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GP-ROBI FIGHT WITH BTRC

Kamal steps in as mediator

Conflict to be resolved within 2-3 weeks, he says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The long drawn-out conflict between the country's top two mobile operators -- Grameenphone and Robi -- and the telecom regulator over unpaid dues amounting to Tk 13,447 crore is finally heading towards an amicable conclusion after Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal stepped in.

"We will resolve this within the next two-three weeks," Kamal told reporters in a press conference at his office.

Kamal's involvement came after he waded through the reasons for the ongoing slump of the stock market -- and the sinking stock price of Grameenphone, the largest listed company by market capitalisation, was a major reason.

In a span of five months Grameenphone's share sank 30.70 percent to Tk 289, as its regulatory issues concerned investors.

This prompted the finance minister to call a meeting with Grameenphone Chief Executive Michel Foley yesterday.

At the meeting, Foley informed Kamal that the stock will continue to sink if its regulatory issues prolong.

As soon as his meeting with Foley wrapped up, Kamal summoned Telecom

BREAKDOWN OF CLAIMS		
	GP	Robi
First claim	Tk 11,530.15cr	Tk 1,251.68cr
Revised claim	Tk 12,579.95cr	Tk 867.23cr
BTRC's part	Tk 8,494.01cr	Tk 488cr
Principal amount	Tk 2,299.71cr	Tk 319cr
Interest	Tk 6,194.30cr	Tk 169cr
NBR's part	Tk 4,085.94cr	Tk 379cr

Minister Mustafa Jabbar, National Board of Revenue Chairman Md Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and officials of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to his office.

Jabbar had a press conference scheduled at the BTRC headquarters later in the day but Kamal requested him to shift it to his office.

"If we continue with our claims, a resolution will take a long time and that will hamper the mobile operators' business and restrict our revenue growth too," Kamal said at the press conference.

According to the BTRC's audits into the two operators' books from their inception until December 2014, Grameenphone has Tk 12,579.95 crore pending and Robi Tk 867.24 crore.

All TV channels on board Bangabandhu Satellite

MUHAMMAD ZAHIRUL ISLAM

The commercial potential of Bangabandhu Satellite-1 is finally coming into being more than a year after its launch as all 34 local television channels are set to start commercial transmission through it from October 2.

At present, six of the 30 private channels -- Deepto TV, Somoy TV, Jamuna TV, Bijoy TV, Bangla TV and MY TV -- and the four state-owned stations are broadcasting via the country's lone satellite, which was launched into orbit on May 12 last year under a project amounting to Tk 2,702 crore.

The rest are doing test transmission from the satellite.

"We found Bangabandhu satellite's quality to be the best," said Zahirul Islam Adar, chief engineer of ATN Bangla.

Through Bangabandhu Satellite-1 the channels are getting about 100 percent reception, whereas with the other options the maximum signal strength is 85 percent, said Adar, also a broadcast operation and engineering consultant at ATN News.

To incentivise the local private channels to switch to Bangabandhu Satellite-1, its operator Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company Ltd (BCSCL) is offering a discounted rate, said the company's Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood.

For the next one year, the BCSCL is offering Tk 1.57 lakh per Megahertz (MHz) of spectrum a month, down from their regular rate of Tk 1.95 lakh. In contrast, Hong Kong-based Star Alliance, which the Bangladeshi TV channels used thus far, charges \$4,000 to \$5,000 (Tk 3.40 lakh to Tk 4.25 lakh).

According to industry insiders, Star Alliance is now offering a discounted rate of \$2,000 per MHz to Bangladeshi channels to fight off competition from the BCSCL.

But the TV channels are not renewing their contracts with Star Alliance.

About 40 percent of Bangabandhu Satellite-1's capacity has been leased out in the local market since its launch, according to Mahmood.

"The demand is rising rapidly in Bangladesh. All the local channels have tested the satellite and found tremendous quality," he added.

Earlier, Akash, a local direct-to-home (DTH) service provider of Beximco Communication, took six transponders from the satellite. Bangabandhu Satellite-1 has 40 transponders

voiced some concerns about going all in with Bangabandhu Satellite-1.

Since their broadcasting infrastructure was geared toward Star Alliance's satellite, the TV channels are now using an ad hoc mechanism to transmit from Bangabandhu Satellite-1.

They are now sending their programmes

CAPACITY AND POTENTIAL

- Total capacity: 40 transponders
- DTH firm Akash took 6 transponders
- TV stations to use 5.5 transponders
- Army to take 2, while Navy, Air Force and VSAT users 1 each
- Cost recovery time of the Tk 2,702cr satellite is 8 years
- Islands to get internet via the satellite
- Projects on e-health, e-education underway

in total and the televisions will use about 5.5 transponders.

Bangladesh Army is in talks with the BCSCL to take two transponders, while VSATs, navy and air force will take one transponder each.

It will take eight years to recover the cost of launching Bangabandhu Satellite-1's cost, according to the project proposal.

The government has in principle decided to launch two more satellites and the BCSCL has started consultations with stakeholders about Bangabandhu Satellite-2.

Meanwhile, the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), however, has

through a fibre optic cable to the Bangabandhu satellite's ground station in Gazipur and from there the programmes are uplinked.

"This is risky as the fibre optic cable can break down any time and it will be a challenge for us then," said Anjan Chowdhury, president of the ATCO.

Subsequently, the ATCO has sought a place in Dhaka to set up their uplink stations.

Chowdhury, also the managing director of Maasranga Television, said the Bangabandhu satellite's low footprint in the Middle East and absence of coverage in Europe were another challenge for the local TV channels.

CIP status for 182 exporters, businesspeople

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government yesterday bestowed the commercially important person (CIP) status on 182 exporters and businesspeople in recognition of their stellar contribution to exports and trade for 2017.

Of the recipients, 136 were given the cards in export category and 46 in trade category.

The CIP cards given under the trade category are for the president, vice-presidents and directors of the country's apex trade body, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

The awardees represent diverse sectors such as jute and jute goods, garment and textiles, leather and leather goods, fruits and vegetables, frozen fish, sea foods, processed and agricultural foods, software and IT services, home textile, tea, engineering products, ships and yarn.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi handed over the cards to the awardees at a function jointly organised by the commerce ministry and the Export Promotion Bureau at InterContinental Hotel in Dhaka.

Before presenting the cards, Munshi said the number of award winners would increase next time.

He said Bangladesh started its journey as a garment manufacturing nation in the late 1970s and now is the second largest apparel exporter worldwide.

"The credit goes to the businesspeople," Tofail Ahmed, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on commerce and the immediate past commerce minister, said in 1972-73 fiscal year, Bangladesh's export value was \$348 million and only three products -- jute, leather and tea -- were the main products.

He said after independence, Bangladesh exported eight million kilograms of tea, out of a total production of 10 million kgs.

However, last year the country produced 85 million kgs of tea and all of them were consumed locally. Besides, the country had to import a handsome quantity of tea to meet the local demand, he said.

This indicates that the country has developed a lot over the years and the business community contributed to this development, Ahmed said.

He suggested Munshi to pay more attention to achieve the status of generalised system of preferences (GSP)-Plus from the European Union after the withdrawal of the standard GSP



Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi speaks at a ceremony for presenting CIP cards to businesspeople at InterContinental Dhaka yesterday.

status in 2027.

Bangladesh will not enjoy duty-free benefit to its largest export destination if the EU discontinues GSP benefit. But once the GSP Plus is attained, the duty benefit will continue, he said.

On behalf of the card winners, Abdus Salam Murshedy, managing director of Envoy Group, said every day new challenges are emerging for the business community. So, the government should take time-befitting measures to take businesses forward.

Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of the FBCCI, said defying various challenges, Bangladesh has made

CONTAINER HANDLING Private ICDs start charging higher rates

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Owners of private inland container depots (ICDs) have begun realising increased charges for container handling since Monday despite opposition from users who feared the cost of export and import would go up.

On Monday morning, the ICDs increased the charges for handling of export, import and empty containers by 20 to 25 percent. But later in the evening, they revised the charges down to 12 percent upon request from Zulfiqar Aziz, chairman of the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

Earlier, the ICDs discarded their plan twice--on April 1 and August 1--to raise the rates, because of the request and assurances from the shipping ministry and the CPA to bring a solution soon.

On August 2, the shipping secretary and the CPA chairman assured the owners of 19 ICDs of taking a decision in this regard by August 25.

Even after the expiry of the deadline, the ICD owners had waited two more weeks but no solution was in sight which prompted them to begin charging at the increased rates.

Nurul Qayyum Khan, president of the Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA), said the CPA chairman had assured that the tariff committee of the shipping ministry would review the charges soon.

But the ICD users, which include exporters, importers, and freight forwarders, expressed dissatisfaction over the tariff hike, saying the decision was taken by the ICDs unilaterally at a time when three committees formed by the shipping ministry and the CPA had been working on the issue.

Khairul Alam Sujan, director of the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association, said the ICDs should not have raised the charges on their own in violation of the ICD policy.

According to the ICD Policy, a tariff committee formed by the ministry could only review the tariffs, which need to be approved by the ministry before being effective.

The latest hike came after the BICDA increased the charges by 20 to 25 percent on February 28 against the backdrop of operational and investment cost escalation, devaluation of the local currency, and the increase in fuel prices, labour charges and equipment maintenance cost.

Bangladesh leads world in green RMG production

It has highest number of platinum rated factories, BGMEA leader says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is now home to the highest number of platinum rated garment factories in the world, which portrays the country's strong footing in green production, a leader of the garment makers' platform said yesterday.

Twenty-five Bangladesh factories have achieved the highest certificate provided by the US Green Building Council (USGBC), a Washington-based non-profit organisation that promotes sustainability in building design, construction and operation.

Six out of the top 10 LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified factories worldwide are located in Bangladesh, said Faisal Samad, vice-president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The data shows how Bangladesh apparel units had recovered from the disastrous Rana Plaza building collapse that took place in April 2013, he said.



Mashiur Rahman, economic advisor to the prime minister, poses at an event titled "Green Financing for Sustainable Growth" organised by the Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bangladesh at Amari Dhaka yesterday.

Monno under BSEC scanner

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) yesterday asked Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) to investigate alleged manipulation of stocks of Monno Jute Staffers and Monno Ceramic Industries.

The stock market regulator also directed the Dhaka bourse to send the probe report on the two low-cap companies' stocks within the next 14 working days.

The stocks of Monno Jute Staffers rose 196 percent to Tk 2,032 in the last one and a half months till September 11 while that of Monno Ceramic Industries 85 percent to Tk 237.

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