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Star BUSINESS

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Teletalk to 'die' if funds not injected: Tarana

She puts blame on finance ministry

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Teletalk will not survive if the government does not allocate adequate funds for the state-run mobile operator, said Tarana Halim, state minister for telecom, yesterday.

In a press conference at her secretariat office, she said she is trying to get a funding of Tk 610 crore for a Teletalk project to establish 1,200 stations capable of providing 3G and 4G services along with 500 2G towers.

"Teletalk will die if the government does not provide the funds immediately. We are getting a step-motherly treatment from the finance ministry in this regard," Tarana said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also approved the project in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council but the finance ministry is yet to disburse the fund, she said.

In two Ecnec meetings, members



brought up this project and the prime minister also spoke in favour of Teletalk.

The prime minister even instructed that all the dues that Teletalk owes to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulator Commission must be converted into government grant.

"But that is also not moving forward." Teletalk owes about Tk 2,000 crore to the telecom regulator, which includes 3G spectrum and licence fees.

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Spinners struggling for port congestion

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Spinners are facing troubles as they cannot release cotton from Chittagong port in time due to congestion that was created from the breakdown of two of the four gantry cranes in June.

Cotton is an essential raw material for the garment sector, the country's main export earner.

The spinners import cotton from India, the US, African countries and many others, and they have to wait for eight to 10 days to release the cotton from the port.

"Sometimes, we have to wait even for two weeks to release the containerised cotton from the port," said Razeeb Haider, managing director of Outpace Spinning Mills Ltd.

Even six months ago the spinners could release the cotton from the port within three days, which was very convenient for them, he said.

The longer waiting time at the port means paying fees to the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) every day as berthing charge.

Haider said every cotton importer has to face the same situation as him at the port now.

The importers are paying \$14-\$20 for a container as overstaying fee at the port every day. The fees have been increasing the cost of doing business.

In such a scenario, importers are bringing in more raw cotton than they need at present and stockpiling them at warehouses.

The stockpiling has also a big cost for spin-



IMPORTERS' WOES

Spinners have to wait for 8-10 days to release cotton from the port

Sometimes they have to wait even for two weeks

Importers pay \$14-\$20 for a container as overstaying fee every day

"If cotton importers can submit their documents timely we can deliver the goods in normal time, like in three days," says a port official

ners, Haider said.

Leaders of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), the spinners' platform, will meet with the chairman of the CPA soon for a solution to the problem.

It might take six to seven months to repair the two gantry cranes at the Chittagong port, according to Md Jafar Alam, member for administra-

tion and planning at the CPA.

Alam said the turnaround time at the port has come down due to rolling out of round-the-clock operations on August 1.

The goods are released from the port by geared vessels, which have a similar capacity to gantry cranes.

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4G service by December

Minister optimistic, operators raise concern

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile users can brace themselves for faster 4G services by December if the licences are handed out in November, a minister said.

"Our target is to organise the spectrum auction by November, and by December customers will get the benefit of the fastest data service," Tarana Halim, state minister for telecom, said yesterday at a press conference at her office.

The government hopes to earn Tk 11,000 crore from the auction.

Despite the high charge, the operators will be able to provide 4G services at low prices, Tarana assured.

The government has set a floor price of \$27 million for per megahertz of spectrum in the 2,100 band and \$30 million for per MHz in both the 1,800 and 900 bands, according to the guideline approved by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who heads the telecom ministry.



Spectrum auction in Nov. 4G services from Dec

36.4 MHz spectrum in three bands will be put up for auction

4G licence fee: Tk 10cr

Annual fee for a licence: Tk 5cr

Operators will have to roll out 4G services in all divisional headquarters within nine months of getting licences

Some 25 MHz of spectrums in the 2,100 band, 18 MHz in the 1,800 band and 3.4 MHz in the 900 band will be made available at the auction.

The operators though were calling for \$15 million for each MHz in all three bands.

Tarana said they have reduced the spectrum price, going against the recommendation of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. And before fixing the price, they discussed the matter with the operators.

"We have to consider inflation and the previous spectrum pricing for fixing the new price," she said.

However, the operators said the telecom division never sat with them about the 4G guideline and only asked for recommendations, which were never addressed. The government will also charge \$7.5 million for each MHz of spectrum's technological neutrality in the 1,800 and 900 bands.

Technology neutrality allows the operators to offer any service in any band, which reduces the cost of doing business and improves service quality.

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Rohingya crisis to take a toll on economy: Sanem

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The influx of Rohingya refugees has created a pressure for the economy and overall security of Bangladesh, said the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem) yesterday.

Bangladesh's future development hinges on some critical projects in Chittagong and the hill tracts areas, such as the Chittagong port, special economic zones and deep sea ports, which are very close to Myanmar, said the private think-tank.

"A possible conflict with Myanmar can hamper Bangladesh's efforts for

integration with Southeast Asian countries," the Sanem said in its latest quarterly economic review.

There is also a risk of a rise in military expenditure in Bangladesh, which can have implications on the development activities.

Subsequently, it called for prudent diplomatic strategies and proper management of refugees, aid and security issues to deal with the Rohingya crisis. Selim Raihan, executive director of the Sanem, presented the review at a programme held at The Westin Dhaka.

The review also touched upon the

recent increase in rice price, jobless economic growth and the Sustainable Development Goals. There has been a 44 percent rise in the price of coarse rice in recent days from a year ago.

"In order to contain the soaring price of rice, there is a need to increase the supply of rice in the local market," the Sanem said, adding that the attempts to import the staple from India, Cambodia and Myanmar should be intensified.

The Sanem said the price of rice should be set at Tk 20 a kg at the open market sale.

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Website with all customs info goes live

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue has launched a new customs website yesterday providing various trade-related information, including the rate of import duty and taxes for goods, with a view to facilitating cross-border trade.

Businesses will also find all the laws, rules and gazette notifications related to customs and know about the export and import procedures, including customs clearance, from the website without taking the hassle of visiting customs offices.

The webpage, www.bangladeshcustoms.gov.bd, also contains various forms such as those for licensing, duty drawback to take part in international trade related activities.

"The website offers a one-stop service for customs and trade information," said Md Khairuzzaman Mozumder, chief of party of USAID Bangladesh Trade Facilitation Activity project, at the launch of the website.

The NBR and the USAID Bangladesh Trade Facilitation Activity, jointly organised the event at the capital's Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel.

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Petrobangla to form joint ventures for LNG import

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government is going to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) on a small scale using existing seaside platforms of various state-owned enterprises as part of an aggressive drive to meet energy shortages.

At least 200 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) will be imported through joint ventures of Petrobangla and the local private sector or foreign companies.

Already 13 foreign companies have expressed interest. Petrobangla on Tuesday signed an initial agreement with one of them, Gunvor Singapore.

Yesterday the cabinet committee on economic affairs gave approval for Petrobangla to use jetties of Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CULF) and Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company Limited (KAFCO) and a platform in the Bay of Bengal of Sangu, the country's first off-shore gas field.

The interested companies are PTC Corporation, Panama City & SKE & S Korea, Trifigura Pte Ltd (Singapore), Pavilion Energy (Singapore), Gunvor (Singapore) and Exmar Marine NV (Belgium), ExxonMobil LNG Market Development Inc (USA), Petronas LNG Ltd (Malaysia), Marubeni Corporation, JERA & K-Line (Japan), Wison Offshore & Marine (China), Hemla Energy AS (Norway) and MIE Holding

Corporation (USA).

Petrobangla will buy LNG once the companies import it after constructing necessary infrastructure.

The official said Petrobangla has been examining the proposals from these companies and as a part of this signed an initial agreement with the Singapore-based company.

Earlier, the government signed agreements with several floating LNG terminals. It has also appointed a consultant for setting up a land-based LNG terminal.

The government has taken an initiative to import LNG from various countries.

At the signing ceremony on Tuesday, Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power and energy, said the government signed memorandums of understanding with RasGas of Qatar, Oman Trading International of Oman, Pertamina of Indonesia, Astra Oil of Switzerland and Gunvor Singapore to buy LNG.

Forty one companies have expressed willingness to supply LNG through spot market to Bangladesh after the government sought "expressions of interest" on August 17 this year.

A panel will be formed to sign the sales and procurement agreement, said the minister. "The crisis of gas will start to go away from April next year," he said.

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Beijing, Shanghai to close bitcoin exchanges

AFP, Beijing

Banking regulators in Beijing and Shanghai have ordered local cryptocurrency exchanges to shut down, state media reported Tuesday, in the latest blow to the once flourishing Chinese market for virtual money.

A Beijing-based regulator required all exchanges in the city to submit a plan by 6:00 pm on September 20 for winding down their operations, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

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