

BlackBerry 'optimistic'

It can avert Indian ban

AFP, New Delhi

BlackBerry maker Research in Motion (RIM) said yesterday it was "optimistic" it could avert a threatened shutdown by India of the core features of the popular smartphone on security grounds.

A top-level delegation of the Canadian firm met India's Home Secretary G K Pillai to discuss the government's warning it would ban BlackBerry's corporate email and messaging unless it gave security agencies access to the services.

"I am optimistic," Robert Crowe, vice-president of Research in Motion, told reporters following the half-hour talks.

Crowe's statement came as India's showdown with BlackBerry threatened to widen and encompass Google and the Internet telephony firm Skype as the country seeks access to any services that might be used by militant groups.

"These are all issues that are being deliberated from a security point of view," an Indian government official, who declined to be named, told AFP.

The government, fearful that extremists could use BlackBerry's heavily encrypted messaging system to coordinate attacks, has given RIM until August 31 to provide a "technical solution" to its demand for security access.

India is battling insurgencies from Kashmir in the northwest to the far-flung northeast and mounting Maoist unrest. Islamist gunmen used mobile and satellite phones to coordinate the brazen three-day assault on Mumbai in 2008 that killed 166 people.

India's telecom operators, already forced by the government to conform to tough new security regulations on importing equipment to ensure it is not embedded with "spyware", declined to comment on the ultimatum to BlackBerry.

"We have to wait to see how the story unfolds, it is a very fluid situation," said an executive at one wireless company.

Sanjay Kapoor, South Asia chief of top mobile operator Bharti Airtel, said earlier in the week: "Of course, we're

AL activist

he was making preparations to contest in the Dhaka City Corporation election," said Saleh Ahmed, father of the deceased.

Some unknown miscreants also shot Ibrahim one and half years ago, he added.

Ibrahim's wife Rina Akter is an activist of Jubo Mahila League.

Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Chhatra League leader of Gazipur district, who suffered stab wound on August 3, succumbed to his injuries at DMCH early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mizanur Rahman, former organising secretary of the district unit of BCL.

Falu seeks to quit

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Since then Falu refrained from taking part in any party activities. He was not seen in any programme held at chairperson's Gulshan office or party's central office in Nayapalton or at any street demonstration, the insiders said.

The issue came up for discussion following the resignation of Gayeshwar Chandra Roy from the standing committee on August 2, which too was not accepted by the chairperson.

This correspondent contacted Falu over the phone on August 11 for his version of the issue.

Falu asked the correspondent to meet him at his office yesterday. He also suggested making a phone call before going to his office.

Following his suggestion, this correspondent made a phone call yesterday when Falu once again asked about the issue.

After hearing the subject of discussion, he said, "I am away from my office, so tell me whatever you want to know from me over the phone."

On submission of the letter, he just said that he did not send any letter to the chairperson.

aligned to the government as far as national security interests are concerned. We just hope customer interests are also protected."

The Indian deadline came after Saudi Arabia on Tuesday postponed imposing a BlackBerry ban as the ultra-conservative Muslim country reported progress in solving its own security concerns.

The United Arab Emirates, however, has said it will ban BlackBerry messenger, email and web browsing services from October 11 for security reasons.

In response to the Indian threat, RIM said in a written statement it tried to be as cooperative as possible with governments "in the spirit of supporting legal and national security requirements".

But it also wanted to preserve "the lawful needs of citizens and corporations".

Analysts have noted other security-conscious countries such as China and Russia appear to be satisfied over their intelligence agencies' level of access to BlackBerry communications.

Quoting minutes from a July 12 meeting between Indian officials and telecom and Internet providers, the Financial Times on Friday said the government wanted a broad solution to enable possible interception and monitoring of all Internet-based traffic, including Skype and Google.

Google is already locked in tension with Beijing over state censorship and cyber attacks that the US company says originated in China, the world's largest online market with 420 million users.

India is another coveted prize for communications providers. It is the world's fastest-expanding cellular market and already has 1.1 million BlackBerry customers.

40 hurt

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20 people wounded. Md Aktaruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Birganj Police Station, however, said the agitators first swooped on police with sticks when they reached the spot.

The demonstrators regrouped and attacked police at different points prompting the law enforcers to fire at least 20 rubber bullets and eight teargas shells.

Twenty more people were injured in the clash.

Traffic movement on the Thakurgaon-Dinajpur highway was restored at about 4:50pm after the law enforcers brought the situation under control with reinforcement from Dinajpur police lines.

Two persons -- Md Sajahan, 32, and Md Shohel, 15 -- were arrested for attacking the law enforcers. Police, however, released the two later in the face of protest from the villagers.

Critically injured Abdus Sattar, 40, Mokbul Hossain, 35, Anwar Hossain, 28, and Anwarul Islam, 29, who were hit by rubber bullets, are now receiving treatment at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

DAM COLLAPSE Nine Dakope villages under water

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

At least nine villages of Dakope upazila went under six feet of water as a newly-constructed ring embankment at Joynagar collapsed Thursday afternoon.

Over 10,000 villagers of Aila affected areas became homeless and marooned without food or safe drinking water.

The situation is likely to worsen as another ring embankment at Kalabogi union under the same upazila is also facing threat under the tidal surge of the rivers Shibsha and Dhaki which are swelling more than usual due to the weather, said Shaiful Islam, an engineer of Water Development Board (WDB).

"This may inundate several villages rendering over 20,000 people homeless," he said, adding, "We are vigilantly observing the situation and preparing to tackle the problem".

The affected villages of Dakope are Channirchawk, Fakirdanga, Kalinagar, Kamarkhola Uttarpara, Kamarkhola Madhyapara, Shibnagar, Mozamnagar, Kaminiabasia and Andharmanik.

The marketplaces and shops have gone under flood water paralyzing the economy of the affected villages.

The flood victims have taken shelter at the temporary cyclone centres and academic institutions while others have migrated to neighbouring villages which have not been hit yet.

The marooned people are facing a severe crisis of safe water and food, said Sheikh Abul Hossain, chairman of Dakope.

Man held for throwing acid on housewife

UNB, Khulna

Police arrested a man yesterday morning on charge of throwing acid on a housewife over land disputes at Hatisura village in Terokhada upazila Thursday night.

The arrestee was identified as Ektadul Molla, 20, son of Nuru Molla of the village.

Ektadul entered the house of his neighbour Feroza Parvin Ranjila, 40, wife of Hasmat Sheikh, when she was offering Tarabi prayer on Thursday midnight, police said.

He then demanded a cassette, in which conversations of the conflicting parties were recorded during the feud over land, to the housewife.

On refusal, Ektadul threw acid on her leaving her seriously injured.

Locals rushed her to upazila health complex soon after the incident.

She was later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Jong-il's son seeks military 'stripes' Says Gates

REUTERS, San Francisco

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on Thursday recent provocations by North Korea against the south were probably tied to ailing leader Kim Jong-il's youngest son seeking to earn his military "stripes."

Gates, who was in South Korea last month, said one of his biggest worries about the North was that with the succession of the ailing leader's son now apparently underway, there would be more provocations against its neighbour.

Relations across the divided peninsula have turned increasingly hostile after South Korea accused the North of sinking one of the South's warships, the Cheonan, in March, killings 46 sailors.

"I have a sneaking suspicion that Kim Jong-il's son, who wants to take over, has to earn his stripes with the North Korean military," Gates said at the U.S. Marines' Memorial Club in San Francisco.

"My worry is that that is behind the provocation like the sinking of the Cheonan, and so I think we are very concerned that this might not be the only provocation from the North Koreans," he added in response to a question over the threat posed by Pyongyang.

Extortionists

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owners refused to give in which led to the incident, said the victims.

Officer-in-Charge of Rampura Police Station Mohammad Saidur Rahman admitted the incident adding that two auto-rickshaw drivers were injured.

24 killed

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Official sources said instead of taking measures to stop import of such ships, now the government is formulating a guideline, bypassing the court's directives, which will ultimately allow ship-scrapping yards to import unclean ships.

The Ministry of Environment and Forest also did not bother to ensure any safety measures for the workers in the yards.

"The shipyard owners did not clean the ship before scrapping. So it exploded while I was cutting a pipe," said Nazrul.

The court also directed the government that all yards must have clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forest but at least 32 new yards have been set up since the court ruling. The new 32 have been set up clearing mangrove forest. No shipyard has the clearance.

However, following the directions of the court, the Ministry of Commerce, which decides what to import and not, prohibited the import of ships with toxic substances inside under the Import Policy Order 2009-12.

Interestingly, the ministry of environment requested the commerce ministry to amend the policy and to include provision for importing ships that has "inbuilt" toxic substances.

"We don't want to shut down the ship breaking yards," Hasan Mahmud, state minister for environment and forest, told The Daily Star justifying their activities immediately after the amendment five months ago.

"There was no guideline about how to operate the ship breaking yards. We are going to formulate a guideline under which we will give them environment clearance certificates," said the state minister who is from Chittagong.

The Daily Star failed to reach him yesterday.

Recently the government has formed a committee to make a "Guideline for ship breaking and managing hazardous materials, 2010". In the guideline, the committee drafted a form for the ship breakers where they would mention what toxic substances are coming with a certain ship, which is meant to be scrapped.

Schoolteacher

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and a resident of Bank Colony in Savar.

Sarwar's family could not say why he and his mother Hamida Parvin was beaten up.

Hamida said Sarwar's wife Jannatul Ferdousi Jui called her father Nurul Munshi and brother Shohag over to Sarwar's place and they started beating them up as soon as they arrived around 10:30am.

Locals after hearing screams rescued the two and admitted Hamida to Savar Health Complex and sent Sarwar to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Sarwar succumbed to his injury at 7:30pm at DMCH.

Officer-in-Charge of Savar Police Station Mahbubur Rahman said the incident might be the result of an extramarital affair. He said the accused are absconding.

Bangabandhu bridge

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to get on it. "I strongly recommended construction of a separate railway bridge on the western side of the existing bridge, since it is now unable to take the full load," said Prof Chowdhury.

Khan Mahmud Amanat, a professor in the civil engineering department at Buet, who will be in the new investigation team, noted, "If the recommendations of Jamilur Reza Chowdhury were executed on time, the bridge would not be in such a bad condition now."

About the delay in selecting a contractor for the repair work, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain told The Daily Star on Tuesday that his ministry is at the final stage of selecting a firm for the job.

"We are now evaluating finance offers from three firms -- two Japanese and a Chinese ---- and hope to issue work order by the end of this month," he said adding that the bridge will be okay once the repairs are done.

"We were not in power when the cracks were detected. After assuming power we invited tender twice, but failed to find a suitable firm for the difficult job. This compelled us to go for the third tender which is going to be a successful one," he said.

A Bridge Division official said the repair work may take three months to start, and a

year to be finished.

The government cut vehicular speed and load limits by a half in 2006, in line with the recommendations of Prof Chowdhury led expert team.

The speed limit for trains had been 40 kilometres per hour in the original design, which was reduced to 20 km/h for passenger trains, and 16 km/h for freight trains, railway officials said.

Moreover, trains that use the bridge now cannot haul two engines, and freight trains must have empty containers in between loaded ones.

The maximum UDL [Uniformly Distributed Load] capacity of the bridge has also fallen.

"The UDL is now 43.7 kilo Newton [about 3.3 tons] per metre, which was higher in the original design," Joint Director General of Bangladesh Railway Mohammad Shahjahan told The Daily Star last week.

Prof Amanat said, "The delay in repair will only reduce the lifespan of the bridge."

Meanwhile, the government planned construction of two other railway bridges -- one parallel to the Bangabandhu Bridge and the other near Bahadurabad Ghat -- sensing that the Bangabandhu Bridge might be left out of the Trans-Asian Railway, Asian Highway, and other sub-regional connectivity routes due to its poor condition.

Join hands to resist stalkers Nahid urges all

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of growing incidents of stalking and committing suicide by female students as a result of this, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday called upon the countrymen to actively join the movement against stalkers.

Condemning the recent incidents of stalking across the country, he urged the authorities concerned to arrest and try the stalkers immediately.

"We have been noticing with concern that the stalkers are still pressurising female students at different places of the country while the education ministry is trying to create public opinion to resist stalkers," the minister said in a written statement.

The minister's statement comes two days after Synthia, a 14-year-old class X student, committed suicide in Munshiganj on Wednesday, apparently to relieve herself of stalking by a local youth. Police, however, arrested the alleged stalker, Jahangir.

On Thursday, three students and a teacher of Bichhat Model High School in Sathkira were injured in an attack by stalkers for protesting them.

Nahid urged the people of all walks of life to come forward and wage a social movement against the menace and ensure female students' security.

In a separate statement, he urged all the students and teachers to observe August 15, the National Mourning Day, in a befitting manner. The ministry directed all the schools, colleges, madrasas, technical institutes and universities in this regard.

However, confusion arose among teachers and students over observing the day as the government on Thursday shut all the schools and colleges across the country. The over one-month-long holiday begun yesterday.

A number of schoolteachers and college principals told The Daily Star that they are unsure about the participation of the students following the closure of the institutions.

30 hurt in Sunamganj village clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

At least 30 people were injured, four with bullet wounds, in a clash between two groups of villagers in the Jagannathpur upazila of Sunamganj yesterday.

Police and local sources said around 11:00am yesterday Nurul Haque, of Betauka village of Jagannathpur, had a heated exchange of words with Alais Miah of the same village over money that Alais had borrowed from Nurul.

At one stage, relatives and some villagers joined in an hour-long clash armed with lethal weapons and firearms, said police and locals.

Of the injured, eight in critical condition had been admitted to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital. The rest were taken to the Upazila Health Complex, said police sources.

Outlaw held

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Hospital as he was hit by a bullet during the gunfight.

Sub-Inspector Hassan Jahid of Aitakula police station said they raided Alodiya, a remote village of Santhia upazila, when the gang was holding a secret meeting about money they had looted from the village.

The outlaws opened fire on police leading to a 30-minute gunfight as the security force reached the spot.

Other members of the gang managed to flee abandoning the arms and ammunition they were carrying.

Ctg students

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centre, said the Officer-in-Charge (OC) Nobo Jyoti Khisa.

The law enforcers arrested them around 4:15am and seized 13 posters from their possession. Two others of the group managed to escape arrest.

The posters were to protest the move for going back to 1972 constitution and the High Court verdict on fifth amendment, added the OC.

A case was filed with the Panchlaish Police Station in this connection.

Killers now target

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According to the witness, Rubel and his accomplice Mithun fled the scene immediately after the killings.

Bithi said, "I receive frequent phone calls and the callers give false names of different criminal gangs. They threatened me not to give deposition before the court and said if I ignore them, they would send me to my parents."

"The callers switch numbers after each call, and for this we have never received more than one call from a number," she added.

Police pressed charges against four people in connection with the double murder. They are Rubel, Mithun, Rubel's maternal uncle Mohammad Altaf Hossain Altu, who allegedly supplied the murder weapon, and Mohammad Mohiuddin Azad, husband of Rubel's sister who gave them shelter.

Of the accused in the charge sheet, Altaf and Azad are now out on bail, while Rubel and Mithun are behind bars.

The accused freed on bail and three dropped from charge sheet are allegedly conspiring and issuing constant threats to the orphaned daughters and their lawyer.

Prosecution lawyer Asif Uddin said the investigation officer of the case mysteriously dropped the names of Delwar Hossain Dipu, who allegedly kept the murder weapon, Shariful Islam and Nazmul Islam Babu from the charge sheet.

"I frequently receive cellphone calls threatening not to move the case. On July 27, I have informed the court that the accused freed on bail are posing threats to the lives

of the victims' daughters and me as well," said the prosecution lawyer.

The court fixed July 27 for hearing on the charge sheet in presence of Abul Hossain, who first filed a double murder case with Gulshan Police Station. That day, over 70 men of Dipu and Altaf created a dreadful situation for the lawyer and Abul Hossain.

Asif said, "I could hear those men hurling threat when I was putting submission before the court. I failed to make my submission properly due to lack of security."

According to Asif it would be tough for him to prove the roles of the killers as Rubel's accomplices, as the ones free on bail are very influential.

About her days now, Bithi said, "I still wake up screaming as the flashes of my parents' brutal murder haunt me in sleep. My third semester BBA exams started on July 31. I can neither continue with my studies nor return to my usual life."

"The irony is that most of my parents' killers are out on bail while I pass my days in self confinement," she added in a voice choked with emotion.

Momtaz Begum, Bithi's sister-in-law, said, "I used to teach in a school. But now I keep myself in the house fearing attack, especially on Bithi, the witness."

The family lodged a general diary with Badda Police Station a few days ago in connection with receiving threats from unknown callers.

Bithi's only brother Shihab is a guest worker in Malaysia, while her other sister Sathi studies in Japan.

China examines 'infants breast' reports

BBC ONLINE

China's government is investigating reports that a brand of powdered milk caused infant girls to grow breasts.

It is being alleged that hormone-tainted milk from Synutra International caused several cases of premature puberty in Hubei province.

The Chinese firm, whose shares fell by up to 35% on the news, strongly denies its products were tainted.

Food safety problems involving milk powder and other products have alarmed Chinese consumers in recent years.

Two years ago, the chemical compound melamine was found in milk products made by 22 Chinese firms. Hundreds of thousands of children were poisoned and died.

A panel of nine experts on endocrine, paediatric and food safety issues had been assembled to investigate the tainted milk allegations, the health ministry announced on Thursday.

The ministry was "directly investigating the claimed premature puberty cases at the request of Hubei province" and would publish its conclusions "soon", it said.

Samples taken from the market where the milk powder was purchased, as well as from the homes of the infant girls, were already being tested, it added.

China Daily, the country's leading state-owned English-

Dinajpur

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Nawabganj upazila Land office sources said the kilns are being operated on the land without permission.

Mohammad Soleyman, assistant land commissioner of Nawabganj upazila, confirmed the allegation.

Dignitaries of the district and archaeologists have called upon the government to free the land from encroachers and preserve the site.

Two workers

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the photos published in the newspapers.

The six arrestees mentioned the names of the two leaders who provoked them to resort to violence demanding Tk 5000 as minimum wage.

DB officials said they had information that Babul and Kalpana used to instigate workers of different factories in the capital against their owners and they settled the dispute after taking bribe from the factory owners.

language newspaper, reported the cases in Hubei this week, quoting from a report by the Beijing-based Health Times newspaper.

At least three infants in Hubei were found to have abnormal levels of the hormones estradiol and prolactin, which stimulates the production of breast milk, Health Times reported.

The infants' parents feared that their conditions were linked to their milk powder, produced by Synutra, and a leading children's doctor in the region was quoted by Health Times as calling for the powder to be analysed.

On Tuesday, the father of a 13-month-old girl in Beijing told China Daily his daughter had been diagnosed with symptoms of premature puberty.

Nigerian building collapse toll rises to 23

REUTERS, Lagos

The death toll from the collapse of a multi-storey building in Nigeria's capital Abuja three days ago has climbed to 23 from an initial two, the Nigerian Red Cross said yesterday.

The building, condemned as dangerous by the authorities and which was thought to be four or five floors high, tumbled down at around dawn Wednesday in the Garki Area 11 neighbourhood of Abuja, south of the central business district.

"The rescue operation is now over. We are talking of 23 people dead and 10 injured," a Red Cross official told Reuters by telephone from Abuja, asking not to be named.

Substandard materials and disregard for building regulations mean such collapses are common in Africa's most populous nation, where infrastructure is old and poorly maintained.

Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory Minister Bala Muhammed, responsible for development in Abuja, said Wednesday the building had been condemned by the authorities and developers had continued to add an additional floor despite the warnings.

At least 16 people were killed in two separate building collapses in Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos last year.