

Al-Arafah Islami Bank declares 12pc dividend

Al-Arafah Islami Bank Ltd. declared a 12 per cent dividend for the year 2000 in its 6th annual general meeting held on Saturday at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh Auditorium in the city, says a press release.

The 4th EGM of the bank was also held.

AZM Shamsul Alam, Chairman of Board of Directors of Al-Arafah Islami Bank Ltd, presided over the meetings.

The shareholders participated in the review of the financial performance of the bank and made some suggestion for the improvement of the image of the bank. The bank earned net profit of Tk. 67 million, deposit of Tk. 7307.59 million and investment of Tk. 3728.41 million in 2000.

The Chairman thanked the shareholders for the confidence entrusted on the Board of Directors and appreciated the services of all the employees of the bank for the overall growth and performance during the year.

Among the directors, Ahmed Ali, Harun-or-Rashid Khan, Abdul Malek Mollah, Badiur Rahman, Nazmul Ahsan Khaled, Khondakar Mesbah Uddin Ahmed, Md Siraj-ud-Daula, Dr D M Amanul Hoque, Dr Bahauddin Mohammad Yousuf, Kazi Abu Kawzar, and Mohammad Yahia, Managing Director, and Mohammed Hossain were present on the occasion.

Rahimafroz introduces Volta battery in local market

Rahimafroz has recently introduced its automotive battery, Volta, in local market, says a press release.

Volta's export success in 18 countries has encouraged the company to introduce this brand in the country. The product has been introduced with world class specification, catering to customer need.

Volta comes in a very attractive black container labeled with "Sealed Maintenance Free" in yellow and red. It is heat resistant and totally maintenance free. The design itself protects it from overcharging and voltage dropping.

Now Volta is available in all Rahimafroz and dealer outlets in Dhaka and Chittagong.

PRAN declares 25pc dividend

AMCL-PRAN has declared a 25 per cent dividend for its shareholders for the year 2000-2001, says a press release.

The dividend was announced at the 16th annual general meeting of Agricultural Marketing Co Ltd held at Gulshan in Dhaka yesterday.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the company Lt Col Mahtabuddin Ahmed (Retd) presided over the meeting which was attended by a large number of shareholders.

Maj Gen Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd), Chief Executive, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, Deputy Managing Director, Md Eleas Mridha, Executive Director, and Md Gias Uddin, Director (Business Development), were present at the meeting.

It was informed at the meeting that pre-tax net profit of the company increased from Tk 33.76 million in 1999-2000 to Tk 41.94 million in 2000-2001 while gross sales went up from Tk 503 million to Tk 693 million, registering an increase of 38 per cent gross profit to Tk 171.11 million in 2000-2001 as against Tk 134.52 million last year.

Shareholders praised the management for the continuous growth achieved by the Company over the past several years and gave suggestions for improvement of product quality, packaging, increase of export and reduction in expenses of the company.

The chief executive and deputy managing director in their deliberations highlighted the growth of the company and its future plans for expansion and growth in exports.

Taiwan jobless rate falls

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's jobless rate in November fell to 5.28 percent from the record of 5.33 percent in October, marking its first decline in 13 months, officials said Monday.

But the November unemployment rate still stood at a record level for the month, up from 3.23 percent a year ago, according to according to the Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS).

Govt borrowing posts 29pc rise in 4 months of FY02

Saving certificate sale may come down on rate cut

MONJUR MAHMUD

The government's net borrowing through selling of saving instruments shot up by 29 per cent till October of the current financial year compared to last fiscal's corresponding period.

Net government borrowing through selling of different types of saving certificates amounted to Tk 1,857.93 crore during July-October period of FY02, which was Tk 1,439.14 crore in the corresponding period of last fiscal year.

An official of the National Savings Directorate (NSD) said government borrowing through saving instruments went up significantly in the recent years.

"But the decision to reduce the interest rates on different certificates in late October will discourage people to invest in saving certificates in the coming months," the official said.

The government sold saving certificates worth Tk 3,104.38 crore in the first four months of the current financial year while the encashment was Tk 1,246.45 crore during the same period. An amount of Tk 665.32 crore was also paid as interest during the period.

Gross sales were registered at Tk 2,312.83 crore during July-October

period of last fiscal while the encashment was Tk 873.69 crore.

The gross sales target of different saving certificates has been set at Tk 6,830 crore for this fiscal while the net borrowing target is Tk 3,881.84 crore.

The government currently offers some 11 different categories of saving certificates to borrow fund from the public.

Of the instruments, three-month profit giving certificates registered the highest sales till October of the current fiscal, followed by Defence Saving Certificate.

The saving certificates worth Tk 1,133.69 crore were sold till October of FY02 while the net borrowing through the instrument was Tk 749.44 crore.

During July-October period of last financial year, three-month profit giving certificates valued at Tk 581.03 crore were sold while the net borrowing through sale of this certificate was Tk 535.01 crore.

Defence Saving Certificates worth Tk 947.37 crore were sold till October of this fiscal while net borrowing through selling of this certificate was Tk 673.78 crore.

The government went on selling Defence Savings Certificates amounting to Tk 779.96 crore during July-October period of last fiscal while net borrowing through selling of the same instrument was 570.86 crore.

Bangladesh's submarine cable connection unlikely next year

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's entry into the global information superhighway through submarine fibre optic network by next year is likely to be delayed.

"We expect the project to be implemented by the end of June 2003 instead of December 2002," a top Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) official said recently while addressing a meeting to assess the present and future need of traffic bandwidth and service requirement of submarine cable network.

Actual implementation of the project might take even longer going beyond December 2003, officials told the meeting attended by a cross section of people including Internet Service Providers (ISPs), software developers, private mobile operators and IT experts.

BTTB had invited potential users of submarine fibre optic cable network prior to finally awarding the job to any vendor. Currently the board is in the process of evaluating tenders floated to procure the submarine fibre optic cable network for getting hooked up to the global information superhighway.

The fibre optic cable network would open up new avenues for huge revenue earnings through setting up new concept ventures like call centres, help desk operation, tele-treatment, etc., participants said at the meeting.

Bangladesh, which develops software for different US companies, could grab a greater share of the global software business by setting up call centres, said M Shamsudoha, a local software developer providing software for the US Postal Department.

He said Bangladesh could avail the opportunity by utilising the time gap it has with the USA. Bangladesh could also help desk for different Information Technology (IT) service provider firms, which would also create opportunity for huge foreign exchange earnings.

Bangladesh should establish a nation-wide fibre optic backbone to enable different services at district level, another expert working in tele-medicine said.

He said Bangladeshi patients in that case could consult foreign physicians. But a very strong communication network is required for that in order to download and trans-

fer data, he added.

Another participant underscored the need for a Unified International Gateway of the BTTB so that all incoming as well as outgoing ISD (International Subscribers Dialling) calls and data could be diverted.

A section of participants at the meeting expressed concern over the projected delay and said prolonged delay in setting up the network might not cater to the country's needs.

"The undertaking would become useless and we would not be able to get the market if we lag behind other neighbouring countries which have already established such network," another speaker said.

BTTB officials said the country would require a capacity of around one Giga Bytes Per Second (GBPS) in the next two years but the BTTB considering future needs has opted for two wavelength connections each with a capacity of 10 GBPS.

Different submarine cable solution providers purchased 55 tender schedules and three companies - Tycom, Alcatel and CCC have already submitted their tender documents, sources in the BTTB said.

Prime Bank opens branch at New Eskaton

Prime Bank Limited opened its 25th branch at New Eskaton in the city yesterday, says a press release.

Syed Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, Managing Director (Current Charge) of the bank, presided over the opening ceremony. Mohammad Aminul Haque, Chairman of the Board of Directors, inaugurated the branch as chief guest. Sponsor Director and Vice Chairman of the Board M A Khaleque, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board Mafiz Ahmed Bhuiyan, Directors Firoja Amin, Member of the Parliament Quazi Sirazul Islam, Md Shahadat Hossain, Md Nurul Haque Sikder, Shirjul Islam Mollah, Masud Reza Bhuiya, Representative Director M A Wahhab and Deputy Managing Director M Shahjahan Bhuiyan were also present.

In his inaugural speech, Mohammad Aminul Haque said to meet the 21st century challenges and the reform programs of the new government, the entire banking system should be made proactive.

Syed Naser Bukhtear Ahmed said Prime Bank Limited has been able to earn the confidence of the customers through its services and by taking care of the customers' needs.

RPGCL earns Tk 4.20cr profit

Rupantarita Praktirik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL) earned a revenue of Tk 38.18 crore during the fiscal year 2000-2001, out of which net profit was Tk 4.20 crore.

Meanwhile, Tk 4.43 lakh has been deposited to government treasury. The information was disclosed at the 14th Annual General Meeting of the company on Saturday, says a press release.

The meeting was presided over by M Akmal Husain, Secretary of Ministry of Energy & Mineral Resources and Chairman of RPGCL Board.

A detail discussion was also made on the overall development and financial activities of the company during the fiscal year 2000-2001. By earning revenue for the first time, RPGCL, a company of Petro Bangla, has been recognized as a profit earning organisation, since the establishment of the company.

Directors and shareholders of the company including Syed Sajedul Karim, Chairman of Petrobangla, were present in the meeting.

NIIT announces its anniversary awards

As a part of its 20th foundation day celebration, NIIT, Asia's biggest IT training company, has announced special rewards for IT career seekers of the country, says a press release.

Beginning December 24th, students can win NIIT's 20th Anniversary Awards for its 6-month Career Education programme based on an entrance test and an interview.

A limited number of the 20th Anniversary Awards will be given to bright and aspiring students in all locations having NIIT centre. The award recipients will be able to avail themselves of the NIIT course at half the tuition fees.

Apart from this, NIIT has also announced a programme for building computer literacy in the country at the same time. This short programme will enable a non-user not only to handle a computer efficiently, but also covers the basic functions like document creation and printing, calculations, presentation, sending and receiving e-mail and fundamentals of Internet for Tk 1000.



PHOTO: PRIME BANK
Mohammad Aminul Haque, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Prime Bank Limited, inaugurates the bank's 25th branch at New Eskaton in the city yesterday. Sponsor Director and Vice Chairman of the Board MA Khaleque, Executive Committee Chairman of the Board Mafiz Ahmed Bhuiyan, Directors Firoja Amin, Quazi Sirazul Islam (MP), Md Shahadat Hossain, Md Nurul Haque Sikder, Shirjul Islam Mollah, Masud Reza Bhuiya, Representative Director M A Wahhab, Managing Director (CC) Syed Naser Bukhtear Ahmed and Deputy Managing Director M Shahjahan Bhuiyan are also seen in the picture.

Next Indian budget to focus on reform implementation

Finance minister downplays economic impact of conflict with Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha promised Monday to make reform implementation the core of his next budget after a year that promised much but delivered little.

"The last budget was clearly recognised as a reform budget. Now, though, the criticism is that I am not walking the talk," Sinha said in an interview with the Business Standard newspaper.

"The next big change is to implement the reforms," said Sinha, who will unveil his budget in February for the fiscal year beginning April 1.

Sinha's 2000-2001 budget had been presented as a "new deal" for India and included bold labour reforms as well as plans to accelerate privatisation, widen the tax base and downsize government.

Progress on all fronts, however, has been slow amid a national and global economic slowdown.

But Sinha argued work had continued behind the scenes, with

the government building the national consensus necessary to implementing its reforms.

"You can blame me for the action being slower than promised, but not for inaction," he said.

The minister reiterated his warning about India's fiscal deficit, which his previous budget had aimed to limit within 4.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

"There could be some slippage on the fiscal deficit," Sinha said, adding the main problem was with insufficient revenue rather than bloated spending.

While acknowledging the global economic slowdown, Sinha said India's focus was on its domestic market, the main driver of the economy.

"India has an advantage. We have a huge market of our own. We can be self-reliant," he said.

Sinha played down concerns over the economic impact of the current crisis in Indo-Pakistan relations, while hinting at a possible hike in defence spending.

"There is no reason to panic," Sinha said.

"We have the resilience. We have overcome crises like these in the past. We have clearly demonstrated our capability to meet such challenges."

The Indian and Pakistani militaries have both been put on high alert as tensions have soared in the wake of the December 13 attack on the parliament complex in New Delhi.

India has blamed the attack on Pakistan-based militants acting at the behest of Pakistani intelligence and on Friday said it was recalling its ambassador in Islamabad.

Looking forward to the budget in February, Sinha said an increase in defence expenditure "is not ruled out," despite an economic slowdown.

In his last budget, Sinha raised defence spending by 13.8 percent to 620 billion rupees (13.2 billion dollars) -- or 2.5 percent of India's GDP.



PHOTO: PRAN
Photo shows (from left) Eleas Mridha, Executive Director of AMCL-PRAN, Maj Gen Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd), Chief Executive, Lt Col Mahtabuddin Ahmed (Retd), Chairman, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, Deputy Managing Director, Gias Uddin, Director-Business Development, at the company's 16th AGM held in the city yesterday.

Musharraf calls for stronger trade ties with China

AFP, Beijing

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf wound up his four-day state visit to China Monday, urging businessmen from both countries to step up trade and investment links.

After lavishing praise on 50 years of bilateral ties between China and Pakistan for much of his trip, Musharraf told Guangdong provincial governor Lu Ruihua that the two nations should develop stronger economic connections, Xinhua news agency said.

"Pakistan is focusing on economic revitalization, more Pakistani enterprises should look for cooperation opportunities in China," Musharraf said.

Bilateral trade between the neighbors was expected to come in at just under a billion dollars this year, outstripping the previous years of economic might which the strategic partnership has exerted over South Asia.

Following his talks with Lu, the Pakistani president presided over an economic and investment meeting in Guangdong's provincial capital of Guangzhou.

He departed Guangzhou midway and was expected to head back to

Islamabad following a transit stopover in Beijing, Pakistani officials said.

Musharraf's visit to China has come as tensions between Pakistan and India have grown following an attack on the Indian parliament on December 13 which New Delhi has blamed on Pakistani intelligence forces.

On Sunday, Indian and Pakistani border guards in the disputed Kashmiri region opened fire upon

each other, killing two Indian soldiers as a war of words between the two capitals escalated.

Musharraf's previous visit to China in summer 1999 was cut short after clashes erupted in the Kashmir region.

His present trip has worked to remind the world that China and Pakistan remain close allies, despite Islamabad's involvement in Western plans for the future of Afghanistan and improved relations with the United States through Washington's war on terrorism, analysts said.

In Beijing on Thursday and Friday, Musharraf held talks with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Premier Zhu Rongji and parliamentary head Li Peng, where they widely praised the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations.

"Our relationship is deeper than the oceans and higher than mountains, we are linked by rivers and mountains," Musharraf told China Central Television in an interview.

"I'm very positive with my visit here and my interaction with all the leaders (shows) that Pakistan and China's strategic relationship, political relationship and economic relationship will carry on rising in the times to come."

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PHOTO: RPGCL
The 14th AGM of Rupantarita Praktirik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL) was held on Saturday. Chairman and shareholders of the company attended the meeting.

Thai economy set to rebound in 2002: PM

AFP, Bangkok

The Thai economy could rebound in late 2002 on the back of a global upturn and government efforts to build the domestic market, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was quoted as saying Monday.

Thailand was well positioned to benefit from an expected increase in foreign investment and international trade thanks to his government's economic platform, the premier told the Nation daily.

"The world has changed," Thaksin, who last week made his first official visit to the United States, was quoted as saying. "Who could have predicted the September 11 attacks?"

"But from our assessment and the forecast of the US Federal Reserve chairman (Alan Greenspan), America could see a recovery in the second half of next year. (The impact on Thailand) could be substantial."

Thaksin said he would focus next year on implementing policies using his CEO-style of management, adding that it had been difficult to find officials to take responsibility for his cabinet's ambitious plans.

He was quoted as saying he had asked Finance Minister Somkid

Jatusripitak to take charge of promoting corporate governance via the Stock Exchange of Thailand and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

A stronger emphasis on corporate governance would give foreign investors greater confidence in the Thai market, he added.

"We see corporate governance as a means through which the stock market should be made attractive to foreign investors," Thaksin told the daily.

Thaksin has made repeated efforts this year to restore foreign investor confidence and counter fears of protectionism after he described his government's stance as inward-looking in a March statement.

The prime minister was quoted as saying his government would maintain its "dual-track" approach to economic management, which strives to boost domestic demand while wooing international trade and investment.

"We rely for more than 60 percent of our GDP on exports," he told the Nation. "If we had not paid sufficient attention to domestic demand stimulation we would have been in trouble like some other countries."

Dhaka Bank introduces Any Branch Banking

Dhaka Bank has introduced a new service, Any Branch Banking, says a press release.

ATM Hayatuzzaman Khan, Chairman of the bank, inaugurated the service on Monday.

Under the newly introduced service, customers of Dhaka Bank Limited will be able to withdraw and deposit money and conduct all other personal banking transactions from any branch of the bank in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. The service is free of any charge.

Managing Director of the Bank Md Moklesur Rahman, senior executives and customers of the Bank, attended the inaugural ceremony.

Dhaka Bank Limited offers a variety of personal banking services including 24-hour banking through E-Cash shared ATM network, Phone Banking service from selected branches and a Credit Card.

Japan cabinet okays austere budget for 2002

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's government approved Monday the country's smallest proposed budget in four years for the year to March 2003 as it attempts to cut waste and push for reforms.

"We boldly took the initial step of the reform-implementation budget," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told reporters Monday.

Koizumi's cabinet approved the proposed 81.23 trillion-yen (635 billion-dollar) budget, which is down 1.7 percent from the initial budget for the current fiscal year.

It will be debated at the Diet (parliament) in January for legislative approval.

The cabinet's proposed budget reflects a slump in tax revenues and Koizumi's promise of fiscal policy reforms.

It was formulated in line with Koizumi's pledge to keep new government bond issues under 30 trillion yen in the year to March 2003.