

GP plans 1 lakh new subscribers from Ctg

GrameenPhone has a plan to include another one lakh subscribers from Chittagong region in near future, says a press release.

This was disclosed by the GrameenPhone Managing Director Ola Ree yesterday while on a two-day visit to Chittagong.

The GP management team also accompanied him.

He visited different GrameenPhone installations located in the city.

Later Ree exchanged views with GP Corporate customers, journalists, elites of the city and representatives of GP distribution partners.

Earlier, he handed over two wheel chairs to Maa-O-Shishu Hospital of Chittagong. These were donated jointly by GrameenPhone, Rotary Club of Dhaka, North and Rotary International District-3280.

GrameenPhone started its services in Chittagong on June 28, 1998. GP has coverage in six districts including 20 upazila headquarters in Chittagong division. The GP Info Center is located in Agrabad while the technical department is situated in the Old Railway station building.

GrameenPhone has so far invested 35 million US dollars in the region out of a total investment of 170 million dollars. There are 42 base stations currently in operation and there are 37 points of sales and 185 scratch card distribution outlets around the region.

BKB realises Tk 31cr on Halkhata Day

Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) has realised Tk 31 crore on the occasion of Halkhata, says a press release.

This was revealed at an evaluation meeting on celebration of Halkhata held at the boardroom of the bank on Monday.

The General Managers, Deputy General Managers and Assistant General Managers of Head Office, entrusted with the task of recovery of loan, attended the meeting.

AKM Sajedur Rahman, Managing Director of the bank, presided over the meeting.

The recovery is considered as a great achievement in view of the fact that harvesting has not yet begun.

Halkhata, organised on the occasion of Bangla New Year, was observed for the first time in all branches of the bank.

Lankan FM visits Ctg EPZ

UNB, Dhaka

The visiting Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando has expressed his satisfaction over the infrastructural facilities in the EPZs and incentives being provided to foreign investors in Bangladesh.

"The EPZs of Bangladesh are attractive to the foreign investors particularly because of peaceful environment prevailing in the zones," he said while visiting the Chittagong Export Processing Zone on Tuesday.

Lauding the role of BEPZA in the industrialisation and economic development of Bangladesh the Sri Lanka Minister said "I am very much impressed to see the pattern of work, operational procedure and activities in the EPZs."

He said Sri Lanka would do its best so that Bangladesh could get more foreign direct investment.

Earlier, Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) Brig Gen (Retd) Mofizur Rahman briefed the Sri Lankan Minister about the activities of the EPZs in Bangladesh through a multimedia presentation.

The BEPZA chief said the rental rates for land, standard factory buildings and warehouse at Mongla, Ishwardi and Uttara EPZs have been reduced by 50 per cent than those of the EPZs in Chittagong, Dhaka and Comilla.

Later, the Sri Lankan Minister and his delegation members visited a number of industries in Chittagong EPZ, a BEPZA press release said.

LG turns profitable

AFP, Seoul

LG Electronics Inc. said Thursday its net profit surged 250 per cent to 219.8 billion won (166 million dollars) in the three months to March from a year ago.

LG Electronics said its first quarter operating profit rose to 366.9 billion won from 296.8 billion won a year ago, while sales increased to 4.69 trillion won from 4.03 trillion won.

New filling stations must have CNG facilities

State minister says at BP lubricant launch

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

New filling stations must have CNG filling facilities for getting permission from the government, said State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain.

He also said the government has intention to convert all the vehicles of the country into compressed natural gas (CNG)-run within the next two years.

According to him such a move will ensure maximum utilisation of natural gas.

The minister was speaking as the chief guest at the launching ceremony of British Petroleum (BP) Vistra 2T 200 lubricant at a city hotel Wednesday evening. Meghna Petroleum Ltd has been marketing the BP engine oil.

Among others, Secretary-in-Charge of Energy and Mineral Resources Division Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) Chairman Azharul Islam, Regional Technical Services Manager of BP Middle East-Dubai Karim W Ibrahim and General Manager of Meghna Petroleum Ltd Masudur Rahman spoke on the occasion.

The minister said the government has so far given approval to 313 CNG

filling stations and 35 CNG workshops in the private sector. He invited the petroleum sector to come forward for marketing of CNG through the filling stations.

He said the government in principle decided to phase out auto-rickshaws from Dhaka city. "But the vehicles would be allowed to ply in other cities," Mosharraf said.

He also disclosed the government does not want to continue marketing petroleum products, as private sector can deliver the service more efficiently.

Secretary-in-Charge of Energy Division Khairuzzaman Chowdhury urged the leaders of auto-rickshaw owners' association to ensure the auto-rickshaws in the street use lubricant that reduces pollution.

BP's Karim Ibrahim made a technical presentation on the newly launched engine oil during the launching ceremony.

Meghna Petroleum GM Masudur Rahman said they would market the engine oil through its 260 petrol pumps across the country. According to him, use of new lubricant would reduce ratio of smoke emission by 70 per cent.

He also said the existing two-wheelers and three-wheelers, besides the CNG-run vehicles would be able to use the engine oil.

BFFEA seeks EU support to improve shrimp products

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA) sought technical and financial support of the European Union (EU) at a meeting here Wednesday to improve the quality and diversify the shrimp products.

BFFEA side was led by its president Salahuddin Ahmed in the meeting while the EU officials were headed by EU consultant Alain Dechamat.

Ahmed told the EU officials that Bangladesh had been exporting chemical and antibiotic free shrimp in the world market.

The EU officials assured the BFFEA that EU would extend cooperation to develop the frozen food sector in Bangladesh.

Emirates wins two top awards

Emirates, the world's fastest-growing major airline, has been honoured by the US financial community -- winning two top awards presented last week at Airfinance Journal's prestigious annual 'Deal of the Year' gala dinner in New York, says a press release.

Emirates' financial team, led by Corporate Treasurer Riyaz Peermohamed, was named 'Global Treasury Team of the Year'. The Dubai-based international airline also received the Middle East/Africa 'Deal of the Year' award.

More than 150 international financial leaders from airlines, aircraft manufacturers, banks and institutional investors were present at the awards ceremony to hear Alasdair Whyte, Airfinance Journal Editor, say: "Emirates is one of the most innovative airlines, and these awards continue to demonstrate how much the financial markets respect Emirates and its management team."

This was the fifth time running that Emirates has won Airlines Journal's 'Deal of the Year', regarded as an Oscar for the airline financial industry. Last year Emirates' financial team launched its first bond issue, mandated the first combined export credit and Islamic lease financing, and closed Japanese and German operating leases for five A330 aircraft.

Nokia shares slide as sales forecast cut

AFP, Helsinki

Nokia, the world's leading mobile phone manufacturer, stunned markets Thursday as it sharply downgraded its forecast for sales this year and reported first-quarter net profit dropped 12.5-per cent to 915 million euros (814 million dollars) from a year earlier.

Sales in the period fell by 12.0 per cent to 7.014 billion euros, while earnings per share were 0.19 euros, down from 0.22.

The news sent Nokia shares plunging, losing 10 per cent on the Helsinki Stock Exchange to trade at 21.07 euros, and sent shock waves throughout the global telecom sector.

The tech-heavy Helsinki Hex index plunged by six per cent to 7574.71 points, while stock markets in London, Frankfurt and Paris also slipped due in part, analysts said, to the news from Nokia.



PHOTO: STANDARD BANK

Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Standard Bank Ltd., presides over the 40th board meeting of the bank held in the city on Tuesday.

IMF urges Europe to show restraint over steel row

AFP, Washington

IMF managing director Horst Koehler urged Europe on Wednesday to show restraint before retaliating against US steel tariffs, which he described as regrettable.

"Of course, and I say it frankly, I regret the steel decision," he told a National Press Club lunch here in advance of weekend meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

"I would have thought and of course I would have wished a different decision," he said.

US President George W. Bush announced March 5 he had decided to impose steep tariffs on steel imports to protect US producers, sparking anger overseas and among US steel consumers.

But "I would like to see the Europeans to be mature; think twice before they move to retaliation," Koehler said.

"I think if they would not move to retaliation it may give them even more impact on the talks in the WTO, in the World Trade Organization," the IMF chief said.

In Brussels, European Union officials said they could start striking back by as early as mid-June with retaliatory measures.

Such measures are "one of the options being planned," a spokesman for EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy said.

The World Trade Organisation had given the EU until mid-June to take retaliatory measures increasing tariffs on certain US products, the spokesman, Anthony Gooch, explained.

If the EU does not take action before mid-June, it would have to wait for a panel of WTO experts to review its right to retaliate -- and their decision would not come before mid-2003, Gooch said.

Lamy's spokesman stressed,

however, that Brussels would take measures only in the event that talks with Washington collapse over the payment to Europe of compensation estimated at 2.5 billion euros.

But the big issue on trade, Koehler said, was the rich nations' subsidies for agriculture, cotton, sugar and citrus fruit, which squeezed poor countries out of the market.

"I am deeply convinced if there is leadership, and we need leadership to tackle these subsidies, we will create a better world," Koehler said.

"Whatever we do (for) the poor countries -- give them debt relief, even debt cancellation, that will not do the job (of) bringing them out of poverty," he added.

Developing countries needed to be able to help themselves through trade, the IMF chief said.

"I am appealing to rich countries: Open your markets at the end it will pay off for the American people."

IMF credits global upturn to US action

REUTERS, Washington

The head of the International Monetary Fund said Wednesday the global economy was recovering and credited US leadership for averting a prolonged recession after the Sept 11 attacks.

"It is clear that Sept 11 did not pull down the global economy for long," IMF Managing Director Horst Koehler said in a speech to the National Press Club.

"This is mainly due to the leadership of the United States with its bold decisions to lower interest rates and to reduce taxes. A recovery is underway now in the United States and this is already beginning to have a positive impact on the economies in

other regions," he added.

Koehler joked that he would have to buy US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill dinner to settle a bet made last fall about the IMF's then-forecast that the US economy would expand by a paltry 0.7 per cent in 2002 a prediction O'Neill said was "off by a lot."

Economists now expect an annual growth rate around 2.6 per cent for the year, according to the Blue Chip survey.

With the US recovery well underway, Koehler said the global economy would grow by 2.8 per cent a rate well above the 2.4 per cent the IMF forecast in November when the impact of Sept 11 on consumer and business spending was still unclear.

Putin defends Russian bid for WTO entry

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday rounded on domestic critics of Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO), saying that the country's economy would stagnate outside the powerful body.

"The WTO is an instrument. Those who know how to use it become stronger, while those who don't or won't learn prefer to shelter behind a wall of protectionist quotas," he said in a State of the Nation speech.

"Our country is still excluded from setting of world trade rules.

This leads to a stagnation of the Russian economy and a decline in competitiveness," Putin added in his Kremlin speech, which was televised live.

"Membership of WTO must become an instrument to defend Russia's national interests in the world markets and a powerful internal impetus to deal with tasks we so badly need to resolve," the Russian president concluded.

Russia has stepped up negotiations to join the WTO, which sets the rules for global trade, and could become a member by late next year according to WTO chief Mike Moore.



PHOTO: AFP

Taxi driver Sunny Ho shows the replied Short Message System (SMS) on his mobile phone confirming payment by a passenger at the launch of Telecab and Telepay Mobile Payments Solutions in Singapore yesterday. The first such mobile payment service, Telepay, to be implemented in Singapore.



PHOTO: BKB

AKM Sajedur Rahman, Managing Director of Bangladesh Krishi Bank, speaks as chief guest at the opening ceremony of month-long "Beginners Course on Computers for Executives" held at Computer Cell of the head office in the city on Monday. Muhammad Abdul Matin, General Manager-Planning & Operation, and KM Asaduzzaman, General Manager-Admin, are also seen in the picture.

EU renounces Oxfam 'protectionist' charge

AFP, Brussels

The European Commission rejected as flawed Wednesday a claim by charity Oxfam International that the 15-nation European Union is the most protectionist of the major trading entities.

In a statement, EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy said he welcomed Oxfam's report as "a substantive and in general well-researched contribution to the debate between trade and development."

But he said he had "some doubts" about figures, which allegedly show that the European Union was the most protectionist of the so-called Quad group that also includes the United States, Japan and Canada.

"There are, in our view, factual errors and methodological flaws," he said, adding that these would be refuted in detail on the European Commission's trade site on the Internet.

Broadly speaking, the commis-

sion said Oxfam's report did not take into account reforms started in 1992 to the Common Agricultural Policy, which lays out how subsidies are paid out to EU farmers.

The commission recalled that the EU farm budget has been frozen at 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product until 2006, compared to 0.7 per cent in the United States, and that the EU is "by far" the biggest importer of food from developing nations.

It also argued that the European Union is eliminating quotas on textiles and clothing -- as required under a 1984 international trade agreement -- at a faster pace than Oxfam suggested.

In its report, released last Thursday, Oxfam said the rules of global trade were rigged in favour of rich countries, allowing them to grab the lion's share of world export earnings.

Oxfam complained, in the report titled "Rigged Rules and Double Standards," that current trade rules prevent poverty reduction and

urged radical changes in the rules to make them fair for all.

For every 100 dollars generated by exports in the world, 97 dollars goes to high- and middle-income countries, while just three dollars ends up in poor countries, the Oxfam report said.

It specifically accused the European Union of "double standards," citing as an example the dumping of EU-made surplus powdered milk onto the market in Jamaica, ruining the Caribbean Island's dairy industry.

In its reaction Wednesday, the European Commission said the Oxfam report's "double standards index" -- topped by the EU, with the United States a close second -- was "an arbitrary gimmick" easily confused with UN league tables.

"The methodology is both obscure and ineffective ... the figures used are often wrong," it said.

The European Commission handles trade matters on behalf of the 15 EU member states, who together represent the world's biggest trading bloc.

UN urges world to step up war on hunger

REUTERS, Rome

The United Nations food body urged the world Wednesday to step up the war on hunger and said more political will was needed to achieve a goal of halving the number of extremely malnourished people by 2015.

Jacques Diouf, director-general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), said a June 10-13 World Food Summit in Rome aimed to strengthen the resolve of countries to reach the 2015 target.

A previous World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 set this target, but the number of hungry has been falling by just six million a year -- far short of the 22 million a year needed to reach that goal, Diouf said.

Asked what the June summit

could achieve, he said: "More political will and more priority given both by developing and developed countries to the fight against hunger and to the plight of more than 800 million hungry people around the world."

The Senegalese official said he wanted to build an international alliance against hunger.

The United Nations estimates that 1.2 billion people -- three-quarters of whom live in rural areas -- survive on less than one dollar per day.

Diouf, lamenting a decline in state contributions to agriculture across the world, urged countries to boost assistance to smallholder farming and said agriculture was the backbone of developing world economies.

The FAO chief said developing countries should be at the forefront of efforts to end poverty in their own backyards, rather than just relying on aid from rich nations.

Diouf called for a fairer trade regime in agricultural produce between developed and developing nations, giving poor farmers access to markets in rich countries which currently protect their agriculture through subsidies.

He said poor farmers needed assistance to improve irrigation and to use better seeds.

Biotechnology could be used to boost crop yields, as long as adequate safeguards were in place to protect health and the environment, he added.

The manufacturing sector should be able to head for a mild recovery from June and there has been greater domestic demand especially for petrochemicals and steel, it added.