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Star BUSINESS

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Expats remit Tk 5.83 cr in February

UNB, Dhaka

Expatriate Bangladeshis remitted 3,35,073 pounds sterling and 6,01,001 US dollars equivalent to about Tk 5.83 crore through 6,662 Foreign Money Orders (FMO) in February 2001.

They sent a total of 27.40 lakh pounds sterling and 42.80 lakh US dollars equivalent to over Tk 46.60 crore through 55,428 FMOs in last 8 months since July 2000, said a press release yesterday.

BB T-bill auction held

UNB, Dhaka

The 130th auction of the 28-day, 91-day, 182-day, 364-day, 2-year and 5-year treasury bills were held here yesterday.

Tk 566.50 crore, Tk 54.50 crore, Tk 41 crore, Tk 46 crore, Tk 109 crore and Tk 29.30 crore were offered for the 28-day, 91-day, 182-day, 364-day, 2-year and 5-year bills respectively.

However, Tk 361.50 crore, Tk 1.50 crore, Tk 36 crore, Tk 46 crore and Tk 56 crore (in total Tk 501 crore) of 28-day, 91-day, 182-day, 364-day, and 2-year bills were accepted respectively.

The bids offered for the 5-year bill were not accepted, said a BB press release.

Grameen Trust holds workshop for micro-credit replicators

A six-day workshop on 'Attaining Financial Self-sufficiency' organised by Grameen Trust for the replicators of Grameen Bank's micro-credit programme has ended, says a press release.

Speaking as chief guest at the concluding session, Prof Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director of Grameen Bank, said: "Sustainability of the micro-credit institutions is vital for attaining self-sufficiency. Financial viability is very important to carry on the activities of any organisation, he pointed out.

He called for bringing the credit facilities to the poorest of the poor so that they can become self-reliant utilising the credit in different viable projects.

Prof Yunus expressed the hope that the deliberation of the workshop would help the participants to replicate the Grameen Bank's micro-credit programme in their respective countries.

A total of 17 representatives from India, Nepal, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Nigeria and Tanzania took part in the workshop, which was chaired by Prof H. L. Latif and conducted by Dr Arifur Rahman Siddiqui, General Manager of Grameen Trust.

Japanese life insurers raising premiums

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's troubled life insurers plan to raise premiums on policies for the first time in two years to make up for a 'negative spread' due to rock-bottom interest rates, a press report said Sunday.

The increases will average about 10 per cent and will be applied to new policies to be sold from April, the leading business daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun said.

Near-zero interest rates have prevented insurers from earning a sufficient yield on their investments to match the guaranteed pay-outs to policyholders set in the investment boom years of the 1980s. The discrepancy is termed a negative spread.

The premium increases will be applied mainly to savings-type policies such as pension insurance, the daily said.

Insurers have applied to the government's Financial Services Agency to reduce guaranteed pay-outs by about 0.5 per cent age points from the current 2.15 per cent to a record low level, the report said.

Some of major life insurers have already obtained official approval, it added.

Premiums on some whole-life insurance policies will be raised by up to 18 per cent. Premiums on other products with shorter contract periods will be less affected, the daily said.

IMF dubs current monetary expansion rate 'very high'

Situation to pressure forex reserve, inflation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Resident Representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Ronald P Hicks has termed the current rate of monetary expansion as 'very high', saying the rate, which is almost 20 per cent, would create pressure on foreign exchange reserve and inflation.

The country's foreign exchange reserve is not robust while the inflation rate is less than one per cent. These are all interlinked, Hicks said, adding that the government needs to address these issues very responsively in formulating the next budget and should move ahead with structural reforms.

Hicks was speaking on 'Macro

Economic Situation in Bangladesh' at the luncheon meeting of the France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIFB) at Sheraton Hotel in the city yesterday.

Michel Lummaux, French Ambassador, Pierre Boedoz, French Trade Commissioner, Michel Folliet, new President of CCIFB, also attended the luncheon meeting presided over by Francis Dubus, outgoing President of the chamber.

Stressing the need for controlling government expenditure, he said money should not be spent in unproductive ways.

The IMF country chief said it is reasonable that the GDP growth rate would also be five to six per

cent this year. But such growth rate is not adequate to address the massive poverty in the country.

About the state-owned enterprises, he observed that the government should take reform measures very seriously.

Hicks praised some macro-economic achievements over the past few months. Elaborating these, he said higher export growth and revenue collection, GDP growth rate of five to six per cent and the low inflation situation are satisfactory.

"Besides, there are some improvements in the banking sector. Profitability of the banks has increased and there have been some improvements in classified loans, but there's still a long way to go."

Borrowing and lending rates in Bangladesh are very high, Hicks said, noting that the high lending rate is weighing heavily on the potential investors.

Mentioning that the country's foreign exchange reserve can meet import bills for around two months, he said a reserve for three months' import is comfortable.

French Trade Commissioner Pierre Boedoz told the meeting that trade between France and Bangladesh has been increasing over the past few years.

French export to Bangladesh was around one billion franc in 1999 while Bangladesh's export to France stood at 3.9 billion franc and it was 3.5 billion franc in 2000, he said.



PHOTO: CCIFB
 Michel Folliet, new President of the France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CCIFB), speaks at the luncheon meeting of the Chamber at Sheraton Hotel in the city yesterday. Michel Lummaux, French Ambassador, Ronald P Hicks, IMF Resident Representative, and Francis Dubus, immediate past President of CCIFB, are also seen.



PHOTO: ERICSSON
 Engr Anwar Hossain, General Manager (center), Khandaker Hafiz, Sales and Support Manager (left), and Itekhar Matin, Channel Marketing Co-ordinator (right) of Ericsson Radio Systems AB, is seen at the press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity Sunday.

Local IT firm signs deal on medical data entry

US market promises \$400b business a year

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

High quality assurance and safety measures in the US medical profession have opened up a new business opportunity for Bangladesh in the form of medical transcription of all communication between a US doctor and the patients.

Rebound IT.Com Ltd, a local company, yesterday signed an agreement with Transtek, an Indian affiliate of a US company, for such medical transcription data entry services which will create some 500 jobs in the country.

"This agreement has created a new horizon for the country's IT sector. According to the agreement, we would enter a minimum of 100,000 lines of data per day and it will create jobs for 500 unemployed youths," Nizam Uddin Ahmed, Managing Director of Rebound IT.Com Ltd, told a press conference yesterday after signing the agreement at the National Press Club in the city.

Sudarshan Bugri, Managing Director of Transtek, signed the agreement on behalf of the Indian company.

Transtek would provide all sorts of expertise and technical support to Rebound under this agreement, Nizam said.

He also said if the business expands and his company gets more contracts, he would also subcontract these out to other interested IT companies.

In the USA, virtually all communication between a doctor and a patient must be preserved in written forms. The doctors records the patients' condition and all medical records either in a tape or a digital voice recording system. These tapes are then transcribed and preserved in computer.

Mentioning that in the USA every hospital, diagnostic centre, special medical care centre and clinics require this service, Bugri said around 800 million doctor-patient communications are transcribed every year.

The total size of the medical transcription market in the USA is estimated to be about US\$ 400 billion, which is increasing by US\$

10 billion a year.

"Due to strategic time-zone advantage and cheap labour, the medical transcription industry is shifting its base to this region specially to India," Bugri said.

He said that Bangladesh also holds good prospects to grab a share from this rising sector due its comparative advantage.

"An improving telecom sector, increasing use of internet and familiarity with English language

have given an edge to Bangladesh over others in getting a reasonable share of this thriving sector," the managing director of Transtek said.

A medical transcriber has to understand the American accent and has also to be familiar with medical language. Nizam said his company would provide training to the transcribers to familiarise them with the language and technical terms.

The move was fiscally irresponsible, saying the fiscal stimulus of the tax cuts was a welcome thing given the slowing economic growth.

The prime minister said he expects December quarter growth figures, due out on Wednesday, to show the economy has slowed from recent quarters, but he declined to speculate on whether the data would show negative growth - the first sign of a recession.

"They'll be lower than previous ones. I don't know about whether something would be negative. I can't tell at this stage. But it does look like they'll be lower than what they have been."

Howard declined to speculate on whether the Reserve Bank of Australia would cut interest rates following its board meeting on Tuesday, but said some commentators would suggest the interest rate environment was more benign than before.

"That's a matter for the Reserve Bank. I simply note that commentators, which I won't join, are certainly suggesting that the interest rate environment now is a lot more benign than it was," he said.

"People could well take the view that what you need, have needed over the last few months and over the next 12 or 18 months is a mild fiscal stimulus," he said.

Company wards off quitting rumours

Ericsson outsources manufacturing to get better rates on mobile sets

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Allaying all sorts of fear, Swedish mobile handset manufacturer Ericsson yesterday said its recent outsourcing of product development and production to some foreign companies would not hinder its consumer product services.

"Mobile phone users of the country are likely to get mobile sets at cheaper prices following Ericsson's deal with GVC in Taiwan and strategic manufacturing partnership with Flextronics," Eng Anwar Hossain, General Manager of Ericsson Consumer

Products Division, Bangladesh told reporters at a press conference in the city.

However, he said there has been some confusion over the recent announcement about Ericsson's Consumer Product Division. But Ericsson is committed to its consumer business.

Ericsson, which claims to have increased its market share in Bangladesh to 40 per cent in 2000 from only 5 per cent in 1998, is committed to bring the consumer business back to profitability by the second half of 2001.

Eng Hossain said.

"We have a plan to sell 100,000 mobile hand sets in the country by the end of 2001 that would take our market share to 41 per cent," he said.

Ericsson would offer handsets with Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), which is likely to be launched in the country by leading mobile operator GrameenPhone this year.

WAP handsets will be marketed at reasonable prices, which would facilitate subscribers send e-mail and browse the Internet.

We have plans to open more service collection points at the district level to facilitate mobile users all over the country, he said.

Ericsson's new manufacturing partner offers best in class volume production. The new sets will provide a very promising operation or volume plan flexibility and economies of scale, he said.

Khandoker Hafiz, Sales Support Manager, and Itekhar Matin, Channel Marketing Co-ordinator, also addressed the press conference organised at the conference room of the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU).



PHOTO: UNITREND
 Picture shows the Hyundai Cement Premium Dealers and staff members at the company's Premium Dealer Award Ceremony-2001 held at Sonargaon Hotel in the city recently.

Hyundai Cement holds Premium Dealer Award Ceremony-2001

Hyundai Cement (Bangladesh), a group company of "Holderbank" Switzerland, hosted a gala evening at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel in the city recently to mark the celebration of their Premium Dealer Award Ceremony-2001, says a press release.

The ceremony was inaugurated by Paul Hugentobler, Managing Director of Hyundai Cement and Area Manager, "Holderbank" Switzerland.

The event brought together 15 of the biggest cement dealer/distributors in the city and outlying areas, who were awarded the company's Premium Dealership certificates by Hugentobler to mark their official appointment as Hyundai Cement's Premium Dealers for the year 2001.

The Premium Dealer concept is a key component of the innovative set of customer-oriented marketing programmes being introduced by Hyundai Cement.

It has been introduced in an effort to strengthen long-term partnerships of the company with its key dealers, by offering them product, service, technical and marketing support. It is hoped that by integrating its dealers as an extension of the company and fostering closer working relationship with them, Hyundai Cement would be able to lead the industry in developing a true customer-focused orientation and to ultimately set standards in product and service deliveries.

The concept is essentially captured in what Hyundai Cement calls the "Worry-Free Premium Shopping Experience," whereby every facet of the consumer interaction including the points-of-purchase (retail outlets), the service levels and the product itself has been re-aligned to create a truly premium and customer-friendly shopping experience.

At the authorised Hyundai Cement Premium Dealer Outlet, customers are now assured of authentic, premium quality Hyundai cement backed by exclusive, customer friendly services and logistical facilities.

The company also plans to initiate world-class customer service training programmes for its dealers and their employees.

Following the award ceremony, the audience was treated to a sample of the rich and diversified Bangladeshi cultural heritage.

DITF participants witness brisk business

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Participants of the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF), 2001 did a brisk business and a number of stall owners said their on-the-spot sales were two to three times higher than last year.

"Our everyday sales clocked more than six lakh taka on an average," said Monir Ahmed Khan, Area Sales Manager of Rangs Industries Ltd.

He said that people showed much interest in Rangs products because the company displayed a range of new items. "Besides, the consumers got special discounts, which varied between Tk 500 to Tk 3,000, on every electronic item at the fair," Monir said.

On the other hand, Nazmul Alam, Sales Manager of Nicole International, claimed that his company's daily average sales at the fair were more than Tk 12 lakh. According to him, this year's sales were at least 45 per cent higher than that of last year.

Monirul Islam of Shinepukur Ceramic also claimed that the company's stall failed to meet the demand of the people. "The customer demand was so high that we could not address their needs."

"The main benefit of the International fair is that we can show our goods to people coming from all corners of the country and even from many countries of the world," said Mizanur Rahman of Asian Textile Mills Ltd.

He said the people should know that we can also produce world-quality fabrics in our country. Mahbul Haq of Dandy Dyeing said that more than 15,000 people visited their pavilion every day, which can well be regarded as good consumer response.

The 44-day exhibition concluded yesterday through a ceremony addressed by Commerce Minister MA Jalil as chief guest.

He said that the government would build a permanent structure for holding the international trade fair every year.

The minister also distributed prizes among the participants who secured the first, second and third positions in categories like decoration of the pavilion, quality of goods and customer services.

A total of 431 companies including 22 foreign companies participated in the fair.

Among the pavilions, Micro Electronic got first prize while Akhter Furniture, Concord Group of Companies and Rangs Group jointly secured the second position. Shinepukur Ceramics, Utara Motors Ltd. and Bushandhara