

New Emirates.com version takes off

A new upgraded version of www.emirates.com, the flagship Emirates airline website, has now taken off and is all set to attract more users through a wider range of benefits and services...

The popular site already enjoys twice as many visits as it did in October when a previous package of improvements to it was unveiled. Now better links for members of Skywards, the Emirates/Sri Lankan Airlines frequent flyer programme, online bookings for customers in the UK as well as UAE, simpler user navigation and a greater focus on Dubai have been introduced too.

Advantages for surfers wanting to know what the airlines offers include details of inflight products, stop-overs and seating, and two virtual tours - one of Emirates' business class seat and another around the new lounges at Dubai International Airport.

And to promote the upgraded site, Skywards members in the UK and UAE who book online by the end of March will receive double miles on their trip.

Mike Simon, Emirates' Director of Corporate Communications, said: 'We expect online booking to be particularly popular in the UK, where we now fly six times a day. Better coverage of the airport and of local events will interests business and leisure travellers to, from and through Dubai, and help us improve our services to customers.'

Brazil's economy healthy: IMF

AFP, Washington

Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso met Saturday with officials from the International Monetary Fund, who gave the Brazilian economy a healthy diagnosis.

IMF Managing Director Horst Koehler and First Deputy Managing Director Stanley Fischer also expressed confidence that Argentina, locked in recession for 33 months, would overcome that 'difficult situation.'

'Brazil has a very good central bank and is managing the situation very well. They are taking the appropriate measures,' Fisher insisted.

Pakistan must strictly implement reforms: WB

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's economy is showing signs of improvement but the country must strictly implement the reforms laid down by the military regime, a senior World Bank official said Saturday.

'It is for Pakistan's own benefit to ensure implementation of its ambitious reform agenda to create a good investment climate,' World Bank Vice-President and Chief Economist Nicholas Stern said here.

Stern held a flurry of meetings with top Pakistani officials including military ruler general Pervez Musharraf and finance minister Shaoukat Aziz during his four day stay here.

'There is so much to be done, and so many worthwhile programs

and policies are being designed, that there is a danger of crowding and congestion,' he told reporters. 'Establishing clear priorities and careful sequencing of the reforms is crucial.'

The International Monetary Fund has revived lending to Pakistan on the basis of reforms planned by Musharraf regime which emerged from a bloodless coup in 1999 pledging to make economic revival its top priority.

On Friday, the IMF executive board approved 133 million dollars of credit for Pakistan acknowledging the country had made encouraging economic progress.

The board said its action would bring total disbursements for Pakistan under its current arrangement with the Fund to 324 million dollars.

'Pakistan's achievements to date under the program... have been encouraging,' said Eduardo Aninat, deputy IMF managing director.

Stern said if Pakistan government moved forward and implement reforms strongly, it could be witnessing the beginning of a long period of sustained growth.

The Chief Economist said economic reforms programme, initiated by the government, would ultimately revive the confidence of the business community and improve investment climate.

Musharraf government has initiated steps to accelerate privatisation in addition to tightening control on government spending.

It has tried to enhance country's export to shore up fragile foreign exchange reserves.

World's longest non-stop flight to link NY, HK

AFP, New York

United Airlines on Sunday launches what is says is the world's longest non-stop scheduled passenger flight, linking New York and Hong Kong in just under 16 hours via a polar route, a spokesman for the US airline announced.

United Airlines' Flight 821 will leave New York's John F. Kennedy airport at 10:50 am (1450 GMT) Sunday, arriving in Hong Kong Monday at 2:30 pm (0630 GMT) in a flight lasting 15 hours 40 minutes and covering 13,580 kilometers (8,439 miles), the spokesman said.

That will be a few kilometers (miles) longer than a competing flight by Continental Airlines, which launched its own direct flight between Newark Airport, near New York, and Hong Kong on March 1.

The return flight departs Hong Kong at 5:05 pm arriving in New York the same evening at 8:35 pm local time (0035 GMT Tuesday).

The new flights make use of the latest technology allowing pilots to keep an eye on fuel temperature from the cockpit since they use routes over the North Pole.



PHOTO: AFP

This updated handset photo shows the 'Phone-Card-Phone,' a patented pre-paid wireless service delivery platform and handset which has parts made of recyclable paper. The Phone-Card-Phone will soon be introduced by Telespree Communication to serve 60 per cent of individuals in the United States who still don't own wireless phones, and the even larger array of unserved markets worldwide. The phone will be available at supermarkets, department stores, and vending machines.

Aussie central bank tipped to cut rates amid currency crisis

AFP, Sydney

Australia's central bank was tipped Sunday to cut interest rates again this week to try to boost a sagging economy as the 'Aussie' dollar hit another record low in weekend trading. Its plunge to 48.50 US cents has defied rational explanation in Australia, but threatens an embattled government with deepening financial and political crisis ahead of an election due by the end of this year.

The economy contracted by 0.6 percent in the December quarter for the first time in a decade, but most economists agree that while a slowing economy is a factor in the collapse of the currency, its recent fall has taken it far below any realistic valuation.

Prime Minister John Howard's government, which is well behind Labor in the polls, is struggling to explain why Australia has the western world's weakest currency and why imported products and foreign holidays are suddenly so expensive.

Treasurer Peter Costello argued the slide in its value did not reflect economic fundamentals such as a balanced budget, low inflation and low interest rates.

He also accused the Labor opposition of irresponsibly and deliberately talking it down to gain political advantage.

Some economists believe international currency traders have been targeting the currency for profit.

The board of the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA), under fire for raising rates instead of cutting them to boost the economy late last year, is seen as likely to opt for the third cut in two months when it meets in an atmosphere of growing crisis on Tuesday.

Westpac Banking Corporation chief economist Bill Evans predicted a reduction of half a percentage point, saying: 'I think a half a percent cut this week would in fact support the Aussie rather than be a negative.'

'I think the rules have changed now with regard to the relationship between interest rates and

currencies and now currencies are really responding to the growth outlook.

'In the past there was a view that if you cut interest rates too quickly that would be a large negative for the currency. I think in the current environment the rules have reversed.'

Evans said a factor in the slide was that international currency traders had been targeting the Australian dollar.

'Traders have been doing very well by selling the Aussie dollar and the momentum trade of selling the Aussie dollar has been extremely profitable over a long period of time,' he told Channel Nine's Business Sunday programme.

'And they're continuing to do well,' he said, adding that it would take a very sharp bounce back to discourage the traders.

The RBA announced reduced interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point to 5.5 percent on March 7.

Mbeki calls upon Africans to invest in own continent

AFP, Durban

South African President Thabo Mbeki called on Africans Saturday to start investing in the continent instead of contributing to the flight of capital.

'The challenge to attract larger inflows of capital into our continent signifies that we must take all necessary measures to encourage our own domestic African investors to invest in Africa,' Mbeki said at a two-day African renaissance festival in the port city of Durban.

He said it was absurd that Africa was a net exporter of capital to countries in the West as a result of the 'intolerable and unserviceable debt burden' that many African countries had to carry.

Pakistan to withdraw case against power company Hubco

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's government Saturday decided to withdraw all criminal charges filed against the independent power producer, Hubco, Finance Minister Shaoukat Aziz said here.

'So far as the government is concerned there are no outstanding issues with Hubco,' he told reporters.

A four-year bitter power tariff dispute between state-run Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and Hubco was resolved last year but the company has been demanding the withdrawal of criminal cases pending in courts.

The cases were based on allegations that the company secured exorbitant tariffs through bribes

and other unfair means. The company has consistently denies the charges.

'The chief executive (military ruler General Pervez Musharraf) has approved in principle withdrawal of criminal cases against Hubco and its employees and all documents have been signed and legal formalities are completed,' Aziz said.

The World Bank-backed 1.54 billion dollar Hubco project producing 1,292 megawatts of electricity, more than 10 percent of Pakistan's total generating capacity, is the biggest private sector project in the country.

The row between Wapda and British-run Hubco has been a stumbling block in Pakistan's efforts to revive foreign investment.

Qantas may axe more jobs

AFP, Sydney

Qantas Airways Ltd may have to axe even more jobs as it battles cut-price rivals, rising fuel prices and a sliding Australian dollar, the Australian flag carrier warned Sunday.

Chief executive Geoff Dixon, who took up the appointment a month ago, said conditions remained very tough and had worsened since February.

'In the last two to three weeks the pricing levels have gone further down, the dollar has gone under 50 cents and the economies in the United States and our own are under some pressure,' he said.

Dixon told Channel Nine's Business Sunday programme that he saw no relief for the industry for the rest of the year and into 2002.

Every airline in the United States -- Qantas's most profitable market -- had lost money in the first quarter and probably the second quarter, he said.

He would not rule out further job losses despite the announcement last month that the airline would axe 1,500 jobs from its 31,000-strong workforce amid falling profits, rising fuel prices and economic downturn.

'If we are able to get efficiencies with less people then obviously we would have to look at that,' he said, adding that the board was undertaking a review of the whole structure of the company.

Thousands demonstrate against Turkish govt, IMF

AFP, Istanbul

Several thousand people, among them trade union and civil rights supporters, demonstrated in Istanbul Saturday with banners attacking the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the economic crisis.

Estimates of the numbers varied between 3,000 and 5,000. The unauthorised demonstration passed off peacefully, without police intervention.

METROPOLITAN

HERE & THERE

DU Microbiology Department

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Department of Microbiology of the Dhaka University (DU) held a discussion meeting and a seminar on Friday to mark the 17th death anniversary of Prof Anwarul Azim Chowdhury, the founder Chairman of the department.

Pro-Vice Chancellor of DU Prof M Shahadat Ali, Dean of the Biological Science Prof Nowsher Ali Khan, Prof Harun-ur-Rashid, Prof Tahmidia Begum and Prof Mahbubur Rahman Khan spoke at the discussion held at the gallery of the department while Dr Donald James Gomez, Chairman of the Department of Microbiology, presided.

A seminar titled 'Aids: Global and Bangladesh Perspective' was held on the occasion. Dr Mattur Rahman, Chairman of the technical committee of the 'National AIDS Committee and Blood Transfusion' presented the keynote paper.

Lions Club of Dhaka New City

Lion Raghu Nath Barai has been elected president of the Lions Club of Dhaka New City, District-315A-2, for the year 2001-2002, says a press release.

The director and the vice district governor Lion Md Shafiquddin Miah and the incumbent president Mohammed Sohrab Ali conducted the election held on March 22.

Lion K U Khan Kamal and Lion Md Shahidur Rahman were elected secretary and treasurer of the club respectively.

BCSIR training

Concluding function of a training course on 'Improved stove' was held on March 29 in the seminar room of the Institute of Fuel Research and Development (IFRD), BCSIR, in the city, says a press release.

The function was attended by Md Enamul Huq, Director General

of Agriculture Extension Department, as chief guest while Dr Aftab Uddin Ahmed, Director IFRD, presided.

It was addressed by MA Matin Member (Science and Technology), Dr AM Hasan Rashid Khan, Project Director, Improved stove and Director of the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST), BCSIR, and MM Golam Hossain, Senior Scientific Officer of IFRD.

Twenty-one Agriculture Officers of different upazilas under Agricultural Extension Department and three representatives from NGOs took part in this course held under Improved Chula Extension Project.

Dr Aftab Uddin Ahmed, Director IFRD, presided. It was addressed by MA Matin Member (Science and Technology), Dr AM Hasan Rashid Khan, Project Director, Improved stove and Director of the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST), BCSIR, and MM Golam Hossain, Senior Scientific Officer of IFRD.

MBM Alumni Association

Md Akhtaruzzaman has been elected the president and Md Adil Uddin the General Secretary of the MBM Alumni Association in a poll held recently, says a press release.

This was the first ever poll of the executive committee of the Masters in Bank Management (MBM) Alumni Association, the release said.

Pak Women's Assoc

BSS, Dhaka

Pakistan Women's Association, a committee of the wives of the employees of Pakistan High Commission here, organised a fund raising event on Friday.

Begum Abul Hasan Chowdhury, wife of State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, opened the day-long bazaar in the lawn of the Pakistan High Commission in Gulshan, a press release of the High Commission said.

A large number of people including members of the diplomatic corps visited the bazaar.

The bazaar is an annual feature of the high commission and the sale proceeds are given to different charities, the press release added.

JCB holds orientation

The second annual Orientation Programme (2001) of Junior Chambers Bangladesh was held at the family lounge of Dhaka Club Ltd on Wednesday, says a press release.

The outreach programme was organised by JCB, the only affiliated body in Bangladesh of Junior Chamber International (JCI); to welcome all the potential and new members into the organisation. The goal of this programme is to familiarise the mass with the goals, missions and achievements of JCB and the history of the Junior Chambers (JC).

JC Koichi Washijawa 'Wassy' - Vice President of the Asia Pacific, Australia and Middle East region of JCI was present as chief guest. Shykh Siraj, Director of Channel I was also present as a special guest of honor. He was also awarded an honorary membership into the organisation in appreciation of his support and his life long contribution in community services that happens to be one of the core focus areas of Junior Chambers movement.

Debtec certificate award ceremony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a certificate award ceremony said that environment in Bangladesh is conducive to cultivation of orchids on commercial basis.

Development of Biotechnology and Environmental Conservation Centre (DEBTEC) organised the function on Thursday in the city's LGED auditorium to distribute certificates among 20 participants of training on 'Orchid Cultivation in Bangladesh,' said a press release.

Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Dr AKM Moniruzzaman, Member Director (Crops) of BARC, Dr Sheikh Md Erfan Ali, Director of SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC), Dr Md Abdur Razaque, and Sanullah Mollah, a principal scientific officer of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), spoke at the function chaired by Executive Director of DEBTEC, Dr Ferdousi Begum.



National Professor Kabir Chowdhury receiving an award from president of Gulshan Club ABM Kamal Uddin Khan recently. The club awarded 33 of its members on the occasion of Independence Day.



Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Harun-ur Rashid donated blood after inaugurating a blood donation programme organised by Old Rajshahi Cadets Association (ORCA) in the city on Friday.



Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Dr AKM Moniruzzaman, distributing certificates among the participants of a training on 'Orchid Cultivation in Bangladesh' at LGED auditorium in the city on Thursday.

Death anniversary of Justice Syed Hussain today

UNB, Dhaka



The 15th death anniversary of Justice Syed Muhammad Hussain will be observed today.

Born in 1928 in a noble Muslim family, Justice Hussain had served as the District and Sessions Judge in undivided India during the British regime.

Syed Hussain, who was illegally removed under Martial Law in 1958, was also an eminent judge of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

He was the Chairman of International Law Association, Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists.

His publication includes a book titled 'Banglar Katha.' In recognition of his outstanding contribution, Justice Hussain was awarded 'Swadhinata Padak' (posthumous) in 1998, says a press release.

Death anniversary of Prof Dr Nurul Haque Bhuiyan today



The third death anniversary of renowned educationist, scientist and 'Bhasha Shainik' Prof Dr Nurul Haque Bhuiyan today, says a press release.

Prof Bhuiyan was the first convener of the historic 'Rashtra Bhasha Shangram Parishad' (State Language Action Committee) in 1947-48 and played a vital role in the invitation of the mother language movement.

Manzur-led JP expels office secretary

UNB, Dhaka

A faction of Jatiya Party, led by Nazir Rahman Manzur, yesterday expelled Ahsan Habib Lincoln from the post of office secretary.

'Lincoln has been relieved from the post of office secretary,' said a party press release signed by Nazir Rahman.

Govt urged to send 2 ailing newsmen abroad for treatment

BSS, Dhaka

Leaders of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) urged the government and the civil societies yesterday to take immediate steps to save the lives of two newsmen - Tapash Biswas of daily Janakantha and Tozammel Ali of daily Janata.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Akhtar Ahmad Khan, president and secretary general of BFUJ, and Altaf Mahmud and Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan, president and general secretary of DUJ, in a joint statement said promising journalist Tapash Biswas has been undergoing treatment in Dhaka Medical College Hospital for last one week while senior newsman Tozammel Ali in the BIRDEM for a long time.

It is necessary to send them abroad urgently to ensure better treatment, they said.

OLSA reunion

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Old Laboratorians Association (OLSA) will hold a Grand Reunion 2001 of the former students of Government Laboratory High School to mark the 40th founding anniversary of the school.

The association has requested the former students to contact the following persons for registration: Naim Ahsan, phone-8125581, 017681399; Khandaker Kamruzzaman, phone-9669130, 9565031-2; Engineer Asiful Haq, phone-017560132, 9111619; Syed Masum Ahmed Chowdhury, phone-011832546, 9352220; and Rashidul Karim Rubel, phone-018232428, 8626042.

The former students may also contact Md. Omar Abdullah Salim at the association office at 139, Lake Circus, Kalabagan, Mirpur Road, for details. Phone-9110547 and 9111619.

BSA conference now on April 9

The seventh biennial conference and symposium of the Bangladesh Society of Agronomy (BSA) scheduled to be held on April 3 will now be held on April 9 at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) at Joydebpur, says a press release.

WEATHER TODAY
Dry weather forecast
UNB, Dhaka
Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore, Kushtia, Barisal, Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today.
Weather may remain mainly dry elsewhere over the country during the period. Met Office said forecasting little change in day temperature.
The country's highest temperature recorded yesterday was 35.5 degree Celsius at Rangamati and the lowest 19.4 degree Celsius at Ishurdi.
The sun sets in the capital today at 6.15 pm and rises tomorrow at 5.49 am.
Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:
City/Town Temperature in Celsius Humidity in percentage
Max Min Morning Evening
Dhaka 34.2 24.2 62 88
Chittagong 33.8 25.3 71 73
Rajshahi 34.6 19.7 67 58
Khulna 34.8 24.0 75 50
Barisal 34.5 22.2 76 56
Sylhet 33.5 22.0 65 58
Cox's Bazar 34.5 24.2 76 --