

## SIA provides sponsorship letters for S'pore visa

Singapore Airlines has started providing sponsorship letters for its passengers to facilitate the processing of visas to visit Singapore, says a press release.

This is in response to the recent requirement by the Singapore embassy for Bangladeshis to support their visa application by providing sponsorship letters from an individual or company based in Singapore.

The sponsorship letters will be most beneficial to Bangladeshi tourists visiting Singapore, as they would otherwise not be able to find such sponsors in Singapore. Businessmen and passengers going for medical treatment may also find it useful.

Passengers need only purchase a minimum of one night's hotel accommodation from Singapore Airlines before the sponsorship letter is issued.

For passengers who transit Singapore before travelling to their final destinations, sponsorship letters are also provided for passengers who have long layover so that they could enter the country for a stopover. Hotel accommodation and transportation are usually provided at airline's expense for these instances.

If transit passengers do not wish to endure the 14-day waiting time for a Singapore visa, Singapore Airlines also provides layover at transit hotels located in the world-renowned Changi Airport. The award-winning airport, boasts of 6 gardens, more than 150 shops, supermarket and restaurants, swimming pool, free movie theaters and science discovery centre and others.

## New members to approve ASEAN integration plan

AFP, Phuket, Thailand

Ministers from the four newest members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were due Wednesday to approve an ambitious plan to revamp their economies and infrastructure, officials said.

The Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) "is a special program to help the four newer members integrate themselves into ASEAN," said the 10-nation group's secretary general, Rodolfo Severino.

"This means they take measures to link themselves to the rest of ASEAN in terms of the ASEAN free trade area, the investment area and so on," he told AFP.

The scheme targets four areas for improvement in ASEAN's newest and poorest member nations — infrastructure, human resource development, information technology and regional economic integration.

The ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam were due to inspect the final version of the action plan for the first time on the sidelines of an informal retreat for ASEAN foreign ministers at this Thai resort island.

## WTO tells US to reform steel duties by Nov 23

REUTERS, Geneva

The World Trade Organisation Tuesday gave the United States until November 23 to comply with a WTO ruling which found its anti-dumping duties imposed on Japanese hot-rolled steel violated free trade, officials said.

A neutral arbitrator, appointed by the WTO to determine the timeframe for Washington to come into line with an WTO appeal body ruling handed down last August 23, issued the decision to the two parties, they added.

The text of the WTO ruling was not immediately available.

"The ruling was that the United States has 15 months from August 23, that means November 23," a US official in Geneva told Reuters. "We were notified today."

Tokyo brought the case in November 1999 after Washington imposed antidumping duties of 17 to 67 per cent on hot-rolled steel plates imported from Japan. US steelmakers complained they were being undermined by foreign competitors producing goods more cheaply and "dumping" them on the US market.

The WTO appellate body upheld most of the original ruling, agreeing with Japan that the United States used arbitrary methods and data to calculate anti-dumping duties on Japanese steel imports, but it rejected other elements of the case.

# Stringent rules on moneychangers

SHAHRIAR KARIM

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has tightened the regulation of the money exchange houses slapping a minimum limit on the yearly transaction and making a minimum net asset limit mandatory for renewal of licences.

No moneychanger house would be considered for renewal of licence if its yearly transaction falls below US\$ 0.25 million, a circular of the BB issued Tuesday said.

However, the BB directive said, "if any moneychanger's yearly transaction falls in unavoidable circumstances, the BB may consider renewal of its licence upon written commitment that it would improve the yearly transaction to prescribed limit," the BB directive said.

But a moneychanger would get the chance only once in its business life. All the moneychanger houses have to submit their annual transaction to the central bank for verification.

The central bank also made it mandatory for the money exchange houses to have net asset of Tk one million.

The BB's belt-tightening measure is seen as a drive to reduce the number of the moneychangers. Recently, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman expressed his doubt over the whole mechanism of money exchange business. He also said that there was no necessity of moneychanger houses when the banks are providing the same service.

The minister also alleged that there could be link between the hundi business and rising number of money exchange houses. Against this backdrop, a BB team headed by the governor is working to evaluate the performance of the moneychangers and the whole system.

The minister, late last month, also hinted that the authorities could go for wholesale cancellation of licences of the money exchange firms on the basis of the central bank committee report.

The BB through the circular also raised the yearly licence fee of the money exchange firms to Tk 5000 from Tk 2000.



Managing Director of Shahjalal Bank Limited (SBL) Matin Uddin Ahmed and Managing Director of Industrial Development Leasing Company of Bangladesh Limited (IDLC) M Aminul Islam sign an agreement on behalf of their respective organisations at Dhaka Main Branch of SBL on Monday.

## Call money rate nosedives

BSS, Dhaka

With Bangladesh Bank's lending support to the commercial banks under its rediscount facility, the spiraling call money rate nosedived to eight per cent yesterday from its all-time high at 51 per cent amid huge cash withdrawal by depositors and businessmen from banks, fund managers said.

The call money rate touched its high at 15 per cent in few deals yesterday compared to yesterday's high at 20 per cent. But in most deals it ranged between nine per cent and 12 per cent compared to previous

day's range between 18 per cent and 20 per cent, they said.

During the same period last year, the call money rate shot up to its high at 26 per cent due to high money demand from leather businessmen.

More than Tk 500 crore was withdrawn from different commercial bank yesterday for paying bonus to employees and for hides and skin on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha, the second largest religious festival of the Muslim community, fund managers of nationalised commercial banks told BSS.

"But pressure could not mount as the central bank supported banks providing money through its

rediscount window facility," they said.

At least 15 commercial banks took loans from the Bangladesh Bank, the central bank, at six per cent rates under the rediscount window facility.

The liquidity crunch was created when the central bank issued a new cash reserve rule disqualifying foreign currency balances last week as the demand for money shot up due to the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha, fund managers said.

# Enron CEO knew details of partnership transactions

## Former chairman says

AP, Washington

Former Enron chairman Kenneth Lay told company investigators that his successor as chief executive officer, Jeffrey Skilling, knew the details of many of the partnership transactions that sent the energy-trading company toward bankruptcy.

In 17 pages of notes released Tuesday, Lay appeared to contradict Skilling's recent testimony at a House hearing. Lay was quoted as saying that Skilling presented board members with the idea for one of the key partnerships. In another instance, Lay said, Skilling would have been responsible for tracking the financial performance of one of the deals.

"Lay did not know who came up with the idea of LJM (a partnership) because Skilling and (former chief financial officer Andrew) Fastow presented the idea together," stated the investigators' notes from a Jan. 16 interview.

Skilling testified before Congress that he knew few of the details of the partnership transactions.

The notes, released by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, are the first detailed account of Lay's defense regarding the collapse of Enron. He has invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self incrimination and refused to testify to Congress.

Skilling told Lay he was so upset by the drop in Enron's stock price last summer that he couldn't sleep at night and was resigning, according to the interview notes. Lay told the investigators he was shocked when Skilling told him he was leaving Enron after about six months as chief executive officer.

Skilling testified recently at a hearing of the committee's investigative panel that when he resigned in August, "I did not believe the company was in any financial peril. ... I absolutely, unequivocally thought the company was in good shape."

A spokeswoman for Skilling, Judy Leon, didn't immediately return a telephone call seeking comment Tuesday night.

Lay told the Enron investigators he never felt Skilling was trying to manipulate him and that Skilling always kept him well informed on the company's business.

Telling investigators that he had a hands-off management style, Lay repeatedly said he was unable to recall key details of the partnership transactions.

Lay said he was shocked when he discovered that Fastow had made \$30 million from running the partnerships.

"Lay said that he was shocked because Fastow ... was only spending a few hours a week on LJM work," the investigators' notes say. Lay also said that Fastow had been

reluctant to create the partnerships.

Investors nationwide lost money on a stock that had been a Wall Street favorite and thousands of Enron employees were stripped of their retirement savings in accounts loaded with Enron stock as the company slid into the biggest bankruptcy ever on Dec. 2.

Both the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Justice Department are investigating Enron and the role of its longtime auditor, Arthur Andersen LLP, which has acknowledged widespread destruction by its employees of Enron-related documents.

Skilling is scheduled to testify next Tuesday at a hearing of the Senate Commerce Committee. Also testifying is Enron executive Sherron Watkins, who first warned Lay last August of serious accounting problems involving the partnerships that were used to hide more than \$1 billion in debt and eventually brought down the energy-trading company.

Other key Enron figures, including Lay and Fastow, have invoked their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination and refused to answer lawmakers' questions. Skilling's testimony earlier this month prompted some key lawmakers to say they did not believe his version of events. Rep. Billy Tauzin, a Louisiana Republican and chairman of the full Energy and Commerce Committee, suggested that Skilling could face formal accusations of perjury.

## First AGM of CDBL held

Central Depository Bangladesh Limited (CDBL) held its first annual general meeting (AGM) on Monday, February 18, 2002 at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, says a press release.

The meeting was presided over by AKM Shamsuddin, chairman of the company.

CDBL is a public limited company formed by a consortium of financial institutions including the stock exchanges, nationalized banks, foreign and private banks and publicly listed companies to provide infrastructure support to the capital market.

The company will implement scrip-less trading in the stock exchanges by replacing paper certificates with computer entries and adapt paper-less trading. The scrip-less environment will eliminate the problems associated with paper certificates such as lost or forged certificates and unauthorized endorsements and help modernize and boost the activities of the capital market in Bangladesh.

The Central Depository System (CDS) will also cut down the cost of maintaining individual listed company's share department.

Twenty-two shareholders representing the various institutions participated in the first (AGM) of the company.

## US firm wants to market fuel additive in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

An American company wants to market a fuel additive in Bangladesh to help its older refinery system produce cleaner fuel for vehicular and mechanical usage.

Promoters said Formula Plus, the petroleum treatment liquid, evolved by Formula Plus Inc Arizona, USA, will provide clean fuel for end users and it will significantly reduce black emissions.

Currently, the FP is being marketed in 26 countries including India, China and Malaysia, company's vice president Peter K Condy told reporters in the city Tuesday.

One gallon of Formula Plus will be used for treating 1,000 gallons of fuel and Bangladesh will require 2,466 gallons of the FP liquid per day, Peter said.

Bangladesh's daily fuel consumption is estimated at 58,708 barrels (2,465,736 gallons), he said.

Cost of formula is \$30 per gallon in India, and the price is not yet calculated for Bangladesh, he added.

Since crude oil refinery is completely in public sector in Bangladesh, the government will be the sole consumer for Formula Plus additive, said Naimur Rahman, General Manager of Global Network Ltd, local agent for the US product. He said they will soon take up the matter with government leaders.

## China to cut interest rates in 3 years

AFP, Beijing

China said Wednesday it would cut interest rates on loans and deposits in the local currency for the first time in almost three years, amid warnings of slowing economic growth.

The rate on one-year deposits will fall to 1.98 per cent from 2.25 per cent, while the rate on one-year loans will be slashed to 5.31 per cent from 5.85 per cent with effect from Thursday, the central bank said.

"The central bank's decision aims to overcome the negative effects of the slowing growth of the global economy on the development of China's economy," Xinhua news agency quoted a central bank spokesman as saying.

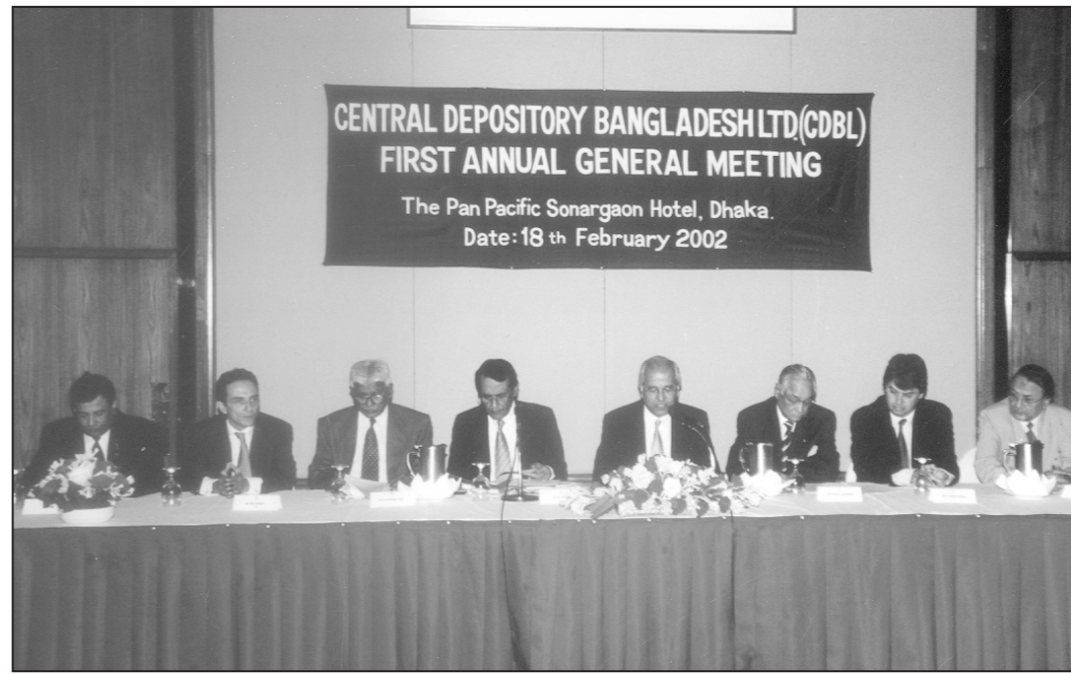
## New SCB office bearers meet shipping minister

The newly-elected office bearers and executive committee members of the Shippers' Council of Bangladesh had a meeting with the Shipping Minister Col (Retd) Akbar Hussain, at his secretariat conference room on Tuesday, says a press release.

The Chairman of council, Faruber Anwar, Senior Vice-Chairman, Arzu Rahman Bhuiya and Vice-Chairman, MR Mridha appraised the minister of different problems faced by the shippers/exporters in transporting country's export/import cargo.

They also explained to the minister about the activities of Shippers' Council and its problems.

The minister assured them of his help.



The first annual general meeting of Central Depository Bangladesh Limited (CDBL) was held at Sonargaon Hotel on Monday with A K M Shamsuddin, Chairman of the company, presiding. Picture shows (from right to left) directors Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed, M Salman Ispahani, Samson H Chowdhury, Chairman A K M Shamsuddin and Managing Director M H Samad, among others, at the AGM.

# Networking professionals can help reap IT benefits: experts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Experts at a seminar on Tuesday called for creating networking professionals in the country to reap the benefits of information technology (IT).

They said that such professionals could be created through knowledge-sharing.

They also focused on the potentials of Broadband Internet and Cable Internet via cable TV network (CATV) in the country for high-speed data transfer.

They highlighted different features of Internet and Networking. "The Internet is the best way for business which saves money as well as time," Shekhar Kulkarni, General Manager of D-Link, said.

Referring to the use of Hub in Mumbai city, India, the experts at the seminar stressed on using Hub through Local Area Network (LAN) for more connectivity and in a cheaper rate.

Bearing the slogan 'Building Networks for People' and focusing



Shekhar Kulkarni

on present and future networking and cabling solution Spectrum, a local IT firm, and D-Link (India) Ltd. jointly organised the seminar at a city hotel.

D-Link, a global company originating from Taiwan and its R&D unit in USA, is now the leader of Networking product manufacturing and Technology Company in Asia.

Addressing the seminar, Shekhar Kulkarni said that in the

coming days Networking will be the need of all segments of life which could enable Bangladesh to double its marketing and sales activities facilitating online support.

Forkan Bin Quasem, managing director of Spectrum, said his company is always committed to provide best technological support and solutions to the local market produced by its highly skilled IT professionals.

Mushfiqur Rahman, DMD of Spectrum, said that to make the country properly equipped and to meet the challenge for present and future technology, the Spectrum has already provided networking training to 100 IT professionals from different IT companies and it has committed to provide more training.

An exhibition of wide-range of D-Link products was also held at the hotel on the occasion.

Later, Prof. Kaikobad of BUET distributed awards among the best client and retailers of the D-Link and the Spectrum.

# StanChart 2001 profits fall 20pc as bad debts soar

AFP, London

British-based bank Standard Chartered announced on Wednesday a 20-per cent fall in pre-tax profits for 2001 to 1.15 billion dollars (1.3 billion euros) as bad debts soared.

Provisions for bad debts climbed by 56 per cent to 731 million dollars, mainly from exposure to the economic crisis in Argentina, wholesale banking in Malaysia and personal bankruptcies in Hong Kong, the bank said in a statement.

The pre-tax figure was below analyst forecasts of 1.25-1.4 billion dollars, but the bank's share price nevertheless rose 1.5 per cent to 745 pence in early deals.

Standard Chartered, which operates mainly in Asia, said that 2001 had been a challenging year both because of the worldwide economic slowdown and the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

"These developments added to

uncertainty throughout the emerging markets, not least in Asia, where the region was still recovering from the crisis of the late 1990s," said Chairman Patrick Gillam.

Growth had slowed across Asia and Malaysia, while Singapore and Taiwan were in recession, he said.

"Consumer confidence was badly affected," he added. "This was particularly noticeable in Hong Kong, where deflationary pressures saw many people suffer from negative home equity for the first time."

But Gillam said there were also bright spots in Asia, including healthy trade surpluses and modest inflation, which had allowed central banks to keep interest rates low in most countries.

The recent entry of China into the World Trade Organisation would also help fuel economic growth across Asia, he added.

Standard Chartered said it was still committed to a secondary stock exchange listing in Hong Kong, which it delayed last year because of

volatile markets.

"We always said we fully intend to list (in Hong Kong) and yes, a listing in the second half is likely" assuming the markets recover, finance director Nigel Kenny told AFP's financial newswire AFX.

Regarding the bad debts, Kenny said: "The provisions are higher than we expected, but we are cautiously optimistic about the development of provisions in 2002."

Gillam said that 2002 looked set to be another year of modest world growth, though emerging markets could suffer from political instability in Zimbabwe, the economic crisis in Argentina and the US-led 'war on terrorism'.

"The US economy will grow, but perhaps at only a slightly faster pace than last year. If the US does better, so too should Asia," he predicted.



Newly-elected office-bearers and executive committee members of Shippers' Council of Bangladesh met Shipping Minister Col (Retd) Akbar Hussain, at his secretariat office in the city on Tuesday.