

## Cabinet okays draft of bilateral trade deal with Cambodia

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The cabinet in a weekly meeting yesterday approved the draft of bilateral trade agreement between Bangladesh and Cambodia.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting at her office. The cabinet also reviewed a report on progress of implementation of decisions taken in previous meetings and took some fresh important decisions, said an official handout without elaboration.

Cabinet members and state ministers of the ministries concerned attended the meeting.

## New MD of Brac Bank



Imran Rahman has been appointed chief executive officer and managing director of Brac Bank Ltd with effect from May 1, 2006, says a press release.

Prior to this new assignment, he served as a deputy managing director of the bank. Before joining Brac Bank in 2003, Rahman worked for Standard Chartered Bank as its head of Distribution and Wealth Management.

He started his banking career as a management trainee with ANZ Grindlays Bank in 1987.

## Nokia's luxury brand Vertu growing fast

REUTERS, Helsinki

Vertu, the luxury brand of mobile maker Nokia, is growing fast as a result partly of geographic expansion and plans to launch in the Nordic countries and Japan, Vertu President Alberto Torres said in comments published on Monday.

"We are now growing in three digit numbers, mainly thanks to geographical expansion and launching new handsets," Finnish business daily Kauppalehti quoted Torres as saying in an interview.

"We sell tens of thousands of phones annually, and our goal is to reach annual sales of hundreds of thousands of phones," he said, but added that high volumes specifically were not a target for Vertu, which is based in Britain.

"It may take even more than 10 years to reach the threshold of selling 1 million handsets."

Nokia does not give separate sales or profit figures in its accounts for Vertu, whose handsets include models studded with diamonds that cost thousands of dollars.

Vertu is to launch its luxury phones in the Nordic markets including Finland later this year, Torres said, adding that it would open shops in Japan and Latin America in the next two years.

# Steel millers decry Tata investment proposal

## FBCCI to talk to govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Steel Mills Owners Association and Bangladesh Re-rolling Mills Association at a rally yesterday urged the government not to make any commitment to Tata regarding gas and coal supply unless 50-year energy security for domestic use is ensured.

They said thousands of workers will be unemployed if the government makes uninterrupted gas supply commitment to Tata to operate in the country.

Thousands of workers and leaders of the associations at the rally at Muktangan in Dhaka also demanded more tax and revenue facilities for local steel industry.

As steel millers and workers after

the rally staged a sit-in in front of FBCCI building, Mohammad Ali, acting president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said, "The FBCCI is aware of Tata's investment proposal and we must protect the interest of local industry."

"The FBCCI is with you. We will hold meetings with the high-ups of the government regarding your demands," Ali told the millers and workers.

The workers and leaders of the associations also displayed banners and placards that denounce Tata investment proposal. They also threatened to go for tougher agitation such as laying siege to Desa, REB, PDB and Petrobangla offices and stopping tax payment if the government does not to meet their demands within 15 days.

At the rally, Bangladesh Re-rolling Mills Association President Ali Hossen said they are forced to take to streets, as a conspiracy is on to destroy the country's steel and re-rolling mills and factories.

Abul Kashem Majumder, senior vice chairman of Bangladesh Steel Mills Owners Association, said, when the production in local mills and factories is being disrupted due to shortage of electricity and gas, the government is going to give uninterrupted gas supply to Tata.

Sheikh Masudul Alam, general secretary of re-rolling association, said, "We have to resist the Tata's investment in the country for the sake of our future."

## Showroom of Canon printers inaugurated

BDNEWS, Dhaka

A showroom and service centre of Canon, an international brand of printer, was inaugurated at BCS Computer City at IDB Bhaban yesterday.

Minister for Science, Information and Communication Technology Abdul Moyeen Khan inaugurated the showroom in presence of President of Canon Singapore Ltd Kazuto Ogawa, Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Masuki Inoue and Managing Director of ZAN Abdullah H Kaif.

Moyeen Khan said, "Bangladesh sees Japan as a model of development because both Bangladesh and Japan are densely populated. Even then, Japan has captured the world market with the help of technology."

## Nissan to fight plunge in Japan sales

AP, Tokyo

A senior Nissan executive acknowledged Monday the recent plunge in the automaker's sales in Japan was worse than expected, and said the company was considering increasing its lineup of tiny cars in response.

Although overall Japanese auto sales are flat, sales of smaller cars called "minicars" that give tax breaks to owners are booming, Nissan Motor Co. Chief Operating Officer Toshiyuki Shiga said.

Under an agreement with Suzuki Motor Corp., Nissan sells Suzuki-made minicars under the Nissan brand.

Shiga, No. 2 at Nissan after Chief Executive Carlos Ghosn, said he was still studying various options and could not say when his decision would be made. Ghosn also serves as chief executive of Renault SA of France, Nissan's alliance partner.

Nissan's sales in Japan in April totaled 34,679 vehicles, down 27 percent on-year. Including minivehicles, which have engines up to 0.66 liter and must be below certain dimensions, Nissan's sales in Japan fell 18.5 percent.

Shiga said Nissan was not considering making its own minicars because the deal with Suzuki was proving lucrative, but adding more minicar models to Nissan's lineup was an option.

Nissan, Japan's second biggest automaker, faces formidable competition at home and abroad from Toyota Motor Corp., No. 1 in Japan and No. 2 in the world, and Honda Motor Co.

## S'pore's visitor arrivals up 16pc in April

AFP, Singapore

Singapore's visitor arrivals in April increased 16 percent to 815,000, with the double-digit rise driven by robust growth in its major markets including Indonesia and China, the tourism board said Monday.

Arrivals from Indonesia, the city-state's top source of visitors, recorded an 11 percent jump to 147,000 while India rose 20 percent to 53,000 and Malaysian was up 8.0 percent to 51,000, it said.

China and Australia, the city-state's second and third largest source of visitors, registered the biggest rise in percentage terms of 41 percent to 97,000 and 63,000 respectively compared with a year earlier, the board said.

# Microsoft introduces business software in local market

## Microsoft Dynamics director talks to The Daily Star

NAFID IMRAN AHMED

As part of its expansion plan in Bangladesh, Microsoft has introduced an integrated business software solution, Microsoft Dynamics. The software giant started its new venture with GrameenPhone (GP) Ltd, the largest cellphone service provider in the country.

The mobile phone operator recently opened its first GrameenPhone Centre (GPC) with the technical support of Microsoft Dynamics, a line of integrated, adaptable business management solutions, to offer sales, customer management- and payment-related services under a single roof.

On this occasion, Sun Whye Mun, director of Microsoft Dynamics (South East Asia), visited Bangladesh and in a recent interview with The Daily Star, he shared his views on the product and its potential in the corporate segments in the country.

"The features of Microsoft Dynamics include financial management, supply chain management and customer relationship management (CRM) solutions. The two major areas the software solution works in are the



Sun Whye Mun

ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) and the CRM. The companies that we serve are enterprises, mid-sized companies and small businesses," said Mun.

"This software is almost like the rest of the Microsoft products. So anybody, who is familiar with the Office and Outlook products, will find it very easy to use. Typically, the ERP software are very hard to use and learn. But by making the product more user-friendly, we have tried to help our clients manage it more easily," Mun said while talking about the value propositions of Microsoft Dynamics.

When asked about Microsoft's potential in the corporate segments in Bangladesh, Mun said, "Based on my interactions and meetings with some local companies, I am actually very optimistic. As the Bangladesh economy grows and matures, I believe companies are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the world has changed and the stage that we are all on today not only has domestic competition, but also faces global rivalry. For example, many of your mobile phone operators are foreign companies in conjunction with local partners competing for the booming cellphone business."

"What the companies here need to do is gaining competence such as increasing operational effectiveness and efficiency, which eventually lower costs. They also need to concentrate on innovation and connect their businesses with trading partners, suppliers and service partners."

Spinnovation Ltd, a local company, in partnership with Microsoft has already implemented the system in two GP centres, while the remaining 98 out of 100 centres will be covered within 2006.

# Quake won't seriously affect Indonesian economy

AP, Jakarta

Indonesia's economy is unlikely to be seriously affected by a powerful earthquake that killed more than 4,300 people and flattened tens of thousands of houses, the central bank said Monday.

"Such an earthquake will of course disturb our (economic) growth assumptions going ahead, but I don't think the impact will be so huge," Bank Indonesia Governor

Burhanuddin Abdullah told reporters.

"We believe many things can be done to catch up (on lost economic growth) in the second half" of the year, he said.

Abdullah said "many things can be done" to help stimulate economic growth to compensate for any contraction caused by Saturday's earthquake. He did not elaborate.

The magnitude-6.3 quake destroyed at least 21,000 buildings, according to the Red Cross. It was

centered south of Yogyakarta, a tourist destination and the location of two large UNESCO World Heritage sites, the Buddhist temple complex of Borobudur and the Hindu temples of Prambanan.

Borobudur was reportedly undamaged, but the earthquake sent intricate carved reliefs crashing to the ground and destroyed years of restoration work at Prambanan.

Tourist arrivals are expected to fall in the near term but then rebound.

# N Korea should open up like China: WB

AFP, Tokyo

World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz called Monday on North Korea to follow neighboring China's lead in opening up its economy, but said it would not necessarily bring political change.

Wolfowitz, formerly a leading hawk in US President George W. Bush's administration, said that China was the "relevant parallel" for impoverished North Korea.

"China was able (to) undertake enormous economic change by changing the policy framework," he told reporters in Tokyo, where he is attending the bank's annual meeting on development.

"It's possible to have a great deal of economic improvement, I'm thinking, without necessarily radical political change," he said.

"Certainly the people in North

Korea would be much better off with that and certainly the opportunity would present itself to engage in the parallel kind of movement" as China, he said.

"I know my institution would be very eager to participate in such a development."

Last week, the World Bank unveiled an ambitious plan of lending annual 1.5 billion dollars for the next five years to China, making it the global lender's biggest recipient along with India.

North Korea -- part of Bush's "axis of evil" along with Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Iran -- is boycotting talks on ending its nuclear program, accusing the United States of hostility and demanding an end to US financial sanctions.

Wolfowitz was a leading planner of the Iraq invasion as the number two at the Pentagon until he was appointed last year at the World Bank.

# Banglalink reaches 2m subscribers

## Offers benefits to users

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Banglalink, a leading cellphone service provider in the country, has reached two million subscribers base and anticipates maintaining the growth pace in the next year.

The company has also launched a 20-day promotional campaign to celebrate the achievement.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Banglalink Lars P Reichelt formally announced the success story of the company at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

Reichelt said, "We reached this two million subscribers base only within 15 months of our operation, which is an outstanding performance compared to that of other operators in the market."

"Banglalink was recognised as the fastest growing mobile phone operator in the world in 2005 with a phenomenal growth rate of 2825 percent," he mentioned.

Under the promotional campaign, the Egyptian company has offered new benefits to its existing subscribers of

'ladies first', 'be linked', 'upper class' and 'professional' packages. The offer will be valid from May 30 to June 18.

For 'ladies first' the duration of 'your time', which now offers Tk 3 per minute call charges to any cellphone operator from 12pm to 3pm, has been extended by two hours to 5pm. Banglalink to Banglalink charges remain the same at Tk 2.50 per minute.

The duration of 'your morning' of 'be linked' package, which offers call charges of Tk 3 per minute to any mobile phone operator from 7am to 10am, has also been extended by two hours to 12pm. The charges within the same operator remain unchanged at Tk 2.50 per minute.

For 'upper class' customers, the Banglalink to Banglalink call rates have been reduced to Tk 2 per minute during peak hours from 8am to 8pm while for the 'professional' customers, tariffs have been reduced to Tk 1 per minute during the peak hours from 8am to 8pm.

The Banglalink CEO said the company attained growth not only in terms of customers' number but also in

revenue earning.

"We are investing a lot of our profits in expansion of our network, developing infrastructure and for the people," Reichelt continued.

About the imposition of Tk 900 as tax on SIM (subscriber identity module) cards in the last budget, the Banglalink CEO requested the government not to impose any new taxes in the upcoming budget.

The growth of mobile phone companies in the country suffered twice once at the time of imposing taxes on SIM cards and then on the government's decision of making registration mandatory for the subscribers, he observed.

"I am confident that the government will look into the matter and would not increase the taxes in the upcoming budget," he hoped.

The Banglalink CEO suggested that the government follow the examples of the telecoms sectors of India, Pakistan and Malaysia in this regard.

Chief Commercial Officer of Banglalink Mehboob Chowdhury was also present at the press conference.



Chief Executive Officer of mobile phone operator Banglalink Lars P Reichelt (L) speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday to announce the company's reaching two million subscribers base and the launch of a 20-day promotional campaign. Chief Commercial Officer Mehboob Chowdhury is also seen.