

### CityCell in three northern dists

CityCell mobile phone has recently launched its services in Rangpur, Dinajpur and Syedpur of Nilphamari, says a press release. Subscribers from these places can now avail of all the packages of CityCell including 'Alaap' -- the most attractive pre-paid package in the country which allows T&T incoming and also T&T outgoing (during specific hours). Besides the prepaid, CityCell will also have its various post paid packages in these areas. The company has already introduced a range of attractive handsets in the market. Plans are on to introduce more packages and value added services in the country. CityCell has also tied up with Singer and Sony Rangs. CityCell is now expanding to Rajshahi, Khulna and Bogra and services will be available in the near future.

### Asian Paints offers to acquire stake in Berger

Asian Paints (India) Limited has announced at the Singapore Stock Exchange that it has offered to acquire controlling stake in Berger International Limited, a holding company incorporated in Singapore, says a press release. This is Asian Paints' largest acquisition in overseas markets and will expand the company's operations to 23 countries across the globe. After the acquisition, Asian Paints will rank amongst the top 10 decorative coatings companies in the world. Berger International Limited (BIL) has operations in 11 countries that include China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bahrain, Malta, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Asian Paints Bangladesh Limited, a joint venture with Confidence Cement, has already started supplying its high quality products in paint stores in Bangladesh.

Chairman Vice chairman

### New chairman, vice-chairman of Southeast Bank

Ragib Ali and Azim Uddin Ahmed have been elected chairman and vice-chairman of the Board of Directors of Southeast Bank Limited respectively. They were chosen at a meeting of the Board held in the city recently, says a press release. Ragib Ali is a leading tea planter having more than seven tea gardens in Sylhet, Chittagong and Tetulia, and is one of the largest producers of tea leaves in the country. He is also the chairman and Managing Director of Kohinor Detergent Factory, producer of JET Washing Powder. Azim Uddin is the chairman of Mutual Group of Companies and Sole Agent of "DANO" and Horlicks

### Gulf Air eases check-in, departure system at ZIA

Gulf Air has introduced an advanced check-in and departure control system at Zia International Airport in Dhaka to allow passengers to transfer through Abu Dhabi and Bahrain to their onward connection without being processed a second time, says a press release. Gulf Air is the first carrier to introduce its own check-in system in Dhaka, which has daily flight through Bahrain and Abu Dhabi onto destinations across GCC, Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. The Manager Systems Development Mark Hartshorne said "Gulf Air continues to invest and enhance passenger systems across its network to improve customer convenience and to deliver a more seamless service from destination to destination. Dhaka operated a manual system of check-in, which meant that, those passengers en route through either Bahrain or Abu Dhabi had to queue again to receive a boarding pass prior to continuing to their departure gate." Other Gulf Air network airports currently receiving enhanced systems and processes, which are due for completion this year, include Islamabad, Jeddah and Kathmandu.

## Three SOE sell-off finalised Five others put on retender

UNB, Dhaka

The Privatisation Commission has decided to sell off three state-owned enterprises at the quoted prices and put five others on re-tender, reinvigorating the denationalisation drive. In a meeting yesterday, with its chairman Inam Ahmed Chowdhury in the chair, the Commission finalised the sale prices of two jute mills and one textile mill at over Tk 57.29 crore. Nishat Jute Mills at Tongi, Gaziur, will be sold for Tk 39 crore 25 lakh and 43 thousand, including a long-term liability of Tk 20,25,43,000. Selling price of Doulatur Jute Mills at Khalispur in Khulna has been determined at Tk 13,64,02,001 which includes Tk 10.57 crore in long-term liabilities. Noakhali Textile Mills at Raipur, Luxmipur, will be sold for Tk 4.44 crore. Star Jute Mills will be offloaded after re-tender giving a short time. Tenders will be floated again for

Magura Textile Mills, Chisti Textile Mills, Bangladesh Oil Mills and Bangladesh Can Company as no quotation was available for the share sell-off of these SOEs. Commission members Abu Yusuf Kholiur Rahman MP, Hafiz Ibrahim MP and Ali Asgar Lobi MP, secretaries of the ministries of Industries, Commerce, Finance, Textiles, Jute and Housing, and Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Monir Uddin Ahmed attended the

meeting. Privatisation has been the shining feature of the government as part of its plan to reduce public-sector waste and trim budget deficit below 4 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal year. The Commission listed some 71 SOEs for disinvestment. Country's largest jute mill Adamjee was closed down in July this year, giving a clear message to other losing SOEs for choosing between the two: become viable or face shutdown.

BIGC declares 18pc dividend Bangladesh General Insurance Company Limited (BIGC) has declared an 18 per cent dividend for its shareholders for the year 2001. The dividend was announced at the 17th annual general meeting of the company held in the city on Wednesday, says a press release. The Chairman and Managing Director of the company, MA Samad presided over the meeting. During the year 2001, the company earned a pre-tax profit of Tk 15.70 million. Vice Chairman, Kalim Sharafi and Directors AZ Humayun, Towhid Samad, Abdus Sattar, FMAB Siddique, Saleh Ahmed, Mahub U1 Alam Chowdhury, Mahmud Hassan and MA Motaleb were present on the occasion.



M A Samad, chairman and managing director of Bangladesh General Insurance Company Limited, speaks at 17th annual general meeting of the company held in the city on Wednesday.

### BIGC declares 18pc dividend

Vacancies in a number of important posts at the Sadharan Bima Corporation (SBC), the state-owned general insurance company which also acts as re-insurer of private sector general insurance firms, are hampering normal activities of the corporation. At present, posts of two general managers (GM) out of six are vacant while out of nine posts of deputy general managers (DGM) four posts are vacant. Besides, there has been no full-fledged managing director (MD) of the corporation for the last nine months since M Lutfor Rahman went on leave prior to retirement (LPR) on December 15 last year. A joint secretary of the ministry of commerce discharged the responsibilities as MD of the SBC as additional responsibility for the first eight months. Joint Secretary (ITO) of Commerce Ministry Abul Kalam Azad has been acting as MD for about the last one month. According to sources, another senior GM of the Corporation is

## Moyeen for e-governance to ensure accountability

BSS, Dhaka

The application of e-governance in civil administration like e-commerce in businesses would effectively ensure accountability and transparency, Minister for Science and Information and Communication Technology Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan said yesterday. Elaborating e-governance, he said it is the application of information and communication technology (ICT) in functionalities of various government departments to make work more transparent and accountable. He said e-commerce has brought about a phenomenal change in running businesses. So, the application of the e-governance would also bring about a new way of thinking and handling of the process of government, the minister observed. Dr Khan was speaking at a seminar yesterday on 'Role of Information Communication Technology: Towards Good

Governance'. Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy organised the seminar at its auditorium. Director General of the Academy Mohammad Abdul Kader Miah presided over the seminar in which Vice-Chancellor of South-East University Dr M Shamsur Ali spoke as chief discussant. Pointing to the fast changing time and the need for attuning the administration to these changes, the minister said, "Public now demand a more open system of governance and quick access to public services." They want free access to how utility services being operated, how the law court functioning, land distribution carried out and such other information having significant bearing on public interest and outlook. Unhindered flow of information is the basis of democracy, he said, adding, "ICT can play pivotal role by opening the system of governance to people and thereby helping in combating corruption and

irregularities." He said the e-governance can play significant role in involving people in the process of development. Through it public can be informed of the nature of development projects and the utilities they can get out of it. They can be informed of the quality of public spending and this is how sustainable development can be attained. He said the government has already started working in this direction. As part of it, the government is now implementing a project to distribute 10,000 computers in a couple of months to schools all over the country. These computers having telephone network and Internet access, aimed at creating IT awareness among students and start a process of training them right from school level. The government will provide qualified teachers and technicians to run these digital devices in rural schools, the minister said, adding they will provide the core manpower of e-governance in future.

### Steps to develop Ctg as Southeast Asia business hub sought

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Speakers at a roundtable here yesterday stressed the need for undertaking pragmatic steps to develop Chittagong as a business hub in Southeast Asia. They said huge potentialities in the port city remain untapped due to lack of effective measures. The roundtable, 'Chittagong -- Recent and Future,' was jointly organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) and Bangla daily the Jugantar. The roundtable moderated by President of CCCI Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury was addressed, among others, by Editor of the Jugantar Golam Sarwar, Commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police Shahidullah Khan and Vice President of CCCI Monjurul Amin. The speakers also called for setting up of a private container terminal at a suitable location to ensure effective and competitive port services.

### Meet on edible oil market value held

UNB, Dhaka

A review meeting on supply situation and market value of edible oil was held at the commerce ministry yesterday aiming to keep its market price static. Chaired by State Minister for Commerce M Barkat Ullah Bulu, the meeting discussed on monitoring the retail price of edible oil so that it does not go much higher than the mill rate and the middlemen cannot take the advantage.

## Govt to allow more pvt firms in telecom sector Reach Global gets licence

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government will allow more private companies in telecommunication sector to ensure better services. "Only excellent services will be key to survival in the competitive market," said Syed Marghub Morshed, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). Morshed was addressing a ceremony organised on the occa-

sion of awarding a licence to Reach Global International Limited, an equal equity sharing company of Australia's Telestra and Hong Kong-based PCCW, at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday. Reach Global offers a wide range of wholesale voice, data, bandwidth and Internet service to other carriers and service providers. Morshed reiterated BTRC's pledge to ensure a level playing ground for both the private and public companies in the telecom

sector. "We are effecting to liberalise licence regime," Morshed added. BTRC chairman said the government will allow more private sector cell phone companies by November, besides Internet telephony by January and fixed-line phone companies by March next year. Sturt Eastwood, regional director of Reach Global International Limited, said his company is interested to provide all types of Internet services in the country.

## Manpower shortage hits Sadharan Bima activities

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

going on LPR totaling the vacant posts of GMs to three from next month. Besides, another deputy secretary took the charge of a GM who has been promoted to the post of joint secretary recently. Sources said the post of that GM is likely to be vacant soon, as it is unusual that government official works under the another government official of the same rank for long. Moreover, an assistant general manager (AGM) is now the in-charge of the zonal office of SBC in Chittagong. "Although the fact remains that a DGM is supposed to be the in-charge of SBC's zonal office in Chittagong," said the SBC official. Considering the business importance of the commercial capital of the country, most of the financial institutes maintain high profile in Chittagong for which at most of financial institutes a GM is in charge of the zone, sources said. The SBC is not only the insurer of government organisations but also the protector of 43 private sector general insurance companies.

As per a commerce ministry approved set up, the SBC is supposed to run with around 2100 officials and employees, but at present it is running with nearly 1500 staff. The SBC officials observed that vacancies at the lower level are not hampering the works of the corporation that much, but the vacancies at the top level are affecting the corporation's works to a great extent. According to commerce ministry sources, there are two options the government has in its hand, either to promote DGMs to the vacant posts of GMs or appoint deputy secretary level government officials from other organisations to the posts. However, there is very slim possibility of filling up any of the vacant posts of GM by promoting any of the five DGMs, who are working for about next one year. As per rules, a DGM has to serve for at least three years to be qualified to become GM. But none of the DGMs have completed three-year services so far.



M Mustafizur, chairman of the Board of Directors of Fareast Finance & Investment Limited, presides over the first annual general meeting of the company held in the city on Saturday.

## Ford, Firestone hid tyre problems, jury told

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Lawyers for a college student injured in a 1999 rollover accident Wednesday opened a lawsuit against Ford Motor Co. and tyre maker Firestone by charging the companies deliberately hid mounting problems with tyre tread separation from consumers and the government. Cristina Hernandez, now 21, suffered brain injuries that probably ended her dream of becoming a surgeon when a rear tyre on her 1997 Ford Explorer lost its tread and the vehicle rolled over, killing one of her passengers, attorney John Denove said in an opening statement before a Los Angeles jury. "This is a case about two companies who literally put profits over people's lives," Denove said. If the jury renders a verdict, it would mark the first time a court in the United States has ruled on the question of whether the two companies are liable for tyre-related accidents with the Explorer. Only one such case has gone to a jury trial, and Firestone settled before a verdict was returned. Attorneys for Ford and Firestone argued that the tyre had been damaged long before the tread separated from the steel belt and that Hernandez's

injuries would not prevent her from becoming a surgeon. "The evidence is going to establish that this particular tyre did not fail because of tyre design ... the road damage can be seen and measured," said Warren Platt, attorney for Ford, in his opening statement. Hernandez, a student at University of Southern California, is seeking compensation for what she says is her lost medical career and punitive damages from the two companies. The trial is expected to last three months. In his opening statement, Denove argued that Ford and Firestone, a division of Japan's Bridgestone Corp, equally share blame in the case because they jointly designed the tyre for the Explorer. He said Ford sacrificed safety in tyre design by threatening to terminate its contract with Firestone if tyre costs increased, while Firestone skimped on safety as a result of profitability mandates put in place by management in Japan in 1996. Specifically, Firestone was compelled by Ford to create lighter tyres that looked rugged to match the image of the Explorer, Denove said. To accomplish this, Firestone allegedly decreased the thickness of a key rubber wedge between the steel

belts in the tyre and also cut the thickness of the belts themselves. "The resulting product, Denove said, did not tolerate the heat resulting from road friction, allowing air pockets to build up and causing the tyre to lose its tread more easily. Denove showed jurors correspondence between Ford and dealerships in the Middle East and Venezuela dating from mid-1997 about rollover and tread separation problems. A 1999 Ford memo said in part: "We have so far been able to control this issue and managed not to have any kind of rumours spread around the region. Make sure that we do not alert the suspicious of the police/insurance in Oman that we might have a problem with our tyres." By late 1999, Ford's own internal analysts had compiled graphs showing that some 1,200 Firestone tyre failure claims had been filed, against just two failures for a more expensive Goodyear tyre, Denove said. Federal regulators have linked defective Firestone tyres to crashes that killed 271 people and injured hundreds more. Many of those tyres were installed as standard equipment on Ford Explorers and the company spent millions of dollars recalling tyres and replacing them.

## China falls short of pledges to open market, says US business group

REUTERS, Washington

China has fallen short of its commitments to open its market to more foreign goods and services in a number of areas since joining the World Trade Organisation nine months ago, a leading business group said Wednesday. Still, in its first major assessment of China's WTO record, the US Chamber of Commerce also said Beijing deserved recognition for taking a number of "promising steps" to implement its WTO commitments and warned against jumping to conclusions based on developments so far. "It is too early to issue sweeping judgments about China's overall compliance," the business group said, with many commitments to be met in phases over a period of years. The chamber, which bills itself as

the world's largest business federation, said the report draws on the experience of its member companies over the past nine months. Myron Brilliant, vice president of the business group's Asian division, said US companies have been willing to give China a certain "grace period," given the enormity of the commitments it has made to allow more foreign competition. But it companies are seeing the same problems three or four years down the road, they will be far less tolerant, he said. "We want to give China every opportunity to succeed. Right now, our patience is still high, but it's not infinite," Brilliant said. The US business group briefed Chinese Embassy officials on the report on Wednesday afternoon to prepare them for its release to the general public on Thursday. The Bush administration will hold

a hearing next week on China's WTO record and is expected to issue its own report in December, near the one-year anniversary of China's WTO entry. The Chamber of Commerce report looked at China's track record in six different areas: agriculture, distribution, information technology, intellectual property rights, transportation and services. Some of the most detailed criticism was in the agricultural sector, where the report says China has used delaying tactics and other means to avoid opening its market to more foreign wheat, corn, cotton and soybean oil. It also faulted China for the continuing use of agricultural export subsidies, which it promised to ban, and for jeopardizing more than \$1 billion in US soybean exports through its clumsy implementation of a new law requiring safety certi-



President of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan (centre right) speaks at an extra-ordinary general meeting of the Chamber held at the FICCI office in the city on Wednesday.