

Dutch-Bangla Bank 6-month profit up 26pc

Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited has earned an after tax profit of Tk 138.06 million in the first half of the current year as on June 30, 2002, recording a 26 per cent increase over the corresponding period of last year.

This was apprised at the 37th meeting of the Board of Directors of the bank held at its board room in the city recently with its chairman Mohammad Sahabuddin Ahmed presiding over, says a press release.

Total operating income of the bank stood at Tk 370.38 million as against Tk 271.71 million of the last year showing an increase of 36 per cent.

Contrary to the customary bonus culture grounded on profit figure of the year-end, the meeting has declared bonus for its employees to the extent of 2.5 months substantive pay on the basis of their achievements of zero classification, deposit target, profit target etc. on the basis of the bank's half-yearly financial performance. Officers and executives are remunerated by incentives like bonus, increments etc. for achieving targets of deposit, advance and profit etc.

The meeting approved the unaudited half yearly financial statements as on June 30, 2002 with suggestions for some amendments and corrections. The board, among others, reconstituted various committees of the bank.

S'pore unveils new programme to boost tourism

An exciting investment programme was unveiled recently showcasing the Sentosa 'Concept Plan', a long-term development programme to transform Singapore's premier island resort and boost tourism, says a press release.

The rejuvenation process, to be implemented in phases over the next 10 years, is expected to more than double tourist figures from 3.8 million last year to 8 million visitors by 2012 and has the full support of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Singapore Tourism Board.

Initial visions of the new Sentosa revealed in the plan include a nightly Dance of Fire and Water Show, a pyrotechnic extravaganza to replace the musical fountain show.

The Maritime Experience Preview, Asia's first interactive theatre show, will transport visitors on an interactive 'all sensory' journey through Singapore's rich maritime heritage while the new Beaufort Spa Botanica, Singapore's first garden destination spa with outdoor treatment pavilions, promises a truly relaxing experience.

Mercator team meets to plan for the year ahead

More than 600 executives from Mercator, the IT division of Dubai's Emirates Group, met to look back at the past year and, much more significantly, to plan for the year ahead, says a press release.

They heard how Mercator had a successful and profitable year, with a new management team now firmly in place, a strong range of new products and a greatly expanded customer base.

Among its new products launched during the year were FASTRAC, the revenue accounting solution for small and medium sized airlines; Nomad, the airfreight container management system; and the Oracle Financials implementation service.

Though overall spending had risen sharply, the business had become much more efficient. And a number of profitable outside contracts were signed with leading airlines, including Qantas, Varig and Grupo Taca.

Steven Hiohan, General Manager Business Solutions, told them: "The growth of the Emirates Group depends on the delivery of timely IT services, and we need to prepare the building blocks for this growth now."

South Koreans invest heavily in China

China is the second most popular choice for overseas investors from South Korea, state media said Saturday, quoting South Korean ambassador to China, Kim Ha Joong.

Statistics released by China showed that by June of this year, South Korea's investment in China totaled 12 billion US dollars, Kim said.

RMG exporters stage hunger strike to realise demands

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Three associations of apparel exporters and Bangladesh Specialised Textile Mills and Powerloom Industries Association (BSTMPIA) yesterday staged a daylong hunger strike on the BGMEA office premises to realise their seven-point demand.

The hunger strike programme started at 9 am and ended at 5pm when Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Yussuf Abdullah Harun offered owners of knitwear factories fruit juice.

Speaking on the occasion, the FBCCI chief said he will meet the finance minister, commerce minister and if necessary the prime minister within a week to work out solution to the existing problems.

He also hoped the government will soon realise the justification of their demands.

Among others, acting President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Kazi Moniruzzaman, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) President Monjurul Haq,

Bangladesh Terry Towel and Linen Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BTLMEA) Chairman Lt Col (ret'd) Anisuzzaman and BSTMPIA President Shahajada Mia spoke on the occasion.

Apparel exporters have been waging agitation for last two months to fulfil their various demands.

Their demands include immediate payment of outstanding cash incentive and continuation of the incentive at the rate of 25 per cent till December 31, 2004.

They also demanded of the government to allow import of yarn against back to back LC (letter of

credit) from India through Benapole land port to help the local exporters survive the stiff global competition.

Their seven-point demand also includes payment of cash incentive within seven days of submission of the application to the bank or, as an alternative, the commercial banks should provide 90 per cent of the demanded money as interest-free loan to the exporters.

Besides, they demanded not to snap telephone, gas and electricity connections of the export oriented industries if they cannot pay the bills till getting the cash incentive.

GMG appoints GSA in S'pore

GMG Airlines has appointed Singapore-based GS Travel Pte Ltd its general sales agent (GSA) in Singapore, says a press release.

An agreement to this effect has been signed between the two organisations. Erfan Haque, DGM of Business development of GMG Airlines, and C Pal Singh, managing director of GS Travel of Singapore, signed the deal on behalf of their respective sides.

Also seen in the picture (from left to right) are: Subra Kanti Sen Sarkar, AGM sales, Mizanur Rahman Siddiqui, general manager of finance and Vijay Alreja, manager (MS&PR) of GMG Airlines.

Bush's corporate task force head served troubled firm

REUTERS, Washington

The head of President George W Bush's new corporate-crime task force served as a director at a credit-card company that paid more than \$400 million to settle allegations of unfair and deceptive business practices, officials said Saturday.

But they said Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson was unaware of problems at Provident Financial Corp PVN.N until they were unearthed by US regulators, and he then played a lead role in pushing the company to recompense consumers.

Thompson chaired the Provident board's audit and compliance committee until he took up his Justice Department post in May 2001. The previous year, the San Francisco-based company, under pressure from federal and state regulators, agreed to pay a total of \$405 million to customers it allegedly bilked through hidden charges and deceptive sales practices.

"As an outside director of Provident, he only became aware of the problems when the regulators began to make inquiries," Justice Department spokesman Mark Corrallo told Reuters. "And as soon as he was aware of the issues, he personally took the lead in making the company do the right thing."

The White House has likened the task force headed by Thompson to a SWAT team -- a type of special unit used by police forces to address acute threats.



Shah Md Nurul Alam, managing director of Prime Bank Limited, and M M Alam, managing director of United Leasing Company Limited, shake hands after signing a loan facility agreement on behalf of their respective sides in the city on Thursday. M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, additional managing director, Md Motior Rahman, SEVP, Shafiqul Alam, EVP, Md Sohrab Mustafa, SAVP, and Md Touhidul Alam Khan, AVP of Prime Bank Limited and Ataul Hoque, general manager and company secretary of United Leasing, were present on the occasion.

US recovery shows strength: Bush

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush on Friday vowed to protect a US economic recovery that is "beginning to show some strength" by taking strong action against corporate abuses that have battered markets.

Unemployment numbers are steady, "our consumer spending numbers are up, our manufacturing orders are increasing -- in other words the recovery is beginning to show some strength," the president declared.

His comments came in a roundtable with Polish reporters, who asked what he would tell Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski -- due here July 17-18 for a state visit here -- to allay his concerns about the US economy.

"We're making some progress, we've got to do more, but I'm pleased to report to him that I think

things are going to get better the foundation for long-term growth is in place," said the US leader.

Asked about worries that the US administration is doing too little to combat corporate wrongdoing in the wake of an avalanche of scandals, Bush replied: "I'll explain to him (Kwasniewski) we are doing things."

Explaining that "there's not much difference" between his proposals and House or Representatives and Senate measures, Bush promised: "a bill will come out that will hold people accountable for accounting fraud."

The US president also emphasized that frayed confidence in corporate actors was just one factor affecting the US economy, which must also contend with fears and expenses tied to the "war on terrorism" as well as price-to-earnings ratios that of late have been "very high."

Prime Bank gives Tk 150m loan to United Leasing

Prime Bank Limited has sanctioned a Tk 150 million credit facility to the United Leasing Company Limited.

Under the agreement, the United Leasing Company will use the loan facility for acquiring Lease assets.

A deal to this effect was signed by the two organisations at the Prime Bank head office in the city on Thursday, says a press release.

Shah Md Nurul Alam, managing director of Prime Bank Limited, and M M Alam, managing director of United Leasing Company Limited, inked the accord on behalf of their respective organisations.

M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, additional managing director, Md Motior Rahman, SEVP, Shafiqul Alam, EVP, Reazul Karim, SVP, Md Sohrab Mustafa, SAVP, and Md Touhidul Alam Khan, AVP, on behalf of Prime Bank Limited, and Md Ataul Hoque, general manager and company secretary on behalf of United Leasing Company Limited were present at the signing ceremony.



An agreement between Ibn Sina Trust and Siemens Bangladesh Ltd was signed yesterday. Under the deal, Siemens will supply and install medical equipment in Ibn Sina Tower Hospital at Hatkhola in the city. Ibn Sina Trust's Member (Admin) Mir Quasem Ali, Hazi Salauddin, Secretary Saiful Alam Khan and Siemens Bangladesh Ltd's MD & CEO Peter E. Albrich and ED & CFO Christian Laufer are seen at the signing ceremony.

Taiwan to lift ban on direct investment in China

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan plans to lift a half-century ban on direct investment in mainland China as the two foes inch towards closer economic ties despite a political deadlock, officials said in newspapers Sunday.

The ban would be lifted "within a few weeks", Taiwan's China policy decision-maker Tsai Ing-wen told a seminar Saturday, the Chinese-language Commercial Times reported.

"The measures are being handled according to due official process," said Tsai, chairwoman of the Mainland Affairs Council.

Once the ban is lifted, Taiwan businesses will be able to invest directly in the mainland rather than going through third places, such as Hong Kong, she said.

Direct commercial links between Taiwan and China were cut off in 1949 after they split at the end of a civil war.

But, with or without government approval, Taiwan businessmen

have poured an estimated 70 billion US dollars of investment into the mainland since Taipei relaxed the ban in 1987.

Vice Economic Minister Chen Ruey-long hailed the planned lifting of the ban as "three-win" move which would be to the advantage of companies, share holders and the government.

He said "it would benefit the companies, and public share holders could have their interests better safeguarded after the companies they invest become more transparent."

And, "the government is also expected to have a total picture of the mainland-bound investments," Chen added.

Chen was swift to dismiss concerns the move could spark a wave of mainland-bound investment mania.

"Allowing direct investment is just a change of form. There are many other factors investors may have to weigh before they decide to invest there," Chen said.

The dramatic policy change comes as a majority of Taiwanese enterprises have given China top priority in their overseas investment considerations, despite the lingering political standoff between the rivals.

An economic ministry survey released in March showed 74.7 per cent of 1,910 businesses polled had operations on the mainland, up from 69.1 per cent in 1999.

Some 16.5 per cent have investments in the United States, followed by 9.1 per cent in Hong Kong and 6.7 per cent in Malaysia.

And 467 businesses, or 24.3 per cent of those polled, said they planned to continue making overseas investments.

More than 77 per cent of the 467 firms said they would invest in the mainland, up 22 per centage points from two years ago, the survey showed.

Compared to China, the United States and Southeast Asia had apparently lost their charm for most new investments.

S'pore unemployment unlikely to ease soon even as recession fades

AFP, Singapore

Singapore's unemployment woes are not expected to ease any time soon, despite a growing flow of economic data indicating the recession that strangled the country last year is easing its grip, economists said.

Apart from the expected time-lag effect -- which sees retrenchments continue for months after a recession ends -- the changing face of Singapore industry means the majority of jobs lost will never return, they said.

As a result, as the city-state emerges from the worst downturn in its 37-year history people will have to get used to a higher unemployment rate than ever before, said Standard and Poor's MMS economist Pamela Wong.

"The economic growth of Singapore will not be as robust as before so we have no choice but to accept a higher unemployment rate," she said.

Fuelling the problem are sweeping structural changes as Singapore Inc. seeks to retool itself in the face of stiffer competition from

regional countries offering a cheaper cost base.

"What we need to come to grips with is these jobs will not return. They are now in the cheaper areas of Asia especially China," said Standard Chartered Bank economist Joseph Tan.

Pampered Singaporeans, who have a reputation for being notoriously picky when it comes to jobs, are being forced to face up to a deteriorating labour market.

"The worst is yet to be. Unemployment itself is a lagging indicator and we are going through some of the structural changes even as the economy recovers," said economist Tan Khee Giap from the Nanyang Technological University.

Nowhere is the loss of competitiveness felt more acutely than in the manufacturing sector where several multinational companies have uprooted and moved to other Asian countries, particularly Malaysia and China, where labour costs are much cheaper.

Manufacturing remains a pillar of the state's economic health, contributing to nearly a quarter of gross

domestic product (GDP), but the government is investing billions of dollars to develop new sectors such as life sciences and chemicals.

However, such efforts will not yield overnight success, forcing the government to constantly remind people that guaranteed employment is no longer a reality.

"The belief in lifetime employment is a thing of the past," says Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng.

"We do not have the luxury of time and must move fast to get rid of such kind of thinking. Companies and investors are very mobile these days and they go to where they can ensure profitability and survival of their business."

A ministry of manpower survey of 2,311 Singaporeans retrenched last year showed only 54 per cent were willing to work in less favourable conditions, while 25 per cent said they had rejected job offers for that reason.

At the same time 83 per cent were willing to take a pay cut just to be employed, while 90 per cent were prepared to change industry. The clear message being that

"having favourable working conditions appears to be an important consideration for job seekers," the ministry said.

But finding the right conditions will not be easy, with Minister of State for Manpower Ng Eng Hen telling parliament last week that "job creation continues to be weak" even though the rate of retrenchment is moderating.

In the first quarter to March, 4,857 workers were laid off, about half the level recorded in the preceding two quarters, said Ng.

Data computed from the first two months of the second quarter showed Singapore's GDP grew 3.2 per cent from a year ago, marking the first year-on-year rise in 15 months.

The government said it was on track to achieve the upper-end of its targeted two-to-four per cent GDP for the year, while at the same time unemployment is projected to grow to around 5.5 per cent, from 4.4 per cent last December.

The island-republic's worst unemployment rate of 6.0 per cent was posted during the 1986 recession.



Erfan Haque, DGM-business development of GMG Airlines, sign an agreement with C Pal Singh, managing director of GS Travel, Singapore. Under the accord, the Singaporean company has become the general sales agent of GMG Airlines. Also seen in the picture are (from left to right) Subra Kanti Sen Sarkar, AGM (Sales), Mizanur Rahman Siddiqui, general manager (finance) and Vijay Alreja, manager (MS & PR) of GMG Airlines.

Humble catfish testing US-Vietnam trade ties

AFP, Hanoi

With their beguiling facial whiskers and voracious appetites, catfish provide little resistance to seasoned anglers.

However, the humble fish is at the centre of a trade spat between the United States and Vietnam that is testing the boundaries of a landmark trade deal between the two former Cold War foes.

Vietnamese seafood exporters are furious over an anti-dumping complaint filed on June 28 by American catfish farmers with the US Department of Commerce and the quasi-governmental US International Trade Commission.

The pair are tasked with investigating the validity of claims by the Catfish Farmers of America (CFA) that Vietnam is undercutting its domestic market by selling catfish in the United States at below-market

prices. The CFA, eager to protect its more than 590 million dollars in annual revenues, says that Vietnamese catfish is of low quality and has captured up to 20 per cent of its domestic market, a figure Vietnamese exporters say is grossly inflated.

The complaint triggered vehement denials from Vietnam, already angered by legislation passed by the US Congress in December decreeing that only the North American variety of catfish could be labelled as such in the United States.

Vietnamese catfish -- of which 34.21 million dollars worth was exported to the United States last year, according to the Vietnamese Association of Seafood Exporters and Processors (VASEP) -- has to be called "basa" or "tra".

SIA wants to lease more planes

AFP, Singapore

Singapore Airlines (SIA) was reported Sunday to be aiming to have up to half of its fleet on lease.

The policy of selling aircraft and then leasing them back was a hedging mechanism for the airline, protecting it against the risk that aircraft values might fall, SIA spokesman Rick Clements told the Sunday Times.

The leasing policy would eventually be extended to the Airbus A380 super jumbo jets due to come on stream in 2006, chief executive and deputy chairman Cheong Choong Kong said.

Novartis awarded 2002 Int'l Galien prize

Novartis has been awarded the International Galien Prize for the innovative drug, Glivec (imatinib), a molecularly-targeted treatment for certain forms of Philadelphia chromosome-positive chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) in cancer patients, says a press release.

Novartis has received a total of six national Galien Prizes in the past two years for therapeutic innovation in European countries.

In CML, recent data have demonstrated Glivec's efficacy as a potential first-line treatment of Philadelphia chromosome-positive CML patients.

The International Galien Prize is awarded every two years. Novartis AG is a world leader in healthcare with core businesses in pharmaceuticals, consumer health, generics, eye-care, and animal health.

Bangladesh Express wins award

Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd (BanEx), licensee of Federal Express Corporation of the USA, has received the Service Excellence Award for the fiscal year 2002 at the recently, concluded FedEx GSP conference in Cyprus, says a press release.

In line with FedEx' "Reward and Recognition" programme, Bangladesh Express won the award for its superior performance in customer service and operational aspects like pick-up, delivery, connectivity and improvements in customs procedures.

The management of Bangladesh Express is confident that the recent achievements in service performance has elevated their level of service and would lead to better customer service.



Tanveer Madar, managing director of Bangladesh Express Co Ltd, receives the Service Excellence Award for the year 2002 from Hamdi Osman, vice-president, and Miltter Azizi, senior manager-GSP of FedEx Middle East, Indian sub-continent and sub-Saharan Africa.