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Star BUSINESS

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Cosmos Telecom to launch pre-paid phone card soon

UNB, Dhaka

Cosmos Telecom Ltd (CTL), an enterprise of Cosmos Group, is going to launch a pre-paid phone card service in the country shortly, says a press release.

The company recently got the licence to this effect from the government.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim handed over the licence to CTL Chairman Amanullah Khan at a function held recently at the Finance Minister.

Brita water purifier launched

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Unicom Far East Ltd, a local trading house, yesterday launched a new brand of water purifier called Brita Water Guard.

The product was formally launched at a press conference at a local hotel in the city. Speaking on the occasion, Managing Director of Unicom Khandekar Mokarram Hossain said Brita has expertise in water purification for more than three decades and is able to offer a broad range of water filters for varied household uses.

Explaining the functions of the water purifier, he said the water flows through a changeable Brita cartridge, which consists of activated carbon and ion exchange resin.

He said price of the product cost Tk 395.

A set of cartridges can purify 2000 litres of water after which these have to be replaced. A set of new cartridges will cost Tk 500.

With this system, the cost purifying one litre of water will be Tk 25 paise only, the MD said.

HSBC sponsorship for IBA students

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (HSBC) in Bangladesh recently presented a cheque to the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of Dhaka University as part of its donations and community sponsorship programme for 2001.

The cheque was handed over by HSBC's Chief Executive Officer Bangladesh Mark Humble to Director of IBA Anwar Hossain at the latter's office, says a press release.

The sponsorship will cover educational and other expenses of selected students of the Institute for the year 2001.

Director of IBA on the occasion, said, "we want closer ties with the financial services organisations for developing business executives."

The noble gesture of HSBC to offer scholarship to meritorious students of our MBA programme will encourage the students to a great extent, he added.

HSBC Chief Executive Officer Bangladesh said, "HSBC recognises that it can only achieve its business objectives by balancing its commercial duties with its broader social obligations. We believe in sharing our success and are committed to helping improve educational and social well-being in Bangladesh."

Emirates SkyCargo transports ten Cadillac Escalade cars to Dubai

Emirates SkyCargo has transported to Dubai 10 Cadillac Escalade four-wheel drive vehicles, the first 2002 models of any motor vehicle to arrive in the Middle East, says a press release.

Manufactured in Arlington, Texas, the cars were trucked to JFK International Airport in New York, flown to Amsterdam and onward to Dubai on Emirates' leased Boeing 747-400 freighter. Emirates SkyCargo organised the entire transportation.

Mostafa El Berry, General Manager of Liberty Automobiles, the General Motors agent in Dubai, said: "These cars are not only the first 2002 Cadillac Escalades in the Middle East but also the first 2002 models of any car to arrive in the Middle East."

"Vehicles are usually transported by sea, but, because of the importance of this consignment, we chose air travel. We insisted on Emirates SkyCargo because of the synergies between our two companies," he added.

The Cadillac Escalade is the most powerful sports utility vehicle in the world offering a 6.0-litre high-output I.Q.-9 V8 engine with 350 net horse power.

Make external trade global shock-resistant

FBCCI-StanChart workshop urges govt, businesses

UNB, Dhaka

Trade and bank executives feel that the country's external trade needs to be resistant to global economic shocks and equipped with adequate remedies to live with changing international trade scenario.

Before facing any major setback, there should be enough preparations for tackling the emerging trade risks and managing international trade more efficiently, they said and called for concerted efforts by the business circle, government and other stakeholders.

The views were aired at a workshop on "International Trade Management" organised jointly by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Standard Chartered Bank.

Inaugurating the day-long workshop at Sonargaon Hotel in the morning, FBCCI president Yussuf Abdullah Harun mentioned the "Disks and barriers" that made international trade complicated.

He called for close partnership between banks and businesses to efficiently manage international trade.

The apex trade body chief

pointed to various inherent risks of international transactions.

"The avoidance and/or minimization of these risks require efficient performance of the businessmen as well as the bankers, and mutual support and cooperation," Harun said.

As a major party in international trade, the commercial bank officials must be well conversant with global trade practices.

Chief Executive of StanChart Grindlays Bank Muhammad A Ali and its corporate affairs chief Mamun Rashid also spoke at the inaugural session, which was followed by two working sessions

and panel discussion.

Banking and trade researchers extensively spoke on "International Trade Practices" and "Changing Trends of Bangladesh Trade," while the exporters' representatives and trade personalities discussed how better international trade could be managed in Bangladesh.

"In fact, we need to move right now with concrete actions before we face a major global trade shock. No piecemeal steps will be useful," StanChart executive Mamun Rashid said while briefing news-

men on the objective of the workshop.

US-UK move to overhaul Iraqi sanctions hits delay

REUTERS, United Nations

With Russia balking, the United States and Britain will be unable to meet their self-imposed deadline to overhaul sanctions against Iraq by the end of the week, UN Security Council diplomats said Tuesday.

Instead the current UN oil-for-food humanitarian programme is expected to be extended for at least a month by the 15-member council before its expiration date on June 3. But the envoys were not certain if anything would be added to the current plan or it would be rolled over on the same terms.

France had floated some compromise proposals that support the US-British draft in principle but water down several of its provisions.

The French suggestions, obtained by Reuters, were meant to bridge the gap between Moscow,

which has objected to the entire US-British draft resolution, and Washington and London, which had wanted the Security Council to adopt it this week.

But Russia, a council source said, was "not interested" in the French proposals either.

In Budapest, Hungary, on Tuesday, the foreign ministers of Russia, France, the United States and Britain met at the edge of a NATO meeting. But diplomats said each minister had a different interpretation of the talks, and no definitive conclusions were reached.

All four countries, along with China, are permanent Security Council members with veto power.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told a news conference in Budapest: "We are hard at work in New York at the UN on the nature of a rollover resolution and you

will see the results of these consultations in the near future."

In an effort to counter critical world opinion of the sanctions, the US-British resolution aims at allowing all civilian goods to go to Iraq, from bicycles to whiskey, but formulates a long list of banned or questionable supplies.

The French proposals would free sanctions from civilian goods as Britain and the United States want but call for a one-month delay in deciding on a lengthy list of "dual use" goods that can have military and civilian applications.

Both Russia and China have said the list is far too complicated for them to make a quick decision.

Among other measures, France wants the \$3 billion worth of contracts for Iraq that Washington has blocked released once new measures on the oil-for-food programme are adopted.

Pressure builds on ECB to cut rates

AFP, Germany

Germany's respected IFO economic institute called Tuesday for a cut in euro-zone interest rates, further tightening the screws on the embattled European Central Bank.

"It is the ECB's job to support the economy," IFO director Hans-Werner Sinn told German television.

"It has already cut rates by a quarter point. One could now envisage a second move to give a total cut of a half percentage point," he said.

The ECB cut its key refinancing rate on May 10 from 4.75 percent to 4.50 percent after holding out against pressure for a monetary easing since October last year.

The central bank's decision to finally cut rates sowed confusion in the markets because it had been warning shortly before about inflation fears, leading investors to rule out a monetary easing.

International Trade Management

Wednesday, 30 May 2001



Yussuf Abdullah Harun, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), addresses the inaugural session of a day-long workshop on "International Trade Management" organised jointly by FBCCI and Standard Chartered Group at a local hotel yesterday. Muhammad A Ali, Chief Executive of Bangladesh Standard Chartered Group, and Mamun Rashid, Head of Corporate and Institutions of Standard Chartered Group, are also seen in the picture.

Deal signed on paying water bills by ReadyCash cards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ReadyCash cardholders will be able to pay water bills using their cards from July 1 this year.

"We have signed an agreement with the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) under which users can pay their water bills using ReadyCash cards," said Sajid Rahman, an executive of ReadyCash.

ReadyCash will also sign an agreement with the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) on Sunday next to offer similar service to telephone subscribers.

Rahman said the company is also planning to strike deals with the country's four private mobile phone operators for payment of monthly mobile phone bills through ReadyCash cards. At present, ReadyCash cards can be used to pay gas bills.

The company also aims to introduce the card in Chittagong within three months.

He said now there are about 10,000 ReadyCash users in Dhaka city, availing of services at more than 300 sales point centres. The card was launched in the country in October, 1999.

The ReadyCash is a product of the American International Bangladesh Limited launched in the country in collaboration with Janata Bank.

The American International (BI) Ltd plans to invest US\$75 million in the next six years.

Standard Charter Bank has recently introduced telephone bill payment system through its ATMs. The BTB and Electronic Transaction Network Limited also signed an agreement for payment of BTB bills through Electroways shared ATM network.

Putin signs anti-money laundering bill

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin signed Russia's first anti-money laundering bill into law Tuesday in a bid to strike the country off the world's list of nations that are presumed to rely heavily on secret overseas bank accounts.

The law in part aims to prevent massive capital flight, which costs Russia an estimated 25 billion dollars each year.

It requires the investigation of all financial transactions above 500,000 rubles (17,200 dollars) and property deals worth more than 2.5 million rubles (86,000 dollars).

The bill will create a financial information service which will carry out systematic inquiries into all large financial transactions.

It also bans banks and other financial bodies from opening anonymous accounts.

Asian central bankers meet in S'pore tomorrow

AP, Singapore

Financial sector reforms and stability will top the agenda of a meeting of Asian central bankers in Singapore starting Friday.

Singapore's de-facto central bank, the Monetary Authority of Singapore, said Wednesday that the 36th Conference of the Governors of Southeast Asia Central Banks, or SEACEN, will meet behind closed doors and also look at development in the financial markets.

The two-day meeting comes amid renewed turmoil in Asian financial markets, with Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand's currencies losing ground because of domestic political instability and concerns over economic policies.

TIPS export fair begins at DCCI today

A three-day TIPS (Women Entrepreneurs) Export Fair and Festival-2001 (TEFF-2001) will begin at Dhaka Chamber Building today, says a press release.

The TEFF-2001 will be jointly organised by DEVNET/TIPS (Technology and Trade Information Promotion System) and European Union. At the fair, the products and services of women entrepreneurs will be exhibited and sold.

Begum Matia Choudhury, Minister for Agriculture, is likely to attend the inaugural ceremony of the TEFF. Md Abdul Jalil, Minister for Commerce has kindly con-

sented to be present as the chief guest at the closing ceremony.

Antonio de Souza Menezes, Head of Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh, may be present at both the inaugural and closing ceremonies as the special guest.

The products which will be put on display at the fair, include readymade garments, handmade block, boutiques, embroidery, handmade and designed pajama, T-shirts, shirts, bed sheet, cushion cover, nakshi kantha, wall mat, handicraft items, ceramic items, dry flower and herbal items.



HSBC Chief Executive Officer Bangladesh Mark Humble (R) hands over a cheque to Director of IBA of Dhaka University Anwar Hossain recently as part of HSBC's community sponsorship programme for 2001.



An agreement was signed between DeltaSoft Limited and Zee Interactive Learning Systems Ltd., India, in the city on Tuesday for providing IT education and training in Bangladesh. Photo shows Ashraf H Chowdhury, Managing Director of DeltaSoft Limited, and Ayaz Shafi, Dy. Divisional Manager of Zee Interactive Learning Systems Ltd, India, exchanging documents of the deal.

World's first third-generation cell phone service starts in Japan

AP, Tokyo

The world's first super-fast next-generation wireless service began in Japan Wednesday although only as a limited rollout of 3,300 handsets in the Tokyo area.

Eager Japanese gadget fans - chosen from 147,000 applicants - lined up at an office of the nation's top mobile carrier NTT DoCoMo. It didn't seem to matter that the most glamorous of the new phones, the video-phone, had been delayed for up to a month for software glitches.

The only models available were an upgraded, speedier version of NTT DoCoMo's current Net-linking i-mode phones and a computer-card model for data transmission.

"My first impression is it's great," said Shintaro Yanagisawa, 24, a marketing company employee, who got an i-mode upgrade. "It's so fast."

The third-generation cell phones - which promise to relay video and eventually allow music downloads - zip data up to 40 times faster than current mobile

phones.

NTT DoCoMo is hoping 3G phones will become portable wireless computers of the future for cyber surfing, corporate data transmission and electronic commerce.

NTT DoCoMo had initially promised full commercial 3G service for the Tokyo area for late May but delayed that to October because of software bugs.

What began Wednesday is a test-run to collect feedback on how the phones work, which will allow the company to sift out the problems.

The handsets are free. Users pay only transmission fees of between 100 yen (80 cents) and 150 yen (\$1.25) for three minutes - about 1.8 times the charge for i-mode phones.

Yanagisawa and others were amply warned about possible glitches. When the cell phone screen freezes, NTT DoCoMo officials said, turn off the phone and start again.

NTT DoCoMo plans to expand 3G to the rest of Japan by 2002 and

is promising to offer 3G in Europe and the United States as well.

The 1,200 video-phones - which allow callers to see each other's faces on the phone screens - will be gradually handed out over the next month, NTT DoCoMo said.

Yoshihiro Fujita, 28, who works for a computer software company and got an upgraded i-mode phone, said he would buy a new 3G phone - but only if it's about the same price as i-mode phones at 30,000 yen (\$250).

NTT DoCoMo has not given a price for the 3G phones, but they are expected to be more expensive than current phones.

"It's fun to be able to use something new," said Fujita. "It's so cool."

NTT DoCoMo took a full-page ad in Japanese newspapers Wednesday, trumpeting the launch of its 3G service called Foma, or "freedom of mobile multimedia access."

"Its biggest advantage is that it is possible to relay large amounts of data speedily wherever you

are," it said.

NTT DoCoMo officials have acknowledged they don't expect 3G to take off for another couple of years, forecasting just 150,000 people will sign on to the service in the first year.

Revenue from i-mode is still NTT DoCoMo's money-maker. For the fiscal year ending in March, NTT DoCoMo earned 365 billion yen (\$3 billion), up 45 per cent from a year ago on sales surging 26 per cent at 4.7 trillion yen (\$39 billion), surging 26 per cent - largely on the success of i-mode.

I-mode has attracted 23 million Japanese, who use their cell phones to exchange e-mail, read news or restaurant guides and play electronic games.

The 3G phones of the future are expected to allow music downloads and film-preview clips on the phone screen.

When connected to satellite systems, 3G phones will allow potential advertisers to send video-ads wooing buyers to stores that owners of the phone just happen to be strolling by.

AFP, Seoul

General Motors (GM) on Wednesday made a formal proposal to buy Daewoo Motor Co. as the labor union of the ailing automaker vowed to launch a movement to foil the takeover bid.

The US carmaker submitted a formal bid to the Korea Development Bank, a key creditor of Daewoo Motor.

"GM submitted the formal takeover bid today," a spokesman of the bank said. He declined to give further details.

GM has said the fall in Daewoo Motor's sales means the company is worth much less than in 1999 when creditor banks rejected a five billion dollar bid from GM.

Some analysts say GM may offer no more than two billion dollars. Negotiations between GM and creditor banks are due to begin next week.

Arthur Andersen Consulting recently assessed the enterprise value of the troubled automaker at 3.6 trillion won (2.8 billion dollars).

The JoongAng daily quoted sources close to the deal as saying GM is expected to set up a new company to take over Daewoo

Motor and will offer a 33-49 per cent stake of the new entity to Daewoo Motor creditor banks.

GM's move, however, prompted an angry reaction from the labor union of Daewoo Motor, which staged violent protests against massive lay-offs earlier this year.

"Today, we will launch a special committee led by laid-off workers to prevent GM from taking over Daewoo Motor," a spokesman for the Daewoo Motor union said.

"We will fight to the end to stop the sale," he said.

The labor union fears GM would close Daewoo Motors' biggest and oldest plant in the western port of Incheon, which employs half of Daewoo's 15,700 workers. GM is interested only in Daewoo's newer plants in Changwon and Kunsan, Daewoo Motor creditors said.

Scores of Daewoo Motor workers will continue daily protests outside two GM outlets in Seoul and a seven-member team will travel to the United States to register their opposition to the takeover.

But Finance and Economy

Minister Jin Nyeom on Wednesday brushed aside the labor resistance to the sale, saying the union would have no option but to accept it.

"Daewoo Motor's labor union is also well aware of the fact that the company needs a global player as it has to continue investing in research and development to keep an edge," Jin said.

Jin added Daewoo Motor is expected to generate operating profits in May and June, after posting its first monthly operating profit for three years in April.

Daewoo Motor said it made an operating profit in April of 6.7 billion won (5.2 million dollars) on sales of 466.1 billion won (362 million dollars).

It had 22.3 trillion won (17.1 billion dollars) in liabilities and 9.1 trillion won (7.0 billion dollars) in assets at the end of last year.

The South Korean auto maker has an annual production capacity of 1.06 million vehicles at home and another 875,000 overseas.

The company is now in a better position after the major cost-cutting, which included laying off about one third of its 18,000 workers.