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Central Insurance opens branch at Mirpur

The Mirpur Branch of Central Insurance Company Ltd was opened at 107, Senpara Parbata, Mirpur in the city on Wednesday, says a press release.

A K M Azizur Rahman, Chairman of the company, inaugurated the branch as chief guest.

Md Golam Kibria, Vice-Chairman, Alhaj Md Abdul Maleque, immediate past chairman, and Shaheda Akter, Md Tayabur Rahman, Md Masud Hossain, Sufia Kabir, Haji M A Malek, Alhaj Md Shafi, Alhaj Md Yousuf Chowdhury, Alhaj Md Abu Taher Chowdhury, Mohammed Musa, Md Nurul Islam, Abu Mohammad, Mir Rahmat Ali, Hosne Arab Begum, Shah Alam Chowdhury, Shahida Nazim, Nabab Siraj-Ud-Dowla and Tulu Kalimullah, directors of the company along with the high officials of the banks and business houses were present on the occasion.

The chairman, in his brief speech, highlighted the role of general insurance in the economic development of a country like Bangladesh.

He also emphasised the need to expand the activities of the company for bringing professional services to the door-steps of the insuring clients.

The chairman expressed confidence that the Central Insurance Company is capable of rendering expert services to the valued clients. The Managing Director (current charge) Md Hashmat Ali also spoke on the occasion.

New circular in China Banks prohibited from using funds on stock market

BEIJING, June 6: The People's Bank of China (PBC), the central bank, yesterday issued a circular prohibiting banks from using funds on the stock market in any way, Xinhua reported, says AFP.

The central bank ordered all commercial banks to halt all involvement in trusts, investments, and stock businesses within 10 days, the official news agency said.

Inter-bank borrowing and lending for trust and investment companies, security dealers, and other non-banking institutions must come under the strict supervision of PBC branches, the circular said.

Overdrafts for stock trading were strictly prohibited and enterprises may not use bank loans to sell or buy shares.

Commercial bank executives would be removed from their posts if their banks were found to be involved in stock trading in direct or indirect ways, it said.

In related news, starting October 1, securities dealers found manipulating stock trading would be dealt with in accordance with the revised criminal law, it said, without giving details.

Saudi Arabia to build oil refinery in China

RIYADH, June 6: Saudi Arabia may build a refinery in China to boost its crude-oil exports there to a million barrels per day (BPD) by 2000, a Chinese official in Riyadh said yesterday, reports AFP.

China Petrochemical Engineering (Sinopec) President Sheng Huanren told reporters Beijing was considering Saudi participation in building the refinery "to increase purchases of Saudi crude and respond to the growing demand."

China now imports more than 300,000 BPD of crude, mostly from Saudi Arabia, he said.

Saudi official, who asked not to be identified, told that the kingdom "wants a long-term oil agreement with Beijing on building several refineries to treat Saudi crude and distribution centres in China."

Sheng and the delegation accompanying him were expected in the eastern industrial city of Dhafran of Friday to discuss "bilateral cooperation in energy" with Aramco officials, the Saudi official said.

Before coming to Riyadh, the Chinese delegation visited Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

A Kuwaiti oil officials said Tuesday that the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation discussed with Sheng the possibility of the emirate investing in China's refinery sector so as to increase Kuwaiti exports of crude there.

In March, Kuwait exported 500,000 barrels of crude to China but it does not have a regular delivery contract for the country whose refineries are not adapted for its type of crude.

Kuwait, which produces two million BPD in accordance with its organization of petroleum exporting countries quota, is seeking to open new markets for its crude exports in Asia, especially in Pakistan, India and Thailand.

Banks to confiscate property of defaulters without going to court Pakistan announces new laws to recover unpaid loans

KARACHI, June 6: Pakistan announced tough new laws Thursday to recover more than three billion dollars in unpaid bank loans, reports AP.

The new laws give state-owned banks and financial institutions the authority to confiscate the property of loan defaulters without going to court. State Bank governor Mohammed Yaqub told reporters.

The laws also give sweeping powers to the banking courts to foreclose or sell the property of defaulters, he said.

Yaqub said outstanding loans have driven the banks to the verge of bankruptcy. Since January 1990, he said, massive

loans have been written off by banks under pressure from the government of the day, he said.

The unpaid loans account for roughly 33 per cent of the total assets of the state-owned commercial banks and financial institutions.

Pakistan's free enterprise Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has promised to privatise all the state-owned banks. But right now there are few buyers, largely because the banks are in such poor financial condition, said Yaqub.

The list of loan defaulters, said Yaqub, reads like a "who's who" in Pakistan. It includes about 8000 major industrial

groups, businessmen, landowners and politicians, he said.

"These laws will make the courts more effective and more competent," he said.

As well, Yaqub said greater care is being taken to appoint competent professionals to head the banks and financial institutions. They have strict orders to pursue loan defaulters more vigorously regardless of their political affiliation, said Yaqub.

He said there is a one-time offer for loan defaulters to voluntarily pay their outstanding accounts.

But the offer runs out in six months, he said.

Pak forex reserve crosses \$ 1b mark

ISLAMABAD, June 6: Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves crossed the one billion US dollar mark on May 31, according to figures released yesterday by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), reports Xinhua.

The weekly statement by SBP said that by the end of May the foreign exchange reserves inside Pakistan stood at 518.5 million dollars while those outside the country were 557.05 million dollars.



A K M Azizur Rahman, Chairman of Central Insurance Company Ltd, inaugurating the Mirpur branch of the company at Senpara Parbata in the city on Wednesday.



Swedish ambassador in Bangladesh Anders Johnson representing SIDA and Project Coordinator of Steps Towards Development, Ranjan Karmakar, signed a memorandum of understanding in the city on Thursday.

US will give duty-free access to more products from LDCs

WASHINGTON, June 6: The United States will give duty-free access to more products from least-developed countries LDCs mainly in Africa, the US trade representative said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

President Bill Clinton added 1,783 products to the list of those covered by the generalized system of preferences (GSP) programme in a proclamation signed on May 30, Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky said.

"The designation of these products will contribute toward effective and sustainable economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa," Barshefsky said in a statement.

The countries that will benefit are those known under the programme as "least-developed beneficiary developing coun-

tries," mostly the 30 least-developed countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Officials said the move was part of an initiative to give Africa a boost through trade and investment rather than aid, which is to be discussed by leaders of the group of seven industrialized nations meeting in Denver later this month.

The GSP programme grants duty-free treatment to specified products from more than 140 countries and territories, in an effort to encourage economic development and reform.

Barshefsky said the countries that will benefit the most will be those undertaking serious economic reforms.

"We are not asking for the moon and the stars, but they have got to move in a positive direction," Barshefsky said at a US trade representative's advisory council meeting.

Utilization of BSP by Sub-Saharan African countries has risen to 588 million dollars in 1996 from 332 million dollars in 1994. But only 0.3 per cent of total imports under the programme come from the least-developed countries.

Barshefsky also said Clinton's "proclamation" extended GSP benefits to Cambodia, because of that country's commitments on worker rights and intellectual property rights led to the decision to designate the country as a beneficiary.

"Cambodia has adopted a labour law that contains internationally recognized worker rights and has formally pledged as part of a bilateral trade agreement to enact and enforce modern intellectual property rights laws," she said.

Swedish envoy visits office of Steps Towards Development

The newly-appointed Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh, Anders Johnson, visited the Steps Towards Development office, a Dhaka-based non-government development organisation Thursday, says a press release.

The envoy had a brief discussion with the staff of the organisation.

The Project Coordinator of the Steps Towards Development, Ranjan Karmakar, explained various programmes of the organisation and the activities of non-government organisation in Bangladesh.

Later, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Steps Towards Development and SIDA, under which the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency will provide support for three years to conduct training programmes on gender and development issues and to carry out advocacy programme on child, human rights and environmental issues.

Export processing zone in Sirajganj urged

SIRAJGANJ, June 6: Sirajganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) has urged the government to set up an export processing zone in the district to help promote the export of local product, reports UNB.

The chamber leaders have also demanded immediate construction of the proposed road to Bogra from Jamuna bridge.

The demand came from a press conference held on Monday. Chamber president Abdul Mannan Talukder, MP, addressed the conference.

The SCCI leaders also called for setting-up of heavy industries and tourist resorts on the western side of Jamuna bridge.

US investors interested in power sector

NEW YORK, June 6: Bangladesh looks forward to foreign investment playing a major role in its goal of economic development. Bangladesh Speaker Humayun Rashed Chowdhury, who is now on an official visit to New York leading seven members parliamentary delegation, has said, reports BSS.

He was making a keynote address on "Current and future business prospect in Bangladesh in context of the govt's far-reaching economic measures" at the luncheon organised by the New York-based Business Council for International Understanding (BCIU).

Outlining government's liberal economic policies the speaker pointed out that Bangladesh had adopted a free market economy with increasing emphasis on strengthening the private sectors and created a very attractive and congenial atmosphere for foreign investors.

The Speaker informed the American business and corporate leaders that Bangladesh had offered excellent opportunities to promote foreign investment and there are good number of sectors where foreign investors could invest profitably.

During the meeting Dewan Farid Gazi MP, Sk Fazul Karim Selim MP, Syeda Zebunnesa Haque MP, Prof Md. Rezaul Karim MP, Al-Haj MA Wahab, and Mohibur Rahman Manik MP were present.

Apart from two business del-

egation from Boston, one led by former Congressman Chet Atkins and another one by Dr. W E Strimling of US Dynamic called on Speaker at his hotel suite. Both the delegation showed keen interest to invest in the power sector of Bangladesh.

The Speaker has assured them that he would convey their interest to the relevant authorities in Bangladesh.

Tourism ministry reviews project implementation

The ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism held a meeting Thursday to review the progress of implementation of the projects under the ministry earmarked in the Annual Development Programme (ADP) for current fiscal year, reports BSS.

The meeting was presided over by State Minister for Planning, Civil Aviation and Tourism Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir.

It was informed at the meeting that out of Taka 50 crore 55 lakh allocated in the ADP for 1996-97 for 12 projects of Civil Aviation Authority and three of Parjatan Corporation, Taka 20 crore 48 lakh 95 thousand had already been spent by May last.

Dr Alamgir directed the concerned authorities to complete the projects on schedule.

Tk 400cr needed for urea subsidy in '97-98

The government will have to give Tk 400 crore as subsidy urea fertilizer during the next financial year, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed said, reports UNB.

He was addressing a gathering at Ghorashal Urea Fertilizer Factory which went on production Thursday after two months of suspension due to annual overhauling and discontinuity of gas supply.

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Noor Uddin Khan was also present on the occasion of restoration of gas supply. The factory has an annual production target of 4.25 metric tons of urea and methane.

Tofael said although the price of urea has been relaxed at Tk 4,800 per mt at the mill gate, the government has to give Tk 700 per mt subsidy to farmers as the production cost is Tk 5,500 per mt. For the imported urea, Tk 5,200 subsidy would be

given per mt.

"In total, the government will have to give Tk 400 crore subsidy to urea in the next financial year."

The Commerce Minister said six public-sector urea factories are incurring loss every year due to unrealistic decisions taken by the previous governments in constructing factories and fixing price of the urea.

The six factories have a production target of 20 lakh mt of urea during the next fiscal year against the projected demand of 25 lakh mt. The rest 5 lakh mt will be imported.

Tofael said the government is committed to ensuring supply of adequate amount of fertiliser at fair prices in due time through an effective distribution system.

He sought cooperation from the dealers, district and thana committees, local political personalities so that farmers can get the fertiliser timely.

Tofael at dialogue Govt to discuss SOEs' situation in JS

Government wants to take decision about privatisation, restructuring and joint venture of the present state-owned enterprises (SOEs) keeping the national interest atop, reports BSS.

This was stated by Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed at a dialogue on "Making better use of Bangladesh's productive capacities" a CIRDP conference room here Thursday.

Former minister A M Zahiruddin Khan, Members of Parliament, business leaders, economists, industrial experts and government officials attended the dialogue, organised by the centre for Policy Dia-

logue, the discussion was conducted by noted economist Prof Rahman Sobhan.

The minister said present government will not take any decision hastily so that the nation would not face any problem in future. We are interested to take all major decision after consulting with the political parties on the floor of Jatiya Sangsad.

The minister said we want to discuss all the existing SOEs on the floor of parliament, as the people can know actual situation of the SOEs. Government will welcome private management in the SOEs to make them viable.

Ansar-VDP Bank branch managers' confce held

The first branch managers conference of Ansar-VDP Unnayan Bank was held at its head office in the city on Thursday, says a press release.

Syed Amirul Mulk, Secretary, Banking Division, attended the conference as chief guest.

The conference was also attended by Azimuddin Ahmed, former Home Secretary and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ansar-VDP Unnayan Bank. Brig Md Enayet Hossain, one of the directors of Ansar-VDP Unnayan Bank and Director General, Bangladesh Ansar & VDP, S S Nazamuddin Ahmed, Managing Director of the Bank, senior executives of head office and branch managers of 18 branches.

Syed Amirul Mulk spoke of close supervision and monitoring of the "micro-credit programme" of the bank. Branch managers must discharge their duties and responsibilities with honesty, sincerity, dedication and with a missionary zeal so that they are able to play a significant role in the field of poverty alleviation and make 4.5 million Ansar-VDP members self-reliant.

He assured all possible help and assistance for overall development of the bank "distinction model" in the field of poverty alleviation for which the government has established this specialised bank for the first time in the country for a particular group.

Leading European bourses gain

LONDON, June 6: Leading European stock markets all gained ground on Thursday, led by the Paris bourse expressing considerable enthusiasm in the wake of the French left's surprise win in early legislative elections, reports AFP.

The London share market chalked up a fair-to-middling gain thanks to new hopes among investors that the Bank of England will not raise interest rates this week, operators said.

The Footsie Index gained 19.1 points or 0.42 per cent on the day to end at 4,576.2 points. Share volume came to 742 million.

While the central bank has said it thinks further monetary tightening is needed, economists think it might wait to see the budget to be announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on July 2 before marking such a decision.

The Paris bourse jumped in active trading, the Cac 40 index finishing the day at 2,690.85 points, up a hefty 2.11 per cent from the Wednesday close. The indicator had been as high as 2,724.57 points during the session, up 3.37 per cent, but gains were then pared back before the close.

Volume came to a strong 11.1 billion francs on the monthly settlement market.

The bourse has risen steadily since the French left's surprise victory in the legislative elections on Sunday, much to the surprise of many operators and in spite of the presence of communist ministers in the new team led by the socialists.

Operators say one big reason for the bourse's strength this week is the dollar's firmness, which helps French exporters. In addition, higher growth in Europe thanks to accommodative monetary policies is anticipated by the market.

Things were more sedate in Frankfurt, where the stock market posted a moderate gain as the Dax index finished at 3,673.03 points, up 0.31 per cent from 3,661.84 at the official close on Wednesday. The performance brought the market almost up to its all-time record closing high of 3,674.36 points.

The bond market was little changed, and the average yield on government issues eased by 0.01 point to 5.08 per cent.

The Milan stock market marked time as the Mibtel index gave up a slight 4 points or 0.03 per cent to end at 12,256.

Emirates raises flight frequency to Dhaka

Emirates, the international airline of the UAE, inaugurated its eighth frequency to Dhaka Thursday offering still another convenient connection to the Middle East, Africa and Europe, says a press release.

EK Flight 612 touched down at the Zia International Airport at 9:30 am and Flight EK 613 went off at 10:45 am.

Commenting on the occasion, Salem Obaidalla, Manager-Bangladesh, Emirates, thanked Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Biman Bangladesh Airlines for their support. "We started with two flights using B727 and now we are operating eight flights with Airbus. This would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Civil Aviation Authorities and Biman."

Emirates now flies daily to Dhaka and twice on Thursdays. Emirates started flying to Bangladesh on October 27, 1986.

10-point plan to improve environment WB urges global phaseout of leaded gasoline in 5 yrs

WASHINGTON, June 6: The World Bank is urging a global phaseout of leaded gasoline within the next five years as part of a 10-point plan to improve the environment, reports AP.

The international lending institution issued its Green Top 10 Plan on Thursday in advance of a UN Earth Summit June 23-27 in New York to be attended by a number of world leaders.

The meeting is a follow-up to the 1992 environment summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A statement from the bank said that even though there has been "encouraging progress" in reducing lead in gasoline and cutting back ozone-depleting chemicals, "the current state of the global environment remains cause for profound concern."

Carbondioxide emissions in developing countries have "jumped by nearly 25 per cent" since the Rio summit, the bank said, and "pollution continues to worsen in many cities, with 1.3 billion people still affected by poisonous air."

The 180-nation organisation estimated that energy-related subsidies by government

around the world total \$800 billion and "rarely benefit the poor and inevitably harm the environment."

Eighteen nations, including the United States and Canada, have phased out leaded gasoline, the bank noted.

It said that countries could recover costs associated with conversion to unleaded gasoline "five to 10 times over through reduced health care costs and economic savings."

For example, the bank said the United States had saved more than \$10 billion for every 1 dir invested in conversion to unleaded gasoline.

On chlorofluorocarbon gases, or CFCs, which some scientists have linked to depletion of the ozone layer, the World Bank said their production and use must be diminished. The bank said it was supporting efforts in Russia to achieve this objective with a 60 million dir loan.

Other measures include a trend toward "trading greenhouse gas emissions," in which a company in one country can meet global conventions on emissions by investing in pollution reduction in another country.

Computer printer sales slow down in US

NEW YORK, June 6: The market for computer printers is slowing despite of aggressive price cuts by major printer makers, reports Xinhua.

In the consumer market, unit sales are expected to rise 15 per cent in 1997 as against 31 per cent last year, according to Dataquest, a major market researcher of the US.

Revenue will be up eight per cent as against 16 per cent a year ago. In the corporate market, unit sales are expected to dip slightly, while revenue will decline 13 per cent compared to last year's standard.

A price war that began a year ago brought down prices for printers in the home market to a record low. Some printers, often older models, are offered free with selected personal computer purchases.

Some dealers said it is hard to make money as people are not buying printers as often.

So to lure buyers back to the market, companies are upgrading printer speed and colour quality and adding more paper-handling features. Top printer companies launch new products every six months, according to market researchers.



Salem Obaidalla, Manager-Bangladesh, Emirates, seen with Captain Yohan Bronge, Pursor Florence Lubato and Air Hostesses of Flight 612, the inaugural flight of eighth frequency, after it landed at Zia International Airport on Thursday.



The Introduction Meet '97 of the newly-elected office-bearers of Bangladesh Studio Malik Samity was held recently at a local hotel. State Minister for Jute and Textiles A K Faezul Huq was the chief guest while Quazi Md Shafiqul Islam, Vice-President, FBCCI, attended the Meet as special guest. Manowar Hossain Manik, President of the Samity, is also seen in the picture.