

Taxicab operators seek waiver on bank interest

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Taxicab operators yesterday urged the government to waive the sector's Tk 25 crore bank interest to give a second chance to the much-needed transportation service.

The government withdrew two-stroke autorickshaws from city roads in 2003 and introduced taxicabs, but the sector witnessed poor investment returns since the beginning as unfit cabs had been imported.

As many as 80 local companies invested more than Tk 50 crore in the sector by taking loans from 10 financial institutions, but poor returns and hefty servicing costs left them unprofitable.

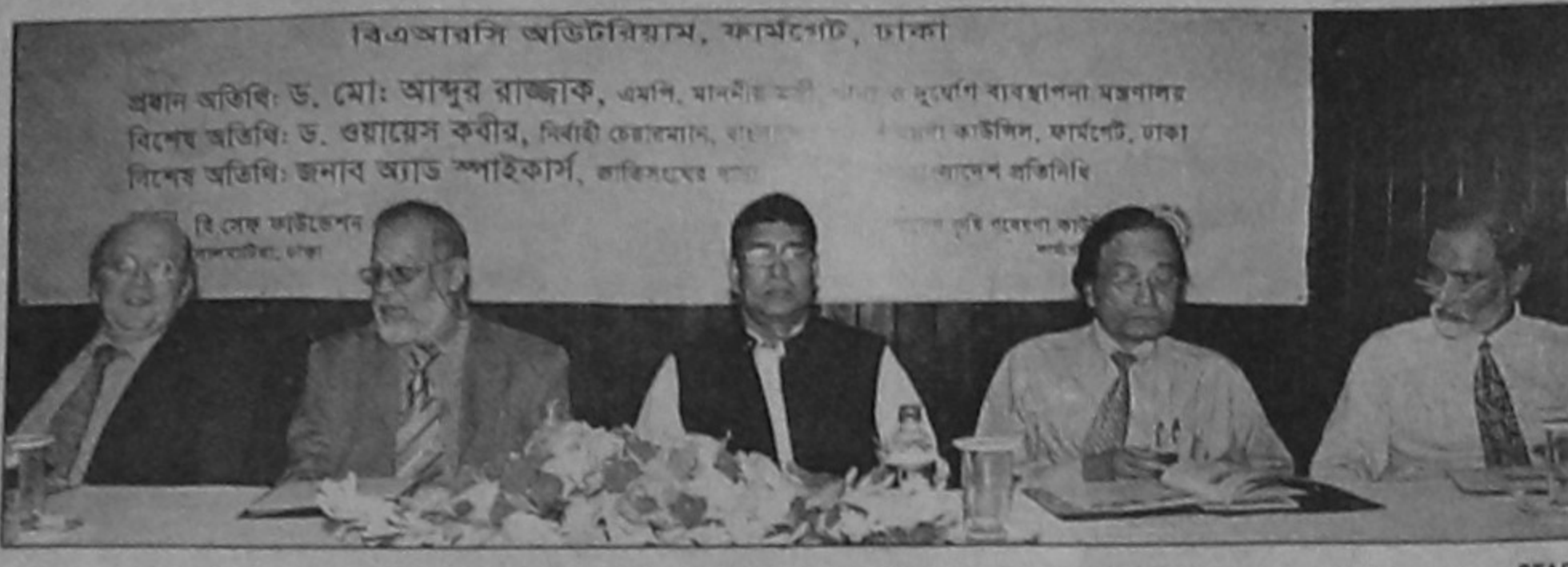
The operators have been able to pay back Tk 25 crore, but the remaining amount cumulatively stands at Tk 50 crore with bank interest.

According to the Bangladesh Association of Taxicab Operators (BATCO), of the total 10,857 imported cabs, 8,000 were imported from India and only 1,000 are presently running. The government imported two types of taxicab in 2003 -- black and yellow.

"We had been misguided by the government. We did not consider the quality of the cars that were imported for us," said Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, president of BATCO, at a press conference at the National Press Club in Dhaka yesterday.

"We want to import taxicabs that are up to 2000cc. But we cannot open L/C as we are treated as loan defaulters by the banks," the BATCO president said.

Anti-adulteration drive soon, says minister



Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque (middle) is seen at the inauguration of Bangladesh Safe Agro Food Efforts (B-safe) Foundation in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The food and disaster management minister has said an anti-adulteration drive will soon be set in to ensure quality food.

"We are going to strengthen the drive against food adulteration, which remains suspended for the last few months," Dr Abdur Razzaque told the launch of a new organisation in Dhaka yesterday.

Held at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), the function was also addressed by Food and Agriculture Organisation representative Ad Spijkers and BARC Executive Chairman Dr Wais Kabir.

The minister said the government wants that the executive magistrates regain their authority to instantly try some offenders, including the persons responsible to make foods toxic.

"The Mobile Court Bill 2009 now awaits parliament's endorsement following its approval by the cabinet early this month. Once this bill is signed into a law, executive magistrates will face no bar to establish mobile courts to ensure food safety," Razzaque said.

At present, the judicial magistrates can only operate such mobile courts against criminal activities, including adulteration of food, after separation of the judiciary.

The executive magistrates, who are officials from the administration cadre of the government, were stripped of any judicial power on November 1, 2007 through amendment to the CrPc.

However, the new bill did not recommend much authority to these mobile courts. It suggests that such courts may only fine the offenders, in default, a three-month simple imprisonment.

The law enforcement agencies along with other organisations concerned will be bound to give necessary assistance to executive magistrates in operating such mobile

courts, the minister said.

Razzaque said every possible measure will be taken to ensure availability of quality food at reasonable prices in the local market.

In this context he underscored the need to create awareness among countrymen, and to organise and strengthen a social movement against adulteration of all types of food items.

The replacement of the pesticides diminishing the soil fertility and causing its contamination is also urgent, the minister pointed out, urging innovation of newer technologies.

"The government plans to strengthen the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to ensure safe use of pesticides. IPM would also help kill harmful insects for agriculture," added Razzaque.

The FAO official in his speech at the function stressed better technology to increase food production and ensure food security in Bangladesh.

"A better co-ordination among different ministries to provide necessary services to farmers and create awareness about technology usages for raising farm productivity is urgent," Spijkers said.

The BARC chief urged the government to build up a strong food inspection system to ensure food quality.

This system would also ensure transparency and accountability in the chain from farmers to trader, and finally to the consumers, Kabir pointed out.

Narrating the objectives of the new organisation, Bangladesh Safe Agro Food Efforts (B-safe) Foundation, Dr Mohammad Jainul Abedin, its president, said it would help produce healthy food and assist farmers to properly market their produces.

Dr Syed Nurul Alam, principal scientific officer of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, and Dr M Abdur Momin, general secretary of B-safe, were also present.

BGFCL seeks Tk 245cr to plug Titas leaks

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Ltd (BGFCL) has sought Tk 245 crore to stop gas seepage from Titas gas field in Brahmanbaria.

The issue will be discussed at a pre-Ecneec meeting on August 5. The meeting will also discuss the appointment of a foreign consultant and a list of services that might be needed to mitigate the problem.

The leaks of gas from the Titas field have been continuing over the last five years.

According to villagers and farmers in the neighbourhood, gas was leaking through more than 3,000 big holes, including some 30-foot diameter ones, spreading to paddy fields, water bodies and the Titas river.

Gas is being spewed through some holes burning with leaping flames.

It was learnt that Petrobangla has sought \$120 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that requires final approval from its headquarters.

"We hope to get a fund from the ADB to address the issue," Mukhtar Ali, the acting chairman of Petrobangla told the news agency.

Over the last four years, Petrobangla has identified this project as a top-priority one, but the ADB did not approve it.

Geologists say the field has been losing one to five million cubic feet gas per day since the start of the leakage five years back.

Titas field produces 396.1 million cubic feet of gas (mmcf) per day against the country's total demand for gas of 2,000 mmcf.

Discovered in the early sixties by Shell Oil, Titas was estimated to have a gas reserve of 5.12 trillion cubic feet (after four decades, it has now a reserve of 2.78 tcf).

SUPRO demands foreign debt write-off



Abdul Awal, left, chairperson of SUPRO, speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A local nongovernmental organisation yesterday demanded an unconditional cancellation of all Bangladeshi outstanding foreign debt to rich countries and international financial institutions to tackle recession.

Sushasone Jonno Procharavizon or SUPRO (Campaign for Good Governance) made the plea at a press conference, prior to a regional workshop on Asia and the Pacific's economic policy responses to the financial crisis, which is to be held in Dhaka.

The four-day international workshop begins today.

SUPRO chief Abdul Awal and Director Uma Chowdhury briefed reporters at the press conference.

The country's debt to rich nations, IMF and World Bank is crippling and comes at the expense of essential investment in education, health care and environmental services, SUPRO said.

"We demand cancellation of all external debt to mitigate the impacts of the financial crisis that originated in the rich countries and to help achieve millennium development goals as well," said Chowdhury.

Awal said the cancelled debt must not be considered assistance to development and additional aid has to be given to tackle the impacts of climate change.

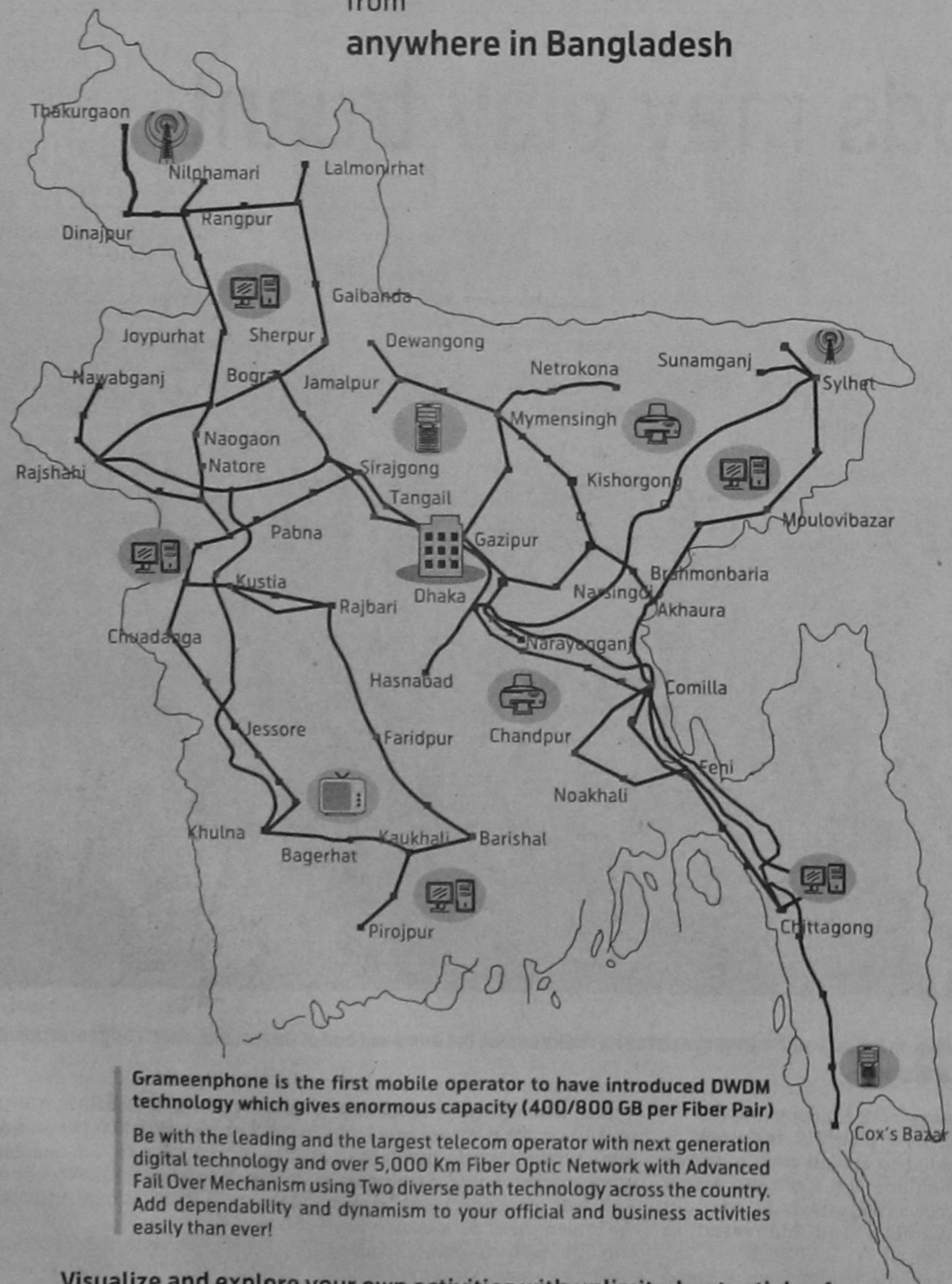
The speakers said average public debt in Bangladesh was only \$6.56 per head in 1974 that reached a whopping \$147.32 in 2007. On average, 65 percent of the country's annual foreign debt is spent on payment of interest and principal amount, they said.

"We also want rich countries to keep their promise to provide 0.7 percent of their GDP to the poor countries to achieve MDGs," Awal said.



Concord Entertainment Co Ltd has signed an agreement with The Bangladesh Monitor recently in Dhaka to work as the hospitality partner of the "Chittagong Travel Mart 2009". Concord officials Safin Ahmed, senior marketing manager, and M Mahfuzur Rahman, deputy media manager, and Bangladesh Monitor representatives Dr Farhad Kamal, executive director, and Subash C Das, sales and marketing manager, were present.

Lease/Sub-lease Transmission Capacity of Grameenphone Fiber Optic Network from anywhere in Bangladesh



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Rate chart for renting Grameenphone's Transmission Capacity

1. Selling Unit: E1 & STM-1 Level: (Underground Fiber)
A. Selling Unit: E1 (30 Channels):

Monthly Rent/Km	Limit of Rate (BDT/Km)		Remarks
	Minimum	Maximum	
a) 0-50 Km	200	250	Note to Table-1. A
b) 51-100 Km	155	200	In addition to (a)
c) 101-200 Km	120	160	In addition to (b)
d) 201-300 Km	100	130	In addition to (c)
e) Above 300 Km	75	95	In addition to (d)

Note to Table-1. A:

- For any lease/sub-lease, the minimum rental of BDT 6,000 per month shall be charged for any distance below 30 Km.
- A discount may be considered depending on bulk, tenure of utilization, data/voice, type/category of client and the route of lease/sub-lease as below:

Sl.	Type of client	Discount	Discount on Bulk and Tenure (No. of E1 years)		
			12-48 E1 month	60-108 E1 month	120 + E1 month
1	Cellular Operator	0%	Nil	5%	10%
2	PSTN Operator	5%	Nil	5%	10%
3	DATA/ISP/DDCSP/Corp.	15%	Nil	5%	10%
4	Rural DATA/ILDS/SME/Media	20%	Nil	5%	10%

B. Selling Unit: STM-1 (63 E1)

- This rental shall be determined by multiplying the unit cost of one E1 by 63
- For an STM-1, a discount within the range of 20% may be considered depending on bulk, tenure of utilization, data/voice and type/category of client.

2. Selling Unit: E1 & STM-1 Level: (Overhead Fiber)

A. Selling Unit: E1 (30 Channels)

Monthly Rent/E1	Limit of Rate (BDT)	
	Minimum Discount*	Maximum Discount*
E1 (Dhaka-Chittagong: 246 Km)	50%	70%

* Refer to Table-1. A.

B. Selling Unit: STM-1 (63 E1)

- This rental shall be determined by multiplying the unit cost of one E1 by 63
- For an STM-1, a discount within the range of 20% may be considered depending on bulk, tenure of utilization, data/voice and type/category of client.

3. Selling Unit: Channel (64 kbps)

Monthly Rent/Channel	Limit of Rate (BDT)	
	Minimum	Maximum
64 kbps regardless of length	2,000	5,000

Note to Table-3. A:

- A discount may be considered depending on bulk, tenure of utilization, data/voice, type/category of client and the route of lease/sub-lease as per Note to Table-1. A (ii).

4. Special Tariff:

A	1. Special Tariff: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Cases In special cases like CSR, Grameenphone will take prior approval from BTRC. This tariff will not be treated as reference tariff by any other organization.
B	2. Special Tariff: Cases of National Interest In special cases like National Interest, Grameenphone will take prior approval from BTRC. This tariff may vary from case to case and shall not be treated as reference tariff by any other organization.

5. All charges are excluding VAT.

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website: www.grameenphone.com/network/

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