

Govt guns for major ICT goal

Plans for installation of pvt sector submarine cable, communications satellite

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and SHARIER KHAN

As part of the government's move to create a better business environment in the country, different authorities are taking up a number of major steps ranging from installation of a private sector submarine cable to launching of a national communications satellite.

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has also agreed to a proposal of Bangladesh Better Business Forum (BBBF) to drastically cut Internet bandwidth cost in line with the charges in the neighbouring countries within the next two months.

Other moves stimulated by the BBBF include awarding of Internet telephony licences to Internet service providers (ISPs) within next

six months, setting up small scale software technology parks at economic zones within six-nine months and setting up a 17-acre ICT village in Mohakhali within six months.

Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), which is leading the ICT related projects, yesterday declared guidelines for the request for proposal (RFP) for the second submarine cable, inviting primary proposals from private investors by June 15.

"The second submarine cable project demands private investment between \$40 million and \$250 million, depending on options and routes to be offered by the bidders," said a competent BTRC source.

The cost for the satellite project is yet to be outlined as its plan is still

in the primary stage, the source added.

BTRC Chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Manzurul Alam said the commission is now working on the orbit data for the satellite. "We had the orbit available for our satellite long ago. We should have launched this satellite by now," he said.

"The satellite may be launched as a joint venture or by the government. This will be worked out," he said, adding that it will take one to two years for the country to prepare for the satellite and five to eight years to have this communications satellite operating in the orbit.

"We have tremendous prospect in the ICT sector. This will be our main foreign exchange earner and employment source," Manzurul said.

Headed by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, the BBBF sits today for the third time to discuss and decide on the "doable" projects. The forum was launched in November last year.

Five thematic working groups under this 38-member private-public forum have finalised a set of recommendations in this regard. The groups are financing business, infrastructure, macro-economic policy, business launching and operation and manpower efficiency improvement. All the infrastructure related steps are ICT related.

The BBBF recommendations were sent to the ministries concerned last month to see if they can be implemented. The ministries have now given their feedbacks

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Govt talks with pro-Khaleda BNP faction today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The pre-dialogue talk between the pro-Khaleda faction of BNP and the advisers of the caretaker government is scheduled for this evening at the state guesthouse Meghna.

Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman last night told The Daily Star over telephone that the meeting will be held at 6:30pm.

Sources said the government informed the BNP faction about the schedule over telephone yesterday.

Meanwhile, detained BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia gave advance consent to whatever decisions senior BNP leaders would make led by Khandaker Delwar Hossain about the dialogue and the party's unity issue, her

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REFORM TALKS

EC finally invites pro-Saifur BNP

Delwar slams decision as 'part of blueprint'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday again invited Saifur Rahman-led faction of BNP to an electoral reform dialogue scheduled for next Sunday, as its move to reunite the party had failed.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda, who on Thursday had said the EC had wanted to sit with a united BNP since it had not wanted to deal with factions, however disclosed last evening the commission's decision to invite only one faction of the party to the talk after all.

Before disclosing the EC's decision, CEC Huda put a condition of

not asking any question on awaiting journalists, and suggested them to listen to what he had to read out from what seemed to be a written speech.

"We invited Hafizuddin Ahmed to participate in the dialogue on electoral reforms with his delegation at 10:00am on April 27," CEC Huda said adding, the invitation would reach Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, acting secretary general of Saifur loyalists, within last night.

He said the EC will sit with the delegation of pro-Saifur faction of BNP only once, although it earlier had sat twice with each of 15 political parties since September 12 of last year.

Through yesterday's move, the EC officially recognised pro-Saifur faction of BNP as the mainstream and upheld its November last year's decision of inviting Saifur loyalists to the electoral reform talks, a meeting which could not be held due to legal battles that followed.

Irked by the EC's decision, Khandaker Delwar Hossain-led faction loyal to detained Chairperson Khaleda Zia termed it 'a part of blueprint'.

"We are not surprised by the EC's decision. It has been done to legitimise the interim administration's design to hold an election

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Cry for water

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was time for Zohr prayers. After the azan, the muezzin of Shah Saheb nagar mosque in Mirpur made an announcement through the microphone yesterday: "Please perform ablutions before coming to the prayers as there is no water at the mosque."

But sometimes, many in the area do not have water at their homes as well for ablutions.

The people of Paikpara in Mirpur where Shah Saheb nagar mosque is situated have been facing extreme sufferings for over a month due to acute water crisis.

Every day, the local residents wait hours in queue for water when the mobile water distribution container of Wasa (Water Supply and Sewerage Authority) comes to the area to provide water.

"Water flow is so low in the tap that it is now very hard for us to collect drinking water. How can we manage water for other household work," said a distressed housewife of the area who was waiting in a queue yesterday noon to get drinking water from the Wasa mobile water distribution container.

Many locals said that the mobile container is barely enough to meet the demand of drinking water in the area.

Shah Saheb nagar Samaj Unnayan Sangstha yesterday

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Residents of Pikepara of Mirpur in the capital queue up with their vessels yesterday and wait for a Dhaka Wasa water tanker as the area has been experiencing acute water crisis for more than a month.

Delwar alleges 'govt agency' interference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of pro-Khaleda faction of BNP Khandaker Delwar Hossain, yesterday alleged that different government agencies are mounting pressure on party leaders and workers across the country to work for the rival faction led by former finance minister M Saifur Rahman.

A few days ago many former lawmakers of the party were forced to attend a meeting of Saifur-Hafiz faction, Delwar told reporters at his NAM flat in the capital.

He also said union parishad chairmen are being summoned to Dhaka by certain [government] quarters and being briefed to demand local government elections before the national election.

"This is absolutely unexpected and must stop," he said adding that exerting such influence is completely out of bounds.

Detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia appointed Secretary General Delwar said his faction will soon announce an agitation programme demanding release of the party chief.

He condemned reported raids by police on the NAM flats and

village homes of the party's Organising Secretary Mohammad Shahjahan and former lawmaker Sohrab Uddin, claiming that both leaders were harassed as they had sided with the detained chairperson.

Replying to a question from a reporter, Delwar lambasted the chief election commissioner (CEC) for his recent 72-hour ultimatum for reunification to the rival factions of BNP, saying that the CEC has no mandate to talk about unity of a party.

"Who is he to talk about unification? The party is run by its constitution. The people will not accept anything imposed from outside,"

"The Election Commission would invite us to the talks if they were able to take the decision independently," he said.

Delwar asked his party leaders and workers to give away a day's meal to the hungry and the distressed across the country between April 28 and 30.

"At this hour of crisis, BNP has decided to stand beside the distressed. As part of our initiative, we have decided to give one day's meal to the needy," he said.

AL going for 1-point free Hasina demand

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League top leaders yesterday said their 5-point demand is gradually turning into a one-point demand for unconditional release of detained party chief Sheikh Hasina.

"Our 5-point demand is moving towards one-point demand and that is Sheikh Hasina's release," party's senior presidium member Amir Hossain Amu told hunger strikers at AL central office at Bangabandhu Avenue.

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CA asks business community to contribute more to economy

UNB, Dhaka

Terming private sector engine of growth, Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed has urged the business community to contribute more to the national economy by creating a business-friendly atmosphere with joint efforts of the government and businesses.

He sought their cooperation when a 38-member delegation of

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Yunus wants global move to tackle rising food prices

UNB, Dhaka

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus has proposed a coordinated global initiative to ease the pressure on the poor due to rising food prices.

He requested British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to take leadership role within the European community and the G-8 for addressing the poor's extreme difficulties created by the global rise in prices of essential food items.

The micro-credit guru made the proposal when he met the UK

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Dr Kamal for lifting state of emergency for meaningful polls

UNB, Dhaka

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday demanded withdrawal of state of emergency to make the long-awaited parliamentary polls meaningful.

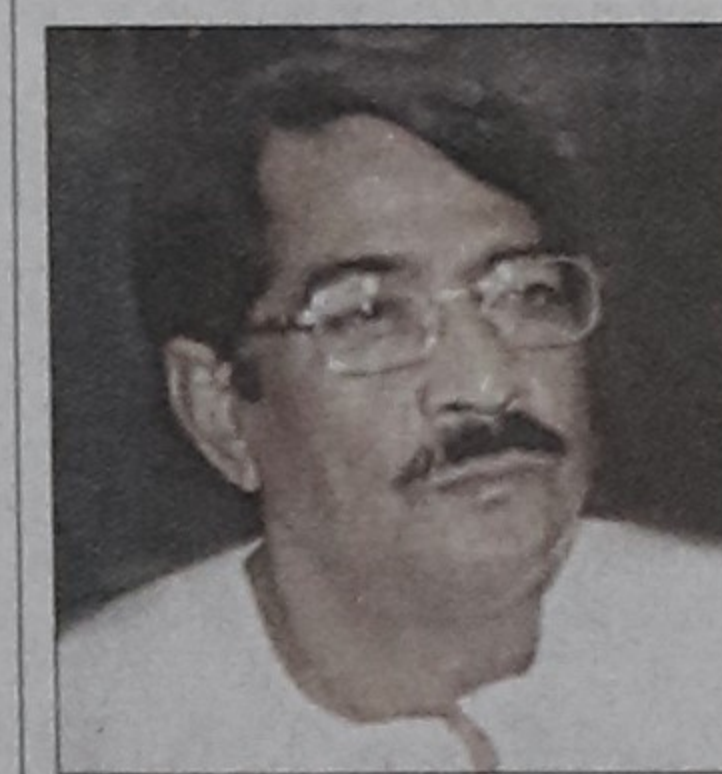
"There is no alternative to holding the long-awaited parliamentary election as per the declared roadmap. State of emergency will have to be withdrawn for a meaningful election," he told reporters after a pre-dialogue meeting with five advisers at the state guesthouse Meghna in the evening.

Dr Kamal said the election will have to be arranged on the basis of national consensus.

He urged the election commission to expedite its activities and complete preparation to hold the

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Shajahan Siraj gets 13 years for illegal wealth



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court yesterday sentenced BNP leader and former minister Shajahan Siraj to 13 years' imprisonment for amassing assets illegally and concealing wealth information from Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

It also fined him Tk 10 lakh. In the event of a default in payment, he will have to serve another year in jail.

His wife Rabeya Siraj was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and fined Tk 5 lakh for aiding and abetting him in the offence. For failing to pay the sum she will

have to be in jail for six more months.

The couple, who have been in hiding since the present military-backed caretaker government launched the anti-graft drive last year, were tried in absentia.

Handing down the verdict, Judge Kamaluzzaman of Special Court-9 also ordered the government to confiscate wealth worth around Tk 3.75 crore, which is disproportionate to their known sources of income.

Of the jail terms Shajahan coped, 10 years' rigorous imprisonment was given for earning illegal income and three years' simple imprisonment for holding back information in the wealth statement to the ACC.

Shajahan, former jute and textile minister, will have to serve out his terms consecutively meaning he will have to be in jail for 13 years.

The court, set up in the MP Hostel in Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex, said the sentences would take effect from the date of their arrest or surrender.

ACC Assistant Director Khairul Huda filed the case against

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Moeen asks edible oil importers to maintain smooth supply

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Army chief General Moeen U Ahmed yesterday asked leading importers of edible oil to maintain smooth supply of the essential commodity in the country.

"We are aware about the global market situation. But we want to see a smooth supply of essential commodities like edible oil," Gen Moeen told the importers at a meeting at his Cantonment office.

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Biman signs deal to buy 8 Boeings

MoU for purchasing two more aircraft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd yesterday signed the final deal with US plane-maker Boeing to procure eight new-generation aircraft—four 777-300ER and four 787-8—at a cost of \$1.26 billion (Tk 8,728 crore).

The deal includes an option on the purchasing rights of buying four more planes—two 777-300ER and two 787-8.

The same day the national flag

carrier also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the plane-maker to buy two 737-800 aircraft. The MoU also has the option on the purchasing rights of buying two more 737-800.

This is the first time Biman independently decided to buy aircraft without any political and government interference since its birth in 1972. Biman became a public limited company in July last year.

Dr MA Momen, managing director and chief executive officer

of Biman, and Glen A Green, regional director, Boeing, signed the definite agreement and MoU.

"In the history of Bangladesh, no single deal this big was made in the past... our past is not that good, rather very poor," Mahub Jamil, special assistant to the chief adviser for the civil aviation and tourism ministry, said at the signing ceremony at Bangladesh Airlines Training Centre in Kurmitola in the city.

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Wheat purchase proposal rejected

UNB, Dhaka

The Advisers Committee on Public Procurement yesterday rejected a tender proposal of Food Directorate for procuring 43,000 metric tons of wheat, saying that the government stock of wheat is good.

The food ministry placed the proposal in the wake of high prices of wheat flour on the domestic market alongside price hike of rice.

After the meeting of the advisers' committee, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam told reporters that the wheat stock in government storage is good and that wheat price on the international market is "downward".

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