in Bogra on Thursday asking them to send the last two years' account statements of 22 BNP and Awami League (AL) leaders, their wives, activists, as well as a number of businessmen.

Bank sources said BB asked for the account statements of Bogra BNP President Razaul Karim Badsha, BNP District Committee Secretary Saiful Islam, former BNP lawmaker Helauzzaman Talukder Lahu, Lahu's wife, Bogra AL Committee Secretary Mazibur Rahman Maznu, BNP leader and Word Commissioner of Bogra Municipality Shiphar Al Bakhter,

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Curious spectators, left, gather near the cage of the Royal Bengal Tiger that came out of the cage after a scuffle with a staffer who went to feed it at Dhaka Zoo yesterday. The tiger was later tranquillised, top right, while staffer Mujibur Rahman taken to hospital.



PHOTO: STAR

## Scuffle with tiger at Dhaka Zoo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Panic gripped the visitors at Dhaka Zoo yesterday noon when a Royal Bengal Tiger attacked its food provider inside the cage, came out of it and roamed the zoo premises for about half an hour.

The victim, Mujibur Rahman Sheikh, 40, employee of an animal food supply contractor at the zoo, narrowly survived with injuries to his arms, thighs, neck and chest.

Scores of people including women and children were seen running helter skelter for safety as they found the majestic animal out of its cage. As the news spread like wildfire, hundreds of people who went to the zoo with their families on the weekend tried to hide wherever they could or raced out.

Narrating the incident, Mujibur said just as on other days, he went

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## Mosharraf sent to jail, Mufti Shahidul gets detention

STAR REPORT

Former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain was sent to jail yesterday after a court had scheduled the hearing of his bail prayer for Sunday while a Dhaka court sent former lawmaker Mufti Shahidul Islam to a 30-day detention.

Former Jubo Dal central leader and a trader from Karwan Bazar in the capital, Nabi Solaiman, was also sent to a 30-day detention by the same Dhaka court yesterday.

BNP leader Mosharraf and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis leader Shahidul were arrested in the ongoing anti-corruption crackdown. Nineteen other high profile politicians were also arrested in the drive. The joint forces last night raided

several houses in Khilgaon area in search of Sonali Bank CBA leader BM Bakir Hossain who is also a Samik Dal leader.

The hour-long drive took place at around 10:00pm, but it failed to capture Bakir.

They arrested 14 people in Patuakhali including Jatiya Party's (Ershad) district unit General Secretary Zafar Ullah and a union parishad (UP) chairman Golam Mortaza alias Shukur Chairman during the 24 hours preceding 2:00am yesterday. Zafar was picked up from his Kazipara residence in the district town around 2:00am yesterday and Golam Mortaza had been arrested from Dumki upazila at 8:00pm on Wednesday. Besides, the army in Cox's Bazar

arrested a listed top criminal and the boss of a smuggling syndicate in Sathkira, Momin Ullah Sarder alias Mohon Commissioner, early yesterday with a stolen private car in his possession. He was drunk when he was arrested. Mohon had been wanted in eight cases including Sathkira based daily Patradoot editor Alauddin murder case.

The police headquarters said police and Rab arrested 1,528 people, seized seven firearms, 11 bullets and three homemade bombs during the 24 hours preceding 6:00am yesterday.

Our correspondent reported from Mymensingh that former state minister for energy and

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PHOTO: STAR

Tara Banu, dweller of a slum beside Dhaka-Aricha Road near Savar, begs for time as a bulldozer of the Roads and Highways Department went there yesterday to demolish the shanties.

## Arresting the accused not enough for fair polls

Ban them after probe, seminar told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The great challenge for the present caretaker government is to conduct proper investigation into the cases of the corrupt white-collar people and putting them on trial so that politics is made a place for honest and qualified people, eminent economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud said at a seminar yesterday.

"We do not have experience in trying such people for 'red-telephone' corruption. Signatures of so many are found in files of tenders that it becomes difficult to identify who the real culprits are," he said.

Arresting the accused is not enough, justice and barring them

from participating in the next election needs to be ensured, he said at a seminar at the National Press Club on "Electoral reforms: Immediate priorities for maximum impact".

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) organised the seminar.

Mahmud said the government should create an environment so that the political parties are forced to nominate honest and qualified candidates.

The chief panellist of the seminar said many legal reform proposals, some of which may not be practical, would not bring significant changes if they were not implemented properly.

"We also should not be too

much technology dependent. For example, introduction of voter ID card is a huge task and we don't want the present government to initiate a project and fail," he noted.

"What we need is a good political culture and mass awareness. The Election Commission (EC) however should be strengthened to punish the violators of the electoral rules," Mahmud said.

The PPRC put forward a number of proposals emphasising independence, accountability, and strengthening of the EC and transparency of the political parties to ensure a meaningful election.

The necessary amendments to the Representation of the Peoples

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## 11 trafficked girls return from India

UNB, Benapole

Eleven Bangladesh girls, who were trafficked to India three to four years ago, returned home yesterday through Benapole check post.

Sources said Indian police with the help of BSF handed over the girls to Benapole immigration authorities.

Police said the girls will be kept at a shelter of Bangladesh Mohila Ainjibi Samity at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital before handing them over to their families.

Indian police had arrested them from different parts of India after they were trafficked to the neighbouring country at different times.

Police produced the girls before the courts, which sent them to safe custody. Later a human rights organisation, Sanglap, took them to its shelter.

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## US wants to see early polls in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

The United States wants to see election in Bangladesh as soon as possible in an appropriate way according to the constitution and rule of law, a State Department spokesman said in Washington.

"Our position on Bangladesh and on its elections I think is well known to you and certainly hasn't changed. We do want to see elections move forward as soon as possible and in an appropriate way according to the constitution and according to the rule of law," Deputy Spokesman Tom Casey told a press briefing Thursday.

He said Washington also wants "to make sure that there is accountability in government, that corruption and any other illegal activities are managed. But that, again, is something that is for the

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PHOTO: STAR

Former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain being taken to jail after he was produced before a Mymensingh court yesterday.

## ARRESTS OF POLITICIANS

# AL bigwigs sit soon to study situation

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The Awami League (AL) top brass are closely watching the developments following the arrests of BNP and AL bigwigs while the mid- and grassroots-level leaders await the high command's instructions in the changed situation.

AL President Sheikh Hasina is likely to meet the central leaders this week to discuss preparations for the International Mother Language Day (21 February). At the meeting, she will hear from her party colleagues and give them directions on what to do and expect in the largely uncharted context, sources said.

The AL-led 14-party alliance too will sit soon to finalise its strategy for the way things have panned out in recent times. The meeting might follow alliance Convener Abdul Jalil's return from the UK.

Meanwhile, a number of AL leaders have welcomed the joint forces' ongoing drive against the corrupt politicians, businessmen, criminals and their godfathers and

Dr Yunus' intent to join politics.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta said they are observing the situation. On the possibility of Dr Yunus joining politics, he said they would welcome if he comes into politics.

"Still, I think he would better play a robust role in peace and conflict resolution in South Asia," observed the AL leader.

AL Acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader said, "I think it would be good for politics if persons of his [Yunus'] calibre joins the ranks. We need qualified and educated people for a qualitative change in politics," Quader said adding that at the end of the day the people will decide whether to accept or reject the Nobellaureate.

Both the leaders said the caretaker government should arrest the criminals and their godfathers, corrupt politicians and businessmen on specific charges.

"We have always wanted arrest of criminals and their godfathers

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## 'CROSSFIRE' WITH POLICE

# Notorious Salam of Kushtia killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A criminal gang leader was killed in 'crossfire' between police and his cohorts at village Raidanga of Kumarkhali upazila in the district early yesterday.

The dead, Abdus Salam 37, hailing from Cheuria in Kumarkhali upazila, was the chief of notorious Salam Bahini.

Kumarkhali police arrested Salam from a house of Baradi

village at around 6:00am on Thursday, police said, adding that during interrogation at the police station Salam admitted to having firearms hidden in Baradi village and informed about his accomplices.

Yesterday night, police started for Baradi village to recover the firearms and arrest Salam's cohorts.

When police reached a plot of

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