

# US-Bangla eyeing to make Sylhet more accessible

Set to introduce three new routes from the northeastern city

MAHMUDUL HASAN

US-Bangla Airlines, the largest local private airline in terms of fleet size, plans to open new routes for Bangladesh's domestic travellers, especially to and from Sylhet.

From the middle of this year, the airline will begin flights on new routes: Sylhet-Chattoogram, Sylhet-Cox's Bazar, Jashore-Chattoogram and Jashore-Sylhet.

Currently, there are eight commercial airports in Bangladesh and each destination can only be reached through the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka.

"If the new routes are introduced, passengers will be able to travel between most airports without a transit at HSIA," said Sikder Mezbahuddin Ahmed, chief executive officer of US-Bangla Airlines, during a press conference at a hotel in Sylhet on Sunday.

As a part of their plans, the airline added a brand new 72-seater ATR72-600 aircraft to their fleet last week on a ten-year lease. The vessel is manufactured by ATR (Aerei da Trasporto Regionale), a joint venture by French aerospace company Airbus and Italian aviation group Aeritalia.

A group of journalists from Dhaka boarded the new aircraft, which carried them to the press conference in Sylhet in its maiden voyage.

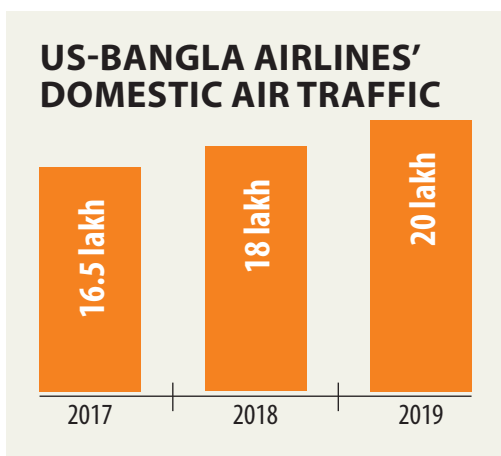
Four more aircraft of similar build will arrive within the next few months.

Launched in July 2014 with the motto 'Fly Fast, Fly Safe', US-Bangla is now trying to modernise its fleet with fifth generation airships.

The airline previously added five of ATR 72-600 aircraft to its fleet, featuring four Boeing 737-800 and three DASH8-Q400 planes. With the latest addition, US-Bangla's fleet size stands

**AT A GLANCE**

- » Established in July 2014 by US-Bangla Group
- » Initially operated with two Bombardier built DASH 8-Q400
- » Now has a fleet of 13
  - four Boeing 737-800
  - Three DASH8-Q400
  - Six ATR72-600
- » It made global headlines in 2018 when its plane crashed in Nepal killing 51
- » Plans to buy four more ATR72-600 aircraft this year



less fuel," Ahmed added. To cope with the new technologies, the airline conducted pilot training programmes, led by experienced foreign instructors and pilots, according to US-Bangla officials.

"We are the biggest local private airline but this does not make us proud. What we are proud of is that we kept our promise to our valued customers by providing safe and comfortable flights with brand new aircrafts, featuring the best technologies," Ahmed said.

Asked about the possibility of operating flights on routes with less equipped airports, he said the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh has already taken the initiative to upgrade airports and all relevant infrastructure as needed.

The airline launches 26 flights to and from domestic locations such as Chattoogram, Cox's Bazar, Jashore, Saidpur, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Barishal and Dhaka each day.

READ MORE ON B3

# Graft, regulatory barriers stand in the way of UK investment

High commissioner says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Uncertainty in regulatory regime and corruption choke the flow of British investment to Bangladesh, said Robert Chatterton Dickson, the UK envoy in Dhaka, yesterday.

A British firm had planned to invest a huge amount in Bangladesh, but it abandoned the plan due to corruption and judicial barriers here, he said.

Dickson was delivering a lecture on the "Importance of international trade" organised by the Department of International Business of Dhaka University in the business faculty's auditorium.

The high commissioner, however, did not disclose the name of the company.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a vital role in upskilling a workforce, he said.

"Bangladesh has done remarkably well in the 50 years since its independence -- something the country can be genuinely proud of. But, to maintain that growth Bangladesh needs to know how FDI can provide more jobs and more capital."

The UK and Bangladesh still have a good trade relationship, and the UK will be developing new partnerships and building on historic friendships, he added. Dickson said he came to know from the British media's commentary during 1971 that the UK had been on the side of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has the fastest growing economy in the world and the UK is its largest single market and second largest source of international investment, he said.

Marks and Spencer, Unilever, HSBC and Standard Chartered are some of the British companies, which are doing well in Bangladesh, he said.



Robert Chatterton Dickson

There are now some 600,000 British citizens of Bangladeshi heritage in the UK, which include four members of the parliament, he added.

"On Brexit, the high commissioner said: "For the first time since 1973, we are a fully sovereign country and able to control our own destiny."

The British government will work with the EU to negotiate a free trade agreement by the year end along with drawing on other recent agreements, such as the ones between the EU and Canada, he said.

"That should be the core of our future relationship."

Bangladesh needs to boost its value chain and diversify its exports to maintain growth in the presence of such free trade deals, he said.

Among others, Shobod Deba Nath, chairman of the Department of International Business of Dhaka University, and Derek Griffiths, head of trade at the British high commission, attended the event along with around 200 students of the university.

# More participatory and inclusive budget next year

NBR seeks budget proposals from think-tanks, lenders

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The revenue authority has sought proposals from a wide range of stakeholders, including ministries, think-tanks and international lenders, apart from trade bodies as it kick-starts its preparations to frame revenue measures for fiscal 2020-21.

"In the past we used to look for proposals from trade bodies only," said an official of the National Board of Revenue. This time, the revenue authority is reaching out to other stakeholders such as think-tanks, multilateral agencies and government bodies to make fiscal measures more participatory and inclusive.

The value-added tax wing of the NBR issued letters in this regard on Sunday.

The official believes the suggestions from the stakeholders will help them boost revenue collection as opposed to the proposals from trade bodies, who usually ask for waivers and discounts.

By February 27, opinions and recommendations will have to be submitted on VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012, the rules related to the law, Excises and Salt Act as well as notifications and orders related to the legislations.

The measures will increase revenue collection, ease the process of doing business and remove procedural complexities regarding revenue matters, according to the letters. "And budgetary exercise is part of that process," the official added.

The NBR logged more than 85 per cent of the total revenue of Tk 252,056 crore the state collected in fiscal 2018-19 to execute its annual expenditure plans.

VAT was the biggest source of revenue followed by income tax and import tariff, according to data from the finance ministry and the NBR.

# Light engineering to help diversify export basket

Says Salman F Rahman, PM's private industry and investment adviser

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Over-reliance on garment industry is Bangladesh's main weakness, said Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the prime minister.

"We have to diversify our export basket and products, in which light engineering sector will play a crucial role," he said yesterday at the inaugural ceremony of the two-day 'Light engineering trade fair' organised by Brac at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The public-private partnership is one of the reasons light engineering sector is flourishing in Bangladesh, he said.

The veteran businessman also lauded the gender-inclusive strategy of Brac and the steps the world's largest non-governmental organisation has taken to give a boost to the light engineering sector.

At the event, Manfred Fernholz, head of the food and nutrition security and sustainable development section of the European Union Delegation in Bangladesh, urged the government and the financial institutions to extend their support to the small engineering sector.

The contribution of the light engineering sector measures up to 2.2 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP, Fernholz said.

"Yet, the sector has been suffering from lack of tech and financial support, skills development, infrastructure, which in turn, makes the sector less competitive."



Centre, Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the prime minister, attends the inaugural ceremony of the two-day 'Light engineering trade fair' organised by Brac at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Capital machinery has only 1 per cent import duty and no value-added tax, said Abdur Razzak, president of the Bangladesh Engineering Industry Owners Association.

"But 15 per cent VAT on local production of the same capital machinery has been imposed to be effective from July 1 this year. We want the VAT to be entirely lifted."

They spoke on the sidelines of the fair being held under Brac's 'Pro-poor growth of rural enterprises through sustainable skills-development' (PROGRESS) project funded by the European Union.

Some 58 businesses from 41 districts showcased their products at the showcase. The three-year PROGRESS project began

in February 2017 to support the growth of the country's light engineering sector by developing dynamic and competitive micro and cottage enterprises.

Diversification of light engineering sector depends on effective policy support, public-private partnerships, technical and business information, innovation and sustainable development of technology and related products, experts said at the inaugural ceremony. Capacity development of industries, research and development facilities and removal of other barriers are also needed to flourish the sector, they said.

"We, as an organisation, continue to focus on skills development in our 2020-2025 strategy as a committed development partner of the Bangladesh government," said Asif Saleh, chair of the event and executive director of Brac.

To effectively grow the skills development sector, Bangladesh must turn around its conventional perception about degree-based education and remove the stigma attached to vocational education, he further said.

Currently, 47 per cent of university graduates in Bangladesh are unemployed and the solution lies in skills-based education focusing on the contemporary and future market needs, he said.

"Bangladesh government is doing the right thing by prioritising the light engineering sector in the Mujib Barsha of 2020."

READ MORE ON B3

# CASHING IN ON CRICKET MANIA

Cottage industry making amateur bats rakes in Tk 15cr a year

HABIBUR RAHMAN, from Pirojpur

Cricket is close to religion in the Indian subcontinent, it is often said.

Bangladesh was late to the party, but thanks to the exploits of Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mashrafe bin Mortaza over the past decade the fervour for the game is reaching the same levels as its neighbours.

When love for the sport began to spread countrywide, a carpenter from a remote village in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila cashed in on the fervour. Abdul Latif Bepary, who passed away in 2012, was said to be the country's first carpenter to produce locally made cricket bats.

Born at Uribuniya village on the bank of river Belua, Bepary travelled to Dhaka for work in the 1980s. There, he was introduced to Sirajul Islam Khan, owner of the Khelarsathi sports shop in the capital's Gulistan area.

Under Khelarsathi's employment, Bepary made assorted sporting goods, mainly wooden awards, with great skill.

"One day, the shop owner called in Bepary and showed him some cricket bats imported from Pakistan. He asked if he could replicate it," said Abul Kalam, 59, a relative of Bepary, who owns a cricket bat factory at Binna village in the upazila.

What transpired next was the birth of the country's first cricket bat, according to Kalam.

READ MORE ON B3



HABIBUR RAHMAN

Nesarabad upazila in Pirojpur is said to be the birthplace of local cricket bat manufacturing companies. Here, non-international standard bats for casual use are made in the thousands each year. From sculpting the wood to burnishing and packaging finished products, some 200 factories laced all over the area have been producing cricket bats since 1997.

# Small businesses suffer as China virus shuts communities

AFP, Beijing

Wang Li's guesthouse sits a stone's throw from the Great Wall, an idyllic setting for a weekend getaway. But in these uncertain times of the new coronavirus, Wang and her family are the only occupants.

The 35-year-old woman now spends her days disinfecting Yingfangyuan Farmhouse and its empty restaurant near Beijing, as millions of people across the country stay home, either under government orders or out of caution.

As the virus claims more lives and infects thousands of people every day, it is also taking a toll on the country's small businesses that rely on spending from China's growing middle-class.

"We used to be able to have up to 10 tables of guests a day during this period," she told AFP. "There is no one now." While she usually earns around 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) during the Lunar New Year holiday, her business was closed this year.

"We rely on this for our livelihood. We can only wait for the epidemic to pass," she said, noting that she will face problems if the situation persists for more than two months.

"I don't have other (backup) plans." Across Beijing's rural outskirts, guesthouses, restaurants



**A woman wearing a facemask as a preventative measure, looks at empty supermarket shelves, which used for stacking paper towels, in Hong Kong on February 5.**

and tourist attractions have been deserted for almost two weeks.

The Great Wall and Ming dynasty tombs remain closed and people are urged to stay home -- with many working remotely even after the Spring Festival break ended.

Many bus and train services have been suspended across the country, and central Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, has effectively been locked down.

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gatherings that have not been held -- in line with officials' advice. At the Shijihualian Supermarket in Heishanzhai village, boxes of Lunar New Year goods, including food items such as persimmons, remain stacked and unsold.

"They are bought as gifts, but people have not been visiting their relatives this year," said its shopkeeper surnamed Yang.

"With no relatives to host this year, it will take time for them to deplete their supplies." With analysts warning that the virus

could cut into the country's already slowing economy, China's central bank has urged financial institutions to continue stepping up support for small and micro enterprises.

But this has not stopped business owners from fretting over an uncertain future.

Adding to the isolation of rural communities, villages have closed themselves off from "outsiders" in a bid to ensure the new coronavirus, which has claimed more than 900 lives, stays out.

Bright red banners proclaiming the importance of epidemic prevention drape across the entrances of villages, and masked volunteers stand guard at each entry point.

Residents who would have typically returned to work in cities after the Spring Festival break are still in their hometowns as well.

In the Heishanzhai village north of Beijing, there are blockades on roads leading into its residential areas. "We stopped allowing people in from the second day of the Lunar New Year," said Zhang Xinao, a 25-year-old volunteer manning one of the entrances.

"We also disinfect the entire village every day in the mornings and afternoons," he told AFP, as another volunteer walked around spraying a can of disinfectant.



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FROM PAGE B4

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Monirul Haque Joarder, director for flight operations of US-Bangla; Moshliq Azam, head of training; Musa Mollah, director of administration; and Md Kamrul Islam, general manager-public relations, also spoke on the occasion.



## CASHING IN ON CRICKET MANIA

FROM PAGE B4

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According to various cricket bat producers, the business began to spread widely in Nesarabad upazila from 1997, after Bangladesh won the ICC Trophy, the qualification tournament for the 1999 Cricket World Cup, in Malaysia.

Following Bangladesh's victory, the demand for cricket bats rose suddenly as did the people's love for cricket, they said.

To make cricket bats, ideally light wooden logs are needed. In Bangladesh's case, the most suitable wood for the purpose was Gewa wood, which is found in the Sundarbans.

At first, the logs were widely used but after the government banned the cutting of Gewa trees in the mangrove forest, producers switched to kadam (burflower-tree) and hog plum logs, which are very low in quality. Generally, bats of nine different sizes are made. The prices range from Tk 200-250 depending on size, said Maksudur Rahman, owner of a cricket bat factory at Jilbari village.

The production of cricket bats has created working opportunities for more than 2,000 people, both male and female, in the upazila, said Mizanur Rahman, who owns another

factory in the village.

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The industry has provided job opportunities for hundreds of people in Nesarabad. With many having mastered the technique of cricket bat making, new factories are opening up often.

Women have also benefitted as the factories provide a source of income. It is now commonplace to see women put the finishing touches on the bats, such as the burnish and logos. Women working at the factories earn between Tk 200-250, said Runu Begum of Jilbari village.

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To get higher quality logs, the government needs to lend its support.

"Only then will the factories be able to produce high-standard bats," he added.



## Light engineering to help diversify export basket

FROM PAGE B4

A study by the project shows that the business productivity of light engineering workshop owners increased by 29 per cent after the intervention of the project.

Around 500 people received training and support facilities to start their own businesses. Of them, 223 were female.

Approximately 9,865 youth received apprenticeship-based training, 98.65 per cent of them were placed in jobs.

Some 5,182 light engineering workshop owners received technical upgrade training. Besides, 5,289 workshop owners received training on fair work conditions and health and safety at work.

Around 700 market committees received gender awareness and access to finance training under the Brac project.

### Officeclick received huge response from a large number of visitors in BASIS SOFT EXPO 2020

Officeclick, a sister concern of Orogenic Resources (BD) Limited, participated at the 16th BASIS SOFT EXPO 2020 (February 6 -9) to showcase their unique B2B e-commerce services. A 15% discount was offered on MRP for the visitors who ordered from the Officeclick pavilion.

### Consultant Wanted

An international reputed Commission Agency urgently requires Personnel for immediate appointment as **CONSULTANT** on the following terms:  
**Qualification:** University Graduate having well conversant with English language.  
**Experience:** Minimum 5 years.  
**Computer:** Must have efficiency in computer operation with E-mail use.  
**Remuneration:** Negotiable  
Potential candidates are requested to apply in confidence with Curriculum Vitae, along with 02 copies of color photos and copies of all credentials to: The Managing Director, **INTERMODAL PTE LTD.**, Iqbal Ehasan, 73 Agrabad C/A, Chittagong, Bangladesh by 17th February 2020 positively.

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AFP, Beijing

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Walton Group's top officials cut a cake to launch the company's electrical appliance brand, Safe, at Walton Factory in Gazipur's Chandra area recently.

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Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, CEO of NCC Bank, and Masihul Huq Chowdhury, CEO of Community Bank, sign a remittance drawing agreement between the banks at the former's head office in Dhaka yesterday.



Sikder Mezbahuddin Ahmed, CEO of US-Bangla Airlines, speaks at a press conference at a hotel in Sylhet on Sunday.

## Digital campaigns in murky waters

FROM PAGE B1

Ashikul Alam Khan, CEO of priyoshop.com, said the Tk 600 crore being paid through the legal channel represented a tiny part of Facebook and Google's market here. The remaining Tk 1,400 crore will never come under Bangladesh's books, he added.

"Our policymakers can also consider another way. We are now paying 43.75 per cent tax and if the government reduces it and makes the process simpler, that might have a positive impact both in terms of government revenue and compliance," said Khan.

Khan also mentioned that while digital companies such as Uber, Daraz and Foodpanda were paying their digital campaign bills from abroad, local companies were claiming that the process was, in effect, money laundering.

"We don't know how much money exactly they are spending for that, so who can say if the market size of Bangladesh's digital campaigns is not Tk 5,000 crore?" he questioned.

Muhammad Risalat Siddique, chairman of digital and social media marketing agency Analyzen, said there was no level playing field when it came to digital spending.

"Companies that want to be compliant will have to pay extra," said Siddique, also chairman of the standing committee of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) on digital marketing. He urged the government to simplify the process to help companies be compliant.

Ashish Chakraborty, director and chief commercial officer of SSL Wireless, said the process was so complex that companies

would have to "spend more" to comply with regulations of Bangladesh Bank and the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

"I am quite certain that if we can simplify the process a bit more, more companies will use the standard authenticated channel and that will help to ensure bringing in government revenue," he added.

Chakraborty also proposed formulating a separate tax structure for local and international companies. This was seconded by Risalat Siddique. ABM Javed Sultan, head of digital business of Prothom Alo, said there were currently about 1,800 Bangladeshi websites earning from Google.

However, it is just 8 per cent of what Google was earning from the country, he added. Waiz Rahim, CEO of Deligram, said the law of the land was so complex that local companies found it confusing to comply with it.

"We, the digital commerce industry, need end-to-end support from the government, like that provided to the garment sector, and the ICT ministry can play a role here," he said.

Rahim said the NBR, with its process and law complexities, was trying to "squeeze the blood flow" of Digital Bangladesh.

Md Saimum Hossain, assistant professor of finance at the University of Dhaka, said the difference between unfair competition and fair play and compliance and non-compliance were slowly eroding.

Awareness needs to be ensured to ensure compliance alongside simplification of the process, he said.

Mastercard Country Manager Syed Mohammad Kamal and Mindscape Director Akif Ahmed attended the discussion.

## Cashing in on cricket mania

FROM PAGE B4

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Mohammad Rassel, CEO of Evaly, an online market, receives two 'Fastest growing brand and leader' awards, presented by Asia One magazine, in the category of 'Services-E-commerce' at a recent event in Bangkok.

## Meera Agro's listing hits a snag

FROM PAGE B1

The issuer has appointed Narayan Roy without knowing that he was running a fraud firm on the name of Pinaki & Company. "Actually, it is tough for a small company to know who is a fraud and who is not." Just after being informed of the issue, AAA Finance & Investment has withdrawn the application of qualified investor offering. "We know that it is totally illegal. How a false auditor auditing reports and none is taking steps against him? Is there no one to stop such fraud auditors?"

Rahman said now they are assigning another auditor and will resubmit the draft prospectus, which is going to be costly for them too.

"This is a surprise to us," said Syed Abdullah-Al Mamun, managing director of Meera Agro, adding that the seed producer did not appoint the audit firm. The episode can be viewed as a foot note in the long list of irregularities centring the stock market, which is now battling a bad rap.

"This is how investors' confidence in the market plummets," said Abdul Mannan, a stock investor. Auditors should be accountable for their works.

"A fraud auditor is working but none is taking steps against him. This is not good sign for the country," he added.

Mohammad Mohiuddin Ahmed, executive director of Financial Reports Monitoring Division at Financial Reporting Council (FRC), said he will check the issue but cannot take any punitive action. "[Roy] is a common man -- not an auditor. I can only punish the company."

But even then, FRC is not yet authorised to take actions against the companies.

FRC was established in 2016 by the government under the Financial Reporting Act with the view to ensure transparency in financial reports of listed and non-listed companies.

"The DSE and BSEC can punish both the issue manager and the company," Ahmed added.

Contacted, BSEC spokesperson Saifur Rahman, passed the responsibility of handing out punishment to the DSE. "As the auditor wrote the letter to the DSE, they should do something first. If the DSE refers the issue to us we will take steps," said Rahman, also executive director of BSEC.

## India's car sales fall in January

REUTERS, New Delhi

Car sales in India fell for the 15th consecutive month in January, as slowing economic growth and rising cost of car ownership made consumers reluctant to spend, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) said on Monday.

Passenger vehicle sales fell 6.2 per cent in January to 262,714 units from 280,091 units in 2019. But sales of sport-utility vehicles (SUVs) rose 2.6 per cent, helped by the launch of new models, data released by SIAM showed.

Sales of motorbikes and scooters, widely seen as an indicator of the health of the rural economy, fell 16 per cent in January, while sales of trucks, a barometer of overall economic growth, dropped 14 per cent.

## Light engineering to help diversify export basket

FROM PAGE B4

A study by the project shows that the business productivity of light engineering workshop owners increased by 29 per cent after the intervention of the project. Around 500 people received training and support facilities to start their own businesses. Of them, 223 were female.

Approximately 9,865 youth received apprenticeship-based training, 98.65 per cent of them were placed in jobs. Some 5,182 light engineering workshop owners received technical upgrade training. Besides, 5,289 workshop owners received training on fair work conditions and health and safety at work.

Around 700 market committees received gender awareness and access to finance training under the Brac project.

## No shortage of garlic, ginger or other spices

FROM PAGE B1

Onion prices have started to drop in India too following a good harvest and the neighbouring country plans to resume exports of the product soon.

The commerce minister also mentioned that the government is getting a report from the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries on what impact the coronavirus pandemic might have on businesses, including the export-oriented industries that depend largely on China for intermediate materials and capital machinery. The country's apex trade body sought a few more days to prepare the report.

## Officeclick received huge response from a large number of visitors in BASIS SOFT EXPO 2020

Officeclick, a sister concern of Orogenic Resources (BD) Limited, participated at the 16th BASIS SOFT EXPO 2020 (February 6-9) to showcase their unique B2B e-commerce services. A 15% discount was offered on MRP for the visitors who ordered from the Officeclick pavilion.

## Consultant Wanted

An international reputed Commission Agency urgently requires Personnel for immediate appointment as **CONSULTANT** on the following terms:  
**Qualification:** University Graduate having well conversant with English language.  
**Experience:** Minimum 5 years.  
**Computer:** Must have efficiency in computer operation with E-mail use.  
**Remuneration:** Negotiable  
Potential candidates are requested to apply in confidence with Curriculum Vitae, along with 02 copies of color photos and copies of all credentials to: The Managing Director, INTERMODAL PTE LTD., Iqbal Ehaban, 73 Agrabad C/A, Chittagong, Bangladesh by 17th February 2020 positively.

# US-Bangla eyeing to make Sylhet more accessible

Set to introduce three new routes from the northeastern city

MAHMUDUL HASAN

US-Bangla Airlines, the largest local private airline in terms of fleet size, plans to open new routes for Bangladesh's domestic travellers, especially to and from Sylhet.

From the middle of this year, the airline will begin flights on new routes: Sylhet-Chattoogram, Sylhet-Cox's Bazar, Jashore-Chattoogram and Jashore-Sylhet.

Currently, there are eight commercial airports in Bangladesh and each destination can only be reached through the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka.

"If the new routes are introduced, passengers will be able to travel between most airports without a transit at HSIA," said Sikder Mezbahuddin Ahmed, chief executive officer of US-Bangla Airlines, during a press conference at a hotel in Sylhet on Sunday.

As a part of their plans, the airline added a brand new 72-seater ATR72-600 aircraft to their fleet last week on a ten-year lease. The vessel is manufactured by ATR (Aerei da Trasporto Regionale), a joint venture by French aerospace company Airbus and Italian aviation group Aeritalia.

A group of journalists from Dhaka boarded the new aircraft, which carried them to the press conference in Sylhet in its maiden voyage.

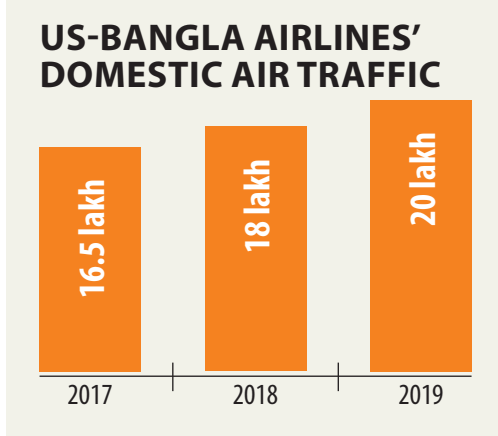
Four more aircraft of similar build will arrive within the next few months.

Launched in July 2014 with the motto 'Fly Fast, Fly Safe', US-Bangla is now trying to modernise its fleet with fifth generation airships.

The airline previously added five of ATR 72-600 aircraft to its fleet, featuring four Boeing 737-800 and three DASH8-Q400 planes. With the latest addition, US-Bangla's fleet size stands

**AT A GLANCE**

- Established in July 2014 by US-Bangla Group
- Initially operated with two Bombardier built DASH 8-Q400
- Now has a fleet of 13
  - four Boeing 737-800
  - Three DASH8-Q400
  - Six ATR72-600
- It made global headlines in 2018 when its plane crashed in Nepal killing 51
- Plans to buy four more ATR72-600 aircraft this year



at 13, the country's second largest overall after national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

"Flying in the ATR72-600, which is equipped with a glass technology cockpit, passengers will now feel safer," Ahmed said.

A glass cockpit is an aircraft cockpit that features electronic (digital) flight instrument displays, typically large LCD screens, rather than the traditional analogue dials and gauges.

Ahmed touted the new aircraft as the best for short-haul destinations in Bangladesh. It has various advanced technologies, such as better air-conditioning and cabin pressurisation system. Its engine is also 6 per cent more powerful and more fuel efficient than its predecessor model, the ATR72-500, he said.

"The plane's most interesting feature is that it has a powerful engine but consumes 20 per cent

less fuel," Ahmed added.

To cope with the new technologies, the airline conducted pilot training programmes, led by experienced foreign instructors and pilots, according to US-Bangla officials.

"We are the biggest local private airline but this does not make us proud. What we are proud of is that we kept our promise to our valued customers by providing safe and comfortable flights with brand new aircrafts, featuring the best technologies," Ahmed said.

Asked about the possibility of operating flights on routes with less equipped airports, he said the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh has already taken the initiative to upgrade airports and all relevant infrastructure as needed.

The airline launches 26 flights to and from domestic locations such as Chattoogram, Cox's Bazar, Jashore, Saidpur, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Barishal and Dhaka each day.

READ MORE ON B3

# Graft, regulatory barriers stand in the way of UK investment

High commissioner says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Uncertainty in regulatory regime and corruption choke the flow of British investment to Bangladesh, said Robert Chatterton Dickson, the UK envoy in Dhaka, yesterday.

A British firm had planned to invest a huge amount in Bangladesh, but it abandoned the plan due to corruption and judicial barriers here, he said.

Dickson was delivering a lecture on the "Importance of international trade" organised by the Department of International Business of Dhaka University in the business faculty's auditorium.

The high commissioner, however, did not disclose the name of the company.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a vital role in upskilling a workforce, he said.

"Bangladesh has done remarkably well in the 50 years since its independence -- something the country can be genuinely proud of. But, to maintain that growth Bangladesh needs to know how FDI can provide more jobs and more capital."

The UK and Bangladesh still have a good trade relationship, and the UK will be developing new partnerships and building on historic friendships, he added. Dickson said he came to know from the British media's commentary during 1971 that the UK had been on the side of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has the fastest growing economy in the world and the UK is its largest single market and second largest source of international investment, he said.

Marks and Spencer, Unilever, HSBC and Standard Chartered are some of the British companies, which are doing well in Bangladesh, he said.



Robert Chatterton Dickson

There are now some 600,000 British citizens of Bangladeshi heritage in the UK, which include four members of the parliament, he added.

"On Brexit, the high commissioner said: "For the first time since 1973, we are a fully sovereign country and able to control our own destiny."

The British government will work with the EU to negotiate a free trade agreement by the year end along with drawing on other recent agreements, such as the ones between the EU and Canada, he said.

"That should be the core of our future relationship."

Bangladesh needs to boost its value chain and diversify its exports to maintain growth in the presence of such free trade deals, he said.

Among others, Shobod Deba Nath, chairman of the Department of International Business of Dhaka University, and Derek Griffiths, head of trade at the British high commission, attended the event along with around 200 students of the university.

# More participatory and inclusive budget next year

NBR seeks budget proposals from think-tanks, lenders

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The revenue authority has sought proposals from a wide range of stakeholders, including ministries, think-tanks and international lenders, apart from trade bodies as it kick-starts its preparations to frame revenue measures for fiscal 2020-21.

"In the past we used to look for proposals from trade bodies only," said an official of the National Board of Revenue. This time, the revenue authority is reaching out to other stakeholders such as think-tanks, multilateral agencies and government bodies to make fiscal measures more participatory and inclusive.

The value-added tax wing of the NBR issued letters in this regard on Sunday.

The official believes the suggestions from the stakeholders will help them boost revenue collection as opposed to the proposals from trade bodies, who usually ask for waivers and discounts.

By February 27, opinions and recommendations will have to be submitted on VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012, the rules related to the law, Excises and Salt Act as well as notifications and orders related to the legislations.

The measures will increase revenue collection, ease the process of doing business and remove procedural complexities regarding revenue matters, according to the letters. "And budgetary exercise is part of that process," the official added.

The NBR logged more than 85 per cent of the total revenue of Tk 252,056 crore the state collected in fiscal 2018-19 to execute its annual expenditure plans.

VAT was the biggest source of revenue followed by income tax and import tariff, according to data from the finance ministry and the NBR.

# Light engineering to help diversify export basket

Says Salman F Rahman, PM's private industry and investment adviser

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Over-reliance on garment industry is Bangladesh's main weakness, said Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the prime minister.

"We have to diversify our export basket and products, in which light engineering sector will play a crucial role," he said yesterday at the inaugural ceremony of the two-day 'Light engineering trade fair' organised by Brac at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The public-private partnership is one of the reasons light engineering sector is flourishing in Bangladesh, he said.

The veteran businessman also lauded the gender-inclusive strategy of Brac and the steps the world's largest non-governmental organisation has taken to give a boost to the light engineering sector.

At the event, Manfred Fernholz, head of the food and nutrition security and sustainable development section of the European Union Delegation in Bangladesh, urged the government and the financial institutions to extend their support to the small engineering sector.

The contribution of the light engineering sector measures up to 2.2 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP, Fernholz said.

"Yet, the sector has been suffering from lack of tech and financial support, skills development, infrastructure, which in turn, makes the sector less competitive."



Centre, Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the prime minister, attends the inaugural ceremony of the two-day 'Light engineering trade fair' organised by Brac at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Capital machinery has only 1 per cent import duty and no value-added tax, said Abdur Razzak, president of the Bangladesh Engineering Industry Owners Association.

"But 15 per cent VAT on local production of the same capital machinery has been imposed to be effective from July 1 this year. We want the VAT to be entirely lifted."

They spoke on the sidelines of the fair being held under Brac's 'Pro-poor growth of rural enterprises through sustainable skills-development' (PROGRESS) project funded by the European Union.

Some 58 businesses from 41 districts showcased their products at the showcase. The three-year PROGRESS project began

in February 2017 to support the growth of the country's light engineering sector by developing dynamic and competitive micro and cottage enterprises.

Diversification of light engineering sector depends on effective policy support, public-private partnerships, technical and business information, innovation and sustainable development of technology and related products, experts said at the inaugural ceremony. Capacity development of industries, research and development facilities and removal of other barriers are also needed to flourish the sector, they said.

"We, as an organisation, continue to focus on skills development in our 2020-2025 strategy as a committed development partner of the Bangladesh government," said Asif Saleh, chair of the event and executive director of Brac.

To effectively grow the skills development sector, Bangladesh must turn around its conventional perception about degree-based education and remove the stigma attached to vocational education, he further said.

Currently, 47 per cent of university graduates in Bangladesh are unemployed and the solution lies in skills-based education focusing on the contemporary and future market needs, he said.

"Bangladesh government is doing the right thing by prioritising the light engineering sector in the Mujib Barsha of 2020."

READ MORE ON B3

# CASHING IN ON CRICKET MANIA

## Cottage industry making amateur bats rakes in Tk 15cr a year

HABIBUR RAHMAN, from Pirojpur

Cricket is close to religion in the Indian subcontinent, it is often said.

Bangladesh was late to the party, but thanks to the exploits of Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mashrafe bin Mortaza over the past decade the fervour for the game is reaching the same levels as its neighbours.

When love for the sport began to spread countrywide, a carpenter from a remote village in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila cashed in on the fervour. Abdul Latif Bepary, who passed away in 2012, was said to be the country's first carpenter to produce locally made cricket bats.

Born at Uribuniya village on the bank of river Belua, Bepary travelled to Dhaka for work in the 1980s. There, he was introduced to Sirajul Islam Khan, owner of the Khelarsathi sports shop in the capital's Gulistan area.

Under Khelarsathi's employment, Bepary made assorted sporting goods, mainly wooden awards, with great skill.

"One day, the shop owner called in Bepary and showed him some cricket bats imported from Pakistan. He asked if he could replicate it," said Abul Kalam, 59, a relative of Bepary, who owns a cricket bat factory at Binna village in the upazila.

What transpired next was the birth of the country's first cricket bat, according to Kalam.

READ MORE ON B3



HABIBUR RAHMAN

Nesarabad upazila in Pirojpur is said to be the birthplace of local cricket bat manufacturing companies. Here, non-international standard bats for casual use are made in the thousands each year. From sculpting the wood to burnishing and packaging finished products, some 200 factories laced all over the area have been producing cricket bats since 1997.