

## Southeast Bank, SEDF sign MoU

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Southeast Bank Limited (SEBL) and South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) on technical and training assistance for the development of small and medium enterprise was signed recently at the head office of the bank, says a press release.

Syed Imtiaz Hasib, SEVP of Southeast Bank Limited, and Anil Sinha, general manager of SEDF signed the MoU.

Among others, President and Managing Director of the bank Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, Deputy Managing Director M A Muthith and Zia U Ahmed of SEDF were present.

## SingTel seminar held in Ctg

UNB, Dhaka

SingTel, a Singapore-based communications company, in association with Bangladesh's Cosmos Telecom, held a business seminar on 'U and Satellite' at Chittagong on Monday.

The seminar was attended by representatives of some major local, multinational and corporate clients.

SingTel is a leading company with a comprehensive portfolio of services that include voice and data services over fixed, wireless and Internet platforms. Serving both the corporate and residential markets, SingTel provides communications to its customers in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Eric Yeow, SingTel's Director for Sales, speaking at the seminar said that the Asia-Pacific region has been an important focal point of his company's expansion plan. "SingTel aims to be the Asian partner of choice for telecommunications operators across the world, specially in Bangladesh," he said.

Enayetullah Khan, Managing Director of Cosmos Telecom, in his opening remarks referred to Bangladesh's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy of 2002 which aims at building an ICT-driven nation comprising of a knowledge-based society by the year 2006.

## Scancement dealers' confce held

The Annual Dealers Conference-2003 of Scancement International Ltd. (SIL), a company of HeidelbergCement Group was held at a city hotel recently, says a press release.

The conference was organized to recognise the outstanding contributions of the dealers and business partners of the company.

K M Zahid Uddin, GM (Marketing and Sales), Mrk Van Kempen, deputy chief operating officer, Mahabubul Alam, CFO, Saeed Ahmed (HR&A), Ashraf Amin Badal, GM (P&D), Ramakanta Bhattacharjee, DGM (M&S), and Quazi Shaifayez Hossain, marketing and sales manager of HeidelbergCement Group, Bangladesh, were present in the ceremony.

The company awarded seven best dealers for their outstanding performance during the year 2002. The dealers are Islam Brothers (North Bengal), Zinuk Traders (Sylhet), Brothers Corporation (Mirpur), Seema Trading Company (Pagla), Islam Trading (Mirpur), Chittagong Cement Complex (Dhaka old town), each of them won a crest, a certificate and a Dhaka-Indonesia (Bali-Dhaka) air-ticket with four-day and three night stay-over there.

Shovro Enterprise (Mirpur) and MNG Enterprise (Tangail) got special awards.

## S'pore hopes to launch free trade talks with India in April

AFP, Singapore

Singapore expects to launch talks with India on a free trade agreement in April. Trade Minister George Yeo said here Wednesday.

"Singapore is likely to launch negotiations with India on the India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, including a free trade agreement, in April this year," Yeo said.

The possibility of a free trade deal was discussed between Singapore President S.R. Nathan and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during the Singapore leader's state visit to India earlier this month.

Nathan said at that time the study on the feasibility of such an agreement was expected to be completed early this year, after which talks could begin.

# No business problem with terror-risk list

## US envoy says at trade show inauguration

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Ambassador Mary Ann Peters yesterday reiterated Bangladeshi businessmen will not face any problem in doing business with the US following the inclusion of the country in the US terror-risk list.

"I don't believe that Bangladesh's image in the US will be influenced in any way by the decision," the US ambassador to Bangladesh told the inaugural ceremony of the three-day 12th US trade show, co-sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) and the United States Embassy at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury was present as chief guest at the function. AmCham President Aftab ul Islam,

AmCham Executive Director A. Gafur and Counsellor for Political and Economic Affairs of US embassy Leonard Hill were also present.

Businesspeople consider Bangladesh as an investment destination on how Bangladesh treats investors and exporters operate here, Peters said defusing the concerns of local business leaders.

The US envoy said a US business firm will invest 30 million US dollars to set up an American cancer hospital in Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh is now on the map of US investors," she said, viewing that the hospital project could be an encouraging example of US investment in Bangladesh when FDI flow dropped 60 per cent last year. She said the number of partici-

pating firms increased by 10 per cent, from 69 last year to 75, at the show and it is a clear indication of the existing bilateral trade relations between the two countries.

The commerce minister said some people may be affected by the decision but businesspersons of the country may not face problems.

He felt that the business people of the two countries can overcome the setback through increased partnerships.

Aftab ul Islam said the trade show will strengthen the existing trade relation between the US and Bangladesh.

He said the trade balance between the two countries is heavily tilted towards Bangladesh. From January to November 2002 the US exported products worth \$ 245.80 million to Bangladesh while it

imported goods valued at \$2024.80 million from Bangladesh, he added.

Various American products on computer and power generation technologies and educational and banking services available in Bangladesh will be put on display at the fair.

Some 75 firms are participating in the show. The American Centre of the US Embassy in Dhaka is showcasing the products and services of its Student Advising Centre at booth no. 57 of the fair. They are also providing information and materials on higher study in the United States.

The show remains open to public from 10:00am to 8:00pm. The entry fee is Tk10 per person.



PHOTO: STAR  
Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters visit a stall at the three-day US trade show that began at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.



Syed Imtiaz Hasib, SEVP of Southeast Bank Limited, and Anil Sinha, general manager of SouthAsia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF), sign a memorandum of understanding in the city recently. Among others, Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, president and managing director, M A Muthith, deputy managing director of the bank, and Zia U Ahmed, senior finance market manager of SEDF, are also seen in the picture.

## New 5-star hotel this year

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Sena Hotel Development Limited (SHDL), a business venture of the Bangladesh Army, is expected to launch the operation of its five-star hotel near Zia International Airport late this year.

Radisson Hotel International (RHI), an international chain based in the US, will operate the hotel named Radisson Water Garden Hotel.

Both the companies yesterday signed an agreement. US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters and Adjutant General of Bangladesh Army Major General Jalaluddin Ahmad attended the signing ceremony.

In her address, Mary Ann Peters said Radisson's presence in Bangladesh reflects yet another progress of strong business ties

between the US and Bangladesh. "Bangladesh is a place where Americans can invest," she said, adding that more service-oriented businesses in this country will speed up economic growth.

The SHDL is a concern of the Army Welfare Trust (AWT) and Sena Kalyan Shangstha (SKS).

AWT conceived the idea of the hotel project in 1995. The idea was materialised in the same year through a joint venture on 22 bighas of land.

With changing market conditions, the AWT joined the SKS to set up the SHDL and the project was approved in May 2000.

About 88 per cent work on building the structure of the hotel at an estimated cost of Tk 90 crore has been completed while interior finishes, mechanical and electrical works are in progress, SHDL offi-

cial said. The hotel will have 211 guestrooms apart from two banquet ballrooms, nine meeting rooms, three restaurants, two tennis courts and a health club. There will be parking facilities for 240 cars in the hotel premises.

The hotel is only five minutes to Zia International Airport as well as five minutes from Baridhara diplomatic zone and just opposite to Dhaka Cantonment.

The recently inaugurated Army golf course opposite to the hotel will be made available for the hotel guests.

SHDL Chairman Maj Gen Jalaluddin Ahmad, President of Radisson Hotel International - Asia Pacific Paul Kirwin, Managing Director of SKS and SDHL Brig Gen Ahmed Muktafir Arif also addressed the programme.



PHOTO: RUPALI BANK  
Mufleh R Osmany, chairman of Rupali Bank Ltd, addresses the divisional and departmental heads of the bank's head office Tuesday. A H Ekbal Hossain, managing director (current charge), is also seen.

# India's precious metals only a dream?

THE STATESMAN/ New Delhi

"A diamond", according to the celebrated De Beers advertisement, "is forever", but it is taking forever to find deposits of these sparklers in India, the land of the Kohinoor. Not even after five per cent of India's territory was leased out to the mineral prospectors.

It is exactly three years since the amendment to the Mineral Concession Rules 1960, and since July 2000 the government has issued 119 reconnaissance permits to 20 firms, most of which are foreign-owned, to look for diamonds, gold and other metals. Some have gone to Indian subsidiaries of foreign firms or Indian firms. About 155,775 sq km or five per cent of the country's territory have been given over to prospecting companies but

government sources said since then, not a single company has applied for a mining licence as yet. Currently De Beers -- the world's premier diamond mining company -- has over 20 permits, mostly in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Orissa. The total area where De Beers is prospecting is about 36,000 sq. km. Rio-Tinto has 16 permits and has operations in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh spread over 30,800 sq. km. and Geo Mysore more than 20 permits in the same states. The total area Geo Mysore is involved with is about 14,000 sq. km. Most permits are for Karnataka (33) and Andhra Pradesh (32) with Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in third and fourth place respectively with 21 and 15 permits.

A majority of the permits are for underdeveloped and poor tribal areas. "The failure to ask for a mining lease suggests the prospectors have not found very much. If they have not found the gold or diamonds, they cannot set up plants. So, they cannot bring about economic growth," a senior official said.

Initially, the laws do not allow a permit to be for an area more than 5,000 sq. km. Also, no company is allowed more than 10,000 sq. kms in the country for aerial prospecting. Later, the area restrictions would apply to a particular state and not the entire country. Furthermore, the firm can continue prospecting for two years after which the area under permit is reduced to 1,000 sq. km. or 50 per cent of the area granted, whichever is less. After the third

year, a company should not have more than 25 sq. km. Two different companies can look for two different minerals in overlapping areas.

The aerial prospecting is supervised by the Civil Aviation ministry and a Defence clearance is required. A representative of the Geological Survey of India would have to be present. Also, all data collected would be made available to the Indian Bureau of Mines, Nagpur. There is currently talk of a high-level committee to monitor the progress of the reconnaissance operations and also joint-sector involvement in them. Currently, most firms are owned by leading multi-nationals or their Indian agencies. Historically, gold and diamonds have been mined in India.

While the other 143 World Trade Organisation members accepted the draft, they acknowledged it was less than perfect. But the WTO makes decisions by consensus, and agreed therefore to a new deadline of February 10-11.

## Managers' confce of AB Bank held in Chittagong

The manager's conference of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd was held at its regional office in Chittagong on Saturday, says a press release.

President and Managing Director, of the bank Abu Hanif Khan presided over the conference.

A total of 17 managers from the region took part in the conference.

Among others, Ali Reza Iftekhar, senior executive vice-president, Ekram Hussein, executive vice-president, and Akhtar Hamid Khan, senior vice-president, were present

## Data show US economy making shaky progress

AFP, Washington

The US economy is making shaky progress as orders for big-ticket items edge higher but Iraqi war fears hit consumer confidence, economists said Tuesday.

New home sales hit a new record in 2002, however, showing the sector is still the bedrock of the economy.

The battery of mixed data were released just before Federal Reserve policymakers started a two-day meeting to ponder interest rates, already at a four-decade low.

Later in the day, President George W. Bush delivers his State of the Union address, confronting scepticism over a 10-year, 674-billion-dollar stimulus built largely on scrapping taxes on dividends.

Latest government figures showed orders for durable items such as washing machines, cars and planes edged higher in December but shrank for the whole of 2002.

Durable goods orders expanded by a weaker-than-expected 0.2 per cent in December alone, capping off a fragile 2002 in which orders shrank 0.2 per cent after an 11.6-per cent plunge in 2001.

"Today's durable goods report is further evidence that the manufacturing sector is flat in the water," said Manufacturers Alliance president and chief executive Thomas Duesterberg.

"Although the fundamentals are positive, it will take a resolution of the international situation and positive momentum on the president's economic recovery plan to bolster confidence and achieve sustained growth."

# Testing facilities needed to boost food export: EC

BSS, Dhaka

The country needs food quality testing facilities because big international corporate businesses cannot purchase many Bangladeshi food products in the absence of such facilities.

"One of the major issues that prevents the corporate businesses in the food sector from purchasing products of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bangladesh is the lack of quality testing facilities," says European Commission (EC) sources.

A financing proposal for South Asia Enterprise Project Facility (SEDF), a joint facility of the World Bank and International Finance Corporation, identified the absence of testing facility as one of the major stumbling blocks in expanding export market, particularly in the Western countries, which follow stringent testing pre-condition for importing food items.

The proposal pointed out that the SEDF, which would receive largest financial support from the EC, had started and would expand the

programmes in quality management, including the introduction of testing facilities for all major food quality tests.

To develop testing facilities under the programme, the proposal said, the SEDF would network with other international and national bodies like the Scottish Enterprises Network or Board.

The sources said that with the establishment of updated testing facilities the export of food items from Bangladesh, particularly to the European countries, would increase manifold.

The EC's financing proposal said that as the SMEs often operate inefficiently due to lack of professional management, the SEDF has developed a comprehensive programme to enhance the competence of the SMEs through various forms of training and system improvement, using local business service providers.

Following the EC guidelines, the proposal said, the facility has planned a strong component in assisting the SMEs to comply with the standard of environmental

sustainability. Under the programme, all the SMEs will be assessed as to their compliance with environmental standards in Bangladesh.

Where needed, the SEDF will facilitate various national and international programmes and the EC's regional environmental programme to facilitate the compliance.

The SEDF will also have a proactive programme, assisting the SMEs with solid waste-management. Advice for these programmes will come from various EC-supported organisations in this field such as CEDRE of France, BMS of Denmark and ENSAC of the Netherlands.

The SEDF has already developed a strong linkage with the Women Entrepreneurs' Association and the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Business and Industry to support development of women entrepreneurship.

The SEDF will support the efforts of these organisations with business counselling, training and technical assistance to their members.



PHOTO: ABBL  
Abu Hanif Khan, president and managing director of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd, Ali Reza Iftekhar, SEVP, Ekram Hussein, EVP, and Akhtar Hamid Khan, SVP of the bank, attended the managers' conference in Chittagong Saturday.

# Totalgaz LPG in operation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Totalgaz LPG formally started its commercial operation in Chittagong yesterday.

Water Resources Minister LK Siddiqui inaugurated the Totalgaz LPG plant at Maddhya Sonaichhari in Sitakunda upazila.

French Ambassador to Bangladesh Michel Limmaux, TotalFinaElf (South-East Asia) CEO Pierre-Yves Loiseau, and Premier LP Gas Managing Director MS

Kumaran were also present at the inauguration.

French ambassador said the Totalgaz plant is the second largest French investment in Bangladesh after Lafarge Cement in Sylhet. Implementation of the plant with Bangladeshi partners further proved that Bangladesh is highly capable of attracting foreign direct investment, the ambassador said.

Pierre-Yves Loiseau, CEO TotalFinaElf South East Asia, in his speech gave details on the activities

and performance of TotalFinaElf and its contribution to the worldwide gas and oil sector.

The plant is incorporating the latest technology in LPG storage, bottling, operation and updated safety and security measures. The two storage spheres have a total capacity of 5000 cubic meters and the bottling plant has an annual capacity of 72,000 tons. "TotalGaz" is being marketed at a retail price of Tk. 385 per cylinder.

## WTO drugs deal talks resume

AFP, Geneva

WTO members met here on Tuesday to try to break a deadlock on access to life-saving medicines for poor countries without pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity, in their first talks since the US blocked a draft accord at the end of last year.

At the heart of Washington's opposition was the scope of diseases to be covered by the new regime, which would allow the poorest countries to sidestep patents and import generic versions of drugs.

While the other 143 World Trade Organisation members accepted the draft, they acknowledged it was less than perfect. But the WTO makes decisions by consensus, and agreed therefore to a new deadline of February 10-11.