

JICA becomes corporate client of CityCell

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has become the corporate client of CityCell mobile phone, says a press release.

An agreement to this effect was signed between JICA and Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd (PBT), the owning company of CityCell, in the city recently.

Faisal Morshed Khan, MD of PBT, and Takashi Sakamoto, resident representative of JICA, signed the accord. AKM Shaiful Azam, SVP of Sales & Marketing Farhad Alam, AVP (Corporate Sales), Jamal Raj, senior executive of PBT, and ATM Zahirul Hamid, assistant director of JICA, were present among others during the signing.

US, Morocco launch free trade talks

AFP, Washington

The United States launched talks here Tuesday for a free trade agreement with Morocco, saying it aimed to send a message of support for open societies in the Muslim world.

The free trade agreement (FTA) would eliminate tariffs and other barriers to trade in goods, agriculture, services, and investment between the United States and Morocco.

"This FTA will promote the indispensable building blocks of a free society, such as respect for the rule of law, private property rights, competition, and the accountable institutions of governance," US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick said.

"And this US-Morocco FTA will send a powerful signal to the rest of the Muslim world that President (George W.) Bush is committed to supporting the development of open, prosperous societies in all regions of the world. Arabs and Muslims can, and must, be part of the widening circle of development, openness and opportunity," he told a news conference.

Both sides aim to wrap up a deal this year.

The United States exports an average 475 million dollars worth of products to Morocco each year, mostly aircraft, corn, and machinery.

US exports face an average tariff of more than 20 per cent, while Moroccan products are subject to an average tariff of four per cent as they enter the United States, the US Trade Representative said in a statement.

The start of the talks, overseen by Zoellick and Morocco's minister-delegate of foreign affairs and cooperation, Taib Fassi-Fihri, was welcomed by business leaders.

Citigroup profit tumbles 37pc

AFP, New York

Number one US financial service group Citigroup said Tuesday its fourth-quarter net profit slipped 37 per cent from the same period a year ago to 2.43 billion dollars, citing litigation costs.

The profit amounted to 47 cents a share, a penny ahead of the First Call consensus estimate of Wall Street analysts.

Revenues in the October-December period were virtually flat at 18.934 billion dollars from 18.903 billion a year earlier.

The results for the fourth quarter and full year include a previously announced 1.3 billion dollar after-tax charge to set up reserves for a previously announced settlement with regulators and related civil litigation, as well as regulatory inquiries and private litigation related to Enron, the banking group said.

Sanford Weill, chairman and CEO, said the company expects to deliver double digit income growth in 2003 and added: "We begin 2003 with tremendous confidence in the future."

"We will continue to provide our customers with the highest quality of financial services, and to deliver double digit income growth and industry-leading returns for our shareholders in 2003."

For the full year, net income rose eight per cent to 15.28 billion dollars as revenues rose seven per cent to 75.76 billion.

Weill said the company weathered a difficult situation over the past year.

"During 2002, our company faced several significant challenges: continued weakness in global markets, record bankruptcies in the developed world, political and economic upheaval in a number of countries in which we operate, and intense scrutiny of its business practices," he said.

Biman's first-ever holiday package

Travel agents to sell domestic tickets

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In the face of stiff competition, Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday announced a holiday package, 'Biman's Enchanting Siam Holidays,' from Dhaka to Thailand.

The national flag carrier of the country also decided to sell tickets for the domestic passengers through travel agents.

Biman officials said that such a decision had to be taken, as the carrier was no longer leading in the domestic market due to the presence of other private airlines.

The package offers five destinations in Thailand: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Phuket and Koh

Samui. Under the package, Biman will facilitate all air and surface transportation, special baggage handling, airport transfer, high class hotels and food and health services.

Such a package is the first of its kind to be introduced by Biman, said Mahmoodur Rahman, director of Marketing and Sales of Biman Bangladesh Airlines. The package was formally launched at a ceremony at a city hotel.

Addressing the ceremony, Biman's director (Marketing and Sales) said the package is very much competitive.

He urged the travel agencies to promote the package and give suggestions for the improvement of the package.

Rahman said Biman also plans to launch several such holiday packages to India.

He said that tickets for domestic flights would be sold through travel agencies from February 1.

He noted that the total revenue growth of Biman increased thirteen per cent in the July-December period last year while the passenger growth has been five to six per cent during the same period.

Among others, Ashan Kadir, director of store and purchase, and Akhter Uddin Ahmed, general manager, Dhaka District Sales office of Biman, spoke at the occasion.

Standard Bank managers' confce held

A managers' conference of Standard Bank Ltd. (SBL) was held recently at a city hotel, Mosharrif Hossain, Managing Director of SBL in the chair, says a press release.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the bank Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed was present chief guest, Vice-Chairman Feruzur Rahman as special guest and directors Mohammed Abdul Aziz, Nurul Haq Sowdagar and Advisor S. S. Nizamuddin Ahmed were present as guests of honour.

Among the participants all branch managers, executives of head office were present in the conference.

Arla Foods holds dealer conference

Arla Foods Ingredients Milco Bangladesh Limited organised its annual distributors' conference for the year 2001-2002 in Rajshahi recently, says a press release.

High officials of Arla Foods from both Denmark and Bangladesh along with 60 distributors attended the conference.

Ahmed Kabir, country manager of Arla Foods Ingredients Milco Bangladesh, presented the Danu sales report for the year 2001-2002 at the conference.

As a part of the conference, an workshop on how to increase the sales of Danu was also held. Topics of the workshop included distribution and marketing plan for the year 2001-2002 and Danu's vision for the future.

Top performing distributors and sales officers were awarded at the conference.

Arla Food Denmark's export managers Viggo Madsen and Sten Nielsen and Chairman of Mutual Trading Azimuddin Ahmed, among others, spoke the conference.

Indian economy to grow 6pc in 2003-'04: ADB

AFP, New Delhi

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday forecast the Indian economy to grow six per cent in the year to March 2004, describing New Delhi's target of eight per cent as "ambitious".

"We have forecast six per cent growth for 2003-2004 and 6.5 per cent growth for 2004-2005," an Asian Development Bank official told reporters in the Indian capital New Delhi.

Asked to comment on India's target of eight per cent growth in the next five years, Yoshiro Iwasaki, director general of the ADB's South Asia sector said that although the goal was not "impossible... it looks ambitious and quite challenging."

An ADB press statement quoted Iwasaki as saying that sustaining such a high growth rate would "depend critically on a successful effort at fiscal consolidation since the large fiscal deficit of about 10 per cent crowds out both public and private investment."

Last month, India's federal and state governments agreed to set an eight per cent economic growth target every year until 2007 on the recommendation of the country's top economic think-tank, the Planning Commission.

This was essential to achieve long-term social objectives such as reducing poverty and creating jobs, said K.C. Pant, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission.

The commission, which sets targets for the economy every five years, said the country would also aim to bring down poverty from the existing 26 per cent to 21 per cent of the population by 2007.

The ADB also announced Wednesday it had recommended an eight billion dollar assistance package for India during the next four years.

Siemens sees net profit falling 35pc this year

AFP, Frankfurt

German electronics giant Siemens expects its net profit to slump by 35 per cent this year as the weak dollar, a shortfall in the group's pensions funds and losses from its stake in microchip giant Infineon eats into earnings, the fortnightly magazine Capital reported on Wednesday.

Quoting Siemens' own internal forecasts, the magazine said that the group expected net profit to slide 35 per cent to just 1.7 billion euros (1.8 billion dollars) in the year to September on a five-per cent drop in sales to around 80 billion euros.

Siemens, which runs its business year from October to September, refused to comment on the report.



PHOTO: STANDARD BANK
Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed, chairman of Standard Bank Ltd, addresses the bank's Managers' Conference 2003 as chief guest at a city hotel recently. Special guest Feruzur Rahman, vice chairman of the bank, directors Mohammed Abdul Aziz, Nurul Haq Sowdagar, Advisor SS Nizamuddin Ahmed and Managing Director Mosharrif Hossain are also seen in the picture.

Int'l garment technology now on display

Garmentech extravaganza kicks off in city

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

With a view to giving a clear idea about the world's latest garment technologies to local producers, the second international apparel and knitting technology trade show 'Garmentech' kicked off in the city yesterday.

Some 80 companies from over 10 countries including Japan, Italy, Singapore, Turkey, India and Hong Kong are taking part in the four-day trade show at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

At the trade show, the participating companies are exhibiting the latest technology in knitting, dyeing, sewing, CAD/CAM and embroidery.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) President Yussuf Abdullah Harun formally inaugurated the show organised by ZAK Trade Fairs and Exhibitors Pvt Ltd in association with Zakaria

Enterprises Limited at the conference centre.

The inaugural ceremony was attended among others by Bangladesh Garments' Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Kutub Uddin Ahmed, ZAK Trade Fairs and Exhibitors Pvt. Ltd Managing Director Syed Zakir Ahmed and Zakaria Enterprises Limited Chairman Zakaria Bhuiyan.

Speaking at the ceremony FCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun said though the country is making progress in the RMG sector it still needs to create its own brand in the international arena for which setting up of backward linkage industries is essential.

Harun hoped that the fair would help the garment producers become familiar with the latest technologies which would help the garment sector in establishing backward linkages industries.

He said duty free market access of Bangladeshi products to Canada, Australia and European Union is a good opportunity. "We have to cash in on these opportunities by capturing the big segments of these large markets."

BGMEA President Kutub Uddin Ahmed said though RMG sector is the largest foreign exchange earning sector, it would be faced with the challenges of the post MFA. "To cope with the situation, we have to look for product and market diversification for which we must adopt new technologies."

He hoped the trade fair would provide diverse machinery at competitive prices and reduce expenses in the RMG sector.

Speaking on the occasion, Syed Zakir Ahmed said the fabric requirement of the country is nearly three billion yards increasing by 20 per cent annually. Substantial portion is imported, he said.



PHOTO: CITYCELL
Faisal Morshed Khan, managing director of Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd (PBT), Takashi Sakamoto, resident representative of JICA, exchange documents of after they sign an agreement in the city recently. Under the deal, JICA has become the corporate client of CityCell mobile phone.

Tea up by Tk 21 a kg

BSS, Chittagong

Weekly tea auction in Chittagong on Tuesday witnessed bullish trade, resulting in average price hike by Tk 21 a kg.

Market sources said all grades met with an excellent demand and prices moved up further, registering the highest average so far this season.

Average price of tea per kg, registered in the last week's auction, was Tk 97.21 while this week's sale was Tk 117.98.

According to the report on the sale prepared by the National Brokers Ltd., all clean liquoring brokens, fannings and dusts strongly competed and sharp rise in price was witnessed.

Blenders/packeteers dominated the market along with useful support from the loose tea buyers. Buyers from the CIS countries operated actively while the Afghan buyers were very selective. Dusts were again stronger this week at a higher level.

The details of the market reports are as follows:
CTC leaf: 1,718 chests, 14,205 gunny sacks, 1,950 p.p.w.s and 280 p/s on offer met with a much stronger demand with high prices for all grades.

Brokens: Initially prices of all brokens were from Tk 5 to Tk 10 but with the progress of sale. The prices rose from Tk 15 to Tk 20 and it moved occasionally near to the prices of liquoring varieties. Large

brokens were also much dearer and its prices shot up from Tk 5 to Tk 10.

Fannings: All fannings were much stronger in the market and those were dearer initially by Tk 10 and finally their prices moved up to Tk 20 with the progress of sale. Plain types were also much dearer.

CTC Dusts: 200 chests, 1,918 gunny sacks and 183 p.p.w.s and 1 p/s on offer continued to meet with stronger demand. Prices of well-made good liquoring types advanced from Tk 10 to Tk 20 following competition.

All other grades of tea also sold well and were dearer by Tk 10. Blenders were once again very active with strong support from the loose tea buyers.

Myanmar to strengthen economic ties with India

AFP, New Delhi

Foreign Minister U Win Aung has decided to strengthen economic cooperation with India in various sectors including hydro-electric energy, oil and gas exploration and road development, officials said Tuesday.

India's foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters that the agreement followed discussions with Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha late Monday.

He said an Indian team would go to Myanmar to look at opportunities

for oil and gas exploration. Aung also said his country wanted to strengthen its information technology sector, Sarna said.

The foreign minister of Myanmar's ruling junta is due to visit the southern city of Bangalore, India's information technology hub, during his six-day stay in India.

Later India's Commerce Minister Arun Shourie, after a meeting with Aung Tuesday evening, told reporters the two countries had decided to set up a joint panel to boost trade.

He said Myanmar was interested in India's pharmaceutical and gems

and jewellery sectors.

The two ministers also discussed the possibility of developing a road and river route between the two countries in order to ease the transport of goods between them.

Aung is due to meet Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee later Tuesday.

Bilateral trade between India and Myanmar has jumped from 84.7 million dollars to 435 million dollars in the past decade.



PHOTO: ARLA FOODS
Arla Foods Denmark export managers Viggo Madsen and Sten Nielsen, Arla Foods Bangladesh Country Manager Ahmed Kabir and Chairman of Mutual Trading Azimuddin Ahmed were present at the Annual Distribution Conference 2001-2002 of Arla Foods Ingredients Milco Bangladesh in Rajshahi recently.



PHOTO: SUVASTU DEVELOPMENT LTD
Real estate company Suvastu Development Ltd Managing Director Nazmul Huq Khan and housing financing firm Delta Brac Housing Corporation Ltd (DBH) Managing Director QM Shariful Aala exchange documents after they sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on behalf of their respective sides in the city yesterday. Suvastu's Chairman Rezaul Huq Siraj, Director (Marketing) Akil Akhtar Chowdhury, Director (Finance) Muhammad Abidur Rahman, Executive Director (Marketing) Mahbulul Alam and DBH's Ishtaque H. Chowdhury and Nasimul Baten were also present on the occasion.

EU states hold up WTO farm trade proposals

REUTERS, Brussels

European Commission proposals on agriculture as part of global talks to free up world trade were blocked yesterday by opposition from member states, particularly France and Ireland, European Union diplomats said.

The hitch in the Commission's proposals, which will now be discussed by foreign and trade ministers on Monday, is embarrassing just a day before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is due to discuss the agriculture question.

But he spokeswoman Pascal Lamy said the EU executive could live with

the delay. "They (EU member states) have not given us the green light," said Arancha Gonzalez. The EU executive anyway believed the proposals would get member state backing on Monday, which meant they had only been delayed by a matter of days.

EU trade diplomats said France and Ireland had asked that foreign and trade ministers from the bloc decide on the issue on Monday at a monthly meeting in Brussels.

The Commission rattled member states with its plan to offer EU cuts in import tariffs by 36 per cent, a reduction in export subsidies by 45 per cent and a slashing of trade-distorting domestic farm support by

55 per cent. Although the Commission runs trade for the EU, it must consult with member states. It will rarely act without their backing, particularly in such a sensitive area as agriculture.

An EU diplomat bemoaned stalling over the trade proposals just before a next round of WTO talks in Geneva on January 22, when an overview paper on proposals so far will be discussed.

"People will say that this is a pity," the diplomat said. The overview paper is the build-up to a March 31 deadline for WTO members to agree on the way they propose to free up farm trade.

Weak data renew debate over double-dip US recession

AFP, Washington

A series of weak economic reports has sparked renewed debate over whether the US economy is poised for a strong rebound or teetering on the edge of a double-dip recession.

Brokerage Merrill Lynch, offering an increasingly bearish outlook, said Monday it is cutting its estimates for US growth.

David Rosenberg, Merrill's chief economist for North America, said he is cutting his outlook for fourth-

quarter 2002 economic growth, to be released next week, to a 0.8 per cent pace "from what was an already below-consensus view of 1.3 per cent."

Rosenberg is maintaining his call for a 2.25 per cent growth pace in the first quarter of 2003, but added that "last week's data releases were so weak (that) ... the risks are to the downside."

Rosenberg added that the case is building for the Federal Reserve to revert to its "de facto easing bias,"

which would set the stage for more interest rate cuts, as early as the January 29 meeting.

Economists are particularly concerned about figures showing declining consumer confidence -- which could affect consumer spending -- and its two-thirds of US economic activity -- as well as a surprise dip in industrial output.

Morgan Stanley economist Richard Berner acknowledges that Wall Street is worried.