

CNG filling station at Kalyanpur soon

UNB, Dhaka

Rupantarita Pratikritik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL) will set up a CNG filling station soon at BRTC's Kalyanpur bus depot, aiming to help reduce the crisis of fuel for CNG-run vehicles.

An agreement to this effect was signed between Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) and RPGCL here yesterday.

BRTC Director (Finance and Accounts) M Azhar Ali Talukder and RPGCL Secretary Nazrul Islam signed the agreement on behalf of their respective sides.

BRTC Chairman Toimur Alam Khandaker, RPGCL Managing Director and other high officials concerned were present at the signing ceremony.

Rahimafrooz Batteries celebrates 40th anniversary

Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd has celebrated its 40th founding anniversary at its factory at Zirani Bazar in Gazipur, says a press release.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury was present as chief guest and State Minister of Industry Prof M Rezaul Karim was special guest at the function.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company Feroz Rahim, Chief Operating Officer (COO) Munawar Misbah Moin and General Manager Sayeed Hassan also spoke.

The function was attended by Chairman Afroz Rahim, diplomats, senior government officials, bankers, dealers and suppliers from home and abroad and executives of the company.

In his speech, the commerce minister assured the company of all possible cooperation for its continued growth and said the govt. is fully aware of the barriers in exporting batteries to India and is going to solve this entirely from the business perspective.

Asian traders banned from Swiss fair over virus scare

AFP, Basel

More than 2,500 traders from Southeast Asia have been banned from working at a jewellery and watch fair here because of fears of a deadly respiratory disease, fair organisers said Wednesday.

The announcement followed a decision late Tuesday by the Swiss government to ban traders from China, Hong Kong and Singapore from taking part in the World Watch, Clock and Jewellery Fair 2003 in Basel and Zurich from April 3-10.

The ban does not affect visitors to the trade fair, one of the top gatherings of the watchmaking industry worldwide, said the event's president Rene Kamm.

On Wednesday, the Geneva-based World Health Organization (WHO) warned against travel to Hong Kong and neighboring Guangdong province in southern China due to the outbreak of atypical pneumonia.

Travellers from those areas are also subject to health checks on their departure.

Kamm said about 400 stands for companies from China, Hong Kong and Singapore would stay closed, affecting about 2,500 to 3,000 staff.

He told journalists that the measure would shut about two-thirds of the stands at the exhibition hall in Zurich.

"We will close these stands because people arrived after March 1," Kamm said.

The Swiss government decree forbids people who have been to China, Hong Kong and Singapore since the beginning of March from working at the fair.

"Personally I regret this restriction, and it doesn't concern visitors," Kamm added.

A representative for Hong Kong's Trade Development Council, Fred Lam, said the ban had shut down business for the 317 exhibitors in the Hong Kong pavilion, the second largest at the international fair.

"It is most disappointing that the Swiss government issued the decree after most of the Hong Kong exhibitors had arrived in Switzerland or were on flights, and without prior consultation," Lam said.

BB mulls list of professionals for bank boards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank is contemplating preparation of a list of 100 professionals from where it plans to elect two directors to represent depositors at board-level in all private commercial banks.

This move is in line with an amendment to the Bank Companies Act 2003 passed in the parliament on March 9, 2003. Sources said the panel will be comprised of chartered accountants, lawyers and economists who are non-political persons.

Bangladesh Bank officials mentioned this list will also serve a secondary purpose. There is a pressure from donor agencies to restructure the

boards of the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs).

"And if the government opts for such change, then this panel will help elect board members for NCBs as well," one Bangladesh Bank official said.

The Bank Company (Amendment) Bill 2003 had been passed to strengthen activities in the banking sector and enhance supervisory authority of the Bangladesh Bank over commercial banks.

According to the changes, private commercial banks will also have to raise their paid-up capital balances from Tk 20 crore to Tk 100 crore.

7-month imports rise 17.48pc

UNB, Dhaka

Imports rose by 17.48 per cent in terms of LCs opened in first seven months of the current fiscal year, according to statistics of Bangladesh Bank.

The central bank says import LCs worth Tk 32701.55 crore (US\$ 5647.94 million) were opened by authorised dealer banks during July 2002-January 2003 period.

The increment is 17.48 per cent in terms of US dollar and 19.13 per cent

terms of taka from the level of the same period of the previous fiscal (2001-2002).

Food grains import saw 188.75 per cent increment, consumer goods 62.25 per cent, industrial raw materials 16.81 per cent, POL 29.46 per cent and capital machinery 49.17 per cent.

LCs worth Tk 664.55 crore were opened for import of rice, 828.68 crore for wheat, 569.31 crore for sugar, 456.69 for pulses and 1346.34 crore for edible oil during the period.

3-day Thai trade fair in Ctg from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A three-day Thai trade fair begins at Institution of Engineers Bangladesh (IEB), Chittagong centre here tomorrow.

Thailand is organising the fair with a view to enhancing bilateral trade and investment between the two countries.

The fair will remain open to traders and entrepreneurs on the first two days and to public on the concluding day of April 7.

Around seventy-four Thai manufacturing and exporting firms are participating in the fair, Thailand Exhibition 2003.

On the eve of the fair a press conference was held at a local hotel here yesterday. The organisers at the press conference said the fair is aimed at

accelerating trade and investment in different fields with special focus on garments and textile, hotel and tourism, construction, leather, agro-based and service industries like transportation, power generation and infrastructure.

Thai Officials from Office of Commercial Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy, Dhaka, were present at the press conference on behalf of the organisers. Of them, Phannee Suttivaree, director of Department of Export Promotion (DEP) of Thailand, and Inthorn Wan Kaeo, minister counselor, replied to different queries.

Thai delegation also lauded the role of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) and said the chamber is very co-operative and helpful for enhancing trade relation between the two countries.



PHOTO: RAHIMAFROOZ

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury speaks at a function of Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd to celebrate the company's 40th founding anniversary at Zirani Bazar in Gazipur recently. Feroz Rahim, CEO, Munawar Moin, COO, and K Javed Islam, Marketing & Sales Manager of the company, were also present.

Nervous creditors avoid poorer countries: WB

AFP, Washington

Wary creditors are steering clear of poorer nations, which are left trying to fill the gap with money from investors and migrant workers' paypackets, the World Bank said Wednesday.

"The decline in private lending was especially steep in 2001 and 2002, as the global economy struggled through a recession," said Phillip Suttle, lead author of the Bank's Global Development Finance 2003 report.

"Debt finance for developing countries has shrunk and won't come back quickly," he said.

In fact, poorer countries sent more money to creditors than they received. Last year, developing countries paid nine billion dollars more on old debt than they received in new loans, the Bank said.

Foreign direct investment slid to 143 billion dollars in 2002, down from a peak of 179 billion dollars in 1999,

but it remained the dominant source of foreign financing for those countries.

Migrant workers sent 80 billion dollars back to their home countries in the developing world last year, up from 60 billion dollars in 1998.

A boom-bust cycle in private lending was a critical factor behind a string of financial crises that began with the 1997-98 East Asia crisis, striking Latin America last year, the report said.

Foreign investment and migrant workers' remittances were a more stable form of funds, the Bank said.

"Over-reliance on debt has been a problem for many countries," Suttle said.

"Looking ahead, there is room for cautious optimism that capital flows to developing countries will be less volatile in the future. This would be good for growth and for poor people."

Repo auction

UNB, Dhaka

The repurchase agreement (Repo) auction of Bangladesh Bank for commercial banks and financial institutions was held here yesterday.

Two bids of two-day tenor amounting to Tk 130.00 crore were received, of which two bids of total Tk 54.00 crore were accepted.

The rate of the interest against the accepted bids was 8.30 to 8.27 per cent per annum, said a press release of Bangladesh Bank.

Junior Chamber workshop held

A training workshop on grooming your professional image and motivation was held in Dhaka on Wednesday, says a press release.

The workshop was jointly organised by JJ Wing of Junior Chamber Bangladesh (JCB), and Murphy McCann, Consulting Group (MMCG), a UK-based management consulting firm.

The workshop was conducted by two world class trainers from the UK.

The workshop was targeted towards the students and young professionals who are in the early stage of their career trying to understand the corporate environment where motivation and professional grooming are of immense importance.

National President of JCB, Syed Almas Kabir, Vice-President of JCI, Nessar M Khan, JCB National Governing Body (NGB), Chairman Senator Waqar A Choudhury, JCB-NGB members, Managing Director MMCG, Syed Kenan Ibrahim Bakht, Executive Director of MMCG, Quazi M Ahmed, and members of JCB and JJ Wing were present at the workshop.

Reducing software piracy can boost Asian growth: Report

AFP, Singapore

Improving software copyright protection will provide a big boost to economic growth in Asia by boosting jobs, business opportunities and government's revenue, industry groups said Thursday.

Nearly 54 per cent of software programs in Asia are now pirated and reducing that rate by 10 percentage points by 2006 could create 1.1 million new jobs and raise economic growth by 170 billion US dollars, the Business Software Alliance (BSA) industry group and research group International Data Corp. said.

It would also generate another 15 billion dollars in tax revenues, the two organisations said in a joint study of the impact of reducing software piracy in 57 countries, including 14 in Asia.

"This report reveals not only how significant the software sector has been for economic growth worldwide, but how it will continue to be the engine in powering the Asian economies forward," said Jeffrey Hardee, BSA's vice president and regional director.

SIA cuts flights as passengers drop on Sars, war

ANN/The Straits Times

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has slashed another 60 flights a week, mainly to Asian cities, as passenger numbers drop off over Sars (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and war concerns.

This makes a total of 125 cancelled SIA flights after 65 flights were cancelled last month after the war broke out.

The combined reduction, representing about 13.6 per cent of all SIA passenger seats, is SIA's biggest round of flight cuts since the aftermath of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks.

Back then, 20 per cent of seats to the US were cut, along with other major cuts, although a total overall figure was not available.

In the latest cuts, about 7.5 per cent or 443 of the total 5,932 scheduled flights departing Changi this month (April) are hit, a Singapore Airport Terminal Services spokesman said yesterday.

For SIA, flights to Sars-affected areas such as Hongkong, Guangzhou, Taipei and Hanoi were most affected, with services to Hong Kong reduced by 15 to 26 a week.

The latest cuts also include the suspension of all flights to Kaohsiung from April 15 and to Hiroshima, Japan between next Wednesday (April 9) and May 31.

The launch of a new thrice-weekly service to Bangalore - intended for May 1 - is deferred to June 12.



PHOTO: CDBL

AKM Shamsuddin, chairman of the Central Depository Bangladesh Limited (CDBL), speaks at the second annual general meeting of the company held in Dhaka recently. Directors present were Samson H Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Association of Publicly Listed Companies (BAPLC), Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB), AKM Rafiqul Islam, executive member of Bangladesh Insurance Association (BIA), M Salman Ispahani, president of Chittagong Stock Exchange Ltd (CSE), and MH Samad, managing director and CEO of the CDBL.

MCCI to hold pre-budget talks with CCCI

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

An eight-member delegation of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) will leave for Chittagong on Monday to attend a pre-budget meeting with the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI).

The two chambers are expected to discuss immediate business issues and forward a joint proposal to the govern-

ment to incorporate in the next budget.

CCCI President Amir Humayun Chowdhury said his chamber invited the MCCI leaders to discuss several topics ahead of the budget.

"Usually each chamber forwards its own proposals for the budget. But this time we want to have a uniform proposal representing views of our aggregate business community," CCCI

president said.

The MCCI delegation is also expected to visit the on-going Chittagong International Trade Fair.

The delegation includes: MCCI President Tapan Chowdhury, Vice-President A Hafiz Chowdhury, Secretary General CK Hyder, members David JH Griffiths, AKM Rafiqul Islam, Feroz Rahim, Mrs Rokia A Rahman and Shahab Sattar.

War fallout, deflation cloud East Asian economies: WB

AFP, Washington

The menaces of terror, deflation and a war-related rise in oil prices cloud an otherwise bright outlook for East Asian economies, the World Bank said Wednesday.

East Asia and Pacific economies are expected to grow 6.4 per cent this year, slightly down from 6.7 per cent in 2002, said the Bank's Global Development Finance 2003 report.

"The forecast anticipates average regional growth of more than six per cent over the next two years with China increasingly the dominant player," it said.

Exports would be key, helped by China's integration into the World Trade Organization.

Exceptions to the rosy outlook were Hong Kong and Singapore, where growth had faltered, and Indonesia, still reeling from the October 12, 2002

bombing of a Bali nightclub in which 202 people were killed.

Four key tensions overshadowed a horizon of rapid growth, low inflation and strong external accounts:

-- Oil. Every 10-dollar-a-barrel rise in the price of oil during the Iraq war costs the region's net energy imports about 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

-- Instability. "The unpredictability of developments on the Korean peninsula has become a new regional concern and the memory of the bombing tragedy in Bali is a recent reminder of the problem of terrorism in the region," the report said.

-- Exchange rates. With fierce competition for western markets, "the question of appropriate exchange rates is likely to emerge as a larger issue," it said.

-- Deflation. "The corrosive effects of

deflation, already painfully evident in Japan, could become more pervasive across the region if measures to promote corporate restructuring are slow."

South Asian economies, meanwhile, were tipped to grow 5.3 per cent this year, up from 4.9 per cent in 2002.

Poor weather, political insecurity and a subdued global economy had put a damper on the region's growth in 2002, although India-Pakistan tensions eased and a cease-fire was reached in Sri Lanka's civil war.

"Improving exports and a recovery in agriculture, which accounts for a quarter of the region's output, are together expected to boost GDP growth to 5.3 per cent over the next years," the Bank said.

But higher export revenue would likely be channeled into higher imports, leading to little overall change in the trade balance, it said.

Poor states to take retaliatory measures against the rich

Deadline failure for outline farm trade accord resented

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil

Developing countries, angered by lack of progress in global talks on freer farm trade, could take retaliatory measures against protectionist rich countries if the impasse continues, South American analysts and oilseed industry leaders said Wednesday.

Noting the failure to meet a March 31 deadline for an outline accord, they signalled that a so-called peace clause, under which countries agreed not to challenge each other's farm subsidies, is due to expire at the end of 2003.

"Some countries are likely to take countervailing measures and file complaints with the World Trade Organisation (WTO)," Luiz Felipe

Lamprea, chairman of the Brazilian Center for Foreign Relations (CEBRI), told a world oilseed crushers' conference.

He said that Brazil and other developing countries have been marking time before attacking various US and EU trade-distorting farm subsidies through the WTO's dispute process.

But Lamprea, who was Brazil's foreign minister from 1995 to 2001, added, "It would be a step towards the law of the jungle in agriculture and no-one wants that."

Brazil, a top exporter of soy, coffee, sugar and other farm products, sees the liberalisation of agricultural markets as vital to promote economic growth and social welfare.

Strong support came from neighboring South American oilseed industry leaders.

"Every country has the right to struggle for fair and ever-increasing revenues for its farmers, and the immoderate use of trade-distorting instruments only generates a loss of revenues ... for the farmers in our region," said Raul Padilla, President of the Argentine Vegetable Oils Industry Chamber (CIARA).

Padilla, who is also president and chief executive of Bunge Argentina SA, told oilseed industry leaders from more than 30 countries that Mercosur, would forcefully defend its right to export value added oilseed products.

CDS to start functioning in June

The Central Depository System (CDS) will start functioning in Bangladesh in June or July next covering both securities listed in the stock exchanges as well as treasury bills, says a press release.

This was announced by AKM Shamsuddin, chairman of Central Depository Bangladesh Limited, at the second annual general meeting of the company held in Dhaka recently.

CDS is a significant capital market infrastructure, being established as a part and parcel of the overall financial sector reforms initiatives spearheaded by the Ministry of Finance with the financial and technical assistance of the Asian Development Bank.

With the start-up of the CDS, dematerialisation of listed securities i.e. the process of eliminating physical certificate as record of security ownership by substituting it as an accounting record in the CDS, will commence eliminating delays in delivery and transfer and doing away with risk of loss, forgery and duplication of share certificates.

CDS will restore investors' confidence and breathe new life in the share market as well as in general trade, commerce and industry.

The coming of the CDS will rejuvenate the country's capital market significantly and speedily introduce a vibrant secondary market in treasury bills.

Asian growth forecasts slashed on virus spreads

AFP, Singapore

Economists are slashing this year's growth forecasts for Asian economies due to the fallout from a fast-spreading killer virus but say the full impact will depend on whether it can be brought under control.

Businesses from hotels and restaurants to airlines are bearing the brunt of the health crisis which has slashed tourism in the region.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), a virulent form of pneumonia which has no cure, has killed nearly 80 people worldwide and affected more than 2,000 people, mostly in East Asia.

Pradumna Rana, an economist at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), said the institution may have to downgrade this year's forecast for East Asian gross domestic product (GDP) growth from 5.6 per cent, but he does not know by how much.

European stocks steady after swift rise

AFP, London

Leading European stocks were taking a pause for breath on Thursday after the previous day's swift rises, as US-led forces in Iraq prepared for a final push towards Baghdad.

In early trading the British FTSE 100 index of leading shares inched up 0.1 per cent to 3,757.9 points.

The German DAX 30 index -- which soared almost six per cent on Wednesday -- was up 0.85 per cent to 2,611.5 points and the French CAC 40 index rose 1.5 per cent to 2,786.2 points.

The relative lull came despite a strong performance on Wall Street overnight, which saw the Dow Jones industrials average of 30 top stocks gain 2.7 per cent to 8,285.06 on hopes of a short war.

The technology-laden Nasdaq leap 3.6 per cent, to 1,396.72.

Analysts said the US rises had come after the military push towards the Iraqi capital triggered a bout of profit-taking and position adjustment.

Standard Bank opens branch at Uttara

Standard Bank Limited opened a new branch at Uttara in Dhaka on Monday, says a press release.

Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed, chairman of the bank, inaugurated the branch.

Vice Chairman Ferozur Rahman, directors Md Nurul Islam, Ashok Kumar Saha, Mohammad Ayub, Harun Rashid Chowdhury, Md Monzurul Alam, SAM Hossain, Md Abdul Aziz, Md Shamsul Alam, Abdul Ahad, Md Nurul Haque Sowdagar and Ferdous Ali Khan, and Advisor of the bank SS Nizamuddin Ahmed, were present at the function.

Managing Director of the bank Mosharraf Hossain presided over the function.



PHOTO: STANDARD BANK LTD

Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed, chairman of the Standard Bank Limited, inaugurates a new branch of the bank at Uttara in Dhaka on Monday.