

## Asia-Pacific employers' confce begins tomorrow

### Globalisation, corporate social responsibility on main agenda

#### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The 6th Asia-Pacific Employers' Conference begins in Dhaka tomorrow with the objective to take a common stance on globalisation and issues relating to corporate social responsibility.

The high-level conference is being held for the first time in a least developed country, M Anis Ud Dowla, president of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), told reporters at a briefing at its office in Dhaka yesterday.

Some 100 delegates from 21 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and senior officials of International Labour

Organisation (ILO) and International Organisation of Employers (IOE) will attend the three-day meet.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury will inaugurate the conference at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel.

Dowla said corporate social responsibility and globalisation will be two common issues on which the employers in the Asia-Pacific region can have a common voice. "We don't want to follow a single standard or model," he said.

"We want welfare of the employees but we want to do that on the basis of our socio-economic conditions. The employers group in the region is trying

to set a common stand in this regard," the BEF president told the briefing.

The countries to participate in the meet are Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Speaking at the briefing, CK Hyder, secretary general of BEF, said regional trade is very important for globalisation but non-trade issues do not help promote free trade. "Non-trade issues should not be linked with trade issues."

Iftekharul Alam, former president

of BEF, said as corporate social responsibility is one of the main agenda of the conference, it will encourage local businessmen to be more involved in performing social responsibility.

Rokia A Rahman, president of Women Entrepreneurs Association, Bangladesh, said entrepreneurs here perform their social responsibility in different ways. "So, we prefer to follow a home grown policy in this regard."

Mahbub Jamil, former president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Kamran T Rahman, Niaz Rahman, Mohammad Hatem and other BEF members attended the press conference.



PHOTO: STAR

M Anis Ud Dowla (2nd from left), president of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), speaks at a press briefing on the eve of the 6th Asia-Pacific Employers' Conference that begins in Dhaka tomorrow. Mahbub Jamil, former president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry; and Iftekharul Alam, former president of BEF, were present.

## Nat'l Housing cuts rate

National Housing Finance and Investments Limited has decided to reduce its lending rates.

The decision was taken at the 52nd meeting of the Board of Directors of the company held in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

The rate of interest for the prime clients would be 14.25 per cent and general clients 14.75 per cent against the present interest rate of 15.75 per cent.

The revised rate will be effective from December 1, 2003.

## Call money rate strong

#### BSS, Dhaka

The demand for call money was strong in post-Eid trade yesterday as some private commercial banks faced liquidity crunch at the end of the day, fund managers said.

The call money rate touched its intra-day high at 11.25 per cent and in most deals ranged between 7.50 per cent and 10.50 per cent in line with its previous closing on Monday last week, leading fund managers said.

"The demand for call money is very strong as some private banks faced liquidity short-fall due to higher payments," dealers said.

The inter-bank money market resumed its operations Saturday after a four-days Eid holiday but most fund managers was in holiday mood.

The call money rate jumped to its record high at 12 per cent in the previous week due to huge loan and deposit withdrawals on the occasion of Eid.

Government, corporate bodies and other organizations paid salaries, Eid festival bonus to their employees and other payments. This put serious pressure on liquidity of some private banks.

"They (banks) are still under pressure for call money to meet their liquidity requirements with the central bank," dealers said.

## Economists see 1pc growth this year for S'pore

#### ANN/ THE STRAITS TIMES

Economists here have raised their full-year growth forecasts for Singapore following a better-than-expected performance by the local economy in the second half of the year so far.

A Straits Times poll of nine analysts found an average forecast of 0.97 percent growth for the Singapore economy this year, higher than the 0.61 percent earlier.

The Government had earlier narrowed the range of its forecast to between 0.5 and 1 percent from 0 to 1 percent.

The economists attributed the more bullish outlook to a slew of stronger-than-expected economic figures released over the last two months.

These included last month's record 19.3 percent surge in manufacturing output as well as the economy's surprising 1.7 percent expansion in the third quarter.

"The economy performed much stronger in the third quarter than we had expected. And early fourth-quarter figures appear to continue the trend," MMS International economist David Cohen said.

Up till early last month, he had anticipated the Singapore economy would stagnate.

## Biman earns Tk 450cr revenue in 1st quarter

#### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines earned Tk 450.15 crore revenue from passenger and cargo transportation in the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

The national flag carrier witnessed a three per cent rise in cargo and passenger carrying during the July-September period of 2003-2004.

Biman carried a total of 3,56,814 international and domestic passengers which was 3,46,421 in the corresponding period of 2002-03 fiscal year. It also transported 11,105 tonnes of cargo during the period.

The revenue earning is eight per cent higher than that of the corre-

sponding period of last year and 12 per cent higher than the target set for the first quarter.

Biman says its market share in passenger carrying is 43 per cent while 17 other foreign airlines operating in Bangladesh hold 57 per cent. In cargo, Biman has 40 per cent market share and others hold 60 per cent.

However, according to Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab), Biman carried 40.77 per cent international passengers in 2002. It handled 9,20,798 international passengers out of the total 22,58,312.

Biman enjoyed 41.21 per cent international passenger share in 2001,

38.59 per cent in 2000 and 38.79 per cent in 1999.

A Biman official said apart from increasing flight frequency to profitable routes like Abu Dhabi, Jeddah and Riyadh, Biman started direct flight on Chittagong-Riyadh route, which contributed to increasing revenue.

He said Biman also introduced wide-bodied aircraft on Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes, which results in increasing passengers in domestic routes.

Biman now operates in 26 international and seven domestic destinations with 17 aircraft.



PHOTO: STAR

Banks had a low volume of transaction as they resume business yesterday after a four-day recess for Eid.

## WTO to be back on track if rich nations change farm stance: India

#### AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said Saturday that World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations could be nudged back on track if developed countries changed their stance on trade-distorting farm subsidies.

Officials of both India and the European Union who are here to attend a two-day EU-India business summit said they were working to bridge differences responsible for the collapse of trade talks in September in Cancun, Mexico.

Vajpayee told Saturday's plenary session that "practical negotiations" on agriculture really held the key to "infusing life" into global trade talks.

Millions of agriculture-dependent people in developing countries were being undercut in the global marketplace by billions of dollars worth of subsidies being doled out by rich nations to their farmers, he said.

"The WTO is like a chariot pulled by many horses. Unless each horse pulls at the same pace and in the same direction as the others, the chariot will eventually

collapse," said Vajpayee.

"I think we should draw the right conclusions from the outcome of the Cancun ministerial meeting. We have to recognise that the developmental concerns of the poorer countries of the world are taken into account," he added.

Agriculture is vital to India's economy, with more than 70 per cent of the country's billion-plus population dependent on it.

The five-day WTO ministerial conference in Cancun, Mexico, broke down September 14, riven by deep divisions between poor and rich nations.

India led a coalition of developing nations, including Brazil and China, in a battle to push rich nations like the United States, Japan and European countries to slash their agriculture subsidies.

World trade ministers had agreed in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001 that a final agreement should lower all forms of agricultural export subsidies with a view to eventually phasing them out.

During the Cancun conference, the European Union agreed to remove

export subsidies on certain products deemed critical by developing countries but balked at eliminating all such assistance by a specific date.

The United States went along with demands for an end to export subsidies but sought concessions in return.

"It is important not to upset the carefully balanced agenda of interests that resulted from hard fought negotiations and compromises at Doha," said Vajpayee.

EU Commission President Romano Prodi agreed that it was time to move forward by learning from the Cancun debacle.

"We need a helping hand to push the Doha process. We should reflect on the sticking points at Cancun. The outcome was not satisfactory for us nor for you," Prodi said.

The G20 group of industrialised nations will try to find ways to revive the stalled WTO talks at a meeting in Brazil on December 12 with European Union Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy, Indian commerce ministry official S.N. Menon told an EU-India meeting on Friday.

## Dollar firm against taka

#### BSS, Dhaka

The US dollar was firmed against the Bangladesh taka in thin inter-bank trade yesterday while it hit record lows against the euro, pound sterling and remained markedly lower against most other currencies, dealers said.

The dollar touched its high at Tk 58.4500 per unit and in most deals traded between Tk 58.4350 and Tk 58.4400 higher than its previous day's range between Tk 58.4250 and 58.4300 last week, dealers of different commercial banks said.

The demand for the greenback was higher as the banking activities resumed operations after a four days holiday on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, the second largest religious festival of Muslim community.

The volume of foreign currency trade was lower as most international markets remained closed due to weekend holiday and traders were in Eid-holiday mood, dealers said.

Last week, the dollar dropped from its record high against the taka, the previous week due to higher remittance inflow. Bangladeshi people living abroad sent a substantial amount of dollar on the occasion of holy Eid festival that helped the local currency to gain points against the dollar.

But, some banks faced short-fall in dollar when their clients were under pressure to pay their outstanding bills, dealers of some commercial banks said.

## India's tea exports to Pakistan up

#### REUTERS, Kolkata

India's tea exports to Pakistan in the first ten months of 2003 increased to 4.11 million kg up 11 per cent against the corresponding period last year, industry officials said Friday.

India is the world's largest tea producer and is increasingly looking at Pakistan, the third-largest importer after Russia and Britain, to partially offset its declining exports.

"We want to try and bridge the big gap in exports this year compared to last year and hope the Pakistan market would play a role in this," Sujit Patra, Deputy Secretary of the Indian Tea Association (ITA), told Reuters.

In June, the ITA signed an agreement with Pakistani officials to triple exports to Pakistan in less than a year.

## BRTC makes a turnaround

### Tk 32cr operating surplus in last 2 fiscal yrs

#### UNB, Dhaka

Making a turnaround from the verge of collapse, state run Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) is now running at an operating surplus income thanks to a well-thought-out bailout plan.

BRTC earned about Tk 32 crore in operating surplus in the last two financial years. It has also paid Tk 5.50 crore in revenue to the exchequer since December 2001.

But a steady advance and growing demand for BRTC bus services irked a vested quarter that is trying to obstruct its operations to secure monopoly of transport business, sources at the BRTC said.

BRTC buses are now running in some 40 districts on lease to private operators as well as under the corporation's own management.

Private bus owners and workers' combined associations reportedly put barricades, damage and stop the BRTC buses on a number of inter-district routes trying to muscle the rival out of their way.

However, common people came

forward to help BRTC -- in many places waging a movement to keep as well as have BRTC bus service in their respective areas.

People also forged passenger-welfare committees in some areas to ensure comfortable and competitive bus service to get rid of various harassment and monopoly of private bus operators, the sources said.

In last two years, 10 BRTC bus depots were reopened, grabbed lands of the corporation recovered and two new depots set up in Sylhet and Rajshahi.

The corporation also had its accounts straightened up, paying all its dues to various organisations, clearing land taxes and getting its establishments legalised.

Talking to the news agency, BRTC Chairman Adv Taimur Alam Khandokar said the corporation had removed the curse of bankruptcy clearing all the arrears, loans and liabilities. He also said salary and bonus of about 1,800 officers and employees has been made up-to-date.

Replying to a question Taimur said they earned Tk 4 crore by direct adver-

tisement on the bodies of BRTC buses as well as Tk 6 crore from BRTC-owned markets and realising arrears from the buslees.

He said they were also able to reduce unemployment problem by creating job opportunities through introducing 1000-1200 ticket counters and balanced bus leasing, cancelling the previous monopolised leasing to individuals. Some 40 deaf and dumb persons have been given appointment in various working areas of the BRTC.

Asked about future plans, Taimur said the next target is to operate bus service in the rest of the districts, ensuring comfortable, secure, timely and fixed-fare journey.

"The process is underway to manufacture bus in Bangladesh in joint venture with Sweden and China," the BRTC chief said about the plan for further expansion of its fleet.

Referring to addition of 50 new trucks to its fleet of lorries, he further said the corporation has a plan to increase the number of trucks from 200 at present to 500 in the near future.

The BRTC Chairman said 50 more single-decker buses are in the pipeline.

## Battlelines emerge in new EU stability pact clash

#### REUTERS, Berlin

Battlelines over how to revise EU budget rules emerged Friday with Germany vowing to defend its national sovereignty, Austria rejecting political deals and Brussels warning that the EU's future was at stake.

Analysts said it could be years before EU countries can put the pieces of its Stability and Growth Pact back together again, implying looser budgets for some time and diminishing the chance of a further cut in European Central Bank interest rates.

Earlier this week EU finance ministers effectively tore up the Stability Pact, which aims to underpin the euro, in a deal allowing Germany and France to run budget deficits above a limit set at three per cent of gross domestic product with impunity.

On Friday Germany and Austria differed in public on how binding the new rules should be, even before negotiations in earnest to have begun in Rome.

"Decisions are taken here," German Finance Minister Hans Eichel told parliament. "I am fighting to make

sure that budgetary sovereignty is not handed to Brussels but remains here".

Eichel said he would like to see greater account taken of differences in inflation and overall public debt levels when the EU sought to coordinate budget policies. He pointed to Portugal, which ended up in recession by following the European commission's policy advice.

Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel said he wanted the

European Commission to propose a re-write of the Pact, adding a new version should not be open to political deals.

"We must have given an impulse for a new, improved Stability Pact by the spring summit," Handelsblatt newspaper quoted him as saying. "It is important that these new criteria for national budgets do not allow later political interpretation."

## CURRENCY

Following is yesterday's forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank

Sell	Buy	Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer
58.7300	58.7800	USD	57.8700	57.7000	57.6310
71.4333	71.4941	EUR	68.5532	68.3518	68.2700
102.0845	102.1714	GBP	98.8792	98.5887	98.4707
43.3721	43.4090	AUD	41.2431	41.1219	41.0727
0.5406	0.5411	JPY	0.5223	0.5208	0.5201
45.8613	45.9004	CHF	44.4380	44.3075	44.2545
7.7657	7.7724	SEK	7.3108	7.2894	7.2806
45.5589	45.5977	CAD	44.1500	44.0203	43.9676
7.5727	7.5791	HKD	7.4458	7.4239	7.4150
34.2449	34.2741	SGD	33.4016	33.3035	33.2636
16.1213	16.1351	AED	15.6336	15.5877	15.5690
15.7851	15.7990	SAR	15.3131	15.2681	15.2498
9.8691	9.8775	DKK	8.9801	8.9537	8.9430

Exchange rates of some currencies against US dollar

Indian rupee	Pak rupee	Lankan rupee	Thai baht	Nor. kroner	NZ dollar	Malaysian ringgit
45.77	57.175	96.425	39.925	6.8050	0.6895	3.80

**Local Interbank FX Trading:** Local interbank market was subdued on the first working day after the Eid-ul-Fitr as the international market was closed on Saturday. The greenback remained unchanged against Bangladeshi taka.

**Local Money Market:** Money market was active. Call money eased slightly. Call money rate ranged between 3.00 and 6.00 per cent. Bangladesh Bank accepted 6.305 billion taka worth of bids for repo agreement.

**International Market:** Euro rose to a record high above \$1.20 in thin trade on Friday, as investors sold the US dollar,

which failed to rally on strong US economic data earlier this week. Although greenback trimmed closes in late trade, it remained markedly lower against most other major currencies. Geopolitical worries and persistent concerns that US may be shifting toward a more protectionist stance on trade policy also lend a negative undertone to the greenback performance. Dollar posted against the yen as traders grew wary of intervention after the Ministry of Finance said it had spent about 1.6 trillion yen in yen-selling intervention in November.

At the closing of New York on Friday, euro was at 1.1993/97, GBP at 1.7222/30 and yen at 109.63/66 against dollar.

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## ReadyCash Raffle Draw Winners

The latest ReadyCash Raffle draw was held at ReadyCash Bangladesh office at Dhanmondi in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

Prizes	Name of Winners	Card No
China Junction Chinese Free Lunch for Two	Md Md Rony	5047980000049768
Meal in the Box Free Lunch for Two	Md Masum Hossain	5047980000049734
Kena Kata free Gift Box	Mohd Azizul Hoque	5047980000049763
White Castle free Lunch Package	Tanzeer Ameer	5047980000049639
Liton's Snacks free Meal Box	Dr Gulshanara Akhter	5047980000049802
Pabna Cloth Store free Gift Box	Md Nurul Hasan	5047980000049752
Desh Karupanna free Gift Box	Kh. Zahurul Hoque	5047980010025639
Karmal General Store free Gift Box	Md Nahid Khan Chy	5047980010025759
Swiss free Meal Box for three	Md Nasir Uddin	5047980010025755

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