

## Ovaltine 3 in 1 launched

Novartis (Bangladesh) Limited has recently launched Ovaltine 3 in 1 in the market as a brand extension of the umbrella brand, says a press release.

Ovaltine 3 in 1 is a unique and nutritious blend of Ovaltine, skimmed milk powder and sugar. It dissolves easily in hot or cold water and comes in handy single serve sachets for easy preparation at home, at work or even outdoors.

Ovaltine 3 in 1 is now available in 30 gram sachet pack and MRP is Tk 12.

Ovaltine 3 in 1 is made with high quality ingredients providing the body with vital energy producing and protective nutrients.

Ovaltine 3 in 1 mixed with water contains, only 1.5g of fat per 200 cc serving making it an ideal drink even for the most health conscious consumers.

It is considered an ideal drink for students, executives and sportsmen engaged in hard physical and mental labour, as it will act as a revitaliser.

## India to get gas directly from Iran

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Iran is planning to deliver natural gas directly to India via a deep-sea pipeline to avoid Pakistani territorial waters, National Iranian Oil Company vice president Ahmad Rahgozar said Monday.

India initiated the scheme and an Italian joint venture of Snamprogetti and Saipem have signed a contract with the Iranian company for feasibility studies for the 2,000-kilometre (1,200-mile) link which have begun.

"This is a new concept of selling gas from Iran through a bilateral contract. It is between Iran and India," Rahgozar said at a gas conference in Abu Dhabi.

Iran informed Pakistan about the deep sea project and Islamabad had accepted it, he said.

The cost for what would be the first such pipeline under the Arabian Sea is still to be calculated.

Plans are nonetheless continuing for an Iran-Pakistan-India onshore pipeline, despite difficult relations between Pakistan and India.

"Through the onshore pipeline, Iran can sell natural gas to Pakistan and India. Iran will undertake all risks," he said.

The cost of the onshore pipeline project is about 3.5 billion dollars.

## SIA launches Internet check-in service

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has launched a new Internet check-in service that allows customers to choose their seats up to two days before departure, says a press release.

Users can view a real-time seating plan while choosing their desired seats.

Yap Kim Wah, SIA's Senior Vice President for Product and Services said with Internet check-in, you can check-in from the comfort of your home or office and have the peace of mind of knowing that you have a seat before you get to the airport. We hope to offer our customers a more convenient pre-flight experience and save them some precious time. In fact, if you have checked-in online, you only need to arrive 45 minutes before the flight, or an hour for flights to and from the United States.

The service is available for KrisFlyer (SIA's frequent flyer programme) and PPS Club members, as well as customers who book their flights through the SIA website, on all SIA flights with the exception of flights to some destinations in Asia and Europe. Up to seven passengers under the same reservation can check-in together. Customers can check-in through to their final destination and even check-in for return flights within 48 hours of their outbound flight. The internet check-in-service also enables customers to check-in for connecting flights operated by selected airlines through SIA's wide network of through check-in arrangements with these airlines.

## Oil price eases

AFP, London

Oil prices eased gently on Monday as the market shrugged at an OPEC decision to keep output unchanged. A barrel of Brent North Sea crude for May delivery gave back 20 cents to 24.35 dollars. In New York, the light sweet crude April contract eased five cents on Friday to 24.51 dollars a barrel.

# US offers to help better port facilities, shipping routes

UNB, Dhaka

The United States has offered to assist Bangladesh's comprehensive plans for enhancing port facilities and developing shipping routes in view of huge prospects for free trade in the eastern Himalayan region.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters assured the help in a meeting with Shipping Minister Lt Col (Retd) Akbar Hossain at his office yesterday.

During the talks the minister specially mentioned a possible free-trade area comprising Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar in the eastern Himalayan region and plans for creating port facilities for catering the needs of the trading bloc.

Short and long-term plans of the government for developing river routes, shipping system and expanding port facilities in the country were discussed in the meeting.

The American Ambassador expressed her country's interest in the expansion of port facilities in Bangladesh in view of "huge prospects" for export of various products, including readymade garments, to a quota-free world market.

Mary Ann hoped that the US-Bangladesh cooperation in port facilities and shipping development would be expanded further in the days to come.

A big container terminal project planned by a company of her country, SSA, off the Chittagong sea port has long been held back.

The Shipping Minister explained the progress of work on the New Mooring Terminal Extension Project at the coast of Chittagong and mentioned the necessity of increasing terminal facilities in private sector.

He also apprised the US envoy of various future plans and programme of the government for developing river routes and increasing port facilities.

The plans include construction of Pangoan and Khanpur container terminals and development of Sunamganj-Mongla and Chilmari-Teknaf river routes.

"Work for increasing navigability of the river route from Ashulia to Sadarghat encircling Dhaka City and creating landing facilities in this route are in progress," he told her.

The US envoy appreciated different steps of the government taken in this field for increasing internal and external trade facilities of the country, said a ministry press release.

## Govt asks officials to achieve higher revenue target

UNB, Dhaka

Although revenue collection is well behind the projection, State Minister for Finance Monday asked the bewildered tax officials for a hectic drive to achieve a higher target.

Shah Abul Hussain met separately senior VAT and income tax officials at the National Board of Revenue to whip them up for collecting more revenue to help the government raise the share of development financing from domestic resources.

Apparently reluctant to accept the pleas of the officials about objective constraints, Hossain asked them to chase the fresh targets. He directed them to concentrate more on the areas where taxes are evaded and look for unexplored pockets.

Earlier, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman set an ambitious target asking revenue officials to exceed this fiscal year's projection at least by Tk 1000 crore.

Meanwhile, revenue collection fell short of target by about Tk 300 crore in July-February period. The collection in the first eight months of the current fiscal year was, however, Tk 982 crore higher than the corresponding period of previous year. The original revenue target for 2001-02 was set at Tk 20,730 crore.

Heads of various tax and VAT zones placed their 8-month reports at the review meeting chaired by NBR Chairman Dr Shoeb Ahmed.

While most of the VAT and Income Tax circles failed to achieve their targets, the state minister asked the officials to apply all tricks to exceed the targets.

Meeting sources told UNB that commissioners of different VAT and tax zones informed the State Minister of the practical problems. Despite that the minister raised targets for each zone asking them to achieve it during the rest three months of the fiscal year.

Added pressure puzzled the officials and some of them frankly admitted their inability to achieve it. Some commissioners even sought police protection during their hunt for tax collections.

However, a VAT commissioner from Dhaka assured the minister of collecting additional revenue of Tk 200 crore if police support is provided.

The revenue officials said VAT has piled up in crores with the utility agencies as they have not paid to NBR the revenue collected from the customers along with bills.

VAT commissioner from Chittagong told the minister that they could not realise about Tk 320 crore from Petrobangla, which it has

already collected from consumers as VAT. One commissioner in Dhaka said that BTTB has not yet submitted return of VAT proceeds to NBR.

Recently, NBR decided to collect VAT separately through banks from utility bills from February. Although the new system would ensure due collection of VAT from these agencies, banks would take at least three months to process every month's collection and send it to NBR.

So the revenue proceeds from February onwards from telephone, gas, electricity and other utility agencies would not actually be added to this year's accounts, they added.

While examining the reports furnished by different sectors, the minister expressed his dissatisfaction over the failures in revenue collection from brick-fields, cement, hotel and restaurants, iron sheets and re-rolling mills, tea estates and construction sector.

Since external assistance is gradually becoming more and more scarce and conditional, domestic revenue remains the only option for meeting the country's development needs, the minister said referring to the Paris meet, meeting sources said.

## Nat'l cricketers open EBL high performance account

National cricket stars opened EBL High Performance Account at a simple ceremony at the principal branch of Eastern Bank Limited (EBL) in the city on Monday, says a press release.

K Mahmood Sattar, Managing Director & CEO, and other high officials of the bank were present on this occasion.

Among the players, Khaled Mashud, Habibul Bashar, Javed Omar Belim, Khaled Mahmud, Al-Shahriar, Mohd Ashraf and Akram Khan were present.

Eastern Bank launched EBL High Performance Account last month. This is a savings account that accrues interest on a daily basis.

Moreover, it conjoins the security of a savings account with the convenience of a current account by allowing customers unlimited number of withdrawals of any amount.

## PRAN Group celebrates 23rd Corporate Day

PRAN Group celebrated its 23rd Corporate Day at a local hotel on Sunday, says a press release.

Maj Gen Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd), Chief Executive of PRAN Group, thanked the invitees for their continuous support towards PRAN Group success.

Chairman of the Group Lt Col Mahtabuddin Ahmed (Retd) also spoke on the occasion.

Deputy Managing Director Ahsan Khan Chowdhury in a short presentation on the group said the group at present comprises nine companies and about 5000 employees are working in it.

Members of the Parliament, economists, editors of the leading national dailies, journalists, business personalities, prominent citizen and functionaries of PRAN Group were present at the function.

## Kenya tea prices end mixed at auction

REUTERS, Mombasa

Kenya tea prices were mostly softer Monday although quality teas held steady as exporters bought selectively, traders said.

"Most teas were well absorbed but prices were mixed," said a broker at Africa Tea Brokers (ATB). "Quality teas maintained their prices, but others were lower."

Traders said the anticipated high yield of tea, due to the onset of heavy rains over the main growing areas, was not now likely to materials as the rainfall had not been sustained over the past week.

"The feeling has been that the rains may yield a high crop, but we are not so sure yet," the ATB broker said.

"The rains are late and not well spread and the cold weather is likely to step in soon."

He said exporters who had slowed down their activity for a second week in a row, due to the improving rainfall, may soon have to re-examine their strategy.

Most buyers were active at the market but at lower prices, traders said. Britain, Pakistan, Egypt and eastern Europe were fairly active.

Best Broken Pekoes (BP1s) were sold at between \$1.90-\$1.92 per kg compared to \$1.98-\$2.03 per kg last week. Best Pekoes Fannings ones (PF1s) were at \$1.90-\$2.10 per kg from \$1.99-\$2.01 per kg last week.



A group of Bangladesh cricketers are seen with K Mahmood Sattar, MD & CEO of Eastern Bank Limited, at the opening ceremony of their EBL High Performance Account at the principal branch of the bank Monday.

# US networking co plans business expansion 'Bangladesh a potential market for IP solutions'

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

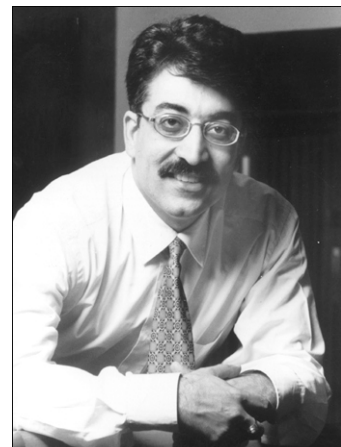
As Bangladesh IT market is growing, a US-based networking solution providing company Cisco Systems Inc. is planning to expand its business activities in the country.

"We are eyeing multimillion dollar market here through providing networking solutions to Bangladeshi Internet firms," Sudhir Narang, Vice President of Cisco Systems-India, told The Daily Star in an interview yesterday. Narang is on a three-day visit to Dhaka to attend the launching ceremony of two of its local distributors -- Ingram Micro and Redington.

He said Bangladesh is a potential market for different Internet Protocol (IP) solutions since the market is growing tremendously. Bangladesh is one of the pioneers in the region to embrace the technology, he added.

Narang said the country has now focused on developing its infrastructure and his company is committed to helping both the government and private organisations with their networking needs.

Another purpose of his visit, he said, is to find more educational institutes for inclusion of Cisco



Sudhir Narang

networking curricula. "We are hoping to establish more Cisco networking academies in order to cater to the need of local IT industry," he said.

Presently Cisco has a deal with the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), where about 50 students are taking a course based on Cisco networking curriculum.

Cisco Networking Academy is a world-wide philanthropic programme aimed at creating

trained manpower that can meet the growing demand for networking professionals.

He said Cisco established its presence in Bangladesh back in 1998. Since then it has appointed two system integrators Flora Limited and Desktop Computer Connection Limited. There are also 70 resellers in the country.

Cisco had supplied US\$4 million worth networking solutions in the country in the last three years. The Cisco clients' list includes Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), foreign and nationalised commercial banks, private ISPs, NGOs and different educational institutions in the country.

He said Cisco Networking Academy Program includes courses on Internet technology.

The company has an investment of US\$75 million within the SAARC region till date and has a plan to invest another US\$200 million over the next two years.

The company has also announced an investment of US\$10 million to expand the Cisco Networking Academy Program across India and the SAARC countries.

# India's economic condition deeply worrisome: PM

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said Monday he was concerned at the nation's economic health, adding targeted economic growth would barely dent the massive poverty problem.

"The country's economic condition is deeply worrisome," Vajpayee told parliament's upper house, adding state government finances "are in worse shape".

"After 54 years of independence, we're still battling poverty."

India is grappling to bridge its yawning fiscal deficit which is expected to widen to 5.7 per cent of GDP in the current financial year to March from its earlier estimate of 4.7 per cent, due to lower-than-expected revenues.

The fiscal deficit has been pegged at 5.3 per cent of GDP in 2002/03 (April-March). But the combined fiscal deficit of the federal and 29 state governments is already close to 10 per cent of GDP.

"Revenue or funds from the centre go towards paying pensions and

wages, here is the money left to fight poverty," Vajpayee said.

Analysts said rising interest payments, an increase in subsidies and a surge in pension payments had driven up the deficit to unsustainable levels and curbed the government's ability to invest in infrastructure and social sectors.

Vajpayee said India's GDP, seen increasing 5.4 per cent in the fiscal year to end-March, was not growing fast enough. "That's why we are aiming at eight per cent. Even this will make only a small dent in poverty."

India grew at 4.0 per cent in 2000/01.

On Saturday, Finance Minister Yaswant Sinha said he saw signs of a rebound in the economy on the back of strong agricultural growth and revival in the global economy.

Analysts say the recovery could halt if political uncertainty and religious tensions continued in the country and put the brakes on fresh investments.

Vajpayee's government is facing a deep crisis after a row over a holy site claimed both by Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya in the northern state of

Uttar Pradesh.

The Ayodhya crisis was at the centre of religious riots in India's second-most industrialised state of Gujarat that killed more than 700 people earlier this month.

Vajpayee said politicians had caved in to populism too often and had to abandon policies driven by vote-winning.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition which Vajpayee heads halved a controversial hike in cooking gas prices announced in the federal budget in February following pressure from political and consumer groups.

"The government decided to roll back cooking gas prices as there was a demand from people. We have succumbed in the past to populist pressures," Vajpayee said.

"(But) if we are going to stick to the beaten path, we are not going to have a transformation. Populism will have to be given up," he said.

The rollback will increase the government's annual subsidy burden by seven billion rupees because the government sells cooking at lower than the actual cost.

# 'Southeast Asia's export-driven growth formulas irreplaceable'

AFP, Singapore

Southeast Asia's economic prosperity will continue to hinge on export-driven policies despite the "painful" changes forced by globalisation, Singapore deputy leader Lee Hsien Loong said Tuesday.

Although the region was criticised during the 1997-1998 financial crisis for being over-reliant on exports and foreign investment, Lee said there was no alternative for the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"For small Asian economies, and Singapore in particular, the idea of relying on tiny domestic markets to stimulate growth and enterprise is inherently implausible," he said in a keynote speech to an Asian invest-

ments forum.

"Larger economies may make more of their domestic markets, and indeed the ASEAN countries as a group need to integrate their markets in the ASEAN Free Trade Area to make themselves more attractive to foreign investments."

"But no single domestic market can substitute for the world market, an age where economies of scale are global, whether in industries like electronics and pharmaceuticals, or services like banking and telecommunications."

Under the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), duty free privileges are given to products traded among member countries and which have at least 40 per cent local content.

Tariffs on a wide range of prod-

ucts in the key economies have been brought down to between zero and five per cent under the AFTA.

ASEAN leaders have agreed to completely eliminate all import duties in the region beginning in 2010.

Citing Singapore as an example, Lee said the trade-dependent Southeast Asian state will stick with an export-oriented mindset where economic policies are concerned even if it meant pain for parts of the economy.

"We will continue to push for free trade, welcome investments, and integrate into the global economy, even as we promote entrepreneurship and seek to build Singapore firms into regional players," he said.