



GP
Grameenphone Chief Executive Officer Oddvar Hesjedal, centre, attends the launch of GPIT, an offshoot company of the mobile operator, at its head office in Dhaka on Friday.

Fishermen to get digital warning

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bangladesh's coastal fishermen communities will be able evade dangers in the sea and save their lives and livelihoods by using digital telecom technologies from now on.

Airtel Bangladesh recently signed a memorandum of understanding with CARE Bangladesh, Oxfam, Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL) and Centre for Global Change (CGC) to provide technology to ensure their safety.

Chris Tobit, chief executive officer of Airtel; Nick Southern, country director of CARE; Gareth Price-Jones, country director of Oxfam, and Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of CGC, signed the deal at Airtel's head office in Dhaka.

The primary objective of the joint effort is to save lives of drowning fishermen and restore their livelihoods, Airtel said in a statement yesterday.

Fishermen were severely affected in recent years due to frequent occurrence of rough



AIRTEL
Airtel recently agreed with CARE Bangladesh, Oxfam, Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods and Centre for Global Change (CGC) to disseminate voice warnings to fishermen at the time of fishing in the sea. Chris Tobit, Airtel CEO; Nick Southern, CARE Bangladesh country director; Gareth Price-Jones, Oxfam country director, and Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of CGC, inked the deal in Dhaka.

sea events and an advance warning in a foreseeable timeframe viz. next 48 hours could enable them to avoid being affected, drowned and at risk of losing lives.

Airtel will use its newly constructed towers to disseminate voice warnings through digital

telecom devices stored in each fishing boat or vessel.

Tobit said: "This is a great opportunity for us to help the fishermen community to lead a safe livelihood and this will in turn help the nation."

CGC, in association with CSRL, will study genesis of each

rough sea event and generate warning related information with a target of providing early warnings about 48 hours ahead of the occurrence of each event.

Information generated by CGC will be passed on to Airtel lab for direct dissemination at a frequency as preferred by the

fishermen communities.

"While Bangladesh is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change; this initiative will be a big milestone for Bangladesh to adapt with the climatic vulnerabilities," Southern said.

Price-Jones said: "The potentials of a digital Bangladesh must be opened for the people who are suffering from poverty and vulnerability. This is the only way to make development inclusive and sustainable."

In case of an unfortunate capsizing of a boat caught in a rough sea event, despite issuance of early warning, Airtel will immediately track the position of the drowned boat or vessel and forward the message to concerned government agencies like Bangladesh Navy or Bangladesh Coast Guard.

Advanced telecom technology has high potential to save lives and to enhance livelihood opportunities of poor people of Bangladesh and other least developed countries, Ahmed believes.



SIBL
Atiur Rahman, Bangladesh Bank governor, awards a scholarship to a student as part of Shahjalal Islami Bank's scholarship awarding ceremony at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday. Mohammed Solaiman, chairman of Shahjalal Islami Bank, and Md Abdur Rahman Sarker, managing director, were also present.



CRAB
Hamidul Huq, third from left, managing director of Credit Rating Agency Bangladesh, addresses participants at a workshop on Basel II: Asset Quality vs Capital Adequacy of Banks, at Hotel Agrabad in Chittagong recently. Mohammad Naushad Ali Chowdhury, general manager of Bangladesh Bank for Chittagong office, was the chief guest.

Furnace oil price spike will hurt economy: BKMEA

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) yesterday urged the government to reverse its decision to increase the furnace oil prices.

The government last Monday raised the price of furnace oil, widely used in industrial units, by 34 percent or Tk 9 per litre, to Tk 35.

In a statement, BKMEA said the sudden rise in furnace oil prices will greatly hamper knitwear manufacturing and exports as production costs will go up and hurt the competitiveness of the local products in the global market.

"During the economic recession knit manufacturers maintained the stronghold of their products by providing competitive price and quality and that's why Bangladesh did not feel the pinch of the worldwide downturn," said BKMEA.

The international buyers are continually leaning towards Bangladesh for export orders now-a-days because of China's increased labour wages, Pakistan's political instability and Japan's China plus-1 policy, the statement said.

The manufacturers increased their

dependency on furnace oil and continued production according to the previous orders to ensure smooth exports and retain the buyers, amid nagging power and gas crisis, which is already a threat to the export-oriented industries, the association said.

"If the industries have to buy furnace oil at a higher price to finish the production, the cost will shoot up and we will incur huge losses. Many industry owners will even be forced to shut down their factories," BKMEA said.

"Production will have to be stopped and existing export orders will be hampered, which will, in turn, hurt Bangladesh's economy. We fear of losing the world market share that was built by many years of hardship."

Bangladesh exported \$4,311.92 million, posting 43.37 percent growth, in the first six month of this fiscal year, which is the highest among all the export sectors and 42.01 percent of the total national export.

"To meet the national export target and develop the knitwear industry we strongly demand the government review its decision of increasing the furnace oil price," BKMEA said.

Onions travel long, costly road to table

REUTERS, Pimpalgaon, India

At one of India's biggest wholesale markets, 65-year-old Ganpat Sakharan Jadhav sold his 2-tonne onion harvest on a recent day at 13 rupees (29 US cents) per kilogram, and he wasn't happy.

A day earlier, as he uprooted the crop from his field in the heart of western India's onion belt, the price was twice as high.

"I know prices will go up again once arrivals go down in the next few weeks. But by that time, these onions will rot. I will not get even a rupee," said Jadhav, separating leaves from the purple mound of bulbs in his trailer attached to a tractor.

Three days later and about 200 (125 miles) to the south at a market in the Bandra district of Mumbai, 32-year-old Anita Fernandes bought onions harvested at the same time for 40 rupees per kilogram, triple what Jadhav was paid, after the produce passed along a lengthy chain of middlemen.

India's volatile food prices have mostly risen for the past year and a half -- onion prices alone jumped 346 percent over 20 days last month after heavy rain wiped out crops -- driving broader inflation and adding pressure to a government that faces elections in important states this year.

The surge in prices of onions and tomatoes as well as meat, milk and edible oils underscores India's tight supply-demand balance as consumption rises on the back of nearly 9 percent economic growth, as well as entrenched inefficiency that adds to costs and waste.

As demand soars and Indians consume more and higher-quality food, output has failed to keep pace amid political resistance to reforming a farm economy based on small holdings, reliant on monsoon rains and lacking adequate cold storage, which keeps the gap between farm gate and retail cost wide.

Globally, food prices hit a record high in December.

In India, food inflation has been in double-digits for most of the past year, with onions -- the most widely used vegetable -- coming to symbolise the frustra-

tions of ordinary people.

"We can't avoid onions, but prices are so high that we have to reduce consumption," Fernandes said.

Governments have shied away from reforming the agriculture sector as farmers make up an big voting block. At most, authorities have tinkered with a system that analysts say needs overhauling to attract private investment.

FARM TO TABLE -- AND IN BETWEEN

By the time Fernandes bought her onions they had changed hands four times, adding over a quarter to the cost at each stop.

Traders in Pimpalgaon, after buying onions from farmers such as Jadhav, pack them into gunny bags and sell them to a wholesaler in a place like Vashi, on the outskirts of Mumbai.

The wholesaler in Vashi sells to a mid-sized vendor at Dadar in central Mumbai, who in turn sells to small vendors across the city, where people like Fernandes buy produce.

At each step, perishable vegetables and fruits are unloaded and loaded into vehicles, delaying their journey and adding to wastage, which is typically up to 30 percent.

As in most farming communities in India, cold storage is unavailable in the village north of Mumbai, forcing farmers like Jadhav to offload produce at whatever price they can get.

A victim of timing, Jadhav sold his produce immediately after harvesting despite the lower price as he had no other option. The price had plunged as a new crop arrived at the Pimpalgaon market.

"Vegetable supplies are not smooth and that's why prices are volatile. We take the risk of buying in such a volatile environment," said Atul Shah, an onion trader in Pimpalgaon.

WASTE AND WANT

India, the world's second biggest producer of fruit and vegetables, produced 226.87 million tonnes of horticultural crops in 2009/10, up 55 percent from 2001/02, government data showed.



DBBL
KS Tabrez, managing director of Dutch-Bangla Bank, attends a daylong workshop on Money Laundering Prevention Act-2009 and Anti Terrorism Act-2009 at the bank's training centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Grameenphone launches GPIT

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mobile operator Grameenphone launched its first offshoot company, GPIT, with a two-day grand inauguration ceremony at GPHouse in Dhaka on Friday.

GPIT is an international B2B company with a profit balance and stable corporate clientele's right from day one, said a Grameenphone statement yesterday.

Chief Information Commissioner Ambassador (ret'd) Muhammad Zamir was the chief guest of the programme that was also attended by senior government officials, diplomats and leaders from corporate and the IT industry.

"GPIT has been established with an experience of more than a decade of excellence and effort to make people's lives easier," the statement added.

GPIT targets to be a dominant player on the local market for enterprise grade IT software and managed solutions and recognised globally for quality mobile and enterprise software solutions as well as its support/maintenance.

GPIT's foremost ambition is to contribute to the growth of the local IT industry. Currently GPIT provides complete managed services to GP. In addition to the telecom industry, the company wants to be successful in banking industry by providing best IT solutions. "We believe the adoption of IT in our business and way of life will improve productivity and efficiency that will take Bangladesh to a brighter future," said GPIT.

New DMD for National Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Abdul Hamid Mia has recently been promoted as deputy managing director of National Bank, says a statement yesterday.

He was the senior executive vice president of the bank prior to the promotion.

In his banking career of 31 years, he also worked with Sonali Bank, IFIC Bank, Southeast Bank and National Bank as manager.

An MSS in Economics, he also served Oman International Exchange Company in Oman as gen-



Commodities to be less pricey: commerce minister

UNB, Gopalganj

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday said prices of essentials including rice will be reduced ahead of the Boro harvesting season.

At present the prices of essentials are less in Bangladesh comparing to the international market, he said.

Khan was responding to a question of local journalists at a function at SK High School in Gopalganj.

He said the opposition party should not criticise the prices as a syndicate raised them when the BNP-led alliance was in power.

"Our government rather brought the prices of commodities within people's purchasing capacity."

Earlier, the minister distributed warm clothes among the cold-hit people at Jaynagar Bazar in Kashiani upazila.

India's Suzlon wins \$1.28b deal

AFP, Mumbai

Suzlon Energy, the world's third-biggest wind turbine maker, said on Friday it received a \$1.28 billion order from Caparo Energy to develop 1,000 megawatts of wind power projects in India.

The projects will produce 500 megawatts of energy from March 2012 with a further 500 megawatts added by the same month the next year, Suzlon said in a statement.

Suzlon shares rose as much as 2.09 percent to a day's high of 51.25 rupees but fell back to 49.8 on profit-taking at the close -- posting a nearly one percent fall.

Caparo Energy is a Channel Island-registered firm and listed on London's junior Alternative Investment Market. Its shares remained unchanged at 119 pence at 1100 GMT.

The deal was signed with a Caparo Energy subsidiary -- Caparo Energy India -- which already develops wind power projects in India.

"This has been a strong year for wind in the Indian power market," said the founder-chairman of the Suzlon group, Tulsi Tanti.

"With large players like Caparo entering the market, we are seeing independent wind power producers becoming a major force."