

Minister: survey impact of mobile phone on economy

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ICT State Minister Yeafesh Osman yesterday said he would like an institution to conduct a survey on how the mobile phone has changed the life and economy of individuals and the country.

Osman spoke as the chief guest at a seminar, "Information and Communication Technology: Towards a Digital Bangladesh" organised as part of Bangladesh Social and Economic Forum 2011 at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

"The mobile phone's impact on people's life is tremendous but we have never done a survey to gauge it. I want to engage an institution to check out how it facilitates people's life and economy," the minister told The Daily Star.

The ICT state minister stressed the need for a master plan to translate the 'Digital Bangladesh' vision into reality. According to the ICT policy, some tasks have been assigned



Yeafesh Osman, state minister for ICT, speaks at a seminar organised by Bangladesh Social and Economic Forum at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

to different ministries -- some are progressing while the rest are falling behind, he added.

The educational system should be reformed as a whole,

because the ages-old system has been destroying the creativity of students, said Osman.

Bangladesh Computer Samity President Mostafa Jabbar said

the ICT policy does not reflect the government's Digital Bangladesh vision as it was formed before the last national election. The ICT ministry has targeted a

106-point action-plan while 48 measures would be enough and the repeats in the plan could be removed, he added.

"We are working without coordination," said Mostafa Jabbar in his keynote speech. He said the digitisation would create problems in the life of villagers and low-income people, as they will be divided and helpless.

Dr Ananya Raihan, executive director of development organisation D.Net, said even if this government does not come back to power next time, the future ruling party must take the digital vision forward and keep up the progress achieved.

Dr A Musawir Chowdhury, the former BCS executive director, chaired the seminar. SM Nazrul Islam, vice chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, also spoke. The seminar was co-organised by Bangladesh Economic Association and Dhaka School of Business.



TRAVEL MART

Selahattin Elmaa, extreme left, sales manager for Bangladesh of Turkish Airlines, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, extreme right, editor of Bangladesh Monitor, present a Dhaka-Los Angeles-Dhaka air ticket to the winner of a raffle draw that was held on the concluding day of Dhaka Travel Mart, at a programme in Dhaka on Saturday.

Steel millers urge govt to shun PSI and import duty

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The country's steel and re-rolling millers yesterday urged the government to abolish the pre-shipment inspection system, solve import duty discrimination and allow exports of surplus production to help the industry contribute more to the national economy.

The pleas came at a meeting between Commerce Minister Muhammad Faruk Khan and leaders of Bangladesh Auto Re-Rolling and Steel Mills Association at the secretariat in the capital.

The millers urged the government to abolish the pre-shipment inspection (PSI) system in the imports of raw materials such as melting scrap and re-rollable scrap, as they pay duty during imports.

They said value added taxes (VAT) on raw materials, chemical and machinery should be withdrawn to stop shutting down of country's steel and re-rolling mills.

"About 100 mills have already been closed down, as we are forced to pay VAT for chemical used by the domestic steel mills to produce billet and other machinery," said Abul Kasem Majumder, secretary general of the association.

"We are even paying VAT on power and gas consumption," he said.

The country's existing steel and re-rolling mills can produce 80 lakh tonnes of steel products annually, but they are running at 40 percent of the capacity due to power and gas crisis.

The 32-lakh-tonnes steel production is however enough to meet the annual domestic consumption of 12 lakh tonnes, said Sheikh Masadul Alam Masud, president of the association.

"There is a huge market for rods in the seven states in northern India. If exports are simplified our steel mills will be able to earn a lot of foreign currency after meeting domestic demand," he said.

He said the country's foray into the neighbouring country is being hamstrung by high export duty and India's denial to accept Bangladesh's testing report on MS rods.

"The government should discuss the issue with its Indian counterpart to export MS products to the seven Indian states. If we can make a breakthrough, India will get steel products cheaply, while Bangladesh will be able to earn about Tk 20,000 crore annually."

"It will also help bridge the huge trade imbalance existing between the two countries," Masud said.

The association urged the minister to withdraw charges levied by shipping lines, cut demurrage charges by half and take steps for ensuring faster delivery of containers from ports.

Local steel and re-rolling mills are financed by the banks. As a result they are affected by interest rate swings, as a rise in borrowing rate pushes up the prices of MS products.

Lending rates now range between 18 to 20 percent, after the central bank withdrew the 13 percent cap on interest rates.

"Due to high prices, consumers use less MS products than required. So, we are being forced to produce less while paying high interests," said Masud.

New vice chairmen for Mercantile Bank



Morshed Alam

Mohd Selim

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mercantile Bank has recently elected Morshed Alam and Mohd Selim as vice chairmen, the bank said yesterday.

A sponsor of the bank, Alam is a graduate in business studies. He is the founder chairman of Bengal Group of Industries. He is also the chairman of National Television Ltd, vice chairman of Desh General Insurance Company Ltd and director of United Hospitals and National Life Insurance Company Ltd.

He won the national export trophy (silver) for 1997-98 and the same trophy (gold) for 2000-01 and 2006-07.

Selim is the chairman of Synthia Securities Ltd and director of Global Insurance Ltd and Metropolitan Education Promoters Ltd. He is also a member of the government body of Metropolitan University.

He is also the vice chairman of Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association and Lions Club International Dhaka.



Michael Kuehner, seated second from right, chief executive officer of Robi, shakes hands with Khaled Shams, CEO of Banglalion, after signing a deal to pay the internet provider's monthly bills through Robi bill payment service, at the mobile operator's head office in Dhaka yesterday. Bidyut Kumar Basu, chief marketing officer of Robi, was also present.



Akbar Hussain, chairman of Rangs Group of Companies, and J Ekram Hossain, managing director of Pharmasia Ltd, a Sony-Rangs enterprise, attend the launch of Cardotel tablet in Dhaka on Saturday.