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A chilling move on internet

Concerns grow over freedom of internet as ITU conference in Dubai may approve new draft

ABDULLAH MAMUN

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) conference, set to take place in Dubai next month, will decide whether internet content access remains free -- of government intervention and cost.

A new draft on the International Telecommunications Regulations (ITRs) governing the internet's role is gaining attention as concerns grow over the potential impact of the treaty.

The regulations could increase internet costs and violate consumers' privacy rights.

The proposed move implies providers of YouTube, Facebook, Amazon, iTunes, Khan Academy would have to pay a substantial amount to the ISPs for their services -- part of which might be passed on to the consumers.

The European Telecommunications Network Operators, an association of 50 operators of 35 countries,



wants the ITU to subject internet content providers to a rule which would authorise internet service providers (ISP) to charge them rates proportionate to the bandwidth their content consumes.

Some non-democratic countries

in Europe, Asia and Africa, all members of the ITU, the UN's information and communications technology arm, are inclined towards regulation of internet usage and proposed the idea.

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Analysts see loopholes in consumer rights law

Rights to financial services were not reflected in the act

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The rights of people to various services, including the financial services, have not been reflected properly in the Consumer Rights Protection Act, said an economist yesterday.

"A lot has been put in the law regarding the rights of consumers for using goods. But the law has not focused in details on the rights of consumers in getting various services, including banking services," said Centre for Policy Dialogue's Executive Director Mustafizur Rahman.

He pointed to the loopholes in the law at a discussion on the use of Right to Information Act for effective enforcement of the law on consumer rights protection by the government.

Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) with the support of Manusher Jonno Foundation organised the programme at the National Press Club in Dhaka.

Retired Justice Mohammed Mumtaz Uddin Ahmed said the law suffers from various limitations.

"So it requires amendment," he said. The law gives rights to an aggrieved consumer to file civil cases. But it is not clear how to file civil petitions and what the court fee will be, he added.

"The law should be amended to allow us to file case at an assistant judge's court. It will be easier for consumers to

file petition at such a court," said Ahmed.

There should be no provision of court fee for filing cases to seek compensation for being deceived by businesses, he added.

Rahman of the CPD suggested the use of information technology for creating awareness of the laws to protect consumers' rights and ensure right to information.

Zakir Hossain, executive director of Nagorik Uddyog, an NGO, called for making the Department of National Consumer Rights Protection an effective body to ensure the rights of the consumers.

He said the "right to information act" gives people the scope to ask the commerce ministry the reasons of delays in making the body effective.

Citing prices of medicine, he said the prices of medicine, including tablets, should be written on the packages.

Abdul Baten Mia, director of Department of National Consumer Rights Protection, said one of the main weaknesses of the law is that aggrieved consumers cannot directly file cases seeking justice against the businesses.

Consumers have to lodge complaints to the Department first. If the Department takes the matter into cognizance after investigation, the aggrieved person can go to court, he said.

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Air India to connect Dhaka, Delhi

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Air India is set to start Dhaka-Delhi direct flights on December 3, the company said in a statement yesterday.

The inaugural flight coincides with the India Show, a conference by trade and industry bodies of Bangladesh, to strengthen commercial relation between the two countries.

The incoming flight to Dhaka will land at 8:45am local time starting from Delhi at 5:45am Indian time. The flight to Delhi will depart at 9:45am local time and land at 11:45am Indian time.

Tax returns submission beats last year's figure

SOHEL PARVEZ

The deadline for the submission of income tax returns ended yesterday with the National Board of Revenue (NBR) receiving 36 percent higher returns this year from a year ago, a senior official said.

Some 11.42 lakh individual taxpayers have submitted their income and expenditure statements, said MA Quader Sarker, member-in-charge of tax administration and monitoring of NBR.

Taxpayers submitted 8.41 lakh returns last year by the deadline.

The NBR received Tk 1,748 crore in taxes through the submission of these returns this year, up nearly Tk 700 crore from the previous year, Sarker said.

"The results are a happy jolt. Submission of tax returns in Khulna and Rajshahi has shot up this year compared with the last year," he said.

The NBR extended the deadline twice for returns submission, due to demands from different quarters on grounds that they faced difficulties locating their tax offices following NBR's increase of tax offices this year.

Only a third of the 35 lakh taxpayer identification number holders submit returns every year.

Over the past several years, income tax receipts grew by more than 20 percent annually, thanks to NBR's motivational campaigns such as the tax fairs held annually in large cities.

Online jobseekers on the rise

SUMAN SAHA

Online job vacancy postings have seen robust growth over the last several years, mainly due to quick responses from job seekers and increasing internet usage, officials of two jobsites said.

Bdjobs.com and Prothom-alojobs.com, the country's two leading jobsites, posted 62,799 jobs together in the 10 months through October, up 12.83 percent from the same period last year.

Guerrero will visit Bangladesh in coming months, but the timing is not yet confirmed, WB Dhaka office's Communication Officer Mehrin A Mahbub told The Daily Star.

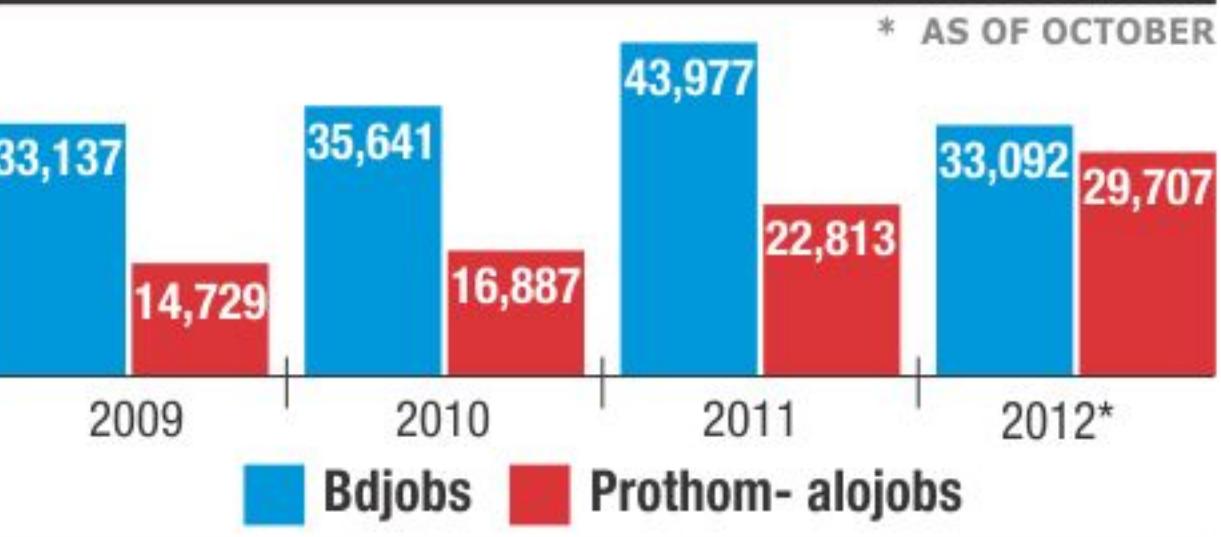
Mehrin said the WB vice president routinely visits countries of South Asia as part of her duties. Guerrero's initial plans for a South Asia tour in November have been postponed due to senior management meetings in Washington this month, she said.

"It takes around one month to complete

the entire recruitment process with the use of traditional media, while the process can be finished within a week," said Mashroor, who started the country's first job portal in 2000 from his living room.

Around 80,000 jobseekers visit the site a day and nearly 2 lakh people have been employed through it in the last 11 years.

WEB JOB POSTINGS



Currently, bdjobs.com has 6,500 registered employers and a CV bank of around 5 lakh.

Mashroor, who is also the president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services, said higher internet awareness is another reason for the growing popularity of online job portals.

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State banks' reforms to figure high in govt-IMF talks

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Reforms in the state-owned banks will dominate the discussion between the government and an upcoming mission of the International Monetary Fund.

The IMF team led by David Cowen, the lender's mission chief for Bangladesh, Asia and Pacific Department, will arrive in Dhaka on November 27 on a two-week visit.

An official of the finance ministry said the mission will hold a final discussion on how much the government has fulfilled the lender's conditions tagged with releasing the second instalment of \$1 billion loan.

After detection of irregularities, including the Hall-Mark scam, in the state banks, the global lender asked the central bank to conduct a special "diagnostic examination" in these banks.

The IMF earlier submitted a detailed plan about the examination to the central bank. The IMF mission will want to know about the status of its implementation.

To discuss the visit of the IMF mission,

the lender's representative in Dhaka Eteri Kvintradze met Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday.

The IMF team will hold talks with the government on issues such as financial soundness indicator, deposit mobilisation and liquidity situation in the state banks.

The new VAT law, amendment to Banking Companies Act, and subsidy on petroleum, fertiliser and electricity will also figure prominently at the discussions.

The IMF delegation will also hold meetings with the officials of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

They will discuss the update on the Padma bridge financing, as well.

The IMF approved around \$1 billion loan under its Extended Credit Facility in April and its first instalment worth \$140 million has already been released.

Though the second instalment was scheduled to be released in November, the finance ministry official said it may be delayed as the government is yet to fulfil the conditions of the lender.

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