

GP unlikely to go public this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

GrameenPhone (GP) is unlikely to float shares in the securities market this year and the earliest to do so would be the next year, said GP Chief Executive Officer Erik Aas in Singapore, reports Bloomberg.

In an interview at the CommunicAsia telecommunications conference in Singapore yesterday, Aas also mentioned that the GP shareholders have already expressed interest to list the company locally but are yet to take the final decision.

The company expects the share sale to be Bangladesh's biggest ever, he added. The GP may also sell shares overseas, Aas said without identifying any country.

The GP has 13 million subscribers now, which is more than half the country's total 23-24 million mobile phone users, Aas said. It had 10 million customers at the end of November last year, he said.

Norway's Telenor ASA owns 62 percent of the GrameenPhone.

PDB top management running by makeshift arrangements

SHARIER KHAN

The top management along with about 100 other technical officers of Power Development Board (PDB) is running on makeshift arrangements for many months because the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) is not clearing their promotions.

The PDB's woes have multiplied because the promotions were being handled by the power ministry, instead the PDB itself, for more than a year now. A senior PDB official said the ministry's intervention is unwarranted. Again, the ministry was not pursuing the ACC clearance that is holding back vital promotions.

As a result, the PDB is heavily

suffering from lack of decision-making, he said. Junior officers are ignoring their immediate bosses who are working based on "current charge" or "additional charge".

The PDB chairman and the members for generation, planning and distribution are serving on "current charge" from January-February last. They are technical officials who have developed their careers in the PDB. The post of member transmission has remained vacant for more than a year.

Two other members for finance and administration, who the ministry sent on deputation, however hold full responsibilities.

In addition, all engineers ranging from executive engineer to chief

engineer are carrying out their duties as "in-charge" or on "current charge". The number of these posts is above 90, said a PDB high official requesting anonymity.

As there had been no fresh recruitment in the PDB for many years, retirements of a good number of competent officials have created huge vacancies at the top tier. These posts were never completely taken up during the alliance government rule where the Hawa Bhaban dictated which decisions the PDB should take. This is manifested in the fact that in five years the BNP led alliance government

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3 JMB men held in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested three cadres of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in Satkhira Sadar upazila on Monday night.

The arrestees are Maulana Wasikur Rahman of Taluigachha village, Abdul Hai of Banshdah village and Abu Sayeed of Akhrakhola village under the upazila.

The law enforcers raided the villages at dead of night and picked up the JMB men from their respective houses.

Sources said the arrested militants of the banned outfit were involved in August 17 bomb blasts in the district.

When contacted, the officer-in-charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station declined to make any comment on the involvement of the arrestees in the serial blasts.

Iran refuses to rule out use of 'oil weapon'

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday refused to rule out using oil supplies as a weapon in the standoff over its nuclear programme, saying Washington had never excluded attacking the Islamic republic.

"When the Americans say that using the military option against Iran regarding its nuclear issue is not off the table then Iran can say that it will not put aside the instrument of oil," Iran's representative to Opec, Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, said in an interview with the Shargh newspaper.

Asked where Iran's "red line" on using oil as a weapon lay, he replied: "The red line lies where the Americans fail to say that using military means against Iran is illeg-

gal."

"We will not be the first to use our instrument but if the others do not put aside their pressure instruments in the negotiations, then it is natural both sides talk about their instruments," he added.

"Talking about instruments does not mean that they will be used, it is a deterrent," said Kazempour Ardebili.

Iran's refusal to rule out using oil as a weapon has frequently rattled oil markets, which fear that any squeeze in supplies from Opec's number two producer could cause a huge jump in prices.

There have also been fears that Iran could block the Strait of Hormuz, a vital channel for the transport of oil.

The United States has never

ruled out the use of force against Tehran over its nuclear programme although Washington insists it wants the issue resolved through diplomacy.

Washington accuses Tehran of seeking nuclear weapons. Iran vehemently denies the charges, saying it only wants to generate energy for a growing population whose fossil fuels will eventually run out.

Ardebili predicted that the price of oil would rise to "at least" 100 dollars per barrel if Iran moved to cut its supply of 2.5 million barrels per day from the market.

But he also played down fears of a looming confrontation between Iran and the United States and emphasised that Iran had not

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2 more cases filed against ex-MP Gias

A CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Two more cases were filed against former BNP lawmaker Mohammad Giasuddin with Siddhirganj Police Station yesterday.

Secretary of Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation Mohammad Ishaque and secondary school education officer of Narayanganj Monajer Rashid filed the cases. Two wives of the lawmaker and four of his relatives are also accused in one of the cases.

In the first information report (FIR), Ishaque said Gias took lease of an irrigation canal along the

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PHOTO: STAR

Trees at Osmani Uddyan in the capital are dying due to lack of proper maintenance. A worker is cutting a dead tree in one of the last remaining parks in the city.

West restores direct aid to Palestinians

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas won the lifting of a crippling Western aid freeze amid efforts to isolate Hamas in its Gaza enclave, where fears are mounting of a humanitarian crisis.

The United States and Europe restored direct aid to the Palestinians on Monday in a show of support for Abbas, who set up an emergency government when his Islamist rivals seized power in Gaza after days of brutal bloodletting.

"We will not leave 1.5 million Palestinians at the hands of terrorist organisations," US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said of the impoverished Gaza Strip.

Rice said the United States was lifting its 15-month embargo on direct aid, as the European Union -- the biggest donor to the Palestinians -- normalised ties with the new government and resumed its own aid flows.

The moves came a day after Abbas swore in a new 12-member cabinet excluding the Islamists after sacking the three-month-old

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ILLEGAL HILL CUTTING

DoE officials defy mobile court order for filing case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The officials of the Department of Environment (DoE) in Chittagong on Monday allegedly dilly-dallied for hours to file a case, defying a mobile court's orders against an influential business group in connection with cutting hills in Foy's Lake area.

The DoE, however, eventually lodged the case late into Monday night after the mobile court magistrate threatened to sue the DoE officials if they did not carry out his orders without any further delay, sources said yesterday.

During the second day of the

crackdown on illegal hill-cutting, the mobile court led by Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Magistrate Mohammad Munir Chowdhury on Monday found three instances of devouring hills causing degradation of the environment at Nasiaghona of Koibalyadham in the port city's Uttar Pahartali and Lake City Housing Project areas, both under Khulshi Police Station.

The magistrate instantly ordered DoE Director Mosharraf Hossain to file cases against Chittagong City Corporation (CCC)

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BDR starts selling vegetables in city

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) starts marketing fresh vegetables in the city today through its 20 open markets as part of the ongoing efforts to stabilise the soaring prices of essentials.

The paramilitary troops will also distribute vegetables, to be collected from Narsingdi, through four makeshift wholesale markets to be set up in front of Uttara Rajuk College, TT Para in Kamalapur, Mohammadpur and Adabar areas, chief coordinating officer of BDR Dal-Bhat Programme Lt Col Fazle Akbar told the news agency yesterday.

Meanwhile, BDR began monitoring the comparative retail prices of essentials at Karwanbazar,

Mohammadpur, Kamalapur, New Market, Kachukhet and Kalyanpur kitchen markets.

They will also regularly monitor the retail prices of similar items at the kitchen markets of Kolkata.

The price monitoring is aimed at giving people a view on the comparative prices of the items with the prices at BDR sales centre and open markets, said a BDR official.

The items are coarse rice, packed flour, imported lentil, chhola, sugar, imported onion, soyabean oil, palm oil, milk powder and vegetables.

The comparative figures BDR released yesterday suggest that the prices of essentials at BDR sales centre are the lowest followed by

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