



SINGER
AM Hamim Rahmatullah, managing director of Singer Bangladesh and vice president of Singer Asia, speaks at the company's sales conference at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka on Sunday.

BTRC slashes bandwidth prices by 31pc

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN
The telecom regulator has reduced the monthly rental bandwidth price for leased internet access through submarine cable by one-third to spread the communication services among the masses.
The monthly rental bandwidth price for leased internet access through submarine cable will be a maximum of Tk 12,000 per Mbps, said Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) in a circular on Tuesday.



There are more than 80 lakh internet users in the country, which will soon cross the one-crore mark, keeping pace with the boom of mobile users, according to BTRC.
Internet services providers said the internet users should get 20 percent extra bandwidth due to a 31 percent decrease in bandwidth prices.
"But it is difficult to say now how much the end-users will be benefited, as our operation and other associated costs will remain the same," said Rashed Amin Biddut, joint secretary general of Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh.
The association will sit today

to discuss the issue, he said, adding that the benefit would not be so high for the internet users if they pass on the amount of money they are paying to the industry regulator to get connected with Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network (NTTN).
"Each ISP is paying between Tk 12 lakh to Tk 25 lakh to be connected with underground network to operate services in the capital. We have no other way but to pass the costs onto the customers," Biddut told The Daily Star.
This is the second time the present government has decreased the prices of bandwidth to spread uses of information and communication technology under its Digital Bangladesh vision. It brought down the prices to Tk 17,400 from Tk 28,000, soon after coming power

low-cost nature, and also the call charge is much lower. The same can be true for internet penetration," said Bangladesh Computer Samity President Mustafa Jabber.
Jabber said the impact would be tremendous. "We had been fighting for long to bring bandwidth prices to this level. It's a good step forward."
He said the government should give up its mentality of making profit out of everything and cut bandwidth prices further. "The government buys each Mbps at Tk 6,000. They should make profit of maximum Tk 500. If they even give free bandwidth the return will be huge."
Jabber said internet users using services of Wimax and mobile operators would be particularly benefited. "They hold the majority share of the growing market. It will spur more price war among operators, ultimately benefiting the customers."
Mobile operators however said the fixing of the price from the regulator is a piecemeal solution and will not be beneficial for the market competition.
"Mobile penetration in the country shot up because of its

FBCCI sounds alarm over furnace oil price hike

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) yesterday expressed grave concerns over a sudden rise in furnace oil prices, saying the hike will increase production costs and deal a severe blow to the competitiveness of local products in the global market.
The government on Monday raised the price of furnace oil, widely used in industrial units, by 34 percent or Tk 9 per litre, to Tk 35.
The FBCCI leaders feared that the industrial sector will fall behind due to the decision and inflation will also go up.
Generally, the paper mills, sugar mills, ceramic, clothes and dyeing factories having no gas connection use furnace oil. Readymade garment and other sectors will be affected by the price hike, the apex trade body said in a statement.
Exporters are now making apparel products at prices negotiated earlier and production is now going on according to prior orders, so paying more for the furnace oil will hamper production, said FBCCI.
The garment sector will not be able to make the most of opportunities emerging in the global market thanks to the global meltdown, FBCCI said.
The government reduced the furnace oil prices last march from Tk 30 to Tk 25 last March. The government alleged that some dishonest businessmen are selling the low-priced furnace oil to foreign ships, but FBCCI said the excuse is not logical at all.
FBCCI said the rise in prices would increase the tariff of the newly-installed and under-implementation furnace oil-fired plants and the government will have to buy electricity from those plants at a higher rate.
The government took the decision to increase the price without even discussing with stakeholders, FBCCI complained. It urged the government to reverse its decision and reset furnace oil prices at Tk 26.



GOLDEN LIFE
Golden Life Insurance Managing Director MA Aziz receives the best life insurance specialist award from economist Qazi Kholiqzaman at a ceremony in Dhaka on Sunday. Fortnightly magazine Business Express gave the award.



IFIC
Salman F Rahman, chairman of IFIC Bank, speaks at the bank's annual managers' conference at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka on Monday. Mohammad Abdullah, managing director, was also present.

ICC elects top brass

STAR BUSINESS DESK
Jean-Guy Carrier has been elected secretary general of International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the chamber said yesterday.
More than 80 business members of ICC World Council -- ICC's governing body -- met January 24 in Paris to elect the new leader.
The council also elected Harold McGraw III, chairman of the United States Council for International Business, as vice-chairman.
Carrier has been serving ICC as acting secretary general since July 2010. He also led various research-based publishing and public information programmes, notably for the World Trade Organisation.
McGraw was elected chairman of McGraw-Hill Companies in December 1999.



Jean-Guy Carrier

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka agree to deepen cooperation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT
Bangladesh and Sri Lanka yesterday agreed to intensify bilateral cooperation in the fields of trade and investment, tourism, connectivity and shipping, and work together in regional and multilateral sectors.
The agreement was reached at the first-ever Foreign Secretary Level Consultation between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the state guesthouse Meghna.
Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quayes led Bangladesh delegation while his counterpart Chrysantha Romesh Jayasinghe led the Sri Lankan team.
To strengthen bilateral and diplomatic ties, Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse will visit Bangladesh this year when the two countries will sign several deals on promotion of trade and investment, cultural and youth exchanges and other areas.
Addressing a press conference yesterday afternoon, Quayes said they had a comprehensive discussion, which identified new areas of cooperation, increase South-South cooperation, and special emphasis was given in private sector engagement.
Both the side, he said, discussed about the institutional arrangements for forming EO Forum, comprising chief bosses of important companies of the two countries, with an aim to enhance private sector collaboration.
Quayes said Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have already established direct air service between Dhaka and Colombo, which will help boost the two-way trade from the present insignificant volume of \$36 million.
He said Bangladesh offered to export pharmaceuticals, jute and jute goods, ceramics and tea packaging. The meeting also discussed removal of non-tariff barriers and mutually acceptable laboratory test of export products.
The secretary said they discussed about the entire range of pharmaceutical products and their quality. The Bangladesh team informed the meeting the country exports pharmaceutical products to 74 countries. On jute, Bangladesh offered to meet the entire demand of jute and jute products of Sri Lanka.
He said Sri Lanka seeks access to higher education in Bangladesh. Presently some 500 students of Sri Lanka are studying in private medical colleges here. Bangladesh agreed to accommodate more students in different educational institutions.
Bangladesh also sought Sri Lankan expertise to train nurses.
Turning to migrant labour issues, the two countries extensively discussed a common stance regarding protection of the rights of migrant workers. A meeting of the fourth Colombo Process, a regional consultative forum, will be held in Dhaka in April to discuss how the rights and job security of the migrant workers could be protected in the best possible way in the worker recipient countries.
Eleven countries -- Afghanistan, China, Indonesia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and Bangladesh -- are engaged in the Colombo process.
Replying to a query, Quayes said similar foreign secretary level consultations will be held in India, Myanmar and Norway this year. Indian Foreign Secretary will visit Bangladesh soon to attend the consultation.
He said he will visit Egypt to sign a memorandum of understanding regarding Protocol on Foreign Secretary Level Consultation and hold the first consultation there on February 1-2.

Fears of trade war stalk Davos meeting

REUTERS, Davos, Switzerland
Of the raft of global risks confronting business and political bigwigs at Davos, the threat of a trade war is one of the scariest.
Open markets and trade are the essence of the globalization that delivered rising prosperity for decades until interrupted by the credit crunch and economic downturn.
An initial unified global response to the crisis staved off the wave of protectionism that many felt was inevitable. But fears persist that stubborn trade disputes -- especially between China and rich powers like the United States, European Union and Japan -- could spill over into an outright trade war, not least because of tensions over exchange rates.
Trade ministers will hold two meetings at Davos this week to review progress on the renewed push for a deal on the Doha trade round this year.
A failure to conclude the round, already more than nine years old, would deal a body blow to the global trading system.
Brazilian Finance Minister Guido Mantega, watching the appreciation of the real, said last September the country was in a currency war, and earlier this month warned that conflict was turning into a trade war.
"The threat of a trade war is real," Jean-Pierre Lehmann, a professor at the IMD business school in Lausanne and founder of The Evian Group trade and economy think-tank, told Reuters.
"We know that trade wars make everybody pay the consequences, but that doesn't prevent them from happening."
The failure of 1930s-style protectionism to emerge in the downturn was widely ascribed to the multilateral trading system umpired by the World Trade Organization (a system set up in response to the economic tensions of the interwar period).
The WTO dispute system provides a respected channel for states to resolve differences by consultation or litigation.
Just recently the United States has proposed changes to a controversial method of setting anti-dumping duties, known as zeroing, to comply with WTO rulings.
China, a frequent target of WTO litigation, also makes active use of the system as a complainant.
According to former WTO Deputy Director-General Roderick Abbott, the recognition that supply chains nowadays are global militates against protectionism.
"Interrupting the chain by shutting out your neighbour can mean shutting down your main



BEEDUTECH
Shah Kamal Sohail, chief executive of Bangladesh Enterprise of Education and Technology, attends a press meet to announce a creative and technical education fair at National Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. The fair will be held at Plaza Centre of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in the city on February 4-6.



PRIME BANK
Isbahul Bar Chowdhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank, and KM Saiful Islam, director of Square Hospitals, exchange documents after signing a deal at the hospital's premises in Dhaka on Monday. The bank's employees and their dependants will get special medical facilities in the hospital.